



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

Keynote address by L N Sisulu, MP, Minister of Tourism on the occasion of the launch of the Summer Season campaign, Sandton Convention Centre, Johannesburg

Programme director

Deputy Minister of Tourism, Mr Fish Mahlalela;

Honourable Members of the Portfolio Committee and Select Committee of Tourism;

Chairperson of the South African Tourism Board, Dr Nondumiso Maphazi and Board members;

Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBCSA) Chairman, Mr Blackie Komani and members of the TBCSA Board;

Acting Director General, Ms Aneme Malan

Acting CEO of SA Tourism Mr Themba Khumalo and Executive Management of South African Tourism

Industry leaders and the Entire Supply Value Chain for Tourism

Valued members of the media

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a distinct honour and privilege to be here today. We are gathered here to represent our collective efforts and the strong spirit with which we went into this year, following a devastating two years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am glad to say, as a sector, we pulled together and survived. Now we are poised for unparalleled growth. South African tourism's rebound post-COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns is now unstoppable after the 2022 October tourism performance report showed an upward trajectory for both domestic numbers and international arrivals.

I am happy that 2022 looks much better and I remain optimistic for even better numbers and improvements next year.

I am pleased that cumulative international arrivals to South Africa from January to October 2022 amounted to 4,5 million. While this is 47% below 2019 levels, 2022 levels have improved significantly since 2021. Africa Land arrivals accounted for the most significant number of arrivals (3,2 million), followed by Europe (671 000) and the Americas (256 000). The Africa Air markets had a healthy increase of 132%. Europe's strong growth is correlated to its fast recovery globally.

Over the months 2022 has performed better than 2021 but it is still not at the 2019 levels. According to Oxford Economics' latest estimations, it is predicted that South Africa will reach 2019 levels in 2026.

On the domestic front, we are cruising. Domestic overnight trips from January to September 2022 reached 23.9 million trips, a 138.6% increase when compared to the same period in 2021.

Clearly, domestic tourism consumption is following the 'revenge travel' phenomenon showing that South Africans are travelling to compensate for the lost time. We also know that our team has done a stellar job in promoting domestic travel in a manner that appeals and resonates with the market.

We thank you as an industry for your continuous work in this regard and I remain optimistic that we will continue to collaborate in addressing barriers that deter domestic travellers from exploring their country, these includes concern for personal safety, issues of racial discrimination and indeed affordability.

Between January and September 2022, total domestic expenditure was R65.9 billion, a 150.7% increase over 2021, and was driven by holiday trips having accounted for 43.3% of total expenditure. Domestic day trips recorded a 169.4% increase or 131.0 million. Day trip spending also showed a phenomenal increase of 163.3% to reach 122.1 billion and was primarily driven by trips taken for shopping and attending social events.

Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) trips increased in share in January to September 2022 compared to the same period in 2021.

Total Foreign Direct Spend increased in January – September 2022 by 188,6%, reaching R37,0 billion over the same period in 2021.

According to the October 2022 tourism performance figures, the future looks even brighter.

Overall, South Africa forward bookings for the next six months are expected to reach a staggering 208% increase in arrivals compared to the previous year. The top forward bookings are from Europe and the Americas. There is an 88% increase in bookings for the next six months (22 September to Feb 2023) from the USA alone. This is set to increase as we saw the recent launch of a new, nonstop airlift service between Washington, DC and Cape Town this month. There is already a 187% increase in seat capacity from 2021 to 2022. Seat capacity is expected to increase even more in 2023 but will not be at 2019 levels any time soon.

These promising numbers come in the wake of yet another good set of Tourism Sentiment Index® results. South Africa's alluring appeal has seen the country being ranked number #16 globally in terms of tourism sentiments. This is according to the recently released Tourism Sentiment Index® for the third quarter of 2022, which indicates that the top contributors to South Africa's overall performance were: Wildlife Viewing (15%), Restaurants plus Dining (12%), Festivals, Events and Concerts (10%).

According to the Tourism Sentiment Index®, we are ahead of India, Mexico, China, Denmark, Norway, Thailand, Spain and The Netherlands, to name a few. South Africa notched up a Tourism Sentiment Score® of 23.6, 4% higher compared to Q3 2021. This South Africa's Tourism Sentiment Score® of nearly 24 in Q3 means the country outperformed the global benchmark of 21,2.

This evening, I invite you to join me on a voyage down memory lane to reaffirm our people's never-say-die spirit.

When I was appointed the Minister of Tourism in August 2021, it was amid one of the deadliest pandemics to hit the world. It goes without saying that, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the tourism industry quite hard - mainly due to the imposed lockdown and travel restrictions.

According to the Tourism 2020 report released by Statistics South Africa, foreign arrivals dropped by 71% from just over 15, 8million in 2019 to less than 5 million in 2020, while the overall number of travellers (arrivals and departures) decreased by 71,0% between 2019 and 2020.

The same week I was appointed, COVID-19 was the only game in town. The impact of COVID-19 on our people's well-being and the extent of grief and trauma dominated our people's lives.

The concomitant factors of grief, restrictions and lockdowns began to hit more than just the bottom line for operators; others closed their doors. Jobs were lost, people's livelihoods destroyed and the winter of discontent in the leisure industry became palpable. South Africa's tourism industry bled thousands of jobs during the first year of the pandemic, with little reprieve in 2021.

As a collective, we hit the ground running to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns on tourism at home and abroad.

Let me pause here and take this moment to recognise and thank the entire tourism industry for your commitment in co-creating and subsequently implementing the Tourism Sector Recovery Plan.

The Plan is a product of a collaborative effort with you, our key stakeholders from the government, to the private sector and other social partners. The country's premier economic plan, the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan, identifies tourism as one of the priority areas of intervention, and we designed this Plan in 2020 to facilitate the sector recovery to preserve jobs and livelihoods; facilitate new job opportunities, match demand and supply, and strengthen transformation.

While we were getting to grips with the COVID-19 lockdown levels, the COVID-19 variant, later named omicron, was discovered in South Africa in November 2021, eight days before the launch of the 2021 summer holiday season. Our key source markets hit us with widespread travel bans following the discovery of omicron.

It is bittersweet that our world-renowned scientist Prof Tulio de Oliveira, is a co-winner of this year's prestigious German Africa prize for her work for identifying the COVID-19 Variant omicron.

Programme director, we had no choice but to face the storm. Of course, it was a baptism of fire for me, but the industry veterans passionately and enthusiastically jumped in to assist and together, we began the long climb out of the COVID-19 slump.

We profusely thank all South Africans who have never stopped travelling and exploring their country even after the COVID-19 restrictions were rescinded. We couldn't have done it without you!

As we gather here today, I am happy to say we are poised for a rebound and growth, judging by the recent performance figures in the sector. My cautious optimism is grounded in reality.

I must take this opportunity to thank our tourism bodies, operators, the hospitality industry, and guest house owners, to name a few, for walking this journey with us. We did it not for ourselves but for our country and its people.

During the hard lockdowns across different markets, we were running our **“Don’t travel now so that you can travel later”** campaign because we had to be responsible in ensuring that we put the preservation of humanity and lives first. We were overwhelmed by gratitude because many travellers and our compatriots heeded the call and deferred their trips and deposits only to claim them later.

Determined not to fold at the face of the pandemic and with travel restrictions slightly relaxed, in September 2021 we hosted a very successful Africa’s Travel & Tourism Summit (ATTS) to re-ignite the sector’s growth. Its purpose was relatively simple - to get the industry together again and re-ignite interest in destination South Africa. It was also to showcase that we had solid COVID-19 health and safety protocols in place to host successful and incident-free events.

South Africa is renowned for its quality-assured establishment and high service excellence - now more than ever, we must continue to maintain this enviable reputation.

The United Kingdom was the first to place South Africa on its red list in May 2021 banning any flights/travel to our country and other countries followed suit. After a great deal of diplomatic wrangling, the UK lifted the travel ban on 08 October 2021, only to put six African countries including ourselves back on the red list following the discovery of the new COVID-19 Variant omicron. But it wasn’t until January 2022, when the European Union (EU) finally relented, that our country was eventually removed from the more expansive Europe red list.

While fighting red lists and travel bans, we steamed ahead with our Tourism Sector Recovery Plan and launched the Global Advocacy Programme as a response to the protracted damaging narratives and misinformation reported about South Africa.

We embarked on a strategic yet direct approach to our key source markets to ensure that consumers, trade partners and the global media were properly informed about visiting destination South Africa amidst the pandemic.

Our message has always been clear - South Africa offers memorable, affordable, accessible and safe travel experiences.

Then to amplify our efforts and to spread our message wider, we took the Global Advocacy Programme to the Dubai Expo in December last year. The Dubai Expo 2020 was critical as it was the first World Expo to be hosted in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia (MEASA region) and was the first to be hosted by an Arab country. The Expo helped us promote South Africa and inspired the world to visit our shores and secure investment opportunities.

In February 2022 we launched the “Live Again” campaign to market destination South Africa to our source markets worldwide, and it has played a big part in the rebound of the tourism sector since it was launched earlier this year. Through this campaign, we invited the world to come to our country and experience something new, unique and energising to take away the dullness that may have set in due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We want every visitor to be mesmerised by our hospitality, and the warmth of our people, and of course, we want domestic travellers to explore and enjoy the freedom of travelling their own country. This year, not only did we launch a global campaign to woo travellers back to our country, we successfully hosted both our flagship trade shows, Meetings Africa and Africa’s Travel Indaba. We are so proud that we continue to partner with the greater African continent to advance the growth of our continent.

As we continue to roll out our “Live Again” campaign in a bid to stake our claim and market share we continue to promote our destination’s stunning landscapes, wildlife, beaches and value-for-money experiences.

As South African Tourism, we also hosted the inaugural Global Media Forum in April, where we shared our vision, prospects and challenges with you our valued stakeholders. And we are pleased to say that we have seen your collaborative spirit as notably witnessed at the Tourism Business Council of South Africa leadership conference held in September this year.

At the Arabian Travel Market in May this year, South African Tourism signed a deal with Emirates Airline to augment its service to South Africa. Recently, we announced that Emirates is expanding its schedule to and from Johannesburg with three daily flights from 1 March 2023. Cape Town will

be served with double daily services starting from 1 February 2023. Emirates has also added two more flights to Durban, making it a daily operation from 1 December 2022.

This year, we made sure that we remind all our stakeholders across the globe that South Africa is open for business. In August SA Tourism was at the Virtuoso travel trade show in Las Vegas to engage in one-on-one appointments with travel advisors, tour operators and media representatives to share destination updates. This was of course building on the enthusiastic response from a report that the US was South Africa's top source market for overseas travel in 2021.

At the beginning of September this year, SA Tourism embarked on an all-important West Africa roadshow and we were joined by 23 South African product owners who were part of this road show to share and showcase the many unique tourism experiences and products that are awaiting to be explored by travellers from this market. Amongst these product owners were SMMEs.

Let me reiterate, that as a government, we truly value everyone's contribution.

Of course, many of you, have also raised great concern about visa issues that have negatively affected all of us and travellers and in the process undermined our marketing efforts. I would like to reassure you - the South African government is fully committed, through the work that we do as the Department of Tourism, to removing barriers that hinder the growth of our sector.

At the end of September 2022, SA Tourism participated in the Japan Expo and there we reassured travellers from that market that we have a variety of products and experiences to cater to their needs and preferences. SA Tourism also attended IMEX America, the largest trade show in the US, for the global meetings, events and incentive travel industry.

Similarly, we attended International Golf Travel Market (IGTM) hosted in Italy. This bespoke trade show provides pre-scheduled meetings providing golf destinations, resorts and courses with the opportunity to connect with leading golf travel agents and tour operators who help grow the world's outbound tourism market. Our mission there was clear – it was to promote and position South Africa as a golf tourism destination.

Programme director, in all our engagements with key partners and stakeholders on a global stage, we always bring our Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) alongside us to showcase their

wares abroad. This is part of our efforts to provide market access to upcoming tourism businesses, aid the sector's recovery, and ensure inclusion in the industry.

In the same spirit of ensuring inclusivity in our sector, at the beginning of September, we also launched Tourism Month - a month dedicated to heightening awareness and promoting domestic tourism. This year, we hosted the launch at Kwa ttu! San Cultural village in the Western Cape as we know that September is also Heritage Month.

In September we also ran our hugely successful ***Sho't left Travel Week*** Campaign. This performed well, with many South Africans taking advantage of the great deals designed to ensure that travel is accessible to all locals.

Our key objective in all these travel shows, campaigns and engagements are to re-ignite interest in destination South Africa. It is to unlock the destination so that the many men and women in this room can run their businesses, receive visitors from all over the world and contribute to our country's inclusive economic growth.

We are unambiguous in our message - we are open and ready to do business. South Africa is ready and geared up to receive visitors from all over the world and of course we are capable and ready to host events. Our efforts from when the COVID-19 pandemic hit us were not in vain, and numbers repeatedly prove that hard work pays.

Airlift to and from South Africa has seen continuous recovery, particularly with the September launch of direct flights by Air Belgium Airways connecting the country to the European region along with the announcement by Delta Airlines who launched a direct route to Cape Town from Atlanta, including the return of Brazil's Lataum Airways that ceased operations to the country in the wake of the pandemic.

Most recently, we were thrilled to welcome Eurowings flight operations between Frankfurt and Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport as the first intercontinental airline ever. This is really good news both for South Africa as a tourism destination and for all visitors from various parts of the world who want to enjoy our unique country. These flights will undoubtedly ***contribute to boosting*** the country's tourism, economy and job creation.

Making South Africa more accessible to international visitors and open to successful trade with other countries is a crucial component of economic growth.

Collaboration among our airlift stakeholders is a major part of tourism recovery and beyond. As such, it was imperative that a team comprised of South African Tourism, Airports Company South Africa, Durban Direct, Gauteng Air Access and Cape Town Air Access showcase at World Routes 2022 in Las Vegas. World Routes is a premium route strategy development conference, bringing together over 2000 delegates within the aviation and route development community, including route planners, tourism authorities and key airline stakeholders and decision makers. In addition to a successful showcase, Cape Town Air Access was also named the **winner of the destination marketing category**.

We are also hugely excited by the return of our national airline, SAA. It is so encouraging to see that over the last year, SAA has introduced new routes connecting South Africa to more parts of the rest of the African continent and beyond.

Last month SA Tourism attended the World Travel Market (WTM) 2022 held in London. This is one of the market-leading international travel events so it was important for South Africa to be at World Travel Market following a two-year absence due to COVID-19. Our exhibitors' busy schedules as well as our team's consistent engagement with members of trade and partners from all over the world, is a clear testament that people are interested in South Africa and they want to do business with us.

As a government we have always revered the heroic contribution of women in the liberation struggle and therefore it is important that we focus on assessing how far we have come in the journey towards women empowerment and gender quality. In this regard, we partnered with UNISA in the Executive Development Programme for Women in Tourism. This programme covered areas such as accommodation, travel and related tourism sub-sectors. To date a total of about 120 students have been trained through the programme.

The Department of Tourism recently hosted the graduation of the Wine Service Training Programme in the Western Cape and welcomed the new cohort of 139 graduates to populate the talent pool in the tourism value chain. This is hot on the heels of Statistics South Africa reporting a 31.2% increase in the Food and Beverages Industry in Quarter 3, 2022 compared to Quarter 3, 2021. This year on year growth is a boost for the tourism industry.

Valued partners, this year we have worked hard and we have made serious strides and we ought to be proud of ourselves. Out of the devastation of Covid-19 on our tourism outlook, we have been able to change the world's perception about South Africa as a tourism destination of choice. As government we are working towards a visa regime which will bring more business and leisure travellers. We have since the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions, held two massive tourism summits which have stimulated tourism business and we are continuing to market South Africa in international tourism platforms.

Tourism is now back in business and we are on course to increase its contribution to the country's GDP and job creation. We are holding firm in driving an inclusive tourism trajectory that expands benefits to all including those who have been historically excluded. Not even the devastating floods in Kwazulu-Natal are holding us back. Instead, we are working together with the private sector, local municipalities and civil society in addressing these challenges. We are encouraged that more and more beaches are being cleared for the summer holidays and this bodes well for the flourishing of tourism.

Indeed, we can and must do more, but as we head towards our summer holidays, let us take the time to acknowledge our gains and gear ourselves up for a bumper 2023 ahead.

As a country, we are poised for the best summer holiday since 2019. Summer is a time to rest for all, making it the best time to for us to also connect with friends and family but to also explore our own country. Summer creates an opportunity for us to tap into holidaymakers' time availability. It is the time for us to show both domestic and international travellers that they need Summer, this year more than ever - after all there are no restrictions!

So through our "Gimmer Summer That" Shot Left campaign we are getting South Africans out of their backyard and we are showing them what they can do to make their Summer fun – because there is something for everyone!

While this campaign was established in 2021 and created excitement for South Africans through the catchy phrase, this year we are bringing more engagement with South Africans through social media and targeted radio and of course the nationwide events and activations.

Let me invite you to watch the “Gimmer Summer That” Sho’t Left television campaign that is currently on air!! Such an exciting and a true and accurate depiction of the South African Summer spirit!

So let us get South Africans travelling their Mzansi and let us stand ready to welcome visitors from all over the world and get them to have their best summer holiday experience ever!

I declare the summer holiday season open!

MINISTER RINGS BELL