



MINISTRY
TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF TOURISM, MAGGIE SOTYU, AT
THE SADCSAD DIALOGUE AT THE AFRICA'S TRAVEL INDABA 2026
IN DURBAN ON WEDNESDAY, 13 MAY 2026**

Honourable Ministers and Deputy Ministers,
Director-Generals and Permanent Secretaries responsible for Tourism,
Representatives of the SADC Secretariat,
Leaders of the Southern Africa Tourism Alliance,
CEOs of Tourism Boards and Tourism Associations,
Representatives of the European Union, the German Government, and GIZ (Deutsche
Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit),
Leaders from the aviation, tourism, and transport sectors,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

A warm South African welcome!

It is a privilege to join you today at Africa's Travel Indaba 2026 for this important Strategic Dialogue on Regional Connectivity under the theme: *"Unlocking Regional Connectivity: Rethinking How Southern Africa Moves Its Visitors."*

This dialogue takes place at a critical moment for our region. South Africa currently holds the Interim Chairpersonship of the Southern African Development Community, and with that responsibility comes an obligation not only to lead discussions but to help drive practical regional progress that strengthens our economies and improves the lives of our people.

Tourism remains one of the most powerful economic sectors available to the African continent. It creates jobs, stimulates small business development, attracts investment, supports infrastructure development, and connects people across borders and cultures. But tourism cannot fully realise its potential where connectivity remains constrained. That is why this dialogue is both timely and important.

Programme Director,

The SADC Tourism Programme 2020-2030 correctly identifies regional connectivity as a foundational enabler of tourism growth across Southern Africa. Its ambitions are clear: to stimulate visitor movement, strengthen the region's tourism reputation, enhance tourism development in Transfrontier Conservation Areas, improve visitor experience, and deepen regional partnerships.

These goals are directly linked to economic growth, investment, employment, and Africa's broader integration agenda under Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area.

Yet we must acknowledge that the movement of people across our region remains more difficult, expensive, and fragmented than it should be. Too many routes remain underserved. Too many travellers face costly and complicated journeys. Visa systems remain disconnected, and border inefficiencies continue to undermine the tourism brand we are trying to build together. Connectivity is therefore not simply a transport issue. It is an economic growth issue, a competitiveness issue, and increasingly, a continental integration issue.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The global aviation industry carried more than four billion passengers in 2023 alone. Meanwhile, Africa still accounts for a disproportionately small share of global air traffic despite having one of the fastest-growing tourism markets in the world. Southern Africa cannot speak confidently about regional integration while travellers still struggle to move efficiently between neighbouring countries. That is why South Africa continues to prioritise air access and route development as part of our broader tourism growth agenda.

Our Tourism White Paper of 2024 identifies tourism as a pillar for economic diplomacy and recognises the importance of implementing the SADC Tourism Programme and strengthening regional integration. Cabinet has approved the Tourism Marketing Route Development Plan to support new air routes and sustain existing routes through coordinated marketing efforts. Important work has also been undertaken through initiatives such as Cape Town Air Access, Durban Direct, and Gauteng Air Access, all of which contribute to improved regional and international connectivity.

We are seeing encouraging momentum across the region, but the work ahead remains significant. The time has come for us to move beyond discussions about connectivity and towards practical, commercially sustainable partnerships among governments, airports, airlines, tourism authorities, and the private sector. Our collective efforts must ensure that aviation growth not only strengthens international access into major hubs but also unlocks seamless intra-African travel and supports the growth of regional tourism across Southern Africa.

Programme Director,

We have expanded e-Visas and are transitioning toward Electronic Travel Authorisation systems designed to fully digitalise visa processing and expedite approvals. We have implemented the Trusted Tour Operator Scheme to facilitate group travel from key source markets, including China and India. We have introduced the MEETS (Meetings, Events, Exhibitions, and Tourism Scheme) Visa Scheme to support international delegates attending conferences, exhibitions, and events. Importantly, South Africa also welcomes continued progress on the SADC UNIVISA initiative, which involves Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.

The UNIVISA concept remains one of the clearest demonstrations of what regional integration can look like in practice. A traveller visiting Southern Africa should increasingly experience the region not as disconnected destinations, but as one connected tourism ecosystem.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The visitor experience does not begin at the hotel. It begins at the border. Long queues, outdated systems, and inefficient processing damage destination competitiveness and visitor confidence. We therefore welcome investments currently underway in One Stop Border Posts and the modernisation of ports of entry across the region. South Africa's investment into airport

infrastructure, border modernisation, and digital systems reflects our recognition that seamless travel is now a core expectation of modern travellers.

Programme Director,

I also wish to commend the operationalisation of the SADC Tourism Working Groups and the establishment of the Southern Africa Tourism Alliance as a collective private sector platform supporting regional tourism development. Regional integration cannot succeed through government action alone. It requires the active participation of airlines, tourism businesses, investors, transport operators, border authorities, destination marketers, and communities.

As South Africa, we remain fully committed to supporting regional initiatives that strengthen connectivity, unlock tourism growth, and deepen African integration. And as we gather during Africa Month, we are reminded that tourism is more than an industry. Tourism connects our people. Tourism strengthens regional understanding. Tourism builds economic bridges where political borders once divided us.

Let us therefore leave this dialogue with a renewed sense of urgency and shared purpose - committed not only to discussing regional connectivity, but to delivering it. Let us build a Southern Africa where our borders become bridges of opportunity; where travellers move across our region with ease and confidence; and where tourism becomes a true driver of regional integration, shared prosperity, and inclusive growth. The future of African tourism will not be built by countries working in isolation, but by a region moving forward together with a common vision. Because when Southern Africa connects, Southern Africa rises - together, stronger, and more competitive on the global stage.

I Thank You!

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