tourism
Department:
Tourism
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MEDIA STATEMENT

12 NOVEMBER 2026

YOUNG INNOVATORS TO POWER RURAL TOURISM THROUGH DIGITAL SOLUTIONS AT TOURISM HACKATHON

#TourismHackathon26 – The Department of Tourism, in partnership with the University of Cape Town (UCT), will on 14 November 2026 launch the Tourism Hackathon Challenge in Cape Town. Minister of Tourism Ms. Patricia de Lille will officially launch the initiative that will bring together young innovators to develop practical, technology-driven solutions for challenges facing the tourism sector.

The Tourism hackathon is a collaborative event in which young innovators work in teams to develop practical, technology-driven solutions for the tourism sector. The hackathon will culminate in the presentation of working prototypes that aim to strengthen and improve the visibility of township and rural operators, whilst providing online solutions that connect them to new markets.

“Investing in the sustainability of the tourism sector begins with an investment in the youth. Through the hackathon, we want to build a pipeline of young talent who will not only gain digital skills, mentorship and practical experience, but who will be encouraged to pursue careers and entrepreneurship through innovation in tourism,” says Minister De Lille.

Building on the success of the inaugural 2025 G20 Tourism Hackathon, this year’s challenge is themed: *“Community-Based Tourism and Rural Inclusion”.* Fifty students, selected from public and private universities offering tourism and hospitality qualifications, will work in teams to develop solutions in the following areas:

- Digital platforms that connect tourists with township and rural experiences,
- Online booking systems for local guides, homestays, and village experiences,
- Virtual-reality tours that highlight hidden gems, and
- Payment and financial inclusion solutions for small tourism operators.

The Department has partnered with UCT and various multi-sector stakeholders, including CATHSSETA, the Centre for Public Service Innovation (CPSI), Future Leaders Challenge and Geekculture, to implement the Hackathon.

“We are pleased to have partnered with UCT on our quest to propel innovation in the tourism sector. This hackathon is a key aspect of the Tourism Growth Partnership Plan (TGPP) 2025–2030 to drive tourism product development, job creation, skills development, and economic empowerment through community inclusion.”

“Tourism is open to innovation that will enhance travel experiences, whilst laying the foundation for entrepreneurial opportunities for the youth.”

“Our collaboration with UCT will draw on the institution's expertise in design thinking, innovation, entrepreneurship and financial technology to strengthen the development of practical solutions for the tourism sector,” Minister De Lille added.

Beyond the competition, the Department and UCT will explore opportunities to support the top three finalists through relevant innovation and entrepreneurship development programmes. Teams will refine their concepts after the launch, ahead of the final pitching and awards event planned for the fourth quarter of the 2026/27 financial year (January to March 2027).

"The University of Cape Town (UCT) is proud to enter into this three-year strategic partnership with the Department of Tourism. This collaboration reflects our shared commitment to strengthening tourism through innovation, entrepreneurship and the creation of new opportunities across the sector. It also aligns with UCT’s Strategy 2030 and our commitment to advancing impactful partnerships that drive sustainable development,” UCT Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mosa Moshabela said.

The Tourism Hackathon strategically contributes to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), which promotes sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products, and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure). Through its multi-stakeholder collaboration, it also advances SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

Members of the media are invited to the launch of the Tourism Hackathon challenge as follows:

TOURISM HACKATHON CHALLENGE LAUNCH:

Date: Saturday, 14 November 2026
Time: 08h30 for 09h20
Venue: University of Cape Town (UCT DSchool), cnr. Woolsack & Cross Campus Rd, Rosebank, Western Cape Province

Media RSVP:

- Members of the media can confirm their attendance no later than **12h00 on Friday 13 November** to szwane@tourism.gov.za or via WhatsApp on 0812674665.

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