

INSIGHT

Africa Middle East Insight

Africa is trending with millennials

By [Dorine Reinstein](#) / March 30, 2017 [A+](#) [A-](#)

Tour operators and travel agents have reported a marked increase in millennial travel from the U.S. to Africa in the past year.

Leigh Barnes, North America regional director for Geckos Adventures, said that up till now the biggest missing piece in the youth tour market was safaris. She said: "It has long been seen as a luxury

experience, out of reach to the young backpacker."

However, when Geckos Safaris was developing its 2017 trips, the company asked its travelers where they wanted to go next. Said Barnes: "Africa, and specifically safaris, was the top choice. Last year we had no itineraries in Africa. This year we launched three brand new tours in response to growing demand.

Safari Pros' Teresa Sullivan said she has also seen a huge increase in interest from the millennial market. She explained Africa is a perfect fit for that generation, as the continent offers active adventures and unique experiences, which is exactly what the millennial traveler is looking for.

Katie Blackstone, Travel Beyond Consultant, agreed, adding, "Millennials constantly crave new things that they haven't done before, and Africa easily falls to the top of that list. Experiences (vs. material items) are what millennials are interested in; the sheer number of experiences that Africa can provide makes it the perfect destination. From safari to wine tastings to shark cage diving to up-close culture, Africa truly has something for everyone."

The price-tag associated with Africa is a concern for the younger traveler to Africa, but a safari doesn't have to be expensive. Said Blackstone: "While the high-end market is still huge in Africa, I have also noticed a renewed focus on getting back to the basics. With more budget-friendly options, the dream of travel to Africa can become a reality for millennials who are still working to pay off their student loans."

Also, Barnes said: "When developing our millennial Africa trips, we ditched the lodges for camping, which helped us deliver an incredible safari product starting at less than \$100 a day."

Lodges in Africa responded to this up-and-coming market segment and have adapted their offerings and strategies.

Marketing through social media has taken off in a big way in Africa. "Millennial travelers are interested in following and being connected to the lodges they will be visiting during both the lead-up and afterglow of their actual trips. Lodge companies with a good social media footprint are getting these millennials interested and keeping them connected," said Sullivan.

Of course, WiFi remains high on the agenda of lodges catering for this profitable market. Said Barnes: "More and more lodges have introduced WiFi, which is a huge travel priority for youth. We even have WiFi access at our camp in Hwange National Park."

Sean Kritzing, managing director and co-owner, Giltedge Travel, agreed, pointing out that even the most remote lodges now tend to offer WiFi, which is top priority with millennials. He adds he has also seen an increase in the range of adventure activities offered at lodges: quad biking, hot-air ballooning, overnighting in sky beds and treehouses, hands-on safaris.

Henk Graaff, managing director at SW Africa, added that healthy food options have also become an important consideration for lodges and travelers. They've ditched the all-you-can-eat buffets and focus on fresh produce and high-quality food.

"Millennials want to see, feel and taste their destination and explore every aspect of the culture," he said. "They want to sample shisa nyama, chakalaka and have a taste of home-brewed beer at one of the township restaurants or learn to cook these dishes themselves by participating in a cooking workshop in the colorful Bo-Kaap," referring to an area of Cape Town known for its brightly hued houses and

cobblestone streets.

"Millennial travelers are always looking for their next big adventure," said Sherwin Banda, president of the operator African Travel. "They want amazing experiences where they can take that epic selfie, and Africa has an abundance of adventure experiences. With African Travel, at the edge of Batoka Gorge, travelers can take flight on the Flying Fox, which enables them to "fly" over the gorge while attached to a cable; or if travelers want to experience a ziplining thrill, they can throw themselves off the edge of the gorge in a body harness and freefall before ending their jump with numerous pendulum swings."

Authenticity is another important consideration. Barnes explained: "For millennial travelers it is really about authenticity; they want to have immersive and real experiences. In Africa, it is so much more than safaris. We offer opportunities to meet the local communities in Matobo Hills and participate in traditional rituals with Maasai warriors."

And connected to authenticity, social responsibility is also an important element for millennial travelers. Sullivan said that millennials are interested in lodge staff and guides being treated well, as opposed to a more colonial view where the travelers' level of service was the only thing that people focused on.

In response to the interest in authenticity and social responsibility, lodges have started offering a lot more hands-on safari experiences and engagement with various people and wildlife, said Marcia Gordon, president and co-founder of Extraordinary Journeys. "Millennials want to be empowered participants, not just passive bystanders."

Banda adds that many millennial travelers are very cognizant of their ecological "footprint" and want to support sustainability and wildlife conservation initiatives in the places they visit, and Africa is a destination that not only offers amazing travel experiences but also an opportunity to help with conservation initiatives that affect both wildlife and local communities.

Said Banda: "Africa has always been a destination that is focused on giving back and allowing travelers to participate in philanthropic efforts. With millennial travelers looking to give back and especially interact with locals, lodges have adapted by allowing guests to participate in conservation efforts such as volunteering time and participating in meaningful cultural engagement within the

community either by building schools or other forms of educational enhancements like building desks and donating them to a classroom in need."

Jim Holden, president of Holden Safaris, said millennial travelers to Africa are often wary of the classic safari experience as they see this as being somewhat old school. Says Holden: "Lodges have started taking whatever stuffiness and pretention remains out of the safari experience. Dressing for dinner is out, with casual attire accepted pretty much anywhere. The long-established routine of early morning and late afternoon game drives is replaced by a menu of safari activities to be taken at any time."

Tour operators wanting to cater to the millennial market should keep in mind that the millennial traveler wants to do things their way, in their time and at their pace, said Holden.

"Millennials want to redefine the world in their image and not be bound by any of the old rules. And Africa is able to fulfill all the expectations of millennials with its flexibility and long tradition of service to the client. There is a wonderful expression used by Zimbabweans: 'let's make a plan.' Loosely translated, it means we can handle any request you throw at us! Adapting to millennials is no problem for African safari operators; we just have to listen to the millennials' needs and deliver."