



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

Private Bag X424, Pretoria, 0001, South Africa. Tel. (+27 12) 444 6780, Fax (+27 12) 444 7027
Private Bag X9154, Cape Town, 8000, South Africa. Tel. (+27 21) 469 5800, Fax: (+27 21) 465 3216

MEDIA STATEMENT

DATE: 09 SEPTEMBER 2026

**MINISTER DE LILLE HOSTS
SAUDI MINISTER OF HAJJ AND UMRAH AL-RABIAH**

Minister of Tourism Patricia de Lille hosted Saudi Arabia's Minister of Hajj and Umrah, H.E. Dr Tawfiq bin Fawzan Al-Rabiah, during his official visit to South Africa, with discussions focused on strengthening cooperation to better serve South African pilgrims and Umrah visitors travelling to the Kingdom.

Minister de Lille said the engagement provided an opportunity to develop a broader tourism relationship that benefits travellers and the tourism economies of both countries.

"South Africa and Saudi Arabia already have an important connection through the thousands of South African Muslims who travel for Hajj and Umrah. We now have an opportunity to build on that relationship by encouraging greater two-way travel, strengthening connectivity and introducing more Saudi travellers to the diversity of experiences that South Africa has to offer. As part of our approach, South African Tourism will also build seasonal packages that we can market to Saudi travellers," said Minister de Lille.

The visit provided an important opportunity for Minister Al-Rabiah to meet with Minister de Lille and representatives of the travel and tourism sector and to hear directly their views on the Hajj and Umrah experience and the challenges facing South African pilgrims and Umrah visitors. Discussions focused on facilitating the journey of pilgrims and Umrah visitors, supporting the transition to digital services, strengthening coordination with tour operators, and working together on practical solutions to address existing challenges.

The two sides agreed to establish a joint working group to follow up on the recommendations arising from the meetings and further strengthen cooperation between the two countries. They also agreed to encourage airlines in both countries to explore increasing flight frequencies, helping facilitate the movement of pilgrims, Umrah visitors and other travellers, while strengthening connectivity between Saudi Arabia and South Africa.

"Last year, around 56,000 South Africans travelled to the Kingdom for Umrah, an increase of approximately 10% compared to the previous year. This growth means a great deal to us. Our priority is to listen to South African pilgrims, Umrah visitors and service providers, understand their needs, and work together to make their journey more accessible, seamless and enriching," said Minister Al-Rabiah.

Arrivals from Saudi to South Africa increased from 5 461 in 2021 to 24 942 in 2025.

“Travel brings people closer together. Hajj and Umrah have connected South Africa and Saudi Arabia for generations, and we look forward to building on this historic connection to further strengthen the relationship between our two countries,” added Minister Al-Rabiah

The Ministers also discussed opportunities for closer cooperation between the tourism sectors of both countries, including destination promotion, skills development, and showcasing South Africa’s rich Islamic heritage and Halaal tourism offering.

The visit forms part of ongoing efforts by South Africa and Saudi Arabia to deepen cooperation, strengthen people-to-people ties and continuously enhance the experience of South African pilgrims and Umrah visitors.

THE END

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



Media Queries:

Aldrin Sampear

Spokesperson for the Minister of Tourism

Email: asampear@tourism.gov.za

Mobile: +27 67 138 3487