



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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Speech delivered by the Deputy Minister of Tourism, Tokozile Xasa, at the occasion of the Tourism Buddies Graduation event – Gauteng

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Programme Director, distinguished guests, ladies and gentleman, graduates,

My dear graduates, I am so happy to be here with you today. I have been at a number of these graduations and it only serves to inspire me more. When I look at you, I see the future of this beautiful democracy. I see our young people taking up the reigns and contributing to the growth of our economy. I see leaders in the making. I see the face of a new South Africa.

The Department of Tourism's National Tourism Sector Strategy in Cluster 3 under the heading of People Development, has, amongst others, identified a need to address skills shortages in the tourism sector by training and building capacity of unemployed youth and graduates in especially critical and scarce skills in the hospitality and tourism services sector. This dovetails with the Department's Social Responsibility Implementation Expanded Public Works Programme to deliver on its job creation and skills development target.

Over the past 20 years, tourism has experienced continued growth in South Africa and has undergone such a diversification in our country to become one of the fastest growing economic sectors. Modern tourism's success depends on, and is closely linked to skills development. These dynamics have turned tourism into a key driver for socio-economic progress.

Today, the business volume of tourism equals or even surpasses that of oil exports, food products or automobiles. Tourism has become one of the major players in international commerce, and represents at the same time one of the main income sources for many families in our country. This growth goes hand in hand with an increasing diversification and competition among the products on offer.

The aim of the Department of Tourism and government is to safeguard the long-term prosperity of the tourism industry through sustainable development, giving special attention to training human resources in specifically tourism-orientated skills, which will ensure the professionalism of service performance. Tourism businesses are no longer competing purely against each other, but against other economic sectors. Supply will have to adapt to the needs of the consumer, and consolidate a competitive advantage.

One such programme that has been implemented for several years now is the Tourism Buddies learnership programme which is aimed at transferring skills to young South Africans under the age of 35 with or without a grade 12 certificate residing within the Province.

The National Department of Tourism appointed VPK Business Venture to implement the Tourism Buddies Programme in Gauteng Province. The Tourism Buddies Programme was a learnership programme where learners undertook a 12 months' work based learning programme either in Food and Beverage Services NQF level 4 or Accommodation Services NQF level 2. Gauteng Province was allocated 450 learners.

The objective of the programme was to empower unemployed youth by affording them the opportunity to train in hospitality programmes and to acquire theoretical and practical experience. This in turn would benefit the local hospitality industry by providing a pool of skilled youth who would add value to the local establishments and up the standards of the local hospitality sector. This would also lead to reduced unemployment and improved livelihoods locally.

The learnership period of 12 months was made up of 3 months theory (classroom) and 9 month workplace training. Learners were required to do their experiential learning at established hospitality institutions where they would be able to get relevant practical experience mentored by experienced personnel in those establishments. The programme commenced on the 23rd of September 2014 and ended on the 31st of September 2015.

Learners were paid a monthly stipend of R2200 to cover transport costs and meals. Each learner received a uniform that comprised of two branded shirts, a dry mac jacket and a school bag with National Department of Tourism and Expanded Public Works branding.

The Project budget was R20 295 000 with a total of 450 youth in Gauteng Province were identified to benefit from various municipalities. They were distributed as follows: City of Johannesburg 100; City of Ekurhuleni 100; City of Tshwane 100; West Rand 100 and Sedibeng 50.

Recruitment of the learners was conducted at regional level with all five regions in the province playing a pivotal role in the process. The recruitment exercise emphasized the importance of a prospective learner to be passionate or at least have an interest in the tourism sector.

The Gauteng Tourism Agency also played a key role in mobilising relevant personnel in all the five regions towards the implementation of the programme. The Gauteng Tourism Agency and the five regions constituted the Project Advisory Committee which sat every 2 months to deliberate on issues related to all aspects of the programme and to advise accordingly.

The response from the local hospitality industry was positive with all the participating learners having secured host employment in their respective regions. There were 48 host employed who participated in the programme and opened their facilities to provide practical training for the learners. Some of the host employers went an extra mile by providing learners with permanent employment at the end of their training. This programme is the perfect example of the Public Private Partnership where all three spheres of government and private sector worked together for the success of the programme.

The Gauteng Tourism Buddies Project came to a successful conclusion at the end of September 2015 with all learners having completed 12 months towards attaining a qualification in Accommodation Services (NQF Level 2) or Food & Beverage Services (NQF Level 4). An additional 116 learners was recruited in June 2015 to replace the learnership learners who dropped out.

The table below gives an analysis of learner numbers as at the end of the programme.

REGION	SEPTEMBER R 2014	SEPTEMBER R 2015	SKILLS PROG APRIL 15	SKILLS PROG OCTOBER 15
WEST RAND	100	72	25	24
CITY OF JOHANNESBURG	100	70	23	12
EKURHULENI	100	56	32	28
TSHWANE	100	71	25	24
SEDIBENG	50	38	11	8
TOTAL	450	307	116	96

A total of 403 learners have successfully completed their programmes and will be certificated. A total of 307 learners will be certificated on a learnership and 96 on a skills programme. What an amazing achievement!

It is well known that the tourism industry is very dynamic and run by several skilled entrepreneurs who started off with very small businesses. I and my department have catalogued several success stories of young graduates from several of our skill programmes who over the years have gone on to own and manage successful businesses and who themselves employ graduates from our programmes. Several of our graduates are employed by the big international hospitality institutions.

I would like to conclude with the following quote... "I hope your dreams take you to the corners of your smiles, to the highest of your hopes, to the windows of your opportunities, and to the most special places your heart has ever known." - Anonymous

I want to wish all the students well in their future endeavours and careers and hope to meet many of them in my travels in and around South Africa. I am so immensely proud of you.

I thank you.