



**MINISTER
TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**TOURISM MINISTER PATRICIA DE LILLE'S SPEECH FOR AFRICA'S TRAVEL INDABA
OPENING CEREMONY**

Theme: UNLIMITED AFRICA: GROWING AFRICA'S TOURISM ECONOMY"

DATE: 12 MAY 2026

VENUE: DURBAN INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE

PROTOCOL:

The President of the Republic of South Africa, His Excellency Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa
Deputy Minister of Tourism, Maggie Sotyu;
All Ministers and Deputy Ministers from the various countries across Africa and beyond
Chairperson of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Tourism, Members of the
Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Tourism
Members of the Select Committee of the NCOP
Premier of KwaZulu Natal, Thami Ntuli
MEC of Economic Development in the KwaZulu-Natal Province, Reverend Musa Zondi
Mayor of Ethekwini, Councillor Cyril Xaba
South African Tourism Board Chair and Board Members;
Director General at the Department of Tourism, Victor Vele and all government officials;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I stand on the protocol that has already been observed.

Sanibonani, Good Morning, Bon Jour, Assalamu alaykum

It is in this building, here at the Durban International Convention Centre, that the OAU successor, the African Union, would in July 2002 launch the AU and have its inaugural summit.

Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, it is because of this history, that Africa's Travel Indaba held every year during Africa Month.

In keeping to the ideals of the OAU and the AU, I encourage everyone to co-sign the Africa Travel Indaba pledge which reads as follow **"TODAY, WE PLEDGE TO GROW AFRICA'S TOURISM ECONOMY, TO TELL OUR STORIES AND TOGETHER BUILD A BETTER AFRICA AND A BETTER WORLD."**

Tourism is an economic catalyst, and its impact is life changing.

According to the recently released Statistics South Africa Satellite Account, by 2024 the Tourism sector accounted for 954 000 direct jobs and contributed 4,9% to the country's GDP.

And with a record breaking 10.5 million international arrivals in 2025, we are no longer speaking recovery we are speaking "growth"

It's only through deliberate action, including partnerships that our industry will continue to soar.

In 2025, South Africa's cabinet approved the Tourism Growth Partnership Plan, which was co-created with private sector, which includes diversifying our tourism offerings.

We are already seeing investment in tourism products, including the R24 billion expansion of the V&A Waterfront, R10,5 billion is being injected into Winelands Airport, while here in Kwa Zulu Natal, the R2.1 billion Club Med Beach & Safari resort which opens in July, stands as a bastion of successful Public Private Partnership.

These are demonstrations of confidence in South Africa's tourism growth prospects.

Mr President, in your state of the Nation Address in February, you instructed us to promote the country's unique cultural, historical and natural attractions.

To this end, last month at Africa's southernmost tip Cape Agulhas where the two oceans meet, we handed over the R82 million Cape Agulhas Lighthouse precinct, which among others boasts a 60-seater restaurant, an interpretation centre and visitors' facilities.

Meanwhile, in the Free State's Golden Gate Highlands National Park, together with the European Union, more than R120 million was invested to build the Kgodumodumo Dinosaur Interpretation Centre.

This is where the world's oldest dinosaur embryo, 200 million years old, was discovered, and since the launch last year in June close to 90 000 people visited the centre.

We are not only the cradle of humankind, we are also the cradle of culture.

Here in northern KwaZulu Natal, the Department of Tourism invested over R23 million into the rehabilitation and refurbishment of the Bhanga Nek Campsite in the iSimangaliso Wetland Park.

As the Department of Tourism, we continue to facilitate investments in tourism sector through the Tourism Infrastructure Investment Summit.

During the inaugural summit last year we unveiled 8 projects from both the public and private sectors valued at around R1 billion.

In October we will convene the second investment summit and we call on stakeholders in tourism to submit their projects.

Delegates, we have also identified MICE, Meetings Incentives Conference Events, a critical job creator.

In the 2025/6 financial year, the South African Conventions Bureau put in 100 international MICE bids and secured 52.

This is yet another vote of confidence in our world class MICE infrastructure.

And after a successful G20 summit, we look forward to hosting the SADC heads of state summit right here in Durban, in August 2026.

Then in 2027, we will host the World Economic Forum special meeting as well the Cricket World Cup, together with our neighbours Zimbabwe and Namibia.

Once again, together we can grow Africa's Tourism Economy.

With the change in traveler trends, this would require a re-evaluation of how we sell our tourism products and what we say about ourselves in Africa.

In response, Africa's Travel Indaba will go through a revamp.

We are looking for sponsors and partners to journey with us in 2027.

To the creatives and stakeholders on the tourism sector, we are calling on you to send your ideas to proposals@southafrica.net.

Ladies and gentlemen, let's continue to grow the sector and change our people's lives

With over 1 200 exhibitors and 1000 buyers, I wish everyone turbulent free negotiations as we invite the world to Africa.

THE END