



**MINISTRY
TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF TOURISM, PATRICIA DE LILLE,
SOUTH AFRICAN TOURISM INVESTMENT SUMMIT 2026
THEME: INVEST IN TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE. INVEST IN GROWTH
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Good morning, Sanibonani, Dumelang, Goeie more, Assalamu alaykum. A very warm welcome to the South African Tourism Infrastructure Investment Summit 2026, which we are convening under the theme “Invest in Tourism Infrastructure. Invest in Growth.”

I would like to thank our sponsors, partners, financial institutions, project owners and representatives of government for joining us at a Summit. with a very specific purpose: to connect South Africa's tourism growth with the capital and infrastructure required to realise them.

The purpose of this Summit is to bring together government, project owners, investors and financiers to mobilise capital for investment ready projects and accelerate implementation.

We started with 8 bankable projects valued at R1 billion and the pipeline has now grown to 15 projects valued at R3,5 billion, 3 projects already secured funding commitments.

These projects are from both the public and private sectors, spanning accommodation, tourist attractions, heritage spaces, entertainment facilities and infrastructure.

This Summit takes place at an important moment for tourism, because globally and domestically there is growing recognition that tourism must be viewed as an economic sector with significant capacity to generate investment and create jobs at scale.

Last week, I returned from Geneva, where I served as Co-Chair of the inaugural Beyond Tourism Day at the World Economic Forum, and I repeated an argument I have consistently made: Tourism policy is Economic policy.

For too long, economic development discussions have been dominated by industrialisation and manufacturing. That is changing. At Beyond Tourism Day, the World Bank's work identified tourism among the 5 sectors with significant potential to generate jobs at scale.

The same recognition is taking place in South Africa. In August, President Cyril Ramaphosa identified tourism alongside mining, infrastructure, and agriculture and agro-processing as four key sectors under Phase Three of the Government-Business Partnership, with a focus on accelerating inclusive economic growth, job creation and confidence.

According to Stats South Africa, tourism directly employed 953 981 people in 2024, equivalent to 5.7% of total employment, while its direct contribution to GDP reached 4.9%, exceeding agriculture, utilities and construction.

Meanwhile, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council, from a direct, indirect and induced perspective, South Africa's tourism sector contributes 10% to GDP.

Let me take this moment to also share with you, next week at the WTTC conference in Malta, South Africa will be presented with the Global Tourism Champion award for our exceptional dedication to reviving and advancing the global travel and tourism sector.

This is important because global travel and tourism support over 366 million jobs and accounts for 10% of global GDP.

This is the economic context in which we must consider tourism infrastructure investment.

South Africa has already demonstrated growth in demand.

In 2025, domestic overnight trips reached 44.7 million with expenditure at R111.6 billion, while South Africa welcomed a record high 10.5 million international arrivals with expenditure at R102.2 billion.

Cumulatively, between January and August this year, international arrivals reached over 7.5 million, an increase of 11.7% compared with the same period last year.

Just yesterday, Stats SA announced that South Africa welcomed over 1 million international tourists for the month of August.

As you will hear a bit later during the presentation by UN Tourism, South Africa has emerged as the strongest-performing African destination in the first half of 2026.

Globally, we are among the top 20 countries performing in international arrivals.

This growth is not by accident, it is by design through the Tourism Growth Partnership Plan, which government and the private sector have agreed to, with 5 priorities.

These are; Ease of Access, Coordinated Destination Marketing, Safety and Security, Tourism Product Development and Job Creation.

In August the President launched the Electronic Travel Authorisation Digital Visa which is now live in over 30 countries. Through machine learning technology, applicants can apply from the comfort of their homes, no queues, no paperwork, just one application, one answer within 24 hours.

Together with the private sector, government is implementing the Cabinet-approved Tourism Route Development Marketing Plan, which moves us away from fragmented route-development efforts towards greater national coordination between government, provinces and the private sector.

Government has invested R6.5 million into the Plan as we establish a special-purpose vehicle capable of supporting coordinated route-development marketing.

We are already seeing airlines demonstrate confidence in the South African market through the increased additional capacity.

Spain's Air Europa launched its inaugural direct Madrid–Johannesburg service in June, operating three flights per week.

Brazil's LATAM Airlines launched three weekly direct services between São Paulo and Cape Town in July, bringing the launch forward from September because of passenger demand.

From October, Turkish Airlines will increase its direct services to South Africa from 14 to 20 flights per week, 10 to Johannesburg and 10 to Cape Town.

The Transport Department has recently approved increased frequencies from the USA.

Air China announced plans to increase its Beijing – Shenzhen – Johannesburg direct routing from 3 weekly flights to 5 weekly flights later this month.

Meanwhile, Air India's announcement of a direct flight between India and South Africa is imminent.

Because of this increase in demand, we must fast track the diversification of our tourism products.

The Department has established a Tourism Infrastructure Facilitation Unit specifically to help remove barriers faced by investors and to assist in moving priority projects towards implementation.

We have now strengthened that capacity further through a three-year Memorandum of Agreement with Infrastructure South Africa and strengthened access to finance through institutions such as the Industrial Development Corporation.

We are already seeing what investor confidence can produce.

The recently opened Club Med Beach & Safari Resort in KwaZulu-Natal represents an investment of more than R2 billion, adding significant tourism capacity while demonstrating confidence in the long-term prospects of the South African visitor economy.

On that same warm Indian Ocean coastline, construction of the R1,5 billion Oceans Umhlanga North Tower is at an advanced stage.

In the Western Cape, the V&A Waterfront is investing R24 billion into the expansion of Granger Bay while the R8 billion Cape Winelands Airport is taking shape.

But our objective must be to create a much deeper pipeline of such investments across the country.

With that said; here are the 10 reasons to invest in tourism infrastructure:

1. TOURISM IS ECONOMIC POWER

This is a growth sector.

Tourism contributed 4.9% to South Africa's GDP in 2024 and sustained approximately 954,000 direct jobs.

Every new tourism investment can activate a wider value chain - from accommodation and transport to food, retail, experiences, technology, and local enterprise.

2. GROWTH YOU CAN SEE

Demand is rising - and breaking records.

South Africa welcomed a record 10.5 million international visitors in 2025. By August 2026, international arrivals had reached 7.5 million - up 11.7% year-on-year.

The market is growing. The opportunity is growing with it.

3. A MARKET WITH DEPTH

Strong at home. Connected to Africa. Attractive to the world.

Domestic tourism is the bedrock of the sector, generating R111.6 billion in spend in 2025, while African markets continue to drive strong regional demand.

Africa accounts for 76% of South Africa's international arrivals, while long-haul demand from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany adds further depth to the market. This mix helps spread demand across source regions and visitor segments. For investors, this means a visitor economy supported by domestic, regional and international markets. Multiple markets. Multiple segments. More ways to grow

4. A YEAR-ROUND DESTINATION

Sunshine. Coastlines. Cities. Mountains. Safari.

With diverse climatic regions, nearly 3,000 kilometres of coastline and outdoor experiences across all nine provinces, South Africa offers reasons to travel throughout the year. Year-round appeal supports year-round opportunity.

More seasons. More experiences. More opportunity.

5. HOSPITALITY PEOPLE REMEMBER

Our people make your tourism experience unforgettable.

International visitor sentiment is strong, with travellers consistently praising South Africa's hospitality, service, food, attractions and atmosphere.

Our spirit of Ubuntu - warmth, welcome, and human connection - helps turn first-time visitors into returning guests and global advocates.

6. ONE COUNTRY. ENDLESS EXPERIENCES.

Few destinations offer this much variety in one place.

Wildlife. Beaches. Culture. Heritage. Food and wine. Adventure. Wellness. Business events. Cities. Rural and township experiences.

The pipeline can also respond to growing interest in wellness, adventure and agritourism, expanding the range of investable experiences and helping destinations package more reasons for visitors to stay longer. South Africa lets investors develop products across multiple tourism segments, price points, and markets.

7. CONNECTED TO OPPORTUNITY

Access is expanding.

South Africa's international airports connect the country to key African and global markets, while continued route development is bringing new capacity and new source markets within reach.

The wider transport platform includes 144 airports with paved runways and a road network of more than 747,000 kilometres. Together with an expanding flight network, this infrastructure provides a substantial base for connecting visitors to tourism regions across the country.

In 2024/25 alone, regional air passenger traffic grew alongside continued international growth. More connections mean more customers

8. ROOM TO DISCOVER. ROOM TO INVEST.

Beyond the icons lies the next frontier of tourism growth.

From the Wild Coast and the Karoo to the Drakensberg and South Africa's towns, villages and rural landscapes, underdeveloped destinations offer significant scope for new accommodation, attractions and experiences.

Established attractions can anchor new regional offerings, while wellness, adventure and agritourism can help convert underdeveloped assets into bookable experiences. This creates space for investors to enter emerging destinations and shape their next phase of growth.

For early investors, untapped potential can become first-mover advantage.

9. PARTNERSHIP THAT UNLOCKS INVESTMENT

A strong enabling environment for investment.

South Africa combines a sophisticated, world-class financial system with a sound regulatory environment and established mechanisms that support investment security.

Government and industry are working together to unlock tourism investment - building a stronger pipeline of commercially viable projects and helping turn opportunity into growth.

Coordinated work on air access, visas, tourism safety, skills and infrastructure strengthens the operating environment. Project-preparation support can also help move tourism infrastructure opportunities towards commercial readiness.

Strong systems. Sound regulation. Investment opportunity.

10. INVESTING FOR THE FUTURE

The next tourism opportunity is smarter, greener and more connected.

Energy and water efficiency, climate resilience, digital platforms, smart mobility and technology-enabled visitor experiences are reshaping the tourism economy. Digital booking, payments and destination data can expand market access for rural and township enterprises, while local procurement helps spread investment benefits. South Africa's young talent base - with 33% of the population aged 15–34 - offers strong potential for tourism skills, careers and enterprise development. The Green Tourism Incentive Programme supports energy- and water-efficiency improvements, while renewable-energy investment strengthens the country's clean-energy platform. South Africa offers investors the opportunity to pursue commercial growth alongside environmental and social impact.

That's it. I wish you productive deliberations. Thank you.

THE END

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