



Perseverance and service excellence: The driving force behind success

Starting with just one van in 2009, ZAF Travel and Tourism has steadily grown into a leading transportation provider in Durban. Under the leadership of Vishal Govind, the company prides itself on offering exceptional services. They transport travellers to the airport, facilitate local tours, and cater to conferences, among other services, with their well-maintained fleet. Despite hitting potholes like COVID-19, ZAF keeps moving forward, leveraging opportunities to expand its vehicles and reach.



Meet Vishal Govind, founder of ZAF Travel and Tourism:



The joy of giving back

Giving back to the community fuels his soul, says Vishal, which is why he chose to sponsor the Woodview United youth soccer team. "I believe supporting youth sports builds character and unity," he says. ZAF Travel and Tourism provided new uniforms and equipment to boost the kids' morale and ensure they have what they need to succeed on the field.

Having played soccer himself as a child, Vishal says he understands the positive impact it can have. "I learned so much about teamwork and determination," he reflects. So, when the chance to back Woodview United emerged, Vishal was moved to ensure local young talents could reap those same rewards. Through this support, he aspires to foster a cycle of giving back to youth sports. Vishal hopes that his actions inspire others to step up and make a meaningful difference.

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The driving force behind ZAF Travel and Tourism is no stranger to providing exceptional hospitality and logistics services. Born and bred in Durban, Vishal gained experience in the casino and cruise line industries after completing his accounting degree. This allowed him to hone his customer service skills and manage diverse teams and cultures. So, when Vishal decided to branch out on his own in 2009 and start a transport company in his hometown, he was determined to bring the same level of professionalism he provided at sea back to the port city.

Vishal reflects on his journey. "I worked for a few years in the local casino industry at Suncoast Casino. After that, I accepted a position with Norwegian Cruise Line. I worked in the casino and surveillance departments for four years on the cruise ship, which is where I did quite a bit of travelling."

This international experience expanded his worldview. As he states, "I was able to acquire the skills of adapting very quickly and making decisions quite swiftly in terms of business and interacting with people from different backgrounds and countries."

Starting small but dreaming big

Like many entrepreneurial endeavours, ZAF Travel and Tourism began small – with just Vishal and one 22-seater van providing airport transfers, tours, and transportation for schools and local government in 2009. But he had big dreams of growing his fleet and tapping into Durban's lucrative tourism and events industries.

Over the next few years, Vishal steadily acquired more vehicles to meet demand, including minibuses, vans, and luxury sedans. By 2014, Vishal's company had expanded into tourism transportation through partnerships with shuttle operators in major cities. He reflects, "From day one I built relationships with other shuttle operators in Johannesburg and Cape Town to increase our client base." Today, his fleet includes 14 vehicles tailored for corporate, leisure, and group transportation.

Resilience through challenges

Just as ZAF was gaining momentum, COVID-19 hit, and Vishal faced his biggest business challenge yet. With tourism at a standstill, he credits his diversified client base for helping him weather the storm. "Once the business and government sectors opened up and staff started travelling again, there was a slow cash inflow. I didn't need to fully pivot my business."

By negotiating with banks and leaning on his corporate and government accounts as travel restrictions eased, Vishal managed to retain his entire fleet of 14 vehicles throughout the pandemic. This feat speaks to his business acumen and unwavering

perseverance. Many companies would have folded under such intense pressure, but Vishal's resilience and commitment kept ZAF's wheels turning throughout the crisis.

Becoming an incubatee

As travel started to regain momentum, Vishal recognised the necessity for bolstered support to rejuvenate and broaden ZAF's outreach. Being a member of SATSA, Vishal was chosen for the SATSA Tourism Business Incubator, facilitated by Sigma International in 2021. This incubation opportunity was sponsored by Europcar, a Division of Motus Group, aligning with their broader initiative of fostering inclusivity and creating a positive impact.

Europcar substantiated its support for ZAF by making them a supplier and further enhancing this relationship with a supplier development grant. This financial assistance helped to strengthen ZAF's business operations, embodying real support in action.

This one-year program turned out to be a game-changer for the seasoned entrepreneur, connecting him with hands-on support to upgrade his marketing, operations, and tech capabilities. He highlights four key areas of support during the programme, driven by consultants who helped analyse ZAF's processes and clarify its vision moving forward.

First, Vishal was paired with a fellow SATSA member and head of sales and marketing for Inspirations Travel & Tours, Craig Drysdale. Craig worked with Vishal to create a marketing and business strategy with the support of Sigma International, who

provided a SWOT analysis. Innovation was highlighted as an area that Vishal needed to focus on, which led to the development of an automated online booking system.

Automation will streamline operations as demand grows. He notes, "It will assist me in getting direct bookings via the website. I had a static website where a person needed to go through the contact page, and an email came through. The new system will allow the person to book directly and confirm on the website."

With social media and marketing masterclasses provided by Natalia Rosa of Big Ambitions Marketing, Vishal also fine-tuned skills in online marketing and design. These digital marketing strategies will amplify his reach. He says, "I post on social media and have a Google Ad campaign. I also run ads on Instagram and Facebook. There are a lot of word-of-mouth referrals as well. Once one person uses you, they refer you to other family members. It's all about your network," says Vishal.

The business of travel

To grow his network, the programme also sponsored ZAF to attend two conferences. Vishal says the programme positively transformed ZAF's capabilities and outlook. When asked about his proudest moments, Vishal pointed to the positive feedback he receives from happy customers about his professional, enthusiastic employees.

Their stellar service is crucial because, as he notes, drivers are the "ambassadors" of his company out on the road each day. By investing in training and ensuring his vehicles are immaculate, ZAF's team upholds Vishal's customer service values

first instilled on the cruise ships.

This consistent excellence is clearly paying off based on the rave reviews. As Vishal says, "When the client jumps in, the vehicle needs to be fresh. We always receive comments on how nicely smelling the vehicles are."

With Durban expecting more international flights and events, and heavyweights like Club Med making Durban a new home in 2026, ZAF is perfectly positioned to provide visitors with exceptional airport transfers and logistic solutions, thanks to Vishal's experience, resilience, and incubator programme support.

Of course, growing any business involves overcoming obstacles, and ZAF has navigated its fair share. The pandemic was the most devastating hurdle, forcing Vishal to fight to keep his fleet intact.

But he also cites ongoing challenges like local competitor pressure, fluctuating fuel prices, and stagnant international tourism arrivals to Durban. By running a lean operation with part-time staff and contracted drivers, ZAF maintains reasonable pricing despite external pressures.

Vishal's accounting background gives him the financial management skills to navigate challenges. And his hands-on leadership enables agile adaptation to customer needs. This kind of resilience will serve ZAF well as the company moves into its next growth phase.

Eyes on the horizon

Looking ahead, Vishal has bold plans to

continue expanding ZAF's market share. He aims to branch into packaged tours, collaborating closely with tour operator partners. Hiring more full-time staff and drivers will also help meet demand.

Vishal knows that strengthening marketing is a crucial step to unlock future growth. He remains actively involved in operations but wants to carve out more time for strategic planning as ZAF grows.

Vishal's story proves that with the right mix of perseverance, service excellence, and support, a small local company can survive major crises and lay the foundations for future expansion. As tourism gains momentum again, ZAF is perfectly positioned to shuttle many more visitors to explore Durban's people, sights, and unique experiences.

Vishal's top tips for entrepreneurs

Leverage opportunities like incubator programmes to get support

Vishal credits the SATSA Tourism Business Incubator programme with transforming ZAF's capabilities and outlook. He advises entrepreneurs to fully embrace all mentorship, training, and networking opportunities to help get their businesses off the ground.

Invest in excellent customer service

Vishal is proud of the rave reviews he gets about his professional, enthusiastic employees. He knows they are the face of his company, so he invests heavily in their training and ensuring his vehicles are immaculate. New entrepreneurs should recognise that quality customer service creates loyal, happy clients that fuel growth.

Persist through challenges

Vishal tenaciously negotiated with banks and leaned on corporate clients to keep his entire fleet and stay afloat. His resilience shows that even massive challenges can be overcome with determination and adaptability. For new entrepreneurs, persistence is key - keep pivoting and pushing through tough times to achieve your dreams.