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**MINISTER HOSTS PRESS BRIEFING TO HIGHLIGHT THAT TOURISM POLICY IS
ECONOMIC POLICY**

The Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille, has reaffirmed that tourism is a key driver of economic growth, investment, and job creation in South Africa. Between January and December 2025, South Africa welcomed 10.48 million international arrivals, a 17.6% increase compared to 2024 and the highest number of arrivals on record. This performance confirms tourism's growing contribution to the economy.

South Africa's global competitiveness was further recognised when the country was named Best Destination: Africa 2025 by the Travel Weekly Reader's Choice Awards. According to the Minister, this achievement reflects deliberate policy choices, focused implementation, and strong collaboration between the Government and the private sector.

Cabinet has endorsed the Tourism Growth Partnership Plan, developed jointly with industry and led by the South African Tourism Business Council. The Plan is anchored on five priorities and supported by a real-time performance dashboard to ensure accountability and delivery.

The first priority is Ease of Access. The Department of Home Affairs is rolling out the Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) system, starting with key markets including India, China, Mexico, and Indonesia, following its successful pilot during the G20 Summit.

The full rollout of the ETA system is projected to create between 80,000 and 100,000 jobs.

Improved access also includes strengthened air connectivity. New and expanded routes include Qantas' direct Perth–Johannesburg flight, Air France's seasonal daily service to Cape Town, SAA's Cape Town–Mauritius route, and expanded domestic connectivity such as FlySafair's Hoedspruit–Cape Town service.

The second priority is Coordinated Destination Marketing, with strengthened collaboration across national, provincial, and local government. Provincial performance continues to improve, with KwaZulu-Natal recording a strong festive season and Durban welcoming 1.2 million visitors. The Free State's Kgodomodumo Dinosaur Interpretive Centre in the Golden Gate Highlands National Park has welcomed over 80,000 visitors and generated more than R1 million in revenue since opening.

Tourist safety remains a critical focus. The Tourism Safety Forum, chaired by Deputy Minister of Tourism, Maggie Sotyu, continues to coordinate public and private sector efforts. During the festive season, 1,500 tourism monitors were deployed nationally, including over 400 supporting the Border Management Authority.

Tourism Product Development is driving infrastructure investment and diversified experiences. The inaugural 2025 Tourism Infrastructure Investment Summit launched eight bankable projects worth approximately R1 billion, with three projects already securing funding. Major investments, including the R2.5 billion Club Med development in KwaZulu-Natal, signal strong investor confidence in the tourism sector.

Consultations on a Short-Term Rental Code of Good Practice are underway, with the first draft to be released for public comment next week.

Tourism currently sustains 1.8 million direct and indirect jobs, with one job created for approximately every 13 international arrivals.

Technology and Artificial Intelligence are reshaping tourism. South Africa launched the G20 Tourism Hackathon in 2025 and has since introduced *Siyanda*, an AI-powered travel assistant for North American travellers. South African innovation continues to receive global recognition, including awards for conservation-focused AI solutions.

South Africa's strength as a business events destination continues to grow. In the current financial year, 51 MICE bids were secured, generating an economic impact of R894.5 million. Meetings Africa 2025 generated R690 million and supported 1,200 jobs, while Africa's Travel Indaba contributed over R610 million and supported more than 1,000 jobs.

Following the successful hosting of the G20 Tourism Ministers' Meeting, the World Economic Forum will host a Special Davos Meeting in South Africa next year, reinforcing confidence in the country's capabilities.

South African Tourism continues to strengthen governance, with permanent appointments of a Chief Financial Officer and Chief Audit Executive, and processes underway to fill remaining executive vacancies.

The Minister thanked tourism stakeholders, content creators, and staff across the Department of Tourism and South African Tourism for their continued efforts.

"Tourism is working. Tourism is delivering. And tourism will remain a cornerstone of inclusive growth, investment, and job creation in South Africa," Minister De Lille said.

THE END

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