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Meetings Africa 2024: a Pan African showcase of South Africa and Africa's meetings and business events offering

NOTE TO EDITORS: The following speech was delivered by Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille at the opening ceremony of Meetings Africa 2024 at the Sandton Convention Centre TODAY 27 February 2024. Read more below

Good morning, goeie more, molweni, sawbona, dumelang

This is my first Meetings Africa since I took office in March last year, and I am pleased to be here with all of you at this proudly Pan African gathering of global business events partners.

It is a very special time to be in South Africa. This year, our country celebrates 30 years of Freedom since our first democratic elections in 1994.

For us as a country, this means a time of reflection but also of celebration.

Freedom is pivotal for our sector, granting the freedom to move and explore.

The many successes of the past 30 years in our industry can be attributed to the partnerships formed with various countries both on and off the African continent.

We are here today for the 17th edition of Meetings Africa which is a key strategic platform for business meetings and events.

This annual event has become a hallmark in showcasing the best of the African business events sector.

I extend heartfelt thanks to our partners, Gauteng Tourism Authority, the City of Johannesburg, and the Sandton Convention Centre.

Your support allows us to showcase South Africa's ability to host major events, inviting the world to experience our country beyond conference centre rooms.

EXHIBITORS

A warm welcome to each of you, especially our esteemed exhibitors from across the African continent.

Your presence at Meetings Africa is truly valued and appreciated. Meetings Africa is most definitely a Pan-African showcase of excellence because of all you, our exhibitors.

I would like to offer a warm welcome to the 19 exhibitors who are making their debut at Meetings Africa this year.

Among them are four from the rest of the African continent, including The Galaxia Group from Egypt, the Mangalis Hotel Group from Cote d'Ivoire, MICE Solutions DMC from Tanzania, and Willch Travel and Tours from Zambia.

The remaining 15 exhibitors are from South Africa, contributing to a total of 19 new participants. Each of these exhibitors brings distinctive perspectives that enhance the diversity of our exhibitor line-up.

However, during its early years, the representation was primarily South African, with minimal participation from the rest of Africa.

Over the years, we have successfully expanded the event, and today, it stands as a truly Pan-African show.

Although Meetings Africa has been in existence for 18 years, the impact of lockdown restrictions in 2021 resulted in the omission of that year's edition.

Therefore, this year marks the 17th occurrence of the show.

Back to the present – I am delighted to highlight the presence of 380 Exhibiting Companies from 21 African countries at this year's Meetings Africa. I am very proud of that representation of Africa.

These exhibitors collectively represent our continent's business events industry echo and showcase our diverse array of products and experiences, offering our unique and abundant choices.

To all our exhibitors, I extend my best wishes for success on the trade floor over the next two days.

As you negotiate business deals while showcasing our culture of innovation, expertise, and our contribution to the knowledge economy to the buyers.

Building on the success of previous editions of this event we continue to reassure the global business events industry that our continent is open for business and has all it takes to host events of any size.

I am excited about the collaborative experiences that await us over the next two days so that we together, can bring more business events to be hosted on the African continent.

Having had the privilege of attending the World Tourism & Travel Global Summit in Rwanda last year, I have witnessed first-hand the incredible offering of our African business events sector.

I have no doubt that even here at Meetings Africa, it will be clear for all to see that the African continent, is the best place to bring all Meetings, incentives trips, conventions and indeed exhibitions.

According to global economic research, the global business events industry forecast 2017–2028 market was valued at 345.8 billion US Dollars in 2021, and is projected to reach 2.1 trillion US Dollars by 2031.

Africa's Business Events for 2023 is estimated at 12,7 billion US dollars or R240 Billion while South Africa's Business Events for 2023 is estimated at 6,4 billion US Dollars or R121 Billion.

Business Events travellers who attend MICE events spend over 65% of their money on hotels for rooms and hotel dining while 15% is spent on other restaurants outside the hotel.

BUYERS

To all our buyers from various parts of the world, we guarantee you that here at Meetings Africa you will get to meet and collaborate with the best business events products and services that Africa has to offer.

To all delegates, your presence is invaluable as you help us to share the story of our beautiful continent, our world-class quality assured amenities, accommodation establishment, conference/event establishments, our rich heritage/culture and, of course, our warm people.

I am confident that our partnerships across African countries will once again demonstrate the value we all derive from this event.

With 63 countries represented in terms of buyers, this promises to be an event rich in collaboration and partnerships that extend far beyond the continent of Africa.

Certainly, as South Africa we are serious about growing both our leisure tourism and business events offerings.

ARRIVALS

The recent official release of international arrival figures by Statistics South Africa for the period January to December 2023 underscores the rising momentum of South Africa's tourism sector.

International tourist arrivals totalled 8.5 million from January to December 2023 representing a remarkable 48.9% increase when compared with same period in 2022.

The Lion's share of this number is made up of the 6.4 million visitors from the rest of the African continent that South Africa welcomed during this period, marking a significant 75.6% of all arrivals.

BIDS for MICE EVENTS

On the business events front – over the past year, the South Africa National Convention Bureau (SANCB), together with its partners, have worked extensively to secure international and local bids to our shores.

South Africa successfully secured 40 bids for the 2022/23 financial year.

This is excellent news for the economy as it will contribute R338 million between 2023 and 2025 and attract more than 16 000 international and regional delegates.

The SANCB invested R19.2 million in the bid submissions through its bid support programme to attract business events aligned with the National Government's development and priorities. The conferences also help spread business events across the regions.

Since the start of the 2023/24 financial year, the SANCB sourced and submitted 95 bids for international business events to be hosted in South Africa between 2024 and 2032.

The 95 bid submissions have a combined estimated economic value of R1.5 billion and can potentially attract 60 040 international and regional delegates to South Africa between 2024 and 2032.

Thus far, South Africa has won 19 of the bids submitted for the 2023/24 financial year.

These secured business pieces will contribute R85m to South Africa's economy between 2024 - 2025 and attract 2 995 international and regional delegates.

The SANCB invested R5.7m in bid submissions through its bid support programme to attract business events linked with the National Government's development priorities.

The secured conferences will also contribute to the regional spread of business events and will be hosted in Johannesburg, Tshwane, Ekurhuleni, Cape Town, Sun City, Parys, Skukuza and Potchefstroom.

The economic impact that these business events have on local economies should not be underestimated.

Every business event, regardless of its scale, holds inherent value, and the secured conferences also play a role in dispersing business events geographically.

Talking about successes, let us briefly reflect on last year's Meetings Africa as we look to growing and surpassing last year's standards.

Meetings Africa 2023 contributed a staggering R388.5 million to the economy of South Africa, creating and sustaining 753 jobs and generating significant business deals.

The energy and collaboration witnessed during the Business Opportunity Networking Day (BONDay) yesterday is already promising for the tourism sector's forward momentum.

Already, at yesterday's BONDay, delegates who attended were exposed to a trove of information through the various sessions held throughout the day.

I know many walked away not only having gained immense value for their respective businesses but also attained invaluable connections having shared knowledge and exchanged ideas.

Meetings Africa is dedicated to providing unique insights from the finest business speakers across our continent.

The goal is for each of us to drive success in our individual countries' business events, contributing collectively to the growth of the entire continent. After all, our theme centres around Africa's success, built on quality connections.

I am thrilled to introduce someone who has experienced the positive influence of the business events sector and undoubtedly concluded yesterday on a high note.

Hlolohelo Zwane from Tshwane North College emerged as the winner of the 2024 Future Leaders Forum – International University Challenge at Meetings Africa.

As a result, she will be heading to Frankfurt, Germany in May to represent South Africa at the IMEX Future Leaders Forum.

What began as a dream during her entry into Future Leaders Forum has now transformed into an opportunity to showcase South Africa's excellence to the world.

Please join me in giving Ms Zwane a massive round of applause for this remarkable achievement.

Following her win during BONDay yesterday, Zwane emphasised the importance of the business events industry.

She said: “This event is so important because it encourages young people in universities and colleges to appreciate the broad nature of tourism and not only focus on the leisure side of it but also the business tourism side”. Closed quote.

The competition – an initiative by the South African National Convention Bureau (SANCB) - was open to young people below the age of 35 currently pursuing qualifications in Tourism and Hospitality.

This competition provides students an opportunity to showcase their creativity in conceptualising, planning and coordinating business events.

Therefore, let me invite everyone here today to take full advantage of all the networking platforms and events that are part of the official Meetings Africa programme. They are planned and designed for your full benefit and gain.

Economic Support and Sustainability

Sustainability takes centre stage at our Meetings Africa, reflecting our commitment to various aspects.

Firstly, we acknowledge and celebrate the most sustainable/green stands, with the winners set to be announced later today.

Sustainability, encompassing people, prosperity, and the planet, is further emphasised through our second touchpoint, the Sustainability Village focussing on enhancing economic sustainability.

Here, you'll find 20 proudly South African vendors showcasing exceptional and unique products, all crafted with remarkable stories behind them.

Please make your way to the Sustainability Village, situated at the back of this exhibition room.

Support our local businesses and experience a place where every purchase makes a meaningful difference, allowing you to carry a piece of South Africa back home with you.

I never leave any event without visiting the local businesses and supporting them and each time, I take home a piece of their creativity and their story.

The Department of Tourism is also proud to support exhibition participation for 25 small to medium tourism enterprises at Meetings Africa this year.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me say: as South Africa: we are open for tourism and we are open for business events.

We don't wait for others to build our dreams; we fulfil them ourselves.

It is imperative that we take control of our narrative and boldly showcase ourselves to the world.

Our challenges do not define our potential, our ability to lead in key business sectors, or our capacity to innovate and host global MICE events.

South Africa is home to exceptional individuals achieving remarkable feats, and it's time to share that story.

We will be launching a global campaign on our business events in the coming weeks and this will be an opportunity to revolutionise the way we market MICE tourism.

Embracing our culture of problem-solving, South Africa stands as a mecca for the curious, a place where thinkers, creators, artists, scientists, and business trailblazers can converge, learn, and collaborate.

It is an invitation to experience mind-opening cultural exchanges and spectacular natural wonders that leave a lasting impression, enticing them to return to one of the most inspiring and diverse nations on Earth.

So again, our message is clear: we are open for business and ready to collaborate with all partners to ensure Africa's success built on quality connections.

Thank you for being part of Meetings Africa 2024. Let's make the most of the next two days of collaboration, learning, networking and doing business.

While you are here, please make sure to enjoy some time off at the many amazing and vibrant tourism offerings in South Africa.

I thank you and God Bless.

ENDS

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