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Digital solutions and innovation can propel inclusive and sustainable tourism growth

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Pioneers in tourism and academics agree that technological advancements can inspire new opportunities that can catapult the growth of the industry to greater heights.

Tourism and the Digital Transformation was the focus of the Annual Tourism Public Lecture held on 18 September 2018 at the Walter Sisulu University Mthatha Campus in the Eastern Cape to explore the value and impact of the digital evolution on tourism - with a particular focus on small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs).

Guest speaker and author, Ryan Hogarth, stated that digital transformation was an imperative not a disruptor, and tourism needs to embrace this reality in order to advance.

“Digitisation is the new normal, and its demand is growing exponentially worldwide.”

“The digital age is resulting in travellers who are highly connected, who demand and expect instant information about tourism offerings tailored around their needs.”

“The industry needs to re-configure its thinking and vision around digital transformation, and make means to a build a frictionless environment that meets both demand and supply side of the tourism industry. Tourism can propel itself forward when it looks for opportunity as opposed to fearing change,” said Hogarth.

A panel of tourism influencers that included Uber SA; Voice Map; the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR); Airports Company of South Africa (ACSA); Mind Interactive and Flow Communications who have made strides in digitising tourism echoed Hogarth’s sentiments.

According to the panel, insight on the needs of the consumer will be imperative in determining tourism’s ability to meet the digital demand as the world adopts advancements such as voice recognition, augmented reality, improved internet connectivity and wearable technology.

Director General of Tourism Victor Tharage acknowledged the value of digital transformation in advancing the sector, in particular the gathering of critical data and information for planning and forecasting.

“The department has begun working on a legislative intervention that speaks to the use of digital platforms in the hospitality industry, including initiatives similar to AirBnB”

“Change is inevitable, and tourism needs to assess how it can leverage on digitisation to create opportunities and still remain relevant.”

“It will be critical for us to have continued engagements, such as this, to ensure that we find common ground in growing tourism in the digital era,” said Tharage.

The fourth Tourism Public lecture took place aptly in the Eastern Cape Province as the provinces readies itself to host festivities in celebration of World Tourism Day on 27 September 2018.

“We will be back to Mthatha to join the world in celebrating World Tourism Day under the UNWTO theme Tourism and the Digital Transformation.”

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“Tourism is a people centred activity, and technological advancements have made it possible for the world to learn, connect and share its diverse cultures and experiences at a click of a button.”

“As we embrace digital transformation and its multiple benefits for our sector, we must ensure that new innovations promote inclusivity for the benefit of all our people,” concluded Tharage.

For further information on the World Tourism Day Celebrations on 27 September 2018, visit: www.tourism.gov.za

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