

## **Tourism Month showcases domestic offerings and biodiversity**

Minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk, the Minister of Tourism, said today with the launch of the annual Tourism Month commemoration that foreign arrivals to South Africa for the first four months of 2010 had risen by more than 350 000 compared to the same period in 2009.

“Our foreign arrivals continue to reflect the consistent growth of our tourism industry and I have no doubt that 2010 is going to be a very successful year. From January to April this year foreign arrivals totalled more than 2.5 million, compared to approximately 2.2 million in 2009. This represents growth of 16.3%,” Minister van Schalkwyk said.

“Foreign arrivals are very important to our industry and we expect 2010 to be a strong year in this regard, amongst others due to the World Cup. We have always understood, however, that the backbone of any tourism industry is its domestic market. We will continue to promote the richness of our destination to South African travellers and during Tourism Month we have a particular focus on showcasing our local tourism offerings,” the Minister said.

Approximately 14.6 million adult South Africans undertook about 30 million domestic trips in 2009, with a total annual spend of more than R22 billion. In 2009, 75 percent of all tourist volume in South Africa was derived from domestic tourist, making it by far the biggest segment of the industry. It is also less volatile than foreign tourism and offers the industry and the country’s economy a steady income stream.

“South African Tourism’s (SAT) Sho’t Left campaign is specifically aimed at making travelling more accessible and affordable for all South Africans. Over the last six years we have invested approximately R70 million in domestic marketing, including television, radio, print and outdoor advertising and events. This significant investment reiterates the fact that we are serious about strengthening domestic tourism as the foundation of our industry.

“During Tourism Month we are again reminding South Africans what a fantastic destination our country is to explore. We want to encourage people to explore for themselves the new and upgraded attractions and facilities in cities across our country and experience the investments in the industry. The more we travel, the better ambassadors we become for our country and the better hosts we are to foreign visitors,” Minister van Schalkwyk said.

SAT has a number of joint marketing agreements in place for its Sho’t Left campaign with partners such as Thompson Holidays, Premier Classe and Shosholozza Meyl, kulula.com, Computicket Travel and Flight Centre/Infinity Holdings. These partners offer South Africans special deals and rates on everything from flights to accommodation and train trips.

“South Africa’s tourism industry has outperformed the international trend, but we have nonetheless seen the effects of difficult economic conditions on our figures, particularly in terms of foreign and local tourists undertaking shorter trips or fewer trips per year. It is therefore more important than ever that our industry remains innovative in order to encourage people to keep travelling.

“An important element of this is campaigns that offer consumers affordable and value for money experiences, especially in the local market. I would like to encourage the tourism industry to continue to maximise the potential of the domestic market by amongst others marketing locally and maintaining realistic pricing structures,” Minister van Schalkwyk said.

South Africa celebrates Tourism Month annually in September and will also commemorate World Tourism Day on 27 September, with this year’s theme being Tourism and Biodiversity. The theme provides a unique opportunity to raise public awareness of the importance of biodiversity to tourism and the role of sustainable tourism in the conservation of life on Earth.

Says Thandiwe January-McLean, CEO of SAT: “In South Africa, the majority of our tourism offerings are rich in biodiversity. It is important for each and every South African to preserve this in order to ensure that we have a sustainable tourism offering.”

During Tourism Month the lesser visited province of Limpopo comes under the spotlight as SAT encourages all South Africans to take a Sho’t Left to this province. Furthermore, in line with the theme of Tourism and Biodiversity for World Tourism Day, Limpopo is rich in biodiversity, offering the best of conservation, beautiful scenery and a rich culture.

The Mopani district of Limpopo is arguably the most famous of all wildlife destinations in South Africa. It is the home of the iconic baobab tree, the Great Olifants River Valley and the world famous Kruger National Park. It is unmistakably bushveld country and features dozens of different wildlife experiences.

Robert Tooley, CEO of Limpopo Tourism and Parks, adds: “Some activities to try when visiting Limpopo include hot air ballooning over the Lowveld games areas adjoining the Kruger National Park and experience ballooning at its best. Adrenalin junkies can experience the best panoramic views with some freefalling skydiving. For those passionate about food, traditional VhaVenda food reflects Limpopo Province’s heritage of earthly bounty to delicious perfection. Whether you opt for baobab infused milk dishes or peanut rich venison stews, VhaVenda cooking is the flavour of the month.”

Ardent cultural fans will be fascinated by Limpopo’s deep cultural heritage. Dating back to 1000 AD, it is full of stories of lost civilisations, African kings and queens, historical groups that left their mark in secretive caves and traditional cultures that still hold on to the myths.

### **Note to editors**

World Tourism Day is a thematic event held every year on 27 September. Its purpose is to foster awareness among the international community of the importance of tourism and its social, cultural, political and economic value. The event seeks to address global challenges outlined in the UN Millennium Development Goals and to highlight the contribution the tourism industry can make in reaching these goals.

Biodiversity is a key tourism asset and fundamental to its sustained growth. Intact and healthy ecosystems form the cornerstone of thousands of tourist enterprises and products worldwide, attracting hundreds of millions of tourists each year. As a leading economic activity, sustainable tourism has an important role and responsibility in managing and conserving biological natural resources. As a key source of income and employment, tourism often provides strong incentives to protect biodiversity. Sustainable tourism can furthermore generate significant revenues for conservation and community development and help to raise awareness of biodiversity issues.

The theme Tourism and Biodiversity is particularly pertinent in 2010. Concerned by the continued loss of biological diversity, the United Nations Assembly declared 2010 the International Year of Biodiversity. The year coincides with the target adopted by governments in 2002, to achieve, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of biodiversity loss.

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