

SEPTEMBER 2026

EDITION

02

Bolanala



tourism

Department:
Tourism
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

A **NATION** 
THAT **WORKS**  **FOR ALL**



INSIDE THIS EDITION

- 1 Editorial
- 2 Tourism Month 2026
Celebrating South Africa. Growing the Visitor Economy.
- 4 World Tourism Day 2026: Limpopo Showcases the Future of Tourism in the Digital Era
- 6 Three Province Tourism Month Media Launch and Explore Lake Gariep Together.
- 8 South Africa's New ETA System Set to Enhance Tourism Growth and Travel Experience
- 9 Empowering the Next Generation Through Gastronomy Tourism
- 10 The District Development Model and Creating the Conditions for Tourism Growth
- 12 Deputy Minister Soty Launches Mthontsi Lodge and Conference Centre, Marking a New Chapter for KwaMazosha Tourism
- 14 Beyond Technology and How Digital Innovation and Artificial Intelligence are Redesigning the Future of Tourism
- 16 Gauteng Delivers A Golden Weekend Of Music, Sport, Aviation And Culture, Reinforcing Its Position As Africa's Leading Events Destination
- 18 Sport Tourism - More Than the Final Score
- 20 Women in Tourism: Turning Participation into Ownership and Economic Power Revitalizing the Women in Tourism Chapter to unlock opportunities, strengthen collaboration, and drive inclusive growth
- 21 Tourism's next 30 years need more women at the table
- 22 One Region. Shared Opportunity. How Regional Cooperation and Global Engagement Strengthen Southern Africa's Visitor Economy

CREDITS

PUBLISHER

Department of Tourism

EDITOR

Tasneem Carrim

EDITORIAL TEAM

- Susan de Bruin
- Sifiso Halama
- Natasha Rockman

CONTRIBUTORS

- Natasha Rockman
- Annah Mashile
- Elizabeth Mpetsi
- Phathu Luvhengo
- Northern Cape Economic Development Trade and Investment Promotion Agency

DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Edited by Digital Mindset (Pty) Ltd

DISCLAIMER

While every reasonable effort is made to maintain current and accurate information in this publication, the Department of Tourism accepts no responsibility for any errors or omissions in this magazine. The use of the content of this magazine is at the user's own risk. The user assumes full responsibility and risk of loss resulting from the use of the content of this magazine.

The Department of Tourism or any of the legal entities in respect of which information are contained in this publication, or employees of the Department of Tourism or such entity, will not be liable for any special, indirect, incidental, consequential, or punitive damages or any other damages whatsoever, whether in an action of contract, statute, tort (including, without limitation, negligence), or otherwise, relating to the use of this magazine or information.

Celebrating Tourism. Honouring Our Heritage. Shaping Our Future.

Every journey begins with people.

Before a visitor arrives, someone has imagined a destination, protected a heritage site, welcomed a guest, prepared a meal, shared a story, or created the experience that makes travel memorable.

Tourism has always been, and will always remain, a profoundly human endeavour.

Every September, Tourism Month gives South Africa an opportunity to celebrate that endeavour. As the flagship national moment for our sector, it places tourism firmly in the national conversation - showcasing our destinations, encouraging South Africans to explore their own country and recognising the people and businesses that drive our visitor economy.

But Tourism Month is also an opportunity to look ahead.

Tourism growth does not happen by chance. It requires the right conditions: easier access to destinations, quality tourism products, skilled people, successful enterprises, safe visitor experiences, innovation, investment and strong partnerships between government, industry and communities.

Above all, it requires growth that creates opportunity where people live.

This thinking also extends beyond our borders. As South Africa chairs the Southern African Development Community (SADC), we are reminded that tourism is connected to the broader development of our region. Regional cooperation on connectivity, trade, infrastructure, investment and the movement of people help create an environment in which tourism can flourish across Southern Africa.

September is also Heritage Month, reminding us that so much of what makes South Africa extraordinary as a destination is rooted in our

cultures, traditions, landscapes and stories. Our heritage is not separate from tourism. It is part of what visitors come to experience and, when protected and shared responsibly, it can create livelihoods and opportunities for communities.

This year carries further significance as we reflect on 70 years since the historic Women's March of 1956 and 30 years since the adoption of our Constitution. These milestones remind us of the values of equality, dignity and shared opportunity that continue to shape our country.

“

*Our heritage is not
separate from tourism.
It is part of what visitors
come to experience.*

”

Those values find expression in tourism when women move from participation to ownership and leadership; when young people find pathways into careers and enterprise; and when rural and township communities participate more fully in the visitor economy.

The stories in this edition of Bojanala reflect these connections.

They explore the policies and partnerships creating the conditions for tourism growth, the entrepreneurs building businesses, the investments strengthening destinations, the connections bringing South Africa closer to the region and the world, and the innovation preparing tourism for the future.

They also remind us that South Africa does not compete as a collection of individual attractions. We compete as a destination. Every airport, road, tourism business, community, guide, hotel, restaurant and attraction contributes to the experience visitors

take home. Every South African therefore has a part to play in the story our country tells the world.

Tourism Month gives us an opportunity to strengthen that shared sense of ownership. It encourages us to rediscover South Africa, travel beyond the familiar and support the businesses and communities that make our destinations distinctive.

Every journey has an economic ripple effect. A traveller may stay in a guest house, eat at a local restaurant, visit an attraction, buy a handmade product or book a local experience. Behind those transactions are entrepreneurs, workers, families and communities.

That is why Tourism Month is both a celebration and a call to action – to travel, to invest, to innovate, to collaborate and to continue building a tourism sector in which more South Africans can participate and prosper.

As we celebrate Tourism Month, let us look beyond the journey to what every journey makes possible: businesses growing, jobs being created, heritage being preserved, communities participating and stronger connections being built across our country and our region.

Tourism is an economic opportunity, a bridge between people and cultures and a source of national pride.

And when we create the right conditions for it to flourish, tourism can help build a more inclusive, prosperous and connected South Africa.

Enjoy this Tourism Month edition of Bojanala. Beyond the Journey. Inspiring Growth.

Tourism Month 2026

CELEBRATING
SOUTH AFRICA.
GROWING THE
VISITOR ECONOMY.

Written by Natasha Rockman



Every journey through South Africa tells a story. It is a story of extraordinary landscapes, vibrant cultures, resilient communities and shared heritage. During Tourism Month, South Africans are invited not only to celebrate these stories, but to become part of them.

Each September, South Africa joins the global community in celebrating Tourism Month - a national campaign that highlights tourism's contribution to economic growth, job creation, social cohesion and nation building. More than a celebration of destinations, Tourism Month is an opportunity to encourage South Africans to explore their own country, support local businesses and recognise tourism as a shared national asset.

A distinctive feature of South Africa's Tourism Month celebrations is that the national World Tourism Day event is hosted on a rotational basis by one of the country's lesser-visited

provinces. This approach reflects government's commitment to spreading the benefits of tourism more equitably, showcasing emerging destinations and encouraging domestic travellers to discover places that may be less familiar but equally rich in natural beauty, cultural heritage and authentic experiences.

In 2026, Limpopo Province hosted the national World Tourism Day celebrations, providing an opportunity to showcase one of South Africa's most diverse tourism destinations. While the national event took place in Limpopo on 27 September, Tourism Month is celebrated across the entire country. Throughout September, all nine provinces will host a range of tourism activations, community events, exhibitions, educational programmes and destination experiences that encourage South Africans to explore the remarkable diversity of their own country.

“Tourism is more than a journey to a destination. it is a journey into our people, our cultures, our landscapes and our shared future.”



The campaign culminates in World Tourism Day on 27 September, when South Africa joins countries around the world in celebrating tourism under the UN Tourism 2026 theme: "Digital Agenda and Artificial Intelligence to Redesign Tourism." The theme highlights the growing role of digital innovation, artificial intelligence and emerging technologies in creating a tourism sector that is more sustainable, inclusive, resilient and responsive to the needs of travellers and destinations alike.

Sho't Left: Discover More at Home

One of the highlights of Tourism Month is the continued promotion of Sho't Left, South Africa's flagship domestic tourism campaign that encourages citizens to discover the extraordinary experiences available within their own country.

**EXPLORE.
EXPERIENCE.
SUPPORT LOCAL.
DISCOVER MORE.**

Travel Week: Making Travel More Accessible

Tourism Month also features Travel Week, an annual campaign that brings together tourism businesses from across the value chain to offer discounted travel experiences and special promotions. From accommodation and flights to attractions, car hire, tours and leisure experiences, Travel Week makes travel more affordable while encouraging South Africans to explore destinations they may not have previously considered.

Together, Sho't Left and Travel Week demonstrate that domestic tourism is more than a seasonal campaign. They are practical initiatives that make travel more accessible, support tourism businesses during the shoulder season and stimulate local economies across the country.

By encouraging more South Africans to travel locally, these initiatives strengthen the visitor economy while fostering a deeper appreciation for the country's diverse cultures, landscapes and heritage.



WORLD TOURISM DAY 2026:

Limpopo Showcases the Future of Tourism in the Digital Era

Written by Annah Mashile and Elizabeth Mpetsi



The scenic Waterberg region of Limpopo provided a fitting backdrop for South Africa's celebration of World Tourism Day (WTD) on 27 September 2026, held at Legend Golf & Safari Resort. The celebration brought together government representatives, tourism industry stakeholders, local government, tourism businesses, communities and other partners to reflect on tourism's contribution to economic growth, investment, employment and community development.

Held under the localised theme "Growing South Africa's Tourism Sector in the Digital Era," the event highlighted the sector's evolving face and the growing importance of digital technology in promoting destinations, connecting travellers with tourism products, and creating new opportunities for tourism businesses. The theme aligns with the global theme: "Digital Agenda and Artificial Intelligence to Redesign Tourism."

Choosing Limpopo as the host province provided an opportunity to showcase its

diverse tourism offering, from wildlife and nature to culture, heritage, adventure, rural experiences and sport tourism.

The celebration came alive through a vibrant cultural performance by renowned Sepedi singer Pleasure Tsa Manyalo. Her performance brought the richness of Limpopo's culture and heritage to life, creating an atmosphere that celebrated the province's musical traditions and cultural identity. Representatives from Meta and TikTok also participated in discussions on digital tourism and innovation, exploring how digital platforms and products can support local tourism businesses and help destinations reach wider audiences.

The programme also featured a Sustainability Village, showcasing locally produced crafts and products, and giving attendees a chance to support local businesses.

Delivering a message of support, Deputy Minister of Tourism, Ms Maggie Sotyu, emphasised the importance of domestic tourism and encouraged South Africans to broaden their travel horizons.

Her message reminded South Africans that memorable tourism experiences are not found only in the country's best-known destinations. Small towns, heritage sites, local restaurants and community tourism products can offer equally meaningful experiences.

Limpopo MEC for Economic Development, Environment and Tourism, Dr Tshitereke Matibe, placed partnerships and digital storytelling at the centre of the province's

tourism development agenda. The MEC highlighted the province's "We Are Limpopo" digital campaign, which aims to reshape how Limpopo tells its tourism story by encouraging residents and visitors to become ambassadors for the province.

“Limpopo is not only a place that the government must market. Limpopo must be marketed by Limpopo and by all who experience it because our stories are everywhere, said the MEC.

MEC Matibe challenged participants to use their mobile phones to record and share their most memorable experiences in Limpopo. Visitors were encouraged to capture moments ranging from a Waterberg sunrise and wildlife encounter to cultural experiences, food and golf.

The call was simple: "Record it. Post it. Tag it. Share it. Use #WeAreLimpopo."

"Together, we can position Limpopo as a leading tourism destination that embraces innovation while remaining authentic to its cultural and natural heritage," said the MEC.

Delivering the keynote address, Minister of Tourism, Ms Patricia de Lille, described the Limpopo province as a fitting host for World Tourism Day.



"This province brings together many of the strengths we want tourism growth to unlock: iconic nature and wildlife, rich cultural heritage, vibrant music and food, rural and community-based experiences, and tourism opportunities beyond our traditional gateways, including golf," Minister De Lille said.

The Minister emphasised that tourism growth is a shared responsibility. Government has a role to play in creating an enabling environment, while the private sector must invest and innovate. Provinces and municipalities play a role in strengthening destinations, while communities and tourism businesses must participate in the opportunities created by tourism growth.

Minister De Lille stressed that South Africa must use digital platforms and artificial intelligence to make the country more visible, accessible and competitive. "Technology can give a small tourism business in Limpopo access to customers anywhere in the world," said Minister De Lille.

Bringing the WTD theme to life, the Department of Tourism's inaugural G20 Tourism Hackathon winners showcased a strong youth and innovation dimension during the celebration.

The initiative brought together 48 young people from 21 higher education institutions across South Africa to develop innovative

solutions using artificial intelligence and digital technologies to transform the tourism experience. Three groups, The Catalysts, Map My Biz, and Ubuntu Verse, presented innovative solutions to tourism-related challenges. Their presentations showed how digital innovation, technology, and creative thinking can support the growth and development of the tourism sector. At the end of the presentations, the winners received certificates and prize money in recognition of their participation and innovative solutions. The Catalysts took first place and received R170 000, followed by Map My Biz in second with R140 000, and Ubuntu Verse in third with R105 000.

Their participation added a strong youth and innovation dimension to the 2026 World Tourism Day programme, highlighting the importance of nurturing a new generation of digitally skilled tourism innovators.

Discovering the Waterberg

The Waterberg, with its combination of nature-based tourism, accommodation, adventure and golf, provided an ideal setting for a celebration focused on the future of tourism. The hosting venue, Legend Golf & Safari Resort, allowed delegates to experience a destination that blends luxury, golf, wildlife and outdoor adventure. Located in the Waterberg region of Limpopo, the resort brings together a range of tourism experiences in one destination,

allowing domestic and international visitors to combine leisure, adventure and nature-based experiences.

One of the resort's distinctive attractions is its Extreme 19th, an elevated golfing experience where players travel by helicopter to reach the 19th hole. The resort also offers an 18-hole Signature Course featuring 18 golf legends, as well as a Tribute Course with holes inspired by famous par-three holes from around the world. This golf offering adds another dimension to Limpopo's tourism portfolio, demonstrating that the province's appeal extends beyond traditional wildlife tourism.

For visitors seeking an African safari experience, the resort offers opportunities to encounter the Big Five as well as a wide variety of other wildlife and bird species.

As Minister de Lille concluded, "The future of tourism will be increasingly digital, but its heart will always be human. Take a Sho't Left. Discover Limpopo. Discover South Africa."

The message from World Tourism Day 2026 was therefore both a celebration and an invitation: to discover, experience, and share South Africa, and to let the world discover Limpopo through the people, communities, businesses, and visitors who bring its tourism story to life.





THREE PROVINCE TOURISM MONTH MEDIA LAUNCH

EXPLORE LAKE GARIEP *Together.*

The Northern Cape, Free State, and Eastern Cape have joined forces for the first ever Three Province Tourism Month Media Launch, held on 31 August 2026 at Chargo River Lodge, Colesberg.

The theme for the 2026 Tourism Month is, "Growing South Africa's Tourism Sector in the Digital Era".

This pioneering collaboration positions the three provinces as one seamless tourism region, centred around the breathtaking Lake

Gariep — South Africa's largest reservoir and a shared natural wonder. By breaking provincial boundaries, the initiative invites domestic travellers to experience connected journeys of culture, heritage, adventure, stargazing, and wildlife across all three destinations.

With support from the relevant tourism industry stakeholders the campaign promises wide exposure and fresh itineraries that encourage longer stays and greater local spend.

Embracing digital innovation, the collaboration integrates AI, social media storytelling, and immersive visitor experiences to position the Three Provinces as a modern, competitive, and sustainable destination.

The three Province Tourism Month Media Launch was officially opened by the three MECs: Ms. Nonkubela Ntomboxolo Pieters (Eastern Cape), Ms. Venus Blennies Magage (Northern Cape), and Mr. Ketso Makume (Free State).



The MOU was signed by the three CEOs of the provincial tourism authorities: Mr. Shawn Modise (NCEDA, Northern Cape), Mr. Obakeng Seseane (FSGLTA, Free State), and Ms. Nokulunga Mnqeta (ECPTA, Eastern Cape).

NCEDA CEO Shawn Modise hailed the initiative as “a historic moment for rural tourism growth in South Africa,” urging tour operators and the travel trade to present joint itineraries that inspire inter province travel.

Tourism Month, celebrated each September, encourages South Africans to explore their own country affordably and authentically. This flagship collaboration ensures that visitors can “find their joy in the three Provinces” — creating lasting memories while supporting local communities.

“ A historic moment for rural tourism growth in South Africa ”

Issued by: Northern Cape Economic Development Trade and Investment Promotion Agency (NCEDA)



September 2026



SOUTH AFRICA'S NEW ETA SYSTEM SET TO ENHANCE TOURISM GROWTH AND TRAVEL EXPERIENCE

Written by Elizabeth Mpetsi



South Africa is embracing digital innovation and advancing its digital transformation through the rollout of the Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) system, aimed at improving ease of travel and enhancing the country's competitiveness as a global tourism destination.

The Department of Home Affairs and South African Tourism showcased the Electronic Travel Authorisation system at Africa's Travel Indaba in Durban, presenting it to tourism stakeholders, destination management companies, and industry partners.

The ETA is a digital travel authorisation system that allows travellers to apply online for tourism and visitor travel to South Africa, reducing reliance on traditional paper-based visa processes. It forms part of government efforts to modernise immigration systems and improve how visitors are processed. The system enables applicants to complete the application process digitally, including the submission of personal details and supporting documentation. Enhancements such as

renewals, family profiles, and expanded country coverage are now being rolled out to improve the system's functionality and user experience.

The implementation of the ETA system also supports the "Ease of Access" as one of the strategic pillars of the Tourism Growth Partnership Plan (TGPP), which prioritises improving traveller access to South Africa through digital transformation, streamlined visa processes, and enhanced travel facilitation measures. By reducing administrative barriers and improving processing efficiency, the system is expected to contribute towards tourism growth and improve the overall visitor experience.

In her remarks, Minister of Tourism Patricia de Lille described the ETA as a significant milestone in modernising South Africa's tourism and immigration ecosystem, highlighting its role in improving efficiency and supporting tourism growth.

"The easier it is to travel to South Africa, the

more travellers will come. And the more travellers come, the more businesses grow, the more jobs we create, and the more communities benefit," she said.

The initiative aligns with broader efforts to improve regional connectivity and enhance the travel experience across Africa, as reflected in the Africa's Travel Indaba theme, "Unlimited Africa."

The ETA system forms part of South Africa's broader strategy to modernise border management and improve service delivery in the immigration environment. It is expected to evolve over time, with potential expansion to additional visa categories and further digital integration within border processing systems.

By advancing digital innovation in immigration and travel facilitation, South Africa aims to improve efficiency, strengthen border management, and support sustainable growth in the tourism sector.



The Department of Tourism, in partnership with the Free State Provincial Government, hosted an inspiring Youth Month Gastronomy Tourism and Entrepreneurship Programme in Mangaung, reaffirming the government's commitment to empowering young South Africans through skills development, entrepreneurship, and innovation in tourism.

Held under the theme "Empowering Youth through Tourism, Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Gastronomy," the programme brought together government leaders, tourism stakeholders, educational institutions, development finance organisations, entrepreneurs, and aspiring young professionals to explore the growing opportunities across South Africa's tourism value chain.

The event recognised tourism as one of the country's most powerful drivers of inclusive economic growth, capable of creating jobs, stimulating entrepreneurship, and transforming local economies. Participants explored opportunities in culinary tourism, destination marketing, tourism technology,

funding mechanisms, and enterprise development, while engaging directly with industry experts and government programmes designed to support emerging businesses.

Delivering the keynote address, Deputy Minister of Tourism Maggie Soty reminded participants that the commemoration of Youth Month coincides with two important milestones: the 50th anniversary of the 1976 Youth Uprising and the 30th anniversary of South Africa's Constitution.

"The generation of 1976 fought for political freedom. The generation of 2026 must help build economic opportunity. The challenge before us is to ensure that young South Africans have the skills, support, and opportunities needed to participate meaningfully in the economy and contribute to our country's development," said Deputy Minister Soty.

She emphasised that tourism is far more than travel and leisure; it is a people-centred economy that creates employment across accommodation, restaurants, transportation services, attractions, cultural experiences, and community enterprises.

Deputy Minister Soty further highlighted the growing importance of gastronomy tourism, noting that food experiences have become one of the strongest travel motivators worldwide. Through local cuisine, visitors learn about our cultures, traditions, and communities. Every meal tells a story, every local ingredient reflects a place and its people, and every dining experience creates a lasting connection between visitors and our country.

Empowering the Next Generation Through Gastronomy Tourism

She encouraged young entrepreneurs to embrace innovation and take advantage of government support programmes, including the Tourism Equity Fund, Tourism Transformation Fund, Tourism Incentive Program, and Market Access Support Programme, all aimed at strengthening tourism SMMEs and creating sustainable livelihoods.

The Free State Government echoed these sentiments, reaffirming tourism as a strategic sector for the province's economic development. Free State MEC for Economic Development and Tourism, Ketso Makume, said the province is deliberately investing in tourism initiatives that create opportunities for young people and showcase the province's unique cultural and natural assets.

He highlighted several provincial tourism initiatives that are already delivering positive results, including the tourism monitors programme, niche tourism experiences such as the Cosmopolitan Tourism Route, coffee festivals, hiking trails, and gastronomy tourism initiatives that attract visitors while creating employment opportunities.

Closing the event, Deputy Minister Soty challenged young people to become the generation that builds South Africa's future through entrepreneurship, innovation and service excellence.

The programme reinforced the Department of Tourism's commitment to creating an enabling environment in which youth-led tourism enterprises can thrive, ensuring tourism continues to contribute meaningfully to economic transformation, job creation, and community development across South Africa.

Written by Annah Mashile



THE DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT MODEL CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR TOURISM GROWTH

Tourism does not begin when a visitor checks into a hotel or arrives at a destination.

It begins much earlier with safe roads, reliable water and electricity, well-maintained public spaces, effective municipal services, environmental stewardship, investment ready precincts and communities that are empowered to participate in the visitor economy. These are the foundations upon which successful destinations are built.

Recognising this reality, South Africa's District Development Model (DDM) provides an important framework for strengthening coordination across all spheres of government to improve service delivery, stimulate local economic development and create the conditions in which tourism can thrive.

Rather than viewing tourism as the responsibility of a single department, the District Development Model recognises that destination development depends on the collective efforts of national, provincial and local government working alongside communities, traditional leaders, business and civil society.

Tourism is Local

Every tourism experience is ultimately local. Visitors interact with local roads, local businesses, local attractions and local communities. Their experience is shaped by the quality of municipal services, public amenities, environmental management and the hospitality they encounter. For this reason, tourism cannot succeed through national policy alone. It depends on coordinated implementation at district and municipal levels, where decisions about infrastructure, spatial planning, transport, public safety, environmental management and local economic development come together. The District Development Model provides a mechanism for aligning these efforts through a shared vision for each district.

“Tourism cannot succeed through national policy alone. It depends on coordinated implementation at district and municipal levels.”

One Plan. One Vision. Shared Responsibility.

At the heart of the District Development Model is the principle of “One Plan” - a coordinated approach that aligns the priorities, budgets and programmes of all spheres of government around the specific needs and opportunities of each district. This approach reduces duplication, strengthens collaboration and enables government to respond more effectively to local priorities. For tourism, this means that destination development is no longer viewed in isolation.

Road upgrades, public infrastructure, environmental conservation, skills development, investment promotion, enterprise support and tourism planning become part of a single development agenda. When these interventions are coordinated, destinations become more attractive to visitors, investors and tourism businesses alike.



From Infrastructure to Visitor Experience

Visitors rarely distinguish between different spheres of government. They simply experience a destination.

A well-maintained heritage site, clear road signage, reliable utilities, attractive public spaces, accessible transport and safe communities combine to create positive visitor experiences.

These are also the same conditions that improve the quality of life for local residents. Investment in tourism infrastructure therefore delivers benefits that extend far beyond the visitor economy. It strengthens communities, supports local businesses and creates environments where people are proud to live, work and welcome guests.

Partnerships that Build Destinations

The District Development Model recognises that government alone cannot unlock the full potential of tourism. Sustainable destinations are built through partnerships.

Municipalities, provincial departments, national government, tourism authorities, private investors, community organisations, traditional leadership, educational institutions and tourism businesses each bring unique expertise and resources.

By working together, these partners are able to identify local opportunities, address barriers to growth and develop destinations that reflect the unique identity and aspirations of each district. This collaborative approach also creates greater confidence for investors by demonstrating that development is guided

by shared priorities and coordinated planning.

Empowering Communities Through Tourism
One of the greatest strengths of the District Development Model is its emphasis on inclusive development. Tourism should create opportunities not only for established businesses, but also for local entrepreneurs, community-owned enterprises, youth, women and small businesses.

When communities participate meaningfully in tourism, they become active custodians of the destinations they call home. They preserve cultural heritage, protect natural assets, create authentic visitor experiences and generate employment that supports local livelihoods. This strengthens both the visitor economy and the social fabric of communities.

From Projects to Visitor Economies

Successful tourism is not measured only by the completion of infrastructure projects. Its true success lies in the visitor economies those investments help to create. Across South Africa, destination development initiatives are demonstrating how coordinated planning can transform public investment into lasting economic opportunity.

Improved access roads connect visitors to attractions. Upgraded heritage sites preserve national assets while attracting new markets. Community tourism enterprises create employment and diversify local economies. These outcomes illustrate the broader purpose of the District Development Model: connecting infrastructure, services, investment and people to create places where tourism can flourish.

A Shared Vision for Growth

The Tourism Growth Partnership Plan sets an ambitious vision for expanding South Africa's visitor economy. Achieving that vision depends not only on attracting more visitors, but on ensuring that destinations are ready to receive them.

The District Development Model provides an important bridge between national policy and local implementation. It demonstrates that tourism growth is most sustainable when planning is integrated, partnerships are strong, and communities share in the benefits of development.

By bringing government closer to the places where tourism happens, the District Development Model is helping to create destinations that are more competitive, more resilient and more inclusive. In doing so, it is laying the foundations for a visitor economy that creates lasting opportunities for communities across South Africa.

Written by Natasha Rockman



DEPUTY MINISTER SOTYU LAUNCHES MTHONTSI LODGE AND CONFERENCE CENTRE

Marking A New Chapter For Kwamaqoma Tourism

The Department of Tourism, in collaboration with the Eastern Cape Provincial Government, Amathole District Municipality, Raymond Mhlaba Local Municipality and the local community, officially launched and handed over the Mthontsi Lodge and Conference Centre in KwaMaqoma, Eastern Cape, on 2 July 2026.

Officially launched by Deputy Minister of Tourism Maggie Soty, the R31 million investment demonstrates the government's commitment to leveraging tourism as a catalyst for economic growth, job creation, and community engagement.

The newly developed Mthontsi Lodge and Conference Centre offers 13 chalets accommodating up to 52 guests, backpacker accommodation for 32 guests, two lapas, a restaurant, conference facilities, staff accommodation, an administration building, a guard house and internal roads. The facility is intended to strengthen the area's tourism offering while providing a platform for visitors to experience the natural, cultural and heritage attractions of KwaMaqoma and the surrounding region.

For Deputy Minister Soty, however, the significance of the investment extends far beyond the construction of a new tourism facility.

During the launch, Deputy Minister Soty highlighted the link between the country's 30 years of constitutional democracy and the tourism opportunities for local communities. "As we celebrate 30 years of our Constitution, we are reminded that the promise of democracy extends far beyond political freedom; it is about creating opportunities that improve lives, strengthen communities, and enable every South African to participate meaningfully in our economy," she said.



She emphasised that tourism is fundamentally about people, creating jobs and preserving the country's heritage. The investment, she explained, was not made merely to construct buildings, but to contribute towards building an economic future for the community. The handover also marked the start of ongoing support for the facility, particularly to strengthen its management and ensure its long-term sustainability.

"Today we officially open more than a lodge. We open new possibilities, new opportunities, new dreams for our people, new hopes for local entrepreneurs."

"We are not going to hand over and end there. We are going to make sure that, as a department, we train management on financial management," Deputy Minister Soty said.

The project has already contributed to local economic activity. During the construction phase, opportunities were created for local MSMEs, women, and young people, and the completed facility is expected to support additional employment and tourism-related business opportunities.

The launch also highlighted the importance of strengthening tourism offerings beyond the lodge. During the event, local tourist guides received certificates after their training, while owners of nine homestays received support to enhance their accommodation offerings. Together, these initiatives contribute to a wider tourism value chain through which visitors can access a range of products and experiences.

Community participation and ownership are also central to the development. The land on which the lodge stands was acquired by the Amathole District Municipality through the Land Reform Programme, benefiting more than 240 farm dwellers and their descendants, who form the core of the Mthontsi Waselukhuko Primary Co-operative. The facility is intended to be ultimately owned by the co-operative, creating an opportunity for the community to participate directly in the future of tourism.

Eastern Cape Premier Oscar Mabuyane described the development as a demonstration of what can be achieved when land reform is paired with investment, planning and strong community leadership.



"The lodge is much more than bricks and metal," Premier Mabuyane said, emphasising that communities should never remain spectators in their own economy.

Premier also highlighted the changing nature of tourism in the Eastern Cape. While the province is well known for its coastline, natural attractions and game reserves, travellers are increasingly seeking authentic experiences that enable them to connect with the history, culture and communities of the destinations they visit.

Mthontsi's history provides an important part of that experience.

The significance of the development becomes even more apparent when considering the history of the land on which the lodge now stands. Mthontsi has historical links dating back to the 1800s and the War

of Mlanjeni, when AmaXhosa communities faced conflict with British forces. The area's fierce resistance became part of its identity, and the place later came to be known as "Mount Misery", reflecting the difficulties the British encountered during the conflicts.

Today, a place once marked by conflict and resistance is being given a new purpose through tourism. Its history provides an important foundation for heritage tourism, while the lodge offers visitors an opportunity to engage with that history and experience the culture and stories of the surrounding communities.

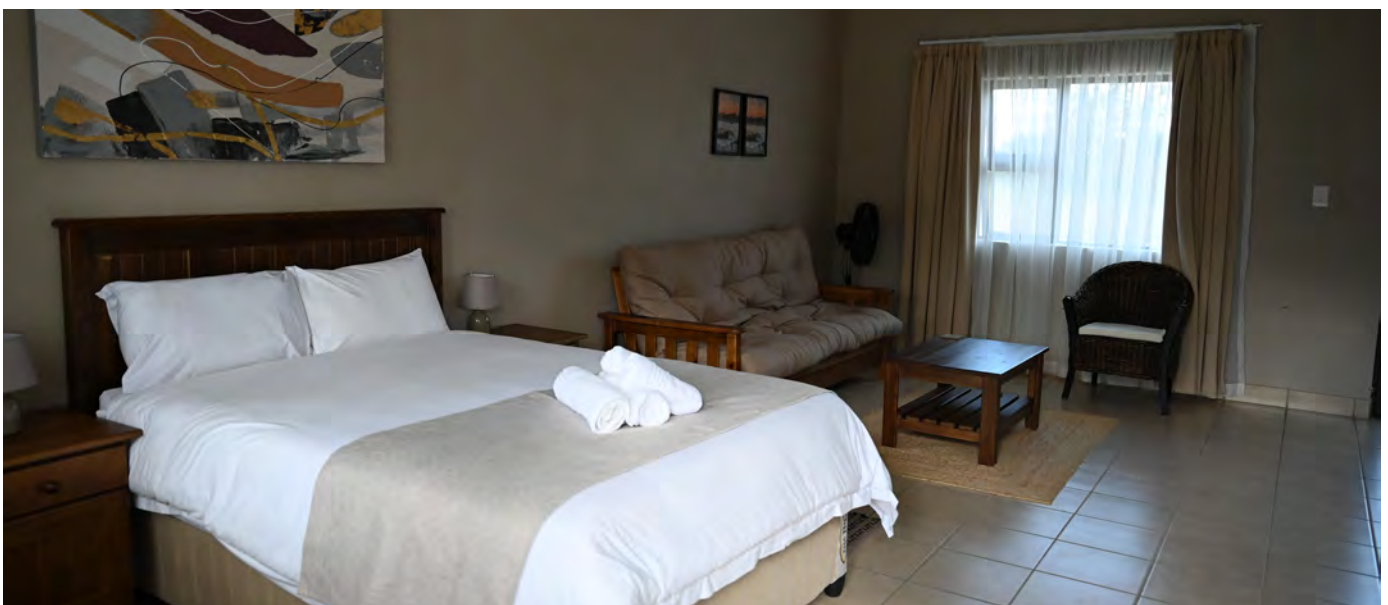
For KwaMaqoma, the launch therefore represents more than the opening of a lodge and conference centre. It brings together land reform, public investment, community ownership, heritage and tourism development, creating a platform from which

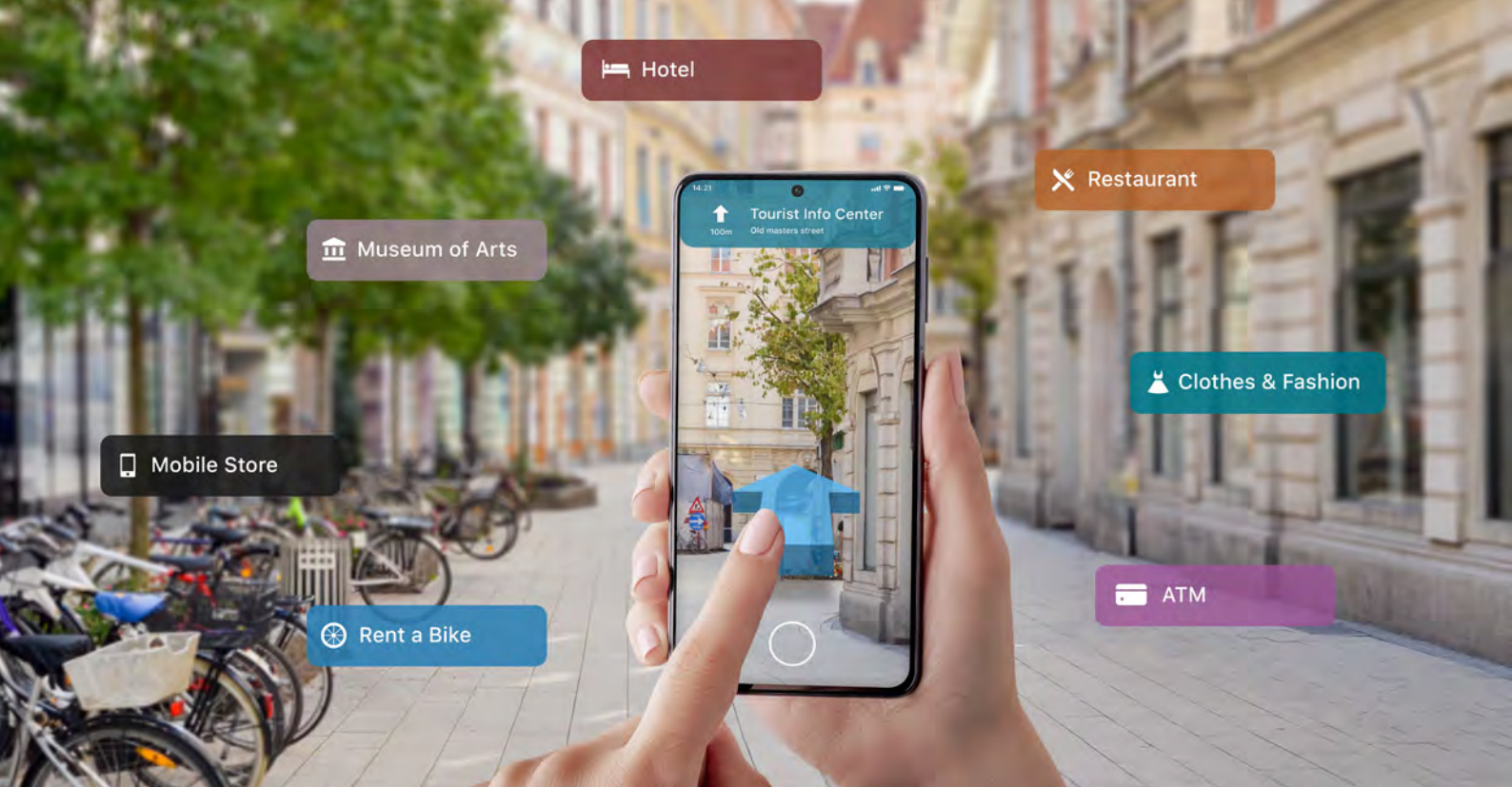
the area's history can contribute to future opportunities.

The lodge adds a new dimension to KwaMaqoma's tourism offering by providing accommodation and conferencing facilities while complementing the area's existing cultural and heritage attractions. Its development also creates space for local tourism businesses, guides and accommodation establishments to be part of the visitor experience.

For a community whose history has been shaped by struggle, resilience and change, the opening of the lodge marks a significant moment. Mthontsi now has a place where its history can be encountered, its culture experienced and its people connected with the visitors who come to discover it.

Written by Elizabeth Mpetsi





Beyond Technology

HOW DIGITAL INNOVATION AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ARE REDESIGNING THE FUTURE OF TOURISM

Tourism has always evolved alongside innovation. From steamships and railways to commercial aviation and online booking platforms, each new generation of technology has transformed how people discover, experience and share the world.

Today, tourism stands at the beginning of another significant transformation. Digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) are changing how destinations are marketed, how businesses operate, how visitors plan their journeys and how governments make decisions. For South Africa, this transformation presents an opportunity not simply to adopt new technologies, but to redesign tourism in ways that are more inclusive, sustainable and competitive.

A New Digital Era for Tourism

Around the world, travellers increasingly expect seamless digital experiences. They research destinations online, compare prices instantly, use digital maps, access mobile boarding passes, translate languages in real time and share experiences with global audiences while they travel.

Artificial intelligence is accelerating these changes. AI-powered travel assistants, personalised recommendations, predictive analytics and smart customer service are becoming part of the modern visitor experience. These technologies help travellers make informed decisions while enabling tourism businesses to better understand customer preferences and improve service delivery. For destinations, digital innovation provides new opportunities to reach global audiences and compete in an increasingly connected marketplace.

Supporting Smarter Decisions

Digital innovation is equally important behind the scenes. Governments and tourism authorities increasingly rely on data and digital tools to understand visitor behaviour, monitor travel trends and

identify emerging opportunities. Evidence-based planning enables resources to be directed where they will have the greatest impact. Predictive analytics can help identify future demand. Digital platforms improve coordination across institutions. Artificial intelligence can assist with analysing large volumes of tourism information, enabling faster and more informed decision-making. Technology therefore strengthens not only visitor experiences but also the planning and management of tourism itself.

Creating Opportunities for Small Businesses

One of the greatest opportunities presented by digital transformation lies in expanding access for small tourism enterprises.

Digital platforms allow small accommodation establishments, tour operators, guides, restaurants, craft producers and community



tourism businesses to reach markets that were once beyond their geographic or financial reach.

A locally owned guesthouse can now attract international visitors through online booking platforms. Community guides can promote authentic cultural experiences through digital storytelling. Emerging entrepreneurs can market their products globally using social media and e-commerce.

Digital innovation helps level the playing field by connecting small businesses directly with potential visitors.

Technology That Strengthens Sustainability

Innovation also supports more sustainable tourism.

Digital tools help destinations monitor visitor flows, reduce congestion, improve environmental management and protect sensitive natural and cultural heritage sites. Artificial intelligence can assist with forecasting visitor demand, supporting conservation planning and helping destinations manage resources more efficiently. Smart technologies can reduce waste, improve energy efficiency and support responsible tourism practices. In this way, technology contributes not only to economic growth but also to environmental stewardship.

Human-Centred Innovation

Despite rapid technological advances, tourism will always remain a people-

centred industry. Technology cannot replace authentic hospitality. It cannot replace meaningful cultural exchange. It cannot replace the warmth of a genuine welcome or the stories shared by local communities. Instead, digital innovation should enhance these experiences.

The most successful destinations will be those that combine advanced technology with authentic human connection. Innovation should empower people rather than replace them.

Preparing South Africa for the Future

South Africa's tourism sector is well positioned to embrace this digital future. The country's growing technology ecosystem, entrepreneurial spirit and expanding digital infrastructure provide a strong foundation for innovation.

Government, industry, educational institutions, and technology partners all have important roles to play in

strengthening digital skills, encouraging innovation, and ensuring that tourism businesses of every size can participate in the digital economy. By investing in digital capability today, South Africa can position itself as a competitive, resilient and future-ready tourism destination.

Redesigning Tourism Together

Digital transformation is not a destination. It is an ongoing journey.

Success will depend on collaboration among government, industry, researchers, innovators, and communities to ensure that technology creates opportunities for everyone.

Artificial intelligence and digital innovation are not changing the purpose of tourism. They are changing how tourism delivers on its purpose - connecting people, supporting livelihoods, protecting heritage and creating shared prosperity. They are reshaping the global tourism landscape.

By embracing technology responsibly, South Africa can improve visitor experiences, strengthen destination management, empower tourism enterprises and build a more inclusive, resilient and competitive visitor economy.

The future of tourism will belong to destinations that embrace innovation while remaining true to the people and places that make travel meaningful.

Written by Natasha Rockman



GAUTENG DELIVERS GOLDEN WEEKEND

OF MUSIC, SPORT, AVIATION AND CULTURE, REINFORCING ITS POSITION AS AFRICA'S LEADING EVENTS DESTINATION

By Barba Gaoganediwe, Chief Destination Marketing Evangelist @VisitGAUTENG



Gauteng has once again demonstrated why it remains the heartbeat of South Africa's visitor economy, successfully hosting a bumper weekend of world-class music, sport and aviation events that attracted an estimated 195 000 attendees across the province, generated significant tourism activity and reinforced Gauteng's growing reputation as Africa's premier events destination.

Anchored by the spectacular Scorpion Kings Live concert at FNB Stadium, attended by more than 70 000 fans, supported by the Africa Aerospace and Defence Expo (AAD 2026), which attracted an estimated 80 000 visitors, and the historic FIFA Intercontinental Cup clash between Mamelodi Sundowns and Al Ahli Saudi at a near-capacity Loftus Versfeld Stadium attended by just under 45 000 spectators, Gauteng delivered a powerful demonstration of the province's ability to host major events at a global scale.

The result was more than packed venues. It was a powerful reminder that events are

not simply moments of entertainment. They are catalysts for tourism growth, economic activity, destination competitiveness, city vibrancy and global visibility.

THE GOLDEN PROVINCE'S EVENTS ECONOMY IN ACTION

For one weekend, Gauteng became a convergence point for music lovers, football supporters, aviation enthusiasts, industry executives, international exhibitors, domestic travellers and visitors from across the Southern African region.

The economic impact was visible across hotels, restaurants, guesthouses, township tourism operators, transportation services, retailers, informal traders and entertainment precincts.

The Scorpion Kings Live experience alone demonstrated the scale of opportunity presented by music tourism. Industry estimates indicate the event generated

approximately R150 million in direct event revenue, while broader visitor spending on transport, accommodation, food, entertainment, merchandise and associated activities contributed a further estimated R49 million to the local economy. More than 2 300 jobs were supported across the event value chain.

More importantly, the weekend showcased Gauteng's ability to convert event attendance into broader destination experiences. Visitors travelled from across South Africa, the SADC region and international markets, spending time in Soweto, Johannesburg, Tshwane, Ekurhuleni and the province's many cultural, leisure and entertainment hubs.

THE WORLD DANCES TO AMAPIANO. ALL ROADS LEAD BACK TO GAUTENG.

The success of Scorpion Kings Live further validated Gauteng's strategic positioning as the global home of Amapiano and highlighted the growing power of music tourism as a tourism and economic growth driver.

As Amapiano continues to dominate dance floors, streaming platforms and festival stages around the world, Gauteng remains the cultural birthplace, creative engine and commercial home of the genre. What took place at FNB Stadium was more than a concert. It was a global cultural homecoming.

It showcased not only world-class talent, but also the creative, technical, production and event-hosting capabilities resident within Gauteng. The scale, sophistication and quality of the production provided compelling evidence that the province can confidently stage events that meet the highest international standards.

SPORTING EXCELLENCE WITH GLOBAL REACH

Equally significant was the performance of Mamelodi Sundowns, whose victory over Al Ahli Saudi in the FIFA Intercontinental Cup placed Gauteng firmly on the global football map.

The event brought international attention to Gauteng while demonstrating the province's ability to host major continental and global sporting spectacles.

As African champions and international ambassadors, Mamelodi Sundowns continue to elevate the profile of South African sport and contribute to the broader destination brand of Gauteng.

AAD 2026 SHOWCASES GAUTENG'S GLOBAL BUSINESS APPEAL

The successful hosting of the Africa Aerospace and Defence Expo at Air Force Base Waterkloof added another dimension to the province's attractiveness.

As Africa's premier aerospace and defence exhibition, AAD attracted global exhibitors, government delegations, business leaders and aviation enthusiasts, reinforcing Gauteng's position as a leading business events destination and gateway into African markets.

The event underscores the province's ability to simultaneously host leisure, cultural, sporting and business events, an increasingly important differentiator in a competitive global tourism landscape.

EVENTS AS A PILLAR OF THE PROVINCIAL TOURISM GROWTH STRATEGY

The success of the weekend is no accident. It reflects deliberate investment, intentional bidding and a strategic commitment by the Gauteng Provincial Government to leverage major events as a core pillar of tourism growth, destination positioning and economic development.

International evidence consistently demonstrates that destinations that invest in recurring, high-quality events benefit from

increased visitor arrivals, improved destination awareness, stronger business confidence and longer visitor stays. For Gauteng, events provide more than visitation. They create reasons to travel. They create reasons to stay. They create reasons to return.

This is particularly important given current tourism dynamics. Recent domestic tourism data shows South African travellers remain under financial pressure, even as they continue seeking meaningful travel experiences. Consistent hosting of quality events provides critical demand drivers that sustain tourism businesses, encourage travel and stimulate visitor spending.

GAUTRAIN: THE CONNECTING CATALYST

Central to the success of mega-events in Gauteng is the province's integrated mobility ecosystem. The Gautrain continues to serve as a strategic enabler of tourism growth and visitor movement, connecting airports, business districts, event precincts and tourism attractions.

Together with PRASA, municipal transport systems and e-hailing partners, Gauteng offers visitors a level of accessibility and connectivity unmatched on the continent. The ability to move seamlessly between Johannesburg, Tshwane and Ekurhuleni remains one of Gauteng's strongest competitive advantages.

“
***They create
reason to
Travel.
They create
reason to stay.
They create
reason to
return.***”

THE GOLDEN PEOPLE OF GAUTENG REMAIN OUR GREATEST HOSTS

While stadiums, convention centres and transport systems matter, Gauteng's greatest tourism asset remains its people.

The warmth, vibrancy, energy and hospitality displayed throughout the weekend once again demonstrated why visitors continue to choose Gauteng. From Soweto to Mamelodi. From Sandton to Tshwane. From Alexandra to the East and West Rands. The people of Gauteng continue to play the role of champion hosts, turning events into memorable experiences and visitors into lifelong ambassadors for the province.

THE CELEBRATION CONTINUES

As one remarkable weekend concludes, Gauteng is already preparing to welcome thousands more visitors.

This week marks the arrival of:

- Comic Con Africa 2026, expected to attract more than 70 000 visitors to Nasrec.
- Standard Bank Joy of Jazz
- Marble Circus

Together, these events further reinforce Gauteng's position as South Africa's cultural capital and the continent's most dynamic events destination.

VISIT GAUTENG. ZWAKALA. STAY ANOTHER DAY FOR THE CULTURE.

Whether you are travelling for music, sport, business, aviation, gaming, fashion, food, heritage or culture, there has never been a better time to experience the Golden Province.

Because in Gauteng, the event may bring you here. But the culture will make you stay.

Visit Gauteng-Zwakala & Stay Another Day for the Culture.



Sport Tourism

More Than the Final Score

When the final whistle blows, the greatest victory is not always measured on the scoreboard. It is measured in the visitors who discovered a destination, the businesses that welcomed new customers, the communities that shared their stories and the lasting legacy left behind.

Sport has a unique ability to bring people together. It unites nations, inspires communities and creates unforgettable moments that transcend language, culture and geography. For tourism, however, sport represents far more than competition.

It is one of the world's fastest-growing tourism segments, attracting millions of travellers who journey across borders to watch major events, participate in sporting competitions or experience destinations renowned for their sporting heritage.

These visitors fill hotels, dine in local restaurants, visit attractions, extend their holidays and often return long after the final match has been played. Sport tourism is therefore not simply about hosting events. It is about creating destinations that people want to experience.

A Winning Partnership

Tourism and sport have a natural partnership.

Successful sporting events rely on efficient transport, quality accommodation, welcoming communities, safe public spaces and memorable visitor experiences. These are the very foundations of successful tourism destinations.

Every investment in airports, roads, public transport, destination management, hospitality services and visitor attractions strengthens a country's ability to host international events while improving the experience for all travellers. In this way, sport tourism demonstrates how investment in destination readiness creates benefits that extend far beyond the event itself.

Building Destinations, Not Just Stadiums

The true legacy of a major sporting event is not measured by the number of spectators who attended. It is measured by what remains after the event has concluded.

Successful destinations use major sporting events to strengthen infrastructure, improve destination management, showcase local culture, support small businesses and build international confidence.

Visitors who arrive for a sporting event rarely experience only the stadium. They explore cities and towns. They visit museums and heritage sites. They enjoy local cuisine. They discover national parks and cultural attractions. They engage with communities and create memories that encourage future travel. The event becomes the beginning of the visitor journey - not its destination.

The Power of Sport to Showcase South Africa

South Africa has earned an international reputation as a world-class host of major sporting events.



From rugby and football to cricket, golf, cycling, marathon running and adventure sport, the country has repeatedly demonstrated its ability to deliver exceptional experiences for athletes, spectators and visitors alike.

These events showcase more than sporting excellence. They introduce international audiences to South Africa's breathtaking landscapes, rich cultural heritage, vibrant cities and renowned hospitality. Every event strengthens the country's destination brand while reinforcing its reputation as a welcoming and capable host nation.

A Regional Opportunity

The ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2027, to be co-hosted by South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe, presents an opportunity that extends beyond the boundaries of sport. It reflects a growing recognition that regional partnerships can strengthen tourism by encouraging visitors to experience multiple destinations during a single journey.

For many international travellers, the tournament will provide an opportunity to discover Southern Africa - not only through world-class cricket but through wildlife, heritage, adventure, gastronomy and cultural experiences that span the region.

This collaborative approach aligns with South Africa's commitment to regional integration under its SADC Chairship, demonstrating how tourism and sport can work together to strengthen economic cooperation and position Southern Africa as one compelling destination. It is an opportunity to invite the world to: Come

for the cricket. Stay for the culture.
Opportunities Beyond the Stadium

Sport tourism creates opportunities across the visitor economy. Accommodation providers welcome travelling supporters. Restaurants and local markets experience increased demand. Tour operators develop new itineraries. Transport providers connect visitors with destinations. Craft producers, guides, artists and cultural performers all benefit from increased visitor activity. For many small businesses, major sporting events provide valuable opportunities to reach new markets and build lasting customer relationships. The benefits therefore extend well beyond host cities, creating opportunities for destinations and communities across the tourism value chain.

Leaving a Lasting Legacy

The greatest measure of success is not whether a country can host a major event. It is whether the event leaves destinations stronger than before.

South Africa's successful hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup demonstrated the enduring value of investing in world-class infrastructure, transport networks, destination marketing and international partnerships. While the tournament captured the attention of billions around the world, its legacy extended far beyond the final match. It enhanced South Africa's global profile as a premier destination for tourism and major events, strengthened the country's capability to host international conferences and sporting competitions, and left a lasting legacy of improved infrastructure,

skills development and national confidence. That experience continues to inform South Africa's approach to sport tourism today. Major events are viewed not as one-off occasions, but as strategic opportunities to accelerate destination development, stimulate local economies and create lasting benefits for communities.

The legacy of sport tourism includes improved infrastructure, enhanced destination marketing, stronger partnerships, skilled tourism professionals, increased investor confidence and international recognition. When managed strategically, sport tourism becomes an investment in the future of the visitor economy. It creates opportunities that continue long after medals have been awarded and trophies have been lifted.

Looking Beyond the Final Score

As South Africa prepares to welcome the world once again, sport tourism reminds us that every major event is an opportunity to tell a bigger story. It is the story of destinations that are ready to welcome visitors. Of communities that proudly share their heritage. Of partnerships that create lasting economic opportunities. And of a country that understands that tourism success is measured not only by the number of visitors who arrive, but by the experiences they take home and the reasons they find to return.

Sport tourism generates economic activity that reaches far beyond sporting venues. It strengthens destination brands, supports local businesses, creates employment and encourages visitors to explore more of South Africa and the Southern African region. When destinations are ready, major sporting events become catalysts for long-term tourism growth.

Because in tourism, the final score is never the end of the story. It is the beginning of the next journey.

Written by Natasha Rockman

WOMEN IN TOURISM:

Turning Participation into Ownership and Economic Power

Revitalizing the Women in Tourism Chapter to unlock opportunities, strengthen collaboration, and drive inclusive growth

Written by Annah Mashile and Phathu Luvhengo



The launch and revitalisation of the Women in Tourism Chapter in the Free State Province has placed women's economic empowerment, ownership, and meaningful participation at the centre of the province's tourism agenda. The two-day gathering at Aldam Resort in Versterburg brought together government leaders, tourism practitioners, women entrepreneurs, businesses, and other stakeholders to reflect on the role of women in building a stronger, more inclusive tourism economy.

The event was not simply about celebrating women's contributions to tourism. It was a call to action to move women from participation to ownership, from being beneficiaries of opportunities to becoming decision-makers, investors, employers, and owners of tourism enterprises.

Deputy Minister of Tourism, Ms Maggie Sotyu emphasised that collaboration and networking are essential for women to realise the full potential of the tourism economy. Deputy Minister Sotyu challenged women to support one another and build businesses that can grow beyond individual success. She stressed that women should not see each other as competitors but as partners who can create opportunities for one another.

Her message was clear: the success of one woman can create opportunities for many others.

Deputy Minister in the Presidency for

Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities Ms Mapaseka Steve Letsike expanded the conversation by highlighting the importance of women's visibility across the tourism value chain. However, the Deputy Minister Letsike argued that women must increasingly occupy positions where they can influence ownership, investment, procurement and strategic decision-making.

Why Strong Chapters Matter

Women entrepreneurs do not operate in isolation. Businesses grow through networks, market intelligence, partnerships, skills, finance, mentorship and access to customers. This is why Women in Tourism Chapters matter.

Within the broader Women in Tourism Programme, provincial Chapters can bring women entrepreneurs together, strengthen collaboration between government and industry, identify barriers affecting businesses at provincial level and ensure that local realities help shape national programmes and implementation.

But their potential goes further. A strong Chapter should be a business network. It should connect women to information and skills. It should connect entrepreneurs to financial opportunities and markets. It should create relationships among women who can collaborate, share experience, and open doors for one another. Importantly, it should connect women-owned enterprises with the companies and institutions that buy tourism

goods and services.

Seen in this way, Chapters become part of the economic infrastructure required to strengthen women-owned businesses. The Free State and North West experiences during Women's Month demonstrate two different but complementary stages of this journey.

Free State: Rebuilding the Platform

In the Free State, the Women in Tourism Engagement and Dialogue emerged from a request by women tourism entrepreneurs to revive the provincial Chapter after it became inactive.

The significance of the engagement was therefore not simply the relaunch of an organisational structure. It represented an opportunity to rebuild a provincial network around the practical needs of women-owned tourism enterprises - bringing together government, industry, development finance institutions, tourism associations, entrepreneurs and community stakeholders to identify opportunities, strengthen collaboration and develop a practical Programme of Action aligned with the national Women in Tourism Programme.

The Free State experience demonstrates an important lesson: Chapters will remain relevant only when they respond to the realities facing the women they represent. That means moving beyond meetings towards purposeful programmes and connections that help businesses overcome

Tourism's next 30 years need **more women at the table**

A recipe passed down from a grandmother has become part of an award-winning tourism experience.

For Manti Maifadi, Co-Founder and Managing Director of Naledi Farm, what began with watching her grandmother make bread is today part of a business that welcomes visitors from around the world. Her story was one of several shared as women from across South Africa's tourism industry gathered at Constitution Hill's historic Women's Jail in Johannesburg for a Women's Month event hosted by the Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBCSA).

From hospitality and travel to conservation and entrepreneurship, the stories showed the many different routes women have taken into tourism and how much opportunity remains. Women are estimated to make up around 70% of the tourism workforce, but the conversation also turned to ensuring they have a greater stake in ownership, leadership, and decision-making.

Boitumelo Daniels, Manager: Stakeholder Relations and Marketing at TBCSA, said

the event was deliberately created to give women in the sector a space to connect and be celebrated.

"As the TBCSA team, we conceptualised this event because we felt it was important to create a space that celebrates women in tourism," Daniels said.

“*Lift as you rise, a reminder not to wait until reaching the top before helping to open doors for other women.*”

TBCSA Deputy Chairperson Lindelwa Isabelle reflected on her own unconventional career journey and the importance of women learning, speaking up, and creating opportunities for others. She also shared a piece of advice she had read that had stayed

with her: "lift as you rise," a reminder not to wait until reaching the top before helping to open doors for other women.

Tourism pioneers Vanya Lessing, Rosheen Singh, and Dr Tanya Abrahamse also reflected on defining moments in their careers, from tourism's role in South Africa's early democratic years and the creation of the Sho't Left campaign to challenging traditionally male-dominated industry spaces.

The stories shared during the day demonstrated that tourism opportunities can begin in unexpected places. A family recipe can become a visitor experience, a passion can become a career, and an idea can become a business.

As TBCSA celebrates its 30th anniversary, these conversations will continue at the TBCSA Tourism Leadership Conference at Sun City from 27 to 28 October 2026, where leaders from business, government, academia, and the media will consider the opportunities and challenges shaping the future of South African tourism.



One Region. Shared Opportunity.

How Regional Cooperation and Global Engagement Strengthen Southern Africa's Visitor Economy



Southern Africa is home to some of the world's most extraordinary tourism assets. From the iconic Victoria Falls and the Okavango Delta to the mountains of Lesotho, the beaches of Mozambique, Namibia's desert landscapes, Botswana's wildlife and South Africa's diverse cultural and natural attractions, the region offers visitors an exceptional range of experiences.

Increasingly, the opportunity lies not only in promoting these destinations individually, but in recognising the strength of Southern Africa as a connected region.

International travellers do not necessarily experience destinations through the lens of national borders. A journey may combine wildlife, culture, coastlines, cities and heritage across several countries. Better connectivity, easier movement and complementary tourism routes therefore have the potential to encourage visitors to stay longer, travel further and spend more across the region. This is where regional cooperation becomes important.

Creating the Conditions for Tourism Growth

South Africa's 2026 Chairship of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) provides an important platform to deepen cooperation across Southern Africa.

SADC is not a tourism organisation, and the meetings convened under its structures are not tourism events. Their purpose is much broader: advancing regional integration, industrialisation, trade, infrastructure development, investment, energy security, skills development and sustainable economic growth. Yet these priorities are closely connected to the environment in which tourism operates.

Improved transport infrastructure makes destinations more accessible. More efficient borders support the movement of people. Stronger aviation and transport connections make multi-country travel easier. Investment cooperation can stimulate new tourism products and infrastructure, while coordinated planning strengthens destinations and communities. Tourism therefore becomes both a beneficiary of regional integration and

a contributor to it.

When neighbouring countries are better connected, visitors can experience Southern Africa as a broader destination rather than a collection of isolated markets. Countries are also able to develop complementary routes and experiences instead of competing for the same traveller. The opportunity is to grow the regional tourism market together.

When Regional Leadership Brings the World Here

There is another important dimension to South Africa's regional and international engagement.

The summits, conferences, ministerial meetings and other gatherings associated with regional and global cooperation bring people into the country.

These delegates come primarily to discuss policy, diplomacy, trade, investment and economic cooperation. But while they are here, they also become part of the visitor economy.

They stay in hotels and guesthouses. They use airports and transport services. They dine in restaurants, visit local establishments and purchase goods and services. Some explore cultural attractions and heritage sites, while others extend their stay or return later for leisure or business. In this way, the economic value of an international gathering extends beyond the conference venue.

Every successful meeting creates activity across a much wider tourism and hospitality value chain - from accommodation establishments, transport operators and restaurants to event organisers, attractions, artisans and small businesses. It also gives delegates first-hand experience of South Africa as a place to visit, meet, invest and conduct business.

The quality of that experience matters. A seamless arrival, efficient transport, professional event infrastructure, warm hospitality and compelling destination experiences all contribute to perceptions of South Africa long after the meeting has ended.

From National Benefits to Regional Opportunity

The value becomes even greater when South Africa's position as an international gateway is connected to the broader Southern African tourism offering.

A delegate who travels to South Africa for a conference may add a leisure experience before returning home. An international visitor may combine South Africa with Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique, Lesotho or another destination in the region. Improved air access and stronger tourism routes can turn a single-country visit into a multi-destination journey.

That creates opportunities across borders. Regional tourism supports airlines, accommodation establishments, restaurants, tour operators, guides, transport providers, attractions, conservation areas, artisans and community enterprises.

It also supports tourism between Southern African countries themselves. Regional travel strengthens cultural connections while expanding the customer base available to businesses and destinations beyond their domestic markets.

The visitor economy can therefore become an important practical expression of regional integration - connecting people, places and economic opportunity.

Partnerships That Make the Difference

None of this can be achieved by government alone. Building a competitive regional visitor economy requires cooperation between governments, tourism authorities, the private sector, airlines, airports, investors, convention bureaux, local authorities, communities and development partners.

The same is true when South Africa hosts major international gatherings. National, provincial and local government must work alongside tourism authorities, security services, event organisers, accommodation providers, transport operators and other businesses to deliver a seamless visitor experience.

These partnerships can strengthen air access, improve tourism routes, encourage responsible investment and support sustainable destination development. Importantly, their value does not end when

a summit or conference closes.

The infrastructure, relationships, investor confidence, business connections and destination exposure generated through international engagement can create opportunities long after delegates have returned home.

Turning Cooperation into Shared Growth
Tourism growth requires more than destination marketing. It requires the right conditions for people to travel: connectivity, infrastructure, safety, investment, efficient services and destinations that are ready to welcome visitors. Regional cooperation helps build those conditions.

South Africa's leadership within SADC, together with its participation in wider continental and global forums, provides opportunities to strengthen relationships, deepen economic cooperation and position both the country and the region before influential international audiences. Tourism can translate some of those relationships into tangible economic activity.

A successful summit supports local businesses. Better regional connectivity opens new routes. Investment creates new products and experiences. Easier movement encourages multi-destination travel. And every positive visitor experience strengthens the reputation of Southern Africa as a place worth exploring. Ultimately, regional integration is about improving the lives of people across Southern Africa.

Tourism contributes to that ambition by creating jobs, supporting entrepreneurship, stimulating investment and connecting communities and economies across borders. Southern Africa's strength lies not only in the extraordinary diversity of its destinations, but in what those destinations can achieve together.

Written by Natasha Rockman

One region. Shared opportunity. And a visitor economy with the potential to grow across borders.





PHYSICAL ADDRESS

Tourism House, 17 Trevenna Street, Sunnyside, Pretoria 0002

POSTAL ADDRESS

Private Bag X424, Pretoria 0001

CONTACT INFORMATION

Call centre: +27 (0) 12 444 6730/6621

Call centre e-mail: callcentre@tourism.gov.za

Switchboard number: +27 (0) 12 444 6000

Switchboard fax: +27 (0) 12 444 7000

www.tourism.gov.za

 Department of Tourism @Tourism_gov_za departmentoftourism_ Tourism.gov.za