

What does the future of tourism in South Africa look like in a 4IR age?

 By [Dorine Reinstein](#)

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Technology has changed and revolutionised every aspect of our lives, including our tourism experiences. However people remain at the heart of every innovation, experts agree. "Technology does not change society; people change society. People may change society with the assistance of technology, but the primary drivers of change remain, people," said Dr Nomvuselelo Songelwa at a panel discussion on the impact of the fourth industrial revolution on tourism at the University of Johannesburg.

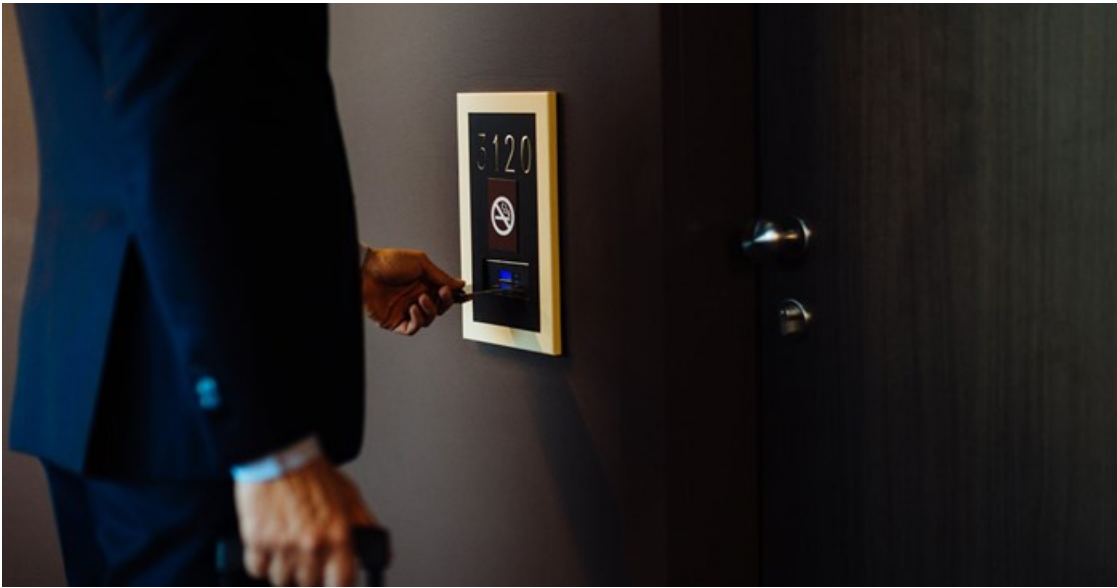


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The panel discussion took place at a prestigious event celebrating the 50 year anniversary of the School of Tourism and Hospitality.

Prof Daneel van Lill, Executive Dean at the University of Johannesburg, agreed and explained that every technological innovation in the tourism industry has to serve the customer experience. "We often deal with people who have expendable money, but not expendable time. We need to stretch people's perception of time by delivering a formidable tourism experience," he said.

"We are in the business of giving the customer service," said also Arthur Gillis, CEO Platinum Hospitality Holdings. "People are glued to their devices and are more stressed than ever before. They want to come to their hotel as a place of refuge. They don't want to be confronted with more tech that is impossible to understand or load yet another app they don't need."

Connecting people

Technology needs to merely exist to give guests substantially better service than ever before, maintained Gillis. "If we are not using it to that end, then tech is driving us as opposed to us using the technology to give guests a better experience."

"The fourth industrial revolution shouldn't be seen as 'disruption', but as innovation," added Velma Corcoran, country manager for Airbnb. She explained that there is an underlying fear that robots will take over the world. However, the opposite is true.

Said Corcoran: "Technology connects people. Airbnb is a people-powered platform underpinned by technology. We connect people who have a space to share or people who have a passion to share to people across the world who are looking for unique tourism experiences."

According to Corcoran, tech can be used as an enabler for more inclusive growth. "We have seen incredible growth across the continent, and we have realised that there's real potential. You can use tech to take tourism to communities that haven't previously benefited from tourism. They have now access to a global audience of travellers who are looking for unique experiences."

Dr Songelwa explained Jurni addresses exactly the challenge of connecting the tourism products in the more isolated areas with tourists worldwide. "People are running fantastic products in the rural outskirts of our country. We can help put those on the map through technology," she explained. Jurni has developed an affordable SMME booking tool to level the playing field and allow everyone to be able to market their tourism products in the same way.

Simultaneously, Jurni is also working on the development of a data hub. "We need reliable and current data to be able to make informed decisions in the tourism industry," said Dr. Songelwa. She warns however that this can't be done in isolation. "The time of gathering statistics and developing our own analysis in isolation is long gone. We have to change our mindsets, behave innovatively, and respond to the needs of the customers as a community."

"Next year, this time, we will no longer be talking about Google as a disruptor in the tourism industry, we will be talking about Jurni. We will provide incomparable tourism analysis for our country with integrated data at a granular level."

Dr Songelway concluded by saying that the fourth industrial revolution is about the convergence of all the technologies to make sure the visitors to South Africa can seamlessly experience the authentic SA.

ABOUT DORINE REINSTEIN

Dorine Reinstein is corporate division leader for Big Ambitions. She is a seasoned travel writer and editor, who is passionate about corporate and retail travel. She has written for several award-winning publications including Travel Weekly and Travel Buyer.

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