

Travellers tired of surprises, striking out on their own

 By [Cari Coetzee](#)

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Ramesh Jeenarain, managing director of World Leisure Holidays, dishes on the biggest trends in travel.



Ramesh Jeenarain

What are the biggest trends that will influence the travel industry, both locally and internationally?

Ramesh Jeenarain: • Cultural emergence: South Africans are travelling to destinations for local special occasions such as Maha Shivaratri in Mauritius.

- Experiential travel: travellers are moving away from the beach and resort relaxation to fully submerge themselves in the local experiences, creating once-in-a-lifetime memories. People are looking for meaningful activities and life experiences when travelling, not just famous sites to tick off a checklist.

- Economic climate

- Solo travel: In the last two years, solo travel has more than doubled among affluent and first-time travellers. Just under half of solo travellers are professionals/executives.

- Bleisure travel is on the rise: we see more people blending the lines

between business and leisure and extending their work trips to include some extra me time.

■ What will be the game changing trend?

Jeenarain: The economic climate and the volatility of the rand, has lead consumers to opt for 'no surprises' packages, whereby more value for your rand and all-inclusive packages are preferred.

■ What are some of the main challenges facing the travel industry and travel companies?

Jeenarain: The way clients' plan and book vacations is quickly changing, with almost three-quarters of travellers opting to organise a trip themselves, rather than via a travel agent. Last year, search data revealed that travel-related Google questions increased by a massive 50%, showing they're more willing than ever to be hands-on in organising a vacation.

In 2017, we'll see travel apps improve and offer a centralised way to research, book, and take a trip. Clients have become their own travel agents. With hotels and resorts having an online presence, the client is intricately involved in the selection process of their package. Travel agents are now in competition with the online booking engines and the end client themselves.

Travel agents, therefore, need to emphasise the ease of booking with them and the value of face-to-face in order to retain market share. Customer experience marketing and customer retention marketing needs investment in order avoid this competition.



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▄ **How can travel agents, operators and companies in the industry adapt to leading trends and challenges?**

Jeenarain: The wants and needs of the end customer filter through the supply chain to create a ripple effect throughout the industry. Travel agents need to collaborate with tour operators, resorts, and airlines in order to offer the end customer a specialised package that suits their exact needs and budget. In tourism, as elsewhere, delivering quality services is no longer enough to attract customers - retain and promote positive word of mouth. We must go further and design experiments that engage emotionally throughout their stay.

▄ **What do you hope to see more of in 2017?**

Jeenarain: I would like to see clients being more open to new destinations, such as Reunion Island as well as new adventures that old South African favourite destinations offer.

▄ **Any advice you would like to share with the industry?**

Jeenarain: If travel agents segment their database and quantify their clients into exactly the type of holiday they would like to go on (this can be done through CRM systems), their product offerings and marketing plans can target exactly who would go on a trip that you are offering. Your ROI on marketing will increase.

ABOUT CARI COETZEE

Cari Coetzee is a contributor to Bizcommunity Tourism, Agriculture and Lifestyle.

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