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New urban tourism in the Global South: The case of inner-city Johannesburg

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Abstract: The phenomenon of ‘new urban tourism’ is attracting growing scholarly attention. In many cities a strong trend is for visitors increasingly to leave the confines of tourist precincts or zones and instead to venture into new city spaces. This tendency has been linked to the growth of ‘off-the-beaten track’ tours in many urban destinations in the Global North. The aim in this paper is to explore the development of ‘new urban tourism’ in one leading tourism city in the Global South. Johannesburg inner-city is the geographical focus of the study. Using interviews with tour operators as well as tourists, the analysis charts the evolution and major features of off-the-beaten track tours in inner-city Johannesburg from their beginnings in the 2010s decade. Arguably, new urban tourists in Johannesburg are experiencing ‘edgy tourism’ as they explore spaces of an inner-city which, in recent years, has a tarnished reputation as no-go zone because of its physical decline as well as crime and grime.

Keywords: inner-city tourism, off-the-beaten track tours, new urban tourism, Global South, South Africa

Introduction

Urban tourism represents “one of the most dynamically developing forms of tourism and, in many cases, one of the most important drivers of economic growth”

(Panasiuk, 2019, p. 14). Indeed, it is considered by Postma et al. (2017, p. 95) that since the “*rise of mass tourism in the 1960s, city tourism has consistently been one of the fastest growing segments of the travel phenomenon in countries with developed economies*”. Until the 1980s, however, “*the academic literature on urban tourism was very limited*” (Pasquinelli, 2015, p. 7). Urban tourism as a significant and distinctive field of scholarship emerged only during the 1980s and 1990s (Novy, 2011). Despite the growth of cities as tourism destinations, for many years urban tourism was seen as a neglected dimension of tourism studies which was usually dominated by research on resorts or rural spaces (Nilsson, 2024). One observer in the 1990s could state that many “*academic books and papers are still written as if tourism only happens in coastal and ski resorts, and the role of tourism in urban economies is often ignored*” (Law, 1996, p. 1). The general view was that cities were considered mostly as generating sites rather than as reception areas in the tourist system. As articulated by Larsen (2019) much tourism research therefore exhibited an ‘anti-urban’ bias on the grounds that tourism was considered as an escape away from alienating and stressful cities to tranquil rural spaces and nature.

Over the past three decades attitudes towards urban tourism have reoriented and there has been a burst of research concerning various aspects of urban tourism (Pasquinelli, 2015; Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021a; Duignan and Pappalepore, 2023; Page and Duignan, 2023). Nilsson (2024) contends that this rise of academic interest is accounted for not only by the expansion of urban tourism but from the recognition of its economic importance and ramifications for local livelihoods and environments. In the 1980s city tourism experienced a fundamental directional shift which accompanied the march of deindustrialization that occurred across many cities of the United States and Western Europe (Law, 1996). The economic recession and severe distress catalysed a burst of interest in tourism as policy makers searched for new sectors to reinvent and renew their ailing city economies (Law, 1992 & 1993). In the USA urban policymakers viewed tourism as an economic panacea for the demise of traditional manufacturing activities and applied substantial funds to compete for visitors (Judd, 1995). Infrastructural investments were committed to waterfront dockland redevelopments, festival market halls, convention centres and sports stadia (Ioannides and Petridou, 2016). By the 2000s “*one would be hard pressed to find a single urban area within the United States that does not have some form of tourism promotion strategy*” (Ioannides and Timothy, 2010, p. 149).

In the post-industrial economy the importance of tourism, has been heightened for its implications for social, cultural, employment and revenue improvement (Khusnutdinova et al., 2019). As Maitland and Newman (2009, p. 1) pinpoint “*urban tourism has been an inseparable part of the transformation of many cities over the past several decades*”. Klepej and Marot (2024, p. 1) observe similarly that in recent times “*tourism has become one of the major drivers of development in cities*”. In particular, many cities both in Europe and North America used tourism as a vehicle to regenerate inner-city areas (Law, 1996). From a wider perspective the transformation of inner cities into standardized tourism enclaves or tourist bubbles was simply one facet of neo-liberal urban entrepreneurial strategies (Ioannides and Petridou, 2016). Scholars acknowledged that urban tourism needed to be considered seriously for its increasing

cultural, economic and social significance (Larsen, 2019; Nilsson, 2020). Tourism was further propelled onto the urban agenda by its transformative impacts in cities, including gentrification and the appearance of resident protests around ‘overtourism’ (Colomb and Novy, 2016; Koens et al., 2018; Dodds and Butler, 2019a & 2019b; Novy and Colomb, 2019; Milano et al., 2020; Pereira et al., 2020; Horn and Visser, 2023). Touristification precipitated changes in urban spaces and especially the complexion of certain physical urban environments with severe impacts for housing prices as well as for residents’ quality of life (Nilsson, 2020). As urban tourism overtook city spaces it has therefore become a topic of policy concern and an element in strategic spatial planning (Duignan and Pappalepore, 2023).

Arguably, tourism research should assume a more prominent role in urban studies “*that have been blind to the ever-increasing economic, social and cultural role of global tourism in shaping the everyday spaces of cities around the world*” (Larsen, 2019, p. 25). This observation applies equally well to cities in the Global South many of which have emerged as significant destinations for urban tourism (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021a). Nonetheless, as is evidenced by the recent overview of scholarship on African urban studies, contributions on tourism are scarce (Croese and Wood, 2024). Against this backdrop the aim in this paper is to elaborate the debates around ‘new urban tourism’ and interrogate the recent development of ‘off-the-beaten’ track tours in one major African city. Our case study is Johannesburg which is South Africa’s commercial heart and largest city. The paper is a modest contribution both to international scholarship on ‘new urban tourism’ and the more specific literature on the shifting trajectories of tourism development in Johannesburg.

Literature review

Recently Gravari-Barbas (2024, p. 242) remarked that the “*tourism literature has paid limited attention to the spatial aspects of tourism*”. Over the past decade, however, the changing spatialities of tourism flows in and across city space have attracted scholarly attention. One observed geographical trend in many cities is for visitors to urban destinations increasingly to leave the confines of tourist precincts or zones and instead to venture into new city spaces, including residential areas (Stors and Kagermeier, 2013; Novy, 2018; Stors, 2022). For several scholars, tourism is expanding in ‘ordinary places’ as ‘new’ urban tourists “*are drawn to the mundane, the routine and the familiar*” (Condevaux et al., 2016, p. 5). Smith (2019, p. 5) points out that traditionally the activity of tourism “*has been regarded as something that takes place in a distinctive part of a city – the ‘tourist bubble’ or ‘entertainment district’ – but it increasingly infiltrates a more diverse set of urban spaces and places*”. Indeed, it is evident that the spatial patterns of urban tourism are no longer confined to ‘tourist bubbles’ but have spread in geographical extent.

Novy and Colomb (2019) highlight that visitors increasingly have sought to experience ‘ordinary spaces’ which are situated outside of the traditional spaces of inner-city tourism. Beyond inner-city tourism precincts, an increasing trend therefore is for tourists to go ‘off the beaten track’, searching out the ‘backstage’ and places that are distinctive and uncontrived, not planned as tourism zones (Maitland, 2016; Novy, 2018). As is stressed by Pappalepore and Gravari-Barbas (2022) tourist

researchers are isolating the appearance of 'new urban cultures' associated with novel practices and places. Such new urban cultures developed as a result of visitors' desires to go outside of the traditional urban tourism precincts and to experience the city 'as a local', interact with local communities, to experience off-the-beaten track spaces in cities and be thrilled in engaging in the activity of urban exploration (Pappalepore and Gravari-Barbas, 2022).

Conventionally, the notion of getting off the beaten track has been strongly associated either with the activities and locational choices of backpackers who explore exotic destinations of rural or 'wild tourism' or of groups of adventure tourists journeying off the beaten pathways of tourism to engage in physical and sporting pursuits such as climbing, snowboarding or mountain biking (Hudson, 2002; Maitland, 2019). In recent years getting off the beaten track has become progressively relevant to cohorts of visitors to city destinations and "*central to the experience that some visitors seek*" (Maitland, 2017, p. 68). In many cities the axis of tourism is pivoting away from a reliance on exploiting tangible assets such as heritage sites, buildings or museums and towards a concern with intangible resources and the need for experiencing 'something different' (Maitland, 2017). It is considered that many urban tourists are becoming urban explorers in their quest to experience the real city (Maitland and Newman, 2009; Maitland, 2019). Nevertheless, Novy (2011, p. 2) makes clear that going 'beyond the beaten path' in cities is not a new phenomenon as it "*has been with us since the early days of commercialized urban tourism*". This said, what is new is "*the extent and breadth to which areas previously not visited, or less frequented by tourists and place consumers, are today integrated into cities' tourism and leisure trade*" (Novy, 2011, p. 2).

New urban tourists are looking for off-the beaten track experiences and drawn to the mundane, the routine and the familiar (Condevaux et al., 2016; Lim and Bouchon, 2017; Maitland, 2022). According to Dirksmeier and Helbrecht (2015, p. 277) new urban tourism is marked as specific varieties of practice being "*characterised by the complement or substitution of ordinary touristic activities like sightseeing or museum visits for encounters with ordinary, mundane, city life*". Stors and Kagermeier (2013) aver that tourists are 'coming of age' and crossing outside the tourist bubble and exiting the beaten track of well-known historic centres of European cities. One consequence is that some "*ordinary places are becoming tourist destinations*" (Condevaux et al., 2016, p. 2). For example, the cases of Kreuzberg in Berlin or Islington in London show that "*former working class and/or peri-central immigrant neighbourhoods currently undergoing gentrification, are gradually becoming new tourism destinations*" (Condevaux et al., 2016, p. 7). In these areas, as well as others, such as Harlem in New York, new urban tourism contributes to increasing the value of historically marginal urban spaces (Novy, 2018).

According to Novy (2011) the advance of tourism developments in marginalized neighbourhoods of cities must be understood as the outcome of a complex of interrelated trends which are connected to broader processes of urban restructuring and change. Arguably, these changes are inseparable from the following: "*post-industrial shifts of contemporary cities' economies; changing patterns of business and leisure; new geographies of capital accumulation; changing conversion*

of socially marginal and working-class areas of the central city to middle-class residential use; increasingly sophisticated forms of cultural commodification; as well as 'new' tourist demands and tourism strategy formations" (Novy, 2011, p. 3). In another perspective on the rise of new urban tourism Gravari-Barbas (2021) explains the phenomenon in relation to the emergence of tourism-rental platforms. She describes new urban tourism as a 'platform-led' tourism and inseparable from digitalization and the explosion of social media.

Overall, for Pasquinelli (2015) new urban tourism necessarily must accomplish two different missions. First, it is essential that new urban tourism transcend the narrow notion of a tourism city as an enclavic tourism space which is disconnected from the ordinary life of the city. Second, "*city tourism requires a shift from 'staged authenticity' to the promotion of 'the ordinary as authentic', thus challenging traditional destination products and promoting a revision of the notion of competitive destination"* (Pasquinelli, 2015, p. 15). Nevertheless, it remains that off the beaten track tourism does not oppose the traditional 'mass' tourism in urban tourism precincts rather it serves to complement it (Delaplace and Gravari-Barbas, 2016).

Methodology

At the outset this research was informed by a set of methodologies. One, a bibliographical analysis of international literature on 'new urban tourism' and off the beaten track tours. As is evident from the above review the existing scholarship is nearly entirely focused on city destinations in the Global North. Two, the study is anchored further on literature concerning the specificities of urban change and restructuring in Johannesburg. This necessitated the collection and analysis of material relating to both broad patterns of urban spatial change in the city and the specific evolutionary pathways of tourism in the inner-city, particularly over the last 30 years. The study therefore builds upon a small group of research studies which have documented the contours of tourism development in the 'difficult' and challenging environment of Johannesburg inner-city (Rogerson, 2002; Rogerson and Kaplan, 2007; Rogerson and Rogerson, 2016; Rogerson, 2020) and of the specific issues around the operations and impacts of alternative 'off-the-beaten track' tours in the city (Frenzel, 2014; Hoogendoorn and Giddy, 2017; Frenzel, 2018 & 2020; Opfermann, 2021). Three, field research and structured interviews were conducted with eight operators of inner-city tours in Johannesburg. This facilitated an audit of the current extent and characteristics of off-the-beaten track tours taking place in the inner-city and its surrounds. Four, the findings from a survey completed with 127 tour participants provides insight into the nature of 'new urban tourists' in Johannesburg. The survey contained 17 questions and explored variously the demographics of visitors and sought to understand the tourists' knowledge of Johannesburg inner-city, their expectations and experience of the inner-city tours.

Results

Two subsections of results and discussion are given. The first provides context on Johannesburg as a tourist city and in particular of the historical evolution of tourism in the inner-city. The second turns to present the findings from the empirical

work undertaken on the development of off the beaten track tours and new urban tourists in South Africa's major city.

Tourism Development in Johannesburg

In its history "*Johannesburg was designed and built by Western architects, planners and developers after the discovery of gold in the area*" during the 1880s (Baro, 2017, p. 43). Indeed, Nuttall and Mbembe (2008, p. 18) stress the constant aspirations to develop the city into a metropolis focused on Western models and for the making of "*the largest and most modern European city in Africa*". As South Africa's most economically vibrant city Johannesburg always has been a visitor destination from the time of the city's foundation as a mining settlement camp during the late 19th century. Typically for any large city the nature of the Johannesburg tourism economy was multi-purpose and included visitors arriving for business, visiting friends and relatives, and for leisure reasons (Rogerson, 2002).

Tourism promotion of the city began at a small scale as far back as the 1920s with the activities of a local publicity bureau (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2019). But, with a booming manufacturing economy from the 1940s and the growth of a strong commerce and finance sector, throughout the apartheid years (1948-1991) tourism was only a minor component of the economy of South Africa's 'City of Gold' (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021b). From 1980 a major restructuring of Johannesburg's economic base occurred. At this time the traditional role of mining had been eroded and the significance of the city's manufacturing economy overtaken by the rise of an economy articulated around finance services, insurance, real estate and business services (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2015). The sector of tourism remained generally neglected in urban policy making until after the 1994 democratic transition when the economic base of Johannesburg was in a state of flux as the manufacturing sector in the post-apartheid (post-1994) period experienced the impact of growing international competition. With decreased local competitiveness of local industry, the march of factory closures and escalating unemployment by the early 2000s Johannesburg city authorities identified tourism as a potential 'sunrise sector' to contribute new employment opportunities and growth momentum. The tourism sector became a focus for strategic intervention as part of wider restructuring of the urban economic base and rebuilding the landscape of post-apartheid Johannesburg (Murray, 2008; Rogerson and Rogerson, 2015). An additional benefit from tourism promotion was city re-imaging and improving the reputation of Johannesburg as an investment destination (Rogerson, 1996).



Figure 1. The location of Johannesburg inner-city

In terms of the geography of tourism, historically, as Johannesburg emerged as a tourism destination, the spatial focus was upon the cluster of museums, attractions, shopping and entertainment which was situated in the Central Business District (CBD) (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2019). This cluster of tourism-related assets serviced a clientele of both business and leisure travellers and for most of the apartheid years remained the axis of the city's tourism economy (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021b). As is documented by Jayne Rogerson (2018) the inner-city was the overwhelming geographical locus for leading hotels and travel-related enterprises which concentrated in the CBD around the landmark Carlton Hotel (Fig. 1). The suburbs of Berea and Hillbrow functioned also as important nodes for accommodation and entertainment of visitors and residents. Johannesburg inner-city remained the hub of the city's tourism economy until the early 1990s (Rogerson and Kaplan, 2005). Beginning in the 1980s and accelerating in the 1990s a spatial shift occurred in the tourism economy with the emergence and strengthening of new tourism spaces in the city. At this time the tourism economy of Johannesburg inner-city experienced a period of dramatic decline and readjustment (Rogerson, 2014 & 2020). The emasculation of the inner-city tourism cluster was linked to the exodus of commercial office and retail activities from the CBD to new decentralized property nodes in Rosebank and most importantly at Sandton. As Murray (2011) points out central Johannesburg began in the 1980s to show early warning signs of socioeconomic stagnation and decline. The spiral of decline occurred in the 1980s as businesses began to abandon the inner-city and relocate to Johannesburg's northern suburbs. Capital flight precipitated a cumulative downward deterioration of the central area with firms fleeing to the northern suburbs for both push and pull reasons (Turok et al., 2021). It was evident by the 1990s that *"the once thriving central city of*

Johannesburg had become synonymous with unregulated street trading, poor urban management, abandoned and badly maintained buildings, unauthorized squatting, overcrowding, neglected public spaces and general disorderliness" (Murray, 2011, p. 88). In consequence the inner-city acquired *"a tarnished reputation as a tense and dangerous place of crime and fear, with its inhospitable thoroughfares of dehumanized speed and impersonal gloom, massive skyscrapers, and cold buildings cut off from the surrounding streets"* (Murray, 2011, p. 88).

With lack of investor confidence in the inner-city the physical deterioration of properties and environmental degradation continued to progress (Rogerson, 2020). From the mid-1990s the inner-city experienced accelerating decline and the exodus of businesses to suburbs such as Rosebank and the emerging new CBD of Sandton (Turok et al., 2021). This decline was mirrored in the status of the inner-city within Johannesburg tourism; between 2001 and 2011 despite some initiatives for regeneration the share of the inner-city in total tourism spend fell from 17.2 to 15.1 percent (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2016). The cycle of decline in the inner-city was exacerbated by escalating levels of crime and violence amidst the deteriorating physical environment (Murray, 2011). A striking symbol of the demise of Johannesburg inner-city for tourism was the progressive run down in occupancies and eventual closure in April 1998 of the prestigious and former five-star Carlton Hotel (Rogerson, 2020). Equally telling was the downgrading of the status of several other of the cluster of leading hotels that were situated in the inner-city.

From the early 1990s the quality standards of tourism accommodation services available in Johannesburg inner-city deteriorated radically as the geographical pivot of the international visitors and of the business tourism economy gravitated away from the inner-city to the Rosebank and Sandton areas (Rogerson, 2014). Lack of investment in tourism properties and disinvestment from the CBD of leading hotel chains were manifestations of an inner-city tourism economy experiencing a spiral of decline. As summarized by Murray (2011, p. 91) with collapsing revenues and the loss of the traditional white middle class clientele as well as the market of international tourists *"once-fashionable five-star hotels either shut down or purposely downgraded their facilities, offering no-frills service, long stay rates, and Spartan accommodation in response to changes in the market demand and social composition of customers"*. In addition, it was observed that *"smaller and older hotels in the inner-city transformed themselves into nightclubs, brothels or drinking establishments catering to low-income, marginally employed customers"* (Murray, 2011, p. 91).

By the early 2000s in terms of international tourism cities Johannesburg represented a 'non-traditional' destination in which the tourism sector was considered as a promising source of new job creation and economic vitality with several interventions enacted to drive fresh waves of tourism expansion (Rogerson, 2004). The destination of Johannesburg offered a range of tourism assets and products (Rogerson and Kaplan, 2005). For leisure travellers, the city's upmarket shopping malls and shoppertainment complexes (including casinos) were major attractions for both domestic tourists and travellers from other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Geographically the major shopping areas are situated in the city's plush Northern suburbs (around Sandton and Rosebank) with Sandton City,

Montecasino and the Mall of Africa as the leading foci. Other popular attractions for domestic leisure travellers continued to be the city's zoological gardens, parkland areas and botanical gardens found in the Northern suburbs, and the Gold Reef City theme park situated in the south of Johannesburg (Figure 1).

As part of its endeavors for tourism promotion the city authorities since 1994 sought to upgrade and market a range of new cultural and heritage attractions aimed at both domestic and international tourists (Rogerson, 2004). The most significant are Constitution Hill, Newtown, the apartheid museum (situated next to Gold Reef City) and 'poverty' or township tours to Soweto, a major focus of the anti-apartheid struggle (van der Merwe, 2013; Booyens, 2021). The Maboneng Precinct, a cluster of creative industries occupying formerly abandoned or degraded warehouse space and part of the renewal initiatives surrounding the inner-city, was another newer leisure node for both domestic and international visitors (Murtagh, 2015; Gregory, 2016; Goo, 2017).

New Urban Tourism and Off the Beaten Track Tours

Tourism in the inner-city and its surrounds has been troubled and stagnant most especially since the early 1990s. Informal business tourists in the form of cross-border shopper/traders increasingly came to dominate the tourism landscape of inner-city Johannesburg (Rogerson, 2018; Zack and Landau, 2022). Leisure tourism was in a state of precipitate decline. Among others Baro (2017, p. 47) observes the "*Inner-city of Johannesburg has suffered from its negative image when it comes to visitors avoiding it*".

At a time when both private and public sector initiatives for inner-city regeneration were taking root, however, the 2010s decade witnessed the launch of a new kind of leisure tourism for inner-city Johannesburg. This sub-section seeks to elaborate the essential characteristics of 'new urban tourism' in Johannesburg and of the tours made available in Johannesburg inner-city. The green shoots for the inner-city tourism economy were sown by the innovation of a different genre of tours for the inner-city to those which had existed in earlier periods and during the apartheid years (Rogerson and Kaplan, 2005; Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021b). For Opfermann (2021) the establishment of off-the-beaten track touring within the perceived 'dangerous spaces' inner-city Johannesburg was both daunting and innovative.

Table 1. Thematic Foci of Inner-city Tours

Thematic Focus	Number of Tour Offerings
History (Heritage)	18
Food	13
Art	7
Architecture	3
Culture	3
Education	2
Nightlife	2
Adventure	2
Lifestyle	1

Note: Several themes are evident in many tours

Table 1 presents the findings of an audit that was conducted of the different tours that were in operation in inner-city Johannesburg. At the time of the audit (2018-2019) at least ten tour companies were identified as operating various kinds of off the beaten track tours in Johannesburg inner-city. Eight of these ten companies participated in the study and provided details of 36 different tours on offer. The broad thematic foci of each tour was categorized and as shown in Table 1 emphasized different experiences. It is evident that the largest number of tours concentrate on aspects of the history of the inner-city as a whole or of specific areas such as Fordsburg, Hillbrow or Newtown. A second major thematic focus is food and seeking to expose visitors to the diverse range of food experiences that exist in the inner-city (Naicker and Rogerson, 2017), including those from migrant communities from other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. A third focus is around art, both public art and graffiti, which is widespread across much of the inner-city and with a cluster around the Maboneng precinct (Parker et al., 2019). Architecture and culture are explored in several of the tours. Finally, there are certain highly specialized tours that seek to profile the inner-city as a space of adventure in terms either of experiencing its nightlife or as a fun zone where visitors engage in activities such as pub crawls, skateboarding or lifestyle fitness challenges.

The works of Frenzel (2014, 2020) pinpoint the manner in which the growth of inner-city tours contributed to place-making initiatives that sought to counter negative place representations of inner-city spaces. As is stressed by Frenzel (2014) several inner-city tours aim to address the territorial stigma that impacts these spaces in Johannesburg. The tour operators seek to introduce visitors to different, little-known elements of the inner-city. The tours take place both in daytime and in the evenings and can involve different modes of mobility including walking, cycling, skateboarding and use of minibus taxis. In terms of the group size often there is no minimum and private tours for one person are welcome. Tours all have a determined starting point which allows the tourists to meet the guide at a specific location. The tour operators select a starting point that is easy to locate, often in a public place that is designated near major and safer public transport routes including parking or metered taxis. In terms of the actual tour routes, each route is clearly marked out in order to ensure safety of the tourists. Within these demarcated spaces there is provided private security in order to ensure the security of both tourists and tour operators.

Figure 2 maps out the attractions that are visited in the 36 different tours that are offered. These areas are evidence of various sites of historical significance, attractions and exciting activities and tour stop overs. The tourism assets of the Johannesburg inner-city are considerable and include the iconic Nelson Mandela Bridge, several museums and heritage sites, food markets and art centres. It should be noted that the route itineraries are carefully planned in order to ensure the safety of the tourists. According to the tour operators the inner-city tours are not only aimed at challenging perceptions but also are uniquely designed to showcase the heritage of the inner-city and profiling places that have much history that people can learn from.

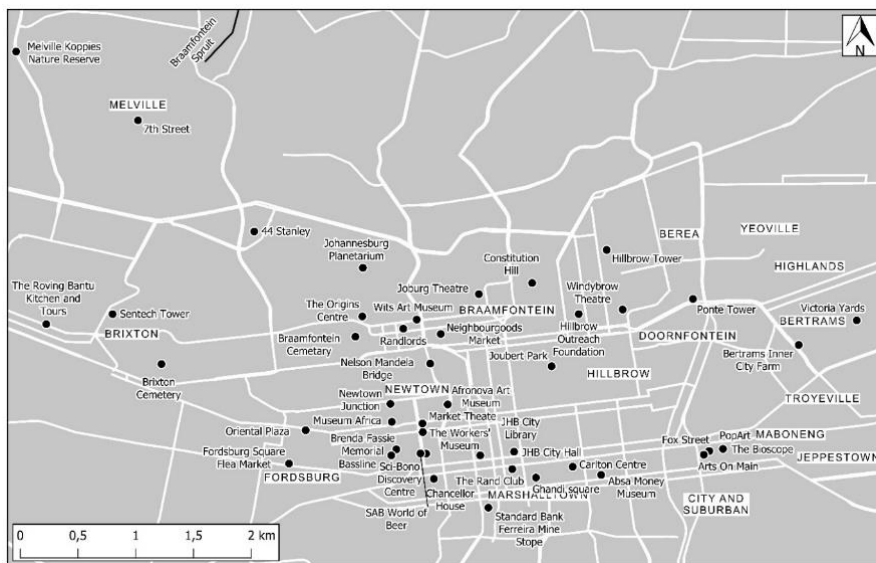


Figure 2. Tour Attractions for Inner-city Johannesburg Off the Beaten Track Tours

Tour operators want tourists to be part of the city that is going through transformation and not to fear being within it (Opfermann, 2021). The operators expressed the view that they want to uphold the history and heritage of the city and through the tours educate people and to also encourage them to preserve these important places. All tour operators agree on the importance of correcting perceptions about the Johannesburg inner-city that have been created out of fear and false information which makes many people reluctant to travel to and within the inner-city. Hence, the tours seek to open up a platform for the tourists to have their own interpretations and meaning of the places they visit within the city without that experience being tainted by negative opinions whether from the media or from individuals that previously experienced the city in a negative way. The itineraries of off the beaten track tours are geared therefore towards spaces and attractions that are out of the norm, meaning that this type of tourism is about moving away from the traditional tourism assets. It is evident from Figure 2 that the inner-city hosts a number of historical sites that play a great role in the preservation of cultural and heritage significance. Some attractions are also the actual base for the tour companies. Dlala Nje tours operates from Ponte Tower and (the former) Joburg Places was established at Gandhi Square inside Somerset House which served as their tour base.

Table 2. Profile of new urban tourists of inner-city Johannesburg

Characteristic	Key Findings
Age	51% below age 35 and 86% below age of 50 years
Gender	44.9% male, 55.1% female
Origin	63% South Africa; 37% international tourists.
Leading Sources of International Tourists	USA, United Kingdom, Brazil

Information and insight on Johannesburg's new urban tourists was gleaned from the survey completed with 127 tour participants. Table 1 reveals a profile of the new urban tourists visiting Johannesburg inner-city. Three points are worth highlighting. First, is that off-the beaten track tours in inner-city Johannesburg are mainly patronised by a relatively younger cohort of travellers. The results showed almost two-thirds of tour participants were under 40 years of age and nearly 90 percent under 50 years. Second, in terms of gender representation the survey captured a larger share of women respondents than men in terms of tour participants. Three, the country of origin of tour participants reveals the notable finding that the majority of tour participants are local South Africans who account for almost two-thirds of the patrons of inner-city tours with international tourists accounting for 37 percent of the total. The caveat needs to be made, however, that the numbers of international tourists inevitably would have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic as the period of data collection spanned the period from August 2019 to March 2020. The cohort of South African tour participants including residents of Durban, Cape Town and Pretoria but overwhelmingly was dominated by local residents from Johannesburg who made up 83.8 percent of the South African cohort. The high representation of local Johannesburg residents' points to the increasing blurring of boundaries between locals and residents in tourism (Page and Duignan, 2023). Of the group of international tourists participating in Johannesburg off the beaten track tours the largest flows as captured in the survey were from USA, the United Kingdom and Brazil. Smaller participation was noted from Germany as well as from visitors from several countries in sub-Saharan Africa including Angola, Nigeria and Gabon.

Table 3. Tourists Source of Knowledge of Inner-city Tours

Source	Frequency	Percent (%)
Referral	58	45.7
Social media	45	35.4
Internet browsing	7	5.5
Accommodation provider	13	10.2
Other	2	1.6
No response	2	1.6

Table 3 shows the source of information for tour participants. It reveals that the most important is word of mouth referral followed by social media which impacted a total of 80 percent of the sampled tour participants. Tourists are therefore most likely to participate in a Johannesburg inner-city tour as a result of a referral or recommendation by someone who had already participated and shared their tour experience. The role of social media is clearly significant, and it was evident that the tour operators use social media platforms in order to disseminate tour information, promotions or images. Referrals from accommodation service providers emerge as the third most significant base for visitors to acquire knowledge and information about inner-city tours.

The research explored reasons behind participation in the tours. Several factors surfaced as relevant. Many participants were interested in taking the tour as an educational experience. Learning about the inner-city history and culture including

exploring the architecture of the city, the style of the buildings, and manner in which they were built were widely expressed. Interest in art and graffiti was another basis for participating in tours. One tourist stated that “I honestly love street art, so I wanted to see what the tour is all about”. Other tourists disclosed that they participated because they wanted to meet new people and to ‘interact with locals’. Others stated that they wanted to ‘try something new’ and go ‘off the beaten track’. Interest in local food and drink was another impetus for touring with one respondent declaring: “I came across their website and enquired and saw delicious food that they had posted so ended up taking a tour”. For other mainly local participants, the reason they took the tour was simply to have ‘fun with friends and family’. The meaning of ‘place’ as a theme also stood out as it signified tourists’ connection with the city. Notwithstanding the above, most visitors undertook tours because it was either recommended by someone else: “My friend and I were told about the tour before coming to South Africa so we were told it is a ‘must do’ experience of Johannesburg”. This statement once more reinforces the importance of word of mouth or reviews by previous participants for influencing the decisions of others in taking the inner-city off-the-beaten path tours.

Questions about tourist expectations of the tour elicited a range of responses. The most common related to ‘explore the city’ as well as ‘see historical sites’. Other important expectations were ‘to meet new people’, ‘learn about the culture’ or expectations of experiencing a variety of art, food and drinks. Some participants indicated that they expected the tour to be ‘community orientated’ and ‘to meet locals’. Many visitors expected to see positive change and transformation of the inner-city whereas others expected to see crime and grime. One tourist observed that “*I expected to see nothing more than crime, abandoned buildings and getting robbed. But all was replaced by an awesome experience that proves we should not judge or make assumptions*”. Tour participants were asked to identify the aspects of tours which they found to most memorable or enjoyable. It emerged that “learning” about the architecture, art, history, culture and language was what most tourists enjoyed. The positive change through tours and within the city was mentioned as tourists felt that the tours advocate for social and economic change. The built environment of the inner-city as well as opportunities to take photographs was another feature that tourists enjoyed as well as having fun with friends and relatives. Food and drinks were another memorable experience for many visitors. One respondent stated that he “*enjoyed eating everything at loads of different places*”. Another participant highlighted that “*we had an opportunity to sit down at the local restaurant and eat some local food so there were locals there in the same place*”. Nightlife was another form of local interaction where tourists are able to visit bars and clubs and interact with other locals, sing and ‘dance the night away’.

The theme of interacting with locals was highlighted by many respondents who considered its importance for allowing mutual understanding between locals and visitors. The majority of the responses focused on tourists having a conversation with the locals and learning about local history, culture and language. Another aspect that the tourists enjoyed was the social interaction with the guide as this form of relationship enabled visitors to feel welcome and safe. It is evident that there no

specific criteria for tour guides apart from the fact that guides needed to know the area that they are taking people to and be passionate about being a guide. Indeed, in many instances the tour guide was from the specific area for visitation and familiar with the community. One tour guide reflected that *“with the tours that we do, you have to be passionate about it and love it also. It is not a job and because you live it, you have to live in it as well”*.

Finally, tour participants were asked whether the tour had altered their perspective on the inner-city. A mix of positive and negative responses were evidenced. Most tour participants expressed views about a positive transformation taking root in the inner-city. The city government and private sector have undertaken clean-up efforts as well as improved safety to make the inner-city a safer space to navigate and thereby triggering a change of many visitor perspectives as they had expected an unsafe environment. Other visitors stated the tour of the inner-city changed their perspective because they were able to meet new people and that the ‘community’ was friendly towards them. Other participants considered that the tour altered their perspective on the inner-city because they had learned a lot about the local history and local culture. As a whole, the opinions were expressed that tours contributed a changed perspective because it made participants more “socially aware”. For a minority of participants, the tour confirmed their preconceptions about the insecurity of the inner-city. One respondent stated: *“I still think it is not safe. Hence we walked in safer streets as the security company was visible along our route”*.

Conclusion

The international growth of tourism in inner cities records a chequered history. The rise of new urban tourists is the most recent wave of change to reshape inner-city tourism. As has been demonstrated, the phenomenon of new urban tourism is characterized by the increased tendency of tourists to experience contact with everyday life in ordinary residential spaces (Dirksmeier and Helbrecht, 2015; Lim and Bouchon, 2017; Maitland, 2022). One significant consequence is the making of new geographies of urban tourism which are pointing towards places ‘off the beaten track’ as visitors’ search for distinctiveness away from the usual tourism bubble or district of many cities.

Extant literature concerning new urban tourism and new urban tourists overwhelmingly is dominated by studies of cities in the United States, United Kingdom or Europe. This paper contributes a fresh insight on new urban tourism from a city destination in the Global South. Over the past 30 years the central spaces of Johannesburg have undergone tumultuous change (Turok et al., 2021). Off the beaten track tours in inner-city Johannesburg began to develop in the 2010s decade. New urban tourists in Johannesburg experience what Frenzel (2020) styles as ‘edgy tourism’ as they navigate spaces of an inner-city which, in recent years, has had a tarnished reputation as a no-go zone because of its physical decline as well as a syndrome of crime and grime. Understanding the unfolding impacts of this new urban tourism for contributing towards the fragile renewal initiatives taking place in Johannesburg inner-city is a critical research issue for both scholars of urban studies and tourism.

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