

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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South African Tourism saddened by the passing of Lebo Malepa of Soweto Backpackers

The South African Tourism (SA Tourism) Board, Management, staff and partners are deeply saddened by the news of the passing away of one of South Africa's tourism sector's pioneers, Lebo Malepa, founder of Soweto Backpackers.

The multiple-award-winning business owner passed away on Christmas Day, 25 December 2021, following a long period of ill-health.

Lebo started off selling crafts to tourists in 1998, and as he got to learn more about tourists from various countries, his interest in the sector grew. Having never travelled anywhere outside the country before, but armed with his vision and passion, Lebo opened Soweto Backpackers in 2003, starting off using his one back room in the yard of his parents' house in Soweto Orlando West. Over the years, the business grew as Lebo hosted tourists from all over the world.

He introduced bicycle tours in Soweto, which fast became a trend of visiting historical sites on a bicycle. His offering also included hosting story-telling nights for tourists where locals get to share stories with tourists staying at the Soweto Backpackers. In one media [interview](#), Lebo dubbed his business as "everybody's business" because he integrated the entire community through his establishment.

"It is truly a sad day not only for his family and friends but for the entire tourism sector. Lebo was a visionary, an innovator and an inspiration to many people. He led the way and managed against all odds to grow a successful business. He brought hope to many township tourism businesses. He was the epitome of entrepreneurship, and most admirably, he was passionate about empowering his community. The nation has lost a treasure. We applaud Lebo for his contribution to the success of tourism in this country," commented SA Tourism Acting Chief Executive Officer, Themba Khumalo.

Over the years, Lebo has won several awards at the SA Tourism hosted, prestigious Lilizela Tourism Awards that recognise businesses that excel in the tourism sector. He was often featured in SA Tourism's promotional collateral representing and showcasing the country's culture, history, and the fun and vibrant spirit of South African people. Lebo will be remembered for his energy, joyful personality and warm smile.

SA Tourism would like to express its deepest condolences to family, friends and close associates of Lebo Malepa.

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