

*Three Key Trends Every Seller of African Travel
Needs to Know About Right Now*
By: Sarah Fazendin, President, The Fazendin Portfolio

To read month after month of glossy travel article on “Africa”, one would think that there are simply no other companies selling travel in Africa besides a few behemoths offering mass-market safaris. However, the industry is made up of many, many small companies who specialize in either a destination, a style of travel or cater to a specific clientele. Each of these companies is unique in their own right and work to make the African travel industry the dynamic and exciting place it is today.

Across the board the African travel industry is doing quite well, in fact travel to Africa has averaged growth of 7% per year since 2000 according to the UNWTO, and we’re seeing regular and ongoing investment in tourism product across the continent. The downturn in the U.S. economy has not had a great impact on the market for travel to Africa, at least at the higher end of the spectrum. Recent research shows that households with over \$250,000 annual income will not be greatly affected by unsettling economic news. However, according to the Luxury Marketing Council, “more than ever in recent history these luxury customers are demanding a highly personalized marketing approach and more bespoke products and services. But with them, price is no object. And there’s no sign their spending of enthusiasm for the best of the best is abating, when they’re properly courted by smart luxury marketers who know how to surprise and delight them.”

Quite simply, now is a great time to be selling the amazing continent of Africa.

Dedication to Luxury.

Luxury lodges and hotels continue to be of great interest with international travel buyers. Properties such as the Alfajiri Villas on the Indian Ocean of Kenya and Galdessa Safari Lodge, just inland Kenya at Tsavo National Park, are very popular with American travelers now because they offer travelers a chance to get to know their hosts, enjoy total privacy in fantastic settings and experience all the comforts of luxury travel.

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South African accommodations continue to reach for the sky as well, with collections of properties such as An African Anthology, Islands in Africa, Rare Earth Retreats and the Zorgvliet Portfolio providing sellers of travel a simple way to maintain relationships with key contacts at several properties. And perhaps more importantly, travel agents and tour operators can easily maintain relationships with several properties via one key contact and have some assurance that all properties in the collection meet the same standards of quality and luxury that North American travelers expect.

Despite the challenges the Kenyan tourism industry encountered due to the disputed presidential election in early 2008, the Kenyan tourism industry continues investing in tourism product to ensure that travelers experience luxury and quality across the board. For example, Heritage Hotels recently finished a massive refurbishment among their key properties. To meet the evolving desires of today's luxury travelers, Heritage Hotels' Mara Intrepids camp, along with sister-property Samburu Intrepids, now offers safari-goers three Family Tents. These new Family Tents are comprised of two traditional permanent safari tents joined by a common sitting area in between. Additionally, both Mara Intrepids and Samburu Intrepids now offer exclusively romantic Honeymoon Tents. These new tents include all the lovely amenities of the traditional safari tents, such as comfortable linens, spacious verandahs, mini-bar and en suite facilities, but are secluded to ensure the utmost privacy and luxury for discerning honeymooners while on safari in Kenya.

New Destinations and Cultures.

For the passionate, experienced African traveler looking for deserted beaches, tropical forests and dramatic landscapes, West Central Africa may be the answer. Gabon, for example, is a destination that may spring onto the main travel stage in the very near future. Many nature lovers well acquainted with the African continent consider Gabon a rare and exotic tropical gem. Wildlife-rich forests cover 70% of Gabon's landmass, its vast picturesque coastline is predominantly wild and unspoiled, and its inland and coastal waters teem with myriad species of fish, reptiles and marine mammals. However, it can be difficult to find reputable travel suppliers to Gabon and other West African destinations. We see this changing in the coming years as traveler demand increases.

Madagascar offers both a wildlife experience and a beach experience, all entwined with the unique Malagasy culture. Eighty percent of the flora and fauna in Madagascar are endemic to the country, and the 18 different ethnic groups are a blend of African and Indonesian making for a completely unique culture. And with less than 300,000 visitors per year, Madagascar offers an intimate and personalized travel experience.

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Ethiopia is an African destination which offers a rich history and opportunity to view priceless artifacts in the northern part of the country and intimate interaction with mysterious tribal communities in the south. Ethiopia is a destination for seasoned African travelers interested in diving into this unique culture and history. While not an easy trip, nor as luxurious a travel experience as many other African countries, it is well worth it to experience this destination sooner rather than later as the country is experiencing rapid growth and the tourism industry there is booming, indicating change is on the way.

As new travel destinations open up to international travelers, it's important to stay abreast of infrastructure developments, new accommodation options and new itineraries. One way to differentiate yourself within the African travel industry is to specialize in these new and up-and-coming destinations. It's also an opportunity to help shape these developments, by using your relationships with suppliers to educate them about what your travelers are looking for when it comes to African travel. These are truly symbiotic relationships!

A Second Look at “Old” Product.

As the travel industry and our travelers become more savvy, “unusual destinations” are growing in popularity. How about Malawi for example? While the travel product here is not “new”, it’s “off the beaten path” mystique makes for a perfect travel experience for someone looking beyond a Big Five safari.

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While Kafue is a famed game area in Zambia (and one of Africa’s largest parks), the park has been somewhat “forgotten” over the past years. This impressively vast national park is making a great comeback and offers several stunning, recently-renovated properties for travelers to combine for an amazing adventure in Zambia. This country is reminiscent of the more laid-back, “Old Africa” safaris void of crowds and the luxury tourism infrastructure.

The African travel industry is alive and kicking today. As a seller of travel to Africa it’s important to understand the new levels of luxury travel opportunities, embrace learning about up-and-coming destinations and also take a second look at some “old” products to determine “what’s next” for your clients.

We would be remiss not to mention all the amazing developments there have been in sustainable travel in Africa today. Companies are ever-committed to “greening” their operations, supporting local communities and working to preserve the wildlife and delicate ecosystems of Africa. However, this is no longer a new trend but something that each and every seller of travel to Africa must incorporate into their ongoing business practices and continue to be mindful of in day-to-day business.

Now is the time to be a part of the exciting African travel industry!



White Paper Resources:

Alfajiri Villas: www.alfajirivillas.com
Galdessa Safari Camp: www.galdessa.com
An African Anthology: www.africananthology.co.za
Islands in Africa: www.islandsinafrica.com
Rare Earth Retreats: www.rare-earthretreats.co.za
Zorgvliet Portfolio: www.zorgvliet.co.za
Heritage Hotels: www.heritage-eastafrika.com
Kafue National Park, Zambia: www.kushiyana.com

About Sarah Fazendin

As president of The Fazendin Portfolio, Sarah works exclusively with African travel companies to provide cost-effective integrated marketing communications solutions. This innovative portfolio also provides the travel agent community an opportunity to develop strong local partnerships with Africa-based companies that foster their individual success in selling travel to Africa.

Formerly, Sarah managed North American marketing communications for the Kenya Tourist Board. Given this high-profile industry experience, she understands the needs of African travel companies, the demands of American travelers, and how to most effectively partner with the local travel trade and media. During her tenure as North American Marketing Manger for the Kenya Tourist Board, Sarah led a team that overcame significant challenged including a U.S. government travel advisory to deliver one of Kenya's best years on record in 2005. Additionally, in January of 2006 Sarah and her team were awarded an HSMAI Adrian Award for her Kenya Tourist Board's consumer advertising campaign.

Active in her community, Sarah is a member of the Colorado Women's Chamber of Commerce, the Rocky Mountain Association for the Promotion of Tourism to Africa (APTA) chapter and sits on the executive board of Just GO! Global, a non-profit organization that helps high-school students become "global citizens" and promotes travel abroad at a young age. Sarah is also a guest lecturer for the Hospitality, Meeting and Travel Administration undergraduate program at Metropolitan State College of Denver and sits on their Curriculum Advisory Board.

About The Fazendin Portfolio

The Fazendin Portfolio partners with African travel companies to present classic African experiences to the American market. This unique approach to in-market representation includes fully integrated, cost effective marketing, public relations and sales programs to reach consumers, the travel trade and the media. The Fazendin Portfolio strives to provide representation services that not only drive sales and stimulate bottom-line growth, but work to create a strong brand image and positive awareness in the U.S. market effectively going beyond traditional travel-industry representation services.

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