



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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Opening address by Tourism Minister Derek Hanekom at the World Youth Student and Educational Travel Confederation in Cape Town on 23 September 2015

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Thank you so much for holding this event in Africa for the first time. We are delighted to be afforded this opportunity to show the world how tourism is developing on our continent and in our country. A warm welcome to all of you from all corners of the world to the southern tip of Africa! We are truly honoured to have you here with us.

And thank you, David, for those generous words.

I say “generous” because I am not nearly as important as all the young people who travel the world today, who are much more important to the future of tourism, to building human togetherness, and to sustaining life on our planet.

The world, and the world of travel, has changed so much since the time I was a young traveller. When we look at how the young travellers you represent travel today, compared to how their parents travelled, you will see just how important they are to shaping the future of the world.

Young travellers make up about 20 percent of the one billion tourists that are now traversing the globe. That’s a massive 200 million people, and it is growing every year. By 2020, about 320 million people under the age of 35 will be enjoying the benefits of travel.

Research shows that younger travellers undertake longer trips, and spend more money, on average, than any other group in the tourism sector. The frequency of their trips is increasing as well.

Furthermore, the youth travel market is growing faster than any other group in tourism. This is very good news for the South African tourism sector, because we firmly believe that we offer an amazingly diverse and attractive experience to entice young travellers.

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation says that young travellers spend about 46 days in South Africa on average, and the spend per trip in our country is higher than the global average. Young people are keen on nature and wildlife, but also in adventure tourism, and city experiences.

South Africa captures a relatively small share of the global youth travel market, but young travellers represent a substantial portion of the international travellers who do come to our country. In 2014, we received close to four million international tourists aged between of 18 and 35, which is just over 40 percent of total international tourist arrivals.

A few decades ago, travel, in relative terms, was a lot more expensive than it is today. Research tells us that young travellers are very likely to return to South Africa after their first visit.

Young people in general are a whole lot tougher and more resilient than people of my age. They are far less likely to be put off by stories of civil unrest or outbreaks of disease.

Their parents stuck largely to well-known destinations which were marketed for their glitz and glamour.

Young travellers like to discover new destinations, go off the beaten track, and the money they spend tends to benefit local communities more, especially those in rural areas.

Their biggest travel accessory is social media, accessed through their mobile devices. About eight out of ten young people say that reviews from other people on social media influence where they choose to go. Online travel bookings to South Africa have nearly doubled, from 150 000 in 2011 to 285 000 in 2013.

A generation ago, travellers wanted to stay near well-known landmarks, airports and holiday hotspots. Now, young people want to be near public transport, so that they can be on the move and travel with the locals, whenever they want to.

Fewer young people prefer hotels that offer laundry services and spa treatments. Younger people are more inclined to want to stay at places where they can meet other young people.

When I was a young traveller I sent postcards home, and it took days, sometimes weeks, to arrive. Today, few young people even know what the inside of a post office looks like.

Your clients, and many of you, use Twitter and Facebook to share their experiences with many more people, in real time, wherever they are. They share everything, every day, with everyone. In fact, even I do that.

Young travellers are in constant contact with their friends and parents, sharing their experience as they experience it, sometimes even with video clips.

This brings me to one of the most significant ways in which young people differ from their parents in their travel decisions: their parents travelled the world to see places and talk about them later - now many young people travel around to experience people and cultures, and to change the world.

Not too many years ago, the majority of visitors to South Africa came for the sun, the beaches and safaris. These remain attractive, but more and more people, young and old, for that matter, want to meet people in remote places and understand their culture. Young people want to explore and do adventurous stuff. They want hiking trails and biking trails, they want to do kite surfing, and shark cage diving, and not just lounge in the sun.

Young people are far more concerned about social and environmental issues, learning about people and their culture, about the environment and how to sustain it.

Younger people tend to be more conscious of travelling in a more responsible way. Not all, but many think about social justice and how to eliminate poverty, and many are aware of their own carbon footprint.

These changing values and desires are forcing the tourism industry to reinvent itself, and to keep pace with what the modern traveller wants, and increasingly, given the massive growth of youth travel, what the young traveller is looking for.

Providers of accommodation are adapting to these new needs. It is not just about another place to sleep, and clean sheets; there is a growing demand for free Wi-Fi and informal lounge facilities where young people can meet other young people, and for places with character and ambience.

In South Africa, we have started to respond to the needs and desires of young travellers, but we can certainly do more.

We have plenty of successful entrepreneurs embracing the opportunities presented by social media and the internet. Vamos Township Tours, operating from Langa, right here in Cape Town, has built its success through digital review platforms. The owner, Siviwe Mbila, has become a very successful tour operator. He is creating jobs and making a truly meaningful and sustainable contribution to developing his community.

Our marketing agency, SA Tourism, is adapting its marketing efforts to respond to social media. They recently invited nine international and five local bloggers to Meet South Africa and share their perspectives on various social media platforms. This campaign is now in its second year. It provides an authentic, first-hand lens for online influencers to take the story of Meeting South Africa around the world.

Places like Lebo's Backpackers in Soweto are becoming social hubs for young international travellers to meet people from the community. You can "Live like a Local" in many of our city's townships, and

get a first-hand experience of what it's like to live there. Amid the hardships they face, the people will reveal to you their remarkable spirit, their aspirations for a better life, and their determination to achieve it. Your own spirit will be uplifted in the most remarkable way.

We have great adventure tourism products, like bungee jumping, river-rafting, zip-lining or horse-riding along our beaches. You can swim with sharks from the safety of a cage, and go boating to see whales up close.

I am not going to delay your conference by listing everything our Department of Tourism is doing, but one of our most exciting new programmes is the retrofitting of establishments to make them more energy efficient and less reliant on coal generated electricity. We are starting this year by installing solar panels at some of our iconic sites like Robben Island, as well as at botanical gardens and national parks. Next year we will expand this program by providing subsidies to private businesses to switch to solar energy. Beyond that we intend advancing towards the conversion of establishments to be more accessible to visitors with disabilities.

The 25 small enterprises that we are helping to participate at this event are also part of the Tourism Incentive Program, and we hope that they will sign up new contracts, expand their businesses and create more jobs.

As I have already said, the tourism industry is changing rapidly. We can extract more value from innovating faster, re-positioning our offerings to serve the needs of young travellers, creating avenues for stronger cultural and educational links, and supporting local communities to meet people and share their culture with tourists in an appealing way.

In conclusion, allow me to leave you with some thoughts about a discovery recently announced in South Africa - a discovery that confirms that all of you here today are in fact my long lost relatives. We are all related, we all come from the same common ancestors.

This extraordinary discovery by a team of paleontologists of an as yet unknown species of hominid - described as "almost human" - was announced to the world just two weeks ago. This new addition to our family tree was found in a cave at the Cradle of Humankind near Johannesburg.

This is the largest collection of hominid fossils ever found by a long way, and many scientific papers will follow. I can only encourage all of you to go to the Cradle of Humankind and see for yourselves. It will be a pilgrimage.

What is clear though, is that we share a common ancestry, and we share a common future. Wherever we happen to live now, our shared humanity should redefine our understanding of each other, and our respect for each other.

But back to travel and tourism. It is travel, and the human connection that comes along with it, that is our most powerful tool to break through the irrational prejudices and artificial barriers that stand in the way of peace and friendship between human beings.

Through tourism and travel we get to appreciate each other, and the planet we share.

As the playwright Henry Miller once said: "One's destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things."

Once we see things in new ways, we become open to the possibility of changing things.

This is the higher purpose of tourism, and if we keep this concept in mind, believe it in our hearts, and hold it in our hands, we can change the world!

Thank you.