



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

Private Bag X424, Pretoria, 0001, South Africa. Tel. (+27 12) 444 6780, Fax (+27 12) 444 7027
Private Bag X9154, Cape Town, 8000, South Africa. Tel. (+27 21) 469 5800, Fax: (+27 21) 465 3216

Speech by Deputy Minister of Tourism, Ms Tokozile Xasa on the occasion of the South African Tourism Seminar in Iran

11 November 2015

Ambassador Whitehead, Ladies and Gentlemen of the travel trade, I bring to you all, the warmest greetings from our people - the diverse but uniting citizens of South Africa.

I am deeply grateful to have this opportunity to offer some views on Tourism in the company of so distinguished a gathering. We are also thankful to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the kind hospitality accorded to myself and the members of the South African delegation. I am sure I echo the sentiments of my delegation when I say to you that we have enjoyed the warm hospitality of the Iranian people.

I had the opportunity to tour some of the historic sites in Tehran and I was impressed by the rich culture and history that is on display. Your city undoubtedly is - and I believe will remain – one of the centres of world history.

Our visit here takes place within the context of a bilateral working visit by Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa and our keenness to strengthen bilateral relations between South Africa and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran remains, for us, a partner and a good friend as we continue to cement our historical and fraternal relationship.

With your permission I would like to turn my attention to the topic at hand, to speak on the important role Tourism plays in our lives. Tourism is regarded as a modern-day engine of growth and is one of the largest industries globally. Not only is tourism important as a source of revenue generation for governments across the world. But it is also provides employment opportunities to many of the people in our communities. Tourism, culture and heritage tourism in particular, brings people together and promotes mutual understanding across communities. Governments across the world have accepted tourism as an important revenue stream. For instance the World Travel and Tourism Council estimates that the tourism sector contributed 7.6 trillion US Dollars to the global economy in 2014, and supported 277 million jobs.

The South African government has earmarked tourism as a key sector with excellent potential for growth and we are constantly looking to increase tourism's contribution to our economic growth. To quote the world Travel and Tourism Council report on South Africa, it is estimated that in 2014 the tourism sector contributed over 1.7 million jobs to the economy of the country. The same report indicates that the tourism sector contributed 10% of Gross Domestic Product. I am referencing these figures to illustrate the point I made earlier that tourism is an important driver in our effort to overcome socio-economic challenges that confront us in South Africa.

South Africa's scenic beauty, magnificent outdoors, sunny climate, cultural diversity and reputation for delivering value for money have made it one of the world's ideal leisure and business travel destinations. Our country is highly diverse in terms of its climate, culture, tourist activities and infrastructure, catering for every tourism niche, from business, eco- and cultural tourism through to adventure, sport and paleo-tourism. Over the years we have seen an increase in the number of tourists from diverse countries visiting our beautiful country. Tourists with different backgrounds as well as different religious affiliations.

South Africa is a Muslim friendly destination with excellent Muslim-friendly services and facilities. Herein perhaps lies one of our strongest selling points making South Africa as an ideal tourist destination for people from this beautiful country.

- We have a population of around 1 million Muslims spread across the length and breadth of the country;
- We have around 500 Halaal certified restaurants and food outlets spread throughout the country;
- We have more than 400 Muslim prayer facilities located throughout the country, including all major airports; and
- And we are accommodating towards and fully accept the dress code for Muslims.

In recognition of the above, the 2015 MasterCard-Crescent Rating Muslim Travel Shopping Index (MTSI), ranked South Africa 9th amongst the non-Organisation of Islamic Co-operation destinations that can accommodate the needs of Muslim tourists.

Iran is a strategic market for South Africa in the Middle East region, however, sanctions on the country have slightly affected the overall number of tourist arrivals to South Africa. Tourist arrivals took a dip in 2013 with 2 652 inbound tourist arrivals from Iran but we have started to see an increase from 2014 to 3 156 inbound tourists from Iran. We are however confident that once the economic situation improves the number of Iranians visiting South Africa will be on the rise again. From 2009 until 2014, South Africa has received a total of 22 647 arrivals from Iran and through our partnership with the trade we can grow these numbers further.

As government we will do our part by negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding on Tourism Cooperation with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran. I believe this agreement will identify common areas of cooperation where both countries can fully cooperate in areas related to human resource development, promote cooperation between the private sector on investment projects as well as to look at the development of tourism infrastructure projects. We have noted the negative impact that sanctions have had on your tourism sector and we are available to work with Iran to build both our tourism sectors further.

As we move to revive our partnership in tourism cooperation I wish to convey the message that our private sector and government entities such as the South African National Parks and the Airports Company South Africa have expertise and knowledge which they can share with their Iranian counterparts as your country works towards reviving its tourism industry. The task that will face our countries is to do everything that needs to be done, to ensure that all the opportunities that will be identified in this meeting today, not only succeed but these help permanently to increase travel and tourism between our two countries.

In closing, allow me to thank you once again for your presence here today and I look forward to a constructive interaction!!

Thank you!!