

COVID-19: An update since our last note

Living in and adapting to a fluid environment seems to be the new normal. South Africans love entertainment, but the pandemic has curtailed our options. This week we focus on cinemas and gambling.

The show must go on

Cinemas across the country have closed since March this year as part of Government's efforts to curb the spread of the virus. Some of the major films that have been delayed include: *No Time to Die*, *A Quiet Place*, *Mulan*, *Peter Rabbit 2*, *The Fast and the Furious 9* and others. A recent directive and the President's address both indicate that Government is working with cinemas on the re-opening of movie theatres, but the movie theatre experience may never be the same again. While we wait to see the detailed regulations, we can expect rules around reserved seating to maintain social distancing, empty seats between guests and staggered showtimes with all hygiene protocols maintained.



- This could prove difficult for cinemas, which would need to seat less than half their usual guests and adhere to stricter requirements.
- It remains to be seen whether the pandemic will revive an old-school tradition of drive-ins. Drive-in theatres seem well suited to the pandemic: social distancing is observed with people in their own cars.
- Plans are already underway in Cape Town and Durban for drive-in cinemas and a concept that will allow fans to enjoy live music, movies, comedy and other entertainment from the safety of their cars.
- Ticket prices at the Cape Town Mother City Drive-in vary from R249 for a small vehicle to R349 for larger vehicles with a limit on the number of passengers and kids under 12 free.

Will the gaming industry survive?

The casino industry is said to employ more than 20 000 people in South Africa. Even before the coronavirus pandemic, the industry was under pressure. *Fin24* reported that Sun International announced a R1.2 billion rights issue on 12 June while Tsogo reported lost revenues of R2 billion during the lockdown. Casino groups such as Sun International have published their plans for reopening of their casinos. These include ensuring that every second seat at slot machines and tables is removed in order to create space between customers. They will further implement an 'ongoing chip-cleaning programme' to sanitise casino chips with customers needing to sanitise their chips. There will be no more blowing on the dice for good luck and the number of people on the casino floor is likely to be limited. Sun International casinos will initially limit customers to Most Valued Guest (MVG) cardholders. High-touch areas such as promotional kiosks, cash desks, card machines and devices will be sanitised after interaction with each guest. It is still early days, but the post-pandemic gambling mindset may change. Online gambling sites have reported a surge in activity. Will this be an ongoing trend post the pandemic or will casinos be able to adapt?



A new way of travel and entertainment

South Africans will soon be able to entertain and travel locally, provided the appropriate health and safety protocols are followed. What remains to be seen is whether they will be comfortable in going out to watch the latest movie or visit a casino. It may require that we adopt a new consumer leisure mindset. The future of the entertainment, tourism and hospitality industries and the livelihoods of its many employees lie in our willingness to support local in a safe and responsible way.

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