



MINISTRY
TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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SPEAKING NOTES OF THE MINISTER OF TOURISM, PATRICIA DE LILLE, AT THE OPENING OF THE MIDDLE EAST AFRICA (MEA) FUTURE LEADERS CHALLENGE SOUTH AFRICA IN JOHANNESBURG ON 5 MAY 2025

Programme Director,
Directors of Schools from various Institutions of Higher Learning, Tourism Business Leaders,
Future Leaders Challenge SA Strategic Board Members,
Guiding Teachers,
Students,
Representatives from government institutions,
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am pleased to participate in the Second South African Future Leaders Challenge this morning, hosted by the Middle East Africa (MEA)-SA Game Changers.

This Challenge creates a community to solve future problems and jump future barriers in order to grow tourism for years to come.

The Future Leaders Challenge aims to build a sustainable pipeline of skilled professionals through advocacy and an impactful development Programme.

The Department of Tourism supports this initiative as it gives us an opportunity to transform and adapt to the changes in tourism in South Africa.

This initiative allows youth to propose innovative solutions to improve the tourism and hospitality sector.

It further provides an opportunity to explore solutions as the world and the tourism sector in particular are confronted with global trends such as digital transformation, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and improving tourists' experiences.

Tourism plays a significant role in job creation and contributes to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and it has the potential to create even more jobs.

A skilled workforce is needed to sustain this economic growth and create jobs. Despite tourism's leading role in the economy, unemployment remains high, especially amongst the youth.

Skills development and entrepreneurial leadership can play a significant role in addressing this challenge.

Tourism businesses, academics, students, and thought leaders need to engage in a dialogue to identify critical skills relevant to the tourism industry, such as digital literacy, AI-driven customer experiences, digital marketing, data analytics, and sustainability.

The industry requires strong partnerships and collaboration with institutions of higher learning and tourism businesses to ensure that the curricula meet industry needs.

We need to upskill and reskill the current workforce to adopt digital transformation and AI by exposing them to relevant training programmes.

As you participate in this two-day conference and leadership platform, I urge you to find solutions for this challenge. Let us work together to develop critical skills relevant to the Sector and grow employment opportunities amongst the youth.

We must empower our youth through mentorship and networking opportunities to nurture their leadership qualities.

The Department of Tourism, in line with the National Tourism Sector Strategy (NTSS), the Growth Plan, the Tourism Master Plan and the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2025 is embarking on a process to review the skills and training offerings that are demand-led.

This conference will undoubtedly contribute to identifying skills initiatives that will address the demand of the tourism and hospitality industry.

The Future Leaders Challenge is happening at a time when South Africa is hosting the G20 Presidency.

As part of the G20 Tourism Working Group, the Department of Tourism is hosting a G20 Tourism Hackathon Challenge to support one of the Tourism Working Group's priorities: "People-centred Artificial Intelligence and Innovation to enhance travel and tourism start-ups and Micro Small Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)."

This Hackathon challenge seeks innovative solutions for how MSMEs and Start-ups can leverage digital and AI solutions to maximise their businesses.

The Future Leaders Challenge will provide further opportunities for the students from the 18 tourism and hospitality schools to participate in this G20 Tourism Hackathon.

The organisers of the event will advise the Schools and the participating students on the criteria to be used for the selection of the students who will advance to form part of the Hackathon challenge.

As much as AI is an enabler to deliver tourism services, there are barriers to implementing AI in government-led tourism initiatives, such as a lack of infrastructure, high implementation costs, limited skills of professionals, regulatory challenges, and data privacy and security.

Effective infrastructure is a decisive factor in choosing destinations as it ensures continuous mobility, reliable internet access, and integration between remote work locations.

The rise of experiential travel in tourism is evident with the introduction of Digital Nomad Tourism (DNT). Tourists require destinations where they can work from home while exploring South Africa.

Reliable technological infrastructure is one critical factor for digital nomads when selecting their destinations. South Africa can learn from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Brazil, Ethiopia, and India on Digital Nomad Tourism.

Tourism should be done within the context of sustainability and responsibility. Responsible tourism entails adopting sustainable practices such as ecotourism, carbon-neutral operations, and waste reduction. In its sustainability mission, tourism should consider the preservation of culture and communities.

Joint public-private partnerships are needed to fund training programmes and create employment opportunities. I, therefore, call upon all stakeholders to collaborate and invest in the future of tourism in South Africa.

In conclusion, allow me to thank Future Leaders Challenge Leadership and its partners for hosting this event and making it a success.

Thank you, Ngiyabonga, Baie dankie, Kealeboga.

ENDS

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