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Speech by Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille at opening of Africa's Travel Indaba 2023

9 May 2023

NOTE TO EDITORS: The following speech was delivered by Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille at the official opening of the Africa Travel Indaba held at the Durban ICC today.

- Deputy Minister of Tourism in South Africa, Honourable Mr. Fish Mahlalela
- Ministers from various African countries
- Ambassadors
- High Commissioners
- Members of the Diplomatic Corp
- The Tourism Portfolio Committee on Tourism and NCOP members
- Premier of Kwa Zulu-Natal Province, Ms. Nomusa Dube-Ncube
- Honourable MEC for Economic Development, Tourism & Environmental Affairs, Mr. Siboniso Duma
- His Worship the Mayor of eThekweni, Councillor Mxolisi Kaunda
- South African Tourism Interim Board Chair and Board Members
- Director General at the Department of Tourism, Mr. Victor Tharage
- DDGs from the Department of Tourism
- All tourism boards members, executives, councils, associations and government officials.
- Industry Associations, business owners, partners and our Tourism Stakeholders
- Valued Media representatives,
- Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good morning, goeie more, molweni, sawubona

It is an honour and privilege for me to be here at the 2023 Africa's Travel Indaba in this picturesque city of Durban, renowned for its sunshine, surfing, and swimming and of course cultural melting points amongst many attractions.

We are gathered here at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli Convention Centre, named after Africa's first Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, to celebrate Africa as we all pull our efforts towards our sector's recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic.

In one of his famous quotes, Inkosi Luthuli expressed his strong connection to mother Africa; he said: “I am an African. I am bound to Africa by the ties of blood, race, history, culture and language.” END QUOTE

During the month of May, we celebrate Africa Month and I would like to remind us of the inspirational words of the African Union Anthem which says:

“O Sons and Daughters of Africa, Flesh of the Sun and Flesh of the Sky Let us make Africa the Tree of Life, Let us all unite and sing together to uphold the bonds that frame our destiny. Let us dedicate ourselves to fight together for lasting peace and justice on earth.” END QUOTE

Today are here to honour the African people’s incredible ingenuity, fortitude, and magnificence.

We do so with humility as we also welcome delegates from across the world.

We are part of a common humanity and we are here bound together by a desire for shared prosperity.

As Africans, together, we will craft a narrative that tells our story in our own words, sharing with the world the unique contributions we bring to the global tourism community.

I am looking forward to coming together with as many of you as possible and for us to learn from each other, challenging stereotypes and promoting a more tolerant and inclusive society.

A repositioned Africa’s Travel Indaba

Ladies and gentlemen, a lot has changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we felt it necessary and critical to reposition Africa’s Travel Indaba to ensure it remains relevant in the current environment.

This year, we are hosting Indaba under the mantra “Shaping Africa’s Tomorrow, Through Connection Today.”

This positioning speaks to the essence of Africa’s Travel Indaba, bringing the world to Africa to positively influence the continent’s economic and cultural trajectories.

One of Africa’s best exports, Ben Okri, the Nigerian author and poet, is on point when he writes: “The most authentic thing about us, as Africans, is our capacity to create, to overcome, to endure, to transform, to love, and to be greater than our suffering.”

The 2023 Africa’s Travel Indaba, at near the pre-pandemic scale, also demonstrates that we can host world-class safe events as Africans.

This year, at Africa Travel Indaba, we are working hard to exceed pre-COVID attendance numbers and have an estimated 6 000 people attending from all over South Africa, Africa and the rest of the world.

This year’s Indaba sees more than 350 tourism products being showcased, 1000 buyers from across the tourism ecosystem and just under 1 000 exhibitors.

The attendees include destination marketing bodies, hotel groups, airlines, tour operators, and 10 African Tourism Boards and 21 African countries represented here.

Competition and collaboration

Ladies and gentlemen, competition is often considered the lifeblood of destination marketing and tourism.

However, it is important to note that competition should always be balanced with collaboration.

While healthy competition can drive growth and innovation, unhealthy competition can lead to a race to the bottom, with businesses and destinations undercutting each other on price and quality.

Therefore, as the tourism industry, let us foster a culture of healthy competition, where businesses and destinations are encouraged to compete on quality and innovation.

Let us remember that long-term success in the industry depends not only on competing but also on recognising the value of collaboration and partnerships.

And so, each player in the value chain has a unique role to play, and by working together, we can create seamless and memorable travel experiences for visitors - that is the spirit of Africa's Travel Indaba.

Supporting Tourism Enterprises

The Department of Tourism keenly understands the value of tourism businesses especially small to medium enterprises and that is why I am proud of the investment we have made in this regard as part of our Market Access Support Programme.

The Department of Tourism is thus supporting 123 local small inbound tourism enterprises through its Market Access Support Programme (MASP) to showcase their products and services at the Hidden Gems pavilion during Africa's Travel Indaba.

The total value of support approved for the 123 enterprises amounts to R11.7million and this investment will enable these small businesses to display their unique products and services, expand their networks, and foster partnerships that will drive the growth and sustainability of the tourism industry in South Africa.

To all the buyers present here today - you are critical in promoting Africa as a premier travel destination and thank you for continuing to partner with us in showcasing our continent's diverse experiences and attractions.

To all the African product owners, thank you for your contribution in creating a cohesive and thriving tourism sector that benefits communities and promotes faster economic growth.

I am a firm believer that our country's and continent's tourism sector can only grow if we work together.

So whether you are an accommodation establishment owner, an airline partner, a travel agency, a tour operator or any other tourism product and experience – this is a call to you.

I invite all South African tourism companies to be part of this year's Sho't Left Travel week by providing discounted travel deals to South Africans.

By offering discounts of up to 50% off during the week starting from the 4th to the 10th of September, we will be encouraging South Africans to travel our beautiful, vibrant and diverse country.

South African Tourism will promote all Sho't Left Travel Week deals on various marketing platforms, so make sure you don't miss out on this chance to market your products or services.

Please register on deals.southafrica.net by no later than end of August 2023.

Africa's Tourism Sector Performance

Africa's tourism sector is open and thriving, offering various products and experiences catering to travellers' needs and preferences.

For South Africa, we have seen encouraging growth in our tourist arrival numbers between January and December 2022 where it reached nearly 5.8million with over 4 million of those arrivals from African countries.

This represents an overall inbound increase of 152.6% for South Africa compared to January to December 2021.

The future looks bright. We have, as a collective, weathered the COVID-19 hurricane and it should only propel us to exceed our targets.

After stronger than expected recovery in 2022, this year could see international tourist arrivals to South Africa return to pre-pandemic levels in Europe and the Middle East.

These numbers demonstrate the immense potential of tourism in Africa, not only as a revenue generator but also as a job creator and a catalyst for faster economic growth.

Here at Africa's Travel Indaba, the African tourism sector works together to create sustained growth and economic impact; there's no Big Brother here.

Africa's Travel Indaba provides the ideal platform for us to collectively showcase our African products and experiences.

It is the most valuable platform for all of us to meet face-to-face, do business with the most influential partners in the world and access Africa's excellence and endless possibilities.

The business opportunities and quality connections gained at this trade show will certainly shape Africa's tomorrow.

Challenges to overcome

In addition to collaboration across the value chain, there are other areas where we need to work together to unlock the full potential of the African tourism sector.

One of these is the visa regime in all African countries.

We must have a harmonised visa regime across the continent to make it easier for visitors to move from one country to another.

We must also simplify the e-visa application process and reduce visa costs to make Africa a more attractive destination for both Africans and international travellers.

In this regard, South Africa has visa waivers for several African countries for a specified period and up to a maximum of 90 days, including SADC countries such as Tanzania, Namibia, Angola, Mozambique, Mauritius, Malawi and Botswana.

We have also rolled out the e-visa system to several countries including Kenya, Nigeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Uganda, Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo and we are expanding the e-visa system to an additional 20 countries.

Another critical area is airlift capacity.

On the global stage, Africa is the strongest performer currently with international air connectivity in Africa.

However, this growth has been uneven, with some African regions and countries having better airlift connectivity than others.

I am looking forward to working with various partners in reducing the high cost of air travel in Africa as we know that this deters visitors and thereby limit tourism growth.

Despite some challenges, there are some positive developments in the African aviation sector.

For example, some African airlines are expanding their fleets and increasing their routes to meet the growing demand for air travel.

The African Union (AU) has also launched the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), which aims to liberalise air transport on the continent and promote greater competition and connectivity.

Sustainable Tourism

Ladies and gentlemen, we must prioritise sustainable tourism practices that addresses climate change, protects our environment and cultural heritage while promoting economic development.

One of the key projects the Department of Tourism in South Africa has to help businesses mitigate climate change and adapt to energy constraints is the Green Tourism Incentive Programme (GTIP).

The programme encourages and incentivizes private sector tourism enterprises to move towards the installation of solutions for the sustainable management and usage of electricity and water resources through installation of solar system and water saving technologies.

The GTIP also ensures an uninterrupted visitor experience for tourists, reduce operational input cost and facilitates increased competitiveness and operational sustainability in the tourism sector.

Apart from providing funding to 130 tourism businesses under this programme, the Department of Tourism also invested R98.5 million to retrofit 8 state owned tourist attractions.

Combined savings for all eight sites is estimated to be just under R40 million by the end of the 2022/23 financial year.

Ladies and gentlemen, sustainability is big for our sector. We must invest in sustainable tourism to protect communities' natural resources, cultural heritage, and social fabric while creating economic opportunities.

Again, collaboration and partnerships between African countries and the public and private sectors will be critical in achieving this objective.

We must also prioritise innovation and technology, which can help us develop and promote our tourism offerings more effectively and efficiently.

Finally, we must ensure that our efforts to promote the African tourism sector are inclusive and benefit all members of our society.

We must work to ensure that the benefits of tourism are distributed equitably and that all members of our communities can access the opportunities created by the sector.

At the very least, that is what the future generation of African children expect and deserve.

Ladies and gentlemen, through concrete actions, not just words, we are here as Africans, at Africa's Travel Indaba to work to reposition ourselves in the minds of international travellers.

Our top-notch hospitality, favourable weather, and unique wildlife are just a few examples of what makes Africa an attractive tourism destination.

We are also here to recognise the value of visitors travelling to different parts of Africa and the world.

We know that through tourism, we can help create cultural exchanges, promote understanding, and break down stereotypes.

This can help to build bridges between different communities and contribute to the peaceful coexistence of different cultures and religions.

On a domestic front, South Africa must keep our country's domestic sectors going.

Countries with a strong domestic tourism sector are generally better equipped to withstand fluctuations in international demand as has been witnessed with the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.

For us in South Africa, growing our country's tourism sector is a key aspect of the country's Tourism Sector Recovery Plan and aims to ignite economic growth and create jobs.

I would like to thank all the South Africans that continue to heed the call by taking a Sho't Left and exploring their own country.

Thank you fellow South Africans for playing your part in our country's tourism sector recovery and ultimately contributing towards an inclusive economy.

In conclusion

I am proud to welcome all international delegates to South Africa. I invite you to experience, the beauty of our landscapes, and the richness of our cultural heritage.

I know this year's Africa's Travel Indaba will serve as a platform for building new relationships, sharing knowledge, and driving the growth and success of the African tourism sector.

It is possible. Let's do it together.

I thank you and God Bless.

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