



**tourism**

Department:  
Tourism  
**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**Tourism House, 17 Trevenna Street, Sunnyside. Private Bag X 424, PRETORIA - 0001  
Tel + 27 (0) 12 444 6000- Fax + 27 (0) 12 444 7000. Call Center: 0860 121 929**

**Speech delivered by the Director General of Tourism (Acting), Mr Victor Tharage, at  
the launch of the virtual experience of Robben Island built on Google street view**

**Robben Island Ferry Terminal, Waterfront, Cape Town**

**22 April 2015**

Many of us who serve in tourism in South Africa feel extremely privileged and blessed.

We feel blessed because of the many amazing tourism assets we have in our country: the beauty of our diverse landscapes, our wildlife and biodiversity, our people and our cultural diversity, and our rich heritage of ancient and recent history.

And we feel privileged because of the deep sense of fulfilment that comes from taking these wonderful assets to our people, and to our international tourists, in a meaningful and memorable way.

Robben Island is one of our most compelling assets. People come here from around the globe to experience for themselves the place that held Tata Mandela, and many of his closest comrades, in captivity for decades.

Now, people from around the world can get a feel of the island without leaving the comfort of their homes. For many people, this will be their first interaction with Robben Island. For some, it will be their first introduction to the story of South Africa.

It is a story that we want the world to know. Thanks to this innovative partnership between the Robben Island Museum and Google, we are now better positioned to tell our story, and to take it to the entire world.

We do not want to tell it because it is a story of subjugation, a story about how a state imposed hardship and suffering on its citizens, trampled on their rights and curtailed their freedom.

We want to tell this story because it demonstrates the capacity of human beings to find and forgive each other, to reconcile without bitterness, to focus on the things that unite us and to work through the things that divide us.

It is a story of the triumph of the human spirit over indescribable suffering.

This is a story for the whole world, for regions that are ravaged by conflict, and for people who are left in despair.

There are many other sites around South Africa, and many tourist attractions, that help us to tell other chapters of this story. The Department of Tourism is working hard to make the experience of tourists who visit these sites memorable and meaningful.

We are upgrading signage and enhancing the information that is available for tourists at our World Heritage Sites. We are training people in key occupations like chefs, sommeliers and food safety assurance. We are training and registering tourist guides, so that the standard of their guiding can be improved.

Through our Tourism Incentive Program, we will be retrofitting some sites and establishments with solar energy that will make them less dependent on the national electricity grid, and allow them to offer uninterrupted services to their guests when the demand for power exceeds capacity, and we have load-shedding.

I am delighted to inform you that Robben Island has been selected as one of the first sites for this pioneering project. The plan is to replace the unsustainable diesel generators that are currently providing the Island's electricity with a sustainable solar-powered system.

All the skills training and product development that we are undertaking is aimed towards one goal: to enhance the experience of our tourists and make their visit as memorable as possible.

This is what will make them market our country to others when they return home, through the most powerful medium: word-of-mouth. This is what will help us to continue growing the number of tourists who come to South Africa every year, and to ensure that tourism continues to support jobs and contribute to the GDP.

According to the latest statistics, the tourism sector directly employed over 655 000 people in 2013, which is about 4.4% of the total labour force. Tourism contributed R103.5-billion to our GDP, which is about 2.9 % of total GDP.

The Google Street View imagery and audio-visual tour of the Island is welcomed as an additional spanner in our toolbox as we continue to grow tourism and support our economy.

It will be especially useful for those who cannot afford to travel here, and for learners and teachers at schools around the world. But it will also stimulate those who use it to think about coming here one day, and to experience for themselves the emotions associated with Robben Island, following their virtual tour on Google.

We offer our hearty congratulations to everyone who was involved in this partnership. You have produced a valuable mechanism for marketing South Africa to the world, for educating people from every country on the globe, and for opening their hearts to the incredible story of our country.

You have helped the people of the world to connect to the soul of our people.

I thank you.

### **Enquiries**

Mr Trevor Bloem - Chief Director - Communications  
National Department of Tourism  
Telephone: +27 (0) 444 6607  
Cell: +27 (0) 82 771 6729  
Email: [tbloem@tourism.gov.za](mailto:tbloem@tourism.gov.za)

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