



MINISTRY
TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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MS PATRICIA DE LILLE, MP, MINISTER OF TOURISM ADDRESS AT THE BARSA AVIATION SUMMIT IN SKUKUZA, KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

DATE: 14 MARCH 2025

Board of Airline Representatives of South Africa (BARSA), Chairperson, Bali Mabena
BARSA CEO, George Mothema
Airports Company South Africa, CEO, Mpumi Mpofo
Chairman of the Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBCSA), Jerry Mabena
Chairpersons, CEOs, and representatives from various airlines, aviation, and tourism organisations and associations.
Tourism stakeholders from various national and provincial entities and agencies

Good morning, Dumelang, Avu Xenj

It is my great pleasure to be with you all at this important gathering of leaders in the aviation and tourism sectors in South Africa, Africa and from around the world.

I must commend BARSA for an impressive programme touching on all the key areas where much more needs to be done to advance the aviation sector in South Africa. The aviation sector is a vital partner for tourism - without you, we cannot attract visitors to our country.

This is an exciting year for South Africa as we will proudly host the G20 Summit. The G20 is being held on African soil for the first time and it is a defining time for South Africa and indeed the rest of the African continent.

G20 nations represent 85% of the global economy, 75% of international trade, and 67% of the world's population. The G20 Summit will bring global heads of state together in South Africa. More than 130 G20-related meetings will be held across South Africa during the year, providing unparalleled opportunities to showcase our country's venues and facilities, showcase business collaboration, contribute to job creation and driving investment.

I am sure the airline industry is happy to hear this because it means full planes for them for 2025 and beyond.

The G20 Tourism Ministerial Meeting will also take place here in Mpumalanga from 10 to 12 September 2025, welcoming over 400 delegates to the province - enough to fill one or more of your planes.

On the tourism side, we are pushing to grow arrivals to achieve the Government of National Unity's priorities of driving inclusive economic growth and job creation. This is our only mission, and we are working on various fronts to ramp up the marketing of South Africa as a must-visit, diverse, and value-for-money destination.

South Africa is known the world over as a top tourist destination but we are still punching below our weight with so much untapped potential. With 8.92 million arrivals in 2024, up 5% from 2023, we need to work together and work much harder to grow this number.

Growth in arrivals means more business for the aviation and tourism sectors, and importantly, it means growth for our economy and jobs for our people. Our target is to reach 15 million arrivals by 2030, and I am determined to push for us to achieve more than that.

Two key factors are essential to achieving this growth: visas and air connectivity.

VISAS

Together with the Department of State Security, Operation Vulindlela in the Presidency and the Department of Tourism, the Department of Home Affairs launched the ground-breaking Trusted Tour Operators Scheme (TTOS) for travellers from India and China late last year.

This digital visa system went live on 12 February, and on 22 February 2025, we welcomed the first arrivals processed through the TTOS to South Africa. This is a game changer for us as India and China are two key source markets to help us achieve our target of 15million annual arrivals by 2030.

The TTOS is a faster and more seamless visa process for travellers from India and China and so far, we have 65 tour operators registered on this system. We are working with the Department of Home Affairs and the tourism sector partners to significantly increase the number of tour operators registered on the TTOS in Phase 2.

The Digital Nomad Visas is already in operation while the Electronic Travel Authorisation is another game-changer which will significantly improve the turnaround time for processing visas. These initiatives are all geared towards making it easier for people to visit and do business in South Africa. The Department of Tourism will be using these visa regime improvements as enablers to grow arrivals.

AIR CONNECTIVITY AND THE TOURISM ROUTE DEVELOPMENT MARKETING PLAN

Another key enabler for tourism growth is air connectivity. On 4 December last year, Cabinet approved the Tourism Route Development Marketing Plan to achieve our goal of growing arrivals and working in collaboration with the aviation sector.

The Government of National Unity has resolved that the next five years will be focused on actions that will advance the following three strategic priorities:

- Drive Inclusive growth and job creation;
- Reduce poverty and tackle the high cost of living; and
- Build a capable, ethical and developmental state

The Cabinet-approved Tourism Sector Master Plan identifies ease of access, particularly air connectivity, as one of the critical priorities for tourism economic growth. Implementing the Tourism Route Development Marketing Plan, working with other relevant stakeholders in the public and private sectors, aims to support the increase in direct connectivity to and from and within South Africa in a manner that enables sustainable tourism market development and growth.

The programme will be driven initially over an 18-month to engage and collaborate with all stakeholders.

The Tourism Route Development Marketing Plan aligns with national tourism goals and is anchored on collaborative public-private partnerships. The public-private partnership approach will also allow for immediate traction and delivery of the following prioritised deliverables: Prioritise route market retention, expansion, and new market route introduction, focusing on Asia (China, India, and Japan), the African Continent, and domestic connectivity.

Key deliverables include:

- World-class business cases that show carriers how they can be profitable connecting to, and within, South Africa
- Marketing incentives and packages designed to attract and retain airline partners.
- Stakeholder coordination at national level including ACSA, Department of Transport, Department of Tourism, aviation authorities, and private sector partners.
- Alignment with provincial air access programmes like Gauteng Air Access Network, Durban Direct and Cape Town Air Access
- Public-private partnerships to ensure sustainable air service development.

We expect that the Tourism Route Development Marketing Plan will improve coordination at a national level, and support the air access projects at provincial level to ensure that resources are optimized, and that South Africa puts its best foot forward in all engagements with carriers. To be clear, this does not mean replacing, but rather supporting, established provincial programmes.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to note that important matters have been discussed at the Summit yesterday and today. Travel within the African continent remains cumbersome and we all know that often to travel within Africa, at times, it requires us to fly out of the continent first.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) needs to be used to move goods and people, and we need to use this agreement to influence route expansion and connectivity. There is no new frontier or evolution of aviation without a concerted effort, once and for all, to connect African countries with more intercontinental flights.

IMPROVE THE FRAGMENTATION

To improve, we have started the following initiatives: We convened the marketing committees between South African Tourism and TBCSA, chaired by Mr Jerry Mabena.

They are working on a country business plan for destination marketing. They have established task teams on air access, research and data, marketing, and branding, amongst other things.

Key questions for the aviation experts are:

- What more can the tourism sector do to support the aviation industry to push up demand for seats on planes?
- What plans does airlines have to expand direct connectivity between South Africa and key source markets?
- How can government facilitate airlines in expanding capacity from key markets like India and China?
- What incentive structures will make a route development to South Africa more viable?
- How can tourism, airports, and aviation authorities work together to streamline processes?

The government's role in route development is facilitation, not control, ensuring real partnerships between the government and the industry. What we need is a structured National Route Development Committee with both public and private sector representatives.

We must think of strategic actions for the future where our destination marketing efforts are aligned so that we integrate strategies and budgets.

Partners in tourism and aviation, and especially BARSA, thank you once again for the opportunity to address you all today.

I wish you well in your work to enhance air connectivity, modernize and improve the aviation sector.

Let us talk action and at next year's BARSA summit, let's report the progress of our actions.

Thank you and God Bless.

ENDS

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