



Speech by Mr Fish Mahlalela, Deputy Minister of Tourism, on the occasion of the World Tourism Day Celebrations held in the North West Province

27 SEPTEMBER 2023

Let me express my deepest appreciation to all of you, for attending to celebrate this important day in the calendar of the Tourism sector.

Today, we gathered here to mark the World Tourism Day under the inspiring and forward-thinking theme, “Tourism and Green Investment”, it behoves us all to appreciate our strides we made thus far in making an enterprise for everyone.

It therefore becomes imperative that we acknowledge the role of sustainable investments in forging a resilient and inclusive future for tourism.

In the words of former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, “Sustainable development is the pathway to the future we want for all.”

In the light of the UN Roadmap for a better world by 2030, the urgency for innovative solutions that transcend traditional investments has never been so great.

Programme Director, tourism extends beyond simply powering economies and creating jobs or offering wanderlust explorers unforgettable experiences; it is a formidable force in building cohesive societies.

It facilitates the breaking down of barriers of race, gender and class, thus fostering understanding and nurturing the rich tapestry of our shared humanity.

As we celebrate today, we are mindful that we have come a long way from the precipice we faced during the days of the Covid-19 pandemic.

International travel is making a GREAT comeback, as per the statistics reported by StatsSA.

From January to July 2023, a total of 4.8 million international tourists arrived in South Africa, signifying a remarkable 70.6% surge compared to the same period in 2022.

While this resurgence is undoubtedly encouraging, it’s important to note that these figures still lag behind the pre-pandemic levels of 2019 by a 19.0% shortfall.

We are however encouraged by these figures. Within these 4.8 million arrivals, the African region has the biggest share while Europe played a significant role, contributing 14.3% (equivalent to 682,828) of the total tourists.

These significant numbers paint a vibrant picture of South Africa’s continued allure, an epitome of the global trend steering towards a post-pandemic recovery in travel.

It is clear that our nation remains a destination of choice, captivating the hearts of many with its rich cultural heritage, diverse landscapes, and remarkable wildlife.

However, to reach our ambitious target of 21 million arrivals by 2023, we must flip the script and drive a clear well illuminated united path to our destination marketing.

We must implement insight-driven marketing strategies and strengthening telling the story of our beautiful destination as we continue our efforts of attracting the new traveller in the post-COVID-19 landscape.

The enchanting beauty of South Africa has not gone unnoticed, as recently, we were bestowed with the prestigious title of the “Best Country” by the readers of the UK’s Telegraph Travel publication, with our iconic city, Cape Town, crowned as the “Best City in the World”.

This is a testament to our sustained commitment to promoting South Africa as a top tourist destination.

As we stand here today, I am filled with a deep sense of gratitude towards every traveller who chose South Africa as their destination, thereby playing a pivotal role in revitalising our economy and breathing life back into our tourism sector.

Our contribution has been invaluable in implementing the Tourism Sector Recovery Plan, setting us on a trajectory of accelerated economic growth.

As we forge ahead, let us carry this momentum, steadfast in our determination to surpass the pre-COVID-19 arrival numbers for foreign arrivals.

South Africa is open for tourism, embracing visitors from the rest of our beloved continent of Africa and beyond to immerse themselves in the rich tapestry of diverse cultures and heritages that define us.

We wish to express our gratitude to everyone for the continued support and belief in the beauty and spirit of South Africa. Let us grow stronger daily, showcasing South Africa as a mosaic of beautiful experiences waiting to be explored.

To this end, as we venture further, we must steer our vessel with a compass calibrated towards sustainability.

I must emphasise that green investments play a cardinal role in nurturing a tourism sector that is both economically vibrant and environmentally responsible.

Our vision is clear: to foster a tourism ecosystem where every investment is green, every endeavour nurtures our environment, and every step brings us closer to the Sustainable Development Goals outlined for 2030.

Now is the time to innovate, to think beyond the beaten path, to envision tourist facilities powered by renewable energies, accommodations that are a haven of green architecture, and experiences that enable our guests to leave a green footprint behind.

By investing in green technologies and infrastructures, we not only preserve our exquisite landscapes for generations to come but also spawn new avenues for economic growth and job creation.

It is therefore, our moral imperative to safeguard our rich cultural heritage.

As we wrap up the 2023 September celebrations of Heritage Month, a period that also heralded Tourism Month, we find ourselves at a pivotal moment to renew our pledge. A pledge to prioritise investments that uplifted local communities, fostering a symbiotic relationship between tourism and the rich tapestry of authentic South African culture.

We must cherish this moment every September and beyond, acknowledging it as an invaluable opportunity to celebrate our deep-rooted and diverse cultural traditions.

We must also continue to showcase the vibrant diversity and richness of South Africa's cultural heritage through a kaleidoscope of avenues such as attire, music, dance, poetry, and culinary arts and indeed our signature welcoming spirit.

Furthermore, we must ensure that every day a tourist (whether domestic or international) spends in South Africa, stands as a canvas, ready to be painted with the vibrant colours of our nation's heart and soul.

Today we are here celebrating World Tourism Day and to breathe life into this day, celebrations were orchestrated at local, provincial, and national levels, where South Africans proudly donned their indigenous and national attire and gathered over the wide diversity of our culinary offerings.

These celebrations were a festival for our senses, a symphony of music, a theatre of dance and poetry, accompanied by the enticing aroma of indigenous cuisine brought forth by local vendors showcasing their produce and crafts.

Within this rich tapestry, we found our living human treasures, the bearers of indigenous knowledge, individuals steeped in skills, wisdom, and history, covering various aspects of our shared living heritage.

As a tourism sector, let's do our part in promoting our heritage and envision homestays that tell untold stories and experiences that celebrate our indigenous knowledge, music, crafts, and gastronomy.

Therefore, we must encourage investments that empower local entrepreneurs and foster local economic development.

As we forge ahead, let us remember that tourism is a beacon of hope, an instrument of fostering empowerment, nurturing local entrepreneurs, and it is a sector that is truly by and for the people of this vibrant, diverse, and culturally rich nation.

Programme Director, our journey towards sustainable tourism is not solitary; it requires a convergence of minds and a coalition of efforts across all stakeholders in the industry.

We applaud the global and regional partnerships that have taken flight, like our promising collaboration across the African continent and the vibrant routes that now connect us to the rest of the world breathing fresh life into our tourism landscape.

As we look into the horizon, the forward bookings paint an optimistic picture, pointing to a surge in international tourism in the coming months.

However, the path towards a green and resilient tourism sector is replete with unmet challenges.

It is up to us to rise to this occasion to foster a brand of tourism that stands tall on the pillars of sustainability and inclusivity.

We are on the cusp of a revolution where green investment is not just a choice but a cardinal principle that guides our path to recovery and beyond.

By 2024, as predicted by the UN World Tourism Organization, we are aspiring to stand in a world where our tourism sector has not just recovered but has evolved into a greener, cleaner, and more sustainable space.

As we stand united in our commitment to nurture a tourism sector that is the epitome of sustainable development, I call upon each one of you to be the bearers of this vision, the architects of this green revolution.

Remember, the investments we make today are the seeds that will nurture tomorrow's garden.

Let us move forward with foresight and care, united in our purpose. We aim to foster a future of tourism that harmonises with nature, promotes prosperity responsibly, and embodies a green heart.

I am talking here about the proverbial "Triple Bottom Line," which consists of "People, Planet, and Profit."

Let us set forth on this path with vigour and determination, for the road ahead is green and bright, brimming with sustainable, innovative, and genuinely South African possibilities that INSPIRE NEW WAYS.

Let's make South Africa a great place to visit and a green destination to remember.

Thank you!

---

Ends/

Issued by Office of the Deputy Minister of Tourism, Fish Mahlalela

For Media Enquiries on World Tourism Day, contact:

Mr Dumisani Mlangeni

Cell: 083 561 8244

Email: [DMLangeni@tourism.gov.za](mailto:DMLangeni@tourism.gov.za)