



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**Address by Tourism Minister Derek Hanekom at the Tourism Day Celebration in Parys,
Free State, on 27 September 2016**

27 September 2016

Today is a day of celebration.

And in tourism, we have a lot to celebrate.

We celebrate the fact that Tourism Month and World Tourism Day has brought us all together, and united us in our efforts to promote and support tourism.

Just look around us, look at all the happy faces, the colourful costumes, the diverse people of our country, all coming together as one.

Tourism brings people together, all over the world. Last year, more than 1.2 billion people left their home countries to follow their dream of visiting interesting and exciting destinations.

As they travelled, they met local people, experienced their culture and traditions, and they learnt about each other. Many of these tourists would have returned to their homes with an enriched understanding of what it really means to be part of today's world, to be part of the global family of humankind.

This is cause for celebration: it is wonderful that tourism can bring people together on such a vast scale and make such a big difference to our world.

September is also Heritage Month, when we celebrate our diversity, the things that make us unique, which is what the world's tourists are very interested in experiencing.

Travel and tourism is now the world's largest and fastest growing industry.

International tourism grew by 4.4 per cent in 2015, the sixth consecutive year of above-average growth, and arrivals are projected to grow by 4 per cent this year, according to the UNWTO.

This means that tourism is becoming a very important driver of economic growth, creating more and more jobs and business opportunities, especially in developing countries: we must celebrate these advancements, and work together on growing even further.

World Tourism Day comes at the end of the high season in the northern hemisphere and the beginning of the season in the southern hemisphere. Right now, there will be great interest in SA as a destination among the world's travellers.

In South Africa, we can celebrate the growth in arrivals in the first six months of this year, when we received 14 % more tourists than we did between January and July last year. Tourists are finding incredible value for money when they visit South Africa, and we continue to win international awards.

Just last week, the internationally influential Condé Nast magazine put South Africa at number 4 on the list of the Top 20 countries in the world to visit, France, Spain, Thailand, Morocco and Australia, who are highly developed travel destinations.

If we can beat competition like that, we have a lot to celebrate.

Many leading global brands are also expressing their confidence in our tourism industry by investing in our economy, including Marriott International, who recently acquired Protea Hotels, Starbucks, Burger King and Amadeus.

More good news is emerging from the strengthening of collaboration between the tourism industry and government. We have sat down and agreed on the key actions we need to take together to secure growth in tourism.

We believe we can grow the number of international tourist arrivals by 50% in the next five years.

Government and industry are working together to improve market access through joint marketing agreements funded by private sector and government. These JMAs target high yielding markets - the United Kingdom, United States of America, Germany and China - and early indications are that this approach is paying off.

We are establishing a bidding fund for events, which will consolidate our position as the leading business events destination on the continent.

We are also removing barriers to growth by addressing Immigration Regulations and licencing for tourism operations, and working with municipalities to harmonise bylaws that have an impact on tourism.

As the full impact of this collaboration between industry and government emerges, there will plenty more to celebrate.

The additional 5 million tourists that we want to attract to South Africa will provide many more jobs for our people, and more opportunities for entrepreneurs and communities to become involved in tourism.

Tourism operators in the Free State will benefit greatly from the growth in arrivals.

About 1.2 million people travelled into the Free State last year, 15 % more than 2014.

This province has so much to offer tourists.

You have MACUFE, the Manguang African Cultural Festival, which has become one of the biggest festivals on the continent, and a huge celebration of art and culture.

You have the Basotho Cultural Village that takes visitors into traditional Sotho life, explore rock-art sites and learn about medicinal plants.

There's the town of Clarens, which caters very well for tourists, the Cherry Festival, and the Gariep Dam, the largest in the country.

And you have the Vredefort Dome, the oldest and largest crater on earth, which takes visitors into what happened on our planet millions of years ago.

The Free State's natural and cultural assets have great potential to attract domestic tourists.

The Department of Tourism and South African Tourism are working hard at promoting domestic tourism. SA Tourism has been allocated a ring-fenced budget of just over R100-million a year for the next few years specifically for domestic tourism. Success will depend on making domestic tourism more affordable for more of our people.

As part of its #TourismForAll campaign, SA Tourism asked our domestic travellers where they want to go and what they want to do, and this is what they said:

They are looking for beach and bush holidays, they can afford to pay between R1300- R3500 for a quick break, and they like to travel with friends and family.

Our people said they really want to explore South Africa, and they are proud of what our destination has to offer. They are looking for new experiences, so all the hidden gems in all our provinces can play a big part in providing these new experiences.

We also know the main reason that many people do not travel: they cannot afford to.

And this brings us to today's theme: creating Universal Access for our domestic and international tourists to have unrestricted access to our many wonderful attractions.

In addition to creating access for people with disabilities, in South Africa we also need to create affordable access for groups of marginalised people, our pensioners, those who have very little disposable income and the youth.

The Department of Tourism's efforts to get more South Africans to tour their own country, and to build a stronger domestic tourism economy, depends on making domestic tourism more affordable.

Tourism businesses who create affordable access for the domestic market will be rewarded by additional customers.

And as more of our people explore our diversity, they will understand each other better, and the bonds that ties us together as one nation will be strengthened.

Our challenge is to provide for the specific needs of domestic and international tourists living with disabilities. We need to provide accessible airport transfers, wheelchair vehicles, and appropriately designed streets and pavements.

Hotel rooms, restaurants and other facilities must be adapted to the needs of the blind, the deaf and people living with physical disabilities. Professional staff should be on hand to help customers with special needs, and to provide information about local attractions that cater for their needs.

Facilities in public places, like washrooms and waiting areas at bus stations, should be designed for universal accessibility.

We have surveyed Provincial Tourism Departments and government-owned provincial parks, and found a lack of the technical knowledge on what needs to be done to achieve compliance. More training is required for staff to enable them to serve people with special needs.

Compounding these challenges, many establishments cannot afford the cost of adapting or retrofitting their facilities with the correct equipment.

But these costs can be recovered, along with many other opportunities that emerge from advancing accessibility.

Universal Access will enhance South Africa's global competitiveness in an increasingly competitive global market, where people have more options than ever before, all available at their fingertips through their mobile devices. Improved country competitiveness will attract more arrivals to our shores.

There are obvious commercial benefits for operators of facilities and attractions, who can expect additional customers once they provide appropriate services for this niche market.

And there are not-so-obvious business opportunities for small enterprises and entrepreneurs to supply and retrofit equipment and facilities needed for Universal Access. It is estimated that this niche market has the potential to generate income of more than R5 billion a year and create about 30 000 new employment opportunities.

But the biggest opportunity of all is to make a positive difference in the life of that one person who will now have access to a place they could not visit before. It's an opportunity for those among us who are living with disability to also feel proud of our country, and a genuine sense of belonging to a nation that cares for them.

That is something great, for all of us to celebrate

Many South African establishments demonstrate excellent compliance with UA principles.

The Park Inn Hotel in Cape Town is recognised as a world leader in providing facilities for the blind, deaf and those with physical limitations. It is a socially sustainable partnership between the Radisson Group and DeafSA. Many other hotels are now following the example they have set, and we applaud all of them.

Most SANParks camps provide ramped access, and many have accessible ablution facilities with selected accommodation units that have been adapted for use by tourists who have mobility or visual impairments.

The Department of Tourism is undertaking many initiatives to promote Universal Accessibility:

- The Tourism Grading Council of South Africa provides tourism establishments with guidelines on UA features
- A new incentive programme which will become effective in 2017 will support tourism businesses to become UA compliant
- The Service Excellence program for staff at attractions includes Sensitivity Training, training for tour guides to serve clients with special needs, and Sign Language training
- A database of UA compliant providers and suppliers is being compiled to help tourists make choices
- The Department is working with South African Tourism to market UA products domestic and internationally, and encouraging the development of UA tourism routes
- We have engaged various organisations that represent people with disabilities to explore how the tourism industry can serve them better, including Blind SA, Deaf SA, the National Council for Persons with Physical Disabilities in South Africa, and the South African Disability Alliance.
- The Department has been working with Cape Town and Durban to conduct UA audits on tourism businesses and public attractions, transportation and other places of interest
- This year, the Department will develop a UA Assessment Tool for government-owned provincial parks, and provide training for staff at tourism attractions
- Next year, we will conduct audits at government-owned parks in four provinces, identify the gaps and recommend solutions.

These initiatives are starting to yield results. But we must acknowledge that we will all have to do much more, much faster, to make Universal Accessibility in tourism a widespread reality throughout South Africa.

Universal Accessibility is essential for responsible and sustainable development. It is also an exceptional business opportunity. Most importantly, it is simply the right thing to do.

We believe that promoting Universal Accessibility, coupled with our marketing, destination enhancement and skills development programs, will help us to attract another 5 million tourists to South Africa by 2021.

This will provide direct and indirect jobs for about two million South Africans, and will take the contribution of tourism to our GDP to the R500 billion mark.

As we build on what we have achieved so far, South Africa has an opportunity to become a world leader in this field, and we must make use of every bit of innovation and collaboration to achieve this goal.

That will be something special to celebrate, and we can do it.

We are aiming high, but we can achieve these goals by working together at all levels of government, by collaborating with industry, and by making more of our tourism facilities accessible to more people.

Thank you

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