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SPEECH

DATE: 21 OCTOBER 2024

MINISTER OF TOURISM, PATRICIA DE LILLE DELIVERS SPECIAL LECTURE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG'S SCHOOL OF TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

Note to editors and journalists: The following speech was delivered by the Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille at a special lecture at the University of Johannesburg's School of Tourism and Hospitality at the campus today. Read more below...

University of Johannesburg Vice Chancellor, Professor Letlhlokwa Mpedi
UJ School of Tourism and Hospitality Director, Professor Diane Abrahams
Executive Dean, Professor Ben Marx
Executive Dean and Executive Dean Designate from our College of Business and Economics, Professor Tankiso Moloji
Professor Tembi Tichaawa
Tourism Lecturer, Dr. Refiloe Lekgau
UJ Tourism and Hospitality Students
Members of the media
Ladies and gentlemen

Good afternoon, goeie middag, molweni, dumelang, Sawubona

It gives me great pleasure to be with you all today as I stand before, what I know are the future leaders in Tourism in South Africa.

I am honoured to deliver this address on the role of Higher Education in building a sustainable and impactful tourism industry.

This is one of my key passions and missions – to work with the tourism sector to ensure we deliver the right type of skills and knowledge into the sector.

I am also a firm believer that young people need to be front and center of all sectors and leading the way to shape and design the future of tourism.

If I may remind us all of a very powerful quote by one of the world's greatest leaders, our iconic former President, Nelson Mandela who said: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world". End quote

Education is the basis from which we need to grow, learn and lead.

Overview of Tourism Sector

30 years into our democracy, tourism is one of the most powerful economic sector for our country and South Africa has affirmed its place as a leading tourist destination in the world.

Each year, millions of visitors flock to our beautiful Mzansi filled with diverse tourism offerings, vibrant experiences, the most beautiful landscapes and to enjoy our greatest asset, the warm and welcoming nature of our people.

Last year 8.4million people visited South Africa, of which 6.4million were from the African continent.

The numbers last year were almost 50% up from arrivals in 2022.

Between January and August this year, we welcomed around 5,8million tourists, also up from the same period last year.

Tourism brings billions of rands into the economy as last year, in 2023, foreign direct investment from tourism stood at R95million and R121billion from domestic tourism.

In this first quarter of this year, tourism's contribution to the GDP was 8, 8%, more than that of the mining, agriculture and transport sectors.

The sector is doing well but as many reports by government and international bodies show, the tourism sector in South Africa still lags behind its full potential.

Where we need to go with tourism education and skills development?

Tourism creates millions of jobs and this is leading motivation we have in the Department of Tourism, to work with the entire tourism sector to grow tourism's contribution to the economy and create much needed jobs for our people.

Fulfilling that mission starts here.

It starts with skilling and growing the next generation of tourism leaders.

It starts with ensuring that our young people are equipped with the right skills that are needed now and for the future of growth of tourism.

It starts here to create, not only the business minds, but also the creative minds, the critical thinking minds who can project and shape the future of tourism.

Here is where we grow the talent that will push boundaries and be the disruptors to bring new tourism offerings and new technologies that will change the way the tourism sector works and with these advances, bring more people into our country.

In doing so, we grow the economic impact and job creation impact of tourism.

It is not just about the day to day of working at airports, guest houses, hotels and lodges or tourists attractions.

It is about the entire value chain and making sure that from the big thinkers, to the implementers, to the customer facing jobs, that we all work together to grow tourism.

It all starts with teaching the right skills and growing the right kind of thinkers.

It starts with growing the minds of people who will not only worry about the bottom line of a tourism business and profit.

But people who will think about impact, people who will think about bringing progress for people, for communities, people who will think about the environment, about working smarter using technological advances and mostly people who are not afraid to dare to be different.

The worst thing we can do when it comes to skills development, is to stick to the status quo and repeat doing the same things, without seeing real change.

If we don't measure what we are doing, how will we know its impact?

So a key concern for me is always, are we covering the right content in schools and universities for the sector, to ensure that students leave with the right knowledge and skills and that they don't end up with diplomas and degrees and then in the unemployed queue.

I always fear that we are not measuring and assessing what is being taught and not adapting it to align to the future growth and skills needs of the tourism sector.

We need to ensure that we are teaching and training to deliver demand-led skills.

The tourism sector is changing all the time and it is changing fast especially with digital innovation and technologies such as AI.

Universities and tourism higher education institutions must be alive to the constant changes and movements in the sector and adjust the curriculum and content accordingly.

We need to identify the in-demand skills in terms of what will be needed in the next 5, 10 to 20 years and make sure that universities are producing graduates with these skills needed for the future growth of tourism.

The key thing we need to avoid is a mismatch of skills where young people graduate and their degree becomes obsolete.

We already have so many graduates sitting at home, not able to find work, after years of studying so we cannot have a static curriculum.

We must avoid the outcome where what our young people have studied is no longer relevant.

We also need to look at the entry requirements into university as there are many unskilled and semi-skilled unemployed people who can be absorbed into the tourism sector.

We need universities to be futuristic because everything in the world moves and happens because of technology and young people thrive with technology.

The School of Tourism and Hospitality must engage with Professor Arthur Mutambara, the Director and Full Professor here at the Institute for the Future of Knowledge at UJ especially on AI so that this faculty can produce people who can project the future needs and skills needs for the tourism sector using technology.

We need to look at what is happening in Kenya, the Seychelles and Tanzania where their tourism sectors are growing rapidly and they are using a greater level of technology and then adapt and package the curriculum and skills programmes accordingly.

If we don't address this, there will be a lack of skills in the sector.

I am also pleased to see that the UJ School of Tourism and Hospitality has included practical work place training as part of the curriculum.

So I want to put a question to the UJ School of Tourism and Hospitality and ask when last the curriculum was reviewed and updated?

Also, is the school tracking students to see if what they were taught was useful and relevant in the sector?

Those are the thoughts I wanted to share with you all today and now to respond in more detail to the question of "The role of higher education in building a sustainable and impactful tourism industry".

The role of higher education in building a sustainable and impactful tourism industry

It is critical that we define the meaning of sustainability and impactful in the context of the tourism industry.

Sustainability refers to practices that support the environment, communities and the economy in an effective and balanced manner.

While impactful tourism emphasizes creating meaningful positive change that improves visitor experiences and tourism businesses.

These two elements aim to create a tourism industry that is responsible, inclusive, equitable and capable of thriving over the long term.

As a result, in addition to what I laid out before, Higher Education institutions can play a major role in building a sustainable and impactful tourism in our country by doing the following:

- Incorporating innovation and digital technology on their programme offering

As stated before, the world is evolving digitally and this means that the tourism industry should align itself to this digital transformation.

Only the higher education institutions can design their academic programmes to meet these global advancements.

- Secondly, the higher education sector must reskill and upskill the current workforce in the tourism and hospitality sector.

The current workforce should be kept abreast of the latest trends and developments that are happening in the industry which will make them to be up-to-date with such practices.

The curriculum of the higher education institutions should focus on programmes that will cater both new entrants into the field of tourism and also on existing workforce in the tourism and hospitality industry.

The curriculum should focus on programmes that will help us diversify our tourism offering.

For example tourism offerings in townships, villages and small dorpias. We need to develop heritage and history routes to share our visitors.

- Universities should also foster strategic partnerships with other international institutions that promote tourism and hospitality.

South Africa is a Member of United Nations Tourism organisation and I serve on the Executive Council. There are many programmes and research in UN Tourism which our universities must tap into.

These partnerships can give birth to exchange programmes where students can go and learn international practices and gain new insights and perspectives in tourism and hospitality.

South Africa is hosting the G20 next year and I am planning to do a competition with universities for ideas that will make the tourism sector more efficient and using a greater level of technology and AI in tourism.

We want to see a battle of ideas between universities that can move the needle in tourism.

Ladies and gentlemen, students and UJ leadership, we must honour our past 30 years as a country, we must remember our past but we now have an opportunity to design the future and the universities are best placed to lead there.

South Africa will be hosting the G20 countries and guest countries in September of 2025.

I also intend to host an investment summit to explore opportunities for tourism investment in the G20 countries.

- Also as stated before, higher education institutions should also design skills development programmes that are demand-led by the tourism and hospitality industry.

The Higher Education institutions must provide training that will address the demand of the industry and not vice-versa. Meaning not create a supply of graduates for which there is no demand.

By driving demand-led skills training, it will address the focus of demand versus supply in the industry.

- Higher Education institutions should conduct ongoing research and benchmarking exercises with the best in the world.

They need to explore what the world is doing differently that the South African Higher Education institutions can learn from and implement here in South Africa.

- Higher Education institutions can also influence policies and legislation of the tourism sector.

The newly gazetted White Paper on Tourism is a typical example of the role that the Higher Education institutions should play to raise their voice.

They can also play advisory role in policy formulation and implementation processes especially with the implementation of the Tourism Master Plan adopted by Cabinet in 2023.

- Finally, higher education institutions can promote multi stakeholder engagement especially with communities to ensure that communities benefit from tourism and to build an inclusive tourism sector.

The experiences derived from these engagements will be woven into the institution's programmes.

Ladies and gentlemen and especially our students, the world is changing fast, and we need to start moving faster with the times and changes.

The South African tourism sector is thriving but I always say, that when we are trying to elevate the profile of tourism, in every area of our work, we must do so together.

We need to look at what leading countries are doing and implement tried and tested programmes.

The future of tourism is not only in the hands of those working in tourism currently, it's more in the hands of the future leaders in tourism sitting here.

This is an exciting sector filled with possibilities and untapped potential.

There is no doubt that the leaders who will see South Africa reach its full tourism potential are in these rooms and in our classrooms all over the country.

With that, let me thank all the lecturers and professors for the work you are doing here to educate our young people.

Let me congratulate you on being a leading School for Tourism and Hospitality in Africa.

Please continue the mission to develop critical thinkers and problem solvers for the sector. South Africa relies on you to be creative and innovate the future of tourism.

We are proud of your achievements and rankings as 2nd in Africa for hospitality and leisure management in the QS World University Rankings by Subject 2023.

And 6th in the world for hospitality and tourism management in the Global Ranking of Academic Subjects 2023 by Shanghai Ranking.

This global ranking for the UJ School of Tourism and Hospitality is massive as you went from 34th in the world in 2017 to 6th in 2023.

This is a highly commendable achievement in six years.

I am pleased to see that the continuous education programmes and short learning programmes are designed with the inputs from the sector to meet the sector's talent requirements.

It is also great to see that the curriculum content makes specific reference to the Pan-African context.

One of the most noteworthy and exciting things for me is that the UJ School of Tourism and Hospitality continues to achieve 100% placement of its students in the Work Integrated Learning programme through its strong industry partnerships.

I want to engage with the university to see how the university can partner with the Department of Tourism on this Work Integrated Learning programme.

This is so integral to the higher education experience to match theory with practical training and it wonderful to hear that students are placed across South Africa but also at establishments in the Middle East and USA.

I also want to commend the programme you have here at The Kerzner venue where you host conferences and other business events.

I am really pleased to hear that when putting events together here that you use a combination of professional experienced staff with prospective graduates to design and deliver events for clients.

This real life experience is exactly what we need to see and do more of so that by the time students graduate, they can already list that they have worked on these events. This is truly inspiring and amazing to hear.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen, it has been an honour to address you all.

I have been looking forward to this visit for some time and I look forward to us continuing to work together as partners in this exciting sector to see tourism reach its full potential and make a greater impact in people's lives and for our economy.

Thank you again to all the staff in the faculty for all the work you are doing.

To the students, I encourage you to take full advantage of this opportunity you have to study here at internationally highly ranked university.

Many of our young people are out there not able to walk through the doors of a university.

The poverty in our country is a shame and still too high as we even have young people who cannot get into schools.

This is a tough and important part of your life. A make or break phase.

But understand what an honour it is for you to have this opportunity. I am sure many of your parents have made hard sacrifices over many years for you to be here.

Do not waste this opportunity, use it to elevate your knowledge, to elevate your thinking, to elevate yourself in every way.

Understand, that this can be the beginning of your future as a leader in tourism. This can be the start of you claiming your voice and using your talents in the world to bring change to your life and the lives of others.

Our country can only grow, it can only thrive, we can only bring real change and progress if we all work together and help one another.

With those words, let me thank the UJ School of Tourism and Hospitality for inviting me.

I wish you all every success and strength as you continue to educate and shape the next generation of tourism leaders.

Thank you, enkosi and God bless.

ENDS

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