

Minister of Tourism Speech



Speaker: Minister of Tourism, Derek Hanekom

Event: 2018 National Lilizela Tourism Awards

Date: Saturday, 17th November 2018

Members of Parliament present, MECs; Board members of SA Tourism, the CEO of SA Tourism, the DG of the Department of Tourism, CEOs of provincial tourism agencies, the judges, the tourism fraternity in its entirety, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen.

Good evening to all of you,

A very special greeting to all our National Lilizela Tourism Awards finalists here this evening. We salute you for showing true grit to achieve the pinnacle of success that we are celebrating here tonight.

It is a real privilege to be here with you to celebrate your successes and achievements. That's what tonight is all about: recognising and rewarding tourism players and businesses who work passionately and with pride to deliver a world-class product and service - acknowledging the people on the ground who collectively make South Africa the great global destination that it is.

Our country offers amazingly diverse and exciting tourism experiences. No boast: there are not many countries in the world that can match what we have to offer – a variety of wildlife and nature based experiences to satisfy every desire and every pocket; just about every adventure experience you can possibly imagine; a range of heritage and cultural experiences, the best of food and wine, song, dance, theatre, hiking and cycling trails, and breathtaking scenic beauty wherever you go. That's what we have, but it is you who makes it possible for the tourist to experience all of this, and to feel at home and welcomed and pampered. Congratulations to all of you who made it through to the final round in a highly competitive process. The best of the best, the finest of the finest!

The National Lilizela Tourism Awards is the Oscar of tourism in South Africa. It has been running since 2012, with provincial awards taking place throughout the year, culminating in this star-studded ceremony. Congratulations to all the provincial award winners, some of whom are with us tonight.

Recently the entire tourism sector welcomed the Economic Recovery Plan as announced by President Cyril Ramaphosa, which reaffirmed government's commitment to bolstering tourism through enhanced destination marketing and reducing regulatory barriers.

We take this as our marching orders: to continue working hard to ensure that all unnecessary regulatory and entry barriers are removed. **What has been done so far must be seen as just the beginning of far more that will be done.** We saw the dramatic increase in tourist numbers following the visa waivers for countries such as Angola and Russia. But we have also felt the negative effect of the ill-considered imposition of visa requirements on visitors from New Zealand.

We are in the process of relaxing regulations for minors travelling to South Africa to make it easier for young people, and single parents or guardians travelling with children to visit South Africa. South Africa is the ideal family holiday destination – we must make it easier for families to come to our fabulous country.

Our collective task is to transform this exciting tourism sector of ours so that it brings meaningful benefits and opportunities to all South Africans. This is one of the pillars of our tourism strategy.

Tourism is now the world's fastest growing industry with over 1.3 billion people travelling around the world. In South Africa tourism has also outpaced other sectors, contributing about 9% in total to our Gross Domestic Product.

1.5 million people are employed across the extensive tourism value chain. Tourism stands out as a beacon of hope for millions of people who are without jobs and incomes.

The opportunities for new, small businesses to gain a foothold in this growing sector are huge. Opportunities for our hidden gems to expose their products have been created at events such as Africa's Travel Indaba, Meetings Africa and various international trade and travel shows.

The Department of Tourism is also supporting the drive for increased SME participation through its Tourism Incentive Program and the Tourism Transformation Fund – two projects that are very important to us.

All tourism businesses, big and small, must help to drive innovation and digital transformation in our travel and hospitality industry. It is for everyone in this room to help our country achieve the highest level of quality assurance, promote optimal value for money and give customer expectation the dedicated and passionate attention it deserves.

In our attempt to advance and maintain a recognisable, credible and globally benchmarked system of quality assurance for accommodation and venues in South Africa, government recently gazetted the new and revised grading standards for implementation from 01 April next year.

The enhancements to the grading system will further assist the Grading Council of South Africa in upholding and improving the competitive positioning of South Africa as a quality destination.

The new grading criteria will include the introduction of two new categories in the form of "apartment hotels" and "small hotels" which will include boutique hotels. Grading levels have been enhanced and will now also include a new 5-Star Premium grading level which is a recognition reserved for the pinnacle of luxury product in South Africa. This will only be for those products that far exceed premium expectations with respect to quality standards and service excellence.

The new standards will introduce the term *accolades*. It will include insignia and criteria for niche markets such as child-friendly, pet-friendly, wedding venues, spa and wellness facilities, amongst others.

As you can see, we are constantly evolving to offer a better service to our industry. The important role you need to play is to show your peers what value grading has brought to your businesses.

The digital revolution, and the sharing economy that it supports, is changing the nature of jobs in tourism. As one of the sectors most impacted by the digital revolution we need to revolutionise our efforts.

Travel is fast becoming more experiential-based than destination-driven. This is why we are working hard to position our country not only as an affordable, value-for-money destination for the international traveller, but also as a country that has a unique and diverse travel offering for all people around the globe.

The increased direct flights to South Africa airlines such as Alitalia, Cathay Pacific, Emirates, Virgin Atlantic and British Airways and Austrian Airlines confirm that we are indeed a sought-after destination, with huge growth potential.

It must be said though – and you know it better than I do – that this year has not been an easy one for the tourism sector. Cape Town suffered the most severe drought it has experienced in over a 100 years. Thankfully, due to the efforts of all Capetonians and visitors to Cape Town, who had to adopt a more responsible approach to water use, coupled with favourable rains ensured that a disaster was averted. Dams are now 75% full, and things are looking up for the city. By implication, things are looking up for our whole country. In times like these, South Africans reach their brilliant best. Where there is a crisis, there's a smart thinking of a way out.

Working together, we will continue to make tourism grow responsibly, inclusively and sustainably.

2018 is a big year for our country. It is the centenary year of struggle icons Nelson Mandela and Albertina Sisulu. From nature and safaris, to adventure and culture, urban living to authentic township and rural encounters, we invited every corner of the world to join us in the celebrations of this significant year of our revered and much-loved heroes, and to experience South Africa's warm, friendly and hospitable citizens.

I trust that tonight we will not only celebrate the best of the best in tourism and hospitality, but will we will leave here knowing that the responsibility of supporting the growth of our country's global competitiveness rests with each and every one of us.

In conclusion, I would like to once more congratulate all the finalists, and wish you well in your continued valuable contribution to the advancement of our country and our people. There are a number of chosen award winners amongst you – and the choice must have been an extremely difficult one for the judges – but one thing is for sure: there are certainly no losers. As we work together to make tourism grow, we all become winners. But my special congratulations to those of you who will be chosen as the finest of the finest.

I urge all of you, and those who could not join us tonight, to continue adding value through your work. Working together, we will continue to make tourism grow responsibly, inclusively and sustainably.

I thank you.