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SPEECH

28 JANUARY 2025

MINISTER OF TOURISM, PATRICIA DE LILLE HOSTS MEETINGS AFRICA 2025 MEDIA LAUNCH

NOTE TO EDITORS: The following speech was delivered by Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille at the media launch of Meetings Africa 2025 held at the Johannesburg Stock Exchange today, 28 January 2025. Read more below...

Deputy Minister of Tourism, Maggie Sotyu
Johannesburg Mayoral Committee Member for Economic Development, Cllr Nomoya Mnisi
SA Tourism Board Chairperson Professor Gregory Davids
SA Tourism CEO Nombulelo Guliwe and the SA Tourism Executive Management
All our Tourism partners in the private sector and in the various spheres of government
Members of the media

Good morning, molweni

Thank you all for joining us today and for your continued support in advancing Africa's business events sector.

I am thrilled to see *Meetings Africa* reach its 19th edition, a testament to the event's enduring impact.

Over the past 19 years, this platform has played a pivotal role in transforming and advancing the African business events industry.

We thank those who have made this business event the success it has been from the first edition until now.

Let me take time to recognise the bid party partners: South African Tourism, in proud partnership with the Gauteng Tourism Authority, Johannesburg Tourism Company, and Sandton Convention Centre.

It is because of such partnerships that early last year, the 2023 International Congress and Conventions Association ranked South Africa as the leading destination for Meetings, Incentives, Conference and Events (MICE) in Africa and the Middle East.

My call is that we continue pushing the boundaries with innovation and quality connections and partnerships to keep South Africa as the number one business events destination in Africa.

G20 Summit: An important business event to be hosted in South Africa

This year is truly a special one for not only the South African business events sector but the rest of the African continent too.

South Africa has assumed the Presidency of the 2025 G20 Summit, following Brazil in 2024 and preceding the United States in 2026.

This landmark event being hosted on the African continent for the first time will bring over 40 global heads of state to our shores with over 130 meetings hosted in South Africa during 2025 - solidifying South Africa's standing as a premier tourism and business events destination.

With G20 nations representing 85% of the global economy, 75% of international trade, and 67% of the world's population, the summit promises significant benefits for our business events and broader tourism sectors.

As the only African member country of the G20, South Africa offers a vital voice on global discussions, particularly on issues affecting developing nations and the African continent.

The G20 Summit and Ministerial Meetings will be held under the theme: "Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability".

It also allows South Africa to showcase its capacity to host safe and successful global events, further boosting our country's international reputation – an opportunity we openly welcome.

We are excited to host the Tourism Minister's G20 meeting in Mpumalanga in September this year which will include a Tourism Investment Conference to showcase tourism investment opportunities to a global audience.

Meetings Africa value and benefit

Meetings Africa 2025 aims to continue to spotlight Africa's diverse destinations and unique offerings for business events by unlocking Africa's Opportunities Through Quality Connections.

Key features at this year's Meetings Africa, will include promoting the continent's diversity through the new entrants of exhibitors which make it an attractive choice for business events buyers looking for a diversity of products from our African continent.

Equally, Meetings Africa 2025 will bring together industry leaders, local stakeholders, international buyers, event planners, suppliers, and policymakers, facilitating collaboration within the MICE sector.

The event serves as a platform for business deals, knowledge sharing, and cross-sector partnerships, with a strong emphasis on enabling meaningful networking opportunities to support industry growth.

In line with driving economic impact through access, one of my favourite features of *Meetings Africa* remains the educational arm of the event, which plays an extraordinary role in empowering emerging SMMEs and providing crucial networking opportunities, locally and abroad.

Each year the Department of Tourism, through its Market Access Support Programme provides funding to SMEs to attend Meetings Africa and other tourism trade shows to give them exposure to secure more business with global players.

This year, the department has funded the participation of 26 SMEs from across the country to participate in Meetings Africa along with the more than 190 other exhibitors so far confirmed to showcase on the trade floor.

MICE Economic Impact

The MICE industry plays a vital role in local economies by generating jobs in hospitality, event management, tourism, and related sectors.

We know from our insights and research that the impact of Meetings Africa over the years has been profound.

According to an economic impact assessment commissioned by South African Tourism, the total direct expenditure in South Africa generated from last year's Meetings Africa is an estimated R145 million, a 13% increase when compared to the R128 million generated in 2023.

The objective of shows like Meetings Africa is to ensure that Africa gets its fair share of this business events market.

In the same spirit, Meetings Africa 2025 will highlight the economic benefits of the MICE industry, positioning the event as a driver of investment, innovation, and job creation throughout Africa.

According to Allied Market Research, the global Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions industry was, in 2023, valued at approximately 523.3 billion US dollars and is projected to grow to over 1 trillion US dollars in the next five years.

The South African MICE industry was valued at 6.6 billion US dollars in 2023, and it is projected to grow significantly over the next five years.

The South African National Convention Bureau (SANCB) invested R14,6million on 81 business events bid submissions that have an estimated economic impact value of over R975million and can potentially attract over 37 900 international and regional delegates to South Africa between 2024 and 2029.

To date, South Africa has secured 53 of the bids submitted for business events and conferences.

These secured business events will contribute around R616million to South Africa's economy and will attract over 24 000 international and regional delegates.

The secured conferences will also contribute to the regional spread of business events. They will be hosted in Johannesburg, Tshwane, Ekurhuleni, Cape Town, Port Alfred, Gqeberha, Magaliesburg, Sun City, Richards Bay, Polokwane, Muldersfrift and Stellenbosch.

In addition to economic returns, the MICE sector creates opportunities for knowledge exchange, innovation, and stronger intra-African collaboration.

The 2024 International Development Association (IDA) for Africa Heads of State Summit in Kenya, for example, brought together many of our esteemed leaders to unveil an ambitious shared transformation agenda.

Another example is The Africa Impact Summit in Ghana this year which promises stimulating dialogue around responsible investing in Africa.

These moments of connection are priceless, with long-standing benefits for every African nation.

Equally, I herald Kenya, Ghana and Uganda who flew the flag high for our continent as they earned top spots in the recent 2024 EarthShot Prize, hosted by Prince William in Cape Town last November.

Together, we're taking titles for Africa and making big strides as we cement our podium position as a destination of choice.

Trusted Tour Operator Scheme (TTOS)

One of the key improvements we have made in recent months is that South Africa has streamlined its visa processes.

This includes the Trusted Tour Operator Scheme for key source markets, India and China to make our destination more accessible and enabling us in reaching our projected numbers.

Furthermore, the Trusted Tour Operator Scheme (TTOS) will simplify visa processes for group travel from India and China, two of our key source markets, by allowing vetted operators to facilitate group applications through the Department of Home Affairs.

The scheme aims to ease travel barriers, positioning South Africa as a preferred destination for Indian and Chinese travellers.

Other visa improvements include the recently announced Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) and the Digital Nomad Visa.

These visa improvements are expected to boost arrivals from critical markets.

Latest Leisure Tourism Performance Arrivals

On the leisure tourism front, the South African tourism sector's positive trajectory is also evidenced by arrivals to South Africa.

With just one month left to close out 2024, we're thrilled to report over 7,9 Million tourist arrivals from January to November 2024, marking a 5% year-on-year growth.

During this period, South Africa welcome 6.1 million arrivals from the rest of the African continent marking a 5.5 % increase year-on-year.

South Africa welcomed close to 2 million (1.9 million) tourists from the rest of the overseas Markets between January and November 2024, marking a 3, 2% increase compared to the same period in 2023.

Domestic tourism has also played a crucial role in our recovery, with South Africans rediscovering the beauty and experiences our country has to offer.

Aligned with the National Development Plan, the government is actively addressing barriers to international tourism to achieve its target of 15 million visitors annually by 2030.

To achieve this, one of the new key developments is the Air Route Development Marketing Strategy approved by Cabinet on 4 December 2023 to be implemented by the Department of Tourism together with the private sector.

By streamlining travel processes and investing in infrastructure and strategic marketing, South Africa aims to unlock tourism's transformative potential for economic growth and job creation.

Platforms like Meetings Africa, scheduled for 24–26 February at the Sandton Convention Centre in Johannesburg, are essential in showcasing Africa's collective strengths to international buyers.

By working together, we can advance a thriving and inclusive tourism sector that supports economic prosperity across the continent.

Thank you all once again for your continued support in telling the story of Africa's resurgence and growth. Together, we are paving the way for a brighter future.

In closing, remember business events also contribute to driving leisure tourism because people come to do business and get to experience our country as a premier leisure destination.

We look forward to hosting a wonderful business events show again this year and look forward to seeing you all there as we continue to forge connections for Africa's shared prosperity.

Thank you all and God bless.

Note to editors and journalists:

About Meetings Africa

South African Tourism, in proud partnership with Gauteng Tourism Authority, Johannesburg Tourism Company, and the Sandton Convention Centre, is delighted to host the 19th edition of **Meetings Africa**, Africa's premier business events trade show. This prestigious gathering will take place at the Sandton Convention Centre in Johannesburg from **25 to 26 February 2025**, preceded by the **Business Opportunity Networking Day (BONDay)** on **24 February 2025**, designed to foster meaningful connections and collaborations.

Meetings Africa is the leading platform that showcases Africa's diverse business events products and experiences. Under the theme, "**Africa's success built on quality connections**," the event highlights collaboration and knowledge sharing to drive the continent's success and growth.

This year, Meetings Africa will once again bring together hundreds of exhibitors, buyers, and key decision-makers from the global business events sector. It is a sought-after platform designed to drive engagement, create impactful connections, and unlock new opportunities for Africa's business events industry.

With attendees expected from over **nineteen (19) African countries** and **fifty-two (52) international markets**, the event is set to amplify Africa's positioning as a world-class destination for business events. Meetings Africa 2025 also capitalises on the tourism sector's remarkable recovery momentum and its potential to propel economic growth across the continent.

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