

Cape Town Calling: Undoing the impact of 'Day Zero' on Tourism

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At the end of 2017, one of the most picturesque cities in the world, Cape Town, announced a 'Day Zero' to create awareness among its citizens of the severity of its ongoing water crisis. The day marked to be as early as March 2018 at one point of time has been pushed out to 2020 (or potentially 'never') in light of the city's commendable efforts in changing their lifestyle and focusing on water conservation in all aspects of their day-to-day living. It was heartening to see industries, buildings, farmers, hoteliers, each and every citizen coming together for a common cause and making an effort to reduce water consumption. Just for perspective, Cape Town has reduced its water consumption by 60% down to daily consumption levels of as low as ~500-550 million litres a day, a reduction from the 1.2 billion litres per day mark, just three years ago.

The hotel and tourism industry has been at the forefront of a lot of these initiatives. While most of the consumption in the city is residential, hotels seemed to be the ones that took the limelight on water consumption. The hotel industry reacted by closing swimming pools, installing borewells, fitting taps with aerators, using sea water for air-conditioning, implemented the use of paper towels instead of hand towels to reduce the laundry load, installing wastewater treatment plants, removing bath plugs, encouraging guests to take two-minute showers, creating awareness and sharing best practices to switch to a greener lifestyle and more.

Summary

With dam levels rising in Cape Town and the city becoming water-wise the threat of 'Day Zero' has been pushed out to 2020 or potentially 'never'. The city now needs to market its comeback and set benchmarks for sustainable tourism destinations.

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With the efforts of the city, and some blessed rain showers, the dam levels in Cape Town are back up to 48% as of 2 July (as compared to 25% this time in 2017) and rising with a healthy rainfall predicted through the rest of the winter months. While the citizens are cautiously optimistic, this experience over the last year has left citizens environmentally conscious and waterwise.

In January 2018, when I traveled to another country, I would have a longer shower, as a relief to my 60 second shower routine, however 6 months later, having realised the impact of conservation and adjusting to a more waterwise routine, I felt no need to have a long shower upon travels abroad. I feel Cape Town can not only claim its fame for being resilient against the drought and becoming a water wise city but it's citizens/visitors can now be ambassadors of sustainable tourism when they travel. Cape Town is one among a host of cities around the world that may face a water crisis and we may have learnt our lesson earlier than others.

In gaining this wisdom however, the city of Cape town's hotels and overall tourism has suffered a blow in terms of declining occupancy and visitation considering the publicity that 'day zero' gained across the world. The city along with the globe now needs to market its comeback and the fact that the destination is a water wise sustainable tourism destination, along with the numerous other tourism accolades that stand to its name. Tourists use a fraction of the water and with so many places to see in and around Cape Town, exploring the mountains, beaches and vineyards, who has time for a long shower anyway.

We look forward to welcoming the water wise global travelers to the wonders of Cape Town and Western Cape; and getting back on track for the unprecedented tourist arrivals that the city deserves.



About **Rishabh Thapar**



Rishabh is a Director with HVS 's MEA team and is responsible for conducting consulting and valuation assignments in Sub-Saharan Africa. He has worked on a number of different hotel markets across East, West and Southern Africa. Having worked with HVS's South Asia office previously he has more than five years of hotel consulting and development experience, having worked on several projects ranging from market studies to commercial due diligence, transaction advisory and operator searches, valuations and feasibility studies. Before joining HVS, Rishabh worked with Taj Hotels Resorts and Palaces in India and facilitated the construction and expansion of his family's hotel business. He graduated from the Taj Management Training Program in 2008 and holds a BBA degree and a BA Honors degree in Hotel Management from the Institute of Hotel Management, Aurangabad (University of Huddersfield, UK).

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