

OUT & ABOUT

How tech has changed world of travel agents

Like everything else the travel has felt the impact of changing trends with people working in the industry having to adapt fast

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Travel Agents, travel consultants, travel advisors, travel specialists, and travel counselors are terms used interchangeably to describe the travel professional who helps to arrange travel for clients. Travel itself has always been in a state of transition.

The industry has evolved significantly since travelers carried paper tickets to the airport, paid in cash, and engaged in a tedious back-and-forth process to confirm their travel plans. What we may now view as cumbersome was once the height of convenience, given the technology available at the time.

In days past, far fewer people traveled compared to today, and the role of the travel agent was central to the entire process. Since the first travel agency was established in 1865 by Thomas Cook, a travel agent operated as a broker connecting travelers to transportation, accommodation and experiences for a commission.

The rise of technology has transformed the industry, moving it from the traditional model of booking travel through a travel agent located in a physical office at a cor-

ner street to a digital space where travelers can book trips from the comfort of their homes.

In the past, with limited information available to the general public, it was the travel agent's job to paint a vivid picture of the destination for potential travellers. Travellers relied entirely on these agents for advice and information that today can easily be accessed online.

Clients no longer needed to rely on agents to convey information about destinations; instead, they could easily find it online. To stay relevant, travel agents had to evolve into travel advisors. This new role leverages their technical knowledge, which includes creating tailored travel packages based on a deep understanding of the traveller's profile and the destination.

A professional travel advisor can anticipate and fulfill a traveller's desires, ensuring a satisfying experience, says Nicanor Sabula, CEO of the Kenya Association of Travel Agents (KATA).

While one might assume that the advancements in technology would eliminate the need for human expertise, technology's greatest strength is also its biggest weakness.

The limitless information available online also presents limitless possibilities for misinformation.

The online space is fraught with risks that only a trusted advisor can mitigate. Today's travellers depend on travel advisors to verify their travel arrangements and provide technical advice on destination requirements.

Julie Dabaly Scott, Managing Director



of CWT Kenya and Bunson Travel, says the role of a travel agent has undergone a significant transformation from simply booking and organizing travel arrangements to becoming a trusted travel advisor. As a result, the modern travel agent's value now lies in offering personalized advice, insider knowledge, and tailored experiences that go beyond what can be easily found online.

She says this evolution in the role has led travel advisors to approach their work differently. In the past, the primary focus was on securing travel arrangements. Now, the role has expanded to encompass a holistic approach to travel planning. This includes assisting with travel insurance, visa applications, restaurant reservations, special event plan-

ning, and even providing support during the trip itself.

Tom Kitungu of Grato Travels says Kenyan travellers fall into two distinct categories. The first group consists of those with the resources but little time. These travellers don't have the luxury to shop around for the best deals but demand customized experiences tailored to their tight schedules.

The second category includes budget travellers who, while knowledgeable about their needs, are willing to forgo certain luxuries but insist on getting the best value for their money.

At KATA, says Sabula, their role is to equip members with the tools and knowledge needed understand the preferences of today's traveller.

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FOOD & RECIPES

THICK MATUMBO CURRY

Let's make delicious thick matumbo curry and serve with ugali on the side. I like to clean my matumbo with lime juice and then boil them until soft.

What you will need:

1/2 kg of boiled tripe (matumbo)
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
4 tomatoes, roughly chopped
Fresh coriander, finely chopped
1 teaspoon of Mchuzi mix (diluted in 1/2 cup water)
1 large red onion, diced
50g tomato paste

Salt to taste & 1 teaspoon garlic mince
Juice of 1 lime

What to do:

In a pot over medium heat, put the vegetable oil and sauté the onions until soft or golden brown.

Add your tomatoes and a pinch of salt, let this simmer for about 5 minutes until they are well cooked then go in with the tomato paste.

Add your boiled matumbo and mix it in then add the mchuzi mix and stir well. Add 1/4 cup of water and cover this with a lid and let it simmer.

Squeeze in the juice of 1 lime. Add your finely chopped coriander and mix it.

Serve while hot, with some ugali.



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