



OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE MAYOR

Speech by the Executive Mayor at the Local Government Tourism Conference

03 April 2017

Minister Thokozile Xasa,
Minister Des Van Rooyen,
SALGA President,
Mayors and Hon.Councillors,
Captains of Industry,
Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the City of Ekurhuleni, Africa's first Aerotropolis. Thank you Minister, in particular, for yet again hosting this auspicious Conference in Ekurhuleni. As the City, we are humbled by the confidence that the National Department of Tourism and the sector has on us.

Indeed this is a great platform for the country, where stakeholders in the tourism industry will engage, interact and discuss industry's related issues and challenges. The value of tourism's contribution to our economy is massive, hence it is viewed as an effective tool for economic growth. This is partly because it has low barriers to entry and its ability to create jobs.

As a City, we continue to make a significant contribution to the overall economy of Gauteng and the country, being a home to South Africa's primary airport hub, the OR Tambo International Airport. About 19 million passengers lands at the OR International Airport annually, which makes the region a strategic entry point for tourists and investors.

At the last Conference, the City made a commitment to focus on developing a plan for tourism, which will guide us on how to leverage on the potential of the sector. Subsequent to that, the Ekurhuleni Tourism Strategy was developed and approved in 2016. Also, the Inaugural Ekurhuleni Tourism Conference was hosted during tourism month (13-14 September 2016) last year. The Conference attracted a number of national experts, tourism practitioners and stakeholders, who shared their expertise with us on critical issues that needs attention if we are to grow the sector. Resolutions of this session are currently being implemented.

Plans are advanced to set up a State of the Art Ekurhuleni Visitor Information Centre at the OR Tambo International Airport, which will also serve as a welcome platform to tourists, as well as provide much needed information on Ekurhuleni and its attractions, as well as improve tourism safety. This facility will be operational by the beginning of the next financial year.

The City has some of the most sought after accommodation establishments, most of which are also located around the OR Tambo Airport Node. This therefore means that most of the tourists landing in South Africa, do so through the City, and their first impression (experience) of the country is through destination Ekurhuleni.

In order for the City to effectively leverage on the OR Tambo International Airport and related infrastructure, a major focus should/will be on improving the quality of services offered in some of these establishments. It is important to remember that tourists are looking for memorable experiences when deciding where to go and stay (value for money).

It is therefore for this reason that the City will be embarking on a targeted service excellence programme, which will be in partnership with all major hotels located in Ekurhuleni, in order to inculcate a culture of service excellence within the tourism value chain.

We do this because we believe that there is no point in attracting tourists to the destination, and thereafter not provide them with an excellent service and memorable experiences, so as to attract repeat visits.

It is in this regard that we have instructed the Tourism Team to look at this issue immediately, hence the drive to initiate a service excellence programme.

A baseline study will be conducted in the next few months, which seeks to assess service levels in our establishments. We have noted the service excellence programme undertaken by the National Department of Tourism, and we will align ours to it.

Without strong and skilled service personnel, the tourism sector in the country, and in particular Ekurhuleni will not flourish to its maximum potential. There will be a need for a collective approach in strengthening this sector if we are to position the South Africa as a preferred tourism destination.

To that end, the City will continue to engage Captains of Industry and stakeholders extensively in order to agree on the type of tourism economy we want to build in the destination Ekurhuleni.

The City has a rich history, linked to our political struggle icons, such as, amongst others, the late Oliver Reginald Tambo, Chris Hani, Sam Ntuli and Mam Bertha Gxowa, amongst others. An aggressive investment will be channelled towards the development of catalytic and labour intensive infrastructure, linked to these struggle icons of the revolution.

We will develop further develop an OR Tambo Narrative Centre Precinct, to include the establishment of the OR Tambo Library/Knowledge Centre. The narrative centre will give us access to an array of documents not previously available in South Africa and housed in other cities, such as the Soncini Archive in the Panizzi Library dealing with OR Tambo and the Liberation Struggle in Southern Africa.

A 9M Bronze Statue of OR Tambo will be constructed and installed at the OR Tambo International Airport in October 2017, as a fitting tribute and recognition of this great struggle icon.

In light of the above, the City has just recently acquired the home of the late Chris Hani, and plans to develop it into a fully- fledged museum, where his memorabilia will be exhibited. We are also proud to announce that on the 24th March 2017, the South African Heritage and Resources Agency has declared the grave of the late Chris Hani a memorial site, together with the walk of remembrance. These development, we believe, which turn this into a tourist's attraction.

A major focus of the City in the next few months, will be on rolling out a comprehensive programme that seeks to leverage on the pronouncement made to the effect that this is the year of OR Tambo.

To this effect, the City would not only contribute, but play an active role in the planning of the OR Tambo Centenary Celebrations, in partnership with the National Department of Tourism and the OR Tambo Foundation. The City will be rolling out a number of O.R Tambo commemorative programmes and events to celebrate the centenary.

Events have become an effective tool in positioning destinations and in fact have become important tourism products themselves. Some destinations have become popular tourist destinations through the hosting of strategic events.

To leverage, the City will establish, in the next financial year, the Ekurhuleni Development Agency, whose main responsibility will be to drive Aerotropolis Development Programme, Destination Marketing as well as bid for major conventions and events. The Aerotropolis Programme and its related infrastructural projects will be used as an anchor for tourism growth and development.

The City intends to implement the following projects and programmes in order to create an economic value-chain around the Airport, some of which are also relevant for the promotion of the tourism and hospitality industries. These include:

- Aerospace Creative Hub;
- International Convention Centre;
- University of Ekurhuleni;
- Aviation Simulation Centre;

In this regard, the City will continue to identify mega or signature events, with a tourism impact for hosting or partnerships. The aim is to further position the City as a business tourism destination.

We do acknowledge that the state of our tourism industry and Ekurhuleni's brand recognition is not where we would like it to be.

It is out of this realisation that the City is currently rolling out a focused aggressive marketing and promotional **campaign** aimed at positioning the Ekurhuleni as a preferred destination to **Live, Play and Invest**. As part of the **Campaign**, critical tourism markets and platforms will be targeted for activations. The recent example is the Meetings Africa, as a result of which we hosted a number of Chinese buyers and took them on a tour of Ekurhuleni. As a City, we were humbled and thrilled when Minister Thokozile Xasa and delegation visited the City's stand at Meetings Africa, as part of his walk-about.

More investment is being channelled towards tourism infrastructure and urban renewal projects as part of the township revitalisation programme spearheaded by the Province. Included in these, is the development of the Germiston Lake Waterfront Development and the Khumalo Street Precinct. The Germiston Theatre has recently been completed and this would contribute towards precinct development, and destination positioning.

To conclude, I would like to encourage each one of you to make time and visit some of our attractions and products as a contribution to the local economy. Work with us as we strive to stimulate the investment and tourism potential of the City.

I wish you fruitful deliberations in the next two days and hope these would also assist in accelerating the much needed transformation of the tourism industry

Oliver Reginald Tambo once remarked "*It always seem impossible until it is done*"

I thank you