



**DEPUTY MINISTER  
TOURISM  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**SPEECH FOR DEPUTY MINISTER, MR FISH MAHLALELA**

**OFFICIAL HANDOVER CEREMONY OF THE BAVIAANSKLOOF INTERPRETATIVE  
CENTRE & LEOPARD TRAIL HIKERS HUTS, 3 MARCH 2022**

Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. I am delighted to join you this afternoon at this very special site. The Baviaanskloof Mega Reserve, as you all know, is part of the Cape Floral Kingdom. This UNESCO listed World Heritage Site stretches from Table Mountain in the Cape Town, all the way to the Baviaanskloof here in the Eastern Cape. The fynbos biome is one of only six floral kingdoms in the world, with an estimated economic value of R77 million per year based on harvests of fynbos products and tourism.

World Heritage Sites are very special places. There are 1 154 World Heritage Sites, 147 on the African Continent and 10 located in South Africa. South Africa, as a signatory to the World Heritage Convention, has the obligation to protect, preserve and interpret the heritage value of World Heritage Sites on behalf of present and future generations of the world.

South Africa takes its obligation to present and future generations of the world very seriously. As the Department of Tourism, we have adopted strategies to support not just World Heritage Sites but also our National



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Parks and sites of national significance. These iconic sites serve as attractors to our destination.

Funding of tourism infrastructure development in iconic sites such as the Baviaanskloof Interpretative Centre is important to us, not only to enhance the destination, but also to restore human dignity and respect. The investment in infrastructure helps to build an inclusive and sustainable tourism economy thereby creating more economic opportunities for our people. There is value in unlocking the economic potential of our heritage resources through tourism - in a sustainable manner, for broad beneficiation for local communities. This work also ignites tourism economic activity in rural areas, while addressing geographic spread and diversification of tourism products and opportunities.

The Department of Tourism secured R57 million from the European Union through National Treasury to construct this Baviaanskloof World Heritage Site Interpretation Centre and Leopard Trail Hikers' Huts. This was implemented in partnership with the Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency (ECPTA) within the Sarah Baartman District.

This project had two components. The Leopard Trail Hiking Huts project involved the upgrading of 12 sleeper hikers' huts along the three (3) camps of the Leopard Trail as well as existing services i.e. concrete pool, concrete braai facilities and water pumps. The second component involved the construction of this Interpretation Centre building which includes an information centre; conference room; administration office;



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Gallery; Kitchen and Cafeteria.

In construction, this project created 75 jobs for local people (64 in the construction of the interpretive centre and 11 in the construction of the Hikers Huts). More than 30% of the project funds were spent locally, in subcontracting SMMEs and sourcing of materials, equipment and labour.

A Leopard Trail Operator, Linden Booth had this to say:

*"Five years ago the Leopard Trail launched as a hike that required hikers to bring their own tents and mattresses. Initially many hikers did not want to bring their own tents, or sleep outdoors in winter. Now, with the new huts, bookings for the hike have doubled in number. Added to that, the huts superb design with 50% of the walls being glass allowing beautiful views into the surrounding nature, make these huts arguably the best hiking huts in South Africa. And with the Leopard Trail now being one of the most popular hikes in the country, the community project that runs the trail has now doubled the amount of local workers who are permanently employed from 5 to 10 people."*

COVID 19 brought all travel and tourism to a halt. But the global pandemic has also made the world realise the value and importance of tourism and the freedom to travel, in particular the freedom to enjoy wide open spaces. Since April last year, just under 6 000 (5 914) visitors have come to the Baviaanskloof Site. The Leopard Trail is very popular and is fully booked, and hikers have expressed appreciation of new infrastructure proving that



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it indeed does enhance the visitor experience. We anticipate the visitor numbers to steadily increase, and more importantly, create sustainable benefits for the local communities in the region. This centre will play a key role in our quest to educate and promote the unique natural beauty and history that defines us as a people, a country, and a globally distinct destination.

Travellers seek out

- Authentic experiences – rich culture & heritage, adventure and natural beauty
- New and diverse tourism offerings
- Connecting with the locals, through culture, heritage and history
- Memorable experiences

Working together, forging partnerships and collaborations is key to building a sustainable tourism economy. A word of appreciation to all the stakeholders who made this development a success, and everyone who has come here to be part of this important occasion, the Department of Tourism, the Provincial Department of Finance, Economic Development, Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Sarah Baartman District Municipality, the project implementer, and members of the community from various wards.

This year in celebration of International Tourist Guide Day (ITGD), the



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Department in collaboration with the ECPTA, arranged an immersive experience of the Leopard Trail for tourist guides and journalists – showcasing the newly built hikers' trail huts and the wide-open spaces of the Baviaanskloof World Heritage Site. The Baviaanskloof World Heritage Site is open for business and looks forward to welcoming all South Africans to have an experience of the natural beauty of this magnificent country.

**ENKOSI, BAIE DANKIE**