

NEWS

Tourists encouraged to visit Cape Town despite severe drought



The view of Cape Town from Table Mountain. The city has implemented restrictions to hold off Day Zero, when the taps will run dry.

By Michelle Baran

Tour operators that sell South Africa and the nation's tourism marketing organization are trying to persuade travelers to continue with their travel plans despite a severe water shortage in Cape Town that is forcing the city to implement strict restrictions.

"Cape Town is a significant tourism destination for the U.S. market," said South Africa Tourism CEO Sisa Ntshona, who was making the rounds in New York earlier this month to speak with travel agents and media about the Cape Town crisis in hopes of minimizing its impact on travel to South Africa as a whole. He said that between 60% and 75% of U.S. travelers to South Africa typically include a visit to Cape Town in their itinerary.

"I'm concerned about the first quarter of 2018," Ntshona said, adding that, while he doesn't have precise tourist arrival figures yet, anecdotal evidence suggests that travelers have voiced concerns about not wanting to be a burden on Cape Town's limited resources.

According to Ntshona, while there is indeed a severe drought impacting Cape Town, it is restricted to the city and its environs, and there is no shortage in the rest of the country. Further, Ntshona said, travelers should feel comfortable continuing with their plans to visit Cape Town as long as they keep in mind certain water conservation regulations currently in place, such as a call for shorter showers (the suggested time is around two minutes) and no baths.

Lucille Sive, CEO of the Travel Corporation's Africa Division, reported that having visited Cape Town in late January, she could attest that the tourist experience there is not being disrupted or affected in any negative way by the water shortage.

"Visitors may have to make a few minor adjustments to their personal hygiene and dining routines, but otherwise the city is still a viable destination for tourism," Sive said.

Hotels and restaurants have put water-saving measures in place in compliance

with the current restrictions, she said. For example, many hotels have removed bath plugs to encourage guests to take showers, and linens are not changed daily unless requested.

Some hotel swimming pools have even been converted to saltwater pools. In restaurants, bottled water is available instead of tap water, and biodegradable paper napkins and place mats are being used in lieu of place settings that need to be washed.

Dania Weinstein, destination specialist for Africa and the Middle East for Cox & Kings, said she, too, would encourage visitors to continue with their travels to Cape Town and South Africa. She said she has been impressed by some of the innovations in which hotels have invested to help minimize water usage.

For example, she said, the Cape Grace Hotel in Cape Town has installed what it calls a "water from air" machine, a device that is supposed to produce potable water by drawing moisture from surrounding air. The hotel is also giving guests with

smaller children BabyDams, a divider that dams up a portion of the bathtub to create a smaller bathing area.

Cape Town's water crisis hit just as South Africa's tourism industry was experiencing a growth spurt, momentum that Ntshona said the country doesn't want to lose. But his hope is that the worst-case scenario — known as Day Zero, or the day when the taps run dry — will be prevented by

a combination of severe water conservation methods and relief provided by the rainy season, which typically begins in May.

Already, Day Zero has been pushed back several times, and as of Wednesday the latest date provided by South African authorities was July 9.

**South Africa Tourism
CEO Sisa Ntshona is
In the Hot Seat. P. 4**

**Editor in Chief
Arnie Weissmann
is on vacation.
His column, From
the Window Seat,
will resume in the
March 5 issue.**

