



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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Minister Derek Hanekom attends the Chinese Lunar New Year Celebrations

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H.E. Ambassador Lin
Ambassadors and High Commissioners and all members of the Diplomatic Corps
Members of the media,
Distinguished guests,
Dear friends.

It is a great honour to be with you, as you celebrate one of the most significant events in the Chinese calendar, the Lunar New Year. Joining you here tonight is our way of showing how much we value our strong relationship with the people of China, built over many years. The bond we have with you has enriched us, and in many different ways assisted us in addressing our challenges, inspired by the Chinese success story.

China is now South Africa's biggest single trading partner, and we believe there are great opportunities to further grow trade and business between our countries.

If we take wine as an example, exports from South Africa to China are growing dramatically. The Western Cape alone more than doubled its wine exports to China between 2017 and 2018. It is well known that ores remain our biggest export, but there is also growing demand for our Rooibos tea, and other agricultural products, like avocados, citrus and meat. The opportunities are huge. But often it is the intangible things like friendship and trust that drive business growth. We have a lot to learn from China on project planning and execution.

The links that connect our two countries are about far more than business and trade agreements; they are also about the people and our shared history. Nelson Mandela, during the visit of your Vice President to South Africa in 2004, said that he believed that the Chinese people's fight for national independence decades ago played a significant role in inspiring our own liberation struggle.

We admire the rich Chinese culture and traditions, and our cultural exchange initiatives with China offer us tantalizing glimpses of China's incredibly rich culture and heritage. We understand the significance of the Lunar New Year period, and how home and family reunions become the primary focus of the celebrations. This year is the "**Year of the Pig**", and I have been told that some of the personality traits linked to people born in this year include bravery, combined with an easy-going nature and sincerity. These traits are especially important in sustaining the diplomatic, economic and social relationships between our countries. We have to be bold to take full advantage of all the opportunities, but at the same time engage with one another with integrity and sincerity.

Dear friends, South Africa is a land of great opportunities for business and tourism. During the BRICS Summit in 2018, our government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with China on investments, amounting to \$14,7 billion. One of the agreements signed is on simplification of visas for Chinese business and leisure travellers, to promote tourism between our countries.

We will go beyond this agreement. We are determined to make it a lot easier for Chinese travellers to visit our country. Just recently, the Department of Home Affairs announced its plan to issue a new 10-year multiple entry visa to Chinese travellers, and to reduce the application and approval process to only five days. We are moving towards the introduction of e-visas, which will make a big difference in the ease and speed in obtaining a visa.

We have a truly beautiful country, with amazing experiences that we would like to share with far more Chinese travellers. Of course, we also have challenges, like crime levels that are unacceptably high. But let me assure you, Excellency, we are serious about fighting crime and corruption in our country, and the evidence is there for you to see. It is also important to note that the places tourists typically visit - like the Kruger National Park, Table Mountain, the Garden Route, Wild Coast, the Waterfront, Sun City, the Cradle of Humankind, Robben island and Mapungubwe, to name just a few, are safe by any standards.

We currently receive about 100 000 Chinese tourists annually. It is nowhere near enough - we could massively grow this number. Ambassador Lin revealed his dream to me during one of our wonderful lunches at his residence in Cape Town. He has a 5 year term as Ambassador. During his term he wants to see this number grow fivefold, to 500,000. I am with you in this dream and aspiration, Ambassador. We can definitely do it!

The Mandarin training that a number of our tourist guides and front desk officers have received, with the kind assistance of the Chinese government, has further enhanced the Chinese visitor experience in South Africa. We intend to extend this training to many more people during the next few years.

I must say, I would also like far more South Africans to visit your absolutely amazing country. I have been there a few times and have barely scratched the surface – there is just so much to see and experience in your extraordinary country.

Let me conclude by extending a warm invitation to each of the 130 million Chinese outbound travellers to include South Africa in their travel plans. A truly memorable experience awaits you. We offer a range of wildlife experiences; an amazingly diverse culture and heritage offering; unique shopping experiences as well as spectacular natural attractions that not many countries can match. And to crown it all, the food and wine side of it is simply sensational!

Those of you that have visited some of South Africa's iconic tourist attractions and have enjoyed our fine and friendly hospitality will know that we deliver unforgettable experiences to all our visitors. I would like to invite you to bring your friends, families and business partners to our amazing country.

Please enjoy the rest of the evening. May the new year bring you all good health, joy and prosperity, and may the relations between our countries grow from strength to strength.

新年快乐/ 新年快樂(Xīnnián kuàilè).