THE KEY TO UNLOCK THE
LGBT AND AFRO TRAVEL
MARKET IN BRAZIL.

BRA-
FRIKA

South Africa
SOUTH AFRICAN TOURISM

About Brafrika

Brafrika is an award-winning Brazilian company recognized as one of the 100 most powerful tourism companies in Brazil in 2021 and 2022 by PANROTAS, for its pioneering work in building meaningful cultural bridges between Brazil and the African continent, with a special focus on South Africa. Founded in 2019, Brafrika is a benchmark in Afro-centric, urban, and inclusive tourism experiences that connect with the desires, identities, and ancestries of Afro-Brazilian and LGBT+ audiences.

More than a travel agency, Brafrika acts as a hub of cultural intelligence and innovation in the tourism sector. Its products combine history, fashion, gastronomy, art, communication, sports, wellness, and nature in creative itineraries, carefully designed to highlight both South African authenticity and Brazilian diversity—especially for Black and LGBT+ audiences.

In recent years, Brafrika has established itself as a specialist in connecting major brands such as Netflix, YouTube, Spotify, Google, and Symrise, events such as South African Fashion Week, among other art and music festivals, and cultural institutions. It focuses on local entrepreneurs in the South by South axis between Brazil and South Africa, with in-depth knowledge of the behavior and demands of the new Afro-diasporic traveler and the Brazilian LGBT+ community.

We need to have a conversation about diversity and strategic positioning.

Here at Brafrika, we believe that all **innovation** stems from a **discomfort**—that topic that keeps coming up, whether in everyday conversations, when we notice the lack of travel options aligned with new interests, or in the strategic discussions of large companies, which still struggle with the lack of visual and narrative representation in their actions. And if there's one topic that's always on the agenda, it is **DIVERSITY.**

From time to time, we see the tourism market reinforce a limited vision: South Africa as a luxury destination, associated almost exclusively with safaris, distant, inaccessible, and disconnected from the culture that drives the travel desire of different audiences.

But upon closer attention, we realize something different: this very country, often framed by tourist stereotypes, is also a fertile ground for experiences of belonging, cultural dialogue, and inclusive innovation. A destination with the potential to become a **pioneer** in strategically positioning diversity within the Afro-Brazilian and LGBT+ market.

So, what does it mean to travel to South Africa today?

It was by delving into this question that we came to a conclusion: the idea of the tourist experience in the country needs (and can) change. More than a luxury destination, South Africa can establish itself as a space for authentic connection, diversity, and transformation.

In this study, we invite you to explore this vision: **diversity as a strategic driver of tourism and South Africa's pioneering role in Brazil's travel imagination.**

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE.

LGBT+ Glossary

L – Lesbians

Women who feel emotional and/or sexual attraction to other women.

G – Gays

Men who feel emotional and/or sexual attraction to other men. The term can also be used as an umbrella term for homosexuals in general.

B – Bisexuals

People who feel emotional and/or sexual attraction to more than one gender (not necessarily at the same time or in the same way).

T – Transgender/Transvestites

People whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned at birth. Includes trans men, trans women, and transvestites.

Q – Queer

A term originally used pejoratively, it has been redefined to designate people who reject fixed labels of gender identity or sexual orientation.

I – Intersex

People born with sexual characteristics (genitals, chromosomes, or hormones) that do not fit the binary norm of "male" or "female."

A – Asexuals / Aromantic / Agender

Asexuals: People who do not feel (or feel little) sexual attraction.

Aromantic: People who do not feel (or feel little) romantic attraction.

Agender: People who do not identify with any gender.

P – Pansexuals

People who feel emotional and/or sexual attraction to others regardless of gender or gender identity.

N – Non-binary

People whose gender identity does not fit exclusively into masculine or feminine; they may identify on or off a spectrum.

+ (More)

Represents other identities and orientations that are not explicitly included in the acronym, but are part of sexual and gender diversity (such as demisexual, bigender, polysexual, among others).

A 2022 Datafolha survey indicates that more than **15.5 million** people in Brazil identify as LGBT+, which corresponds to approximately 9.3% of the adult population (16 and older).

Around 62% of Brazilian LGBT+ tourists say they prefer to travel to inclusive destinations, according to a Booking.com survey.

Chronology of the LGBT+
community and its consumption in Brazil

The trajectory of the LGBT+ community in Brazil reflects a movement of resistance, visibility, and achievements that intertwines with social, cultural, and economic transformations over more than seven decades.

1950s–1960s: Repression and Invisibility

In the mid-20th century, homosexuality was not classified as a crime in Brazil, but it was the target of severe police and social repression. Transvestites and transgender people were often charged with crimes such as "vagrancy" or "indecent exposure" and homosexuality was treated as a psychiatric illness. The community's social life was restricted to private spaces or discreet nightclubs in large cities like Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

1970s–1980s: Dictatorship and First Organized Movements

During the military dictatorship (1964–1985), repression increased, but the first organized groups also emerged. In 1978, Somos – Grupo de Afirmação Homossexual (Homosexual Affirmation Group) was founded in São Paulo, a landmark of LGBT+ activism in the country. The 1980s were marked by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which brought stigma but also mobilized networks of solidarity and community strengthening.

The 1990s: Growing Visibility

The 1990s were a watershed year for LGBT+ visibility. In 1997, the first LGBT+ Pride Parade took place in São Paulo, bringing together 2,000 people—an event that would become the largest parade in the world. In the legal field, Sergipe included a ban on discrimination based on sexual orientation in its Constitution in 1989, and bills began to emerge in Congress. In the tourism sector, the first gay-friendly itineraries emerged in São Paulo and Rio, still discreet, primarily associated with nightlife.

2000s: Legal Advances and the Consumer Market

In the 2000s, legal recognition and economic recognition were consolidated. In 1999, the Federal Council of Psychology banned "gay cures," and in 2004, the federal government launched the Brazil Without Homophobia program. In 2011, the Supreme Federal Court recognized same-sex civil unions. At the same time, the market began to recognize the economic potential of the segment: brands began to include diversity in campaigns, while destinations like São Paulo, Florianópolis, and Salvador strengthened their position as gay-friendly tourism hubs.

The 2010s: Expanded Rights and Impact on Tourism

The 2010s brought important achievements:

- **2013** – Same-sex marriage authorized nationwide.
- **2018** – Homophobia and transphobia are now equated to crimes of racism.
- **2019** – Trans people gain the right to change their name and gender on documents without surgery.

These legal advances were reflected in consumerism and tourism. The São Paulo LGBT+ Pride Parade was already attracting millions of visitors, significantly boosting the hotel, restaurant, and event sectors. Travel agencies specializing in LGBT+ itineraries began to multiply, and Brazil established itself on the international diversity tourism calendar.

The 2020s: Economic Consolidation and Challenges

Recent years have highlighted the purchasing power and specificities of the LGBT+ community:

Demographics: 9.3% of the Brazilian adult population identifies as LGBT+ — approximately **15.5 million people** (Datafolha, 2022).

General Consumption: Between April 2023 and March 2024, the community injected **R$18.7 billion** into the market (NIQ). In 2022, this consumption was **R$12.6 billion**, a 15.5% increase compared to the previous year.

Purchasing Power: The average online shopping spend in LGBT+ households was **R$363**, compared to **R$286 i**n non-LGBT+ households — approximately **27% more.**

Global impact: LGBT+ tourism generates **US$500** billion annually worldwide, with LGBT+ travelers spending, on average, **28%** more than other tourists. Estimates place the community's financial potential in Brazil at **US$133 billion** (≈ R$419 billion), approximately **10% of the country's GDP**.

Tourism:
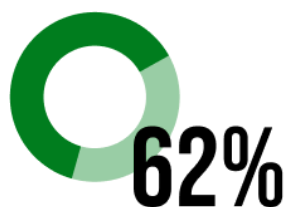
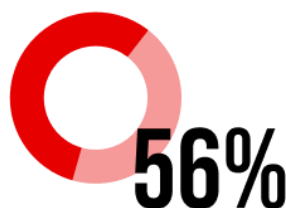**62%** of Brazilian LGBTQIAPN+ tourists say **they prefer to travel to inclusive destinations,** according to a Booking.com survey.
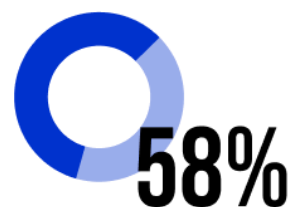
58% have chosen destinations perceived **as welcoming** in the last 12 months.

56% report having experienced **discrimination while traveling.**
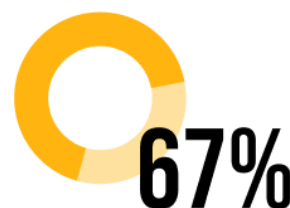
67% of LGBTQ+ parents **evaluate the level of welcoming** before traveling with their children.

JOY
JOY
JOY
JOY

WE'LL NEED A LITTLE MORE THAN JUST A PRACTICAL GLOSSARY TO EXPLAIN *Race Classifications* IN *Brazil,* SHALL WE?

Glossary

Negro (Brazil)

Definition: An umbrella term that includes people who identify as Black or (Brown) Mixed Race, used in public policy, official statistics, and the Black movement.

Historical context: It emerged in the 1970s and 1980s with the strengthening of the Movimento Negro Unificado (MNU) *(United Negro Moviment)* and was reinforced by the concept of "Afrodescendance" to encompass different African skin tones and origins in Brazil.

Black (Brazil)

Definition: People of African descent with dark skin, a subgroup within "Negro"

Historical context: The term gained traction in the 2000s with affirmative action policies and racial visibility campaigns, with a growing appreciation for dark-skinned people.

Brown (Brazil)

Definition: People of mixed ancestry, usually African, Indigenous, and European.

Historical and cultural context: The "brown" category is numerically the largest in Brazil (approximately 43–44% of the population) and represents enormous phenotypic, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity.

- Miscegenation in Brazil was a state policy, resulting from colonialism, slavery, and the integration of African, Indigenous, and European peoples. The brown identity does not have rigid boundaries of skin tone, encompassing multiple forms of cultural expression.

White (Brazil)

Definition: People of European descent, usually light-skinned.

Historical context: Historically privileged during the colonial and post-abolitionist periods, dominating politics, economics, and hegemonic culture.

According to the Continuous National Household Sample Survey (PNAD Contínua/IBGE) (2nd quarter of 2024), Black and mixed-race individuals (the Black population) account for **56.7%** of the Brazilian population.

Consumer dreams/aspirations: In 2021, the Black population consumed an estimated **R$2 trillion** in products and services in Brazil—if it were a country, it would be among the **20 largest consumer markets in the world**.

Chronology of the Black Population and Their Consumption in Brazil

The trajectory of the Black population in Brazil reflects a history of resistance, social, and economic achievements, ranging from invisibility and repression to growing visibility and cultural and consumer prominence.

1950s: Invisibility and Inequality

In the mid-20th century, the Black population was largely concentrated in informal, domestic, and low-wage jobs. The idea of "racial democracy," promoted by Gilberto Freyre, masked profound social and economic inequalities. The Black movement was still starting, and access to education and opportunities was limited.

1960s–1970s: Repression and Resistance

During the military dictatorship (1964–1985), political repression also affected Black movements, weakening organizations and limiting social mobilization. Despite this, Black intellectuals and artists, such as Abdias do Nascimento and Lélia Gonzalez, began to articulate resistance through cultural and academic groups, strengthening Black identity.

1980s: Organization and Visibility

With the return to democracy, the Black movement reorganized. The Movimento Negro Unificado (MNU) *(United Negro Moviment)* , founded in 1978, became a political leader by denouncing structural racism and demanding public policies. The 1988 Constitution recognized racism as a non-bailable and imprescriptible crime and guaranteed rights to *quilombola* communities, although practical implementation was slow.

1990s: Culture and Affirmative Action Policies

The 1990s brought greater visibility to the Black population in the media, education, and culture. Urban cultural movements, such as hip-hop and rap, established themselves as tools for social protest. The first affirmative action initiatives began to emerge in public universities.

2000s: Consolidation of Rights and Expansion of Consumption

The beginning of the 21st century marked legal and social advances, such as the creation of SEPPIR (Secretariat for Policies to Promote Racial Equality) in 2003 and the expansion of racial quotas in universities. Culturally, the Black population gained greater prominence in music, fashion, and literature.

At the same time, the market began to recognize the economic power of the Black population:

- R$1.7 trillion transacted annually in Brazil (2022).

- High consumption in categories such as hygiene, fashion, and beauty, with an average monthly spending of R$100–200.

- Online shopping: 67.6% of the Black/Brown population purchased online in the last four weeks.

2010s: strengthening policies and inclusive tourism

The advancement of racial quotas and social programs has expanded access to education and the middle class. There has been an increase in Black representation in the media, advertising, and politics, as well as a greater appreciation for Afrofuturism and cultural productions. In tourism, recent research has shown:

The 2020s: Economic Prominence and Challenges

Recent data (Datafolha 2022) show that the Black population represents **56.7%** of the Brazilian population, representing a strategic segment in national consumption. Despite this, inequality persists: lower average income, high informality, and violence continue to impact this population.

Tourism and consumption by the Black population reflect this reality: there is great economic potential, but inclusion, representation, and safety remain key barriers. The Black population not only consumes but also transforms markets and influences cultural, social, and economic trends, consolidating its role as a protagonist in contemporary Brazil.

NOW THAT WE KNOW A LITTLE MORE ABOUT THESE TWO *Super Powerful Communities In Brazil,* LET'S TALK ABOUT JOY, THIS FEELING THAT UNITES, TRANSFORMS AND EMPOWERS.

Joy in the Global South: An Anthropological Perspective

Joy, understood as a positive emotional experience, has traditionally been studied in Western societies from psychological and individualistic perspectives. However, an anthropological analysis in the context of the Global South—encompassing regions of Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and parts of the Caribbean—reveals that joy takes on profoundly social, collective, and political dimensions.

In the Global South, joy is not simply a subjective state of well-being, but a relational and symbolic act that reflects stories of resistance, solidarity, and cultural affirmation. Communities that have faced, and continue to face, historical inequalities—such as colonialism, structural racism, economic exploitation, and territorial dispossession—often develop unique ways of celebrating life and collectivity. In these societies, joy manifests itself in rituals, festivals, music, dance, gastronomy, and other cultural practices that cement identity and belonging. For example, in Afro-diasporic communities in Brazil and Latin America, manifestations such as Candomblé, Maracatu, and Samba are ways of transforming memories of suffering and resistance into experiences of collective JOY. In South Africa, celebration through music, singing, dance, and "ubuntu"—the philosophy of "I am because we are"—shows that joy is inseparable from networks of interdependence and social solidarity. Thus, joy functions as a resilience strategy: even in the face of structural adversity, it creates spaces for emotional, cultural, and social regeneration.

Anthropologically, this perspective suggests that studying joy in the Global South requires looking beyond the individual. It manifests itself at the intersection of body, community, and territory, between historical memory and contemporary practices. Joy, therefore, becomes a privileged lens for understanding how individuals from marginalized contexts recreate meaning and value in their lives, challenging dominant narratives that reduce these spaces to suffering or lack. In this sense, defending joy as an object of study in the Global South is not merely an emotional or aesthetic analysis: it is an epistemological and political approach. It reveals ways of existing that resist exclusion, affirm identity, and build networks of affection and solidarity. Celebrating and analyzing joy, then, is recognizing that pleasure, celebration, and social connection are also forms of knowledge, resistance, and cultural transformation.

Joy as a Tool for Resilience, Resistance, and Existence: Brazil and South Africa

In Brazil and South Africa, countries marked by deep histories of colonialism, slavery, and racial segregation, joy emerges as a vital strategy for survival and affirmation. In contexts where social structures often marginalize Black and peripheral populations, celebrating life—through music, dance, celebration, and community rituals—is not just an act of pleasure, but a practice of cultural resilience.

In Brazil, traditions such as carnival and street celebrations carry centuries of historical memory. In these practices, joy manifests collectively, allowing communities to transform experiences of pain and oppression into identity affirmation. It creates spaces of belonging and symbolic resistance, where life is celebrated even in the face of persistent structural inequalities. Joy, in this sense, acts as an innovative and powerful form of resistance: it reconfigures dominant narratives and reaffirms the dignity of those who have historically been marginalized.

In South Africa, the legacy of apartheid also shaped unique ways of experiencing and expressing joy. Cultural practices such as gqom music, kwaito, community celebrations, and the spirit of ubuntu—which values interdependence and the "we" over the "I"—show that joy is inseparable from community and solidarity. Celebrating, dancing, singing and creating collectively are ways of resisting social exclusion and affirming one's existence in a country that is progressively recovering from the deep scars from racial segregation.

In both contexts, joy reveals itself as a political and existential tool. It is not merely an emotional experience, but an act of affirmation in the face of adversity: it resists structures of oppression, sustains collective memory, and reinforces bonds of belonging. By transforming pain and limitation into celebration and creation, joy allows individuals and communities to assert themselves in the world, becoming an act of existence and cultural survival. Thus, joy in Brazil and South Africa cannot be understood as mere entertainment: it is a language of resistance, a form of collective care, and concrete proof that, even in contexts of exclusion and historical violence, life is reaffirmed and celebrated. Understanding joy in this sense is to recognize its political, social, and cultural power—a power that connects the past, the present, and future possibilities for transformation and emancipation.

Joy as a Key to Understanding Tourism Consumption in Brazil

In Brazil, joy occupies a central place not only in social life, but also in the ways we imagine and consume experiences. To understand the consumption mechanisms of the Brazilian public, especially in the tourism sector, it is necessary to recognize that travel choices are not guided solely by the rational logic of price or convenience. They are deeply connected to the collective imagination of joy, the search for experiences that awaken pleasure, celebration, connection, and enchantment.

When we talk about selling travel, we are, in fact, selling personal and collective dreams and achievements. The act of traveling activates emotional dimensions that reawaken the traveler's inner child and sense of "I've made it"—the one that allows oneself to imagine, be surprised, overcome, and experience new things with wonder. Brazilians, characterized by a culture that values social interaction, celebration, music, and gatherings, tend to associate tourism with a space for fulfillment and the expansion of joy: a time when routine and hardships are suspended to make way for hedonism and the pleasure of experiencing.

In this sense, joy serves as a driver of consumer decisions. More than technical information about destinations, accommodations, or logistics, what mobilizes Brazilian travelers is the promise of experiences that awaken positive feelings: laughing with friends, being enchanted by landscapes, being moved by stories, dancing at local celebrations, feeling a sense of belonging. Travel is, therefore, a symbolic investment in one's own happiness and in the realization of a collective dream.

For tourism, understanding this mechanism means recognizing that communication must speak to emotion, not just reason. Brazilian travelers desire to be projected into a narrative where joy is the protagonist—whether imagining themselves on a safari in South Africa, celebrating at a local jazz festival, or simply experiencing moments of relaxation at a wine farm gastronomic gathering. Purchases occur when the experience offered touches this subjective dimension and awakens the feeling of "worth the dream," "worth the sacrifice," "worth the reward."

Furthermore, joy in Brazilian tourism consumption is collective and shared. Many travelers seek not only individual experiences, but memories built collectively: family, friends, couples, communities. This reinforces the social and *Instagrammable* nature of joy, with the use of digital platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok as a place that enhances the value of the experience by becoming a story told, a photo shared, a memory lived together.Thus, in Brazil, selling tourism is about connecting with the

power of joy. It's about offering not just geographic travel, but emotional experiences that recapture playfulness, enchantment, and the freedom to be. Understanding joy as an analytical lens means understanding that, in tourism consumption, the greatest value lies not only in the destination itself, but in what it awakens, in the story it tells, and, even more importantly, in the story that the traveler is able to tell based on their lived experiences: the possibility of being happy, of being inspired, of living intensely, of reconnecting, of being part of something greater, and of rediscovering within oneself the brilliance of the child who is enchanted by the world.

NOW IT IS TIME TO DIG DEEPER IN THE RESEARCH, *let's go?*

We seek to understand how travellers and tourism professionals perceive South Africa and what elements can support a new positioning of the destination based on the JOY narrative thread. The goal is not only to describe opinions but to interpret deeper meanings: what authenticity means to this audience, how belonging appears in their statements, what barriers still keep potential visitors away, and how communication can become more effective.

Beyond numbers and statistics, what is at stake here is the experience of those who travel and, above all, what it means to travel as a Black person, a LGBT+ person, or a member of different generations.

How was the research conducted?

The selection of interviewees was intentional: we wanted to listen to people who represented different intersectionalities — race, generation, and sexual orientation. In total, 12 people participated. The majority (around 83%) self-identified as Black, two-thirds (67%) were cisgender men, and just over half (58%) were part of the LGBT+ community, most of them gay men. From an age perspective, we achieved a balance: one-third were under 30, another third were in their 30s, and the rest were over 50. This mosaic allowed us to compare perspectives between young people, adults, and older participants, revealing differences in expectations and priorities.

Interviews were conducted until responses started to repeat — what we call saturation. This means there was already enough material to identify the main patterns and categories.

In the analysis, we followed two complementary approaches:

Content: we organised the narratives into broad themes, such as authenticity, belonging, storytelling, barriers, and products. With each reading, we refined these categories and added subthemes that emerged strongly, such as social proof, LGBT+ safety, and ancestrally as a rite.

Discourse: more than counting how many times an issue appeared, we sought to understand the how. For example: what does it mean for a young Black man to say he feels "free" in a certain space? What silences and tensions appear when someone speaks of safety or costs? This approach helped us move beyond the surface of the responses.

In addition, all material was cross-referenced with specialised literature. This happened in three stages:

- Before, to help formulate questions (for example, drawing on debates about conspicuous consumption and ancestrally).
- During, as an analytical lens (such as studies on the Black Travel Movement and the impact of the Year of Return in Ghana, which offered clues for interpreting statements about belonging and ancestrally).
- Afterwards, to validate hypotheses and propose practical indicators (such as measuring whether the feeling of joy and belonging truly emerges in travel experiences).

Finally, we followed basic ethical care: statements were kept anonymous and analysed respectfully, without exposing sensitive experiences of participants.

Recent Brazilian and international research has brought important insights to think about tourism, race, identity, generations, and sexual diversity. These works help situate this empirical research within a broader field of debates.

What does the literature tell us?

Conspicuous Consumption and Tourist Behaviour

Corneo and Jeanne (2001) discuss how it influences individual choices, leading people to pursue goods and experiences that signal status and social recognition. This can be seen in destinations globally renowned for luxury, such as Dubai and Disney World, where travel itself carries a strong symbolic weight of distinction and ostentation.

However, when examining our target audience, which is mostly located in lower social strata, the phenomenon takes on different nuances. For many, travelling is not only about displaying status; it is also an act of distancing oneself from harsh realities, providing a moment of leisure and peace where one can feel accepted, safe, and valued. Conspicuous consumption does not disappear, but may be expressed in different forms and intensities.

Some travellers seem to carry this "deep down" within themselfs, as if travelling is a kind of healing from the stigma of poverty. Others, in contrast, make grand trips to resorts with all-inclusive packages and high-standard hotels, as much as their budget allows. In both cases, the performative dimension of tourism is present, such as posting pictures, creating Instagram highlights, and showing the itinerary to others. It's not just about preserving memories; it's also about seeking social validation. Being in a place (or not) means being socially recognized (Lin & Rasoolimanesh, 2022).

This logic becomes clearer in seemingly simple choices, such as where to stay. A comfortable place with basic amenities might be sufficient for rest and relaxation. However, choosing a higher-star hotel may represent more than just comfort. It can signal a move away from the "poor" identity, affirm exclusivity, or exercise a certain snobbery. Here, consumption is not only functional but also symbolic.

Tourism and Race: The Weight of Symbolic Barriers

For many Black people, travelling is not just about choosing the most beautiful or cheapest destination. It also involves crossing symbolic barriers, such as fears, stigmas, and experiences of discrimination. Dillette and Benjamin (2022) demonstrate that racism profoundly influences tourism, restricting not only where people travel, but also how they experience it. Income alone does not explain these choices; perceptions of hospitality, representation, and the possibility of travelling without fear of violence or hostile gazes are as important as budget.

This scenario is also evident in Brazil. Studies of Black tourists (Ferreira & Casagrande, 2018) demonstrate that representation matters. When Black travellers see people like themselves in advertisements, travel guides, or products, they feel genuinely invited to occupy that space. This presence is not merely an aesthetic detail, but a prerequisite for fostering a sense of belonging.

More recently, Afroturismo Hub (2023) reinforced this perspective with market data showing concrete and growing demand for experiences that value ancestral, culture, and belonging. In other words, this is not just an identity or political agenda; it is an emerging market with the potential to transform narratives and generate new offerings in the tourism industry.

Generational Perspectives

Analysing tourist behaviour from a generational perspective requires more than asking what each group wants; it also requires asking why they want it and how this shapes their expectations and needs.

McKercher (2002) notes that, for Generation Z (those born between 1997 and 2012), travel is often seen as a rite of passage. This generation seeks freedom, autonomy, and authentic experiences. They typically rely on real accounts from other travellers, especially videos and posts that show both the challenges and the joys of travel. Their brand loyalty is flexible; decisions to stay with or abandon a provider depend on convenience, value alignment, and perceived authenticity.

Millennials (born between 1981 and 1996) also value authenticity and adventure but balance these values with concerns about safety, which are shaped by global events such as economic crises and terrorism. They value novelty and intense experiences but also demand reliability and detailed planning.

Older generations (Generation X and those over 60) emphasise trust, loyalty, and predictability. According to Thiago Akira of the 2025 São Paulo 60+ Tourism Forum, Brazilian tourists over 60 usually travel once or twice a year and make most decisions independently. Providers must prioritise trust, proven experience, and personalised service, often via in-person contact or WhatsApp. Loyalty is fostered by successful, welcoming experiences that reinforce a sense of belonging and safety.

LGBT+ Tourism:

The LGBT+ community requires specific attention from policymakers and businesses due to its historical vulnerability to prejudice and discrimination. Studies show that these travelers seek destinations that offer safety, equality, and hospitality, as well as services tailored to allow them to enjoy traveling without fear or constraint (Bignardi & Ernesto, 2019).

In this context, destinations and enterprises that brand themselves as gay-friendly play a strategic role by creating spaces of freedom and comfort. However, the literature warns that not all establishments that claim this identity truly practice diversity; many use it as a marketing strategy without embracing inclusivity (Silva, 2021).

The tourist behavior of this group also exhibits particularities. Gay and bisexual men, for example, tend to seek out cultural experiences, nightlife, and urban activities, often guided by international rankings and specialized guides. More than simply choosing a location, this audience values the possibility of living full and authentic experiences. As the authors argue: "The LGBT+ public experiences pleasure in ways that reject depreciation, repression, and prohibition" (Bignardi & Ernesto, 2019, p. 841).

The literature also emphasizes that LGBT+ tourism should not be viewed as exclusionary. Inclusive enterprises do not need to alienate other groups, but rather, they should create environments where diversity is valued to ensure that the LGBT+ community feels safe and welcome. Authentic experiences combined with proper service practices and inclusion policies are central to fostering loyalty and positive destination branding (Silva, 2019; Oliveira & Souza, 2020; Santos, 2020).

Inspiring comparative cases

Two global cases stand out as examples for how South Africa can position itself.

The 2019 Year of Return in Ghana exemplifies how campaigns rooted in identity, memory, and ancestrally can mobilise the African diaspora. To mark 400 years since the first enslaved Africans arrived in the Americas, the project invited diaspora visitors to reconnect with their roots. The impact was striking: **1.13 million** tourists visited Ghana, an **18%** increase from the previous year and far above the global average of **5%** (Visit Ghana, 2020). Beyond economic gains, the emotional engagement was powerful. **97%** of visitors said they would return, highlighting how narratives of "return to ancestry" fostered a sense of deep belonging.

The 2010 FIFA World Cup, hosted in South Africa, was recognized as one of the best tournaments in history. It showcased the country's ability to host a mega-event by combining infrastructure, hospitality, and cultural richness. Besides the immediate tourist influx, the tournament left a lasting legacy of visibility and a reputation for competence and hospitality that play an important role of nostalgia. (Getaway, 2025).

In LGBT+ tourism, WorldPride Madrid (2017) set another precedent. The event attracted between **2.3 and 3 million** visitors and had a significant economic impact (Walsh, 2017). Over the course of ten days of cultural programs, parades, and celebrations, Madrid solidified its reputation as a destination that is inclusive, safe, and welcoming. South Africa, known as the Rainbow Nation, can learn from this that campaigns and events targeting LGBT+ communities can reposition a destination internationally, strengthening perceptions of belonging, safety, and inclusion.

Together, these cases demonstrate that powerful narratives, symbolic events, and genuine communication strategies can reshape perceptions of a destination, fostering emotional connection and tangible economic outcomes.

Interview Results:

After transcribing the interviews in full, it was possible to identify guiding themes across both travelers and tourism professionals. The interview guide explored the following topics: authenticity, belonging, narratives, barriers, and experiences. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured, in-depth format that allowed participants to freely express their views while remaining aligned with the research objectives.

The final sample included 12 interviewees: 83% percent were Black, 58% were LGBT+, and 67% were cisgender men. This representation helps cover gaps in existing academic literature on intersectionality. There was also age diversity: one-third were under 30, one-third were between 30 and 40, and one-third were over 50.

Guiding themes:

1. Authenticity and Trust

For travellers, authenticity emerged as a key theme in nearly **70%** of responses. It was associated with spontaneous encounters, cultural and musical experiences, recommendations from locals, and a sense of safety from racism and LGBTphobia. For them, authenticity means engaging with the culture and being in a place where one can be free.

Among professionals, **60%** of responses mentioned authenticity, which they framed around South Africa's history of resistance, cultural diversity, and ancestry. They argued that trust can be strengthened through visual representation, such as featuring more Black people in campaigns and partnering with Black influencers and journalists.

Insight: For travellers, trust depends on concrete evidence of hospitality. For professionals, trust is still mostly tied to institutional discourse.

2. Belonging & Identity

Among travellers, a sense of belonging was mentioned in **75%** of the responses. For them, belonging means occupying all spaces without being questioned and seeing Black people as protagonists in hotels, bars, parties, and attractions. For LGBT+ travellers, belonging is also tied to openly expressing affection without fear of stares or harassment.

Among professionals, belonging was mentioned in **50%** of the responses, but in a more aspirational way, as something to be felt before travelling through connection with the local culture and behaviour.

Insight: There are layers of belonging: immediate (everyday contact and occupying spaces) and symbolic (ancestrally and reconnection with roots). The "magic" lies in combining them.

3. Narratives & Communication

- Travellers: almost **70%** trust more in influencer content and UGC *user-generated content*. Reels, short videos, lives — even showing mishaps — have more credibility than institutional campaigns. Landscape-only campaigns were widely rejected, with calls for more stories and practical

information.

- Professionals: **60%** admitted adjusting communication by increasing Black representation and ancestry themes. However, they acknowledged campaigns for LGBT+ audiences remain superficial, not backed by trade action.

  Insight: Travellers want authenticity and social proof; professionals still respond with timid, institutional adjustments.

4. Barriers & Challenges

- Travellers: over **80%** cited concrete barriers — language, high costs, restrictive rules, and insecurity *(especially for LGBT+ people)*. Some also mentioned lack of pet-travel information.

- Professionals: **60%** pointed to the need for investment in hospitality and training, recognising that tourist experiences depend heavily on how they are received.

  Insight: Travellers face immediate barriers; professionals see structural challenges.

5. Experiences & Products

- Travellers: about **70%** mentioned gastronomy, festivals, local encounters, and activities beyond rigid itineraries — "something you don't have at home."

- Professionals: highlighted niche diversity (wildlife, culture, nature) as a major strength.

  Insight: Travellers want community co-created experiences (with Black, LGBT+, or silver-economy groups *(60 years+)*); professionals still speak of diversity generically.

Intersectionality Insights

One striking point: a respondent stated, *"it's harder to be a Black man than a gay man"*. All other LGBT+ respondents (travellers and professionals) agreed. This reveals how intersections between race and gender shape travel experiences, highlighting vulnerabilities and resilience that cannot be ignored.

Convergences & Divergences

- **Consensus:** authenticity, diversity of experiences, and representation matter. Safety and hospitality are fundamental.

- **Differences:** Travellers demand practical information and social proof; professionals prioritise institutional image and abstract belonging. For LGBT+ travellers, everyday safety is central; professionals still rely on vague "LGBT+-friendly" claims.

From Empirical to Theory: Building a Dialogue

The empirical results highlight tensions that directly echo the literature. Travellers demand for social proof links to debates on conspicuous consumption and performatively of travel on social media. Belonging and ancestrally connected with Afrotourism and the Black Travel Movement. Generational divergences reflect studies on evolving values and expectations throughout life stages.

In other words: the data shows that theory and practice are not distant — they are intertwined. It is precisely in weaving together real testimonies and critical literature that we can propose a strong positioning for South Africa built on the narrative thread of JOY.

Conclusion

JOY, more than a concept, is a crossing. It is the thread that connects two sides of the Atlantic, Brazil and South Africa, through a shared language: joy as resistance, belonging as healing, and encounter as a way of existing.

In this context, traveling is not merely moving through space. It is a symbolic gesture of reconnection with one's own history, with others, and with the very elements that shape us as a collective. For Black and LGBT+ people, this journey carries additional layers of meaning. It represents the possibility of being in a place where skin color, body, and affection are not reasons for vigilance but for celebration.

At this point, **JOY becomes a bridge. A bridge built from belonging, authenticity, safety, immersion, and social validation**, the five pillars that sustain a new way of relating to tourism.

Belonging, because it is where the traveler recognizes themselves and feels recognized.

Authenticity, because genuine experiences matter more than the staging of the exotic.

Safety, because the body only relaxes where it is welcomed.

Social validation, because the joy of living an experience also lies in being able to narrate it and inspire others.

Immersion, because one only truly belongs to what is lived closely, with awakened senses and an open heart.

Yet something deeper runs beneath this bridge. Traveling to Africa, for many, is driven by the desire to reconnect with an interrupted history, to rebuild ties with an ancestry dispersed by the diaspora. This symbolic return, however, does not always reveal what one expects to find. As Ailton Krenak, an Indigenous writer, philosopher, journalist, environmentalist, and activist of the Krenak people, stated in an interview with Itaú Cultural in 2016, culture is not something static. When left aside, it transforms and reinvents itself. Culture changes, lives, and moves, just like the traveler who rediscovers it. What is found, in the end, is not the lost past, but a living present, and the awareness that ancestry does not dwell in the ruins of time but in the relationships we continue to weave among ourselves.

From this perspective, authenticity is not a promise of purity but of encounter. It does not mean living as the locals live, but sharing the same ground, respecting diversity, and acknowledging the inequalities that shape the territory. South Africa, with its plurality and contradictions, teaches that authenticity lies in accepting reality and still finding beauty and affection within it.

Safety, in turn, goes beyond public policy or institutional protocols. It is also emotional and symbolic, emerging when the traveler feels free to be who they are. This is where tourism and dignity intersect, because the right to leisure, to joy, and to mobility is also the right to exist without fear.

Social validation, so central to the contemporary logic of networks and shared narratives, also takes on a political dimension here. It is not only about posting a beautiful picture, but about affirming presence, about saying: I was here, I belong to this world. Each record and each story becomes a way of claiming visibility and rewriting the history of who can and should occupy the spaces of pleasure and discovery.

Among all these layers, **JOY** emerges as a synthesis. It is not merely an emotion but a communication strategy, a repositioning tool, and above all, a gesture of reconciliation. A reconciliation between the gaze of the tourist and the gaze of the local, between memory and the future, between inherited pain and the possibility of celebration.

Positioning South Africa through this narrative does not mean selling a destination, but proposing a reunion, the reunion of two peoples who share a history of struggle but also a shared aesthetic of life, one that turns resistance into laughter and everyday life into art.

In the end, **JOY** is the very act of existing with dignity. It is joy that asserts itself as politics, travel that becomes a rite of belonging, and tourism that reveals itself as a space of transformation. When the traveler returns, they bring back not just memories but a new way of seeing the world and of seeing themselves within it.

PUTTING IT INTO *practice*

WITH OUR INSIGHTS AND CONCLUSIONS DONE, IT'S TIME TO DEFINE HOW WE WILL STUDY, VALIDATE, AND TRANSFORM EVERYTHING WE'VE LEARNED INTO CONCRETE ACTIONS.

Month 1 — Strategic Positioning of the Destination

Reposition the brand around the concept of *People's Joy*

Why:
Research has shown that South Africa's true differentiator lies not only in its landscapes, but in its people—in the way they welcome, share, and transform the traveler's experience. Both Brazilians and local professionals associate authenticity and trust with human interaction: being with people, hearing stories, feeling part of it.

Concept:
People's Joy puts people at the center of the brand. It's not about "showing" South Africa, but about making people feel what makes the country—their energy, humor, warmth, resilience, and joy as a collective force. It's a positioning that connects emotion and truth: what makes a trip memorable is encountering people.

How to apply (People-Centered Branding):

- **Transform campaigns into encounters:** replace the focus on landscapes and institutional slogans with human portraits, local voices, laughter, looks, and stories that create identification.

- **Let people speak for the brand:** prioritize influencers, guides, and local hosts as narrators of the experience, showing that "South Africa is felt, not just visited."

- **Create an affective language and aesthetic:** visual storytelling that values the body, touch, laughter, and community—the opposite of the impersonal tone of traditional tourism marketing.

Expected outcome:
A brand that stands out for its empathy and emotional connection, perceived as vibrant, intimate, and human—where the narrative is not centered on the destination itself, but on the people who make it extraordinary.

Month 2 — Curating Afrocentric Products and Itineraries

Restructure the portfolio of experiences around the concept of *Community Joy*

Why:
Research has shown that travelers aren't just looking for ready-made products, but for lived experiences—encounters with people, stories, and lifestyles that don't exist "at home." They want to feel part of, co-create, and discover South Africa through the eyes of those who experience it every day.

Concept:
Community Joy expresses the joy that arises from the encounter between travelers and communities. It's about sharing—not just observing—and building genuine bonds with locals. This concept transforms tourism into a two-way street: the visitor is not a spectator, but a co-author of the experience.

How to apply (People- and community-centered experiences):

- Transform local guides and influencers into experience hosts, positioning them as living bridges between travelers and the cultural, gastronomic, musical, and social practices of communities.

- Co-create products with communities, ensuring that the value generated by the experience is also returned in the form of recognition and local development.

- Reposition the tourism product to reflect the leading role of the contemporary traveler, who wants to create their own journey—combining moments of immersion, relaxation, and discovery in their own way.

- Build narratives that celebrate encounters, demonstrating that each trip is unique because it arises from an exchange between real people.

Expected outcome:

A new generation of South African experiences—more human, connected, and transformative—that reinforce the brand as a promoter of collective joy, belonging, and co-creation among travelers and communities.

Month 3 — Communication and Engagement Strategy

Building Belonging through the *I Was Here* Concept

Why:

In the survey, a sense of belonging emerged as one of the main drivers of travel decisions—especially among Black and LGBT+ people. Being in a place where you can be who you are, occupying every space, and seeing similar people prominently featured creates immediate identification.

At the same time, travelers say they trust spontaneous content—videos, posts, and stories from other travelers—more than institutional campaigns. The message is clear: belonging also means seeing yourself reflected in the stories and images circulating about the destination.

Concept:

"I Was Here" can be the meeting point between belonging and social proof.

It has the potential to be the strategy that transforms each visitor into a brand ambassador, and each post into a gesture of recognition: *"I was here, I was welcomed, I belong."*

Authenticity is no longer narrated solely by the brand; it becomes lived, shared, and multiplied by people.

How to apply (Social Proof and Plural Identity):

- Put people at the center of the narrative, with micro-influencers of different backgrounds, ages, body types, and styles as the main campaign voices—showcasing the destination from multiple perspectives.

- Value traveler-generated content (UGC), creating campaigns that encourage the use of hashtags and strategic captions like #IWasHereSA or #EuEstiveAquiSA, which celebrates real stories and the joy of belonging.

- Build a visual identity and plural narrative that represents different ways of experiencing South Africa: from luxury to everyday life, from urban to natural, from ancient to contemporary.

- Reconfigure the aesthetics of communication, prioritizing faces, gestures, laughter, affection, and moments of exchange—the opposite of generic tourism centered on landscapes and empty slogans.

- Create bridges between campaigns and real experiences, connecting digital and offline: "I Was Here" murals, Instagrammable spaces at tourist attractions, and activations with local communities.

Expected outcome:

A brand that gains strength not by what it says about itself, but by what **people say as they experience it.**
"I Was Here" transforms belonging into movement—a network of voices, faces, and experiences that collectively build the living and diverse image of South Africa.

Month 4 — Training Track Development

Brazilian Market Development: Translators of the New Narrative

Why:
Training to ensure that Brazilian Trade understands and can convey the new positioning—based on People's Joy —to their clients.
These professionals are the brand's primary interpreters at the point of purchase decisions and need to feel part of the movement.

How to apply:

- Create an online and in-person training program for Brazilian agencies, combining technical content (products, itineraries, and experiences) with the new brand narrative centered on people and belonging.

- Produce creative and cultural support materials that showcase the stories, communities, and hosts behind the itineraries—reinforcing the destination's human uniqueness.

- Develop co-branding and collaborative storytelling campaigns, allowing agencies to apply the *"JOY"* concept to their own channels, strengthening the communications ecosystem.

Month 5 — In-Person Training for Local Operators in South Africa - Welcome Ready

Training the South African Trade: Hosts of the New Experience

Why:

It is essential to prepare South African agencies, guides, and entrepreneurs to welcome travelers from communities that value hospitality, respect, and representation—such as the Black and LGBT+ population in Brazil.

More than just training, it's about raising awareness about the social, symbolic, and emotional impact of these trips.

How to apply:

- Implement inclusive hospitality workshops, focusing on language, attitudes, and welcoming practices that promote safety and belonging.

- Create binational training sessions (Brazil-South Africa) with exchanges between agents and guides, allowing both parties to understand the expectations and cultural sensitivities of their audiences.

- Include modules on narratives of ancestry, diversity, and joy as a collective force, connecting local hosts to the spirit of the new positioning.

- Establish networks of certified hosts, valuing guides and experiences that represent the true spirit of Community Joy.

Thank you SO MUCH FOR BEING WITH US THIS FAR.

WE'D LOVE TO HEAR YOUR THOUGHTS ON THIS FIRST STAGE, AND WE'RE ALREADY WORKING HARD ON PREPARING CONTENT FOR THE SECOND MONTH. THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING OF A JOURNEY WE WANT TO BUILD TOGETHER.

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