



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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Minister Hanekom engages tourism stakeholders in the Free State

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The Minister of Tourism Derek Hanekom and the MEC for Economic, Small Business Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs in the Free State, Sam Mashinini, engaged tourism stakeholders in the Free State in ongoing efforts of strengthening working relations.

The stakeholder's engagement coincided with the launch of Tourism Month at the Gariep Dam. The launch afforded the province an opportunity to showcase the Gariep Dam as one of the country's hidden gems. The Free State province will be hosting this year's World Tourism Day Celebrations and the National Tourism Career Expo scheduled for end September.

Pointing to the increase in outbound tourists globally, Minister Hanekom highlighted the current global tourist arrival figure of 1.2 billion. "Our biggest challenge is to get a share of that growth", said the Minister as he challenged stakeholders in attendance to come up with strategies that would not only attract tourists to the province, but ensure a satisfactory visitor experience, resulting in increased spend and contribution to the economy of the province.

"The Xhariep District Municipality is one of the most economically depressed areas of the Free State even though it has several comparative advantages including natural beauty, well managed provincial parts and one of the biggest dams in South Africa; the Gariep Dam", said the MEC.

According to the MEC, statistics indicate that in the Free State, tourists focus on social activities including night life. It was a matter of concern that despite the natural riches in the Free State, wildlife and natural attractions did not feature prominently on tourists' itineraries. To address some of the shortcomings and improving the marketability of the Free State, Big 5 tourism routes have been identified aimed at promoting the Free State as a preferred inland destination.

Stakeholder raised issues related to support for small businesses, signage, and coordination across the three spheres of government, availability of tourism information and establishment of local tourism associations.

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