



tourism

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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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South Africa looks to Saudi to boost inbound tourism

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Collaboration in the field of tourism was the main agenda item when the Minister of Tourism, Derek Hanekom, recently visited Saudi Arabia for bilateral discussions with his counterpart, Prince Sultan bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, President of Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH). The bilateral presented a platform to enhance the relationship between South Africa and Saudi Arabia.

"There is great potential to strengthen our co-operation with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and to increase the visitor numbers to South Africa. The feedback we received from tour operators was very positive about South Africa as an attractive holiday destination for Saudi Arabians, especially during their hot summer months, which falls during our slower winter months," Minister Hanekom said.

During the meeting with Prince Salman, the exchange of tourism related expertise was identified as an area for cooperation between the two countries. Saudi Arabia is looking to South Africa for assistance in developing unique tourism experiences related to heritage sites and game parks. Included in this would be route development, desert camps development and management as well as development of culture and heritage tourism.

Tourist arrivals from the Gulf Corporation Council (GCC) region into South Africa (SA) has shown steady growth since 2010, with Saudi Arabia making up 63% of the total GCC tourists visiting South Africa in 2014. The number of Saudi tourists to SA have increased steadily over the past few years and is currently standing at approximately 6 000 tourists per annum.

The promotion of tourism and the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Co-operation in the Field of Tourism with Saudi Arabia are key priorities for South Africa. The two aspects of SA's tourism objectives are inter-related, and the deepening of bilateral relations is expected to have positive spin-offs for tourism revenue from Saudi Arabian visitors.

The ministerial visit to Saudi Arabia served the dual purpose of creating awareness of South Africa as a tourism destination by engaging the Saudi tourism trade during seminars and business meetings. Minister Hanekom touched on the significant role travel agents in promoting Destination South Africa.

Minister Hanekom spoke of the various tourism opportunities available to tourists in South Africa, emphasising that the country is a better value for money destination in comparison to others. He also underlined the important role which the tourism sector plays in contributing towards economic growth in South Africa, urging travel agents to familiarise themselves with the product that they are promoting to Saudi Arabians.

Before departing, Minister Hanekom had lunch with South Africans living in Jeddah and discussed their role as ambassadors in promoting South Africa as a tourist destination.

The next step in engaging the Saudi Arabian market would be business-to-business engagements, allowing South African tour operators to make contact with their counterparts, in order to sell products to the market thereby increasing the flow of Saudi Arabian tourists to South Africa.

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