



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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Dear Friends in Tourism

The whirlwind holiday season has subsided for South Africans, but it remains peak season for international tourist arrivals, particularly those from colder climates. The new year is now well on its way, and this is an opportune time to look at what lies ahead. But first, a quick update on some recent impacts on our sector.

The effect of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa on the perceptions of international travellers to South Africa is fading. South Africa united in saying "No to xenophobia" and the sporadic incidents of tension that we witnessed between various communities living in South Africa have thankfully come to an end. Implementation of the Cabinet decision with respect to visa requirements will commence soon and travelling to South Africa will become easier without compromising safety and security.

2015 was a turbulent year for the tourism sector. I am delighted that the year ended with South African tourism establishments enjoying a successful holiday season, especially those in our coastal regions, which were filled to the brim with visitors.

Figures released by the Department of Home Affairs indicated that the total number of people who travelled to South Africa over the festive season increased over the last year. This is good news, given the over 3% decline in tourism arrivals (excluding SADC) in the last quarter of 2014 compared to 2013. In 2016 the rigour of our analysis must be improved to take advantage of conducive factors to fill beds and restaurants and maximize sales for events and conferences in our country.

The analysis of the monthly, quarterly and annual figures - taking into account our domestic situation, conditions in source markets, economic factors and value for money, the quality of our offering, tourism infrastructure, service excellence and ease of access - will pre-occupy the Department of Tourism and SA Tourism. Making tourism information available to the sector timeously will enable informed decision-making, and this will make tourism work for everyone.

Our national jewels are attracting South African and International visitors in growing numbers. Compared to last year, SANParks received 6.2% more visitors, tourists to Robben Island grew by 43%, and 28% more people used the Table Mountain Cableway to enjoy one of the most spectacular views in the world.

The announcement of the discovery of *Homo naledi* in the Cradle of Humankind resulted in a phenomenal increase in visitor numbers to Maropeng.

Visitors packed Durban's beachfront to capacity, leaving an estimated R3-billion economic boom in their wake.

We owe a special word of appreciation to our immigration and border control officials, the police and traffic officers who patrolled our streets and highways, the lifeguards who kept beachgoers safe, and the many people who contributed to the warm and friendly welcome to tourists during this season. Congratulations to everyone in the tourism value chain for a job well done!

As 2015 recedes, it is now time to make the most of every opportunity ahead. The improved conditions, coupled with a favourable exchange rate for international tourists, offer exciting prospects for the growth of business for tourism in 2016.

We need to strengthen collaboration between government and the private sector to convert these opportunities into inclusive growth.

The strong performance of our coastal regions over the festive season indicates the untapped potential to grow domestic tourism. We have great tourism infrastructure in places across South Africa. We now need to think creatively, and find ways to make these tourism assets affordable and accessible to more of our people.

The tourism sector, and the entire country, can reap immense benefits from developing domestic tourism successfully, making it an urgent priority for all of us.

This year we will accelerate our efforts to transform our sector so that it is more inclusive, and to make tourism more socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable. I look forward to everyone participating in this journey.

We need the right mix of vision and action. It's time to shift our sights from the ground around our feet to the horizon and beyond. We must work together and act decisively to realise the full potential that tourism has to offer our country.

Be assured of my support as we set out on another year, determined to conquer our challenges and harvest the benefits of tourism for all our people.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Derek Hanekom', with a stylized, cursive script.

Derek Hanekom
Minister: Tourism