



Minister Sisulu addressing red list with UK high commissioner a step in right direction for tourism in South Africa

JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA, MONDAY, 20th SEPTEMBER 2021: Recently appointed Minister of Tourism, Lindiwe Sisulu, has brought a bit of respite to the issue around South Africa being red listed on the UK's traffic light system for travellers.

In her keynote speech at Africa's Travel and Tourism Summit this afternoon, Sisulu mentioned that she addressed the red list matter with the British Deputy High Commissioner to South Africa this morning. After some discussion, they had agreed to bring together scientists and advisors from both countries to conduct further research into the Coronavirus Beta variant that has so far created the perception that South Africa is a COVID hotspot.

According to Sisulu, the British government believes the Beta variant - which allegedly circumvents all vaccinations - of the Coronavirus is a South African variant. "They are confusing the variant with South Africa because it was first detected here. But it does not mean it is a South African variant. We have agreed to have a joint team of scientists to advise the South African and British governments so they can get us out of the red and come with the right result."

Summit a "significant step" for tourism

The Summit kick-started on Monday, 20th September, and calls on all tourism role-players to reflect, reimagine and reignite a tourism sector in a bid to re-awaken Africa. The Summit is a hybrid event accommodating delegates participating physically and virtually. It is the first pan-African summit of its kind as it is being hosted in three cities simultaneously, namely Johannesburg, Durban and Lagos.





Sisulu felt that Africa's Travel and Tourism Summit is a significant step for the business events industry since limits on gathering numbers have been eased in South Africa. Up to 500 people can gather for outdoor events and 250 for indoor events. "Gatherings such as this Summit, are crucial to the industry's survival. Through such events, we connect, we share ideas and we create a new positive narrative of Africa, one that shifts from a continent in turmoil to one that is recovering steadily and ready to do business."

She said that governments across the continent will have to show their commitment to reviving tourism as a crucial part of the economy. One of the measures that need to be taken is to ensure an effective vaccination rollout programme. "Reports have shown that tourism in countries with a high share of vaccinated people will rebound faster than in countries with a low share."

Africa's response to COVID-19

Nearly 76-million vaccinations have been administered throughout Africa. South Africa alone has administered over 15-million vaccines and the country seems to show a downward trend in terms of infection rates. Yet Africa as a whole is still considered an unsafe destination. "The AU also launched the Pan-African bio-surveillance technology called PanaBIOS that can track the spread of the Coronavirus and connect testing centres across the continent. Yet Africa as a whole is still considered a no-go zone. Many of our nations are on the UK red list of countries to avoid travelling to."

Statistically, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly dented the tourism industry in Africa. According to Statistics South Africa, all ten leading SADC countries have shown a decrease in inbound tourist numbers from 2019 to 2020. Botswana had the largest percentage decrease of 80.6%.

Outside of SADC, Côte d'Ivoire had the largest percentage decrease at 77.4%. Domestic tourists in Kenya cut their holiday expenditures by 37.5 percent in 2020 amidst massive job losses and pay cuts due to the pandemic.



It is estimated that tourism jobs in the East African region dropped by 46%, from 4.1 million to 2.2 million, according to a new report published by the East African Business Council. It is estimated that a total of \$57.8 million (R857-million) is needed to implement the East African tourism sector's recovery plan.

Sisulu said that greater collaboration among tourism role-players is required and they would need to be flexible enough to adjust to the changing business landscape. "As we embark the new ways of doing business and hosting the peoples of the world, let's draw lessons from the experiences of the pandemic and ensure that our business ways are more robust and agile for future sustainability. It is therefore important that we are aligned as a continent whilst reigniting the tourism industry. This is crucial to gain momentum within the sector, as it works towards an inclusive recovery."

Recovery plans key to reviving tourism

Sisulu's department has drawn up and implemented the Tourism Sector Recovery Plan, which is in line with government's broader Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan. "Government's commitment to tourism is unflinching. It has always recognised tourism's crucial role in developing the economy. And the fact that it is listed as one of eight interventions in its recovery plan illustrates that point."

The following strategic interventions form part of the plan:

- ↪ Implement norms and standards for safe operations across the value chain to enable safe travel and rebuild traveller confidence;
- ↪ Stimulate domestic demand through targeted initiatives and campaigns;
- ↪ Strengthen the supply-side through resource mobilisation and investment facilitation;
- ↪ Support for the protection of core tourism infrastructure and assets;
- ↪ Execute a global marketing programme to reignite international demand;
- ↪ Tourism regional integration; and
- ↪ Review the tourism policy to provide enhanced support for sector growth and development.

Collaboration is vital to tourism health





South African Tourism Acting CEO, Sthembiso Dlamini, said Africa's Travel and Tourism Summit was born from the need to create a property that will demonstrate and highlight the continent's tenacity and holistic abilities. "It is needed to be a springboard to restart and rebuild the tourism sector amidst the COVID-19 pandemic through knowledge and partnerships."

She added that the Summit addresses perceptions that travelling and doing business in Africa is not safe because of the COVID-19 pandemic. "The Summit will offer industry players and its stakeholders an opportunity to meet and engage on the challenges and opportunities that affect the advancement of tourism on the continent. This negative perception was driven mainly by the heightened global media focus on the continent. But we want to tell our own stories, to build our own narratives."

Dlamini said that collaboration among all industry role-players will bring tourism back to full health. "We need to find new ways to adapt to a changing business environment, one that was marked by the COVID-19 pandemic."

She referred to small and medium-sized businesses from SMME Day as examples of how businesses and government can exercise resilience. "Small and medium-sized businesses that were present at SMME Day have the flexibility to adjust quickly. And I think larger corporates and government will do well to follow suit."

She asked that role-players remain curious and to continue asking questions that can help tourism re-engineer packages for a new kind of traveller - a traveller that will be conscious about health, safety and the protection of our planet. "The future of travel and tourism is going to be very different to the pre-COVID era. And we best prepare for it."

Looking ahead at the day two

The line-up of speakers and discussions at Africa's Travel and Tourism Summit is geared towards generating ideas and solutions for the betterment of tourism and the economy as a whole.



Day two will have 20 plenary sessions. Highlights include discussions on creating a growth path for airlines to recover within Africa, how tourism can create more value for local communities and navigating the regulatory environment in creating sustainable investment opportunities in Africa.

The exciting product reintroduction sessions will continue to provide 50 tourism businesses the opportunity to market their packages. These vigorous sessions will be curated along the themes active adventure, conference venues, professional conference organisers, halaal tourism and LGBTQ+ friendly tourism.

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For media enquiries, please contact:

Lesego Marimo at South African Tourism

Tel: +27 11 895-3139

Email: lesegom@southafrica.net OR mediaq@southafrica.net

Website www.southafrica.net

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