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Bolanala



tourism

Department:
Tourism
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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



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WELCOME TO THE FIRST **BOJANALA** OF 2026



Welcome to the first Bojanala of 2026. This edition reflects the many ways in which South Africa's tourism sector continues to grow through collaboration, innovation, and shared commitment across the tourism value chain.

Tourism continues to be one of South Africa's most dynamic and inspiring economic sectors, creating jobs, connecting communities, supporting enterprises, and showcasing the richness and diversity of our country to visitors from around the world. It is evident at global platforms such as Meetings Africa and ITB Berlin, South Africa continues to strengthen its position as a destination of choice while deepening partnerships across the international tourism community.

This edition of Bojanala highlights several exciting initiatives shaping the sector at the start of the year. Among them are the Best Practices Workshop, the Compliance and Resilience Workshop, and ongoing parliamentary oversight engagements that reinforce good governance and strengthen accountability within the tourism ecosystem.

The stories in this issue also reflect the evolving nature of tourism. From innovative sports branding and destination marketing

partnerships to the growing recognition of townships as vibrant tourism destinations, these developments illustrate how tourism continues to unlock opportunities for communities, entrepreneurs, and emerging destinations across South Africa. Digital transformation also remains an important priority for the sector. In this issue, we highlight the digitalisation of the Department's Complaints Office. This initiative reflects our commitment to improving service delivery, strengthening responsiveness, and supporting the tourism sector in an increasingly connected environment.

“Ultimately, tourism is about people”

Ultimately, tourism is about people. Across South Africa, individuals and communities continue to shape the experiences that

welcome visitors and share our country's story with the world.

This month, we also bid farewell to Aneme Malan, Deputy Director-General: International Relations, who will be retiring. While this moment marks the close of a distinguished chapter, her connection to the sector remains steadfast, reflecting a lifelong commitment to serving South Africa and advancing its tourism story. Her legacy will continue to resonate across the department and the broader tourism community she helped to strengthen.

As we move through 2026, the Department of Tourism remains committed to working alongside partners across government, industry, and communities to build a tourism sector that is resilient, inclusive, and globally competitive.

We hope this edition keeps you informed and inspired as we work together to advance a tourism sector that continues to shape the economic landscape.



Celebrating the Leadership and Legacy of DDG Malan

By Sifiso Halama

After more than three decades of dedicated service in the public sector, Deputy Director-General (DDG): Tourism Research, Policy and International Relations, Ms Malan, retires and leaves behind a remarkable legacy of leadership, institutional knowledge, and commitment to advancing tourism development in South Africa.

Ms Malan joined the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism in 2008 as Chief Director responsible for Tourism Development and Research. This period marked a pivotal time for the sector, as tourism was establishing itself as a strategic contributor to economic growth, job creation, and inclusive development. Her role required strong technical expertise, strategic insight, and the ability to translate research and policy into practical initiatives that would support the growth and sustainability of the tourism sector.

When tourism became a stand-alone department, Ms Malan played a crucial role in the transition and institutional establishment of the Department of Tourism. This included contributing to the development of organisational structures and helping build dynamic teams capable of delivering on the department's mandate.

Her appointment in 2011 as Deputy Director-General: Tourism Research, Policy and International Relations further expanded her leadership role within the department. As part of the department's senior management, she has contributed significantly to shaping tourism development priorities, strengthening research and evidence-based planning, and advancing South Africa's tourism policy framework. Her work has also supported

the department's engagement with international tourism partners, ensuring that South Africa remains an active participant in global tourism dialogue and cooperation.

Throughout her tenure, Ms Malan was recognised for her deep understanding of tourism policy and development dynamics, as well as her commitment to strengthening the institutional capacity of the department. Her leadership has helped guide the department through periods of growth, transformation, and significant sector challenges.

Beyond her formal responsibilities, Ms Malan has also been a strong advocate for creating supportive and collaborative work environments. She has encouraged colleagues to foster a culture of mutual respect, teamwork, and empowerment, particularly among women in the workplace. Through initiatives such as the departmental crocheting group established together with the Gender Desk, she created spaces for colleagues to connect and support one another beyond their daily responsibilities.

Looking back, her career in the public service began in 1988 when she joined the Central Statistical Services, now known as Statistics South Africa, as an Economist. She later spent time at the National Treasury before returning to Statistics South Africa for a decade, building extensive experience in economic analysis, research, and public sector governance. This strong analytical and economic background proved invaluable in her later work in tourism development and policy.

As she begins her retirement journey, Ms Malan reflects on a career defined by service, learning, and the opportunity to contribute to a sector that plays such an important role in showcasing South Africa's beauty, culture, and diversity.

Her colleagues across the Department of Tourism recognise her dedication and the invaluable contribution she has made to building and strengthening the department. Her leadership, institutional knowledge, and commitment to public service will remain an important part of the department's legacy.

While she now looks forward to spending more time with family, travelling, and engaging in community initiatives, Ms Malan will always remain part of the broader "Team Tourism" family that she has helped shape over the years. Her retirement marks the close of an important chapter in the department's history, and her colleagues and the tourism sector wish her every success and fulfilment in the journey ahead.

"I am looking forward to this new chapter in my life story with a full heart but tears in my eyes as I leave behind a very capable team of which I am highly proud and share memorable experiences with. I have learned that showing your people they matter is the least expensive part of leadership but the most rewarding. Thank you for the teamwork, encouragement, and great memories I'll always cherish. I will forever see myself as a member of the 'Tourism Family' and hope to continue to service the people of our beautiful country in this next chapter of my life."

SOUTH AFRICA BUILDS ON STRONG TOURISM MOMENTUM AHEAD OF ITB BERLIN 2026



Deputy Minister of Tourism, Ms Maggie Soty, welcomed His Excellency Mr Andries Oosthuizen, Chargé d'Affaires, at the South African stand at ITB Berlin.

South Africa is experiencing strong tourism growth and renewed global confidence as the country prepares to attend ITB Berlin 2026 from 3 to 5 March. Building on a record-breaking 10.5 million international arrivals in 2025, South Africa heads to ITB with a clear intention to further accelerate its drive to convert global interest into real economic impact.

As one of the world's leading global leisure trade platforms, ITB Berlin provides South Africa with a strategic opportunity to deepen trade partnerships, unlock expanded market access and amplify destination awareness across Europe and key international markets. The country's participation is in line with the Tourism Growth Partnership Plan (TGPP), which prioritises coordinated marketing, ease of access, inclusive participation and unlocking tourism's full economic potential.

Led by Deputy Minister of Tourism Maggie Soty, joined by South African Tourism's Acting Chief Executive Officer Dr Shamilla Chettiar and Chief Convention Bureau Officer Corne Koch, a variety of proudly South African companies form part of this year's ITB delegation, enabling structured business engagements.

Forty-nine exhibitors representing a wide variety of tourism products will be at the South Africa stand. They include 22 Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMME) supported through the Department of Tourism's Tourism Incentive Programme (TIP), as well as two Limpopo-based SMMEs facilitated by the Limpopo Tourism Agency. Their participation reflects a deliberate commitment to transformation and inclusive economic growth, ensuring that emerging tourism businesses gain direct exposure to global buyers and distribution networks. ITB Berlin continues to serve as a catalyst for sustaining this upward momentum and expanding South Africa's global market share.

Tourism remains one of South Africa's most impactful economic sectors. Every additional international arrival contributes to foreign direct spend, supports small enterprises and drives the multiplier effect that sustains livelihoods across the country.

This is aligned to the Department of Tourism's vision: Leading sustainable tourism development for inclusive economic growth in South Africa. Tourism sits at the heart of the 2025 State of the Nation Address (SoNA), where the President reaffirmed the

government's commitment to visa reforms, new airline routes, and enhanced global marketing to grow tourism arrivals.

Germany remains one of South Africa's most important European source markets. Tourist arrivals from Germany increased from 254 992 between January and December 2024 to 290 795 over the same period in 2025, representing a 14 percent year on year increase. This sustained growth reflects a strong impact of targeted marketing campaigns and a demand for South Africa's diverse leisure, cultural, wildlife and adventure. Through enhanced trade engagements at ITB Berlin, South Africa aims to increase average length of stay, grow per capita spend and strengthen long term partnerships in this high value market.

Commenting on South Africa's participation, Deputy Minister of Tourism Maggie Soty said: "ITB Berlin is a strategic platform for South Africa to convert global interest into tangible economic opportunity. Our presence ensures South Africa remains a competitive, visible and confidently positioned in the global marketplace as a value for money destination of choice."

Through its presence at ITB Berlin, South Africa continues to elevate its global brand narrative under the call-to-action "South Africa Awaits; Come Find Your Joy". The campaign positions the country as a destination of extraordinary experiences, meaningful connections and vibrant culture also highlighting South Africa's quality gastronomy offering.

South Africa's participation at ITB Berlin also builds on growing international confidence in the destination's ability to host major global events. Following the successful hosting of the G20 Leaders' Summit in 2025 and with the World Economic Forum set to host a Special Davos Meeting in South Africa in 2027, the country continues to reinforce its position as globally connected, investment-worthy and ready to welcome the world.

South Africa Awaits. Come Find Your Joy.

By South African Tourism



20 YEARS OF IMPACT: MEETINGS AFRICA DRIVES GROWTH, JOBS AND GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS

For 20 years, Meetings Africa has positioned the continent as a powerful, competitive, and compelling business events destination, connecting African suppliers with global buyers and transforming opportunities into measurable economic impact.

It has been two decades of partnership, growth, and positioning Africa as a powerful, competitive, and compelling meetings destination with Meetings Africa continuing its trajectory of connecting African suppliers with global buyers.

The South African Tourism-owned trade show delivered a successful three-day event held at the Sandton Convention Centre from 23 to 25 February 2026. Under the theme: "20 years of Connecting Africa to the World," the Meetings Africa trade floor was officially opened on 24 February 2026, with the ceremonial ringing of the bell, setting the tone for the 20th anniversary of the event that continues to connect Africa to the world.

Delivering her keynote address, Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille, commended

that for two decades, Meetings Africa has been connecting African suppliers with global buyers. "Since its launch in 2005, this platform has served as a bridge, connecting African suppliers with global buyers, connecting destinations with investors, connecting policy with partnership, and connecting opportunity with execution," she said. She stated that over the past three years alone, the economic impact of Meetings Africa on South Africa's own GDP, has nearly doubled, from R371 million in 2023 to R690 million in 2025.

During this period, the event has created and sustained over 2 600 jobs. Buyers from 53 countries participated in the 2026 edition, marking a significant milestone and demonstrating confidence in Africa.

"In total, 375 hosted buyers are here, 325 exhibiting companies, with more than 6,440 confirmed business meetings that will be taking place over the next two days. Each of these meetings represents a connection. Each connection represents possibility. And each possibility represents progress," she said.

She stated that 21 African countries were represented as Africa is also an anchor of South Africa's record-breaking 10.5 million inbound arrivals in 2025. "Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions, are aggregators of economic growth and job creation," she said.

Minister De Lille added that since the start of the 2025/26 financial year, the South African National Convention Bureau (SANCB) supported 100 bids for international business events to be hosted in South Africa between 2025 and 2030.

She said South Africa has secured 52 bids for international and regional business events supported through the Bid Support Programme.

"These confirmed business events are expected to contribute nearly R1 billion to the South African economy and will attract over 33 000 international and regional delegates.

These business events will be hosted in a range of cities and towns, including

Johannesburg, Tshwane, Durban, Cape Town, Hermanus, Mbombela, Grabouw, Bela-Bela, Skukuza and Sun City," she said.

She highlighted that the SANCB invested R21.3 million through its Bid Support Programme to secure Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions events, which are central to the Tourism Growth Partnership Plan.

"Equally important to this plan, is diversifying our tourism offerings. In response, last year we launched the Tourism Infrastructure Investment Summit, where we unveiled eight bankable projects valued at around R1 billion from both the public and private sectors. We continue to build the pipeline ahead of our second investment summit later this year in September," she added.

Minister De Lille added that through stronger regional partnerships, greater collaboration with Convention Bureaux and increased participation at key continental platforms, they are strengthening what Africa can offer the world.

During his address, the Gauteng MEC for Finance and Economic Development, Lebogang Maile, emphasised that for two decades, Meetings Africa has been a proudly Pan-African platform that has helped the world see Africa through the lens of excellence, reliability and partnership.

"We mark more than an anniversary, but a promise: 20 years ahead of shared prosperity, visitor economy growth, and the building of an Africa we all want," he said.

MEC Maile said from the inaugural event in 2005/2006, Meetings Africa has grown from early editions that hosted around 1,500 delegates, 82 hosted buyers, and close to 90

media representatives, to today's scale with over 385 international hosted buyers and 3000 exhibitors and participants from across the continent and the world.

Building on the success of 2025, the Department of Tourism continued to support exhibitors through one of the Tourism incentive programmes, the Market Access Support Programme (MASP). The programme aims to assist small inbound tourism SMMEs in accessing and engaging with tourism buyers in new and existing markets.

One of the MASP beneficiaries from KwaZulu-Natal, Sanele Mvuyane, expressed his gratitude to the Department for its support and for the positive impact on his business. Based in Durban, Travel Bug Tours and Safari, have been operating for the past eight years. He said since they started participating in these programmes including the Africa's Travel Indaba, their business has secured opportunities to connect with international delegates and host international tourists, including doctors from Poland.

"We have been operating on a small scale in Durban. In 2023, we won the award for the best tour operator in Durban. This is also an exposure we get from attending these exhibitions. We get to meet people, formulate a network of contacts and improve our visitors experience," he said.

He said that before he could attend events like Meetings Africa, his business relied only on the domestic market.

He added that with the support of the Department, they attended the 2025 Africa's Travel Indaba, "The Department's involvement helped a lot. It is not only about access to market but also brand exposure," he said.



One of the beneficiaries of Market Access Support Programme, Koleka Cele, director of Boutique Hotel participated in the first episode of the Department's podcast

The Director of the Hill Boutique Hotel, based in Tsolo in the Eastern Cape, Koleka Cele, said her business was initially exposed to the market when she attended the 2025 Africa's Travel Indaba.

This has improved her monthly turnover, and she believes her attendance at Meetings Africa with the assistance of the Department of Tourism will improve her business's exposure and attract more opportunities.

"It is the second time attending these shows. I was at the Africa's Travel Indaba last year. I hope the contacts and exposure I got here will help me continue to attract more tourists," she said.

The trade show concluded on 25 February 2026, highlighting the strength of MICE events in forging global relations and positioning Africa as a powerful, competitive, and compelling business events destination.

"Thank you to our partners, Johannesburg Tourism Company and the Sandton Convention Centre, for partnering with us to execute this all-important trade show. It is a purpose-designed ecosystem where high-quality connections drive concrete deals, unlocking Africa's opportunities through quality connections," concluded Minister De Lille.

By Phathu Luvhengo



Some of the beneficiaries of the Tourism Incentive Programme, Market Access Support Programme exhibit their tourism products at Meetings Africa.

ORLANDO PIRATES–AMSTEL NAMING RIGHTS DEAL MARKS A NEW ERA IN SPORTS BRANDING AND DESTINATION MARKETING



BENEFITS FOR JOHANNESBURG AND GAUTENG

A strategically executed naming rights partnership has broad socio-economic implications:

1. TOURISM & CITY BRANDING

Stadium names become shorthand for cities the identity travels globally through broadcast, social media, and major events. Orlando Amstel Arena strengthens Johannesburg's claim as Africa's sports and entertainment capital.

2. INFRASTRUCTURE UPGRADES

Such agreements often finance:

- stadium renovations,
- digital upgrades,
- improved accessibility, and
- ESG-aligned features like renewable energy systems.

This reduces reliance on municipal budgets while improving visitor experience.

3. SPORTS DEVELOPMENT

The deal presents new opportunities to:

- expand youth academies,
- invest in grassroots football,
- support the development of a formal Orlando Pirates Ladies team, and
- uplift local talent in Soweto and surrounding communities.

FAN EXPERIENCE: THE MODERN EXPECTATIONS

Sports fans today expect immersive, connected environments. The partnership enables:

- Upgraded hospitality zones,
- Enhanced digital ticketing,
- Branded fan-experience activations, a
- A more modern match-day atmosphere.

Johannesburg - The newly announced naming rights partnership between Orlando Pirates Football Club and Heineken South Africa's Amstel brand renaming Orlando Stadium to the Orlando Amstel Arena is more than a commercial deal. It represents a strategic shift in how South African cities, sports brands, and corporate partners leverage iconic public assets to shape identity, stimulate economic activity, and strengthen tourism.

At a time when global sports organisations increasingly use naming rights to modernise infrastructure and secure long-term revenue, Johannesburg has positioned itself at the forefront of Africa's sports-business evolution.

A DEAL ROOTED IN HERITAGE AND MODERN STRATEGY

The Orlando precinct carries deep historical significance for the club and for South African football. Aligning the stadium's identity with its home team enhances authenticity and strengthens emotional resonance among supporters. This gives the partnership credibility something naming rights deals often struggle with. The stadium, like others, including FNB,

Rand, and Dobsonville, is publicly owned by the City of Johannesburg but operated by Stadium Management South Africa (SMSA). This model reduces pressure on public finances while enabling clubs and sponsors to fund improvements through structured commercial agreements.

GLOBAL CONTEXT: A PROVEN MODEL

The Orlando Amstel Arena deal follows global precedents where stadium naming rights have transformed clubs and cities alike:

- Spotify Camp Nou (Barcelona) funded major renovations and integrated music culture with football.
- SoFi Stadium (Los Angeles) became one of the world's most advanced sports venues through a record-breaking long-term deal.
- Allianz Arena (Munich) and Emirates Stadium (London) are now inseparable from their cities' global identities.

These examples show that naming rights have grown into powerful tools for city branding, tourism, and economic regeneration.

These improvements deepen emotional loyalty and increase stadium footfall.

RISKS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

No naming rights deal is without complexity. Key concerns include:

HERITAGE AND IDENTITY

Some may argue that renaming a historic venue compromises cultural legacy. Clear communication, heritage preservation, and community engagement will be crucial.

ALCOHOL SPONSORSHIP

South Africa's ongoing struggle with alcohol abuse makes responsible branding essential. Campaigns that promote

moderation, road safety, and youth education are vital to ensuring public support and social alignment.

BRAND REPUTATION

If either party faces reputational crises, stadium identity may be affected. Long-term contractual safeguards and strong brand governance will help mitigate these risks.

A PATHWAY TO SUSTAINABLE IMPACT

If managed with ESG sensitivity, community investment, and a focus on shared value, the Orlando Amstel Arena could become the benchmark for how African cities and clubs use naming rights to balance commercial opportunity with public interest.

The deal has the potential to expand Gauteng's sports tourism footprint possibly anchoring a broader Gauteng Sports Tourism Route that connects heritage, entertainment, and live events into a compelling visitor experience.

This is more than a renaming. It is a blueprint for how partnerships between sport, business, and government can stimulate inclusive growth, strengthen social identity, and elevate Johannesburg on the global stage.

By Barba Gaogamediwe (CM-SA)

Brand Leadership Specialist & Chief Marketing Officer, Gauteng Tourism Authority
(Visit Gauteng)



The newly named Orlando Amstel Arena in Soweto, home to Orlando Pirates Football Club.

A NEW CHAPTER IN INTRA-AFRICAN TOURISM CO-OPERATION

African tourism cooperation took a significant step forward with the successful launch of the Joint Tourism Technical Committee (JTTC) between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Republic of Kenya, held on 20-21 January 2026 at Casa Toscana Lodge in Pretoria, South Africa. The milestone engagement operationalises the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Cooperation in the Field of Tourism, signed in November 2021. It signals a renewed commitment by both countries to deepen collaboration, grow visitor economies, and strengthen people-to-people ties across the continent

The establishment of the JTTC provides a structured mechanism to translate policy intentions into practical, mutually beneficial tourism programmes, reinforcing Africa-led solutions in line with continental and global tourism priorities. The meeting brought together senior tourism officials and industry

representatives from both countries. South Africa was led by Mr. Nkhumeleni Victor vele, Director-General of the Department of Tourism, supported by senior executives from international relations, research, investment, communications, and South African Tourism. Mr David Gitonga, Tourism Secretary at the State Department of Tourism, led the Kenyan delegation, accompanied by officials from the Tourism Fund, the Kenya Tourism Federation, Kenya Utalii College, and the Kenya High Commission to South Africa.

Opening the session, Ms Monika Glinzler, Chief Director: International Relations and Cooperation in South Africa's Department of Tourism, welcomed the Kenyan delegation and highlighted the strong foundation already in place between the two countries. She reaffirmed South Africa's commitment to cooperation guided by the Tourism Growth Partnership Plan (TGPP), which focuses on ease of access, coordinated destination marketing,

tourism safety, product development, and job creation.

Ms. Glinzler further reflected on the growing footprint of bilateral engagement through participation in flagship tourism platforms such as Africa's Travel Indaba, Meetings Africa, and the Magical Kenya Travel Expo, noting that these exchanges continue to enhance destination visibility and trade collaboration.

In response, Mr Gitonga expressed appreciation for the warm reception. He underscored the strategic importance of South Africa-Kenya relations, not only bilaterally but also within multilateral forums such as the UN Tourism Organisation. "Our cooperation demonstrates how African countries can lead, speak with a united voice, and advance sustainable tourism partnerships," he noted. He reaffirmed Kenya's commitment to ensuring that the MoU delivers tangible outcomes for both nations.



Mr N.V. Vele, Director-General of the Department of Tourism, supported by senior executives from international relations, research, investment, communications, and South African Tourism. Mr David Gitonga, Tourism Secretary at the State Department of Tourism, led the Kenyan delegation. Officials from the Tourism Fund, the Kenya Tourism Federation, Kenya Utalii College, and the Kenya High Commission to South Africa



“What will ultimately define the success of this partnership is not the signing of documents, but what we do thereafter,”

-said Mr Vele.”

Mr David Gitonga, Tourism Secretary at the State Department of Tourism Kenya and DG of the Department of Tourism, Mr Nkhumeleni Victor Vele exchanging the Memorandum of Understanding.

Building on these remarks, Mr. Nkhumeleni Victor Vele, Director-General of the Department of Tourism, emphasised that the accurate measure of success would lie in implementation. “What will ultimately define the success of this partnership is not the signing of documents, but what we do thereafter,” said Mr Vele. “The implementation plan must remain a living document, one that allows us to act decisively, seize opportunities, and deliver tangible results for our people.” The JTTC confirmed that the MoU provides a comprehensive framework to support tourism growth in both countries.

KEY AREAS OF COLLABORATION INCLUDED

Tourism education, training, and skills development, including scholarships and fellowships; Tourism investment promotion and facilitation; Joint participation in tourism exhibitions and fairs; Cultural exchange programmes; Exchange of tourism information, research, and best practices; and Enhanced private-sector cooperation.

The Implementation Plan identified priority projects and timelines while allowing technical teams to finalise specific

initiatives. Mr Vele cautioned against unnecessary delays where readiness already exists, noting that “there are moments where all the conditions are already in place to move forward. In those instances, we must act with confidence, particularly in areas such as exhibitions, market access, and product development. Progress will be monitored through annual and extraordinary JTTC meetings, ensuring that cooperation remains dynamic and results-driven.

A significant outcome of the meeting was the agreement on the Terms of Reference for the JTTC, which outline its

composition, meeting procedures, roles and responsibilities, financial obligations, and dispute-resolution mechanisms. This governance framework ensures transparency, accountability, and continuity in the execution of joint initiatives.

The meeting concluded in a cordial and collaborative spirit, reflecting the strong diplomatic and sectoral ties between South Africa and Kenya. Both parties committed to tracking progress and sustaining momentum as they move from agreement to action.

By Annah Mashile



Mr David Gitonga, Tourism Secretary at the State Department of Tourism Kenya and DG of the Department of Tourism, Mr Nkhumeleni Victor Vele and signing the MOU.

ADVANCING ECONOMIC BENEFITS THROUGH DIGITALISATION: TOURISM LEADERS GATHER FOR BEST PRACTICES WORKSHOP



Director General of the Department of Tourism, Mr Nkhumeleni Victor Vele, in a group photo with delegates of the Best Practices Workshop.

"It is a great pleasure to welcome you all to this Best Practices Workshop under the theme "Advancing Economic Benefit Through Digitalisation." We are honoured to host delegates from across Africa and other parts of the world who have joined us for this important exchange of ideas," said Director General of the Department of Tourism, Mr Nkhumeleni Victor Vele.

The Department of Tourism continues to strengthen international cooperation and knowledge sharing through its annual Best Practices Workshop (BPW), an initiative that promotes tourism development and collaboration across borders. The 2026 workshop, held from March 11 to 13 at the African Vineyard Boutique Hotel and Spa in the Northern Cape, brought together tourism leaders, policymakers, and industry stakeholders from across Africa and beyond to explore how digital innovation can unlock greater economic benefits for tourism destinations.

The Northern Cape provided a perfect setting for the gathering. Known for its striking landscapes, wide skies, and unique astro-tourism attractions, the province

highlights South Africa's rich natural and cultural heritage. Visitors were attracted not only by its stunning scenery but also by the genuine cultural experiences in its towns and rural communities.

According to Mr. Nkhumeleni Victor Vele, digital transformation provides significant opportunities for the tourism sector to expand market access and boost competitiveness. "Digital technologies are transforming how destinations are promoted, how travellers plan their trips, and how tourism businesses operate. Digitalisation offers immense potential to broaden market access, enhance efficiency, and improve visitor experiences," he said.

The workshop provided a valuable

platform for countries that have signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with South Africa on tourism cooperation to share experiences, strengthen partnerships, and develop practical strategies for boosting tourism growth through digital technologies. Since its inception in 2017, the Best Practices Workshop has become a key mechanism for collaboration among governments and tourism authorities, allowing stakeholders to exchange insights on tourism policy, destination marketing, research cooperation, and sustainable tourism development.

Delegates from countries including Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Jamaica, Kenya, Mozambique, Seychelles, Uganda, and



Best Practices Workshop delegates during an excursion.

“By strengthening digital capabilities and improving access to digital platforms, we can empower tourism entrepreneurs to reach wider markets and ensure that the economic benefits of tourism extend to local communities,”

-Director General Vele explained.

Zambia participated in the workshop, showing the increasing international interest in collaborative tourism development. Several of these countries have formal cooperation agreements with South Africa, including Kenya, Mozambique, Seychelles, Uganda, and Zambia. Simultaneously, discussions are expected to begin with additional countries, such as Côte d'Ivoire and Eswatini, during the 2026/27 fiscal year.

Recognising these opportunities, South Africa has taken proactive steps to support digital transformation across the tourism value chain. The Department of Tourism has developed a Digitalisation Framework for the Tourism Sector that offers strategic guidance on incorporating digital technologies into tourism operations, destination marketing, and visitor engagement. The primary focus of the framework is to ensure that digital transformation benefits micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, especially those

in rural areas and emerging destinations where tourism can significantly boost economic development.

“By strengthening digital capabilities and improving access to digital platforms, we can empower tourism entrepreneurs to reach wider markets and ensure that the economic benefits of tourism extend to

local communities,” Vele explained.

The workshop programme included presentations and discussions by key tourism stakeholders, covering a wide range of topics to strengthen the sector's digital capabilities. Representatives from South African Tourism examined how digital marketing strategies are supporting the promotion of local products and services, while the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (TGCSA) shared insights on grading and classification in the digital age.

Other sessions focused on collaboration between government and research institutions, crisis management in sustainable tourism, destination marketing strategies, and promoting township and village tourism initiatives. These discussions highlighted the importance of partnerships across government, academia, and industry in driving innovation and building a more resilient tourism sector.

As discussions concluded, delegates reaffirmed the importance of ongoing collaboration and sharing knowledge in shaping the future of tourism. The Best Practices Workshop once again demonstrated how international partnerships can promote innovation, strengthen tourism ecosystems, and support inclusive economic growth across the continent. The final day of the workshop ended with an excursion to Augrabies National Park, including a visit to Augrabies Falls and a river cruise along the Orange River.

By Annah Mashile



Director General of the Department of Tourism, Mr Nkhumeleni Victor Vele, addresses delegates.

STRENGTHENING TOURISM THROUGH PARLIAMENTARY OVERSIGHT AND STRATEGIC INVESTMENT

Parliamentary oversight plays a vital role in ensuring accountability, transparency, and long-term sustainability in South Africa's tourism sector. This commitment was clearly demonstrated during the recent oversight visit by the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Tourism, which conducted a week-long programme from 27 to 30 January 2026 to assess the progress, impact, and sustainability of government-supported tourism initiatives.

The visit enabled Members of Parliament to engage directly with beneficiaries and implementing partners, while evaluating whether public investment in tourism infrastructure and enterprises is delivering tangible socioeconomic benefits for communities, advancing transformation, and strengthening South Africa's competitiveness as a destination of choice.

Among the projects visited were several flagship developments that reflect the impact of targeted incentive programs and effective public-private partnerships. These included the Cape Agulhas Precinct Project, the Arniston Spa Hotel, and the New National Hotel, each representing a distinct but complementary pillar of tourism development: destination enhancement, sustainability, and transformation.

Situated at the southernmost tip of the African continent, the Cape Agulhas National Park is an area of exceptional natural, cultural, and historical significance. Renowned for its rich biodiversity, heritage buildings, and the iconic Cape Agulhas Lighthouse, the precinct has immense potential to attract both domestic and international visitors.



Portfolio Committee Members on Tourism with the Department of Tourism Deputy Director General: Destination Development, Dr Shamilla Chettier during a site visit at the Cape Agulhas Lighthouse project.

In 2017, the Department of Tourism partnered with South African National Parks (SANParks) to implement the Cape Agulhas Precinct Project, which aimed to upgrade visitor infrastructure and enhance the overall tourism experience. Phase 1 of the project, completed in 2018 at a cost of R15.5 million, included the construction of the Africa map monument, terrain rehabilitation, boardwalk realignment, and paving a one-kilometer access road.

Building on this foundation, the Department invested an additional R54.9 million to develop infrastructure for the lighthouse precinct. Construction began in April 2022 and reached practical completion in December 2025. The development includes a 60-seat restaurant, an interpretation centre, ablution facilities, curio shops, vendor stalls, visitor parking, universal access infrastructure, and bulk services such as water, sewer, and electricity. The project is expected to significantly increase visitor numbers, create new revenue streams, and open

opportunities for local entrepreneurs. SANParks has already appointed a restaurant concessionaire, and recruitment and training for curio shop operators and local vendors are underway.

The oversight visit also underscored the importance of sustainability in tourism operations, particularly through the Green Tourism Incentive Programme (GTIP). A standout example was the Arniston Spa Hotel, a four-star establishment in the coastal village of Arniston.

Established in 1999, the hotel provides accommodation, conferencing, and wellness facilities and supports more than 130 permanent and temporary jobs. With GTIP support, the hotel conducted comprehensive energy and water audits, leading to the installation of a 50 kWp solar photovoltaic system. Of the total project value of approximately R1.4 million, the Department of Tourism contributed 61% in grant funding, with the remainder funded by the hotel.



Members of the Portfolio Committee on Tourism engage with Stakeholders in Khayelisha



Members of the Portfolio Committee on Tourism engage with Stakeholders in Khayelisha

The intervention is projected to reduce utility costs by more than 20% annually, strengthening the hotel's resilience amid rising energy costs and load shedding. Welcoming the oversight visit, Robert Haarburger of the Arniston Spa Hotel emphasised the importance of sustainability investments. "The support we received through the Green Tourism Incentive Programme has enabled us to reduce our environmental footprint while safeguarding jobs and service standards. Sustainable

energy solutions are no longer optional they are essential for the future of tourism," he said.

Transformation remains a key priority for the Department of Tourism, and the oversight programme showcased meaningful progress in this area through support provided to the New National Hotel, a 100% black-owned and managed three-star establishment.

Since its acquisition by the current owners in 2015, the hotel has undergone phased upgrades to enhance its competitiveness and service offering. In 2023, the business successfully accessed funding through the Tourism Transformation Fund (TTF), administered in partnership with the National Empowerment Fund (NEF).

An amount of nearly R3 million was approved, combining grant funding, concessional debt, and support for alternative energy solutions. The funding enabled room refurbishments, conference equipment upgrades, the acquisition of a shuttle vehicle to improve accessibility, and the provision of working capital during renovations, allowing the hotel to modernize while maintaining operations.

The committee also visited Langa Township and Khayelitsha, including Lookout Hill in Khayelitsha, where a stakeholder engagement session was held. The Lookout

Hill Tourism Centre was developed to serve both residents and visitors, offering facilities such as a restaurant, arts and crafts hives, an information centre, exhibition spaces, two amphitheaters, and a boardwalk with 164 steps leading to the highest point in the Cape Flats. From the summit, visitors enjoy panoramic 360-degree views of the city, framed by the False Bay and Atlantic coastlines, with a unique perspective of Table Mountain. While the attraction holds significant potential, the committee expressed concern about the underutilisation of the facilities. It emphasised the need for a revised operational strategy to ensure that the centre effectively serves the local community and delivers its intended economic impact.

Through its incentive programs and partnerships, the Department of Tourism continues to work closely with Parliament, development finance institutions and the private sector to ensure that tourism investment drives sustainability, transformation and inclusive growth. The oversight visit reaffirmed the importance of continuous monitoring, accountability and collaboration, while also celebrating success stories that demonstrate the sector's potential to contribute meaningfully to economic recovery and community upliftment.

By Annah Mashile



BEYOND ONE PROVINCE: RETHINKING GEOGRAPHIC SPREAD AND TRAVEL PATTERNS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Provincial distribution, or geographic spread, remains one of the most important levers for sustainable tourism growth, both in South Africa and globally. At its core, provincial tourism encourages travelers to explore multiple regions within a country, thereby benefiting the country more broadly. When visitors disperse geographically, economic value flows into more communities, supports more jobs, and strengthens regional development.

According to South African Tourism's Departure Survey (2025), South Africa faces a stark reality: 91% of international travelers visit only one province, while just 9% travel to more than one province. As a result, most tourism value remains concentrated in a limited number of areas, leaving substantial opportunities untapped across the rest of the country.

UNEVEN SPREAD, UNEQUAL OPPORTUNITY

The data reveal significant regional variation. South American travelers perform best in provincial spread, with 53% visiting more than one province. Australasia follows at 37%, North America at 35%, and key European markets such as France and Germany range from 34% to 36%. At the country level, Brazil leads with 55.2%, followed by Canada at 41.6% and Australia at 37%. In contrast, Africa remains highly concentrated, with 97% of travelers visiting only one province. This pattern is driven particularly by African land markets, where only 2.3% travel to more than one province, compared with 11% in African air markets. The primary driver of single-province

travel is visiting friends and relatives (59%), whereas multi-province travel is largely driven by holidays (55%). The difference between these two travel patterns is economically significant. Multi-province travelers stay an average of 20 days, compared with 14 days for single-province travelers. Their average spend is approximately R26,000 per trip, nearly three times that of those who remain in one province (R8,800).

They are significantly more likely to visit natural attractions (63% versus 9%), participate in wildlife experiences (59%), and book fully inclusive packages (35% compared to 21%). Multi-province travelers are also more likely to be first-time visitors, while single-province travelers tend to be repeat visitors.

Age and travel party composition further distinguish the behavioral segments. Travelers visiting multiple provinces skew older, with 43% over age 40, and are more likely to travel as couples or with friends. Those visiting only one province are predominantly younger and travel alone, with a strong orientation toward socializing and visiting friends and relatives.

THE EXPERIENCE GAP

Travellers who move between provinces have a richer, more diverse journey. As one traveller's insight captures: "Traveling across provinces is not just about covering distance; it's about expanding your experience, finding exceptional hospitality, and enjoying outstanding service wherever you go. Each new province offers exceptional opportunities and positive memories waiting to be discovered!" - US Traveller, 2025.

Multi-province travel is strongly correlated with deeper engagement, greater satisfaction, and more varied consumption of tourism products. It also offers a solution to over-concentration in specific nodes, helping mitigate the risks of over-tourism while unlocking the potential of outlying regions.

South Africa's scenic beauty, cultural depth, wildlife, and heritage experiences are not confined to one province. They are spread across the country. Yet most travelers experience only a fraction of what is available.

A COLLECTIVE INDUSTRY SHIFT

Shifting provincial distribution requires more than intention; it demands coordinated industry action. Travelers need clearer, more compelling information about what to experience in different provinces, including where to stay, what activities are available, and practical guidance on safety and logistics. Rich imagery and video content are essential to inspire travel beyond familiar routes.

Trusted voices also matter. Trusted Influencers, authentic storytelling, and credible reviews can reduce perceived risk and increase confidence in exploring lesser-known areas. Connectivity messaging must be strengthened to demonstrate that South Africa is easy to navigate, whether by land, water, or air, and that combining provinces is practical and can be done seamlessly to unlock the joy of a full experience of South Africa.

The tourism trade plays a pivotal role. Education and enablement are critical to

help trade partners confidently package and sell multi-province itineraries. The profitability of extended itineraries must be clearly demonstrated. At international trade shows and marketing platforms, all provinces should be represented, and off-the-beaten-track experiences should be positioned as compelling differentiators rather than add-ons.

Hosting strategies continue to evolve. When engaging trade and media, curated itineraries that span multiple provinces should become the norm, reinforcing the message that South Africa is best experienced as a connected journey rather than a single stop.

Provincial Distribution is a Strategic Imperative

Provincial distribution is not merely a performance indicator. It is a strategic imperative tied directly to economic inclusion, sustainability, and the long-term competitiveness of destinations and countries.

When travelers move, they stay longer. The longer they stay, the more they spend. The more they spend, the more communities benefit. At the same time, pressure on saturated destinations is reduced, and the country's full diversity is brought to life. With 91% of travellers still visiting only one province, the opportunity is undeniable. South Africa has the assets, the stories, and the diversity. What remains is collective execution.

Provincial spread is not just about geography. It is about unlocking the full value of the destination and the country.

“
Traveling across provinces is not just about distance; it's about discovering exceptional hospitality and unforgettable experiences.”

SOURCES:

Data Source: South African Tourism Departure Survey (2025)
Traveller Quotes and Sentiment Insights: Data Appeal

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TOWNSHIPS AS TOURISM TREASURES: COMMUNITY-LED EXPERIENCES DRIVING LOCAL ECONOMIES

Hector Pieterse memorial museum located in Orlando West, Soweto, South Africa.

Tourism is identified as one of the industries that must be channelled towards poverty alleviation, as it has the potential to create employment, especially for youth with the local economy at their doorstep.

South Africa's townships are steadily emerging as some of the most dynamic and meaningful tourism spaces in the country. Long associated primarily with struggle histories and socio-economic challenges, townships are now being redefined as cultural treasures, rich with heritage, creativity, entrepreneurship, and authentic community life. As travellers increasingly seek immersive, people-centred experiences, township tourism has become a unique drawcard that not only showcases South Africa's identity but also contributes to sustainable local economic growth.

Township tourism offers something deeply distinctive: an opportunity to engage with South Africa beyond traditional tourism routes. It provides visitors with lived experiences shaped by local stories, cultural expression, and the vibrancy of township life. From the iconic streets of Soweto and the colourful neighbourhoods of Langa, to the energetic kasi culture of Mamelodi, Khayelitsha, Umlazi, and Alexandra, townships are spaces where history and modern innovation intersect in powerful ways.

What makes township tourism especially valuable is its authenticity. Visitors are drawn to experiences that feel real, personal, and connected to community. Township tourism allows travellers to explore local markets, enjoy traditional cuisine, attend live music performances, visit heritage landmarks, and interact directly with residents who serve as guides, hosts, storytellers, and entrepreneurs. These encounters often leave lasting impressions and deepen appreciation for South Africa's diversity and resilience.

At its heart, township tourism is driven by communities themselves. Increasingly, township-based tourism is being shaped through locally owned initiatives that prioritise empowerment and inclusion. Community-led tourism ensures that township residents are not merely spectators in the tourism economy, but active participants and beneficiaries. This approach aligns strongly with South Africa's vision for responsible tourism, where economic opportunities are shared more equitably, and tourism becomes a tool for development.

The economic potential of township tourism is significant. Township experiences create direct income streams for small businesses such as tour operators, guesthouses, local eateries, craft makers, transport providers, and

event organisers. Visitors who spend money within township economies contribute directly to livelihoods, job creation, and enterprise growth. For many communities, tourism has become a practical pathway toward reducing unemployment and stimulating local entrepreneurship.

Township tourism also supports the growth of the informal and creative economy. Many township experiences are built around arts, music, fashion, and cultural innovation. Local creatives, from mural artists and designers to performers and chefs, are increasingly becoming central to the tourism offering. This not only strengthens township identity but also positions townships as hubs of cultural production and economic activity.

Youth empowerment is another key benefit. Across the country, young people are entering the township tourism space as guides, digital storytellers, hospitality workers, and social entrepreneurs. Tourism provides opportunities for skills development in areas such as customer service, communication, marketing, event management, and business operations. As youth participate meaningfully in tourism, they gain both confidence and career pathways while contributing to community upliftment.



Importantly, township tourism plays a vital role in preserving and celebrating heritage. Townships have historically been centres of political activism, cultural resistance, music, language, and social solidarity. Visitors are often eager to learn about South Africa's liberation history through visits to museums, memorial sites, and community heritage routes. At the same time, township tourism celebrates living culture, daily life, local traditions, and evolving identities that continue to shape the nation.

However, the growth of township tourism must be guided by ethical and responsible practice. Township tourism should never become voyeuristic or exploitative. Instead, it must be rooted in dignity, mutual respect, and community ownership. Tourism stakeholders must ensure that township communities are consulted, protected, and empowered in tourism development processes. Authentic storytelling must come from within communities, and tourism experiences should highlight pride and possibility, not poverty narratives.

To unlock the full potential of township tourism, continued investment is needed in infrastructure, safety, product development, marketing support, and access to broader tourism markets. Partnerships between

government, tourism bodies, private sector stakeholders, and township enterprises are essential in building sustainable tourism ecosystems. Supporting township tourism is not simply about diversifying travel itineraries, it is about inclusive growth and ensuring that tourism becomes a driver of shared prosperity. As South Africa continues positioning itself as a globally competitive destination, township tourism stands out as a uniquely authentic offering. It reflects the soul of the country, its people, stories, creativity, and resilience. Townships are not just places of the past; they are spaces of innovation and future potential.

Ultimately, township tourism reminds us that some of the greatest treasures in South Africa are found in its communities. By supporting community-led experiences, travellers contribute not only to memorable journeys but also to local economies, cultural preservation, and sustainable development. Townships, indeed, are tourism treasures driving inclusive growth one experience at a time.

By Gwen Ncube

Independent South African Tourism Specialist



Tourists outside Mandela House at Vilakazi Street, Orlando West, Soweto.



Chief Director: Enterprise Development and Transformation, Mr Sibonelo Nzimande presenting on Tourism Compliance and Resilience during the workshop.

EMPOWERING LOCAL MSMEs: NAVIGATING COMPLIANCE FOR TOURISM GROWTH

In South Africa's vibrant tourism landscape, Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises (MSMEs) are a driving force behind economic growth, job creation and cultural conservation. These enterprises not only generate employment opportunities but also bring South Africa's rich and diverse heritage to life, transforming local stories into authentic experiences that resonate with global audiences. On 18 February 2026, the Department of Tourism, in partnership with the City of Ekurhuleni, hosted a Compliance and Resilience Workshop at Edenvale Community Centre. The workshop offered tourism entrepreneurs practical approaches to overcome regulatory challenges and build resilient, future-ready businesses.

The workshop brought together representatives from key institutions, including the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa, South African Revenue Service, National Empowerment Fund (NEF), Small Enterprise Finance Agency and Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDEFA), and Gauteng Enterprise Propeller. Entrepreneurs engaged in discussions that highlighted compliance as a business enabler rather than a barrier.



Tourism MSMEs showcasing their locally produced arts and crafts at the Sustainability Village.



Presenting on the importance of compliance, Mr Sibonelo Nzimande, Chief Director: Enterprise Development and Transformation at the Department of Tourism, emphasised that adherence to regulations and compliance is critical for any business. He noted that recent studies show that South Africa has a high rate of MSME failure, with 70% to 80%

of small businesses failing within five years of inception. This poses a significant challenge for tourism growth, as the sector is largely MSME-driven. Mr Nzimande stressed that to meet GDP contribution and employment targets, entrepreneurs will gain valuable support in collaborative efforts between the public and private sectors to improve the success and resilience of tourism businesses. "By committing collectively to legal and ethical standards and preparing for future challenges, South Africa's tourism sector can secure long-term growth while protecting both people and the planet," he added.

Mr Ofentse Shakung from Companies and Intellectual Property Commission (CIPC) emphasised, "Compliance should be looked at as an enabler of business, and the ability to comply and the simplicity of compliance should not be red tape." The discussion also covered, amongst others, the importance of trademarks, registration with the Information Regulator, and the role of compliance in building trust with clients and stakeholders.

The workshop featured exhibition stalls showcasing locally produced crafts, art, and value-chain products. Attendees received vouchers to support these stalls, boosting local production and entrepreneurship. The session was also a highlight of the department's continued MSME Incubation Programme, which mentors emerging tourism businesses.

Participants engaged in panel discussions with industry experts on business management, financial assistance, technology and data security, along with the inclusion of indigenous leaders in tourism culture and heritage. Mr Neville Govender, Manager of Business Compliance and Regulation at the City of Ekurhuleni, asserted, "The Business Act is currently being relooked to better support entrepreneurs," indicating upcoming policy changes to ease barriers for tourism MSMEs.

By combining regulatory guidance, practical advice, and mentorship, the workshop ensured that tourism MSMEs are better equipped to navigate compliance requirements, sustainable growth, and contribute meaningfully to the South Africa's tourism sector.

By Elizabeth Mpetsi

TOURISM MEETS EDUCATION - INVESTING IN LEARNERS TODAY TO BUILD SOUTH AFRICA'S TOURISM ECONOMY TOMORROW

By Annah Mashile



Deputy Minister of Tourism, Ms Maggie Sotyu, address learners during the Back-to-School Campaign.

The Department of Tourism's Back-to-School Campaign continues to demonstrate government's commitment to integrated service delivery, youth empowerment and inclusive economic growth. Hosted in partnership with provincial and local stakeholders at Thuto Sechaba Secondary School in Heilbron, Free State Province, on 23 January 2026, the programme highlighted how education and tourism intersect to prepare South Africa's future workforce and unlock opportunities for communities.

The campaign underscored the importance of positioning education as a national priority while exposing learners to tourism as a viable and diverse career pathway. Implemented through the District Development Model (DDM), the initiative brought together the tourism and education sectors to support learners, assess school readiness, and engage communities on shared development goals.

Addressing learners and stakeholders

during the programme, Deputy Minister of Tourism Ms. Maggie Sotyu reaffirmed the government's view of tourism as a powerful driver of employment, entrepreneurship, and social cohesion.

"Tourism is one of the most diverse sectors in our economy. From environmental management and heritage preservation to hospitality, transport, technology, and entrepreneurship, tourism creates opportunities for young people with different skills to build sustainable livelihoods," the Deputy Minister said.

She emphasised that introducing tourism concepts at the school level is a deliberate intervention to ensure learners understand the sector's potential early. Subjects such as tourism not only develop practical skills like map work and understanding foreign exchange, but also prepare learners to participate in the global service economy. The Free State MEC for Education, Ms .Mantlhake Julia Maboya, welcomed the collaborative approach, noting that education cannot succeed in isolation. Through the District Development Model, national, provincial, and local government are able to work together to address challenges affecting schools and communities.

"Education is a societal responsibility. When departments work together, we are better positioned to respond to school needs and create environments that support learner performance and wellbeing," the MEC said. Learners received donations, including school uniforms, stationery, and dignity packages containing essential hygiene items.

Through initiatives such as enterprise development support, transformation funding, green tourism incentives and skills programmes, the Department of Tourism continues to create pathways for young people and previously disadvantaged communities to enter and thrive in the sector.

Working alongside education authorities and local stakeholders, the Department remains committed to ensuring tourism contributes meaningfully to poverty alleviation, job creation and nation-building... starting in the classroom.

MANDARIN TRAINING EQUIPS TOURIST GUIDES TO OFFER AUTHENTIC AND IMMERSIVE TOURISM EXPERIENCES



Mr Excellent Nicholas Hlatshwayo, a Department of Tourism beneficiary, attending the Mandarin language training programme.

The Department of Tourism funded Mandarin language training programme is set to equip tourist guides with language proficiency that will allow them to offer Chinese tourists the phenomenal tourism experience in South Africa.

A group of South African tourist guides sponsored by the Department of Tourism to learn Mandarin believe their proficiency in the language will allow them to offer Chinese tourists an unforgettable tourism experience in the country.

About 30 tourist guides attended the Mandarin language training programme in Pretoria, Gauteng, from 16 February to 22 March 2026. They participated in five weeks of continuous, extensive Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (HSK) HSK1 and HSK2-level language training.

Some of the tourist guides from the group who visited China from 1 to 22 December 2025 on a cultural immersion programme were adamant that language training incorporated with the culture immersion equipped them with the necessary skills to communicate with Chinese tourists. This will help them communicate in the language while simultaneously understanding the

culture, traditions, and customs.

The Department identified Mandarin language proficiency as a strategic opportunity for tourist guides, as China remains one of the largest outbound tourism markets, with an unmatched spending power that presents significant opportunities for tourism in South Africa.

The training forms part of the Department's demand-led skills development initiatives started in 2019. Since its inception, 80 registered tourist guides have been trained at various levels of language proficiency, from introductory to intermediate.

One of the Mandarin language beneficiaries, Excellent Nicholas Hlatshwayo, 43, from Hazyview, near Kruger National Park, reckons Chinese tourists will now enjoy the South African tourism experience without language

barriers.

Hlatshwayo's daily work entails driving visitors on a sightseeing field trip. He educates them and shares information about the park's nature, animal behaviour, culture, and rich heritage.

Enthusiastic about his job, with more than 17 years of experience as a tourist guide, he says he loves exploring other cultures. "I personally believe that this opportunity will bear good fruit for us as tour guides. We are the ambassadors of this country that welcome everyone in South Africa, more especially the Chinese Market which is now growing," he said.

He said the language barrier was the main obstacle standing in his way of offering the Chinese the best tourism experience. "The difficult part of it was when they did not understand English, but now, they will have a preference to say, we want people who know the Mandarin language," he said.

According to Hlatshwayo, Chinese tourists usually struggle to ask questions on their tour if they do not have a translator. Eager to learn, he applied when he realised the Government was offering the Mandarin language course, but he did not know it would be a cultural immersion.

Hlatshwayo said that before the course, it was difficult for him to deal with Chinese tourists who were not proficient in English, especially when they were on a tour without a translator. He recalled that they would only take pictures, and even when he was briefing them about safety, they would not understand.

“The Chinese are remarkably interesting people. If you greet them in their language, they are so happy. If you say one word or introduce yourself in Chinese, they will feel

safe. They will feel welcome,” he said.

Godfrey Bachipile Dlamini, 35, from Mokhswase in the North West, one of the only two beneficiaries from that province, said the opportunity came at the right time when the province was starting to receive more Chinese tourists.

“I conserve, preserve, and educate visitors about the beauty and importance of nature at Pilanesberg National Park,” he said. He works for Mankwe Game Trackers based in Sun City.

“For the past 13 years, I have worked in nature conservation. I began my journey in law enforcement, where I was responsible for protecting and conserving wildlife daily. Today, I serve as an interpreter of nature, and I genuinely enjoy unpacking its wonders for

visitors from around the world,” he said.

For him, communication is the key, and sharing knowledge and cultural experiences contributes to sustainable tourism and conservation.



Ms Nashada Ndango, a cultural site guide, attending the Mandarin language training programme.

“If you greet them in their language they feel safe, valued and welcome”

Nashada Ndango, 29, a cultural site guide from the Western Cape, took six Chinese nationals on a tour of the !Khwa ttu San Heritage Centre near Cape Town last year, aiming to give them the best possible experience, but the language barrier proved challenging.

Ndango, a San descendant, explained that Chinese tourists who visit the Heritage Centre often focus mainly on taking pictures. She knew that if she spoke

Mandarin, she could offer them a more meaningful and memorable experience of San culture, stories, and cuisine. “My job is to interpret paintings that we have there, share information on the genocide that happened to the San People, about colonialism and resilience,” she said.

She also reflected that her experience in China during the cultural immersion programme, taught her about Chinese culture, traditions, and norms. This now

enables her to better understand their interests and expectations, allowing her to tailor and enhance their overall experience. “Chinese tourists will now understand what we are sharing with them, especially in a culture like mine, where it is not globally known. I think that this training will help me make people understand my culture and also the diverse cultures that we have in South Africa,” she said.

By Phathu Luvhengo



Department of Tourism beneficiaries with Ms Uveshnee Pillay, Director: Tourism Guiding Management at the Department of Tourism.



DIGITAL OVERHAUL: TOURISM COMPLAINTS OFFICE LAUNCHES AUTOMATED SYSTEM TO RESOLVE COMPLAINTS FASTER AND TRACK PROGRESS

By Phathu Luvhengo

On 1 April 2026, the Tourism Complaints Office will operate as an automated system that allows complainants to lodge complaints online, without sending an email or calling the Department of Tourism. The system will allow tourists to track the progress of their case using the reference number they receive when lodging the complaint.

The Department of Tourism will implement the new innovative changes to its Complaints office from 1 April 2026.

The migration from a manual complaints management process to a more consistent, accessible, efficient, and effective automated system will enable local and international tourists to lodge complaints about unsatisfactory tourism services, facilities, and products.

The office handles a wide range of complaints, including issues with booking agencies, tour operators, tourist establishments, and unsatisfactory tourism service.

Usually, complaints from tourists stem from poor service. Previously, tourists relied on e-mail, phone calls, or visiting the department's office, but with the digital system, it is just a click or a scan of a QR Code to log a complaint.

The new system is set to change how complainants lodge complaints against establishments in the tourism sector, whether it concerns poor service, requests for refunds, misleading advertising, unfair treatment, fraud, or alleged theft. All of these will be handled through a digitised, simplified system.

This digitised platform will assist complaints officers in tracking complaints and ensuring security by storing documents



Tourism Complaints Officials are Mr Michael Nkosi, Deputy Director: Complaints Management; Mr Trevor Maluleke, Assistant Director: Complaints Management; and Ms Julia Masemola, Senior Administrative Officer: Complaints Management.

electronically, as opposed to the previous manual system, which relied heavily on human resources. The system will allow the complaints officers to streamline their search and audit trace.

It will be available 24/7, acknowledging complaints, issuing a reference number to each complainant, and ensuring a smooth, swift process.

The complainant will then receive real-time updates and can check the complaint status in the system through the link. All they need is the reference number to monitor their case. If additional information is required for a specific complaint, the complainant can retrieve it from the system and provide it.

For instance, once the Department begins liaising with the respondent, the complainant will be able to monitor the process. The system is designed in a way

that allows the complaint officer to trace all the complaints from both local and international tourists, as opposed to the previous manual system, where, although it seldom happens, the complaint may be missed. Some complaints received by the Department of Tourism, however, do not fall within the scope and mandate of the Tourism Act.

"We don't only get tourism-related complaints, for example, if tourists are driving to Kruger National Park, and there are potholes on the roads, they don't complain to the Department of Transport. They usually complain to the Department of Tourism, because they are participating in a tourism activity and are going to a tourism establishment. They don't go to Department of Transport; they come to the Department of Tourism," says the Deputy Director from the Complaints Office Mr Michael Nkosi.

The Department previously received numerous complaints concerning tourists' luggage being tampered with at OR Tambo International Airport. Tourists often realised this only upon reaching their destination. By partnering with the Airports Company of South Africa (ACSA), the Department leveraged the airport's CCTV system, allowing officials to monitor luggage from drop-off to boarding and identify the exact point of interference. This intervention has significantly reduced such complaints.

Additionally, there was a troubling trend of tourists being followed upon landing at OR Tambo. The Department collaborated with the South African Police Service (SAPS) to address this issue, which has since become far less prevalent.

The Department also addressed complaints from international tourists who were targeted by traffic officials demanding bribes under threat of imprisonment. This challenge was

resolved through a working relationship with senior traffic officials in Gauteng.

In another notable case, the Department, alongside the Human Rights Commission, successfully challenged a guest house owner who discriminated against non-white guests. Through the assistance of the Human Rights Commission, the Equality Court ruled against the guest house owner in February 2018.

This racial discrimination case highlighted how the complaints office helps drive transformation in the sector.

Beyond tourism-specific issues, the complaints office has built strong partnerships with other government entities to address broader community concerns that impact tourists. For example, it helped resolve a water outage in the Ba-Phalaborwa municipality caused by a blanket service cut-off due to unpaid rates, which affected tourism establishments. The office facilitated a meeting with the

municipality to find a solution.

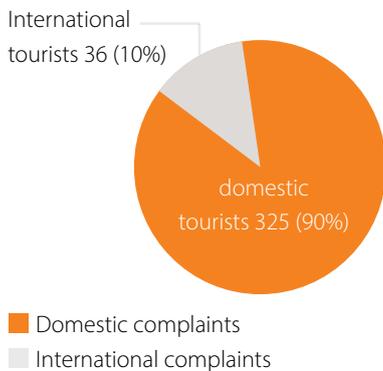
Recurring issues such as potholes have been effectively managed through collaboration with the Department of Transport, ensuring timely repairs. "When we solve the complaints and create a welcoming environment, we encourage repeat visits and positive recommendations, boosting demand for tourism services," says Mr Nkosi.

During the 2024/2025 financial year, the Department received 361 tourism complaints (325 domestic and 36 international), a number that Mr Nkosi says typically fluctuates and is influenced by events in certain provinces. Typically, from December to January, most complaints originate from KwaZulu-Natal, as many tourists visit the region at that time.

The e-mail address: complaints@tourism.gov.za will be discontinued, and complainants are advised to use the [link: https://itks.tourism.gov.za](https://itks.tourism.gov.za)

TOURISM COMPLAINTS OVERVIEW

GRAPH 1:
International and Domestic Tourism Complaints Received



All complaints received during the period were 361

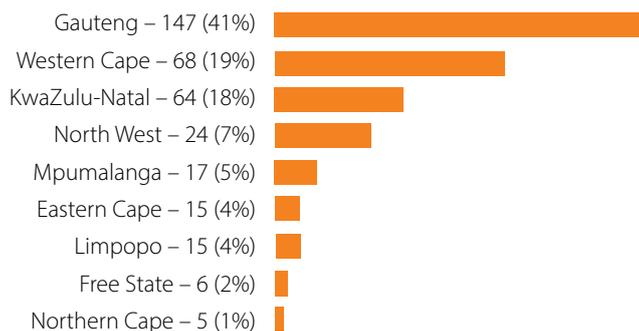
Source: Statistics from the Tourism Complaints 2024/2025 Financial Year Annual Report

GRAPH 2:
Nature of Tourism Complaints



Source: Statistics from the Tourism Complaints 2024/2025 Financial Year Annual Report

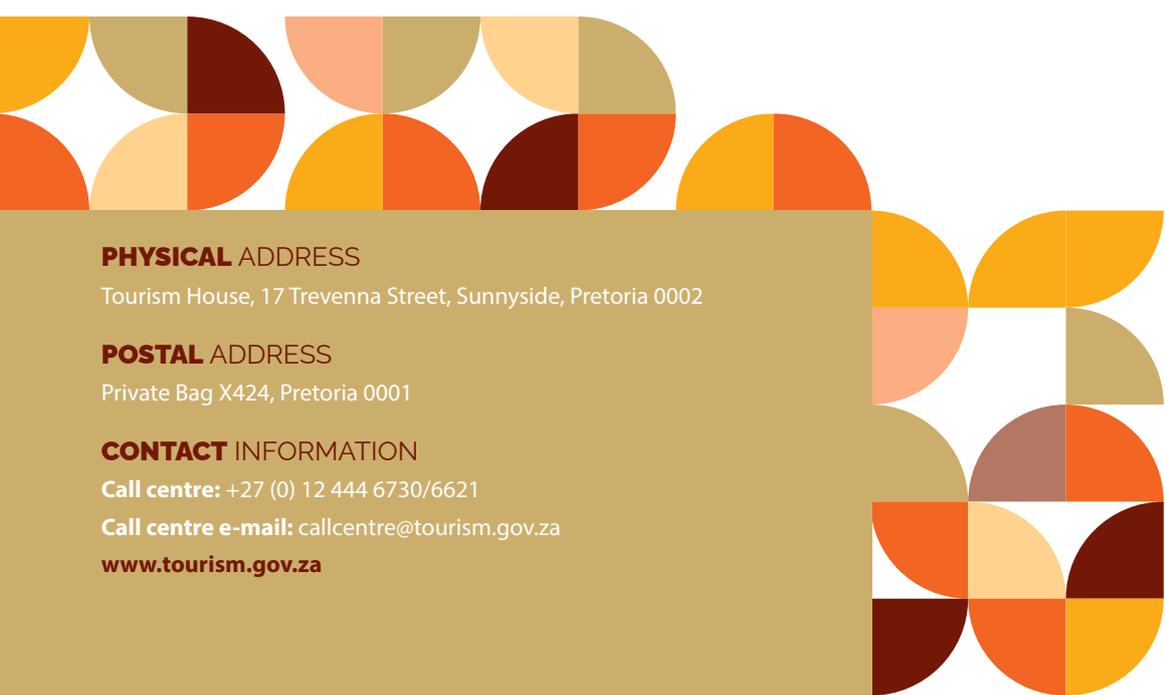
GRAPH 3:
Provincial Breakdown of Complaints



Source: Statistics from the Tourism Complaints 2024/2025 Financial Year Annual Report



Scan for more information



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