



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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Speaking notes by the Deputy Minister of Tourism, Tokozile Xasa on the occasion of the grand opening of the Royal St Andrews Hotel in Port Alfred

4 September 2015

Programme Director
ANC Chief Whip in the National Assembly, Mr Stone Sizani
Mayor Sarah Baartman District Municipality, Cllr Khunjuzwa Kekana
Mayor of Ndlambe Municipality, Cllr Siphon Tandani
Representative from the Eastern Cape Premier's office, Mr Sicelo Gqobana
Founder and Owner Mantis Collection, Mr Adrian Gardiner
Owner and Developer, Mr Martin Bekker
Members of the Media
Ladies and gentlemen

Not only is it a pleasure for me to be here with you today, it is also a great honour to be a part of the revitalization of the Royal St. Andrews Hotel. This is yet another jewel in the crown of the Sunshine Coast of South Africa.

As you may already know, I hail from this beautiful Province of the Eastern Cape, and will always be loyal to its growth and development. It is therefore a heart-warming experience for me when I see investments such as this one not just look good on paper, but be made into a reality.

A world class hotel, conference centre and spa - Mr Bekker and Mr Gardiner, to you and to your companies I say a heartfelt thank you that you have shown such faith in this country and province that you have decided to make this investment of millions.

Port Alfred is a thriving tourist town, and it holds so much more potential for expansion. I salute you for your vision in recognizing this potential. The national Department of Tourism certainly needs more product owners like yourselves to join us on our journey to make the tourism sector the biggest income and employment generator in South Africa.

We are already well on our way. Even with one of the smallest budgets of all the government departments, our sector has found itself contributing almost 10% to the GDP of the country in 2014. One in every 10 jobs in South Africa are also a result of our sector – either directly or indirectly.

The first quarter of 2015 has been more challenging, with figures released by Stats South Africa showing a decline in year on year tourist arrivals. However, we are optimistic that the partnership approach that we favour in the Department of Tourism will soon realize a turnaround. The latter part of 2014 and early 2015 saw the industry battling against topics that are largely beyond our own control, such as xenophobia and the Ebola outbreak. However both these topics have been dealt with and are in the past.

We are currently working with the Inter-Ministerial Committee on immigration and visa regulations formed by the President to find a balance between tourism growth and border security, and are positive that a middle ground solution can be found that will once again see opportunities for growth in tourism.

We believe that this growth can only be truly beneficial to the people of this country if it is based on principals of sustainability. For this reason we prioritize a number of areas in the Department as we carry out our mandate.

These include issues such as inclusive transformation of the sector, whereby we work with product owners to unlock the employment and skills development opportunities for previously disadvantaged citizens – especially the youth and women.

We also focus on creating an image of the country as a responsible tourism destination by focusing on environmental conservation on the one hand, but also equally importantly on social upliftment on the other hand.

We recognize that the sector can only be sustainable if our destination development initiatives and service excellence standards are in place whereby our product owners provide tourists with an experience of a lifetime that will turn them into ambassadors for the country.

Mr Bekker, Mr Gardiner – I mention these foundational pillars today for the simple reason that I would like to urge you to take hands with us on this journey of sustainability.

During the building phase of this hotel, you have created many local jobs and imparted skills to the community. No doubt, the staffing needs of this larger facility will also create additional job opportunities.

However, I would invite you to consider partnering with the Department of Tourism on some of our key programmes aimed at unlocking the untapped potential in the area for tourism.

One example I can give you is the youth skills development programmes we have in place. Many of these programmes offer a practical “on the job” element whereby hospitality owners like yourselves are able to teach our young learners the ropes and show them first-hand the real value of service excellence in growing a loyal clientele.

Not only will you be helping us to create a pipeline of relevant skills for our industry, but you will also be making a difference in the lives of young people for whom the sector is a symbol of hope for a brighter future.

The Royal St Andrews has always been a part of the tourism family of South Africa, but you have now taken a step in a direction that also makes you a major player on the Sunshine Coast.

Once again I congratulate the Royal St Andrews Hotel on the achievement of this milestone in their history, and I wish you all the best for the future to achieve the return on investment that you dream of.

Ladies and gentlemen – thank you for your attention.