



MINISTRY
TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Speech by the Minister of Tourism for South Africa, Ms Patricia de Lille delivered at South Africa's press conference at the IBTM (Incentives, Business Travel & Meetings) World Tradeshow 2024, held in Barcelona, Spain

DATE: 20 November 2024

Buenos días, warm greetings from South Africa
Programme Director
Partners
Valued members of the media
South African exhibitors and SMMEs
Distinguished guests
Ladies and Gentlemen
Introduction

Before I begin my speech, I would like to take a moment to express my heartfelt condolences to the entire nation of Spain following the devastating floods that struck on 29 October, claiming hundreds of lives and leaving deep scars in communities.

Please know that the people of South Africa stand in solidarity with you during this incredibly difficult time. I would like to call for a moment of silence to remember those who lost their lives in the floods.

It is a privilege to join you here at IBTM World for the very first time. I am excited to be part of this vibrant gathering of industry leaders and innovators, who are all committed to advancing the future of global business events.

IBTM World Theme - People, Power, Potential

I am inspired by this year's IBTM World theme, "People, Power, Potential."

This theme strikes a deep chord as a profound reminder of the essential forces that drive the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Events (MICE) and broader tourism sector.

It reminds us that, at its core, the business events sector thrives on human interaction.

It is about people sharing ideas and experiences, people forging lasting connections and designing the future of business events and tourism.

The theme underscores the powerful impact of the MICE and broader tourism industry.

For too long, tourism was seen as a “secondary” sector—its full potential often underestimated. But now it is a dynamic economic force, significantly contributing to GDPs worldwide, creating jobs, and fostering human development.

As South Africa, we are acutely aware of the transformative power of tourism and business events and we are working hard to elevate the profile of tourism and attract more business events and visitors to our beautiful and diverse country.

Hosting the G20

We come to IBTM World this year with excitement as in a few days’ time South Africa will officially take Presidency of the 2025 G20 summit, following Brazil’s hosting of the summit this year and ahead of the United States of America who will host the summit in 2026.

This gathering will see us welcoming over 40 global heads of state to our shores.

The G20 nations account for 85% of the global economy, 75% of international trade, and 67% of the world's population.

Thus, hosting this summit will reinforce our stature and appeal as a tourism and MICE destination and will go a long way in boosting not only our business events sector but also the greater South African tourism sector.

As the leading business events destination in Africa and the Middle East as affirmed in the latest International Congress and Conventions Association (ICCA) rankings, we stand proud and ready to host the G20 Summit and showcase all our diverse offerings in business and leisure tourism.

South Africa hosting the G20 Summit marks a significant milestone and it is important both for our country and the greater African continent.

As the only African country in the G20, South Africa brings a unique perspective to discussions, particularly those affecting developing nations and the African continent.

Hosting the summit allows South Africa us to not only spotlight issues such as economic inequality, development, climate change, and fair-trade practices but it is also helps to once again helps to connect countries to grow tourism and highlights South Africa’s capability to host successful incident-free global big events.

This certainly illustrates the transformative power of the MICE sector and indeed the greater tourism industry.

This is best shown in the current and projected growth of the MICE industry and the direct economic benefits generated from hosting events.

According to Allied Market Research, the global MICE industry was, in 2023, valued at approximately 523.3 billion US dollars (R9.7 trillion) and is projected to grow to over 1,3 trillion US dollars (R25.5 trillion) by 2032.

This represents a remarkable compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 11.4% from 2023 to 2032.

Meanwhile, the South African MICE industry was valued at 6.6 billion US dollars (R121.8 billion) in 2023, and it is projected to grow fourfold over the next eight years, reaching 25.9 billion US dollars (R477.9 billion) by 2032.

I am confident that, with our dedicated efforts, we can even exceed these projections and this is why being at this crucial platform at IBTM World is important to us as we are committed to growing this sector beyond projections.

South Africa has consistently demonstrated its capability to host high-profile local and international events, showcasing our expertise and commitment to excellence.

I can confidently assure you that, as a country we are looking forward to welcoming all the visitors including world leaders, delegates, media personnel, and support staff to our shores.

We cannot wait for all of them to meet our warm and welcoming locals, experience our quality-assured accommodation establishments and experience service excellence in our hotels, restaurants, transportation, and other local services.

As already stated, our country has a formidable track record of hosting successful major business events annually and our hosting prowess will once again be on show for the world to see.

We are excited to be able to share our unique stories with the world's media as we also share with them our vast tapestry of cultures, award winning cuisine, natural beauty, diverse attractions and infrastructure.

There is no doubt that as more of the world gets to see our country through the G20 summit lens, we are confident that they too will be interested in coming to meet in South Africa and exploring our country.

We are therefore looking forward to hosting even more international conferences, trade shows, and business events in future because certainly if the world still did not believe it, the G20 summit cements our country as a capable host for large-scale events.

South Africa is not just a destination—it is the gateway to the future of global collaboration and unforgettable experiences.

At the heart of our Government of National Unity is the focus to reduce poverty and contributing to an inclusive economic growth.

The G20 Summit promises to have an economic ripple effect as local businesses will also receive a boost - contributing to sustaining jobs and growth in the tourism sector and other sectors.

The G20 Summit provides South Africa many gains and we are excited to use this event to grow global visibility, showcase our infrastructure improvements, and a strengthen our brand as a tourism and business events destination.

Not only is the G20 Summit great for South Africa's business events sector, but it is also very important in giving a voice to African concerns on the world stage.

This is indeed the power of business events – it is about knowledge sharing for the greater good.

The attention generated by the event is expected to attract visitors from around the world and pave the way for a boost in international tourism in the years to come.

To that end, we are here to invite everyone to follow the steps of the G20 leaders and contribute to South Africa's MICE sector by coming to South Africa for your meetings and events.

South Africa as an exceptional MICE destination

South Africa is renowned for its exceptional ability to host world-class, high-profile international events—a reputation forged through a series of historic events such as the landmark BRICS Summit, where South Africa welcomed global leaders to discuss vital international relations.

Our country's capacity to host major events has also shone in the sporting arena, with the Netball World Cup 2023—the first-ever in Africa—held at the prestigious Cape Town International Convention Centre.

And, of course, we cannot talk about monumental events without recalling the unforgettable 2010 FIFA World Cup, which made history as the first-ever World Cup on the African continent.

Earlier this year, the International Congress and Conventions Association (ICCA) Global Rankings for 2023 ranked South Africa as the leading destination for MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) in Africa and the Middle East.

This ranking considered only association conferences and excluded corporate or governmental meetings and conferences.

Furthermore, each conference had to be attended by at least 50 international delegates, last at least two days, and take place in at least three different countries.

In 2023, South Africa hosted 98 events that met this criterion and I am happy to announce that we have secured bids to host 25 international business events by 2029.

These are projected to contribute over R240 million to the economy.

Between April and August of this year, we submitted 48 bids for events with an estimated economic impact of R586 million.

We remain proactive in attracting more international events and with the wide variety of products at our South Africa stand this year, we are confident that this IBTM World platform will help advance these ambitions.

There will be even more bid submissions before the end of the financial year in April 2025 to further bolster our position as a premier destination for international business gatherings.

We are incredibly proud of our strides in this regard, and we are committed to building on this success to maintain our leading position.

We are now poised to elevate our standing even further as we prepare to host the highly anticipated G20 Summit next November — an event that will showcase our nation's unparalleled capacity for global leadership and innovation.

Improving Visa Regulations

Of course, to host events such as the G20 summit we need to be a country that works.

That is why I am pleased to update on some significant strides we have made in the last few months including some enhancements to our visa regime with the aim to improve accessibility for international visitors to South Africa.

Apart from the fact that South Africa has visa waivers for travellers from 132 countries for periods of between 30 and 90 days and our e-visa system is available to travellers from 34 countries.

In January 2025, we will start implementation of the Trusted Tour Operator Scheme (TTOS), which aims to reduce red tape and increase tourism from India and China by allowing the Department of Home Affairs to process group visa applications for tourists travelling with approved operators.

As part of this programme, approved tour operators will register with the Department and take responsibility for their travel groups.

The TTOS is a significant milestone and is a collaboration between the Department of Tourism, as well as the Presidency and the Department of Home Affairs which recently announced the creation of an innovative new Trusted Tour Operator Scheme (TTOS) for visas targeting India and China.

The TTOS will remove some of the key obstacles standing in the way of South Africa becoming a favoured tourism destination for Indian tourism.

Through TTOS, vetted and approved tour operators from India will be invited to register with the Department of Home Affairs (DHA).

In exchange for undergoing thorough screening up-front and assuming responsibility for travellers in their groups, the Department of Home Affairs will for the very first-time process group applications from Indian tourists travelling with approved operators.

Tourist visa applications processed through TTOS will be handled by a dedicated and skilled team of adjudicators to ensure swift and reliable processing, and will also benefit from the removal of restrictive red tape that currently suffocates South Africa's tourism potential.

In the past, the DHA introduced an online e-Visa application system with a view to make the process of getting visa simple for travellers from eligible countries, including India.

There were some reported challenges with the e-Visa system - due to system delays and backlogs. In view of this, the TTOS comes at an opportune time, to ease travel and visa facilitation, thereby increasing tourist arrivals from India.

The implementation of the TTOS will yield immediate benefits including:

- Significant boost in visitor numbers
- Growth in MICE, especially incentive travel
- Increased interest from weddings and film production sectors

In 2023, Chinese tourists made up 1.8%, and Indian tourists accounted for 3.9% of all international visitors to South Africa, underscoring the importance of these markets for our tourism sector.

These initiatives represent significant steps toward making South Africa a more accessible and attractive destination for travellers worldwide, especially those in the MICE sector traveling in groups.

India and China are strategic source markets for South Africa but we are working on growing all markets and addressing obstacles to growth to reach our target of 15 million foreign tourists a year by 2030.

Improving Air Access

While we are aware that the cost of airlift remains a barrier for most of our business events delegates, we are pleased to see that air capacity recovery has been solid for South Africa.

In 2023, we saw the return of direct flights between South Africa and Brazil, China, London and Australia.

This aligns well with our ambitions to welcome more business events delegates and leisure travellers to South Africa.

Currently, we have active international routes connecting 72 cities worldwide, serviced by 55 airlines, offering over 7,8million seats across over 52,000 flights scheduled for 2024.

On the domestic front, our capacity has rebounded with 18 million seats for 2024 and 4.2 million seats already projected for the first quarter of 2025.

This means that due to this extensive network and connectivity, even when in South Africa, our visitors have multiple options to get around and explore our country.

However, we recognise the need to further intensify our efforts to improve air access and so we continue to collaborate with some strategic partners in strategic markets that lack direct air access.

Supporting SMMEs

A country that works is one that continues to nurture and grow its entrepreneurs and small businesses so that they can become bigger businesses.

As South Africa continues to excel in the business events sector, we know how important it is to also benefit the smaller players and our communities so that they can progress and grow due the transformative power of tourism and business events.

I am pleased that 18 exhibitors and 6 small to medium enterprises (SMMEs) are joining us here at IBTM World as South Africa stand sharers.

We are particularly proud of the participation of the SMMEs, which has been made possible through support from the South Africa National Convention Bureau (SANCB).

These SMMEs are:

- Karibu Leisure Resort & Conference
- Syavaya Corporate Travel
- Get the Picture
- Afri-Centric Luxury Experiences
- Afrikan Native Tours.
- Offshore Adventures

You can come meet all of them at the Impact stage later today at 16h30.

We invite you all to join us there to engage with these incredible and unique products whom I am confident you will want to book for your next business event in South Africa.

Meetings Africa 2025 - growing MICE throughout Africa

As a Pan-Africanist, I firmly believe that the growth of South Africa's MICE industry should catalyse continent-wide growth.

While healthy competition drives innovation, we're equally committed to fostering collaboration among African destinations to unlock the continent's immense potential.

Africa's business events industry is experiencing promising growth.

In 2023, it was valued at approximately 16.6 billion US dollars (R295 billion) and is projected to soar to around 65.6 billion US dollars (R1.2 trillion) by 2032 at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 16.8%.

The continent's growth rate is expected to surpass other regions, including the Americas, Europe, and the Asia-Pacific.

It is for this reason that we host platforms like Meetings Africa where we facilitate collaboration among African destinations and showcase our collective offerings to international buyers.

In doing so, together we are elevating the continent's MICE industry to new heights.

I encourage you to join us at Meetings Africa from the 24th to 26th of February at the Sandton Convention Centre in Johannesburg for a unique proudly African experience at the continent's premier trade event designed to elevate the business events industry.

Meetings Africa will once again serve as a powerful platform for forging new partnerships, driving collaboration, and creating lasting economic impact and is hosted in partnership with the Gauteng Tourism Authority and Johannesburg Tourism Company.

Meetings Africa 2025 will kick off with the Business Opportunity Networking Day (BONDay) on 24 February, setting the stage for invaluable networking opportunities and business ventures.

Join us in shaping the future of business events in Africa. We look forward to seeing you in Johannesburg in 2025.

Conclusion

Whether it is for Meetings Africa, attending another business event in South Africa or you are hosting your own event in South Africa or attending the G20 summit, we look forward to welcoming you to South Africa.

We are ready to share our quality infrastructure, our high service excellence and our quality-assured establishments.

South Africans cannot wait to welcome you and to host you so you can experience our country's natural beauty and wide variety of tourism experiences and most of all, our best asset - the warm welcoming nature of our people as we were voted the Friendliest Country in the World in 2024.

We look forward to working with you all to grow tourism arrivals and business events in South Africa – a value for money destination and the most beautiful country in the world. Come Meet South Africa!

Thank you, gracias.

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