



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**MINISTER PATRICIA DE LILLE LEADS SOUTH AFRICA'S WORLD TOURISM
DAY CLOSURE CELEBRATION IN LIMPOPO**

Waterberg, Limpopo - South Africa marked World Tourism Day 2026 at Legend Golf & Safari Resort in the Waterberg, with Minister of Tourism Patricia de Lille calling for technology and innovation to help convert South Africa's tourism appeal into more travel, investment, jobs and opportunities for communities. The celebration was held under the theme: *"Growing South Africa's Tourism Sector in the Digital Era."*

Hosting the national celebration in Limpopo placed the spotlight on a province where wildlife, heritage, culture, food, rural experiences and adventure come together. From the Waterberg and Mapungubwe to Kruger National Park, Limpopo offers a diverse range of experiences for travellers from South Africa and abroad. The iconic Extreme 19th hole at Legend Golf & Safari Resort, perched on Hanglip Mountain and accessible by helicopter, provided a fitting backdrop for the celebration, showcasing the province's distinctive tourism offering and one of the world's most extraordinary golfing experiences.

South Africa recorded 10.5 million international arrivals in 2025. Between January and July 2026, the country welcomed 6.5 million international visitors, a 12.4% increase. Domestic tourism also remains a major pillar, with expenditure reaching R111.6 billion and domestic overnight trips rising 4.1% to 21.2 million in the first half of 2026.

Minister De Lille said the opportunity now is to use digital platforms and artificial intelligence to make South Africa more visible, accessible and competitive, while ensuring that rural destinations, townships, small towns and emerging tourism businesses are visible to audiences at home and abroad.

“Our digital strategy must go beyond promoting beautiful images of South Africa. It must convert interest into travel and return visits,” Minister de Lille said. “Travellers must be able to discover, compare and book South African experiences easily.”

She said digital transformation must also support economic inclusion, particularly for smaller tourism businesses.

“Technology can give a small tourism business in Limpopo access to customers anywhere in the world. Digital transformation must therefore support both tourism growth and economic inclusion,” she said.

The World Tourism Day celebration also provided a platform for young innovators to demonstrate how technology can be applied to real tourism challenges. The top three teams from the Department of Tourism’s G20 Hackathon — The Catalyst, Map My Biz and Ubuntu Unlimited — presented their AI-powered tourism solutions during the event. The winning team, The Catalyst, received a cheque for R175,000, while Map My Biz received R140,000 and Ubuntu Unlimited got R105,000.

The presentations showed how young people and emerging technologies can help build a more digitally enabled tourism sector, while creating opportunities for innovation, entrepreneurship, and more inclusive participation in the tourism economy.

Minister De Lille emphasised that while technology and artificial intelligence are transforming how travellers discover and experience destinations, tourism remains fundamentally human.

“Technology may help someone discover and book South Africa; it is our people, hospitality and experiences that they will remember,” she said.

Limpopo MEC for Economic Development, Environment and Tourism, Dr Tshitereke Matibe, said digital transformation must be inclusive, giving a small rural guesthouse, a young tour operator or a community tourism project the same opportunity to reach travellers online. He highlighted the “We Are Limpopo” digital campaign as a way for residents and visitors to become ambassadors for the province.

“Limpopo must be marketed by Limpopo and all those who experience it, because our stories are everywhere,” said MEC Matibe.

His challenge was immediate and simple: record a favourite Limpopo experience, post it, tag it and share it using #WeAreLimpopo, turning the World Tourism Day theme into action.

Minister De Lille concluded by saying tourism growth depends on partnership between government, industry, provinces, municipalities, communities and businesses. As Tourism Month closes, South Africans are encouraged to explore local destinations, support tourism enterprises and share the country’s stories online.

The message from World Tourism Day 2026 is clear: the future of tourism is increasingly digital, but its heart remains human.

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For streaming links, images, videos and further information please scan the QR Code and join the Tourism Department’s National Multimedia WhatsApp Group.



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