



**MINISTER
TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**TOURISM MINISTER PATRICIA DE LILLE'S SPEECH FOR TOURISM MONTH MEDIA
LAUNCH IN DURBAN ON 13 AUGUST 2026**

Theme: "Growing South Africa's Tourism Sector in the Digital Era"

DATE: 13 August 2026 VENUE: 9th Avenue Restaurant, Durban

Good morning. Welcome to South Africa, Welcome to Durban. But more importantly, welcome home. It gives me immense pleasure to join you here in as we officially launch Tourism Month 2026.

As South Africa hosts this year's SADC Summit, we are officially stepping into the formal Chairmanship for the 2026/27 SADC term, with us hosting the 46th Summit here in Durban from 16 to 17 August 2026.

So, it was only fitting that we come to officially launch Tourism Month (September) here in the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

Southern Africa is not 16 separate tourism destinations. We are a region of many nations, many cultures and many experiences connected by history, geography, family, trade and increasingly, by travel.

I want to begin today with a quite simple but important idea: Tourism begins at home. Before we ask the world to discover South Africa, we must continue encouraging South Africans to discover their own country.

Before we speak about millions of international arrivals, we must also speak about the South African family that takes a weekend away; the group of friends who decides to explore another province; the young person who discovers a part of the country they have only ever seen online; and the traveller who chooses to spend their tourism Rand here at home.

Because every time a South African travel in South Africa, something happens in our economy.

In the first half of this year, South Africans took 21,2 million overnight trips, but by 4% from last year's 20.4 million in the same period.

While spend remains down when compared to last year, South Africans took 5.2 million holiday trips up 36% when compared to the same period last year.

This is why domestic tourism matters. It is not a secondary part of our tourism economy. It is one of the foundations of a resilient tourism economy. And this Tourism Month, we want to see even more South Africans experiencing their country.

The ETA launched just yesterday and that signals a swift move towards growing this sector.

WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY

But growing domestic tourism is not the responsibility of government alone. It requires all of us.

Government must create an enabling environment. The private sector must continue developing compelling, competitive, and affordable tourism products.

Provinces and cities must develop and promote experiences beyond our traditional tourism routes.

Technology platforms must help tourism businesses become more visible and discoverable. The media and content creators can help introduce South Africans to places and experiences they may never have considered.

Our tourism businesses must continue innovating.

And South Africans themselves must become ambassadors for their country. This is what Tourism Month should achieve: mobilising all of us behind the growth of tourism.

This is important because tourism is not simply about travelling from one place to another. It is about creating jobs, supporting entrepreneurs, preserving our heritage, strengthening communities, and building national pride.

Every journey has the potential to contribute to a stronger economy and a more inclusive South Africa.

TOURISM AND SOUTH AFRICA'S GROWTH AGENDA

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our focus on growing tourism also comes at a crucial time for our country.

The President has elevated the importance of the tourism sector within South Africa's broader economic growth agenda.

This recognition matters because tourism is far more than a leisure activity.

TOURISM IS AN ECONOMIC SECTOR.

Tourism enables communities to derive economic value from their culture, heritage, natural assets, food, creativity, and hospitality.

Tourism also has an extraordinary ability to connect various parts of the economy. One journey can therefore support many livelihoods.

That is why growing tourism must remain part of how we think about growing the South African economy.

Importantly, we must ensure that tourism creates opportunities for more young people, women, entrepreneurs and SMMEs.

MAKING DOMESTIC TRAVEL MORE ACCESSIBLE

If we want South Africans to travel their own country more, we must recognise the realities that influence whether people are able to travel.

Affordability matters.

Accessibility matters.

Awareness matters.

And the relevance of the experiences we offer matters.

This September, South Africans are therefore once again encouraged to take a Sho't Left — whether that is a day trip, a weekend getaway, or a longer journey.

Through Sho't Left Travel Week, travellers will have access to exclusive discounts and packages designed to make domestic tourism more affordable.

This will be complemented by South African Parks Week, allowing free entry to national parks for day visitors, as well as various provincial Mahala Weeks, creating further opportunities for affordable exploration.

And September is also Heritage Month.

That creates a natural connection between travelling our country and rediscovering our shared heritage.

You do not always need to cross an ocean to discover something extraordinary.
Sometimes you need to cross a provincial border.

Sometimes you need to leave the highway and turn into that small town you normally drive past.

And sometimes there is an extraordinary tourism experience just a few kilometres from your own home that you have never visited.

This September, remember that it is your country, enjoy it because there is nothing more fun than a Sho't Left.

TECHNOLOGY IS CHANGING HOW WE TRAVEL

But if we want more South Africans to discover these experiences, we must also understand that the way people discover travel has fundamentally changed.

Today, many journeys begin on a screen.

Someone sees a destination on TikTok.

Someone watches a travel content creator.

Someone searches for a restaurant online.

Someone sees a video of a waterfall, a township experience, a hidden beach, a hiking trail, or a cultural festival.

And suddenly, a place they had never considered becomes somewhere they want to visit. This is the tourism environment in which we now operate.

And it is why I am particularly pleased that TikTok has joined us today.

Its participation is significant because digital platforms are increasingly part of the tourism ecosystem.

And importantly, they provide tourism businesses, including smaller businesses, with an opportunity to reach audiences far beyond their immediate geography. This presents an enormous opportunity for South African tourism.

It is precisely why our Tourism Month programme culminates in World Tourism Day on 27 September, under the global theme: *“Digital Agenda and Artificial Intelligence to Redesign Tourism.”*

Our localised theme speaks directly to this opportunity: *“Growing South Africa’s Tourism Sector in the Digital Era.”*

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE FUTURE OF TOURISM

Earlier in today’s programme, we were also introduced to an AI Robot for Tourism. That is not simply a novelty.

It illustrates just how quickly technology is becoming part of the tourism sector.

Artificial intelligence is already influencing how travellers search for destinations, develop itineraries, compare experiences, translate information, and make travel decisions.

We cannot ignore it.

It is our collective responsibility to ensure that South Africa uses that transformation to strengthen our tourism economy and create opportunities for our people.

Data and insights tell us that travellers are increasingly open to technologies such as AI-powered applications that allow greater independence and personalisation of trips.

This matters enormously for domestic tourism. Imagine a small tourism operator in Limpopo whose experience can be discovered by a family sitting in Germany or India.

Imagine a township restaurant that is no longer dependent only on word of mouth but can showcase its offering to thousands of potential visitors.

Imagine technology helping a traveller build an itinerary that takes them beyond our traditional attractions and introduces them to smaller communities and emerging destinations.

That is when technology becomes more than innovation.

It becomes economic inclusion.

TECHNOLOGY MUST WORK FOR THE SMME

And this is important. The digital transformation of tourism cannot benefit only the large players. It must work for the SMME.

Technology should lower barriers to participation and not create new ones. This is another area where partnership becomes critical.

Government cannot build a digitally enabled tourism economy alone. This is something we must build together.

THE GLOBAL OPPORTUNITY

Ladies and gentlemen,

While Tourism Month places a strong emphasis on encouraging South Africans to explore their country, we are doing so within a global tourism environment that presents an enormous opportunity.

The *Growth Amid Uncertainty* report projects that annual international visits could exceed two billion by 2030.

That tells us something important.

Despite economic and geopolitical uncertainty, the desire to travel remains remarkably resilient.

People still want experiences.

But two billion global travellers also mean greater competition.

Destinations around the world will be competing for those travellers and for the economic value they bring.

South Africa cannot simply assume that because global tourism is growing, our share will automatically grow with it.

And encouragingly, South Africa continues to attract more visitors supported by strong Africa regional demand and a steady growth from Europe.

Between January and June this year, South Africa welcomed close 5, 6 million tourists up by 12% when compared to the same period last year. We must compete for that growth.

In October and November next year, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia will co-host the 2027 ICC Men's Cricket World Cup, which includes 14 teams, 57 matches, and a global audience.

You have heard me say it and you will hear me say it again. Come for the cricket, stay for the culture.

There is something else in this too.

Every time a South African family holidays in Maputo, or a Zimbabwean family spends a week on this coast, we learn something about each other that no campaign can teach. Travel is the diplomacy we have and it allows South Africans themselves to experience the destination we are asking the rest of the world to visit.

SOUTH AFRICA WELCOMES THE WORLD

So, while tourism begins at home, our ambition certainly does not end there. Our message to ALL travellers (from our African continent and across the globe) remains clear: South Africa welcomes the world.

But saying that South Africa welcomes the world must be more than a marketing line. It must describe the experience of the traveller.

TOURISM REMAINS ABOUT PEOPLE

Even as we embrace technology, artificial intelligence and a rapidly changing digital landscape, there is something we must never lose sight of. Tourism remains a human business.

Technology may help someone discover South Africa.

AI may help them plan their itinerary. A digital platform may help them make a booking. But what they remember will often be a person.

The person who welcomed them.

The guide who told them the story.

The chef who prepared the meal.

The entrepreneur who created the experience.

The community that opened its doors.

Tourism Connects People.

Behind every destination is a person. Communities are the custodians of many of the authentic experiences that make South Africa unique, and tourism creates opportunities for people to encounter different communities, cultures, and traditions.

As we embrace this year's theme, we do so knowing that technology should strengthen that human connection and not replace it.

LIMPOPO — OUR PROVINCE OF FOCUS

Ladies and gentlemen,

If we want South Africans to travel more, and if we want visitors to our country to keep coming, we must constantly give them new reasons to travel and that includes new experiences, new places to discover and more opportunities to explore the diversity of South Africa.

And today, I am delighted to announce a province that represents precisely that opportunity. Limpopo will be our province of focus for Tourism Month 2026.

And my challenge to South Africans is simple: Do not just say you know South Africa. Go and explore South Africa.

Take that Sho't Left. Go to Limpopo.

And then tell somebody else about your experience.

Post it.

Share it.

Recommend it.

Because in today's digital world, one traveller's experience can inspire many others to take their own journey.

CONCLUSION

Ladies and gentlemen,

The world is moving towards more than two billion international journeys a year. South Africa must be ready to compete for those travellers.

But our journey begins here.

At home. With South Africans discovering South Africa.

So, this Tourism Month: Take a Sho't Left.

Tourism begins at home.

Let us discover South Africa — together.

I thank you.

THE END

For streaming links, images, videos and further information please scan the QR Code and join the Tourism Department's National Multimedia WhatsApp Group.



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