



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**Media Statement by the Office of Minister of Tourism, Mr Marthinus Van Schalkwyk -
"Reach for the Stars" Young Aspiring Chefs Competition, Waterfront, Cape Town**

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South Africans are known the world over for their innate warmth and hospitality. The South African culture also extends further to our good wines and great cuisine, which draw millions of tourists to our shores.

Service excellence is one the most important proponents for Brand South Africa, and tells the South African story. In the highly competitive hospitality industry, service excellence goes a long way towards building the brand and reputation of a product. The adage "If you are not happy, tell us, and if you are happy, tell your friends" has never rung truer.

Today, a group of young aspiring chefs sharpen their knives, preparing to battle it out in the cook-off in the 2012 SA Young Chefs of the Year competition. This competition, which was launched last year, is not only a means of encouragement and improving standards of culinary and service skills among our students, but it is a means to contribute significantly to our growing and developing tourism sector through quality assurance and service excellence.

Chef and sommelier skills have been identified as scarce skills in South Africa. The National Department of Tourism has, for this reason as well as the fact that it is such an important part of our hospitality sector, invested in the National Youth Chefs Programme (NYCTP), which is facilitated through the South African Chefs Association. We have also invested in sommelier training, which is facilitated through the Cape Wine Academy. For the 2011/12 financial year, 716 chefs have already completed the programme.

One of the main objectives of these programmes is to address the scarce and critical skills shortage in the hospitality subsector, as reflected in the Tourism & Sport Skills Audit Report 2007, and to provide the subsector with the much-needed cookery and sommelier skills to satisfy demand. The training also provides unemployed youth with skills to enable them to take up available employment opportunities in the tourism industry.

Acquiring these skills enables beneficiaries to advance in their careers, and it is envisaged that the successful learners would be absorbed by the hospitality industry in this way.

Fine-dining restaurants have reputations to uphold and prefer to hire candidates who are as concerned about the restaurant/hotel as they are. Therefore, you must be the best in the business and work hard to distinguish yourself from other chefs and sommeliers in the industry.

Restaurant/hotel sales are of the utmost importance, and an educated sommelier and chef can boost sales through their knowledge of what bottles to sell to which customers and which food to prepare. Chefs, sommeliers and restaurant/hotel managers all work towards a common result – perfection.

According to the most recent tourism figures, tourist arrivals to South Africa increased by an impressive 10,5% during the first six months of 2012, which is double the global tourism growth rate of 5%. Stats SA's tourism figures indicate that South Africa experienced an excellent first half of the year, attracting 4 416 373 tourists to the country between January and June 2012, compared to 3 996 760 tourist arrivals for the same period in 2011.

The tourism industry experienced particularly strong growth in overseas tourist arrivals, recording 17,1% growth in arrivals from outside of the African continent. A total of 1 163 477 overseas tourist arrivals were recorded for the first six months of 2012, compared to 993 364 tourist arrivals for the corresponding period in 2011.

The third-quarter Tourism Business Council of South Africa/First National Bank tourism business index shows that tourism business performance has recovered well from a disappointing second quarter, and has returned to the highs of the first quarter. Tourism businesses registered a performance index of 101 in the third quarter, up from the second quarter's 88,2.

The accommodation sector also celebrated a positive trend. The latest Stats SA accommodation figures indicated that total income for the accommodation sector for the second quarter of 2012 increased by 11,2%, and the number of stay-unit nights sold for the second quarter of 2012 increased by 8,2%, both compared to the same period in 2011.

Our domestic tourism statistics indicated that, in the first quarter of 2012, 5,5 million domestic trips were undertaken, which contributed R5,2 billion to the economy.

Our tourism sector has grown in leaps and bounds in the last few years. In South Africa, as in the rest of the world, tourism remains one of the fastest-growing economic sectors.

Service excellence will also guarantee that visitors will not only return, but will also tell others about us. Not only does it ensure that South Africa maintains its international competitiveness as a tourist destination, but indeed shows that we can be world leaders in terms of quality assurance; that we can enthuse, infuse and deliver.

This is a wonderful time for you to be joining the industry. Tourism is experiencing a 'golden age' with exceptional growth. Welcome to the industry. We look forward to working with you in setting the table for the scores of visitors who come to our country for a 'taste' of South Africa. May what you have achieved today supplement and further strengthen the host of products we offer our visitors in the future.

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