



ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA AT AFRICA'S TRAVEL INDABA 2026

NKOSI ALBERT LUTHULI INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE, DURBAN

12 MAY 2026

Programme Director,
Minister of Tourism, Ms Patricia de Lille,
Premier of KwaZulu-Natal, Mr Thami Ntuli,
Mayor of eThekweni Municipality, Cllr Cyril Xaba,
Ministers and Deputy Ministers from across the African continent,
Leaders of tourism authorities from across our continent,
Exhibitors, buyers, members of the media,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Sanibonani.

It is a joy to welcome you all to Durban, a city that embodies the spirit of African hospitality.

This is a city where cultures meet and where Africa gathers once again to tell its tourism story.

Today, as we open Africa's Travel Indaba 2026, we do so with a sense of pride.

We take pride in the resilience of the tourism sector.

We take pride in the partnerships that have carried us through some of the most challenging years the global tourism industry has faced.

Tourism is more than a sector of the economy. It is a living expression of who we are as a people.

Last year, South Africa welcomed 10.5 million international visitors to our shores, a clear sign that the world is rediscovering our country with renewed enthusiasm.

It is significant that three-quarters of international arrivals come from the SADC region.

This tells us something important: Africans are choosing Africa.

That is why South Africa is working with our neighbours to advance the SADC Tourism UNIVISA, which would enable seamless, borderless travel for tourists across SADC member states.

We are also working to expand our one-stop border posts and develop cross-border itineraries that showcase the richness of our region.

When Africans travel within Africa, we strengthen our economies, deepen our cultural ties and build a more integrated continent.

Earlier this year, in my State of the Nation Address, I made a call to our tourism industry, authorities and communities. I said:

“We must now promote unique cultural, historical and natural attractions that reflect the country’s identity.”

I am greatly encouraged by the response to this call.

Last month, we launched the upgraded Cape Agulhas Lighthouse precinct at the southernmost tip of Africa.

This is where the warm Indian Ocean and cold Atlantic Ocean meet.

This follows the opening in June 2025 of the Kgodumodumo Dinosaur Interpretation Centre in the Free State’s Golden Highlands National Park, where the world’s oldest dinosaur embryo was discovered.

Since the launch of the centre more than 88,000 people have visited the site.

The City of eThekweni has recently added two new attractions to its famous tourism offering. In March, we unveiled the statues of Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo here in Durban.

This demonstrates the importance of expanding and diversifying our tourism offering, catering to a broad range of domestic and international travellers.

The increases we have seen in tourism figures are not merely of statistical interest.

They represent families supported, small businesses revived and communities that are being uplifted.

According to Statistics South Africa, the tourism sector accounts for nearly one million direct jobs in this country.

This means that around 1 in 18 workers is directly employed in tourism.

Africa’s Travel Indaba has become one of the most powerful platforms for tourism growth on the continent.

Last year, about 10,000 delegates gathered here in Durban and more than 1,300 exhibitors showcased the best of African tourism.

In itself, the Indaba contributes to local economic and social development.

The benefits are felt not only in boardrooms but also in small businesses, township enterprises and the homes of ordinary South Africans.

The benefits of this Indaba are felt across our country and across the continent as new destinations are discovered and new linkages are formed.

Last year, South Africa had the honour of hosting the first ever G20 Leaders’ Summit on African soil.

That event was a declaration that Africa is ready to shape global conversations.

During our G20 Presidency, we championed the priorities of the Global South, including sustainable tourism, infrastructure investment and equitable growth.

The G20 year allowed us to pilot the Electronic Travel Authorisation system, which is now being rolled out to simplify travel for millions of visitors.

It is one of several reforms that are making South Africa and the continent more accessible, more competitive and more welcoming.

Tourism cannot grow without connectivity.

In South Africa and across the region, we have seen an increase in airline seat capacity over the last year.

This growth has been driven primarily by African and Asian routes, reflecting the rising demand for travel to our region.

These developments are part of a broader continental movement, a recognition that Africa's future lies in being connected to itself and to the world.

As we look to the future, we must continue to diversify our source markets.

We are strengthening our presence in China, India, Southeast Asia, Mexico and Brazil, all countries and regions with rapidly growing outbound travel markets.

Our new visa reforms, including the Electronic Traveller Authorisation system and the Digital Nomad Visa, are designed to make travel easier and more seamless.

We must nurture these relationships, expand air access and ensure our tourism products meet visitors' expectations.

It is fitting that Africa's Travel Indaba is taking place in Africa Month.

We are reminded at this time that we are called to bring Africans closer together.

We do so within the framework of the African Union's African 2063 agenda which aims to enable all citizens in the continent to move freely.

We do so to advance the African Continental Free Trade Area, which seeks to drive commerce, investment and trade between African countries.

Pan-Africanism is not only a political philosophy.

It is a driver of economic progress.

It is the foundation of our shared prosperity.

At its heart, tourism is about people.

It is about the young entrepreneur in Soweto who is building a digital platform for township experiences.

It is about a rural cooperative in Limpopo that offers authentic cultural encounters.

It is about the young innovators who are developing apps, safety tools and high-tech solutions that are reshaping the visitor experience.

Our youth are not waiting for the future. They are creating it now.

They are proving that tourism is not only about destinations but that it is about innovation, creativity and opportunity.

Every conversation at this Indaba, every partnership formed, every idea shared, these are the building blocks of a continent that is rising, confident in its potential and united in its purpose.

Let us continue to work together – as government, industry, communities and our young people – to ensure that this jewel called tourism continues to shine brightly for generations to come.

Africa is not waiting. Africa is leading.

I thank you.

ISSUED BY THE PRESIDENCY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA