
Free State's tourism is chock-full of investment opportunities

SOUTH AFRICA, Johannesburg – Wednesday, 15 December 2021: The Free State province got its turn in the spotlight last night, as the South African pavilion continues its provincial showcase series at the Expo 2020 in Dubai.

The showcase provides each of South Africa's nine provinces a stage to promote its tourism hotspots to a global audience and potential investors. The pavilion's theme "Think South Africa, Think Opportunity," calls on investors from around the world to consider South Africa a business destination.

The Free State, touted as South Africa's Big Sky Country, is the country's agricultural heartland. A 2020 Statistics South Africa report on agriculture showed that the province has 7,951 farms or 19.8% of the national total – the highest number in the country. It contributed R46.9 billion or 14.1% of the national total – second only to Western Cape.

The province holds its own in mining and chemical industries as it is home to petrochemical giants Sasol and 12 gold mines that produce up to 30% of South Africa's output.

Despite its reliance on industry and agriculture, the Free State also has a tourism sector that is full of possibilities.

MICE industry and sports venue present investment opportunities

According to Kenny Dichabe, the CEO of the Free State Gambling, Liquor and Tourism Authority (FSGLTA), its biggest potential comes from the meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) industry. "We have entered the MICE space and it has had a marked amount of success on a small scale. But an investment in an international convention centre will unlock a world of opportunities in that particular space. We appeal to all investors to consider the centrality of the Free State to build MICE in the province."

He has also called on investors to collaborate with the province to improve the Phakisa Raceway in in Welkom. "It is a facility that has a huge amount of potential. But it can only be unlocked with proper collaboration. I am inviting the audience and any investor who is interested in racing to come and hold our hands and assist us in repositioning that valuable government asset."

Free State accessible to most of the South Africa

Being bordered by six provinces and the Kingdom of Lesotho, the Free State has focused on the domestic tourism market. FSGLTA's Acting CMO, Tshediso Lerumo, said its central position makes the province accessible by air and road from any of the country's major cities.

The N1 road connects to Johannesburg in the north and Cape Town in the south, the N3 to Durban, the N6 to the Eastern Cape and the N8 to the Northern Cape. "We pride ourselves as a self-drive destination. We have linkages to the six provinces [that border Free State], which makes us an accessible province."

Collaboration key to success

Tourism in the Free State relies on five pillars: culture and heritage, active adventure, scenic beauty, safaris and wildlife, and city lifestyle. Travellers can easily become enamoured by quaint towns such as Clarens, which is known for its craft beer and artist community. They could also fall for South Africa's biggest secret – the spectacular Golden Gate Highlands National Park, which is home to several ancient rock paintings and unique wildlife that includes the Bearded Vulture.

To ensure that tourists flock to these emerging hotspots, Dichabe said that collaboration with all spheres of government is crucial for the upkeep of the sector in the province. “The Free State tourism sector has improved its collaboration with local, provincial and national bodies as well as with natural and cultural institutions responsible for tourism marketing.”

Dichabe said that the province has realigned its tourism strategy to adapt to the changes brought on by the Coronavirus. “As part of our strategy and repositioning of destination Free State, we are realigning the brand to make use of more innovative distribution channels and better promote tourism. We are developing a brand message that is common to all stakeholders and how it links to promoting tourism.”

Lerumo assured travellers that the Free State is safe and open for business and travel. “During the pandemic, our destinations, attractions, accommodation and entertainment areas are fully aligned to Covid-19 protocols. We assure that you will be welcomed in good health and spirit and you will depart in good health and spirit.”

The pavilion continues its provincial showcase series tomorrow, featuring the place where the sun rises: Mpumalanga. To catch these events, register on the pavilion’s [online portal](#).

Keep up with the South African Pavilion Team on Twitter using the handle TeamSA_Expo2020. Follow the events at the pavilion using #ThinkOpportunity #Expo2020SA #ShareSouthAfrica.
