



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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Address delivered by Tourism Minister Derek Hanekom at the Meetings Africa Gala Dinner at the Sandton Convention Centre

23 February 2016

MECs and Members of the Mayoral Committee present,
Partners in the business events industry,
Exhibitors and buyers,
Ladies and gentlemen.

We've had a wonderful day today, and what a great evening this has turned out to be!

This morning I had the privilege of opening Meetings Africa, and declaring once again that Africa is open for business. Tonight, it's clear that we are open for pleasure as well.

Walking through the exhibition hall this morning, I met many wonderful people and encountered some really exciting products. The people and their products represented the incredibly diverse culture and heritage of Africa. This is what gives Africa the potential to put tourism to work, and to extract the full value and benefit of tourism in developing our people, our communities and our nations.

I also encountered something quite special permeating through this event: you could feel the energy in the air, the energy of people trying out new things, venturing out confidently into areas where others have feared to go. People are approaching their businesses differently, not only to make them more globally competitive, but to make them distinctly African.

This aspiration expresses the hopes, the strength, and the triumphant spirit of all of us in Africa. The people of Africa are rising. Africa is attracting investment which is opening doors for tourism. And tourism can convert Africa's beauty and cultural heritage into sustainable economic and social progress for all our people.

South Africa hosted 124 meetings which were attended by about 70 000 Association Professionals last year. We have already secured 163 bids for the next five years, including this year. These events will take place over an estimated 757 days, and will be attended by over 150 000 delegates. The estimated economic impact of these events is more than R 3 billion.

The potential of the business events industry, and the great capacity of tourism to support this segment, puts the continent and our country on the cusp of great things for the future.

We are at the beginning of a new era of development for our continent. This applies not only to the business events industry, and the entire tourism sector, but to every industry and sector that is linked to tourism, and to the producers and suppliers of all the goods and services that are needed for successful tourism.

I was thrilled to hear that students from universities in Zimbabwe and Namibia took part in the Future Leaders Forum for the first time this year. These young people dreamed up innovative new ideas around how to organise events.

This is a great way of bringing young people from across Africa together, to share and develop their ideas. Last year's winner, Anzelle Vortsman from the North West University, went on to win the international university challenge, at IMEX in Germany.

Anzelle, you have made us very proud. Congratulations.

The youth of our continent are an inspiration to all of us. I have met many young people who are working with passion in tourism, as they strive to become the best at what they do.

In this highly competitive world, we have to be the best, and we have to judge ourselves against global best practice.

Our cities are well connected to international networks formed to develop the business events industry to world-class standards of excellence.

Cape Town is a member of the Best Cities Global Alliance, whose members include Berlin, Copenhagen, Dubai, Edinburgh, Houston, Melbourne, Singapore and Vancouver.

Durban is a member of the Future Convention Cities Initiative, a group of cities that collaborates to shape and develop their business events industries, along with Abu Dhabi, London, San Francisco, Seoul, Sydney and Toronto.

South Africa is ranked number 32 in the world and number one in Africa by the International Convention and Congress Association. We are steadily climbing up the world ranking. Our aspiration is that Africa will lead the world in hosting exceptional events and meetings, and that the overall benefits of tourism helps to grow all our nations.

We face many challenges, in our country and on our continent. We share the burdens of diminishing agricultural outputs, decreasing commodity prices, and economic performances that do not yield the level of growth we need to advance our people.

But, we have immense hope for the future. The potential of tourism to change lives on a continental scale gives us hope. We are determined to work together to achieve this goal.

Africa is increasingly demonstrating its ability to innovate, and to develop home-grown solutions to developmental challenges.

When people like Kenyan Anthony Mutua invent a way of charging mobile phones by simply walking, and Cameroonian Zang Adzaba develop a Cardiopod that enables heart examinations in remote rural areas, life changes.

Innovation changes life dramatically for people and their communities.

As South African solar energy researchers at Stellenbosch University develop new ways of converting sunlight to electricity, life will change for people across Africa.

Tourism will also benefit from advances like these. More and more tourists are choosing to go to eco-friendly destinations. Many African tourism destinations, including some world-leading facilities here in South Africa, have created sustainable innovations that minimise the impact of tourism on our environment, reduce and conserve energy, and recycle waste products.

These innovations have the potential to spawn new industries and support the creation of new jobs across Africa.

South Africa offers delegates who attend events and meetings a diverse range of tourism attractions, activities and experiences.

More and more tourists come to South Africa to experience our cultural and historical legacy. They are inspired by the story of our peaceful transition from oppression to freedom. Our National Parks offer wildlife experiences that have made us one of the top safari destination in the world.

As you have probably already discovered, tourists can shop for high-fashion items, including locally designed clothing and jewellery, right here in the bustling centre of Sandton, or enjoy the tranquillity of the ocean on a yacht cruising off Durban. If you are adventurous, you can go bungee jumping or white water rafting at many places around the country. I recently went diving in a cage to see sharks up close near Cape Town: what an amazing, unforgettable experience! I recommend it strongly to all of you here tonight, you will not regret it.

We are enhancing our destination through a variety of strategic initiatives like skills training; improving the visitor experience at our iconic World Heritage Sites; retrofitting some of our attractions with renewable energy sources; improving our marketing and making our tourist attractions more accessible to more of people.

We want our diverse natural and cultural heritage to be shared by all our people. Every South African should be able to visit our National Parks, our World Heritage Sites, and our museums and art galleries. Our school children should be able to afford a trip to Mapungubwe and Maropeng, to Vilikazi Street and Robben Island. And for those who cannot afford it, we must devise innovative ways to get them there.

We will soon announce some of our plans to start moving our country in that direction.

In addition to these developments, we have started removing barriers that stand in the way of tourism growth. We recently announced progress made in easing visa requirements for visitors to our country.

Accredited travel companies in China can now submit visa applications on behalf of travelers. We are now working on implementing similar visa application processes for India and for our key African markets.

For South Africa, the combination of the exchange rate and these changes to the visa regulations offer massive opportunities for growth in international arrivals. All early indications show that we can expect a bumper crop in overseas tourist arrivals this year.

Dear delegates, the tourism sector is filled with many dedicated people. All of you are here tonight because you are part of this dedicated team.

I would like to thank our Business Events Ambassadors, some of whom are here tonight, for their sterling work in promoting South Africa as a business events destination. We rely on our Ambassadors to help us to attract international meetings to our shores, and we are grateful for their passion and enthusiasm.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me now to leave you in the hands of someone who epitomises much of what I have spoken about tonight. Passion, enthusiasm, innovation, dedication: good words to describe how our next speaker, Ludwick Marishane, goes about his life.

Ludwick is a young man who is providing home-grown solutions to global consumers. We are looking forward to him sharing his story with us.

Thank you all for being here, and congratulations to the organisers for putting on a truly stunning show. Please enjoy the rest of your evening.

I thank you.

For more information, visit our website on www.tourism.gov.za;

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