



THE MARKETING SOCIETY GCC
AWARDS SUBMISSION 2025
MADAGASCAR TOURISM BOARD (ONTM)
BEST USE OF MEDIA

This entry was submitted by Whereisthis on behalf of Madagascar Tourism Board ONTM dated on 29 April 2025.

See more about the campaign on:

www.instagram.com/whereisthisofficial and www.instagram.com/my_madagascar

www.youtube.com/@whereisthis

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/office-national-du-tourisme-de-madagascar/>

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/whereisthisofficial/>

Executive Summary (500 words maximum)

How do you tell the story of a destination with no visibility, no media budget, and no brand recognition? For Madagascar, the answer wasn't a traditional campaign. It was a media strategy built around emotional storytelling, lived experience, and deep collaboration.

This wasn't just a tourism initiative. It was a media-led transformation where every platform, post, and interaction played a role in building the brand from the ground up.

"Beyond the Baobabs" was a creator-led, social-first campaign designed to reposition Madagascar as the next road trip destination for GCC and global travelers through immersive, episodic storytelling. Instead of relying on ads, we invited audiences into a story: a 17-day unscripted road trip captured and narrated by creators, released natively across Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn.

The plan didn't impose a message, it let a brand identity emerge: adventurous, raw, welcoming, and real. Consistency came not from templates but from emotional alignment, tone, and story structure. The creators' voices became the brand's voice, amplified by the trust they already held with their audiences.

A strategic giveaway was layered into the campaign's media arc to drive engagement midway through rollout. This resulting in more than 60,000 entries, not just for a prize, but to be part of the journey.

In a crowded digital space, this campaign stood out through its media craft: episodic pacing, native platform execution, and a clear emotional thread. It didn't follow a schedule it built a brand in motion, generating over 17 million views and a 437% increase in followers, all with a boosting budget of under USD 4,000 across platforms.

This work showed what media can achieve, not by spending more, but by connecting more deeply.

SUBMISSION (2000 words maximum, headers and references don't count)

What were your objectives and why was this important to the business? Max 10 points

Our objective was to build Madagascar's brand from the ground up using media not as output, but as infrastructure. With no media budget, no prior visibility, and no content ecosystem, we built a format-first campaign where every post, episode, and interaction helped shape the brand in real time.

Instead of applying media to a message, we used media to shape one, treating creators as channels, content as itinerary, and formats as behavioral cues.

Success for Madagascar Tourism meant: Creating a destination identity through episodic, creator-led content. Sequencing content (reels, carousels, hero film) to drive emotional immersion.

Maintaining audience attention without proper paid media or traditional buys. Driving participation through interactive formats and embedded giveaways.

Each platform had a role: Instagram and Facebook for emotion and immediacy, YouTube for long-form immersion, LinkedIn for credibility and professional reach.

This media-first approach wasn't a workaround, it was a necessity.

Why was this important to the business?

Tourism is one of Madagascar's critical economic pillars. Without raising visibility and interest among new travelers, the country risked being overshadowed by more heavily marketed destinations. Increased awareness wasn't just a branding goal, it was a business imperative tied to real-world tourism growth, community support, and sustainable economic development.

By igniting emotional engagement at scale, Beyond the Baobabs created a path for Madagascar to be seen, considered, and chosen, ensuring long-term growth for its tourism sector beyond just a single campaign window.

What were the insights and data that led you to the strategy? Max 15 points

The foundation of the media strategy was built on five key insights:

1. Travel decision-making is now media-driven.

Social media is no longer just inspiration—it's where actual travel decisions happen. 77% of travelers consult at least one social media platform when planning travel, and up to 80% base booking decisions on what they see on social media. Saving Instagram Reels, sharing YouTube links on WhatsApp: media today is the moment of influence.

2. Audiences prefer authenticity over polish.

There's a clear preference for real, emotionally charged storytelling over cinematic promos. Emotional, in-the-moment content consistently outperforms traditional ads, making creators and their spontaneous narratives more influential than glossy brand commercials.

3. Platform behavior varies but converges on social media.

Instagram is where journeys begin. YouTube deepens the experience. LinkedIn builds credibility. WhatsApp cements personal recommendations. We mapped our content to this behavior, recognizing social media has overtaken even Google as the #1 resource for travel inspiration.

4. Trust lives with creators, not brands.

Travelers are highly open to influence: 60% of travelers don't have a specific destination in mind when

they start their search. Our creators weren't hired for follower counts, they were embedded in the journey, allowing audiences to trust what they saw and feel part of the adventure.

5. Social media must move, not sit still.

Content needed to evolve daily. Episodic storytelling gave us a way to create a live narrative, keeping audiences hooked and returning with the question: *"What happens next?"*

These insights helped us build a responsive, iterative social campaign plan designed to spark interest, grow viewership, and sustain connection across multiple platforms.

In a travel landscape where 75% of trips are now inspired by social media exposure, and where Millennials and Gen Z (who together will account for 80% of travel spend by 2030) are most influenced by creators, a bold, creator-led strategy was not a gamble, it was a necessity.

What new strategies and creative and innovative approaches did you take? Max 20 points

We didn't use social media as a billboard. We used it as a vehicle to bring people inside the story, reshaping traditional destination marketing with a series of creative and strategic innovations.

First, we reimagined format and structure through an episodic strategy. Our campaign unfolded as an eight-episode digital series, released over two weeks, with each episode tailored in length and theme to match platform behaviors, Instagram reels for immediacy, a full-length hero film on YouTube for depth, and serialized storytelling to sustain emotional momentum. Every piece of content was designed natively for its platform: a mix of vertical cuts, landscape episodes posted vertically and carousels on Instagram to suit algorithm dynamics, longer cuts on YouTube for richer engagement.

Second, we redefined media behavior. Instead of treating social as a broadcast tool, we used it as a dialogue platform. Comments, DMs, reshares, and live interactions became part of the media lifecycle, supported by a strategic giveaway mechanic.

Audiences were invited to engage directly: voting for favorite episodes, guessing destinations, and participating mid-campaign. This mechanic not only sustained mid-campaign excitement but transformed passive viewers into active participants, deepening emotional investment.

Third, we innovated distribution itself. Rather than funneling all content through a single brand page, we decentralized publishing across the creators' personal platforms, giving each audience a unique, trusted entry point into the story. This approach allowed the campaign to scale organically, maintain authenticity, and blur the line between brand message and creator experience.

Finally, we treated media itself as an extension of the journey. Every asset was tied to a real itinerary stop, building a multi-platform map that invited exploration. The media didn't just document the journey, it was the journey.

Our creative strategy reframed what a destination campaign could look like, transforming media into a map, a story, and a shared emotional experience. It was not about broadcasting a message; it was about building a movement, one authentic story at a time.

What were the risks, how were you brave? Max 20 points

We took multiple unconventional risks:

We relied heavily on earned and owned media, a bold move that demanded exceptional content quality and creative discipline. With minimal paid support, every piece of media had to earn its impact organically.

We complemented this with a strategic giveaway activation, an engagement mechanic that itself carried a risk. Giveaways can sometimes attract superficial participation, prioritizing prizes over real brand connection. But by integrating the giveaway natively within the storytelling arc, inviting audiences to engage with the journey, not just the reward, we safeguarded authenticity.

Audience behavior validated the approach with numerous interactions centered on the content itself: emotional comments about the journey, active participation in storytelling polls, and deep engagement across episodes.

Our storytelling approach was fully unscripted. We launched without a storyboard or final cut, allowing the media plan to evolve in real time based on what happened during the journey. This agility was risky but created a sense of immediacy and authenticity that traditional campaigns often lack.

We trusted creators to craft their own episodes, without controlling every word, edit, or frame. This relinquishing of control was an uncommon risk for brand campaigns, but it gave the project undeniable integrity and credibility in the eyes of audiences.

Platform diversity added another layer of challenge. It would have been simpler to focus solely on Instagram, but we tailored content across Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn, to match where our audiences naturally engaged. This decision required more time and effort, but magnified the campaign's reach and emotional resonance.

Most bravely, we embraced emotional vulnerability. Our creators showed the highs and lows of travel. Muddy roads, logistical setbacks, emotional conversations, language barriers, without sugarcoating the experience. This raw honesty humanized the journey and invited audiences into something real, not staged.

By choosing honesty, decentralization, and spontaneity and strategically integrating a risk-aware engagement mechanic, we elevated social media from megaphone to mirror, forging emotional connections that polished, traditional campaigns often cannot.

What were the measurable results? Max 20 points

While the campaign delivered clear signals of success in awareness and engagement, the full extent of its long-term impact, such as inbound tourism conversion or broader economic effects, cannot yet be fully measured. The rollout concluded in April 2025, and more time is needed to assess behavioural conversion and travel decisions.

That said, **from a media performance perspective**, early indicators were exceptional, especially given the minimal budget and decentralised publishing model. With under USD 4,000 in paid support, the campaign achieved:

- **17M+ video views** across Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn
- **6M+ unique reach**, spanning the GCC, Europe, and Africa
- **138,000+ engagements**, including **3,277 saves** and **2,216 shares**, a strong signal of long-term interest and peer-to-peer amplification
- **43,000+ link clicks** to Madagascar travel pages
- **437% increase** in Madagascar Tourism's follower base
- **Over 59,000 giveaway entries**, with thousands more subscribing to travel updates

Additional media performance metrics:

- **Engagement rates up to 21%** on key episodes, **2–4x the industry benchmark** for tourism social campaigns (typically 5–8%)
- **Sustained platform activity**: Creators and audiences continued to engage with the content well beyond the official rollout window

- **Community growth:** Both Madagascar Tourism and Whereisthis saw measurable spikes in followers and organic reach

Beyond quantitative metrics:

- **Emotional resonance:** Comment threads were filled with language like “transformative,” “real,” and “inspiring,” showing that the content did more than inform, it moved people.
- **Behavioural indicators:** Direct messages and inbound inquiries to Madagascar Tourism increased during and immediately after the campaign, an early signal of conversion potential.

Why this matters for Best Use of Media:

This wasn’t media for media’s sake. It was performance rooted in strategy, built on organic sequencing, native format planning, and distributed trust across platforms. It proved that media, when thoughtfully crafted and emotionally led, can outperform traditional campaigns even without paid amplification.

How does your work advocate the reputation/importance of the Marketing industry? Max 15 points

This campaign is a living case study in how creator led social campaigns can transform brand storytelling. It pushed past outdated norms of impression-based marketing and instead prioritized engagement, emotional connection, and trust-driven visibility.

It demonstrated the following:

- Powerful media doesn’t need a massive budget.
- Creator-led campaigns can build deeper audience bonds than traditional ads.
- Media planning in 2025 is no longer about where you publish, it’s about how you make people feel.

Beyond the Baobabs became more than a campaign. It became a movement. A shift in how tourism boards, marketers, and creators see the role of media in shaping destination dreams. It showed the industry what’s possible when social media is treated as a narrative tool, not just a promotional one.