



**MINISTRY
TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF TOURISM, MS MAGGIE SOTYU,
ON THE OCCASION OF YOUTH MONTH ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUNG CHEFS,
HOSPITALITY STUDENTS AND YOUTH IN TOURISM, MANGAUNG, FREE STATE: 18
JUNE 2026**

Programme Director,
Representatives of the Hospitality and Tourism Industry,
Leaders of Educational and Training Institutions,
Young Chefs, Hospitality Professionals, and Students,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

It is a pleasure to join you today as we commemorate Youth Month and celebrate the talent and creativity of young South Africans who are helping shape the future of our country and of tourism.

This year carries special significance for our nation. We mark the 50th anniversary of the 1976 Youth Uprising, a defining moment in our history when young people stood up against injustice and demanded the right to determine their own future. We also celebrate 30 years of our Constitution, a milestone that reminds us of the progress we have made as a democracy and of our collective responsibility to create a society founded on dignity, equality, opportunity, and freedom.

These anniversaries invite us not only to reflect on our past but also to consider our future. The generation of 1976 fought for political freedom. The generation of 2026 must help build economic opportunity. The challenge before us is to ensure that young South Africans are equipped with the skills, support, and opportunities they need to participate meaningfully in the economy and contribute to our country's development.

That is why today's engagement is so important. It recognises young people not as passive beneficiaries of development, but as active participants in building South Africa's future. It recognises your ability to innovate, create, lead, and contribute to economic growth. It recognises that young people are not waiting for the future to arrive; you are already helping to shape it.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Tourism is uniquely positioned to support this vision. Too often, tourism is viewed simply as travel and leisure. In reality, tourism is a people economy. It is an industry built on people, powered by people, and sustained by people.

Tourism creates jobs, supports small businesses, stimulates investment, and generates economic activity in cities, towns, townships, and rural communities alike. Importantly, tourism creates pathways into the economy for young people.

Every visitor who travels to South Africa contributes to a network of economic opportunities. When a tourist stays in accommodation, eats at a restaurant, purchases local products, attends an event, or visits an attraction, that spending supports businesses and livelihoods throughout the value chain. As I often say, a tourist is not simply a visitor. A tourist is an investor in the local economy. This is why tourism remains one of the sectors with the greatest potential to contribute to inclusive growth, transformation, and job creation.

Young people are already making a significant contribution to this sector. Many of you gathered here today are pursuing careers in hospitality, culinary arts, and tourism services. Others are exploring opportunities in entrepreneurship, digital content creation, destination marketing, and cultural tourism. Through your work, you are helping visitors experience the warmth, creativity, and diversity that make South Africa such a remarkable destination.

The hospitality and culinary sectors are particularly important. Food is often one of the most memorable parts of a travel experience. Through local cuisine, visitors learn about our cultures, traditions, and communities. Young chefs, therefore, play a unique role as ambassadors of South Africa's heritage and identity. Every meal tells a story. Every local ingredient reflects a place and a people. Every dining experience has the potential to create a lasting connection between visitors and our country.

The growing demand for authentic and meaningful travel experiences presents exciting opportunities for young people entering the tourism sector. Travellers increasingly seek experiences that connect them to local culture, local food, local stories, and local communities. This creates opportunities for young entrepreneurs, chefs, guides, artists, performers, and digital innovators to develop products and experiences that are uniquely South African. It also creates opportunities for young people to build businesses that contribute to local economic development while showcasing the richness of our heritage.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As government, we recognise that unlocking these opportunities requires investment in people. The Department of Tourism continues to implement programmes aimed at skills development, entrepreneurship support, and capacity building. These initiatives seek to equip young people with practical experience, industry exposure, and the tools needed to build sustainable careers and businesses.

Through our programmes, we are:

- Training young people as tour guides, hospitality professionals, and tourism ambassadors;
- Supporting women-owned businesses in crafts, catering, homestays, and tour operations;
- Developing rural tourism routes that showcase our culture, history, and landscapes; and
- Reviving heritage sites and festivals that draw visitors into the heart of our communities.

When tourism grows, young people gain skills. When women succeed, families and communities are uplifted. And when local culture is celebrated, identity becomes an economic asset.

We also know that passion alone is not enough - access to finance remains critical.

Through the Tourism Equity Fund (TEF), we provide blended financing, combining loans from Small Enterprise Development and Finance Agency and other strategic financiers with grant funding from the Department of Tourism to support inclusive investment.

The Tourism Transformation Fund offers debt-plus-grant support to small-scale tourism ventures and expansion projects with majority black ownership - ensuring transformation is practical, not theoretical.

Our Tourism Incentive Programme continues to strengthen the sector's competitiveness. Within it, the Green Tourism Incentive Programme supports graded establishments to retrofit with energy- and water-efficiency systems, guided by a resource-efficiency audit.

The Resource Efficiency and Cleaner programme (RECP) aims to train unemployed youth with qualifications in electrical and mechanical engineering and environmental science on resource efficiency methodologies, including water, energy and waste management in order for them to assist tourism establishments to save on costs and the environment.

These programmes are designed to lower operating costs, improve sustainability, and future-proof tourism businesses.

Looking ahead, we will continue to strengthen Tourism SMMEs through:

- Entrepreneur development and mentorship,
- Skills training and advisory services,
- Market access and information sharing, and
- Exposure to local and international platforms.

Through destination enhancement and route development projects, we are diversifying tourism offerings and enriching visitor experiences in priority areas, ensuring tourism benefits are more evenly spread across regions such as the Free State.

The Market Access Support Programme further assists qualifying small tourism enterprises by contributing towards costs such as exhibition space, return airfare, and accommodation to participate in selected tourism trade platforms.

However, creating opportunities for young people cannot be the responsibility of government alone. It requires strong partnerships between government, industry, educational institutions, and communities. It requires established businesses to mentor emerging entrepreneurs. It requires training institutions to equip young people with relevant and future-focused skills. And it requires all of us to work together to ensure that no young person with talent and ambition is left behind.

This commitment aligns with the priorities of the Government of National Unity and the Medium-Term Development Plan, which place job creation, inclusive growth, and youth empowerment at the centre of South Africa's development agenda.

As Deputy Minister of Tourism, I remain committed to ensuring that tourism growth translates into meaningful opportunities for ordinary South Africans. Growth must be inclusive. Growth must create pathways into the economy. Growth must support transformation. And growth must improve lives.

The success of tourism cannot be measured only by visitor numbers. It must also be measured by the opportunities created, the businesses supported, the jobs sustained, and the communities empowered through tourism.

To the young people gathered here today, my message is simple. Believe in your potential. Continue developing your skills. Embrace innovation and creativity. Be willing to learn, adapt, and lead. Most importantly, recognise that your contribution matters.

South Africa needs your ideas. South Africa needs your energy. South Africa needs your entrepreneurial spirit. And South Africa needs a generation that is prepared to build.

As we commemorate Youth Month, let us honour the legacy of the young people of 1976 by creating opportunities for the young people of today. Let us continue building a tourism sector that is inclusive, innovative, and people-centred. Let us ensure that young people are not spectators in economic development, but active participants and leaders in shaping our future.

Because the future of tourism is not something that lies ahead of us. It is already being built by young South Africans in classrooms, training kitchens, hospitality establishments, tourism businesses, and communities across our country. Every new skill you acquire, every innovative idea you develop, every business you build, and every visitor whose experience you enrich contribute to a stronger and more inclusive South Africa.

The generation of 1976 challenged the limits that were placed before them and changed the course of our history. Your generation has the opportunity to build on that legacy by creating opportunities, driving innovation, preserving our heritage, and helping to shape an economy that works for all.

You are that generation. You are the generation that builds. And if we work together to unlock the talent, creativity, and determination of South Africa's young people, there is no limit to what our tourism sector - and our nation - can achieve.

I thank you.

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