



Opinion piece: Safety of tourists in SA top of government agenda

More than any other economic activity, the success or failure of a tourism destination depends on being able to provide a safe and secure environment for visitors.

During the 2019 SoNA, the President stated: "...enhanced destination marketing and measures to strengthen tourism safety, will create the conditions for the growth we envisage, and the jobs and opportunities that will follow."

At the 2019 Africa's Travel Indaba the President said: "We must deal with another major challenge, a challenge which was well articulated to me by the President of China who said to me that many Chinese tourists want to come to South Africa and Africa, but the issue that is holding them back is crime. "

Tourism safety has been consistently identified across a number of studies, media and crime reports as a challenge which threatens tourism growth and therefore, foreign direct investment, visitor spend and employment.

International tourism trends indicate that personal safety and security issues are of high importance in potential tourist's choice of a destination. Incidents of crime directed at tourists and tourism products create a negative perception and reputation about our country and destination and in turn, impact on both the visitor experience and visitor numbers.

A memorable visitor Experience for both domestic and international tourists through cleanliness, safety and security, access to information, as well as provision of quality services and authentic experience.

Work was underway to ensure that we address their primary concerns, which are safety and security. Together with the security agencies, community policing forum and initiatives we have set high on our agenda, the need to collaborate and jointly undertake initiatives to identify, address and mitigate risks, challenges and threats impacting on tourist safety as well as businesses in the tourism industry which includes (1) Identification and analysis of key Tourism hotspots (2) Establishment of a database of crime against tourists (3) Enhancement of tourism built and environment through crime prevention initiatives (4) Ensure the joint implementation of an optimised policing and security strategy in the tourism environment.

The areas of collaboration are informed by the objectives of the **Community Policing Strategy** to enhance community policing partnerships in the fight against crime through a multidisciplinary approach of (1) Public education; (2) Building community resilience to crime; (3) Community policing and public order; and (5) Capacity, capability and resourcing of Community Policing and private sector driven initiatives.

The safety of tourists and residents is one of the challenges facing destinations frequented by visitors in South Africa. Acts of criminality against tourists have become a source of great concern and have a negative impact on the country's tourism potential, and affect the visitor experience.

Despite the few isolated incidents which paint South Africa negatively, our country Africa remains a preferred destination for weddings, honeymooners, lifestyle, music and cultural events as well as filming industry with most of these drawing significant numbers of female travelers.

We will always stand ready to welcome visitors to the country where they will enjoy our hospitality and diversity.

The Department of Tourism remains aware of concerns around safety and security and are keeping abreast with the overall challenges of safety and criminal acts directed at both foreign and domestic tourist in certain hotspots. We welcome the swift action the criminal justice system in arresting the perpetrators of crime in popular tourist areas

We condemn the recent criminal attacks on tourism saying this was a threat to tourism, but further cautioned against disproportionate reporting of tourism crimes which can exasperate the situation. We are confident that through endeavors by numerous partners, including community safety initiatives, we are working around the clock to initiate counter measures in the immediate term, as we consolidate our Tourism Safety Strategy.

We are as a country, fast tracking the adoption as a matter of urgency practical measures to promote the safety and security of travellers and tourists

- The gathering of comprehensive statistics and research that result in reliable information and data suitable for risk assessment by decision-makers and policy-makers.
- The training and education of travel employees and private and public sector service personnel in their role as guardians responsible for protecting the basic right of safe travel by all citizens of the world.
- The development of private sector / public sector partnerships in the facilitation of safety-conscious travel and in ensuring the growth of the national economy.
- The implementation of programmes of emergency services for travellers and tourists in need in order to assist them and, in the event of crime, to permit the successful prosecution of offenders at the least possible burden to the victims.
- The allocation of adequate resources to the courts, the police and public and private security forces for the protection and general well-being of travellers and tourists.

This process - in response to the concern that has been raised by those who want to visit our country that they would like the issue of safety to be given attention – is already at an advanced stage. We encourage tourists and local travelers to maintain awareness of their surroundings at all times;

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