



Break the bottlenecks stifling SA's tourism sector

UNATHI SONWABILE HENAMA

THERE is no better time than Tourism Month to reflect on the vision for the future of tourism.

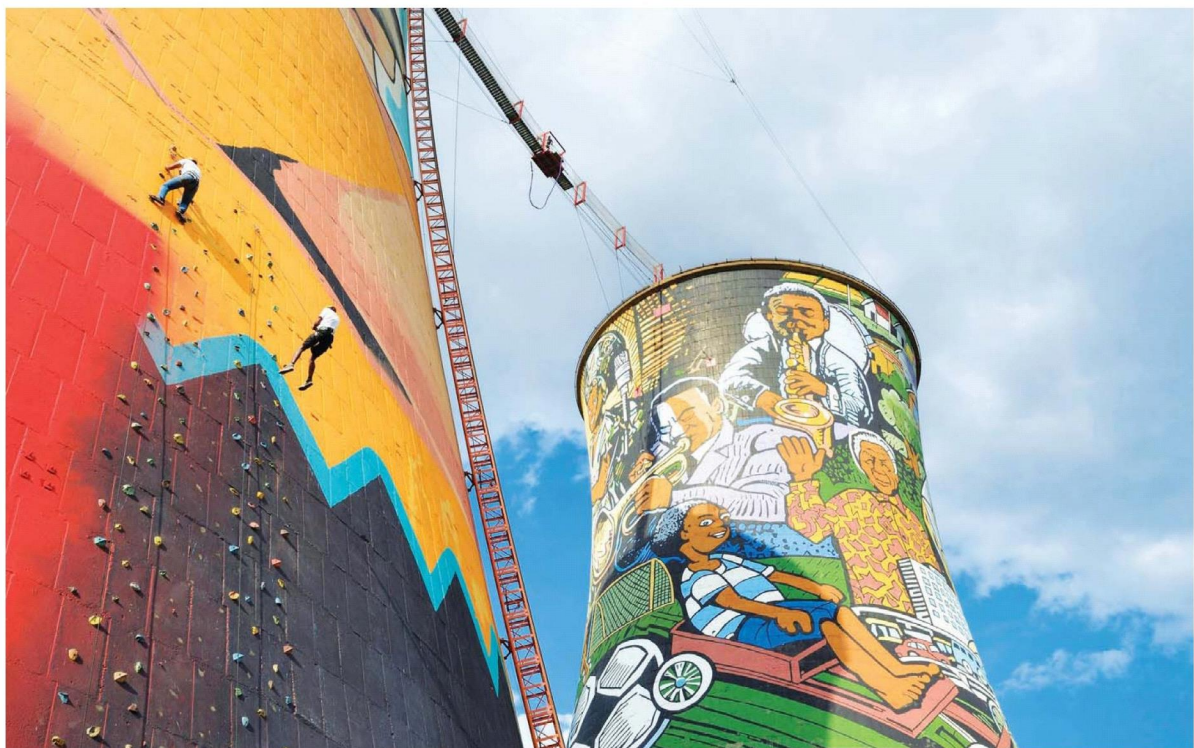
The national tourism sector strategy (NTSS) envisages South Africa to be within the top 20 tourist destinations in the world by 2020, which is rather appropriate to reflect on our collective responsibility and to ensure that we passionately strive to achieve that strategic objective.

The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index 2015 Ranking of the World Economic Forum indicates that South Africa is placed at position 48 on the competitive index, with Spain at the number one spot. South Africa needs to be globally competitive and as the country finds itself placed at position 48, it is imperative that we ask what is to be done to ensure that by 2020 we are at position 20, to achieve the objectives of the NTSS.

In 2009, President Jacob Zuma created a separate tourism ministry as envisioned in the tourism white paper, indicating the political importance of tourism. Possibly the best thing to happen to tourism was the crisis of the introduction of unabridged birth certificates and draconian visa regulation.

Tourism started to flex its muscle and became part of the national discourse. Tourism is the "new gold" as it attracts more foreign exchange than gold mining and it must therefore get dedicated attention.

Tourism located in the consumption economy is far different from the production economy linked to mining, agriculture and manufacturing as it's in the tertiary sector of the economy. Tourism has sustained growth as taking of holidays has become institutionalised as a habit and psychologists have also



ONLY WAY IS UP: The South African tourism industry holds great potential for massive job creation and to reduce poverty, but only the tourism authorities put on place measures that will make the environment conducive for the sector to thrive and prosper says the writer.

indicated that holiday consumption has a positive impact on the quality of life.

Tourism because it is a service, is an export product that is consumed at the destination area, because it is simultaneously produced and consumed.

It's a source of foreign exchange par excellence as it allows countries to attract hard currencies as diversify their economies.

Tourism is big business and a highly competitive industry. The United Arab Emirates, with its high oil reserves has used tourism as a means of diversifying its economy.

Africa continues to receive less than 10% of global tourism receipts, which means that there is much greater scope to grow that 10% to 30% which would change the reality of African economies.

The sector is not just business but an important industry that is related to human rights, because it has a symbiotic relationship with human rights as it positively impacts on the standard of living of citizens.

Governments that realise the potential of tourism usually treat their citizens better and move to improve public transport, infrastructure and reduce crime.

Soveto is a perfect example of how the potential of tourism has prompted the government to build infrastructure that benefits local residents.

Tourism is a vital force for peace as personal safety and security is a prerequisite for tourism growth.

The knock-on effect is that those areas with increased tourism consumption have better policing, which

also benefits the citizens.

Tourism consumption by blacks remains low because the majority of tourism companies do not take the liberty to understand the consumption patterns of black people.

Black people have the stokvel economy, which means that tourism companies must increasingly engage with stokvels so that some of the savings are directed towards the consumption of holidays. Tourism heritage is divided into two phases, pre- and post-1994.

Heritage sites must be commodified and commercialised so that they appeal and heritage must get some swag.

It must be possible to zipline from either Freedom Park or the Voorrekker Monument.

This would give the site a new lease on life and attract different consumer groups. South African politicians do not take tourism seriously and they tend to take the sector for granted.

What is to be done to be in the top 20 destinations by the year 2020 includes sorting the elephant in the room head on Yes, the visa issue.

Provide a 10 year visa, liberalise aviation by giving the freedoms of the sky that will ensure that more airlines fly to South Africa.

Liberate Beit Bridge by giving the best service and ensure that South African Airways is globally competitive to ensure it plays a greater development role in providing reliable fast transportation that is needed by business and tourism.

Tourism also needs a tourism red tape initiative which will identify and unlock the bottlenecks that stifle the tourism economy to create jobs and make poverty a rumour.

Unathi Sonwabile Henama teaches tourism at the Tshwane University of Technology and writes in his personal capacity