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South Africa: A bargain-hunter's dream?

By [Dorine Reinstein](#) / September 24, 2015

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Africa will soon be on every traveler's bucket list if the continent plays its cards right. The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) recently predicted that Africa will develop the world's fastest-growing tourism market over the next 10 years.

David Scowsill, president and CEO of the WTTC, said: "The world has mostly been focused on Asia-Pacific as the fastest-growing region, but our latest figures demonstrate the potential in Africa's travel and tourism industry, which is ripe for investment."



South Africa seems already well on its way to become a favorite destination for U.S. travelers. The country recently saw its currency tumble against the U.S. dollar to almost 14 rands to the U.S. dollar, making a vacation in the African country a "bargain" for most U.S. travelers.

Rowena Robartes, specialist travel consultant for Boundless Africa, explains the company has seen an increase in demand from the

U.S. market, with requests for longer stays. She explains travelers now often request two full weeks instead of just eight nights.

Onne Vegter, director of Wild Wings Safaris, says high-end travelers definitely see South Africa as a bargain destination. He says: "I would say the most visible result of the weakening rand is that travelers are opting for higher-end, luxury options. Travelers are able to choose between a wider variety of lodges and hotels that now fit within their budget, which has allowed us to upsell some guests to higher-end properties."

Sherwin Banda, president of Africa Travel Inc., says South Africa is the operator's most popular African destination, and the value is a huge factor. He says: "Travelers are surprised as safaris are cheaper than ever before. There are many perceptions out there that Africa is extremely expensive so [clients are] pleasantly surprised when they see some of African Travel's packages for under \$5,000 including international air."

Marcia Gordon of Extraordinary Journeys agrees, saying that although most U.S. travelers are unaware of the unprecedented buying power they now have in South Africa and Namibia, they are pleasantly surprised when they realize how far their dollars will stretch.

Says Gordon: "We definitely steer those who are more budget-conscious toward South Africa because they can get a great product at a really comfortable rate. And for those who really want luxury, South Africa sweetens the deal by making upgrades possible or for allowing people to look at five- rather than four-star properties."

A weaker rand has always been a critical element in keeping South Africa a price-competitive destination, says also Gary Lotter, managing director for Go2Africa. He explains, however, that an immediate response to a weaker rand is not common; what the industry tends to see is increasing demand over period of time that is

accompanied by sustained weakness of the currency.

However, although the potential of Africa is limitless when it comes to tourism, Scowsill warns that to fully realize this, African nations must collectively focus on key areas such as tourism infrastructure, improved air connectivity and common visas. During Routes 2015, which was held in Durban from from Sept. 19 to 21, Scowsill remarked that South Africa's new immigration regulations, which require travelers under 18 to carry an unabridged birth certificate and other documentation, is undoubtedly negatively affecting tourism. He congratulated the South African government for appointing a task team to look into the effects of the new regulations on tourism but warned that the country needs to move fast in order to limit the impact.

According to ForwardKeys, a company that monitors future travel patterns by analyzing 14 million reservations each day, the damage has already been done. The research company says international family arrivals to South Africa have fallen 10% year over year since the introduction of the new requirement for children. From the U.S., family travel to South Africa is down as much as 18%.

Gordon admits she has also seen a slight decrease in families with young children traveling to South Africa. She argues, however, that although the visa regulations don't help, there are some other reasons for this decline. She says: "I think that since the Ebola scare, Africa as a whole has been removed from people's list for a while."