

Research topic: Cross-Border Themed Tourism Routes in the southern Africa Region: Practice and Potential

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Abstract:

The potential of cross-border tourism is a well-established phenomenon in that it multiplies the socio-economic effects in bordering regions. Essentially it promotes the integration of value chains, augments investments and increases tourist flows to a broader and more inclusive region. It also allows for the linking of a number of related tourist attractions into a themed experience which attracts the niche tourist with particular needs. Key to these themed tourist routes is the experiential element which creates meaning for the potential tourist. The report acknowledges that cross-border themed tourism routes are not without their challenges at a number of levels. These include aspects such as the non-alignment of the tourist guiding sectors; the discrepancies in tourism rankings; varied facilities and infrastructures; obstructive regulatory systems; safety concerns; global competitiveness; different currencies; and lack of collaboration. However, it is argued that some of these do have short term mitigations as well as long term solutions which could enable the practice of cross-border themed tourism routes. These can be addressed through: collaboration and partnership; diplomacy and supranational agreements; single regional and regionally accepted currency; investment; harmonisation of visas; harmonisation of standards; and experience diversification. Furthermore, best practice examples indicate that cross-border route experiences have been more successful with the implementation of smaller developmental projects where only a few countries are traversed. Here the enabling environment and collaborative practices have been aligned to suite the specific route. The report argues that Southern Africa has vast potential for cross border themed route experiences and proposes the development of a CBTRE Toolkit which the sector could utilise to creatively diversify the experience dimension of the tourist offering. The report maps out a range of potential avenues of collaborative themed route experiences within the Southern SADC region concluding with an example from film tourism and the case of *Black Panther*.