

Review overlooks retailers' domestic potential

THE comprehensive and informative South African Tourism Review was released last month. The objectives of the government's review panel were to establish what needs to be done to boost tourism into the country and to grow domestic tourism, the forgotten or ignored step-child in suppliers' quest for the well-heeled foreigners prepared to pay premium prices. Although domestic VFR travel may be growing modestly, real tourist traffic, which provides meaningful returns to suppliers, is stagnating.

The panel's recommendations call for greater collaboration between the private sector and SA Tourism and more innovation in the na-

tional tourism body's marketing campaigns, including a greater focus on domestic travel.

The domestic market has never been a priority for SA Tourism. It does not have the glamour and perks of flitting around the UK, Europe, America and China, extolling the virtues of South Africa's attractions or the potential for locals to pay the kind of prices, which foreigners are prepared to pay and are often equivalent to what they are used to playing in their local destinations.

The recommendations appear to indicate concern over SA Tourism's organisation and the network of overseas offices and their effectiveness, while many foreign

destinations have for years been reducing the number of their overseas offices, either closing many of them or appointing local marketing organisations to carry out their mandate at less cost but with varying degrees of success.

The aim of the government review is to add 225,000 jobs in the tourism industry by 2020.

The report recognises that the government's new immigration rules are undermining tourism promotion efforts and also points out the challenges of being a long-haul destination, airlift limitations and safety concerns. It claims tourism authorities, and presumably the minister, are seeking to "rapidly address" concerns over the

new immigration regulations as the country's previously strong growth trend is under threat, not that anything has happened rapidly, or at all, to deal with the problem so far. That, however, is almost certainly due to the intransigence of the Minister of Home Affairs.

The findings also point out that domestic tourism is the backbone of all successful tourism economies and details why. But most stakeholders canvassed and the panel felt that SA Tourism should be involved in domestic marketing but that it should be secondary to international.

SA Tourism does have a new domestic marketing strategy, with a bigger budget

than ever before and it plans to increase local marketing over the next three years.

However, throughout the report, no attention is paid specifically to the retail trade and the role it can play in growing the domestic market. And, of all the input the review panel sought out and received, not one of the people involved was a retailer, even though ASATA was consulted.

It continues to be a blind spot in domestic tourism development, with national, provincial and municipal tourism authorities and the majority of suppliers themselves, remaining obsessed with international markets, almost to the exclusion of domestic business.

