



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**Remarks by Tourism Minister Derek Hanekom at the Public Lecture held in
Bloemfontein**

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Greetings to all of you,

Firstly, let me thank our partners for collaborating with the Department of Tourism to make this important event happen.

We are grateful to the Department of Economic, Small Business Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs in the Free State, and to the Central University of Technology for your support and collaboration.

Today's lecture is important to all of us here, and to all the people out there who are living with disabilities. They are looking to us to make Universal Accessibility happen for them.

I want to share with you some of the challenges we face, the opportunities that emerge in promoting Universal Access, and touch briefly on what the Department of Tourism is already doing in this area.

What problem are we trying to solve?

We want all our people and our tourists to have equal access to our attractions and facilities. We also want them to enjoy the dignity they deserve, so they are not kept closeted away from enjoying the things that most of us take for granted.

In South Africa, the problem has an additional dimension: how to create affordable access for marginalised people, like pensioners, those who have very little disposable income to travel, and the youth.

The Department of Tourism and SA Tourism are working hard at promoting domestic tourism. SAT 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.

Our overall challenge is to provide for the specific needs of domestic and international tourists living with disabilities.

We need to provide accessible airport transfers, wheelchair-adapted vehicles, and appropriately designed streets and pavements.

Hotel rooms, restaurants and other facilities must cater 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 meet 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 technical knowledge on what needs to be done to achieve compliance. More training is required to enable staff 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 costs can be recovered, along with many other opportunities in responding to these challenges.

South Africa will become even more competitive as a barrier-free global destination, when our infrastructure, facilities and attractions are suitable for use by all tourists.

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

And there are not-so-obvious business opportunities for small enterprises and entrepreneurs to supply and fit equipment needed for Universal Access.

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, to expand their experiences and open up their lives in fresh and exciting ways.

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.

Many South African establishments demonstrate excellent compliance with UA principles.

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 UA guidelines; tour guides and other staff at attractions are being trained to serve clients with special needs; a database is being compiled of UA compliant providers and suppliers, and South African Tourism is marketing our UA products to domestic and international tourists.

We are working with Cape Town and Durban to improve access, and have conducted UA audits on tourism businesses and public attractions, transportation and other places of interest.

The Department has also engaged Blind SA, Deaf SA, the National Council for Persons with Physical Disabilities in South Africa, and the South African Disability Alliance to improve access for all our people and our tourists.

This year, we will develop an Assessment Tool for government-owned provincial parks, and provide UA training for front office staff.

Next year, we will conduct audits at government-owned parks in four provinces to assess their UA compliance, identify gaps and recommend solutions. We will also develop guidelines on incentivising UA in the tourism sector.

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 offers the tourism sector an opportunity to expand its market base. It is also an exceptional business opportunity. Most importantly, it is simply the right thing to do for our people.

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.

I look forward to seeing how today's lecture and panel discussion will take us further along the journey to leadership in Universal Access.

Thank you.

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