Tourism and Political Change



Edited by Richard Butler and Wantanee Suntikul

From Apartheid to a 'Managed Revolution':

Tourism development and the transition in South Africa

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11 From Apartheid to a 'Managed Revolution': Tourism Development and the Transition in South Africa

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Introduction

South Africa's recent transition from a racist apartheid society that denied basic human rights to the majority of its citizens to a fully democratic nation is one of the most celebrated political changes of modern times. This change has implications at several levels, not least of which is its impact on the tourism sector. The phenomenal growth in this sector resulting from the end of apartheid has provided a massive boost to the country's economy (see Table 11.1).

Ahmed et al (1998: 80) have noted however that 'After years of isolation, South Africa's reemergence as a tourist destination is marked by serious challenges that may inhibit the industry's growth and development'. Given the legacies of the apartheid era, much of the concern here centres on the need, among other considerations, to change the ownership structure of the tourism sector, the involvement of local individuals and communities in the tourism development process, its operations and in benefits-sharing (Rogerson, 2003a, 2004a, 2004b).

The apartheid system was complex and intriguing and one which needs some introduction to if its wider significance is to be understood. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is threefold: first, to chronicle the background to the apartheid legacy of discrimination and inequality in South Africa and the peaceful 'event change' that ended it, described as a 'managed revolution' (Boyd, *et al.* 2001: 72). Second, the chapter reviews the effects of the change on the tourism sector, not just for South Africa but also for neighbouring countries. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the prospects of South Africa's tourism if the country is to successfully compete in the globalised tourism marketplace and turn the post-apartheid fallout into an opportunity.

Understanding the nature and scope of the apartheid system: 1948–1994

Apartheid, literally, 'apartness' or separateness, describes a policy of separating people by race, with regard to where they lived, they went to school, they worked, and where they died (Clark and Worger, 2004; Eades, 1999; McGarth, 1998). It was a conscious policy to separate physically all races within South Africa in a hierarchy of power with minority whites at the top and the majority black population at the bottom. Its structure rested on four major pillars: (1) the exclusive right to centralized political power by white politicians elected by a white electorate; (2) the division of race relations along spatial lines; (3) the regulation and allocation of coloured labourers to factories, farms and mines in South Africa; and (4) the continuance of social control in urban townships surrounding the key loci of political and economic power (Cohen, 1988: 91). This policy was introduced in South Africa in 1948 by the National Party government. Within one generation the policy wove itself into every aspect of South African life, remaining official practice until the fall from power of that party in 1994.

In the views of McGarth (1990: 92), under apartheid, the market acted 'like a malevolent invisible hand, working to the advantage of white workers and capitalists, and widening the wage differentials between black and white workers'. Not surprisingly, the ratio of per capita incomes of white to black Africans rose from 10.6: 1 in 1947 to 15:1 in 1970 (McGarth, 1998: 94).

Economic conditions, including the oil crisis of the 1970s caused major problems, and things came to a head in the 1970s and 1980s with the rise of mass resistance, first from trade union workers who organized huge strikes and, when these were crushed, a growing urban proletariat. Blacks violently protested at being shut out of the system, and the African National Congress (ANC), which had traditionally used non-violent means to protest inequality, began to advocate more extreme measures. Mob rule, as reflected in the emergence of street committees and youth groups, replaced the state in many areas and a wave of strikes and riots marked the 10th anniversary of the Soweto uprising in 1987.

By the 1990s the economy was in a real meltdown: growth was negative, capital was leaving the country at a rapid rate, and there were high levels of unemployment. Problems existed on many other fronts, including the dwindling primary product export, unsustainable import substitution as export prices plummeted, skilled labour shortage, and an insufficient domestic market. The cost of implementing apartheid was sky-rocketing, worsened by the bureaucracy structure, and further compounded by huge military and security expenditures.

In 1989, De Klerk succeeded President Botha, first as party leader, then as president. De Klerk's government began relaxing apartheid restrictions, and in 1990, Nelson Mandela was freed after 27 years of imprisonment and became head of the recently legalized ANC. In late 1991, the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), a multi-racial forum set by de Klerk and Mandela, began efforts to negotiate a new constitution and a transition to a multi-racial democracy with majority rule. In March 1992, voters in a referendum open only to whites endorsed constitutional reform efforts by a wide margin. Despite obstacles and delays, an interim constitution was completed in 1993, ending

Chapter extract

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