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CREDITS

PUBLISHER

Department of Tourism

EDITOR

Tasneem Carrim

EDITORIAL TEAM

- Seapei Lebele
- Sifiso Halama
- Lizanne Job

CONTRIBUTORS

- Ministry
- South African Tourism
- Sifiso Halama
- Annah Mashile
- Celeste Fortuin
- Marjorie Webb
- Yonela Makisi
- Gauteng Tourism Agency

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MINISTER PATRICIA DE LILLE END OF YEAR MESSAGE TO STAFF AND TOURISM STAKEHOLDERS

Colleagues and Tourism Sector stakeholders, what an eventful and busy year it has been.

As a country we held a successful general election which culminated in the formation of a Government of National Unity (GNU). While this process was complex, the transition from the 6th to the 7th administration has been smooth with a real sense of enthusiasm to get things done and take our work as government to the next level.

As articulated by President Cyril Ramaphosa, government has recommitted itself to the goals that will ensure progress for all our people.

The GNU has resolved to dedicate the next five years to actions that will advance three strategic priorities:

- Firstly, to drive inclusive growth and job creation.
- Secondly, to reduce poverty and tackle the high cost of living.
- Thirdly, to build a capable, ethical and developmental state.

I want to appeal to all colleagues and tourism sector stakeholders to internalise these priorities and ensure that it drives and motivates us each day and focuses our work to achieve these priorities.

Our mission every day must be to uplift our people and our communities.

The Department of Tourism is currently working on finalising our 5-year plan which will align to the GNU priorities, the National Development Plan, the Tourism Sector Master Plan and the National Tourism Sector Strategy.

As the NDP states: Tourism is one of the fastest growing economic sectors and there is an opportunity to increase employment in this sector.

This year has also been significant as we celebrated 30 years as a democracy and it was a time for deep reflection of how far we have come and how much we have achieved. It has also been a stark reminder of how quickly time goes and how much work we have left to do to ensure that more people taste the fruits of our democracy.

In the first few months of the 7th administration, a lot has been achieved for the tourism sector and it is thanks to the hard work of all our staff in the Department, SA Tourism and the partners across the tourism sector – our communities and the private sector. I also want to thank you all in advance for the work we will continue to do to drive growth in tourism.

Our success in tourism is shared and it is only possible through collaborative partnerships.

*Between January and September year, we welcomed over **6.5 million arrivals** of which **5 million** were from the African continent. This is a **6% increase** compared to the same period in 2023 for all arrivals and a **7% increase** on arrivals from the African continent compared to 2023.*

I am encouraged by these numbers but there are some markets where growth has slowed down giving us a clear sign that we need to do a lot more and work much harder to boost arrivals and effectively market our country as top travel destination.

Another exciting achievement this year was that in the first quarter of this year, tourism's direct and indirect contribution to the GDP was 8.8%, more than the construction, transport and mining sectors.

Significant progress has been made in the first 100 days of the 7th administration such as:

- On 4 October, we gazetted the White Paper on the Development and Promotion of Tourism in South Africa, following Cabinet approval on 18 September. The White Paper will provide guidance to the next phase of tourism development and ensure that the country as a tourism destination moves towards reaching its full potential.
- On 27 September, following Cabinet approval on 18 September, we gazetted the draft National Astro-Tourism Strategy Implementation Plan for a 30-day public comment period. Through close collaboration with the Department of Science and Innovation, the Department of Tourism produced the draft Astro Tourism Strategy which recognises the importance of this niche area of the sector in diversifying the tourism experience and competitiveness of our destination. By developing the Astro Tourism Strategy together with the Department of Science and Innovation, we became the first country on the African continent to do so.
- A key achievement we can all be very proud of is that the Department of Tourism received a clean audit for the financial year 2023/24.
- We have also made great progress with regard to our visa regime as Cabinet established an Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) comprising Home Affairs, Tourism and the State Security Agency and Operation Vulindlela in the Presidency to finalise improvements to the visa regime for key source markets, India and China. These markets are prioritised as they have been assessed as having the greatest potential to grow numbers.

Following collaboration between various Ministers and Departments, the Trusted Tour Operator Scheme (TTOS) was adopted. The TTOS is a critical step to reform the visa system that will enable

economic growth. With an initial focus on targeting travellers from China and India, the TTOS will remove some of the key obstacles standing in the way of South Africa becoming a favoured tourism destination for the second and fifth largest economies in the world.

This year we also continued to showcase South Africa at major tourism trade platforms such as ITB Berlin, IMEX Las Vegas, IBTM World in Barcelona, WTM London, WTM Africa Africa Travel Indaba and many others as part of our efforts to grow arrivals.

*As a tourism sector,
we have made
good progress this
year but our work is
cut out for us and
there is so much
more we need to
do to fully realise
tourism's potential.*

Colleagues and partners, our goal is to surpass 10 million arrivals for the year by the end of December. From January to September we received 6.5 million arrivals and we now have to push to get to 10 million arrivals by the end of December 2024. Our primary goal for the next five years is to achieve 15 million tourism arrivals annually as per the National Development Plan 2030 targets.

To achieve this, we need to develop action plans aligned to government's Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) for the next five years.

Our key priorities remain:

- Continue working in close partnership with social partners – the private sector and communities to address all aspects of tourism that will drive greater growth in arrivals.
- Facilitate improvements in the visa regime.
- Grow the number of direct flights to and from South Africa.
- Continue efforts for a more seamless tour operator license process.
- Invest in infrastructure and tourism sites that reflect and showcase our diverse culture and heritage for visitors to enjoy.
- To build a capable, ethical and developmental state and sector, we must implement programmes for demand-led skills and a greater use of technology such as AI to enhance our tourism offering.
- Drive a greater level of transformation through support to businesses through more effective implementation of the Tourism Incentive Programme mechanisms such as the Tourism Equity Fund, the Tourism Transformation Fund, the Market Access Support Programme, the Green Tourism Incentive Programme and the Tourism Grading Support Programme.

As a tourism sector, we have made good progress this year but our work is cut out for us and there is so much more we need to do to fully realise tourism's potential.

Thank you all once again for all your hard work but I appeal to all colleagues and partners to work together and push harder to promote this beautiful country we call home.

Take the time over the holiday period to reset and refresh so we can come back in 2025 invigorated to take our work to greater heights. I wish you all a blessed and safe festive season, enjoy the time with your loved ones and take care.

God Bless.

Ms Minister Patricia de Lille
Minister of Tourism

SOUTH AFRICA MAKES A STRONG IMPACT AT IMEX AMERICA: EXPANDING GLOBAL BUSINESS EVENTS REACH



Las Vegas, USA: South Africa proudly presented its vibrant and diverse business events offerings at IMEX America, held from 8 to 10 October 2024 at Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas. With over 15,000 participants and 5,000 buyers, the exhibition served as an ideal market access platform for 15 South African SMMEs and 21 exhibitors who joined the event as stand sharers in partnership with the South African National Convention Bureau (SANCb). This opportunity helped reinforce South Africa's reputation as a premier destination for meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE).

The participating SMMEs were selected and supported through the Department of Tourism's Tourism Incentive Programme (TIP), which is designed to empower tourism businesses, particularly SMMEs, through market access platforms. The TIP offers SMMEs opportunities to access international markets through trade exhibitions. Trade exhibitions like IMEX America are crucial for the growth and success of these businesses, as they

allow them to connect with global decision-makers in the MICE sector and demonstrate their unique offerings on a global scale.

Showcasing South Africa's Largest SMME Contingent

This year, South Africa made a notable impression by bringing the largest contingent of SMMEs to IMEX America, with a total of 36 stand sharers at the South Africa (SA) Pavilion, including 15 SMMEs and 21 exhibitors. These businesses not only gained exposure to key global business event decision-makers but also had the opportunity to generate valuable leads that could translate into future bidding opportunities. By tapping into SANCb's Bid Support Programme, these leads can be nurtured and ultimately converted into secured business for South Africa, enhancing the country's competitiveness in the global MICE industry.

This strong presence enabled SMMEs to achieve several important outcomes:

1. Engagement with global business events decision-makers: The SMMEs had direct access to key decision-makers, giving them valuable insight into the global market.
2. Experience in presenting to an international audience: The event offered a platform for SMMEs to showcase their offerings, enhancing their confidence and experience in presenting to global buyers.
3. Lead generation for future opportunities: Many SMMEs generated leads that they can now nurture into bidding opportunities.

After the show, these businesses can tap into the SANCb's Bid Support Programme to convert these leads into secured business, ensuring long-term success for both the SMMEs and South Africa's business events sector.

Reflections from South Africa's Stand Sharers

Bestina Rakgoale, from Besty Travel, a destination management company (DMC)

based in Limpopo Province, attended IMEX America for the first time. She shared her excitement, stating: "IMEX has been a fantastic platform for showcasing our travel packages. Our collective presence as stand sharers at the South African pavilion highlighted a wide variety of both business and leisure offerings. This combination truly showcases the best of South Africa, and it's been a wonderful opportunity to market our country collectively."

Similarly, Netto Maluka from Mbombela Experience Tours & Safaris, a tour operator based in Mpumalanga Province, reflected on the event's success: "The meetings I had were of high quality and showed a positive impact. We've established commercial partnerships with buyers who have real purchasing power. Beyond meeting and interacting with tourism professionals, the selection of fellow exhibitors was also outstanding. The SA pavilion was inviting and encouraged buyers to engage even longer."

Jabu Matsilele, from Buja Tours, a DMC based in Gauteng Province, shared his experience: "I had an amazing time at IMEX America, positioning South Africa as a welcoming, responsible tourism destination. It was a great opportunity to highlight the unique experiences that align with the needs of intrepid travellers."

A Platform for Business Growth

The success of the SA Pavilion at IMEX America highlights the value and economic benefits of participating in global trade shows. With its world-class event venues, quality accommodations, state-of-the-art conference facilities, and natural beauty, South Africa continues to draw attention as a business events destination. Participation in international platforms not only facilitates networking and collaborations but also opens doors to new markets and business ventures for South African tourism stakeholders.

Bjorn Hufkie, General Manager (GM): MICE Sales at South African Tourism, emphasised the importance of these global platforms: "Participating in international business expos and trade shows is absolutely crucial

for companies aiming to expand their horizons and make a mark on the global stage. Our investment in creating market access opportunities at global tradeshows offers businesses a fantastic opportunity to showcase their products and services to a worldwide audience, generating leads, driving sales, enhancing brand visibility, and opening doors to new markets and potential partnerships. They also provide invaluable insights into the competition and allow companies to elevate their brand visibility.

Moreover, these gatherings serve as a hub for generating valuable leads, driving sales, honing professional skills, and gaining a deep understanding of diverse cultural markets, all in the pursuit of maintaining a competitive edge in the global business arena.

Hufkie further emphasised the positive response from buyers: "Our exhibitors had an exceptional experience, engaging with buyers from across the globe including our key source markets. This level of interest is a strong indicator of the positive impact the outputs of these engagements will have on our business events industry, GDP and the overall economy."

Looking Ahead

As the event concluded, Hufkie reflected on the successful outcomes for the SA pavilion's efforts of IMEX America 2024: "This year has been fantastic for us at IMEX America. With close to 500 meetings, over 10 group presentations, and nearly 200 leads generated, the enthusiasm for South Africa as a destination is clear. We look forward to seeing the successful deals and partnerships that will emerge in the coming months."

Full list of Participating Exhibitors including SMMEs

- **Besty Travel** - DMC - Limpopo
- **Travel Click** - Travel Agent & Tour Operator Services - Western Cape
- **Fairest Cape Meander Tours** - Tour Operator - Western Cape
- **Dawn Travel & Tours** - DMC - Gauteng
- **Ubuhle Be Narha Tours** - DMC/Tour Operator - Gauteng

- **Mbombela Experience Tours & Safaris** - Tour Operator - Mpumalanga
- **Nano Travel** - DMC - Gauteng
- **Under African Skies** - Tour Operator - KwaZulu-Natal
- **Thabile Tours & Shuttles** - DMC - Free State
- **Sowetoo Tours** - DMC - Gauteng
- **Solo Travel Tours & Car Hire** - DMC - KwaZulu-Natal
- **PSN Frenzy Travel** - DMC - KwaZulu-Natal
- **Khalanga Safaris** - DMC - Mpumalanga
- **Syavaya Corporate Travel** - DMC - KwaZulu-Natal
- **Buja Tours** - DMC - Gauteng
- **Dragonfly Africa & Green Route Africa** - DMC - Western Cape
- **Sandown Tours and Incentives** - DMC - Gauteng
- **Aquila collection** - Tourist attraction - Western Cape
- **Peermont Hotels, Casinos and Resorts** - Accommodation/Conference venue - Gauteng
- **Century City Conference Centre and Hotels** - Accommodation/Conference venue - Western Cape
- **Southern Sun** - Accommodation/Conference venue - Regional
- **Cape Town International Convention Centre** - Conference venue - Western Cape and Beyond - Accommodation/DMC - Gauteng
- **Sandton Convention Centre** - Conference venue - Gauteng
- **Nelson Mandela Bay Convention Bureau** - Destination Marketing/ Bureau - Eastern Cape
- **Ikewana Events** - DMC - Gauteng
- **African Visitors** - DMC - Gauteng
- **Newmark Hotels and Reserves** - Accommodation - National
- **Amazing Africa** - DMC - Gauteng
- **SA Safaris Tours** - DMC - Western Cape
- **The Mad Lab** - DMC - Western Cape
- **Durban International Convention Centre** - Convention Centre - KwaZulu-Natal
- **Westin Hotel Cape Town** - Accommodation - Western Cape
- **Wilderness Safaris** - DMC - Gauteng
- **Cape Town & Western Cape Convention Bureau** - Tourism Authority - Western Cape
- **Unique Speaker Bureau International** - Speaker Bureau - Gauteng

By South African Tourism

THERE IS SO MUCH TO EXPLORE IN SOUTH AFRICA THIS SUMMER!



On 29 October 2024, South Africa's Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille, officially kicked off the new Summer Season Tourism Campaign at an event that took place in Bloemfontein in the Free State Province where she was also joined by various leaders from Government as well as private sector tourism representatives.

The "Gimme Summer That Sho't Left" Campaign is aimed at encouraging South Africans to explore their country by visiting various provinces, events, the wide variety of tourism experiences and establishments. The Summer Campaign is also targeted at inviting visitors from outside South Africa to explore all parts of South Africa.

Minister De Lille, together with the Department of Tourism and SA Tourism are committed to ensuring that the benefits of tourism are felt in all nine provinces. Minister De Lille intentionally chose to launch this year's Summer Campaign in the Free State to give exposure to lesser-visited provinces as well as all the hidden gems and amazing attractions spread all over our beautiful country.

With a wide variety of affordable, quality travel offerings, South African Tourism is using the Summer Campaign to invite all travellers to embrace the splendour and diversity of Mzansi showcasing an array of invigorating escapes while capturing the spirit of adventure.

"At its core, our Summer Campaign focuses on promoting affordable, memorable travel experiences in Mzansi. We invite both local and international tourists to explore our country and discover the numerous experiences including our natural wonders, cultural experiences as well both well-known and lesser-visited places and attractions. There are so many quality attractions and hidden gems in every province as well as unique experiences and things to see and do in our little towns, villages, townships and dorpiess," Minister De Lille observed.

A significant contributor to the economy, South Africa welcomed more than 5,8

million tourists in the first eight months of 2024 marking a 7% increase compared to the same period in 2023, according to the latest international tourist arrival statistics. As many as 21,5 million trips were taken by South Africans to explore the country between January 2024 and July 2024, demonstrating that domestic tourism is the bedrock of the tourism sector.

"Through our various travel offers and campaigns executed in our various markets as well as here at home, we want to show that travel to and within South Africa is accessible and affordable. The "Gimme Summer That Sho't Left" campaign aims to foster a sense of national pride among South Africans by encouraging them to explore and get to know their country better and continue to warmly welcome visitors whose visits stimulate the economy and contribute to job creation in South Africa," added Minister De Lille.

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), tourism's direct and indirect contribution to South Africa's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was 8,2% in 2023. It is estimated to rise to 8,8% by the end of 2024 and reach 10,4% of the GDP by 2030. Already in the first quarter of 2024, tourism's direct and indirect contribution to South Africa's GDP was 8,8%.

Tourism is therefore a vital sector for South Africa, at times contributing more to the GDP than transport, mining, and agriculture, and nearly matching government's contribution to the GDP.

The launch of the Summer Campaign was attended by the Premier of the Free State, Maqueen Letsoha-Mathae, MEC for Finance, Economic Development and Tourism in the Free State, Ketso Makume, various tourism industry stakeholders which included the Free State Department of Economic, Small Business Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, and Fedhasa.

By South African Tourism



#TravelWise in Mzansi

There's so much to see, and so many uniquely South African experiences to explore.

Whether you are traveling in a group or alone, we want to ensure you have an unforgettable stay as you explore our beautiful country responsibly.

Information on our top tourism attractions and activities is available at our Visitor Information Centre (VIC) in all our airports, and on www.southafrica.net

Our tourism offerings are best explored with the aid of certified tourist guides. We have more than 10 000 certified tourist guides across the country that can easily be identified with their unique badge and identification cards. Visit www.tourism.gov.za to access information on guides near your destination.

It's your country, Enjoy It!



#ResponsibleTraveller Tips



LOCATION:

- » Update the GPS App on your mobile device to accurately navigate through our country



CLIMATE:

South Africa's climate can get extremely hot and dry

- » Wear sunscreen and a hat
- » Wear the appropriate clothing and foot wear for outdoor activities
- » Carry enough water to stay hydrated
- » Avoid drinking water from rivers and streams



BE WATER WISE:

- » Only swim in designated areas

- » Read and follow the signs to ensure an enjoyable experience at the Beach
- » Take care when swimming as rip currents can pull you out to sea
- » Lifeguards are on call to ensure your safety



PERSONAL SAFETY:

We care about your safety

- » Ensure your personal possessions are with you at all times
- » Keep important documents in a safe at your hotel, and carry a copy whilst out and about
- » Do not share your banking details or pin code with anyone
- » Alert your hotel before going for a walk alone, or an excursion

Useful contacts: Should you require support or find yourself in distress, contact the authorities for assistance:

Police (SAPS): (T) 10111 | **Ambulance/Fire:** (T) 10177 | **Covid-19 emergency no:** 0800 029 99

Tourism Complaints: (T) 012 444 6000 or 0860 686 747, E-mail: complaints@tourism.gov.za



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SOUTH AFRICAN TOURISM



TOURISM MINISTER WELCOMES THE **CONCLUSION OF THE TOURISM POLICY REVIEW**

As we emerge from commemorating Tourism Month 2024, Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille welcomed Cabinet's approval of the *The White Paper on the Development and Promotion of Tourism in South Africa* which was gazetted on Friday, 4 October 2024.

"The finalisation of the White Paper is a milestone for the tourism sector as it will provide guidance to the next phase of tourism development and ensure that the country as a tourism destination moves towards reaching its full potential. The policy envisages a sustainable, competitive and inclusive tourism sector that leverages on innovation, digital technology, addresses barriers to tourism growth, builds partnerships and responds to the social imperatives of the country. It further will enable the tourism sector's contribution to the broader economy, employment and entrepreneurship whilst ensuring that the sector becomes resilient as it better responds to the future needs of the tourism sector," the Minister said.

The Department of Tourism reviewed the *Tourism White Paper* of 1996 as the tourism sector in South Africa is yet to exploit and reach its full potential. Moreover, significant policy developments and trends have emerged since 1996 which necessitated a policy review.

The tourism sector in South Africa has continued to grow over the past decade,

earning the reputation of being one of the most significant and fastest-growing sectors.

*According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), Tourism's direct and indirect contribution to South Africa's **GDP was 8.2%** in 2023. In terms of job creation, according to WTTC statistics, South Africa's tourism sector **employed 1.46 million** people in 2023 and the sector's contribution is expected to grow to **1.7 million jobs** in 2024.*

Despite its impressive contribution to the South African economy, the tourism sector lags behind relative to its potential.

To respond to this challenge, the Department of Tourism embarked on a process of reviewing the 1996 Tourism White Paper. The policy review process has resulted in a Tourism White Paper that seeks to sustainably and competitively grow the South African economy through an inclusive, inspiring, and visitor-oriented tourism sector.

The Tourism White Paper has been taken through tourism stakeholder consultation sessions across the country's nine provinces, including local government participation.

Consultations also took place with national departments and bilateral sessions with affected departments. The process also included a public comment process which was open for 60 days from 1 September 2023. The approximately 3,500 comments received, were all taken into consideration in developing and strengthening the Tourism White Paper.

The Tourism White Paper focusses on, promoting safety and security; facilitating ease of access; domestic tourism; crises management; promoting transformation; enabling technological developments and recommitments to the responsible tourism agenda.

"We would like to thank all stakeholders and the public who took the time to review and make input into the policy process. It was clear that stakeholders supported the policy review process, which was identified by many as long overdue. We now need a collective effort to build on the relationships that have been established as we move towards implementing the Tourism White Paper principles so that tourism can reach its full potential in South Africa," Minister De Lille said.

By Ministry

GREEN TOURISM INCENTIVE PROGRAMME (GTIP)



The 10th GTIP Application Window Period is Open. Closing Date: 28 February 2025.



The Green Tourism Incentive Programme (GTIP) is a resource efficiency incentive programme of the Department of Tourism whose objective is to encourage and support private sector tourism enterprises to adopt responsible tourism practices by moving towards the sustainable management and usage of energy and water resources.

The GTIP was launched in 2017 and through grant funding, financially assists private sector tourism enterprises to reduce the cost of investing in energy and water efficient solutions. Implementing GTIP funded interventions and identified solutions will not only ensure more responsible operations and environmental benefits, but after the projected payback period, the savings will continue to reduce the overall operational cost of the enterprise with direct and sustained benefits in terms of profitability and improved competitiveness. The programme is managed by the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) on behalf of the Department of Tourism and all applications and approvals are managed by the IDC.

The GTIP broadly offers the following benefits to qualifying tourism enterprises:

- the full cost for a new resource efficiency audit or the full cost for reviewing an existing resource efficiency audit;
- grant funding to qualifying small and micro enterprises on a sliding scale from 50% to 90% of the total cost of implementing resource efficiency interventions, which is capped at R 1 million; and
- qualifying enterprises may implement projects in phases in order to better manage their cash flow over a two-year project implementation period.

APPLICATION PROCEDURE

- More detailed information on the GTIP can be obtained from the attached GTIP brochure
- The GTIP application form can be downloaded from the IDC website: <https://idc.co.za/green-tourism-incentive-programme>
- Applicants should submit their application forms and supporting documents directly to the IDC at GTIPapplications@idc.co.za, who will assess applications for GTIP eligibility.
- All GTIP enquiries should be sent to: gtip@idc.co.za

Note that incomplete applications will not be considered for funding.



PRESIDENTIAL IMBIZO

JOURNEYS TO UMGABABA, KWAZULU-NATAL



On 8 November 2024, President Cyril Ramaphosa led the District Development Model (DDM) Presidential Imbizo in Umgababa, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). Umgababa, which forms part of eThekweni, lies between the bustling cities of Durban and Port Shepstone. This hidden gem is home to a blend of rural and suburban communities that exhibit the rich Zulu culture. From a tourism perspective, there are opportunities for tourism growth as the area is known for its beautiful beaches and popular fishing and picnic spots, ideal for an escape away from the hustle and bustle of city life.

A marquee was erected at the Umnini Sportsfield, as traditional leaders and community members came out in numbers to engage with the President and various senior Government officials. The Minister of Tourism, Ms Patricia De Lille and the Deputy

Minister of Tourism, Ms Makhotso Sotyu, joined this delegation of national, provincial and local government officials.

The Imbizo kicked off with a welcome address by the Executive Mayor of eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, Cllr Cyril Xaba. The Executive Mayor provided an overview of the city of eThekweni, expressing Government's commitment to quality service delivery, financial stability, and economic growth. The Department of Cooperate Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) Minister, Mr Velenkosini Hlabisa, highlighted the purpose of the day and the importance of the Presidential Imbizo as an ideal platform for Government to communicate directly with the public.

Community members were then given an opportunity to raise their concerns with the President. Issues raised included crime,

the rising cost of living, matters regarding education, and unemployment. Ministers in the Government of National Unity (GNU), who accompanied the President, responded to the respective issues and promised residents that they would follow up and provide solutions.

In response to an issue raised by Mr Philani Ngcobo, a community member, Tourism Minister De Lille, indicated that the Department of Tourism is working hard to rebuild the tourism sector in the province. "Tourism is a very important sector for this province. It is making a big contribution to the Gross Domestic Profit and economic growth of the province. The tourism sector has gone down in KZN, but we are working hard with the Presidential Task Team and the private sector to rebuild it," said Minister De Lille.

The Minister said that she has already agreed with the KZN Premier, Mr Thamsanqa Ntuli, that they will be meeting as a matter of urgency so they can see how they can collaborate with the plans of the province to do an aggressive marketing campaign in order to deal with all the negative perceptions around the province.

"For the summer season, the Department of Tourism partnered with the private sector and we already have 440 private sector tourist attractions that are offering discounted summer deals and I want to encourage all South Africans to look at the Sho't Left website to view all these discounts," added Minister De Lille.

In conclusion, the Minister thanked all the tourism staff and officials who will be working throughout the festive season and acknowledged their contribution in the tourism sector.

In addition to the interactive engagements, several government departments set up exhibition stands to provide valuable assistance to community members with their enquiries. Representatives from the Department of Tourism were also present, offering insights into a range of departmental programmes that include the Market Access Programme, the Green Tourism Incentives Programme and various skills development programmes.

By Sifiso Halama



DEPUTY MINISTER SOTYU LEADS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT VISIT IN KWAZULU-NATAL

On 17 October 2024, Deputy Minister of Tourism, Makhotso Sotyú, led a delegation of Deputy Ministers and select Committee Members to the Tourism Stakeholder Engagement Programme in King Cetshwayo District Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal. This initiative is part of Government's broader efforts to revitalise the tourism sector through the Tourism Sector Masterplan.

Situated in Empangeni Local Municipality, the Empangeni Civic Hall was filled to capacity, with attendees, eager for an informative session with executive government officials and senior local leaders. Over 20 tourism establishments exhibited their product offerings, which ranged from beadwork and leather accessories to tourism services such as tour guiding and glamping.

During the engagement, community members raised various concerns, primarily focused on land development and support for renovating structures to enhance tourism services. There was also a strong emphasis on strategies to attract international tourists to the region. In response, senior government officials provided valuable insights, outlining how their respective departments and municipalities could assist in addressing these issues.

In her address, Deputy Minister Sotyú spoke about the purpose and significance of stakeholder engagement. She highlighted the tourism potential of the district and underscored the importance of investing in the sector as a strategy to combat rising unemployment and stimulate economic growth in KwaZulu-Natal.

"If we look at the demographics of this district, we see that tourism has huge potential here. Most people who visit this

area do so to visit friends and relatives. Other primary reasons for visits are leisure and holiday tourism," the minister continued.

"Although domestic and international tourist numbers increased prior to the pandemic, we believe the King Cetshwayo District shows great promise as a destination and should continue to build on its strengths," Deputy Minister Sotyú added.

The Deputy Minister concluded her address by inviting stakeholders to partner with Government in addressing the country's socioeconomic challenges. "Lastly, I want us not to forget that much has been achieved over the past 30 years of freedom, but also note that Government realises that there are still many challenges that need to be addressed, including poverty, inequality and unemployment," she said.

"To address these, government departments and municipalities have created programmes to support South Africans, their businesses and communities. I encourage you to learn more about these opportunities in order that we may address these challenges together," the Deputy Minister concluded.

The community engagement was followed by a community engagement and an oversight visit to the Muzi Pan Canoeing Capital Project in the uMkhanyakude District Municipality on 18 October 2024. The Muzi Pan Canoeing Project is an Expanded Public Works Programme-funded initiative implemented by the Development Bank of South Africa.

Located on the eastern boundary of the Mkuze Game Reserve, the project is set along a 15 km stretch of water within the iSimangaliso Wetland Park, which forms a natural boundary between the park and the

KwaJobe tribal land. The site holds significant potential as a tourism destination, offering activities such as sightseeing, birdwatching, hiking, and canoeing. Ultimately, the project aims to provide accommodation facilities for tourists, further enhancing the region's appeal as a hub for ecotourism and adventure tourism.

By Sifiso Halama



NATIONAL TOURISM CAREERS EXPO

KICKS OFF FOR THE FIRST TIME IN LIMPOPO PROVINCE



Deputy Minister of Tourism Ms Maggie Sotyu officially opened the 2024 National Tourism Careers Expo (NTCE) in the Limpopo Province, with more than 10 000 learners, educators and unemployed youth participating. This is the first year ever that the NTCE was held in Limpopo, at the City of Polokwane's New Peter Mokaba Stadium, from 8 to 10 October 2024.

NTCE is a collaborative initiative between the Department of Tourism (NDT), the Culture, Arts, Tourism, Hospitality & Sport Education Training Authority (CATHSSETA), the Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism (LEDET), and its provincial marketing agency, the Limpopo Tourism Agency (LTA). LTA will host the NTCE for the next three years, from 2024 through 2026.

It is an interactive three-day event that is held annually to promote tourism as a career, profession, and business of choice to learners from high schools, TVET Colleges and University students, out-of-school youth, and unemployed graduates.

This year's theme was "Tourism and Peace – 30 years of connecting people to places and cultures." The expo highlighted how our country's diversity has peacefully brought us together in a democratic South Africa, and how tourism continues to promote peace, justice, cultural appreciation, social cohesion, and economic growth.

Deputy Minister Sotyu said, "We are excited that the NTCE is being held in the thriving Limpopo Province. As a cradle of our cultural and wildlife heritage, the Limpopo Province

contributes immensely to the tourism economy, offering unique cultural and nature experiences that consistently draw in international and domestic visitors."

"The NTCE is a leading platform for communicating career, entrepreneurial and the educational prospects and opportunities for youth in the tourism sector. Hosting the event in the City of Polokwane will elevate the Province's capacity to host large conferences, meeting and exhibitions introducing a MICE clientele in the offerings," the Deputy Minister continued.

The NTCE finds its credence in the objectives of the National Tourism Sector Strategy (NTSS) and the Tourism Sector Human Resource Development (TSHRD) strategy that seeks to address the needs of the sector in relation

to human resource development planning, coordination and information management; skills and capacity development, and the enhancement of tourism, hospitality, conservation education and training systems.

Since its inception in 2008, the expo has bridged the information gap and affording thousands of youth an opportunity to directly interact with tourism stakeholders and businesses at the exhibitions, motivational talks, and through the interactive skill empowerment platforms at the NTCE.

Over the years, the NTCE has adapted to evolving technological trends to include information on career paths in digital transformation such as artificial intelligence (AI), and further training for demand-led skills. Inversely, the expo becomes a platform for the industry to present itself as a business and employer of choice.

The Chefs Corner provided a physical demonstration of the culinary arts, where learners interested in a culinary career were fascinated by the cook-offs hosted by the graduates of the National Youth Chefs Training Programme.

The Mixology Corner brought the art of creating fun, enjoyable beverages to life. Mixology is a special craft and an age-old tradition of skilfully mixing various drinks and ingredients to create cocktails with or without alcohol. While mixology and bartending are related, it is generally accepted that a mixologist creates innovative cocktails often using unique or uncommon ingredients, researching and reimagining classic cocktails.

The Hospitality Corner offered an insight into the diverse range of careers from hotel and event management to casino directors, while the Nature Conservation

Corner had a direct impact on the future sustainability of tourism. Youth interested in nature and tourism gained insight into how to join this industry.

The Virtual Classroom and Recruitment Arena was filled with job seekers, engaging with potential employers and getting the low-down on job hunting, what employers are looking for, how to craft a CV and how to prepare for interviews.

“Tourism is a channel for the youth to learn new things and discover the world through diverse cultures. The 2024 NTCE will surely inspire present and prospective tourism learners and unemployed youth to rise to new heights to advance their careers and business opportunities in an inclusive sector,” Deputy Minister Sotyru concluded.

By Annah Mashile





UNLOCKING NEW HORIZONS: SOUTH AFRICAN TOURIST GUIDES EMBARK ON A TRANSFORMATIVE CULTURAL IMMERSION PROGRAMME IN CHINA

From 11 – 31 October 2024, South African tourist guides participated in an in-depth cultural immersion programme, expertly facilitated by the Beijing International Chinese College (BICC) and sponsored by the Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China. This 21-day programme combined lectures, practical excursions, and cultural experiences designed to enhance the guides' understanding of Chinese culture and tourism practices. The BICC, along with governmental officials and experienced lecturers, provided valuable insights into China's social, economic, and tourism developments, particularly its rapid transformation over recent decades.

In South Africa, tourist guiding is a regulated profession governed by the Tourism Act No. 3 of 2014. As the tourism sector continues to evolve, the demand for more skilled and versatile guides has risen significantly. Based on the trends in the guiding sector, the Department of Tourism found that the demand for quality services and more skilled tourist guides was increasing. To remain

competitive and sustain employment and business opportunities, South African tourist guides need to develop a range of skills, including proficiency in foreign languages, specialised knowledge in niche areas, and the ability to deliver authentic, exceptional customer experiences.

Given the growing significance of the Chinese tourism market, the Department recognised Mandarin language proficiency as a strategic opportunity for South African tourist guides. China is one of the largest outbound tourism markets globally, with unparalleled spending power that presents significant opportunities for South Africa's tourism industry. As a result, the Department has taken proactive steps to enhance the skills of South African tourist guides by launching the Mandarin Language Training Programme in 2019.

Strong bilateral relations between South Africa and China, underpinned by two key Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), have been instrumental in fostering tourism

growth between the two nations. The first MoU, signed in 2002, granted South Africa Approved Destination Status (ADS), enabling the country to receive Chinese tourist groups and to open a destination marketing office in Beijing.

The second MoU, signed in 2013, serves as an institutional mechanism to strengthen bilateral relations on cooperation in the field of tourism. Areas of cooperation in the MoU include the encouragement of information sharing, tourism investment, marketing and promotion, skills development and training, and tourism safety and service standards. In alignment with the skills and training component of this MoU, the Chinese Embassy has been a key partner in supporting the department's Mandarin Language Programme. The initiative has been rolled out across all nine provinces, offering extensive language training to tourist guides, many of whom have successfully passed the Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (HSK) exams at levels 1 and 2, which enables them to guide tours in Mandarin.

However, the global COVID-19 pandemic impacted the programme, particularly in the guiding sector, whereby many learners who passed the HSK level 1 exam were unable to continue with phase 2 of the training due to changing employment circumstances and other opportunities. As a result, only 34 guides progressed to phase 2 of the Mandarin Language Training Programme. The Department remained committed to advancing the programme and identified phase 3, which entailed a cultural immersion programme in China with an additional focus on the sustainable use of language skills, as a crucial next step. Only guides who passed HSK levels 1 and 2 were eligible for phase 3, and 22 guides were recommended for the cultural immersion in China. However, seven of the selected participants were unable to attend for various reasons.

List of Participants

- Ms Samantha Alfonse
- Mr Randall Davids
- Mr Katleho Dlamini
- Ms Lindokuhle Dos Santos
- Mr Nelson Qwetha
- Ms Maemu Mandaha
- Mr Gerald Maine
- Ms Sasekani Makhubele
- Mr Jeremia Maleto
- Mr Evick Mankero
- Ms Hazel Matipa
- Mr Katleho Matlokotsi
- Mr Thokozani Mlambo
- Ms Sophie Mompe
- Ms Mamonkeng Siboza
- Mr Kwandiwe Waxa

A welcome banquet and opening ceremony were held at the start of the programme, hosted by the senior management team at BICC. The programme's itinerary was rich in both theoretical and practical learning experiences. Key lectures included topics such as "China's Basic Conditions," "Overview of Chinese Tourist Guides & Practical Skills," and "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era." Participants also explored the preferences of Chinese outbound tourists through a case-based lecture and learned about the importance of Chinese Pinyin, which is essential for Mandarin pronunciation and fluency.

Cultural immersion was a significant component of the programme. Guides visited iconic Chinese landmarks such as the Great Wall of China, where they learned about ancient Chinese military defense systems and experienced the grandeur of this historical structure. They also attended performances, such as the acrobatics of Han Feng, to appreciate the charm of China's intangible cultural heritage. Other cultural visits included the Summer Palace, where



participants experienced the rich history of Chinese art and architecture, and the Beijing Enamel Factory, which offered insights into Chinese craftsmanship and the importance of non-heritage cultures like enameling.

In addition to cultural experiences, the programme featured visits to key tourism businesses and institutions. Guides toured the U-Tour Travel Agency, China's only travel agency listed on the stock exchange, to learn about its operations and explore opportunities for collaboration with South African tourism businesses. They also visited the Tourism College of Beijing, where they learned about the integration of smart technology in tourism education.

Practical excursions were arranged to various attractions, tourism businesses and cultural sites. Guides interacted with local Chinese officials and entrepreneurs, discussing the current socio-economic landscape, investment opportunities, and potential avenues for tourism growth. These interactions were valuable for building relationships that could facilitate future tourism exchanges between South Africa and China.

At the conclusion of the programme, a closing ceremony was held to celebrate the successful completion of the cultural immersion. All participants received certificates of completion, marking their achievements in both language proficiency and cultural understanding.

The Mandarin Language Programme for South African tourist guides represents a significant step in strengthening South Africa's position in the global tourism market, particularly with Chinese tourists. By equipping guides with the language skills and cultural knowledge necessary to cater to this growing market, the Department of Tourism is ensuring that South Africa is well-prepared to meet the needs of Chinese visitors, fostering growth in both tourism and economic development. Through this programme, South African guides are not only enhancing their professional skills but also contributing to the broader goal of building stronger, more sustainable tourism relations between South Africa and China.

By Sifiso Halama and Celeste Fortuin

COLLABORATIONS ACHIEVED, AND SMALL, MICRO AND MEDIUM SIZED ENTERPRISES (SMMES) IN XHARIEP DISTRICT BENEFIT MUTUALLY



Xhariep District held a Tourism Information Sharing (TIS) session at Gariep A - Forever Resort, Gariep Dam, on 31 October 2024. The session was hosted by the Department of Tourism, in collaboration with the Free State Department of Economic, Small Business Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs (DESTEA) and the Xhariep District Municipality.

The tourism sector was profoundly affected by the Covid-19 Pandemic, resulting in near-total travel breakdown, large-scale job losses and widespread business closures in tourism. The Tourism Sector Recovery Plan highlights the need to revitalise and sustain tourism. Thus, the District TIS Programme, which started in 2018, has been aligned to these targets. By 2021, the programme focused on the combination of recovery plans, recovery strategies and recovery initiatives from different SMME recovery strategies, viewed on a single platform in a district. The programme provides a broad spectrum of financial and non-financial support, skills development and multiple opportunities in the public and private sector to bolster SMMEs in tourism. The purpose of this session was to assist SMMEs by making information regarding available opportunities in the sector, more accessible.

The Xhariep District TIS was attended by local tourism product and business owners, tourism representatives from within the district, and officials from across the Free State Province and neighbouring districts. The District representative, Mr Oupa Kale, gave a presentation on the district's plans to further expand its tourism base. It plans to enhance its efforts in sustainable, adventure and cultural tourism to attract an array of visitors, and to develop tourism that financially benefits local communities and creates sustainable economic opportunities. The district is well known for its vast landscape and biodiversity, including local municipalities such as the Mokhotlong, Kopanong and Letsemeng as key attractions for the Free State Province.

In line with the goals of the National Tourism Sector Strategy (NTSS), the TIS will also contribute to creating access to tourism information, promoting the strategies and the initiatives of the Department of Tourism. The TIS will offer vital tools such as information and opportunities, to tourism-related enterprises; particularly the SMMEs and those in local and rural areas.

In the Xhariep session, programme champions from the National Empowerment Fund (NEF) Mr Christoph Peters and

Department of Tourism's, Ms. Mosuping Mofokeng and Modjadji Malatji presented on various initiatives such as the Tourism Incentive Programme (TIP), the grading system of the Tourism Grading Support Programme (TGCSA), and the Market Access Support Programme (MASP). They elaborated on their contributions to supporting travel incentives, lodging evaluations and market access for tourism enterprises. Furthermore, the Tourism Transformation Fund (TTF) and Green Tourism Incentive Programme (GTIP) are now accepting applications from qualifying tourism enterprises with details accessible on the departmental website (www.tourism.gov.za).

During the open floor session with the SMMEs, several important points were raised including businesses' hesitance to seek loan-based funding, sighting the insufficient dissemination of information from government sources to the intended beneficiaries. Participants expressed eagerness for a follow-through meeting in a similar manner with the district and province facilitating in the arrangement, planning and invitation of representatives of the Department of Tourism to participate.

The vote of thanks was concluded by Mr Kale of Xhariep District Municipality, who also acknowledged the participation of all stakeholders attending the session. He lauded the Department of Tourism for this initiative. "This drove stakeholders to collaborate more closely on revitalising the tourism industry, and SMMEs were able to gain valuable knowledge from the session in the district," he said.

The TIS continues to fulfil the objectives of the Local Government Tourism Support Framework by providing communication channels for departmental priorities and initiatives, facilitating collaboration and information sharing, and cultivating strong inter-governmental partnerships in the sector. This aims to promote tourism projects in an integrated approach across all three (3) spheres of government, involving all stakeholders without exception. The programme related calendar and regional schedules will be published on the departmental website.

By Marjorie Webb and Yonela Makisi

JOINT TOURISM AWARENESS CAMPAIGN - NORTH WEST PROVINCE



The Roadside Activation campaign took place from 4 to 8 November 2024 on the Sun City road, R556. It was a beautiful week filled with numerous activities to promote tourism safety in the North West Province. The Department of Tourism, in collaboration with North West Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism hosted this joint tourism safety awareness campaign as part of social tourism.

Key tourism attractions such as Sun City Resort were focal points during the campaign. It assisted in raising awareness and helping to reduce the number of crime incidents aimed at tourists who are visiting the province, as well as the communities that host the tourists. Campaigns like these help to reduce tourists' vulnerabilities and eliminate opportunities for violent crime aimed at tourist operations.

The week-long campaign kicked off with a workshop to provide information to community members, stakeholders, Government departments and entities as well as the private sector. This was followed by a peaceful walk from Ledig Village (Bakubung

Road) to the Sun Valley Shopping complex, to encourage community members to take the lead in ensuring safe communities for safe tourism activities and services.

Campaigns like these help to reduce tourists' vulnerabilities and eliminate opportunities for violent crime aimed at tourist operations.

Tourism is fundamentally a collaborative endeavour, consisting of a complex network of stakeholders and groups that have an interest in its planning, development, management and marketing. The support, commitment and cooperation of these stakeholders, both in the public and private sectors, is essential for the long-term sustainability. The success of the cooperation and coordination hinges on all the relevant stakeholders working together seamlessly.

Among the stakeholders were the Cross-Border Road Transport Agency, Moses Kotane Traffic Department, South African Police Services and Mankweng Game Trackers. The multidisciplinary nature of tourism demands that stakeholder collaboration and partnerships become the main elements for successful growth and development of the sector.

Pertinent tourism information such as tourist safety tips in identified newsletters, magazines, websites, and marketing materials were shared with motorists and pedestrians.

The week wrapped up with a Clean-Up campaign at Sun Village complex, encouraging communities close to tourism attractions to avoid littering and conduct business in clean, safe and conducive environment. The key take-away point communicated through this event was that the success or failure of a tourism destination hinges on its ability to provide a safe and secure environment for visitors.

By Annah Mashile

GAUTENG ATTRACTS MORE THAN HALF OF SOUTH AFRICA'S BUSINESS EVENTS AND REVENUE



Gauteng's capacity to host quality business and lifestyle events continues to be enhanced as the province wins more bids and welcomes quality business events more than any destination or city in South Africa and the region. In Gauteng we use our business positioning to mainstream our leisure tourism offerings in the creation of a sustainable, livable, visitable, and economically growing destination.

The characteristics that give our destination the competitive advantage includes amongst others, the proximity to major world class international airports and air access, and efficient public transportation services with the Gautrain creating a compelling proposition, and a host of industry thought leaders and experts across the many high-growth sectors. This coupled with the availability of high-quality venues, a wide range of accommodation options, infrastructure and technological support, skilled workforce, and head offices of major global corporations together with our undisputed pleasant weather, position Gauteng as the desirable destination for business tourism events.

Since October 2024, the golden province hosted several lifestyle events, conferences, and exhibition from different sectors, resulting in unprecedented bed nights sales, increased tourism revenue and the creation of temporary and sustainable jobs for the destination as referenced by the employment and labour survey results released this week.

The AI Expo Africa took place at the Sandton Convention Centre in October, uniting over 10 000 enterprises buyers, suppliers, and innovators across the African continent.

This was followed by the prestigious South African Music Awards (SAMAs) at Gallagher Convention Centre, the Feather Awards & Festival at 1 Central Fox, World Association for Culture & Heritage Global Leadership Summit, Smart Mobility Africa Summit, and the 17th International Conference on Theory & Practice of Electronic Governance (ICEGOV) 2024 to name but just a few.

The month of November also started on a high note with the hosting of the African Bank Soweto Marathon, Soweto Investment Conference and Kunye Music Festival in Linksfield. The vibrancy and drive to keep our pole position is continuing as more business and lifestyle events are confirmed for this week into the weekend. The Music & Lifestyle Expo will host panel discussion and exhibition on the music lifestyle products in South Africa on 15 and 16 November at Sandton Convention Centre. This two-day event offers an unparalleled platform for both business and consumer engagement. Attendees can explore a diverse range of exhibits and activities tailored for art aficionados, lifestyle enthusiasts, foodies, and industry professionals alike.

Another highlight in the business of music is the Black Coffee Foundation Music Conference & Exhibition which will bring together music industry leaders, recording companies, digital and streaming services, artists, and music business enthusiasts for a day of insights, learning and inspiration. The music conference is scheduled for Friday 15 November 2024 at the Empire Venue in Parktown and will culminate into a charity concert at St David's Marist to raise funds for underprivileged children who cannot afford access to such schools in the province.

On the exhibition front, the 9th edition of Automechanika Johannesburg is set to return from 19-21 November, promising an exceptional platform for automotive industry professionals across sub-Saharan Africa. Visitors will get an opportunity to experience innovation in the sector and be exposed to new technologies and trends represented by the entire value chain of automotive industry. Parallel to Automechanika will be the Futuroad Johannesburg all at the Joburg Expo Centre. The business and events hosting doesn't stop as we continue in November with the World Anthropological Congress from 11-15 November and the Rage Expo from 29 November to 1 December 2024 closing the year with hard work, focus and determination.

Gauteng means business with the business of meetings, conventions, conferences, events, and exhibitions. This is our bread and butter, a key component of what makes up destination Gauteng and its competitive and comparative advantages. For us these are not just a list of hosted or to be hosted events, they represent a continued stamp of approval and preference by various international associations and sector leaders on Gauteng's ability and expertise in providing exceptional and quality convention and events hosting services, explained Gauteng Tourism Chief Executive Officer Sthembiso Dlamini.

For more information on what to do and where to go this season in Gauteng, visit www.gauteng.net. Follow @visitgauteng on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Tik Tok](#) and I Love Gauteng on [Facebook](#) and download the Visit Gauteng mobile app on App store and Google play.

By Gauteng Tourism Agency



SATOVITO'S THIRD INTRA-TRADE CONFERENCE – MPUMALANGA

The South African Township Village Tourism Association (SATOVITO) held their third intra conference from 21 to 22 November 2024 at Elangeni Lodge in Nkomazi, Mpumalanga Province. This conference was attended by delegates from all nine provinces, representing all different offerings in the tourism sector from accommodation, catering, shuttle services, spa treatments, adventure, camping and many more.

Vibrant and resilient, SATOVITO held this conference, following its resounding successes in Limpopo (2022) and the Free State in 2023. The conference aims to expand the tourism value chain and elevate communities' unique offerings within South Africa's thriving tourism landscape. This year's theme was "Value Chain Development".

To strengthen public-private partnerships, the conference underscores the power of collaboration, made possible through a Memorandum of Agreement between the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA) and other stakeholders, including the Nkomazi Local Municipality. This partnership reflects the strong synergy between the private and public sectors, which is vital to unlocking opportunities for Township and Village Tourism businesses.

During his message of support, Director-General of the Department of Tourism, Victor Tharage, said, "There is power in association because it is difficult to be alone. If you are

associated with SATOVITO you have purpose and more. Come together and strategise on platforms you want to target; it will be difficult for anyone to assist you as they do not know your needs. Come together and negotiate on certain deals to get more buying discounts on tourism products."

He went further to say, "Do not leave big businesses without leveraging them; they have enterprise and supplier demand. Attend workshops, network, package your products together and brand them. The Market Access Programme was advertised on all social media platforms. It's the responsibility of individual businesses to make an application."

"There is a great future for SATOVITO as an association. Engage more and discuss what you require the Department to assist you with," the Director-General continued.

A keynote speaker was a Member of the Executive Council (MEC), Ms Makhosazane Masilela of Economic Development and Tourism. Masilela said, "As Mpumalanga we are privileged to be hosting SATOVITO and we will provide service excellence and warmth from the people of Mpumalanga as we deliver a world-class experience in our province."

"Our province has improved in its tourism statistics and it's the second most-preferred tourism province of choice. As we are warming up to the festive season I would like to invite tourists to Mpumalanga province as there is a lot on offer. We are grateful that our

Department and its entity entered a memo of agreement and consensus to support tourism and collaborate on economic employment opportunities in the tourism sector; a growing sector with resilience."

"It is important to realise that townships and villages are pivotal to the growth of domestic tourism. This sector will continue to thrive as we develop more tourism products across the country," Ms Masilela continued.

Conference attendees eagerly anticipated a rich programme featuring discussions such as Tourism Safety; a key agenda topic aimed at ensuring safe and sustainable tourism practices. Exhibitions of over 50 township and village tourism products were on display, offering unparalleled networking and trade opportunities.

"Service excellence and local products make tourists want to visit more. Therefore, product readiness is important and should be managed effectively. Train your staff to provide service excellence and play in the value chain register with tour operators. Invest and grow: dream big!" concluded MEC Masilela.

By Annah Mashile





IT'S WILD HOW MUCH POTENTIAL THERE IS: **UNLOCKING THE POWER OF SOUTH AFRICA'S WILDLIFE TOURISM**

Wildlife is a centrepiece of South Africa's tourism industry, renowned globally for offering exceptional safari and nature experiences. As a premier wildlife destination, South Africa attracts a significant number of tourists, primarily from Europe and the Americas (when compared to the other regions). In 2023, about 91% of wildlife tourists came from these regions, with countries like Norway showing a robust recovery and the highest incidence (61% in 2023) in tourist numbers. This article explores the state of wildlife tourism in South Africa, including key trends, economic impacts, challenges, and solutions to ensure continued growth.

The Current State of Wildlife Tourism in South Africa

Wildlife and safari are central to South Africa's brand, with the country consistently ranked among the world's top destinations for these experiences. The iconic attraction of the Kruger National Park has driven faster recovery to the Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces. Limpopo, for example, has already

achieved 91% of its 2019 visitor numbers. On the other hand, provinces such as the Western Cape, which attract higher overall tourist numbers, are recovering at a slower pace with regard to wildlife tourism, currently reaching only 57.6% of their pre-pandemic levels.

One of the most significant shifts has been in the demographics of wildlife tourists. In 2023, 58% of wildlife visitors were over 35, (pre-pandemic this was 48%) reflecting a shift from the slightly younger audience. Another shift was that European tourists are now more likely to travel with partners than alone. In addition, booking cycles have shortened dramatically, with many tourists booking trips just three months in advance, highlighting a shift in traveller behaviour.

The Lucrative Wildlife Market: A Strong Economic Engine

Despite these changes in traveller profiles, the economic contribution of wildlife tourism remains substantial. In 2023, the average wildlife tourist spent R31,200 per

person, nearly three times the average tourist expenditure in South Africa (R11,800). This high level of spending led to a total of R28 billion in revenue, driven by tourists from Europe and the Americas, who stay longer and often choose higher-end accommodations like game lodges.

Wildlife tourists are some of the highest spenders in South Africa. In 2023, these visitors spent on average, R1,700 per day, significantly more than the average tourist spend of R840 per day. This considerable spending is largely due to the premium nature of wildlife experiences - luxury game lodges, guided safaris, and conservation-focused activities.

European and American tourists are leading this recovery. They make up most wildlife visitors, with tourists from these regions spending over R32,000 each on their trips, a number that is almost back to pre-pandemic levels. The economic impact of these high-spending tourists underscores the importance of focusing on the wildlife tourism sector to drive overall tourism recovery.

Key Challenges Facing Wildlife Tourism

While wildlife tourism is rebounding, it has not fully recovered from the pandemic. In 2023, 907,914 wildlife tourists visited South Africa, only 66.5% of the 2019 figure. This recovery has been wildly uneven and has exposed vulnerabilities in the industry. For instance, while provinces like Limpopo have recovered quickly, others, such as the Western Cape, have lagged. Even the iconic Kruger National Park saw a dip in visitor numbers, falling from the 7th to the 9th most-visited attraction in South Africa. The top visited attractions for wildlife tourists in 2023 were, V&A Waterfront, Cape Town City Centre and Cape Point. Indicating that even though wildlife is a driver, a variety of experiences are expected in an itinerary.

Another challenge is the over-reliance on wildlife tourists from Europe and the Americas, who account for 91% of wildlife visitors. This concentration creates risk, as economic downturns or travel disruptions in these regions could significantly impact South Africa's wildlife tourism market. Moreover, markets like Asia and Australasia are still well below pre-pandemic levels, pointing to a need for broader market diversification.

Safety concerns and the high cost of long-haul flights are also barriers to attracting more wildlife tourists. For South Africa to sustain growth, these issues must be addressed to ensure the country remains competitive in the global wildlife tourism market.

Solutions and Strategies for Growth

To overcome these challenges and fully unlock the potential of the wildlife market, several strategies should be pursued:

1. Expanding Direct Air Access

Improving access to South Africa by increasing the number of direct flights from key source markets could stimulate tourism. By lowering airfares and reducing travel time, South Africa can become more attractive to wildlife tourists. Collaborating with airlines to introduce more direct routes or offer competitive fares could significantly boost arrivals. Particularly direct into Kruger International

Airport in Mpumalanga and enabling the resumption of international flights to and from Polokwane International Airport.

2. Diversifying Wildlife Tourism Packages

The shift toward older, more affluent tourists presents an opportunity to offer tailored travel packages. Special "couples packages" could include luxury game lodges, conservation tours, and wellness experiences, catering to this demographic. Additionally, promoting family-friendly wildlife activities, such as educational safaris, would appeal to families seeking meaningful, multigenerational travel experiences.

3. Promoting Conservation and Sustainability

As environmental awareness increases, many travellers seek experiences that align with their values. Wildlife tourism operators should emphasise sustainable practices and conservation efforts, enhancing South Africa's image as a responsible tourism destination. By engaging tourists in conservation projects and offering eco-friendly wildlife experiences, operators can add value while promoting biodiversity preservation.

4. Marketing to New Regions

While Europe and the Americas remain key markets, there is a need to increase marketing and promotion to grow wildlife tourism from regions like Asia, Australasia, the Africa Air markets and the Middle East. Targeted marketing campaigns and partnerships to diversify the wildlife offerings at different price points with regional travel agencies could attract tourists from these regions. Promoting wildlife tourism as part of broader cultural and adventure

experiences could also help diversify South Africa's visitor base.

5. Supporting Local Communities

For wildlife tourism to be truly sustainable, local communities must benefit directly. Encouraging tourists to engage with local cultures, purchase from local artisans, and participate in community-led tours can amplify the positive impact of tourism on rural economies. This not only enriches the tourist experience but also ensures long-term support for conservation efforts.

Investment in product development that prioritises minimal environmental impact by incorporating Indigenous knowledge and using eco-friendly construction materials. This approach enhances sustainability while expanding the tourism experience beyond wildlife and nature, showcasing the region's rich history, culture, myths, legends, and other creative, unique offerings. By doing so, it adds depth and appeal to areas known for wildlife, making them even more compelling as tourist destinations.

South Africa's wildlife tourism sector remains a powerful engine for economic growth, contributing R28 billion in 2023 alone. Despite the ongoing challenges posed by the pandemic, such as uneven regional recovery and shifting traveller demographics, the potential for growth is immense. By addressing key issues - such as air access, safety concerns, and the range of tourism packages at different price points - South Africa can secure its position as a global leader in wildlife tourism.

Sources of data: SAT's Departure Survey, SAT's Brand Tracker Survey, UNWTO

By South African Tourism



MEETINGS AFRICA AND AFRICA'S TRAVEL INDABA BACK FOR 2025 EDITIONS!



Mark your calendars for the 2025 editions of the African continent's trade events designed to elevate the African continent's leisure tourism and business events industry.

South African Tourism-owned Meetings Africa and Africa's Travel Indaba are back in 2025 and are set to enhance business connections and networking opportunities. These Pan Africa shows will once again offer robust agendas featuring a diverse range of exhibitors, insightful workshops, and keynote presentations from industry leaders and experts, providing opportunities for global tourism professionals to connect, collaborate, and create lasting value and economic impact.

Meetings Africa, the continent's premier business events trade show, is set to take place from the 24th to the 26th of February at the Sandton Convention Centre in Johannesburg, Gauteng province, in partnership with the Gauteng Tourism Authority and Johannesburg Tourism Company.

Africa's Travel Indaba will take place from the 12th to the 15th of May at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli Convention Centre in Durban

in partnership with Durban Tourism and Tourism KwaZulu-Natal and the KwaZulu-Natal Film Commission.

Meetings Africa focuses on highlighting the African business events products and promoting closer collaboration for the continent sector's growth. The show will again feature a dedicated educational programme that unites and builds partnerships, driving the business events sector forward. By connecting the best of the African business events industry with relevant buyers from across the globe, Meetings Africa creates an environment conducive to transacting and building quality connections.

Meetings Africa 2025 will commence with a Business Opportunity Networking Day (BONDay) on 24 February 2025, providing a platform for professionals to forge new partnerships, explore collaborative ventures, and gain invaluable insights from industry experts. This exclusive prelude sets the stage for the main event, ensuring attendees maximise their networking potential.

Under the theme, "Africa's Success Built on Quality Connections", Meetings Africa

emphasises the importance of forging strong, meaningful relationships in driving the continent's economic progress and industry innovation. The trade show will also provide a platform to showcase Africa's leading and diverse business event offerings to decision-makers from key source markets worldwide.

Reflecting on Meetings Africa's Success of 2024:

- 382 exhibitors representing 22 African countries displayed the diverse and dynamic nature of the continent's tourism landscape.
- 371 international and local buyers were in attendance, with a total of 3,480 delegates engaged in the event, underscoring its significance in the global MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) calendar.
- Over 8,150 meetings were conducted between buyers and exhibitors, highlighting the event's role in creating substantial business opportunities.
- The airline pavilion featured nine airlines, emphasising the critical role of aviation in connecting the continent.
- 25 SMMEs (Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises) displayed their innovative

solutions, demonstrating Africa's entrepreneurial spirit.

- 179 members of the media provided extensive coverage, amplifying the event's reach and impact.
- In total, 63 countries were represented.

"Meetings Africa 2025 is not just a trade show; it's a catalyst for business success," said Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille. "We look forward to welcoming exhibitors and buyers from our continent and from around the world to South Africa."

"Meetings Africa 2024 has had a significant impact on South Africa's economy, contributing R420 million to the GDP and creating over 770 jobs. The event showcased the strength of South Africa's business events industry as a key driver of economic growth, generating R27 million in national tax revenue and providing significant business opportunities for exhibitors. Beyond economic gains, Meetings Africa emphasised sustainable practices and supported small local businesses, provided great networking opportunities for exhibitors from the rest of the continent, further elevating South Africa's profile as an attractive and appealing destination for global conferences and events," Minister de Lille added.

Africa's Travel Indaba focuses on showcasing the African continent's leisure tourism products and promoting partnerships geared towards advancing the continent's growth. Africa's Travel Indaba will also lead with a Business Opportunity Networking Day featuring industry and business experts and leaders sharing knowledge.

The 2024 edition of Africa's Travel Indaba hosted 9280 registered delegates, marking an incredible 7% increase when compared to 2023. No less than 24,000 meetings were held between exhibitors and buyers. Additionally, the event featured over 1200 exhibitors who displayed an impressive array of African tourism products and experiences.

The economic activities triggered by Africa's Travel Indaba, from event infrastructure to accommodation establishments, restaurants, and shuttle services, were significant.

The direct economic impact on the city was no less than R226 million, with a spillover effect contributing an additional R333 million. The overall contribution to the city's GDP exceeded R500 million, indicating significant economic benefits and over 1 000 jobs created, especially for the youth.

"For Africa's Travel Indaba we look forward to working with all our partners to showcase the city of Durban and the greater Kwa Zulu-Natal province once again and, indeed, the rest of our country. Given the continent's wide variety of tourism products and experiences, Africa's Travel Indaba showcases a wide variety of exhibitors and continues to be the best Pan Africa leisure global trade show for all our buyers, exhibitors, media and other stakeholders," Minister de Lille said.

Looking forward to 2025, both Meetings Africa and Africa's Travel Indaba, will be tailored to provide immersive experiences and provide excellent value for exhibitors, buyers and media alike.

By connecting the best of the African leisure and business events industry with relevant buyers from across the globe, both Meetings Africa and Africa's Travel Indaba create an environment conducive to transacting and building quality connections.

Meetings Africa Dates:

- **24 February 2025:** Business Opportunities Networking Day (BONDay).
- **25 – 26 February 2025:** Exhibition Days.
- **Venue:** Sandton Convention Centre, Johannesburg.

Africa's Travel Indaba Dates:

- **12 May 2025:** Business Opportunity Networking Day (BONDay).
- **13 -15 May 2025:** Exhibition Days.
- **Venue:** Durban International Convention Centre.

 More announcements will be made on www.southafrica.net

By South African Tourism





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