



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**Speech delivered by the Minister of Tourism, Derek Hanekom at the 3rd Lilizela Tourism Awards**

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Tonight is not about speeches, it is about awards. It is one of these rare moments when we allow ourselves to look back on the year and reflect on our achievements, and celebrate our successes.

Tonight is about acknowledging and rewarding excellence. It is about identifying the best out of an impressive reservoir of excellence.

Most importantly, tonight is about you. You have been selected as the best of the best.

It has been a difficult year for Tourism. The industry was battered by an irrational reaction to the outbreak of Ebola in West Africa – very far from South Africa. The introduction of the new visa regulations knocked our industry. The unexpected attacks on foreign nationals early this year also had a negative impact on arrivals, especially from other African countries. The images projected around the world harmed our reputation as a country. We normally take great pride in our rich diversity of cultures, languages, religions and nationalities. And so it should be.

Yet, despite these setbacks, the sector has proved to be very resilient. I believe this is the result of our collective determination to overcome all challenges, no matter how daunting they appear to be. Through the cumulative effect of your individual efforts we have kept the tourism flag flying high. South Africa remains a most sought after destination. A destination that offers memorable experiences of an incredibly diverse nature.

It must be said though, that these memorable experiences don't just happen; they are to a very large degree shaped by the experience you offer in your hotel, or your backpacker, or the experience offered by you as a tour guide.

Our 3000 kilometer coastlines offers some of the most pristine and beautiful beaches in the world. On its own this is not enough - the safety of the beach goer and the cleanliness of the beach, combined with the friendliness of the people our visitors meet on the beach make up the totality of the experience. Our country abounds with spectacular scenery - but at the end of the day, it's the people, the service and the facilities that make the difference.

We have thousands of restaurants offering every kind of cuisine in our country, but it is not just about having the restaurants - it's about having the finest restaurants that offer quality food, served professionally, with a welcoming touch. You can get a steak anywhere in the world, but word must get around that here you get a damn fine steak that not even Argentina can match!

The tourist experience is determined by what all of us do. SA Tourism markets our country as a whole, and you market your products. The successful marketing of our diverse offerings - our vibrant cities, our beaches, our national parks, our world heritage sites, our cultural diversity, and so much more translates into the successful marketing of our country. But what we market has to be backed up by what we offer. The experience is largely what is offered by you. This must be a continuously improving experience. The warmth, friendliness, service excellence, good facilities and ambience all matter.

Next year our Tourism Incentive Programme will be expanded to assist in the retrofitting of private establishments to make them more energy efficient.

We have entered into a partnership with the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa to help retain the Blue Flag status of our beaches, and to keep them clean and safe. This will be expanded to hiking trails, and other tourism sites over time.

Working closely with the industry we will continue with and expand our training and skills development programmes.

And so, working closely together, we can achieve really inclusive and sustainable growth of our tourism sector, and positively touch the lives of millions of people.

One bit of good news that you probably know, is that the overwhelming feedback we get from travelers to our country is that their experience is great and invariably exceeds their expectations.

I do have some more good news to share with you. The Ministerial Committee on Visa Regulations has concluded its work and cabinet has approved its recommendations. The outcome will be presented to the media tomorrow morning. It will include some positive news for tourism, but that's all I can say at this stage.

So, yes - it's been a tough year. Our Springboks were beaten by Japan a few weeks ago. Who would have believed it? A few weeks later, and we're in the semi-finals. So too will our tourism industry come bounding back. It will take a bit of time and a lot of dedication, but, if we continue to offer the best and market it well, we will regain our rightful place in the tourism race. There is massive opportunity out there: we must grab it!

To conclude, dear friends, to each and every one of you: congratulations on making it as a finalist in a very, very competitive environment. The winners will be announced in a little while. But actually you are all winners, every one of you.

To quote my colleague, the Minister of Sport, you are a bunch of winners! The best of the best! The finest of the finest! Keep up the excellent work, and continue doing us proud. Have a great evening!