



tourism

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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Media statement by the office of the Deputy Minister of Tourism, Ms Tokozile Xasa at the occasion of the official opening of Meetings Africa 2014, Sandton Convention Centre

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Advancing Africa together

Being attended by approximately 260 exhibitors, almost 1000 hosted buyers (including international, regional and corporate buyers); Meetings Africa 2014 was officially opened today by the Deputy Minister of Tourism, Tokozile Xasa, at the Sandton Convention Centre in Johannesburg.

“Meetings Africa has established itself as the most valuable and exciting business events tradeshow on the African continent. It is the ideal platform to do business as well as to take our business events hosting status as a continent to the next level of prominence and success,” the Deputy Minister said.

The year 2014 is also significant because on 27 April, South Africans will celebrate two decades of freedom and democracy, and two exciting decades it has been. In 1994, the first year of the South African democracy, the country hosted 12 international association conferences – conferences that had met the International Congress and Convention Association’s (ICCA) ranking criteria. These 12 conferences brought a total of 5 950 people to South African shores. By 2012, the country had grown that number to 97 ICCA-recognised meetings, which attracted 52 587 delegates to the country, injecting an estimated R663 million into the South African economy. According to ICCA, South Africa has hosted 1 290 international association conferences that met their criteria since 1994.

Some of the major events South Africa has successfully hosted include the following:

- The International Aids Conference in 2000, which South Africa has won the right to host for a second time in 2016 and will be taking place in Durban with an estimated 20 000 delegates in attendance
- The World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002
- The International Diabetes Federation (IDF) conference that took place in Cape Town in 2006 – the largest association conference hosted by Cape Town to date
- More recently, in 2011, the United Nations Framework Climate Change Conference, also known as COP 17, was hosted in Durban.
- Durban also hosted the 123rd session of the International Olympic Organising Committee (2011), the World Congress on Intensive and Critical Care Medicine (WFSICMM) with a total of 10 000 delegates (2013), and in March last year, the fifth BRICS summit.

From having no international convention centres in 1994, South Africa currently boasts numerous and varied world-class facilities in almost every province. The first to have opened was the Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre (Durban ICC) in 1997, followed by the Sandton Convention Centre (2000) and the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC) (2003). In the last couple of years, the Eastern Cape has added two international convention centres to South Africa’s tally, namely the East London International

Convention Centre (2010) and last year, the Boardwalk International Convention Centre in Port Elizabeth. The country also has the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) in Pretoria, Gallagher Estate in Midrand, as well as two expo centres at the Coca-Cola Dome and Nasrec respectively.

According to Deputy Minister Xasa, “business events do more than just contribute to the economy. Business events create a platform to develop the country’s intellectual capital and showcase fields and sectors where South Africa demonstrates global leadership that money cannot buy. The FIFA World Cup, which we hosted in 2010, brought over 300 000 visitors to South Africa during the tournament, and it proved an excellent catalyst for improvements in infrastructure. Through the 2010 FIFA World Cup, we also increased our connectivity, improved our major roads and increased the number of hotel offerings, thus also increasing diversity for hosting meetings and conferences in our country. This major sporting event left a lasting legacy for the leisure tourism and business events industries”.

The theme for Meetings Africa 2014 is “Advancing Africa Together”. As a result, this year’s event will be graced by a strong contingent of African exhibitors, buyers and media coming from countries as varied as Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Nigeria, Ghana, Togo and Zimbabwe.

“We are truly the pan-African platform for the business events industry. Meetings Africa is the one tradeshow where our whole continent can come to network, build relationships and partnerships, and meet with premier buyers from numerous sectors and dozens of countries and markets around the world,” the Deputy Minister continued. “While exceptional growth has already been achieved, South Africa has only just begun to unlock the potential of the sector and is working to grow the size of the business events industry by at least 50% between now and 2020.”

South African Tourism acquired Meetings Africa in 2005. Since then, the show has gone from strength to strength and has been instrumental in solidifying the industry’s approach to growing and developing Africa’s business events hosting capability and prominence. In the South African National Convention Bureau (SANCB), the industry enjoys a strategic platform for collaboration and partnership. The SANCB is a central resource that is working hard to realise the target of 12,3% growth in total spend associated with business events between now and 2017.

South Africa has made giant strides as a business events host in the 20 years since democracy, and is today the single most popular business events destination on the continent. Among the country’s various top-notch facilities, hundreds of thousands of delegates have been hosted, thousands of direct and indirect decent jobs have been created and billions have been contributed to the economy.

The Deputy Minister concluded: “We have the infrastructure and the expertise. We have an enabling environment. We know where we want to go in growing this industry. Most importantly, our government is committed to taking the sector forward.”

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