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SPEECH

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TOURISM MONTH MEDIA LAUNCH WITH FOCUS ON ASTRO TOURISM

Note to editors: The following speech was delivered by the Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille at the Tourism Month Media Launch held in Kimberley today. Read more below...

- Programme Director,
- Premier of the Northern Cape, Dr Zamani Saul
- Frances Baard District Executive Mayor, Nondumisa Buda
- Executive Mayor of the Sol Plaatjie Municipality, Kagisho Sonyoni,
- Northern Cape Provincial Tourism officials
- Industry Associations, business owners, partners and our Tourism Stakeholders
- Valued Media representatives,
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am immensely pleased to be here in the beautiful Northern Cape Province to launch our Tourism Month 2024.

This province is renowned for its breath-taking landscapes, vibrant cultural heritage, and unparalleled experiences for adventure and cultural immersion.

We chose this beautiful province as the host for this year's World Tourism Day celebrations, not just because of its vast and varied tourism offerings but also to bring attention to a region that is often less visited compared to others in our country.

Although less visited than provinces like Gauteng and the Western Cape, the Northern Cape is truly a gem within our South African borders, offering diverse experiences that cater to all tastes and interests.

I had the most amazing visit here last year in Riemvasmaak and at the Kgalagadi National Park.

From the rugged terrains of the Kalahari Desert to the vibrant wildflower displays of Namaqualand, this province embodies the essence of natural beauty and breath-taking landscapes.

ASTRO TOURISM

Very exciting for me is that this province is leading South Africa's proactive stance in leveraging the significant advances made in the development of the world's largest space telescope array, with a comprehensive astro-tourism strategy.

Outside the small town of Carnarvon is the South African site (called MeerKAT) of the Square Kilometre Array (SKA), a global mega-infrastructure project is underway and endeavors to build the most powerful radio telescope in the world.

It is for this reason that we chose this site to be the focus of our official World Tourism Day celebration here in the Northern Cape on 27 September 2024.

There are immense opportunities for Astro Tourism in South Africa and especially in the Northern Cape and this is why we were intentional about selecting this province and the town of Carnarvon.

Today, we are here to cast the spotlight on these experiences and more and to invite South Africans, and indeed visitors from the rest of the world, to come explore this province and to engage with living cultures and traditions that continue to thrive here in the Northern Cape.

We want to use the SKA and the Astro Tourism as a catalyst to develop the Karoo and provide opportunities for rural tourism as well as agri-tourism to develop rural areas further.

To realise this, the Department of Tourism is finalizing the National Astro-Tourism Strategy to present to Cabinet.

South Africa is the first country on the African continent to develop a National Astro-Tourism Strategy.

This gives us the legacy of mutual understanding between the astronomy significance and the indigenous celestial narratives, enhancing the synergy between humans and conservation and a creative link between our origins of life on earth and the origins of the universe.

50% of the world's population cannot see the beauty of the night sky but the African sky still remains at an advantage, by having the clearest and darkest night sky.

This strategy aims to position South Africa as a world-class astro-tourism destination, focusing on infrastructure development, the optimal functioning of astronomy-tourism streams, and community transformation.

The vision of this strategy aims to develop and position an inclusive Astro-Tourism sector that will yield sustainable benefit-sharing opportunities by maximizing on marketing efforts and enhancing visitor experience in South Africa.

The Department of Tourism and the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) are in the final stages of Cabinet approval to finalise the National Astro-Tourism Strategy.

This Strategy has been approved by myself and Minister Blade Nzimande and will be launched at this year's National Tourism Day Celebration.

South Africa has the potential to be a leading astro-tourism destination due to the lack of light pollution, favorable weather, the Southern sky advantage and four of the world's best-preserved meteorite impact craters being on South African soil.

We also host two of the globe's most significant astronomy initiatives, the Square Kilometre Array (largest radio telescope in the world) and SALT (the largest optical telescope in the Southern Hemisphere).

The National Astro-Tourism strategic pillars are developed through a multi-discipline consultancy process involving both the tourism and astronomy stakeholders in South Africa.

The Implementation Plan's goal is to grow astro-tourism in South Africa will be implemented, monitored and evaluated according to the three strategic pillars:

- Pillar One: Indigenous Celestial Narratives and Human Capacity Development
- Pillar Two: Infrastructure Development
- Pillar Three: Inclusive Tourism Growth and Partnerships

Ladies and Gentlemen, before I go further, allow me to brag on behalf of everyone in tourism.

Two weeks back, we held a media briefing on the economic impact of tourism, and I am happy to say that the sector's contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), in the first quarter of 2024 was 8.8%.

Tourism is therefore a vital sector, contributing more to GDP than transport, mining, and agriculture, and nearly matching the government's contribution to GDP.

The Tourism sector's contribution to GDP is also expected to grow to 10.4% of GDP by 2030.

7th administration and GNU priorities

As we commence the 7th administration, our mission is to elevate the profile of tourism by supporting efforts to grow the sector and demonstrating this growth and the sector's impact on the economy and communities.

As articulated by President Cyril Ramaphosa in the Opening of Parliament address, Cabinet has defined the three priority areas for government for the next 5 years.

Cabinet will develop a Medium-Term Development Plan, which will translate these priorities into a detailed plan and interventions that government will implement over the next five years.

The Government of National Unity has resolved to dedicate the next five years to actions that will advance three strategic priorities:

- Firstly, to drive inclusive growth and job creation.
- Secondly, to reduce poverty and tackle the high cost of living.
- Thirdly, to build a capable, ethical and developmental state.

We have placed inclusive economic growth at the centre of the work of the Government of National Unity and at the top of the national agenda.

The Department of Tourism is currently working on finalising our 5 year plan which will align to the GNU priorities, the National Development Plan, the Tourism Sector Master Plan and the National Tourism Sector Strategy.

As part of our plan, our targets will be to increase arrivals to 15million by 2030 as stated in the NDP.

We also want to increase the number of jobs created in the tourism sector by driving greater implementation of programmes which support the private sector to create more jobs.

We will also be working with Operation Vulindlela in the Presidency and Departments of Home Affairs, Transport and Sport, Arts and Culture to:

- Facilitate improvements in the visa regime
- Grow the number of direct flights to and from South Africa
- Implement a more seamless tour operator licence process and
- Invest in infrastructure and tourism sites that reflect and showcase our diverse culture and heritage for visitors to enjoy,

In doing this, we are working to achieve the first 2 priorities of the 7th administration.

In terms of the 3rd priority to build a capable, ethical and developmental state, our five year plan and targets will implement programmes for demand-led skills and a greater use of technology such as AI.

WORLD TOURISM DAY

Ladies and gentlemen, World Tourism Day, celebrated globally on 27 September, is an initiative of the United Nations Tourism Organisation (UN Tourism) that underscores tourism's pivotal role in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals.

For South Africa, this day extends into a month-long celebration known as Tourism Month - which is September.

The UN Tourism's theme for this year's celebrations is "***Tourism and Peace***".

Additionally, for us as South Africa, we have decided to expand the theme to "***Tourism and Peace- 30 years of connecting people, places and culture***".

This is because over the past three decades, South Africa has intensified its efforts in not only identifying but ensuring that tourism is one of the priority sectors that contribute to the economy and to job creation.

We also acknowledge and recognise that in a world where nations are increasingly interconnected, tourism is a powerful tool to break down barriers, defy stereotypes, and challenge prejudices.

Therefore, as our country commemorates 30 years of freedom and democracy, and in recognition of the fact that tourism is a sector made by people and for people, it is fitting that South Africa's theme is: "Tourism and Peace- 30 years of connecting people, places and culture".

This year's Tourism Month celebrations provide the perfect opportunity for us to celebrate tourism's huge contribution to global development, cultural exchange, people connection and of course exploration of the many vast places that are found in our country.

DOMESTIC TOURISM

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we gather here today, we are reminded of the transformative power of tourism.

In 2023, South Africa recorded an impressive 38 million domestic trips, contributing R121 billion in spend to the economy.

This surge in domestic tourism highlights the critical role that domestic travellers play in sustaining our industry.

As I have always said, domestic tourism is the bedrock of our sector.

We are committed to working closely with all our partners, in the tourism value chain, to make travel more affordable and accessible for all South Africans.

Our domestic market is a powerhouse within the tourism sector.

The domestic tourism's performance underscores the significant economic impact of domestic tourism, which remains a key focus area for us as we continue to drive further improvements and encourage more South Africans to explore their own country.

One of the most successful initiatives promoting domestic tourism is our annual Sho't Left Travel Week Campaign, which through offering discounted deals of up to 50%, encourages locals to access travel and discover the many wonders within our borders.

This year, the Sho't Left Travel Week, will be taking place from the 2nd to the 8th of September, and will once again allow South Africans to book discounted travel deals and they can travel when it suits them depending on the terms and conditions.

Last year, over 900 tourism establishments participated, offering a range of deals that made travel more accessible.

This year, we aim to surpass those numbers, and I encourage tourism businesses to sign up for their deals on the Sho't Left deals platform.

Let us work together to ensure that more South Africans experience our country's diverse and fantastic tourism offerings.

JOBS

Ladies and gentlemen, our unemployment rate has increased again to 33.5%.

It is vital that the tourism sector does more to respond to the need of joblessness in our country.

Employment in the tourism sector is projected to grow from 1.7 million jobs in 2024 to 2.2 million by 2030, with tourism jobs expected to make up 12.8% of total employment by 2030 for South Africa.

This highlights the sector's critical role in driving economic growth and providing employment opportunities, particularly in the post-pandemic recovery phase.

Job creation remains a cornerstone of our Government of National Unity's agenda, with the tourism sector playing a crucial role in this vital mission.

We are committed to enhancing the implementation of programmes that empower the private sector to generate more sustainable jobs.

There's a clear correlation between the growth in tourism and the increase in job creation.

This connection underscores the sector's vital role in driving economic prosperity and sustaining our heritage.

Yet, in some circles, the tourism sector is undervalued, and its impact is underestimated.

However, as a sector, we are well-positioned to provide opportunities to unemployed youth and women, whether skilled or semi-skilled, more rapidly than industries like agriculture and mining, which are characterised by high entry barriers and require billions in initial investment.

The tourism sector has an indispensable role in driving inclusive economic growth and is a significant contributor to the prosperity and well-being of our people.

As we roll out our 2024 Tourism Month campaign under the theme; “Tourism and Peace- 30 years of connecting people, places and culture”, let us showcase our many communities' unique traditions, languages, and heritage.

Let us celebrate the unity that emerges from our diversity.

This is not just about attracting visitors to our shores; it is about inviting locals and international guests to engage deeply with the stories and experiences that define us as a nation.

As a sector, we are filled with optimism as we look to the future.

The revival of major conferences and events, and the tireless efforts of tourism professionals across the globe signify gradual global growth in tourism.

Programme Director,

As we gather today to celebrate the launch of Tourism Month 2024, it is crucial to acknowledge the domestic challenges that have impacted local travel.

The high cost of living, driven by soaring fuel prices, food inflation, and persistent inflation, remains a significant barrier.

Furthermore, high interest rates have exacerbated financial pressures on households, and the Consumer Price Index continues to exceed the Reserve Bank’s comfort level, although it is tapering of late.

These factors create a difficult environment for South Africans to explore their own country, posing a challenge to the growth of domestic tourism.

However, despite these challenges, we remain resolute in our commitment to driving the growth of our tourism sector.

We are actively addressing these impediments, working closely with our partners to find solutions and create an enabling environment for domestic and international tourism.

Ensuring the safety of our tourists is of paramount importance. We are actively implementing the 2018 National Tourism Safety Strategy.

Through collaboration with the private sector, we have strengthened safety measures across the board further enhancing the protection and well-being of both local and international tourists.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Tourism Master Plan is already in place, and our focus now is on its effective implementation. Policy continuity remains the cornerstone of this seventh administration.

This comprehensive blueprint is poised to guide our tourism sector's sustainable growth and competitiveness.

One such initiative is the R1.2billion Tourism Equity Fund, designed to facilitate greater inclusivity within the sector by supporting black-owned businesses and small to medium enterprises.

This fund is instrumental in driving sector transformation and ensuring that the benefits of tourism are more equitably distributed across our society.

By providing crucial funding opportunities, we empower underrepresented entrepreneurs to participate meaningfully in the tourism economy, fostering a more inclusive and dynamic sector.

We are reviewing the red tape associated with the Fund.

In parallel, we are intensifying infrastructure maintenance efforts, which are crucial for revamping and preserving our nation's heritage sites.

These sites are not only cultural treasures but also vital attractions for both domestic and international visitors.

By investing in their upkeep and enhancement, we ensure that these landmarks continue to captivate and educate future generations while stimulating local economies.

We must be unequivocal about our sector's immense potential and its significant contribution to our nation's progress.

As a united tourism sector, we must collaborate closely with the new Government of National Unity to align our efforts with its top three priorities.

As the seventh administration, formed through the collaboration of multiple political parties, we have committed ourselves to driving inclusive economic growth, with tourism serving as a cornerstone of this effort.

In conclusion,

Today marks a significant milestone as we launch the 2024 Tourism Month, we also celebrate the progress we have made as a nation and reminds us of the work that still lies ahead.

It also presents an opportunity for us to re-dedicate and renew our commitment to increase the sector's contribution to the global economy while promoting peaceful interactions.

Let us all support domestic tourism by exploring our backyard and becoming true ambassadors of our beautiful land.

I invite all partners in the tourism value chain to inspire our citizens to travel locally through a series of carefully crafted activities, campaigns, and events.

We can all continue to learn from each other as we foster a deeper connection while exploring our vast beautiful country staying true to our theme of ***“Tourism and Peace- 30 years of connecting people, places and culture”***.

Through this, we cultivate a sense of pride and ownership in our collective cultural and natural heritage and therefore we are better poised to receive travelers from all over the world.

I invite all South Africans, to not only explore the lesser visited provinces themselves, but to invite the world to come to the often-overlooked gems of our nation.

South Africa has many captivating attractions including the remarkable sites here in the Northern Cape that I mentioned earlier.

We have award-winning restaurants, authentic and varied culinary offerings, a colourful rich tapestry of arts and culture not to service excellence and quality-assured establishments – and these can be found in all our nine provinces.

So let me encourage you today, to play your part:

Promote any hidden treasures that deserve recognition in your neighbourhood and province.

This is how we all contribute to the economic vitality of our local communities as ensure that the economic benefits of tourism are felt in every corner of our country, contributing to regional development.

Tourism Month is not merely an occasion for celebration, but it is a powerful period for promoting advocacy and action.

During this time, let us all strive to make tourism a force for good that enhances the quality of life for all our people.

Thank you all for being here today, we look forward to continue working with you as partners to bring real change and display tourism's true and powerful potential.

God Bless

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Media Queries

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