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Tourism
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MEDIA STATEMENT

TOURISM HACKATHON CHALLENGES YOUNG INNOVATORS TO OPEN NEW MARKETS FOR RURAL AND TOWNSHIP BUSINESSES

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#TourismHackathon26 – Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille, launched the 2026/27 Tourism Hackathon Challenge at the University of Cape Town (UCT) today. The initiative brings together 50 students to develop digital tools that help rural and township tourism businesses reach new customers and make it easier for travellers to discover and book local experiences.

“The digital economy is changing how people discover, plan and book travel. It is also changing how tourism businesses reach customers and compete. Our responsibility is to ensure that rural and township businesses can participate in that economy and share in the growth it makes possible,” said Minister de Lille.

Building on the inaugural 2025 G20 Tourism Hackathon, this year’s challenge is themed: *“Community-Based Tourism and Rural Inclusion.”* Students from public and private universities offering tourism and hospitality qualifications will work in teams to develop and test prototypes that address challenges small tourism operators face.

The teams will explore online booking tools for local guides, homestays and village experiences, virtual tours that showcase lesser-known destinations, and digital payment solutions for small operators. In her launch address, Minister de Lille urged participants to involve local operators early in the design process and use their feedback to shape the prototypes.

“Tourism is economic policy. The decisions we make about how we develop and promote our destinations directly affect where investment goes, where jobs are created, and who has the opportunity to build a business. As more of the visitor journey takes place online, access to digital tools and markets must be part of those decisions,” said Minister De Lille.

The Hackathon supports the Tourism Growth Partnership Plan’s priorities of tourism product development and job creation. The Department’s three-year strategic partnership with UCT brings expertise in design thinking, innovation, entrepreneurship and financial technology to the initiative.

“The partnership provides an important platform for collaboration and skills development. Ultimately, the success of this initiative will not only be measured by the ideas presented during the competition, but also by our ability to nurture promising innovations and create pathways for their further development and potential implementation,” said UCT Vice-Chancellor Professor Mosa Moshabela.

Following the launch, teams will develop working prototypes for the final pitching and awards event, planned for the first quarter of 2027. The Department and UCT will explore opportunities to support the top three finalists through relevant innovation and entrepreneurship development programmes.

The Department and UCT are working with CATHSSETA, the Centre for Public Service Innovation, Future Leaders Challenge and Geekculture to implement the Hackathon.

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For streaming links, images, videos and further information, please scan the QR Code and join the Tourism Department's National Multimedia WhatsApp Group.

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