



**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 delivered by the Deputy Minister of Tourism, Tokozile Xasa, at the opening of the Mzanzi International Culinary Festival

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As we celebrate Africa Day, we celebrate a cultural fusion and explosion of flavour. Africa's food blends the traditions of many cultures and influences. Food is central to many things that we do as a nation and a continent. We celebrate with food, we go through bereavement with food, we negotiate over food and we build families with food. Food feeds the soul and is the single great unifier across cultures.

South Africa is fast becoming a culinary hotspot. Not only do we boast world-class tourism products but we are also firmly establishing ourselves with our diverse lifestyle offerings. Culinary tourism is a subset of Cultural tourism and contributes significantly to the tourism experience which promotes cultural diversity and social cohesion.

Food and wine is one of the best ways to explore the culture of any country, and culinary travel or tourism is a growing travel passion for many travellers. Every tourist eats at least three times a day, making food one of the fundamental economic drivers of tourism. Culinary tourism is a growing niche market across the globe. Food and travel are so inter-linked, one cannot help by associating pasta to Italy, foie gras to France, paella to Spain, risotto to Milan, fegato to Venice, and old-fashioned braai to South Africa.

Culinary has a significant role in the tourism sector for various reasons. Nearly 100% of tourists dine out when traveling, dining is consistently one of the top three (3) favourite tourist activities. Tourist and travellers are also amongst the highest paying patrons, since they are highly motivated to experience unique and memorable dining experiences. They dine at specifically selected establishment and restaurants which have been decided on beforehand, as they are more likely to research and plan their trips using available marketing materials. Thus, culinary plays a significant economical element to the industry.

The Caribbean Food Emporium (CFE) reports that, "food and drink festivals constitute the sole instance where the decision to travel is taken solely on the grounds of the culinary experiences offered. These are becoming more prevalent, in particular in Europe. Whilst this segment is growing, at present there are estimated to be no more than one million international culinary tourists travelling each year".

Over the years, places like Franschhoek (the culinary capital of SA) and the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands have become popular destinations, thanks to a reputation for superb cuisine based on a wealth of local produce. The local tourism market has a keen understanding that travelers are seeking an authentic gourmet experience and the value of a perfectly cooked Cape Malay curry, a designer bunny chow or a chisa nyama reinvented.

Thus, festivals like the Mzanzi International Culinary festival (MICF) have therefore become a platform for showcasing the diverse cuisines and local produce from South Africa and the African continent to locals and other communities, to sample local dishes and foodstuffs. Culinary festivals such as these are also big drivers of domestic tourism and not just aimed at foreign tourist.

The Culinary sector still faces challenges of gender inequality, racism and poor levels of culinary education. In order to overcome this, the NDT is making use of platforms such as internships and early skills development to develop a thriving culinary tourism industry. In April 2011, we launched the

National Youth Chef Training Programme (NYCTP), to train 800 young people from across the country to become professional chefs.

An investment of R25 million was made by the NDT which would enable youngsters with a passion for cooking to be trained as professionals through the National Youth Chefs Training Programme. The initiative is facilitated by the South African Chefs Association (SACA). The programme was developed to address the challenges of job creation and scarce skills, in order to produce qualified chefs of the highest calibre into the hospitality industry.

The culinary tourism programme was implemented later that year and is running annually, producing new cadre of super-chefs. Since the inception of the programme, NYCTP has received 16,000 curriculum vitae, interviewed 8,000 candidates, engaged 1,760 in the programme of whom almost 1,400 have completed the programme with a certificate, diploma and advanced diploma - achieving a pass rate of 82%.

To date over 700 of our graduates have taken up full-time employment after graduating from this programme. The NDT together with SACA will be showcasing some of the dishes cooked by chefs that graduated from this programme during this festival.

This festival showcases the cultural diversity of our people and is a celebration of our African-ness through a culinary multi-sensory experience. As you experience this festival, I hope that this is a cultural and well as a culinary journey for you. We are Africa.

I thank you