



**MINISTRY
TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF TOURISM,
MS MAGGIE SOTYU,
LAUNCH OF HOTEL 247 RESTAURANT**

18 SEPTEMBER 2026 | WHITE RIVER, MPUMALANGA

Programme Director,
Representatives of the National Empowerment Fund,
Representatives of the Mpumalanga Provincial Government,
Leadership of the City of Mbombela and Ehlanzeni District Municipality,
Mrs Khosi Mthlane and the Hotel 247 team,
Members of the tourism industry,
Tourism entrepreneurs,
Members of the media,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning.

It is a great pleasure to be here in White River during Tourism Month to celebrate the official launch of Hotel 247's restaurant. Today is about much more than opening the doors of this restaurant. It is about opening doors to ownership, investment, enterprise, and opportunity. Hotel 247 gives us a tangible example of what transformation should look like when it moves beyond policy and becomes visible in the economy.

Transformation must move from policy to practice; from aspiration to ownership; from access to finance to a functioning business; and from investment to jobs, growth, and opportunity. That is why today matters.

We are celebrating a South African entrepreneur who saw opportunity where others might have seen uncertainty. We are celebrating an investment partnership that has helped strengthen a black-owned tourism business. And we are celebrating what becomes possible when government, development-finance institutions and entrepreneurs work together towards a common objective.

At the centre of this story is Mrs Khosi Mthlane. Her journey did not begin with Hotel 247. It is built on more than two decades of experience across the fast-moving consumer goods and hospitality sectors - in sales, operations, management, customer service, and business leadership. And then, in 2021, at one of the most difficult moments the tourism industry has ever experienced, she made a bold decision.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when tourism businesses worldwide were fighting for survival, Mrs Mthalande acquired the property previously known as Forever White River. Think about what that means. At a time of enormous uncertainty, she chose to invest. When tourism had effectively come to a standstill, she chose to believe in its future. And when many businesses were scaling back, she chose to build.

She rebranded and repositioned the property as Hotel 247 and committed her own capital, experience, and energy to making the business work. That is entrepreneurship. It is seeing possibility before everyone else can. It is resilience when conditions are difficult. And it is having the courage to put your own resources behind your vision. Today, Hotel 247 is a 100% black female-owned tourism enterprise operating in one of South Africa's most important tourism regions. That is a story worth celebrating.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We speak often about transformation in tourism. But transformation cannot simply mean having more people participating at the edges of the tourism economy. It must increasingly mean owning assets, owning businesses, accessing markets, leading, and building wealth through tourism.

For many years, one of the greatest barriers facing emerging tourism entrepreneurs has been access to capital. Tourism businesses are capital intensive. Hotels, lodges, attractions, and tourism experiences require investment before they can generate returns.

This is precisely why mechanisms such as the Tourism Transformation Fund, implemented by the Department of Tourism in partnership with the National Empowerment Fund, are so important. The purpose is not simply to provide funding. It aims to unlock commercially viable businesses and enable entrepreneurs to establish, expand, and improve tourism assets.

For Hotel 247, the investment package brought together grant support through the Tourism Transformation Fund, NEF financing, and the owner's own contribution.

That combination matters. Because sustainable transformation is not about handing somebody a business. It is about backing entrepreneurs who are themselves prepared to invest, take risks, build enterprises and create value. Mrs Mthalande has done exactly that.

The true measure of a programme such as the Tourism Transformation Fund is not how much money is approved. It is what that investment enables. Here at Hotel 247, investment has supported renovations, restaurant expansion, new furnishings and equipment, and alternative-energy infrastructure. The tourism product has been strengthened, the business has become better positioned to serve both leisure and business visitors, and jobs have been created. That is what we mean when we say that tourism investment must translate into economic impact.

Funding must become assets. Assets must become businesses. Businesses must become jobs, procurement opportunities, market access and sustainable local economic activity. That is how transformation becomes meaningful.

Programme Director,

Tourism is sometimes spoken about as though it is simply about holidays and leisure, but tourism is economic activity. A visitor who stays at this hotel does not only pay for a room; they eat in a restaurant, use transport, buy fuel, visit attractions, purchase goods, employ guides, buy crafts and local products, and attend conferences and events. In doing so, they support businesses throughout the tourism value chain and create opportunities far beyond

the hotel itself. That is why we often say: tourism creates jobs where people live. And this is particularly important here in Mpumalanga.

White River is strategically located within one of South Africa's strongest tourism corridors. Visitors to this region have access to some of our country's most recognisable attractions, from the Kruger National Park to God's Window, the Panorama Route, Graskop, and the many experiences of the Lowveld.

Hotel 247 therefore does not operate in isolation. It forms part of a wider visitor economy. The opportunity is to ensure more visitors do not simply pass through this region, but stay longer, experience more, and spend more locally. Every additional night creates economic opportunity. Every additional meal creates economic opportunity. Every additional experience creates economic opportunity. And every successful tourism business strengthens the destination around it.

This is also why investment in tourism infrastructure matters. When we invest in accommodation, attractions, experiences and tourism services, we strengthen destinations and create the conditions for growth. But successful tourism investment requires more than infrastructure alone; it also depends on access, safety, skills, strong destinations, effective marketing and meaningful partnerships between government and industry.

The Department's approach through the Tourism Growth Partnership Plan recognises precisely this. If South Africa wants to increase visitor numbers, increase tourism spend and create more jobs, then we must create the conditions in which tourism businesses can invest and grow.

Government cannot build the tourism economy alone. The private sector cannot do it alone. Development-finance institutions cannot do it alone. Entrepreneurs cannot do it alone. But when we bring those capabilities together, we can unlock investment that might otherwise never happen. Hotel 247 demonstrates the value of that partnership.

Our responsibility does not therefore end when funding is approved or when a ribbon is cut. The next chapter must be about sustainability: stronger occupancy, growing revenue, repeat visitors, sound financial management, and improved market access. Ultimately, the goal is to build businesses that can keep growing, compete, and create value long after government support ends. That is the transformation we want.

We want businesses that can compete. Businesses that can employ. Businesses that can invest again. Businesses that become part of the established tourism economy. And eventually, businesses that can support the next generation of entrepreneurs.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To tourism entrepreneurs today, the story of Hotel 247 should also carry an important message. Government programmes can provide support. Funding institutions can provide capital. But entrepreneurship still requires courage, preparation, discipline and persistence.

The entrepreneur must also bring something to the table. A viable business proposition. Knowledge of the market. A willingness to invest. And the resilience to keep going when circumstances become difficult. Mrs Mthalande's journey reminds us that transformation is not simply about creating beneficiaries. It is about building entrepreneurs and owners.

Mrs Mthalande, today we congratulate you. We congratulate you for taking a risk during one of tourism's most difficult periods. We congratulate you for believing in this property and in this

destination. And we congratulate you for demonstrating what is possible when entrepreneurial determination meets strategic investment and partnership.

But today is not the end of the journey. It is the beginning of the next chapter. Our hope is that Hotel 247 will continue to grow. That more visitors will walk through these doors. That more people will find employment here. That more local businesses will enter its supply chain. And that the success of this enterprise will inspire other South Africans to see tourism not only as a place to work - but as a place to own, invest and build.

Because ultimately, transformation must be visible in who owns tourism assets. It must be visible in who participates in its value chains. It must be visible in who benefits from its growth. And it must be visible in the businesses that rise, grow, and endure.

Hotel 247 is one such story. May this investment continue to grow. May this business continue to prosper. And may it help us build the inclusive, transformed and competitive tourism economy that South Africa needs.

I thank you.

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