

MEDIA STATEMENT BY THE OFFICE OF MR MARTHINUS VAN SCHALKWYK, MINISTER OF TOURISM,
FOLLOWING A WALKABOUT IN TULBAGH

Tuesday, 8 February 2011

Minister calls on tourists to use registered tour guides only

In the run-up to International Tourist Guide Day, which will be celebrated on 21 February, Minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk visited Tulbagh for a guided tour through the picturesque town's historic Church Street.

Following the earthquake in 1969, all 32 buildings in present-day Church Street were meticulously restored to their original form. The buildings have all been declared provincial heritage monuments, and constitute the largest concentration of provincial monuments in one street in South Africa. A guided tour through this street showcases the contemporary alongside the historic, and many other sites of interest are also interpreted.

The Minister's visit not only paid tribute to the role that professional tour guides play as brand ambassadors, but emphasised the importance of using registered tour guides only. The National Department of Tourism is committed to promote and professionalise tourist guiding in South Africa, and is joining forces with other role players to ensure success in this endeavour.

The Department has developed the integrated tourist guide registration system, currently in a pilot stage, to fast-track registration of guides as well as to provide the public and the tourism industry with any information pertaining to guiding. This includes an updated database of legally registered guides. Information will soon be disseminated via local radio stations and workshops.

"Tour guiding is fast becoming an attractive career choice. Guides interact with people from all walks of life. It is therefore important that tour guides adequately acquaint themselves with all cultures," said the Minister. "The most important characteristic for any aspiring guide, however, is definitely attitude. You need to have a passion for working with people, and a desire and willingness to learn. The tour guiding sector is vast and fascinating, and includes nature guiding, culture guiding and adventure guiding. To qualify, one needs to undergo training from a service provider accredited to the Tourism, Hospitality and Sports Education and Training Authority (THETA). For further information in this regard, all provinces have provincial registrars for tourist guide registration, who would also be able to provide brochures on the topic.

"At present, South Africa has more than 10 000 registered tour guides. One of the main reasons why we encourage you to use registered guides only is because the profession is regulated," said Minister Van Schalkwyk. "The registrars are there to verify the certification of your guide. The profession is further governed by a code of conduct and a code of ethics. Therefore, by using registered tour guides, visitors may not only rest assured that they will receive a professional service, but will also have a built-in feedback mechanism," Van Schalkwyk concluded.

The strategy to professionalise tourist guiding in South Africa is now in place. Tourist guide associations and all other key stakeholders in the tourism family made significant contributions to the strategy. An implementation plan will soon be completed, and the strategy's recommendations will be implemented in the 2011/12 financial year. Already, the Department is engaging with Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries to discuss the harmonisation of training standards across the region. This move will present opportunities for registered guides to extend their services across our borders.

In addition, a national task team including the South African Police Service (SAPS), Home Affairs, the Cross-Border Road Transport Agency, metro police forces and some municipalities has been established to combat illegal guiding.

Finally, Tulbagh unveiled even further treasures. An initiative by the local tourism bureau had seen the training of a group of petrol attendants in their local tourism offerings. This dynamic group embraced this as an opportunity to be brand ambassadors for their town. When visitors stop at the filling station, they are now equipped to give tourism advice. The Minister commended them for their commitment, enthusiasm and winning attitude. After all, while not everyone can be a tour guide, everybody can be a brand ambassador for this country.

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