



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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Speech by Deputy Minister of Tourism, Tokozile Xasa at the launch of the Foreign Language Training Programme, Hilton Hotel, Sandton

21 September 2016

Deputy Ambassador of China, Mr Li Song,
Deputy Ambassador of Russia Mr Andrei Litvino,
Mr Zheng Wen, cultural counsellor at the Chinese Embassy,
Mr Alexander Malyshev, cultural attache at the Russian embassy,
Dr Zhulei Lu, Director of the Chinese culture & International education exchange centre,
Dr Zina Dementev, former lecturer,
Our host, Mr Jan van der Putten - Hilton Area Vice President: Africa & the Middle East,
Various members of the tourism industry represented today,
Distinguished guests,
Members of the media present,
Ladies and gentlemen

In order for anyone to not only fit into, but to live an effective life in today's global village, one needs to learn as much about other cultures as possible.

If you happen to be working in the tourism space then learning about the cultures of those that make up the bulk of your visitors becomes very important.

China has, for example, become the world's largest outbound tourism source market and the country with the largest outbound tourism consumption.

In 2015, no less than a combined total of 139 million Chinese mainland and Russian tourists visited overseas countries and regions.

For the first half of this year, Chinese arrivals to South Africa reached 58, 178 which marks an increase of 63. 7% when compared to the overseas total growth percentage of 18.6%.

Last year, 7 244 Russian tourists visited South Africa which equates to 0.03% of the total Russian outbound market.

It is worth noting that Russia has been secured as an investment market for South African Tourism with the main purpose of this being to ensure that South African Tourism is using opportunities that secure the greatest return on investment when trying to attract visitors from Russia.

Other positive developments in this regard are the relaxation of South African visa requirements which is expected to increase the number of Russian tourists to South Africa.

With respective agreements signed with both Russia and China in areas of capacity building and skills development, the working group set up to develop the project implementation plans identified the language programme for implementation.

The overall outcome of these capacity-building initiatives is to enable the frontline staff and tourist guides, at whom the Language Training Programme is primarily aimed, to develop competencies in language tasks including acquiring essential listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

The programme will also offer them insights into the cultures of the various societies associated with the Russian and Mandarin languages.

Frontline staff play a critical role in how tourists perceive a country and equally so, tour guides are a vital part of the tourism value chain.

It is for this reason that among the key objectives of the Foreign Language Training programme is to train tour guides as well as frontline staff at establishments that deal with tourists.

Equally important objectives of this programme are to obviously meet the needs of the Chinese and Russian tourists and in so doing, contribute to achieving the aims of the bilateral agreements on Tourism with these respective countries.

This programme can also help to enhance the overall visitor experience and satisfaction while creating market access opportunities and even employment for the guides and frontline staff.

The Russian language training targeted 10 tourist guides from selected provinces and was based on a needs analysis of the guiding sector in terms of the availability of specialised language skills.

After applications from interested candidates were received for the training programme, the best candidates were selected to participate and 8 candidates from Kwazulu-Natal and the Western Cape commenced training on September 12, 2016.

20 trainees started the Mandarin language training which started on 5 September 2016 and will be implemented at two separate venues in Gauteng.

The National Department of Tourism will provide transportation, accommodation, food and will also cover other costs related to the implementation of the training programmes.

The tour guides will also receive a monthly stipend of R3000.

Some of the immediate benefits of this language training include social media and word of mouth marketing of South Africa by tourists who now appreciate our country's full offering.

South Africa continues to enjoy tremendous growth in the Tourism sector, with a 14, 4% improvement in international tourist arrival numbers in the period January to July 2016 when compared to the January to June 2015 period.

Ladies and gentlemen the benefits of this programme are best captured in this quote by the late president of South Africa and the father of our beautiful country, Nelson Mandela, when he said;

"Speak to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language that goes to his heart"