



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**Remarks by Deputy Minister of Tourism, Fish Mahlalela on the occasion of the Africa
Travel and Tourism Summit 2021 media launch, virtual platform**

31 August 2021

Chairperson of the Board and esteemed members of the Board
Director General of the Department of Tourism
Acting CEO of South African Tourism
DDGs and Senior Management of SAT present
Members of the Media
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning

Today as we gather here to launch the Africa Travel and Tourism Summit, we also observe the last day of the special month to the women of our country. It may be the last day of the month, it is however not the last day of our government and everybody else commitment to celebrate, empower and defend the women of our country against all societal ills, in particular Gender Based Violence.

It was and should never be in vain for they remain amongst the most battle centred warriors for the democracy we have today. No doubt we owe our nascent freedom to the unwavering commitment of women to the course of their people. Mme Charlotte Manye-Maxeke distinguished herself in this regard. She and those of her generation, never allowed anyone to deter them from their set and defined political destiny.

As President Ramaphosa asserted, we celebrate Women's Month to acknowledge the role women have played in society as mothers, nurtures of humanity and pillars of many single – parent households. They have stared at the face of the worst experiences in life and never flinched. We salute their bravery, gentleness and resoluteness in pursuit of a just society.

In their honour and memory, the struggle for the total emancipation of women and a just society should continue to be fought in all fronts.

Ladies and Gentlemen, there has never been a more compelling time for Africans to work together towards a common goal. The pandemic provides an opportunity for innovation and collaboration. The solutions to reimagine tourism, as in other sectors of the economy, will come from the continent.

For us as government, it is a relief to see the sector lifting itself up after being somewhat dormant for 19 months. And I commend South African Tourism for taking the lead in trying to support the sector as whole to stand still and be resilient. This is an indication of government readiness to rebuild the tourism economy.

Tourism has had to take a backseat to the Coronavirus pandemic. But this does not mean it is less important. In fact, President Ramaphosa still sees tourism as one of South Africa's important economic drivers as it is part of the government's Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan.

The Africa Travel and Tourism Summit will give tourism policy makers and product owners an opportunity to reflect and respond efficiently to the current challenges imposed in the main by the pandemic.

For the last decade, Africa was trying to rebuild its image – shifting away from the negative connotation of a continent in perpetual turmoil to one that was economically and socially on the rise.

And it was working. Investors were pouring into the continent. GDPs in Angola, Kenya and Nigeria were reaching unprecedented scales. Then the Coronavirus happened.

Most developed nations have adjusted their travel restrictions and suggestions so as to protect their people against Covid-19. For instance, the UK has developed a traffic light system that indicates which countries are safe for travel. It is alarming to see that most African countries have been placed on the UK's red list for travel destinations.

This is partly because of the slow rollout of Covid-19 vaccines across the continent and negative reports in the media.

This is despite the number of combined Covid-19 cases in Africa being fewer than the US, India and Brazil. Africa as a whole has reached 7.7-million cases as of this Sunday afternoon according the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

There are numerous questions that need answering such as whether or not our governments are prepared to rebuild the perception of the continent. What are we doing to eliminate negative perceptions about Africa and 'being African', in order to shape positive perceptions right now? And how are we going to attract business leaders and corporates once again.

Indeed, our vibrant cities, diverse cultures, natural wonders and innovation will still play a role in rebuilding that image. Negative perceptions can be undone through ground-breaking cultural, social, political, corporate, and economic initiatives to turn us into a winning continent.

CONTINENTAL CONTEXT

It is encouraging to see that Africa's highest political body has been proactive in safeguarding tourism on the continent. The African Union's Bureau of the Subcommittee on Tourism has played its part in trying to support the recovery of the sector amidst the Covid-19 pandemic.

In April 2020, it drew up The Continental Tourism Recovery Strategy and called on the African Union Commission, Regional Economic Communities, the African Civil Aviation Commission, the African Development Bank, UNWTO, WTTC and international development partners, to provide technical expertise, resources and support for the Continental Tourism Recovery Strategy.

At the First Extraordinary Session of the AU Specialised Technical Committee on Transport, Transcontinental and Interregional Infrastructure, Energy and Tourism held virtually in January this year, it decided to finalise the strategy by the end of 2021 so as to implement its interventions as soon as possible.

SADC

Early in 2020, SADC member states developed the Costed Action Plan for the SADC Tourism Programme to assess the impact the pandemic has had on the region. It has found that countries that significantly rely on tourism and services sectors will experience a downturn in their GDP due to Covid-19 and the resultant restrictions on travel.

Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises will be most vulnerable to the impact. And since these businesses make up most of SADC's tourism industry, the region could lose between 2 million and 4.5 million tourism-related jobs, and between US\$17.5 billion and US\$40 billion in GDP.

Many rural communities living in proximity of natural and cultural attractions in the region depend heavily on tourism for jobs and income. The pandemic also has had a particularly severe impact on tourism in Protected Areas in Southern Africa.

FUTURE DRIVERS OF TOURISM

Africa's wealth is in its social diversity, their business savvy and its natural resources. It is for these reasons that we are in a prime position to take advantage of the five drivers of tourism in the future.

Our offerings would need to leverage off of the following:

- ↪ Sustainability - building sustainable tourism ecosystems that have a positive impact on the environment.
- ↪ Conservation through environmental protection programs and tourism that preserves endangered species and supports biodiversity.
- ↪ Developing an innovative and connective economy through increased direct inbound travel capacity, improved transport infrastructure that supports tourism growth and better data connectivity so as to enhance Africa's visibility online and in social media.
- ↪ Wellbeing that responds to travellers' needs to post-pandemic "wide open spaces" and the need to go back to nature.
- ↪ And inclusivity showcased through our music, art, fashion, food and cultural practices.

These can help in promoting African excellence, particularly its innovation, entertainment and corporate businesses.

DIGITISATION OF AFRICA'S TOURISM

Where there is adversity, there is opportunity. Covid-19 has given the tourism sector a chance to re-invent itself, to reflect and reimagine its role in the world. One of the ways it can adapt is by leveraging off of digitisation.

Africa has the youngest population, most of whom are digital natives. We can leverage off of youth digital culture and knowledge so as to access new business opportunities within tourism. Africa's Travel and Tourism Summit is an example of how the tourism sector can adapt to digital world.

By creating a hybrid event, it makes travel accessible to all stakeholders around the world. I envision the MICE industry will adopt this hybridized version very quickly in the future.

SMALL VICTORIES

In spite of this bleak outlook, there have been some important lessons over the past year that could help us on the road to recovery.

These include:

- ↪ Building proactive cultural partnerships that are key to building a positive narrative so as to attract travellers in the future. Examples are South African Tourism's strategic partnerships with Google Arts and Culture and Netflix so as to promote South African culture and its regions.

- ↪ Increasing airline frequencies through strategic partnerships. We already have seen Qatar Airways and FlySafair partner to increase domestic frequencies and United Airlines adding a direct route between Johannesburg and New York.
- ↪ A Covid-19 PPE Safety and Awareness campaign for graded establishments was key to developing new standards within tourism and hospitality industries.

It is evident, then, that the world still wants to do business with Africa.

ROAD TO RECOVERY

Forming part of government's broader Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan is the Tourism Sector Recover Plan. It is anchored in three interlinked pillars, namely protecting and rejuvenating supply, re-igniting demand and strengthening enabling capability for long term sustainability.

Its key strategic interventions include:

- ↪ Implementation of bio security norms and standards across the value chain to enable safe travel and rebuild traveller confidence.
- ↪ Stimulating domestic demand through targeted initiatives and campaigns.
- ↪ Strengthening the supply-side through resource mobilisation and investment facilitation.
- ↪ Support for the protection of core tourism infrastructure and assets.
- ↪ Executing a global marketing programme to reignite international demand.
- ↪ Tourism regional integration.
- ↪ Reviewing the country's tourism policy to provide enhanced support for sector growth and development.

The recovery plan also recognises domestic tourism as the cornerstone of our tourism sector and international tourism and it will play a huge part in reigniting tourism in South Africa.

CLOSING

In spite of the pandemic's impact on the continent's tourism industry, to be standing here and talking about Africa's Travel and Tourism Summit is a huge achievement for the sector. It shows that despite the pandemic, we remained resilient and steadfast.

Let us use the summit's platform to further entrench the perception that African tourism will remain robust despite the odds, and that we are still open for business.

Let us use the summit's platform to tell the world that we are a continent of conscious travellers, and that we are a conscious tourism sector, one that looks out for the health and safety of all travellers.

Let it be our moment to showcase our efforts in curbing the pandemic and our carbon footprint.

The summit will show that we can adapt and remain resilient. In all my encounters with tourism stakeholders and people within the industry, I have seen the tenacity in them. I urge that you continue to remain tenacious for the sake of African tourism.

THANK YOU