



MINISTRY
TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY DEPUTY MINISTER OF TOURISM, MAGGIE SOTYU, AT THE WOMEN IN TOURISM BUSINESS BREAKFAST AT THE AFRICA'S TRAVEL INDABA AT THE ROYAL MAJESTIC HOTEL IN DURBAN ON 13 MAY 2026

Programme Director,
Deputy Director-General of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, Ms Fikiswa Pupuma,
Acting DDG: Tourism Sector Support Services, Mr Sibonelo Nzimande,
Our guest speaker from Old Mutual, Ms Yoliswa Magangane,
National Women in Tourism Chairperson, Ms Lerato Sekgobela,
Women in Tourism Provincial Chairpersons and members,
Representatives of the Tourism Transformation Council of South Africa,
Board members and Executives from South African Tourism,
Women leaders, entrepreneurs, business owners and stakeholders in the tourism sector,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning.

It is both an honour and a privilege to join you this morning at this strategically important Women in Tourism Business Breakfast taking place alongside Africa's Travel Indaba 2026 - a proudly Pan-African platform that continues to position tourism not only as an economic sector, but as a force for transformation, inclusion, and shared prosperity across our continent.

This gathering takes place during Africa Month - a time when we reflect on the progress of our continent, while also confronting the work that still lies ahead. It is therefore fitting that we gather under the theme: *“Leading the Change: Women Shaping a Sustainable Future.”*

Because across South Africa, and indeed across the African continent, women are not simply participating in tourism - women are building tourism. Women are preserving heritage. Women are sustaining communities. Women are creating jobs. Women are leading innovation. Women are building enterprises from villages, townships, cities, and coastal communities. And increasingly, women are shaping the future direction of the tourism economy itself.

Programme Director,

The Women in Tourism Programme established by the Department of Tourism in 2013, and formally launched at Africa's Travel Indaba in 2014, emerged from a clear recognition that transformation within the sector could not happen meaningfully if women remained excluded from ownership, leadership, access to markets, and economic opportunity.

More than a decade later, the Women in Tourism platform continues to serve as an important mechanism to bring women together across the tourism value chain - from accommodation

and hospitality, to transport, tour operations, cultural tourism, events, digital innovation, and community tourism. Importantly, it also provides a space for networking, mentorship, collaboration, and mutual support. Because transformation is not an event. Transformation is a process. And transformation requires deliberate partnerships and sustained commitment.

Ladies and gentlemen,

While we celebrate progress, we must also be honest about the challenges that continue to confront many women in the tourism sector. Too many women-owned enterprises still struggle to access funding. Too many women continue to face barriers to entering mainstream tourism markets. Too many women remain underrepresented in senior leadership and ownership structures. And too many small tourism businesses led by women continue to struggle with market access, digital inclusion, mentorship, and sustainability.

This is precisely why platforms such as this breakfast engagement remain critically important. They provide an opportunity not only to celebrate success stories but also to listen, engage, and identify practical solutions that can unlock inclusive growth and broaden participation in the tourism economy.

As government, we remain committed to advancing transformation within the tourism sector through programmes and instruments that seek to empower historically disadvantaged individuals, women, youth, and communities.

This includes initiatives such as the Tourism Transformation Fund, skills development programmes, enterprise support initiatives, market access opportunities, and partnerships with both public and private sector stakeholders.

We also continue to position tourism as a key contributor to inclusive economic growth and job creation through the Tourism Growth Partnership Plan - our shared roadmap between government and industry for sustainable sector growth over the next five years. Central to this vision is ensuring that growth in tourism is inclusive. Because tourism cannot succeed if opportunity remains concentrated in the hands of a few. A sustainable tourism future cannot be built if women remain on the margins of ownership, leadership, and opportunity.

Programme Director,

As we engage during this year's Indaba, we are reminded that tourism is evolving rapidly. Technology is reshaping how travellers discover destinations. Digital platforms are changing how businesses market themselves. Artificial intelligence, data, and smart tourism solutions are transforming visitor experiences globally. And as this evolution takes place, women must not be left behind.

Women entrepreneurs must be empowered to participate fully in the digital tourism economy. We must continue supporting women-owned businesses to adapt, innovate, and compete in both domestic and international markets. Equally, we must ensure that young women entering the tourism sector are equipped with the skills, confidence, and opportunities needed to lead in this changing environment. Because the future of tourism will belong to those who can innovate, collaborate, and respond to change.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of the greatest strengths of tourism is that it lives where people live. It reaches rural communities. It creates opportunities in villages and townships. It connects heritage, culture, nature, entrepreneurship, and human experience. And in many of these spaces, it is women

who hold communities together. Women who operate guesthouses. Women who produce crafts and cultural products. Women who preserve indigenous knowledge and storytelling traditions. Women who welcome visitors with warmth, dignity, and pride. When women rise in tourism, communities rise with them.

This is why empowering women in tourism is not simply a social imperative - it is an economic imperative. It is about building resilient local economies. It is about reducing inequality. It is about creating jobs. And it is about ensuring that tourism growth translates into meaningful change in people's lives.

As we move forward, I encourage the Women in Tourism structures across all provinces to continue strengthening collaboration, mentorship, and partnerships. Let us continue opening doors for the next generation of women leaders. Let us continue supporting women-owned enterprises. Let us continue building networks that create opportunities beyond conferences and events. And let us continue ensuring that transformation produces measurable impact.

To all the women gathered here this morning: your presence in this sector matters. Your leadership matters. Your voice matters. Your contribution matters. You are not only participants in tourism's future - but you are also Architects of that future.

In closing, allow me to Thank All stakeholders, organisers and partners who contributed towards hosting this important engagement. May today's conversations inspire new partnerships, new ideas, and renewed commitment towards building a tourism sector that is inclusive, representative, and sustainable.

As South Africa continues to strengthen its position within the African and global tourism landscape, may women continue to stand at the centre of shaping that future. Because a truly sustainable future for tourism will only be achieved when women are fully empowered to lead, innovate, own, and thrive.

I Thank You!

ENDS

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