

South Africa's promotion to the gay market

© Mary Tebje

Tourism Cape Town

The city of Cape Town is arguably the jewel in the crown that is South Africa's tourism product. The city, located in the Western Cape, attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors each year and it is not too difficult to understand why. With the world-famous Table Mountain as its backdrop, the city offers the tourist a world of experiences, set amongst some of the most dramatic scenery to be seen anywhere in the world. Cape Town is home to a wide range of attractions, including some of the finest architectural heritage, culture, a wide retail and entertainment sector, culinary fare and an impressive range of accommodation and adventure sport.



On the beach in Cape Town

This particular case study looks at a marketing initiative undertaken by Cape Town Tourism, (the regional tourist board), in 2000 which looks at how a destination successfully targeted a niche market in recognition of its economic worth and value to the destination - the gay inbound traveller to Cape Town, South Africa.

Mary Tebje works as an independent tourism and leisure consultant and Sheryl Ozinsky is the former Director of Cape Town Tourism.

Background

Cape Town is recognised as one of the top pink destinations in the world. Although few official statistics exist regarding the size and growth of this sector in Cape Town, indications are that the pink market continues to experience high growth, probably in line with national averages in the growth of foreign arrivals to South Africa which totalled 11% in 2002, with the UK and Germany being the leading source markets for the Western Cape.

The foundations of the pink tourism industry in Cape Town lie in the South African constitution, the most advanced constitution in the world, with regard to entrenching human rights in society. Tolerance of all different creeds and sexual persuasion prohibits discrimination based on sexual difference. South Africa's strong culture of human rights has placed them firmly on the map as a destination that is tolerant of diversity in all its forms.

Since becoming a top pink destination there has been, inevitably, a (limited) backlash of conservatism. Despite opposition from some sectors, Cape Town has done much to establish itself as a gay friendly city, home to a thriving queer (the term used within South Africa for gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgendered people) community network and a range of dazzling events glamorous enough to have put them firmly on the international gay culture map.

South Africa's promotion to the gay market

© Mary Tebje

In addition, South African Tourism, the national tourism office responsible for marketing South Africa abroad, has just agreed to develop a Gay South African strategy for the country as a whole, with Cape Town Tourism playing a major role. This reflects the realisation in national tourism circles that the pink tourism market presents a lucrative opportunity for future development.

Understanding the Pink Market

One of the challenges in putting together a case study for the pink tourism market is the relative dearth of statistical information and trend analyses available.

Although estimates are available for the global pink market, and the outbound markets of the UK and US, very little is available for the inbound pink market in relation to specific city destinations.

Pink Tourism Worldwide

Globally it is estimated that in 2003 pink tourism will generate about \$3,3 billion around the world in tourism receipts; while the value of the pink tourism economy is approximately \$140 billion.

Research** into this niche market has identified certain characteristics of the gay and lesbian travellers. In particular:

- Gay travellers seldom travel as part of an escorted group; they usually travel in same sex couples, in groups, or alone.

- Gay travellers travel more frequently and at various times of the year than do straight travellers.
- Gay people typically have a higher than average disposable income and few family responsibilities.
- Gay people are brand loyal, support businesses that are 'gay friendly' and are responsive to advertising that acknowledges their preferences.
- Popular pink destinations are gay friendly and have a vibrant gay culture and community.
- Gay couples prefer gay friendly accommodation.
- Many of the gay holidays on offer reflect a fun-loving, gay 18-30 year old culture. The preference for gay scene destinations is more pronounced among young respondents, who lack the spending potential of older gays.
- However, the most frequent holiday takers in the gay market are the over 55's and the 35-54 year old group. The increasing spending power of these older age groups will demand more sophisticated 'value added' products.
- The pink holiday market is entering a period of growth as gays and lesbians have begun to be targeted by tour operators.

South Africa's promotion to the gay market

© Mary Tebje

In terms of booking patterns, the following characteristics of the pink market is discernable:

- In the US, 59% of gay travellers use the web to research or make travel plans; 50% book on-line; most "upmarket" gay travellers will use a gay or gay friendly travel agent.
- Gay travellers, considering gay travel ads, would most prefer to see tasteful images of obviously gay couples engaging in typical tourist activities or in a romantic setting.
- Companies who sponsor or participate in gay community events enjoy a strong level of loyalty among gay travellers.

Top gay destinations around the world include: Amsterdam, Barcelona, Paris, Sydney, San Francisco, London, New Zealand, Cape Town, New York, Bahamas, Costa Rica, Canada, Thailand, Mexico, Hawaii, Key West and Brazil.

** (Source: Community Travel Research, www.mark8ing.com).

Pink Tourism in Cape Town

In South Africa, an emerging destination, they are only just starting to get to grips with niche markets. As a result market intelligence about the economic impact and changes in inbound

niche markets is either non-existent or limited. This is certainly the case with regard to the pink tourism market in Cape Town.

The only research, to date undertaken into the pink tourism market in Cape Town was completed in 2000 by a Masters student in Tourism, at the University of Cape Town, Elli Yiannakaris. The sample of respondents included in the study was small (only 51) and the great majority of the respondents were men (43 of the 51, or 84%). As a result the data should be treated with caution when drawing conclusions.

Nevertheless, in the absence of other data, the study is useful as an indication of the profile of gay and lesbian travellers to Cape Town and the opportunities that exist to grow this market, as well as the areas where there is room for improvement. The survey indicated that:

- The primary motivators of gay tourists visiting the Cape are to experience local culture and scenery, to visit local attractions and to experience local gay culture.
- The inclusion of the desire to experience local gay culture as a primary motive suggests that gay travellers to the Cape are influenced to some degree by the gayness of the destination.
- Word of mouth is the most common source of information utilised for the Western Cape. Gay specific publications and Internet sites were not largely utilised to obtain

South Africa's promotion to the gay market

© Mary Tebje

information about the Cape, which, considering the general high usage rate attributed to these media by the gay community, implies that there is room for these media to be further utilised to market Cape Town.

- Awareness exists in the pink marketplace that the Cape is a recognized gay destination. This perception indicates that current marketing initiatives have been successful in creating an awareness of the gay friendly attitude of Cape society and the attractions, facilities and services that are available to the gay traveller.
- Cape Town is highly rated by gay individuals as a destination that provides value for money, a variety of attractions and places of interest and quality gay accommodation facilities.
- Entertainment facilities catering to the gay market are inadequate and should be improved upon.

Establishing a Pink Destination - the case for Cape Town

To a certain extent, Cape Town's ascendance as one of the top pink destinations in the world has happened organically over the past 8 years (since the first democratic elections in 1994).

Certainly the tourism authorities have had no explicit master plan to attract this market. This aside however, Cape Town Tourism has naturally gone about promoting this niche market in a number of fundamental and strategic ways.

Market Communication

Collaboration and co-operation between the gay community, particular gay tourism role-players, and Cape Town Tourism, the official Visitor Information Centre (VIC) for the city, has done much to cement the city as a top destination for queer travellers.

The following are good practical examples of active engagement with this sector:

- The gay community is strongly represented in the membership of Cape Town Tourism; as such, it contributes to steering the strategic direction of the organization.
- A distinct association representing gay and lesbian tourism interests was formed in 1999, the Gay and Lesbian Association of Cape Town Tourism Industry & Commerce (GALACTTIC), to represent the specific interests of this

South Africa's promotion to the gay market

© Mary Tebje

sector of the tourism industry. A representative of Cape Town Tourism sits on the board of this organization. The GALACTTIC website provides links to accommodation, tours and transport, restaurant, bars and theatre, amongst others.

- Cape Town Tourism also works with www.gaynetcapetown.com an information site for the gay or lesbian traveller to Cape Town.
- A pink visitors' map has been developed through a partnership between the gay community and Cape Town Tourism; this map lists the city's gay-friendly facilities - ranging from accommodation, restaurants and pubs to massage parlours.
- A pink tourism section is included in the official visitor's guides to the city www.cape-town.org
- Cape Town Tourism is involved in collaborating with and promoting pink events in the city.
- Cape Town Tourism works closely with the gay travel channels (like tour operators and travel agents) and media, to assist in providing promotional and other information and material on this market.

This common stance adopted by the gay and lesbian community and Cape Town Tourism in promoting the city as a pink destination has allowed the city to capitalize on synergies.

Other market communication strategies include:

- Cape Town's hosting of the 2001 International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association's biannual symposium, attended by 1 200 travel retailers from 35 countries. This provided a perfect opportunity to market the city to these booking agents and impress them with the destination. Partly sponsored by South African Tourism, which underlines the national tourism organisation commitment to developing niche markets, such as the pink tourism market.
- Representation of Cape Town's pink tourism industry on international bodies such as Interpride International, a body with members from more than 29 countries and just less than 200 "official" pride celebrations world-wide. San Francisco Pride 2001 drew a crowd in excess of a million people and profits ran into 6 figures enabling San Francisco Pride to benefit 30 community groups.
- Targeted communication through the queer media, in particular popular publications such as Spartacus, the well-known international gay tourist guide, has promoted the profile of Cape Town as a gay-friendly city internationally. Spartacus ranks Cape Town as the fifth most important pink travel destination in the world after The Canary Islands, San Francisco, Sydney and Amsterdam.

South Africa's promotion to the gay market © Mary Tebje

Product Development

As confirmed by the results of the survey of gay and lesbian travellers to Cape Town, certain general characteristics of Cape Town assist in positioning it as a destination for most travel markets, not only the pink travel market. In particular, Cape Town's natural beauty and cultural diversity, its value for money and its developed tourist infrastructure, all contribute to the world-class nature of the tourism product offered.

In respect of the pink tourism market, Cape Town offers queer travellers specific products designed to meet their tastes:

Accommodation: There exists a diversity of tourism establishments catering directly for the pink market and the type of establishments available cater for all budgets and interests. It is estimated that there are currently in the region of 35 accommodation establishments catering for this niche market.

Entertainment: More work needs to be undertaken to improve entertainment facilities. The lack of a variety of entertainment facilities affects the tourism product offering available to all visitors to the city.

Tour Operators: In recent years a number of inbound tour operators catering specifically to the gay and lesbian travel industry visiting Cape Town have been established. These organizations play a critical role in promoting the destination internationally and securing visits to the Cape. Cape Town

Tourism works with these organizations to promote the Cape as a gay-friendly destination.

Events: Gay events have played a big role in putting Cape Town on the pink tourism map. The MCQP, (the Mother City Queer



**The Mother City Queer
Costume Project Poster**

Costume Project) party, now in its 9th year, has a following around the world. It was estimated that in 2000, over R50 million was spent in Cape Town by visitors to the party. MCQP has recently been extended from a one-night party to a weeklong festival. The intention is to attract not only the "circuit queens", who attend all the big queer parties around the world, but also other segments of the pink market, who are interested in a variety of cultural and human interest experiences.

Extending the party to a weeklong festival will also help to increase moneys spent, as well as to diversify the product offering. A number of other activities, such as hikes, sport competitions, theatre, "queers by candlelight", art exhibitions, etc will be held during the weeklong festival. Ultimately the organizers hope for the MCQP festival in Cape Town to rival DiversCite in Montreal, the Mardi Gras in Australia and San Francisco Pride, some of the world's largest pink events.

South Africa's promotion to the gay market © Mary Tebje

Cape Town also boasts a Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, which adds to the city's gay product bouquet. This film festival received monetary support from South African Tourism, which indicates just how seriously the national tourism office is about supporting this niche tourism market. The launch of the *Pink Loerie* festival in Knysna, a picturesque seaside town 4 hours from Cape Town, has added to the pink product offering in the Western Cape region.

Sport: A bid has been made for Cape Town to host the 2010 Gay Games. An international inspection team from the international Federation of Gay Games has recently visited the city, and it is believed that Cape Town's gay-friendly image will boost its chances of winning the bid. Earlier this year the Gay Games took place in Sydney, Australia, and the event drew about 250 000 visitors.

Conclusions

- Niche marketing, although not a new concept in the marketing discipline, has brought with it the identification of markets that until late last decade had not been explored or regarded as exciting marketing opportunities. The pink tourism market has proved to be one such market.
- Cape Town Tourism is keen to build and maintain sustainable tourism initiatives, and following on from the success of this first stage, we are busy with a GAY South

African-wide strategy that includes hosting big events and the mother of all pride marches in February 2004. Due to the fact this strategy is still being finalized, and approval must be sought, details cannot yet be released. The MCQP party and the Queers by Candlelight at *Kirstenbosch Gardens* are big gay events for December this year.

- In order to develop a world-class pink destination, certain fundamentals must be present. First and foremost, a destination must have a constitution and society that is committed to respecting and acting with sensitivity and tolerance towards diversity.
- An active gay community is also critical, as is the desire of the tourism authorities and tourism industry in general to collaborate and work together with the gay community towards the common objective of establishing a gay-friendly destination.
- Official tourism organisations can do much to set up the structures and provide the policy and strategic frameworks for the development of a pink tourism destination. For example, one of the largest gay tourism marketing organisations, the New York City Gay and Lesbian Visitors Centre, provides specialised information for gay tourists at its centre, publishes a monthly magazine, and advertises in most national gay media and travel guide books. The centre also produces a discount coupon book of its members, which include gay businesses.
- Tourism marketing bodies can also assist in identifying and communicating through appropriate marketing channels, such as queer associations and organisations, websites,

South Africa's promotion to the gay market

© Mary Tebje

publications, product maps, trade fairs, etc. Developing strategic alliances with corporates who wish to penetrate this lucrative and brand loyal market is also a useful marketing technique. For example, in addition to specialist gay companies, there are an increasing number of large-scale gay-friendly companies, such as American Airlines, Qantas, BA and Virgin Atlantic, which are recognising gay consumers by sponsoring events or advertising in gay media. The Internet has also emerged as a significant host of gay related travel sites and information sources.

- In terms of product development, promoting the development of gay friendly tourist infrastructure, to include accommodation and nightlife, can extend the product base used to attract and cater to this niche market.
- Events are key to establishing a destination on the pink tourism map and to ensuring that word of mouth advertising takes place. Events also provide a huge revenue injection into the local economy.
- There is no doubt that promoting general tourism experiences and attractions that represent the cultural and natural diversity of a destination will serve to augment the tourism product on offer to all visitor markets and thus, will enhance the visitor experience.
- In the case of Cape Town, value for money has provided an additional marketing tool.
- Detailed research into the pink market is crucial to increasing visitorship and optimising tourism receipts. In this regard, segmenting the pink market to understand the

different opportunities that are presented by the different queer market profiles would also be key to a detailed marketing strategy.