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SPEECH BY MINISTER OF TOURISM, PATRICIA DE LILLE

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TOURISM PARTNERS HOST AFRICA'S TRAVEL INDABA MEDIA LAUNCH

Note to editors and journalists: The following speech was delivered by Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille at the official Media Launch of the 2025 Africa's Travel Indaba held at the Moses Mabhida Stadium in Durban today. Read more below...

Good morning to all our esteemed guests, friends, colleagues, and champions of African tourism.

It is both a privilege and a profound honour to stand before you today as we are here to usher in the 2025 edition of Africa's Travel Indaba – one of the most powerful platforms for collaboration, innovation, and transformation for tourism.

It is wonderful to be in KwaZulu Natal again. This is not just a province, it is a mirror of our continent's warmth, resilience and potential.

As you heard from the SA Tourism Chief Marketing Officer earlier, at the end of March this year, South African Tourism officially launched our latest global brand campaign, '**South Africa Awaits — Come Find Your Joy!**'— a celebration of the country's boundless energy, rich culture, and extraordinary experiences.

This dynamic campaign invites travellers to rediscover their sense of wonder, embracing the joy that travel to South Africa can unlock.

In this spirit, we cannot wait to welcome various delegates from across Africa and around the globe to the eThekweni Metro in the province of KwaZulu-Natal for this year's Africa's Travel Indaba trade show.

The theme for Africa's Travel Indaba "Unlimited Africa," is not just a slogan – it is the essence of this all-important gathering because Africa's Travel Indaba is not just a trade show. It is a celebration of who we are.

A declaration of what we believe.

It is a declaration that we want to think and act without limits.

It is a bold manifestation of the African tourism sector that we, together, are further developing and fulfilling our true potential.

To speak of “Unlimited Africa” is to believe in an Africa unbound by stereotype, unhindered by the past, and unleashed in its full potential.

It means imagining a continent where tourism is not just about visitors but about value.

Not just about destinations, but about dignity. Not just about business, but about belonging.

It means seeing ourselves not through the lens of others, but through our own proud, radiant perspective – and reflecting that to the world.

Africa’s Travel Indaba: Economic Impact

Africa’s Travel Indaba is more than an event. It is our collective voice and stories echoing across the globe.

From its origins over four decades ago as a local platform, Indaba has grown into the most vibrant travel marketplace on the African continent.

In 2024 alone:

- Over 9,000 delegates walked the halls of the Indaba.
- 1,200 exhibitors shared their dreams.
- 24,000 business meetings turned ideas into action.
- And R226 million in direct economic activity was generated right here in Durban, with another R333 million rippling across KwaZulu-Natal.

Behind these numbers are real lives: more than 1,000 jobs created, opportunities unlocked for youth, for students, and for entrepreneurs from all walks of life.

Through funding from the Department of Tourism, 120 SMMEs were empowered to showcase their offerings and access the global stage through our Market Access Support Programme.

This is what inclusive growth looks like. This is transformation in motion. This is what it means to leave no one behind.

As we go into Africa’s Travel Indaba 2025, we currently have participation from 26 African countries including South Africa.

We have also seen consistent interest in the number of tourism products from across the continent.

With over 1200 exhibitors currently confirmed, this includes 297 tourism products, demonstrating confidence in the event as a marketplace for African experiences.

This also reflects our success in positioning Indaba as a truly pan-African event.

Notably, our floor space is completely sold out, signalling increased demand and enthusiasm from exhibitors.

A total of 908 buyers have been vetted and approved, with 7 430 meetings already confirmed on the Indaba online diary platform.

Interest is surging from major markets including the United States, China, the United Kingdom, and India. In fact, a total of 55 countries are represented in our buyer profile.

As we go to Africa's Travel Indaba, there is much about South Africa to be celebrated and highlighted as is the case for the rest of the African continent.

For an example, today we are here at Moses Mabhida stadium recognising the value sport plays not only in our economy but the tourism sector too.

Sport is not just a game – it is a unifier. It contributes an estimated R50 billion to our economy, sustains over 500,000 jobs, and brings global spectators to our doorsteps.

Whether it's the thundering footsteps of the Comrades Marathon or the electric energy of the Soweto Derby, sport moves us – and moves our economy and the tourism sector.

Another key feature of our country and the rest of our continent is the explosion of multiple cultures highlighting the soul of our beautiful Africa.

These are not just attractions; they are testaments to our history and legacy.

KwaZulu Natal is home to many attractions and historic sites such as the Nelson Mandela capture site where the father of our democracy was arrested on 5 August 1962 outside Howick here in KZN.

The Nelson Mandela Capture Site commemorates this moment in history with a visitor centre and a world-renowned sculpture.

The KZN province is also a melting pot of cultures and cuisines and without a doubt, the place where our visitors can find some of the best curries and breyanis.

Adventure Tourism is another major tourism drawcard and our country, South Africa, fares well on the world stage on adventure offerings, competing among the top destinations across the globe.

Based on research done, in 2024 adventure tourists made up 8.8% of tourists to South Africa, which is over 700 000 of the 8.2 million arrivals in 2023.

Adventure tourists to South Africa stay five nights longer and spend almost three times more than the average tourist to South Africa.

Adventure tourism speaks to the heartbeat of the new traveller – those seeking meaning, authenticity, and magic.

From the quiet beauty of the Karoo to the wild trails of the Drakensberg, we invite the world to lose themselves in Africa – and in doing so, find something deeper.

So, we invite all delegates who are coming to Indaba to get ready to experience some of our adventure offerings but come see what they can package for various travellers from across the world.

Our mission is to ensure that all visitors come find their joy across the length and breadth of South Africa and discover all our hidden gems in every little town, dorpie and township.

We want visitors to go beyond the usual and experience all the magic and wonder Mzansi has to offer.

South Africa has 3,000km of shoreline with a wide variety of tourist experiences including surfing, zip-lining, bungee jumping, kayaking, diving and much more.

Tourists across the globe are seeking experiences over products and prioritising their spending on unique and exciting activities – South Africa has it all and at Africa's Travel Indaba we have every intention to show this to the globe.

What to look forward to this year:

Indaba starts on 12 May with BONDay – our Business Opportunity Networking Day – where minds meet, trends emerge, and tomorrow takes shape.

This is where the groundwork for growth is laid. Where tourism becomes not just a product, but a powerful strategy for inclusive, sustainable development.

Africa's Travel Indaba will feature discussions and workshops on how Artificial Intelligence can drive customer service improvements, streamline operations, enhance visitor experiences, and optimize marketing strategies.

This will help tourism businesses; particularly small and medium enterprises harness the power of AI to stay competitive in the global tourism market.

As a proudly Pan African trade show, this year's Indaba will also highlight opportunities for cross-border tourism collaborations and regional destination marketing to increase the value of Africa's tourism offering.

Additionally, Africa's Travel Indaba will showcase how local tourism can drive sustainable economic growth and contribute to job creation.

G20

This is also a historic year for the country as for the first time, the G20 Summit comes to African soil – to South Africa's shores.

As the G20 Chair this year, we are hosting meetings throughout the year with the second G20 Tourism Working Group Taking place right here in KZN during the Indaba.

We have a golden opportunity to forge meaningful partnerships for tourism growth on a global scale.

By the end of November this year, over 200 G20 related meetings will be hosted across our provinces, spotlighting not just our tourism experiences and offerings, but our capability, our hospitality, and our readiness to lead.

These meetings will affirm our status as a leading Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Events (MICE) destination in Africa and the Middle East.

This cements the message - Tourism is not a side act in our economic story – it is centre stage.

Tourism's Economic Impact

From contributing 9.5% to our GDP pre-pandemic, to 8.2% in 2023, tourism is regaining momentum.

Last year, nearly 9 million international visitors arrived in South Africa – 76% from fellow African nations. The tourism sector already supports 1.68 million jobs, set to grow to over 2.2 million by the end of the decade.

Importantly, many of these jobs are held by women, and anchored in rural and township communities.

Tourism is our most powerful tool to bridge divides, spark enterprise, and rewrite the story of economic participation.

To reach our goal of welcoming 15 million visitors by 2030, we must open our skies and deepen our connectivity.

That's why we're rolling out the Tourism Route Development Marketing Plan – targeting 25 key markets with an ambitious air access strategy.

But we can't fly solo. It will take vision, collaboration, and commitment from public and private sectors alike.

Over and above our Airline Pavilion, there will also be twelve independent airlines exhibiting at Indaba this year.

It affirms what we've always known: Africa is not a passive participant in the global narrative, we are authors of the future and we are writing our chapter now.

Let us be clear: Africa is not rising – Africa has risen.

Our tourism offering is not just competitive; it is compelling.

We offer what no other region can: journeys that are rooted in humanity, wrapped in wonder and rich with meaning.

From luxury lodges to township tastings, from starlit skies to sunlit smiles – Africa is unforgettable because Africa is real.

To the media, thank you for carrying our message far and wide. You are not just telling our story – you are shaping how the world sees us.

Please keep shining a light on our SMMEs, our innovators and our hidden gems. These are the stories that will define our future.

To South African Tourism and all our partners – thank you for your leadership, your passion, and your vision drive this platform.

Our new campaign, “South Africa Awaits – Come Find Your Joy,” is not just an invitation – it's a promise.

To every exhibitor, organiser, and partner – thank you for believing in the power of travel to transform.

Let us continue to grow together – government, business, civil society, and communities – to unlock the full promise of African tourism.

Let's use this platform – Africa's Travel Indaba - not just to transact, but to transform.

We are ready to welcome all delegates to Africa's Travel Indaba.

South Africa awaits - Come find your joy.

Thank you all and God Bless.

ENDS

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