

Xenophobia: South Africa's instability is killing its tourism industry

 By [Musa Strachan](#)

18 May 2015

The recent outbreak of xenophobic attacks across the country has left an indelible mark on the South African tourism industry. Not only has the country's reputation as an idyllic and historically significant destination suffered, but the loss of potential income, derived from tourists, will be severely felt by a sector already struggling for an ever diminishing piece of the global tourism pie.

The bigger international picture

Let's look at the international picture. According to the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) there were just more than one billion tourists in 2013. Emerging markets enjoyed a 47% of the international market, with 5% of the 1.087 billion visiting Africa. To narrow it even further, only 3.3% visited Sub-Saharan Africa. The World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index 2013 ranked South Africa 64th out of the 140 surveyed destinations. The main factor contributing to a country's competitiveness is stability.

The Institute for Economics and Peace released their much revered Global Peace Index (GPI) for 2014 earlier this year. South Africa was ranked 122nd (out of 162) with 28 other African countries ranked higher. Examples include Ghana (61), Sierra Leone (66), Senegal (72), Angola (102) and the Republic of the Congo (109). South Africa was also the subject of a case study which showed that 8.6% of the country's GDP is spent on containing violence. In a peace deficit analysis, the report notes that South Africa's murder rate is four and a half times higher than the global average (45 murders a day) and that poverty is the root of the problem. Between 2008 and 2013, South Africa's Gini coefficient, which measures income inequality, has not changed.

The GPI further states that a lack of progress on inequality, coupled with a high unemployment rate and poor service delivery has led to periodic, sometimes violent protests in townships and among affected groups. "Such discontent also threatens to fuel attacks on outsiders - the most serious of such incidents took place in 2008, when there was a wave of xenophobic attacks on foreign Africans."

The picture painted by reports such as the GPI and global news coverage about the recent xenophobic attacks makes it exceedingly difficult to market South Africa as an inviting tourist destination.

Research confirms effect of xenophobia on tourism

A study by Dr Lindie du Plessis of research entity TREES (Tourism Research in Economic Environs and Society) at the

Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University confirms this, but also sheds light on how to remedy the problem.

Du Plessis' research culminated in nine factors as identified by 271 tour operators from across the globe that contribute to the country's competitiveness. They were, from most important to least: stability, economic benefits, brand and image, cuisine, the African experience, attributes, tourist services, location and, lastly, entertainment and activities.

"It goes without saying that through incidents like the xenophobic attacks we cannot possibly market ourselves as a stable country. Our results show that political and economic stability is the most important factors contributing to South Africa's competitiveness. It shows that it is imperative for government to establish and promote stricter safety and security measures. The country should also focus on communicating more positive aspects of the country to the global community. We need to promote places where it is safe to travel as it is clear that the African experience, our uniqueness and the availability of nature based products are attractive prospects for potential tourists," explains Du Plessis. "Our exchange rate is very favourable, we need to promote it."

She is, however, adamant that it is going to take a concentrated and immense effort to repair the damage done to the country's brand. "The task is going to be a mammoth one. There are a lot of lessons to be learned here, and lessons that should be learned, because government has failed the tourism industry. More importantly, government has failed its citizens, those born here and those not."

ABOUT MUSA STRACHAN

It is my passion to utilise my public relations experience and skills that I have gained, to make a difference in the workplace in an effective manner, adding value to the industry and impacting lives in a practical way. As I have grown - I have learnt to value security and tradition. I am loyal, hard-working and dependable. I live by what I have learnt in my profession which is 'Liberating people liberates brands'.

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