



The Tourism Safety Initiative

- Creating **safety support and awareness** for businesses and tourists

By Annalise Kempen

Given our relatively high crime rate, South Africans are, generally speaking, safety conscious. Those who stay in urban areas and who are used to locking their doors and gates and activating their alarms, tend to warn others to do the same and avoid certain areas where there's a greater likelihood of falling victim to crime. Call it a kind of goodwill gesture to ensure that others don't become part of the statistics when they visit these higher-crime areas. But when it comes to travel and tourism, one needs to keep a fine balance in terms of sharing information without scaring tourists away from visiting a certain destination, on one hand, or jeopardising their safety, on the other. In a book entitled *The competitive destination: a sustainable tourism perspective*, the author emphasises that **reputation rather than reality governs choices made by tourists** and that, for some, the element of risk actually becomes part of the reason for why a destination is chosen for travel - for the sake of risk in terms of intrigue, excitement and adrenalin, rather than fear.

The birth of a dedicated initiative

South Africa is not unique in facing challenges of safety and security with regard to the travel and tourism industry. Countries all over the world have to create a balance between the realities of crime, threats and acts of terrorism, political instability and the migrant crisis, and how they market their country as a preferred tourist

There are so **many reasons** for why people would want to visit South Africa, ranging from our **breathtaking natural landscapes, diverse cultures and experiences** - not to mention the current exchange rate, which makes it a cheap travel destination. These were probably some of the main reasons for why **more than two million people visited South Africa** between 1 December 2015 and 7 January 2016 - representing a **7% increase** from the previous assessment period. One just wonders, however, whether there would have been an even greater increase in foreign visitors if our crime levels were lower.

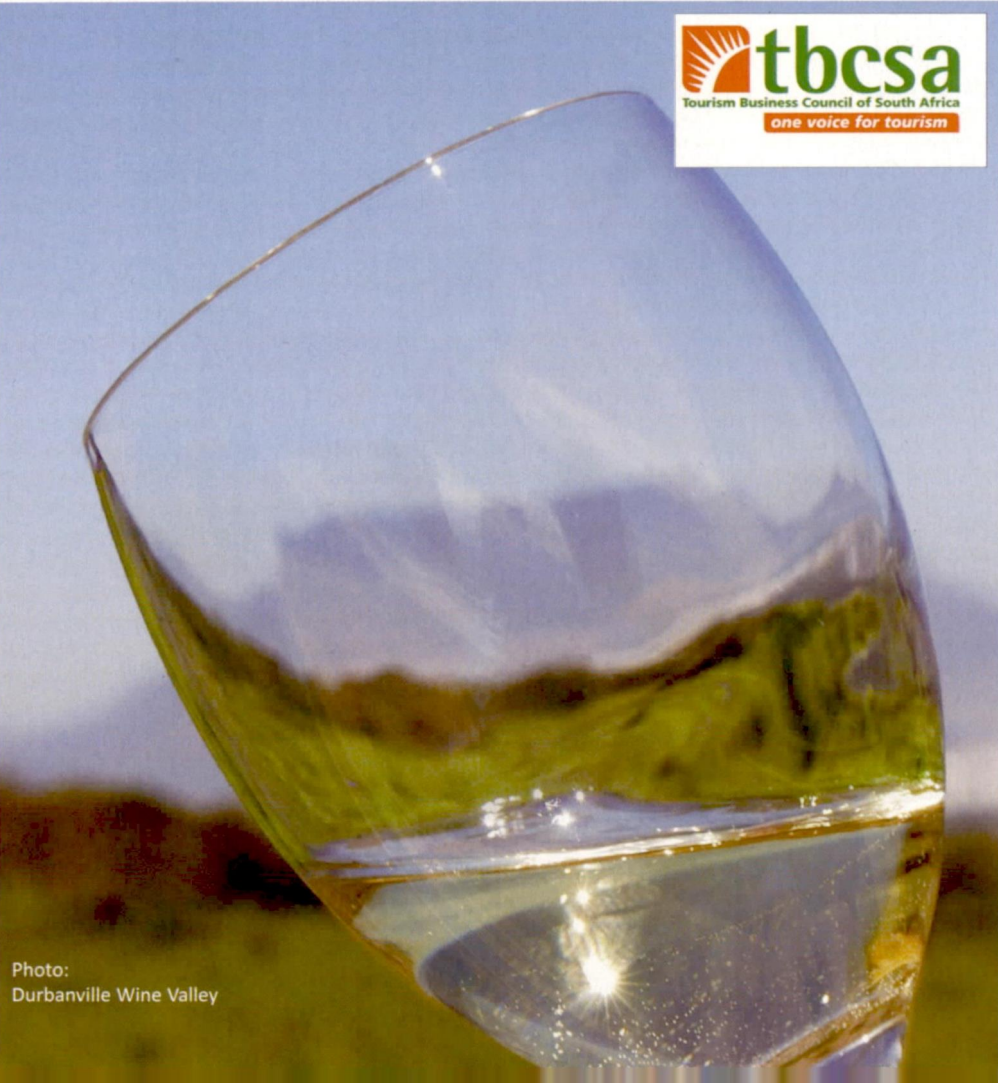


Photo:
Durbanville Wine Valley

destination, irrespective of these issues. One would therefore think that there is a great need for a dedicated initiative that focuses specifically on the impact that crime has on the travel and tourism industry.

South Africa’s travel and tourism industry has recognised that need, which has led to the establishment of the Tourism Safety Initiative (TSI), now under the auspices of the Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBCSA). **The TSI**, as a private sector initiative, **offers a tourism safety information portal and trade support programme**. It also **acts as a vehicle through which safety and security challenges in the travel and tourism sector can be addressed**. Its mandate is wider than security (including crime-related incidents), as it also incorporates safety, which, for example, includes issues such as the availability of safe drinking water or the reliability of medical services, or information about places where there is a high likelihood of an outbreak of disease, eg Ebola.

The TSI aims to **provide a national safety advisory and support service for tourists** by acting as a conduit between tourists and government and law enforcement agencies, to address crime prevalence in the travel and tourism industry through additional resources and legislation. It also aims to raise awareness about safety and security matters among tourists and the tourism trade at large. In other words, it aims to ensure that the **private sector’s voice on tourist safety and security matters is unified** and that tourist safety activities are well-coordinated.

The TSI wants to serve a broad range of audiences. These include organised businesses in the tourism industry, ie those affiliated with the TBCSA; local tourism organisations, and businesses who contribute to TOMSA (the tourism levy) etc. However, the TSI

also wants to serve the interests of individual tourists (whether local, regional and international), irrespective of whether they travel for leisure or business. The last group that can benefit from the TSI’s services is that of industry stakeholders, through information-sharing.

There are **two** types of stakeholders: those **from** the industry side, such as the National Department of Tourism; and external stakeholders, which include a broad range of organisations such as the SAPS, Traffic Police, the Department of International Relations as well as other private sector organisations, such as Business Against Crime, Sabric etc.

Information-sharing is vital

The seriousness of any threat can only be determined when timely and accurate information is available. The same goes for determining how the travel and tourism industry is affected by safety and security issues.

As the TSI is, in essence, an **information-sharing portal**, it is vital that all **stakeholders in the travel and tourism sector report all safety and security-related incidents** as soon as possible after they happened. It is important to note that the TSI wants to work with the SAPS and not against it, and therefore that incidents should first be reported to the police and thereafter to the TSI (each with the relevant case number). The TSI wants to collect statistics and other information to help to support the work that it does and, for this purpose, the TSI has created an easy-to-use form on its website, www.tourismsafety.co.za, where such incidents can be reported either by the establishment itself or by a tourist (individual). Apart from requiring the entry of basic personal information, the form allows the reporter to view a short definition of the type of incident, ie a burglary or extortion, to ensure that the correct type of incident has been selected.

The TSI uses this information to compile regular reports, in the form of weekly overviews, which are disseminated through a secure, password-protected portal. The recipients can use this information to take the necessary precautions to mitigate their safety and security risks, for both their establishments and their clients.

Through the collection of this data, the TSI wants to eventually create a solid and reliable database of all incidents reported on an annual basis, with updates on investigations and arrests relating to such incidents. This will enable the TSI to assess and present a clear picture of the impact of safety incidents on tourism businesses and tourists. It might also put the TSI in a position where it can strengthen the SAPS’s hands in addressing tourism-related crime by providing them with tourism crime-related information, since the SAPS does not keep separate statistics for crimes against tourists. In this way, the TSI can fulfil a similar role to that of Sabric, which is doing the same in terms of banking-related crimes.

Information tools

The TSI collects information from various sources, including the banking industry, the Post Office, petroleum industry, retailers and SAPS, as well as the travel and tourism industry itself, as mentioned above. Various tools, in the form of Infosums (discussed below), accommodation reports and hotspot reports, have been developed and are used to disseminate information to stakeholders.

■ Infosums

Infosums are information summaries produced on a fortnightly basis, aimed at providing information related to safety and security matters and how they impact, or could impact, the tourism space in South Africa.

For example, at the beginning of 2016, the TSI issued an Infosum with expectations for this year. It contains information about some of the major tourism hazards for 2016, ie on humans (crime and terrorism); on the atmosphere (floods and severe storms); on a geological level (earthquakes and volcanos), and on a biological level (insect bites [malaria] and human epidemics [Ebola]).

Infosums also contain information in terms of risks at tourist destinations since some tourist establishments, especially the smaller ones, lack the capacity/skills to identify the variety of risks that they actually face. The TSI helps to address these risks at different levels, ie risks for the establishment/destination (liability, property damage) and risks for the tourist (serious injury or death).