

4 ways you can travel safely in 2020

As the tourism industry gradually opens up, South Africans are keen to travel once again. But some might feel a little hesitant and uncertain about embarking upon their first trip - especially after having spent so much time at home during lockdown.



Image Supplied.

Luckily, South Africa is both travel- and Covid-ready, with the majority of establishments putting strict health and safety measures in place as per the Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBCSA), World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) and World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines.



SA's tourism sector promises to keep travellers safe as borders set to open

17 Sep 2020



Here's four ways you can catch the travel bug without catching Covid-19:

1. Check that your establishment has the 'stamp of approval'

The TBCSA has played a significant role in developing comprehensive protocols for all tourism-related facilities and establishments. These protocols have been approved by top epidemiologists and align with the latest Disaster Management and Department of Employment and Labour (DoEL) Regulations, WHO, National Institute for Communicable Disease (NICD), and Department of health (DoH) guidelines and advice, as well as the Health & Safety Act.

Importantly, the TBCSA has gone out of its way to provide establishments with the support, tools, and information required to make the health of all guests a top priority – including the 'Opus4business' app which allows businesses to record and keep track of their compliance. Their Travel Safe – Eat Safe Certification is also linked to the app, and provides evidence that all social distancing, cleaning, and health screening procedures are up to par, all the while allowing for effortless management of health screenings for patrons, employees, suppliers, and more.

Even more importantly, the TBCSA protocols have received the World Travel and Tourism Council's (WTTC) stamp of approval and the TBCSA has issuing rights for the WTTC Safe Travels stamp within South Africa.

The specially designed stamp allows travellers to recognise businesses in South Africa which have adopted world class health and hygiene protocols for safe travel.



Stellenbosch awarded global safety stamp

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This is good news. "While Stellenbosch was the first local destination to be awarded the World Travel and Tourism Council's (WTTC) Global Safety Stamp of Approval in sub-Saharan Africa, as a result of hard work and strict compliance, the entire country has since received the accolade and is now 100% recognised as a safe destination," says Jeanneret Momberg, general manager of Visit Stellenbosch. "Our Stellenbosch Ready campaign is based on the TBCSA health and hygiene safety protocols and flexible booking conditions related to Covid-19."

2. Follow a few simple, standard recommendations

According to Peter Dros, sales and marketing director of Fancourt in George, the TBCSA's guidelines are impressively comprehensive – but the majority of the work happens in the background, leaving guests with only a few simple steps to follow:

"Some measures are immediately obvious, like health screening on arrival, clear signage and frequent sanitising of 'high touch points'. But protocols are in place for every step of the guest journey, and our Covid-19 protocols are just as stringent behind the scenes. From kitchen to laundry, delivery bays to suites, we have taken every precaution to ensure a happy, healthy stay."

Dros believes that the safety protocols are not an imposition for guests, rather they'll seem very normal, very quickly. "Yes," says Dros. "You can expect to wear a mask in public areas, and you'll see plenty of complimentary sanitiser around, but it's not too burdensome, and the guests appreciate the efforts to keep everyone safe."

In fact, your responsibility as a guest starts and ends with the WHO's standard recommendations to prevent the spread of Covid-19, including:

- Frequent cleaning of hands using an alcohol-based hand sanitiser
- Frequent washing of hands with soap and warm water

- Covering your nose and mouth with a flexed elbow or disposable tissue when coughing and sneezing
- Using a cloth mask in public areas
- Avoiding travel and socialising if you are feeling unwell (for example, have a cough or fever)

3. Listen to your hosts – and respect their guidelines

Most of the travel experience will remain familiar to tourists; however, there will be a few new aspects to be aware of due to Covid-19.

"Of course, social distancing is still of the utmost importance and establishments have been urged to remove any shared stationery from guestrooms. The majority of hotels and B&Bs have done away with buffet-style meals and, as per government regulations, sit-down restaurants must ensure a safe distance between each table," explains Momberg.

South Africa now has a 12pm curfew in place, which means many kitchens may close slightly earlier so their staff, who may have some distance to travel, can get home before curfew kicks in.

Perhaps the most important thing, says Momberg, is to respect your establishment's guidelines. "We need to demonstrate our readiness and safety to the government, especially with the reopening of our international borders. We cannot afford to flout regulations, or take short cuts. Guests can help by supporting their accommodation's efforts."

Of course, the protocols are also crucial in the fight against Covid-19. "While Covid-positive cases are reducing and the South African recovery rate continues to improve, the country definitely isn't out of the woods just yet," says Dros. "We urge all travellers to respect the various protocols, to listen intently, and to ask questions if there is anything that they do not fully understand. We all need to work together to prevent a resurgence from taking place," he adds.

4. Support smaller SMMEs – and avoid the crowds

Almost all South Africans have been suffering from cabin fever, and it goes without saying that Covid-19 and the lockdown period have had a tremendous impact on everyone's mental health. A much-anticipated getaway could be the perfect way in which to reduce stress, unwind, and regain perspective after many long months of worries and uncertainty.

It is also a wonderful way in which South Africans can do their bit to help kick-start the economy once again.

"We encourage all travellers to focus on supporting local enterprises. Now that social distancing is so imperative, there has never been a better excuse to venture off of the beaten track in search of fresh air, wide open spaces and some of South Africa's best-kept secrets," says Momberg.

The bottom line is that prospective travellers can take comfort in the knowledge that the tourism industry is slowly reviving, and that tourist safety is undoubtedly priority number one. While Covid is still very much a factor in how South Africans live their lives, by working towards a common goal and accepting that safety is a shared responsibility, it will be possible to welcome back many of the wonderful pleasures that have been missing from everybody's lifestyles for so long.