

WTM 2005

A look back at WTM 2005

IT WAS a mixed bag for South African exhibitors at the 2005 World Travel Market, with many bemoaning what they described as an "expensive", "unimaginative" SA Tourism exhibition space.

While some have expressed their disappointment at the high cost of the stand space, poor storage and "crowded" conditions, others say the 2005 event was their best ever.

"There was a great deal more interest in general in the destination at this WTM," says Forever Resorts' marketing manager, Bradley Bower, adding that a number of agreements were signed at the event.

Sheree Simpson from Mantis Collection puts this increased interest in South Africa down to South African Tourism's branding efforts. "The branding that South African Tourism has been working so hard to get out there, is now making an impact and people are recognising South Africa by its branding. I believe they have done a superb job on the brand awareness and it certainly makes a bold statement," says Simpson.

SA under-marketed

Despite their experience of a "fruitful", "successful" WTM, many of the exhibitors *Tourism Update* spoke to felt the South African stand could have been more effective.

"We did feel that South Africa as a destination was very under-marketed and that it lacked branding and awareness as an exhibitor," says Southern Spoor's Anita Vernes.

Exhibitors also queried the cost of the stand with some saying, despite their request for the stand to be changed to bring

South Africa's new international exhibition strategy gets the thumbs up, and down, from exhibitors at the 2005 World Travel Market.

Tourism Update's Natalia Thomson reports from London...



SA exhibitors open for business.

down costs and be more open and 'user friendly', they still paid the same amount.

Other challenges highlighted were the lack of storage space and the absence of high-profile SA Tourism officials on the stand.

New event strategy

Just a few months ago, SA Tourism announced its decision to follow a new international exhibitions strategy. SA Tourism said at the time it would continue to prioritise the consumer, emphasising networking and industry workshops rather than managing the South African pavilion itself.

This year SA Tourism also opted out of the annual boat cruise with the UK operators but instead held a cocktail party without inviting any of

the exhibitors. "Sadly we, as exhibitors, were not invited. We would have loved to have been able to interact with SA Tourism and our clients at a function again this year," said Simpson.

Commenting on whether SA Tourism felt the new international exhibition strategy had worked, the organisation's Claude Pretorius said "very positive feedback" had been received.

"Our plan was to set up specific meetings with existing and potential partners in the media and travel trade, thus ensuring a focused and measured approach. People appreciated the venue in the Novotel, where we were able to have uninterrupted and focused meetings," said Pretorius.

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Pre-WTM workshops a success, say tourist boards

FORTHE first time, a number of South Africa workshops were held in London, Merseyside and Glasgow prior to the event.

At least 400 UK-based travel agents attended the round-robin workshops to learn more about eight of South Africa's provinces. Says Eastern Cape Tourism Board's Susan Wilson: "The workshops worked well for us. We introduced our new Go Eastern Cape cards, which acted as a useful training tool during the workshops."

SA Tourism Country Manager: UK, Lebo Mokhesi, says this is the first time such workshops were held pre-WTM. "With this targeted audience, provincial authorities were able to showcase what makes them different, what sets them apart. We have to excite them," said Mokhesi speaking to *Tourism Update* at WTM.

Asked what feedback had been received following the workshops, SA Tourism portfolio manager: UK and Americas, Claude Pretorius had this to say: "The road shows allowed us to present new product to our United Kingdom partners. The tour operators were very excited by the range of product and experiences and also the in-depth introduction to our various provinces. The provinces were also able to present their unique selling proposition and offer a range of complementary experiences between themselves."