



MINISTRY  
TOURISM  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **SPEECH BY MINISTER OF TOURISM, PATRICIA DE LILLE AT NATIONAL WORLD TOURISM DAY CELEBRATION IN CARNARVON, NORTHERN CAPE**

Minister of Science and Innovation, Professor Blade Nzimande

Premier of the Northern Cape, Dr Zamani Saul

MEC for Economic Development and Tourism, Venus Blennies-Magage

Executive Mayor of the Pixley Ka Seme District Municipality Cllr Itumeleng

Mayor of the Kareeberg Local Municipality Cllr Jikella

Member of the Tourism Portfolio Committee

SA Tourism Board Chairperson Professor Gregory Davids

SA Tourism CEO Nombulelo Guliwe and the SA Tourism Team

Tourism partners in the private sector and in the various spheres of government

Community members

Members of the media

Good morning, goeie more, molweni

It is my great honour to be here today at this National Tourism Day Celebration as we celebrate under theme “Tourism and Peace – 30 years of connecting people, places and culture”.

As a country we can be proud of how far we have come 30 years into our democracy. In line with the theme, we can be proud that we emerged from a painful past and peacefully transitioned into a democracy when many people all over the country and the world feared civil war.

But being the peaceful people we are, we worked together to fight oppression and attain our freedom and democracy to become a rainbow nation.

While the transition period was mostly peaceful, there were many casualties in the dark years of apartheid and we must always remember and pay homage to those fearless heroes who died for and were imprisoned for our freedoms.

We have been on a journey of rebuilding our country and indeed the tourism sector is one we can be very proud of.

## **TOURISM PERFORMANCE**

I am very excited to work with all partners to design the future of tourism for South Africa. We can be proud that in July this year, we were voted as the friendliest country in the world.

Last year we were voted as the Best Country to visit by the UK Telegraph Travel magazine.

We welcomed over 8.5million visitors in 2023 and between January and July this year, we welcomed 4.4million visitors.

Our tourism sector is thriving and it is thanks to the collective efforts of the partners here today and the private sector.

In 2023, South Africa recorded an impressive 38 million domestic trips, contributing R121billion in spend to the economy.

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

Domestic tourism is the bedrock of our 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, Took place between the 2nd to the 8th of September where South Africans could book discounted travel deals and they can travel when it suits them depending on the terms and conditions.

## **WORLD TOURISM DAY**

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 inter-connected, 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.

But, there are far too many areas of our country that are not explored.

This means that not all people are tasting the fruits of our democracy because the true impact of tourism is not felt all over the country.

Our hidden gems in all 9 provinces needs to be seen by all our visitors.

And as I said last night, that's is why we chose to have this celebration in the Northern Cape because it is one of the lesser visited provinces and we need to change that because this is a beautiful part of our country.

There is so much vast natural beauty and wonderful people with their warm, friendly nature and some of the best cooks of traditional meals.

We have deep culture and history here where communities and traditional groups like the Komani San have a wealth of unique knowledge and stories.

What the people of the Northern Cape can capture and share is a life changing experience as I had last year when we had a story telling evening under the stars with Elvis and other members of the Komani San.

## **ASTRO TOURISM**

But beyond all the history, culture and beauty the Northern Cape has to offer, we are here today to launch something new the Northern Cape has to offer...Astronomy or Astro Tourism.

We at the Department of Tourism, along with the Department of Science and Innovation, are launching the National Astro-Tourism Strategy, the first country on the African continent to do so.

This Strategy echoes the World Tourism Day theme, "Tourism and Peace", where we aim to strengthen our legacy of mutual understanding between the astronomy significance and the indigenous celestial narratives.

The Astro Tourism Strategy also aims to enhance the synergy between humans and conservation and a creative link between our origins of life on earth and the origins of the universe.

It is with great pleasure that we celebrate the launch of the National Astro-Tourism Strategy by announcing the Gazetting Notice published today.

We invite the public, including the tourism and astronomy stakeholders to participate and contribute towards to strengthening this very important work by submitting their comments.

Collaboration and partnership are critically important to take this work forward and we are thankful for national, provincial and local government working together as well as the private sector to ensure sustainable growth and local community development.

As I mentioned at the Tourism Month media launch in Kimberley last month, The Astro Tourism 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

I had the privilege yesterday, to visit the Square Kilometre Array telescope, largest radio telescope in the world and it's just outside Carnarvon.

It was truly remarkable to see how science is making a remarkable leap towards the future, and all on African soil.

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.

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.

The Northern Cape is the prime location to launch this strategy as 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.

The vision of the Astro Tourism 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 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, it is our responsibility, to encourage the tourism industry, to preserve our dark night sky by limiting light pollution at their establishments, without compromising the use of outdoor lighting for safety and security.

It is for this reason that we request that tourism products and offerings in South Africa continue to experience the awe and wonder of a naturally dark, star-filled sky through committing to do the following:

- Use light responsibly: Adopt the International Dark Sky's principles for Responsible Outdoor Light at Night (ROLAN) to protect the night-time environment while promoting visual safety through better lighting.
- Consider the environment: Ensure that tourism activities and operations do not harm wildlife or the natural environment. Many lifeforms are nocturnal and rely on natural darkness.
- Consider local communities: Consider the needs and activities of nearby residents and aim to enhance their enjoyment of the night-time environment while minimizing negative impacts to the community
- Respect Indigenous cultures: Integrate Indigenous knowledge respectfully, collaboratively, and sensitively, recognizing its cultural importance.
- Support local economic development: Generate economic benefits for local people and communities.

Our aim is to grow the astro-tourism niche market growing and leverage tourism experiences and offerings from the international investment towards the SKA in South Africa.

The country has the competitive advantage to develop the tourism sector and further boost transformation by enhancing the livelihoods of our local communities and sharing our indigenous celestial stories with the rest of the world.

Here in the Northern Cape especially, we must use the SKA, Astro Tourism, the Agriculture and cultural offering as a catalyst to enhance the tourism offering to the benefit of SMEs and rural and traditional communities of the Northern Cape.

There is so much untapped potential in our tourism market and we must work together on all levels of government, with the private to promote our hidden gems and give more business to SMEs and community tourism.

## **INCENTIVE PROGRAMMES**

Ladies and gentlemen, to help support the tourism sector, I also want to encourage tourism businesses in the region and ask the local and provincial government to support local businesses to apply for funding from the Department of Tourism's Incentive Programmes.

We have the Green Tourism Incentive Programme where tourism establishments like guesthouses and hotels can apply for partial funding to retrofit their establishments with solar PV and water saving technologies.

By going green in their operations, tourism businesses can ensure they are adapting their businesses to the impacts of climate change and providing visitors with an uninterrupted visitor experiences.

The other incentive programme we have is the Market Access Support Programme where businesses can apply for funding to exhibit at tourism trade shows like African Travel Indaba and international shows like ITB in Berlin and World Travel Market in London.

I encourage the tourism partners to here in the Northern Cape to promote these incentive programmes and assist SMEs to apply.

All the details of these incentive programmes can be found on the Department of Tourism's Website.

There is also the R1.2billion Tourism Equity Fund to help new and existing businesses with capital funding.

Ladies and gentlemen, the world is changing fast and a key improvement we need to make is on digital transformation of the tourism sector.

We are lagging behind and we must put more energy and effort into our digital infrastructure and seeing how we use technologies such as AI to enhance our tourism offering.

The world lives and operates almost completely online now and leveraging technology to grow our tourism arrivals numbers and tourism offerings must be a priority.

With that ladies and gentlemen, I am here to say let's take hands and work together and work harder to promote our beautiful country and showcase all our provinces and hidden gems.

Let us all be tourism ambassadors to grow arrivals which will grow the economy and create jobs for our people.

That is how we see the democracy in action. That is how we ensure people become truly free.

So thank you once again to everyone here today for your work in tourism and for putting this event together.

Let us continue to build South Africa and to leave a legacy for the next generation of tourism leaders to continue connecting people, places and cultures.

We are truly the most beautiful country in the world with the most amazing, warm and welcoming people. So let us celebrate that and use it to grow tourism in leaps and bounds.

Thank you, baie dankie, enkosi, God Bless.

**ENDS**

**Media Queries**

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