

Travel agents go independent - ITC model on the rise in South Africa

 By [Chantal Gouws](#)

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While no sector or industry has been left unscathed by the coronavirus pandemic, it's safe to say that travel and tourism is one of the hardest hit. The industry continues to lobby for the government to open provincial borders for domestic travel and the country to international visitors from September, balancing lives with livelihoods.



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The travel and tourism sector generates a staggering 375k plus direct jobs, of which 70% are female, and 60% are youth.

Even before the pandemic, we saw more travel agents choosing to become independent travel consultants (termed ITCs) in order to work independently from home – essentially running their own travel agency.

Independent travel consultants on the rise

Many agents have long preferred an independent model of working, opting for the flexibility and control of running their own businesses as ITCs. The ITC model gives agents the flexibility to choose their hours and develop a specialised network of clients.

For those that want to benefit from the support and financial backing of a global brand, many ITCs opt to join the independent travel agency arm of some of the country's travel retailers.

I started the independent travel agency brand, today Flight Centre Associates (FCA) of the Flight Centre Travel Group in 2013, after seeing the need in the market. Today, the FCA model is well established and respected in the South African market, showing consistent growth month on month.

Over the last two months, FCA has grown by 57%. A large portion of these numbers was a result of the Flight Centre Travel Group having to pivot and right-size our business with many consultants choosing to join FCA. However, we have also seen an increase in the number of external consultants coming on board.

More consultants are opting to become independent while remaining associated with a global brand, benefiting from entrepreneurial support, financial security, access to lead management tools, buying power and flexible contracts.

The face of the workplace is changing. Over the last couple of years the millennial and Generation Z workforce has been driving the shift to flexible working arrangements and better work-life balance.

Now, with health and wellness a focus, work-from-home is the new normal. Navigating working from home is not something that comes easily to all and brings with it a unique set of challenges. But with the technology available and the benefits of being an entrepreneur and running your own business, the ITC model is firmly on the rise. Of course, it's going to take time for travel to recover and we don't expect profits right away, but things will start slowly improving.

Focus on the people and work-life balance

For me, it is about people. If we look after our people, our staff, colleagues and teams, as well as our clients, the profits will come in naturally. It is of paramount importance to always be approachable and consistent. Always remain humble and never stop learning as it gives you courage. Learn from your mistakes, and don't do them again.

How does the growth in ITCs affect the traveller?

More than ever, travellers are going to be looking to the experts for personal advice and to assist them in navigating this rapidly changing world of travel.

Travellers are looking for peace of mind, knowledge and expertise – a safety net if you will. They like having someone to call for advice, someone that knows the ins and outs of the world of travel with your best interests at heart.

Trends in post-pandemic travel

Customers can expect rigorous health and safety protocols across all travel touchpoints – from the airport to the hotel. Expect more pre-bookings and careful planning as the world is in different stages of the pandemic. This can be incredibly overwhelming to navigate, especially when no one is quite sure or can predict how rapidly things are going to change.

As for travel destinations and experiences, we expect to see a lot more requests for exclusive off the beaten track experiences and destinations. Think bucket list gems, personal attention, private tours and of course while our borders are closed, much more exploring of our own country. Luxury safari resorts in private game reserves, exclusive suites and villas and more.

MICE travel

MICE travel (meetings, incentives, conferences and events) has taken a knock too, but this doesn't mean MICE travel is going anywhere. It just may look a little different now. In fact, FCA has just launched a niche MICE division to cater to our corporate customer in the new post-Covid world. Our team of MICE consultants offer personalised MICE solutions tailored

to our customer's business needs, no matter its size.

No doubt, the world of travel has changed. For the industry and travellers alike – and we're all adapting to new methods of working. For the independent travel consultant, it's working from home – as usual – but in a whole new world.

ABOUT CHANTAL GOUWS

Chantal Gouws has worked in the travel industry for over 16 years. In 2013, she started the independent travel consultant (ITC) brand for FCTG, today is known as FCA, Flight Centre Associates.

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