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SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF TOURISM, PATRICIA DE LILLE, DELIVERED ON THE OCCASION OF THE TOURISM SUMMER CAMPAIGN LAUNCH HELD IN THE EASTERN CAPE

DATE: 19 SEPTEMBER 2023

MEC for Finance, Economic Affairs and Tourism, Mlungisi Mvoko
Sarah Baartman District Mayor, Councillor, Deon de Vos
Kouga Municipality Deputy Mayor, Councillor Timothy Jantjies
Mayoral Committee Member from the Kouga Municipality, Councillor Lorraine Maree
Kouga Councillor Reinhardt Foley
Senior Management from all Departments of Tourism
SA Tourism senior management
TBCSA representative, Glenton de Kock, CEO of the Southern African Association for the Conference Industry
Tourism authorities and associations
Members of the media

Molweni, I would like to express my gratitude to everyone for joining us today at the launch of our 2023 summer campaign. It brings me great joy to be in the Eastern Cape, a stunning province that remains largely unexplored by tourists.

Our decision to bring the launch of the summer campaign here is intentional - we are committed to highlighting the less-visited provinces and regions of our country.

We do this to shift the spotlight to every corner of our nation because tourism brings immense benefits to host communities and thus we want these benefits to be felt in even the most remote of areas.

All our provinces have the most amazing hidden gems and we are on a mission to highlight these hidden gems and showcase them to all of South Africa and the world. After all, local is lekker.

As we all welcome the peak tourism summer season we must showcase the unexplored beauty and hidden treasures that await discovery.

The beauty of the Eastern Cape

We couldn't have chosen a better province to do this than the province so rich in history and unparalleled beauty.

With over 800 kilometres of awe-inspiring coastline, this province boasts some of our country's most stunning beaches.

Its landscapes are adorned with jaw-dropping rock formations, and its ecosystems teem with a magnificent diversity of flora and fauna.

What sets the Eastern Cape apart is its unique offering of the "Big 7" – a thrilling roster that includes lions, leopards, rhinos, elephants, buffalos, southern Right whales, and Great White sharks.

We all know the province, the home province of Tata Nelson Mandela, but it is equally known for its warm and welcoming people, who extend generous hospitality to all.

Summer campaign objectives

As we kick off this summer campaign today, our message is clear: South Africa offers a treasure trove of experiences suitable for all types of travellers.

Whether you are a local looking to explore your own country without straining your budget or an international adventurer seeking new memories, we've got you covered.

Domestic Travel – the bedrock of the tourism industry

In most successful tourism destinations worldwide, the domestic market serves as the bedrock of the tourism industry.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when international travel faced severe restrictions due to global travel bans, the tourism sector leaned heavily on domestic tourism to sustain itself.

I have said it before but let me say it again – we would like to thank all the South Africans who have heeded the call and explored our beautiful country.

In the first half of 2023, South Africans took 18.8 million domestic overnight trips up 23.4% when compared to the first half of 2022.

Overnight spend was also up by 21.2% to reach R52.2 billion.

South Africans spent 65.7 million nights away from home and this was up 24.4% when compared to the first half of 2022.

Like with all our campaigns, we want to use the summer campaign to further foster a culture of travel among South Africans.

We understand that for this to be effective, ensuring affordability of travel should be at the forefront of our efforts.

We are well aware that consumers are grappling with the challenges of a high cost of living. Consumers are facing an overall rise in the cost of living, driven by escalating fuel prices, and interest rate hikes among others.

Since November 2021, the Repo rate has increased by 350 basis points, bringing South Africa's prime interest rate to 10.50%.

Since travel expenses are often seen as discretionary spending, this poses a huge risk for domestic tourism.

Research has shown that in light of the rising cost of travel, consumers are actively seeking better value for their money.

To respond to this, the industry continues to explore creative ways in which to make travel more affordable.

At the beginning of this month, we hosted Sho't Left Travel Week from September 4th to the 10th, during which we featured a range of discounted deals for local travellers.

These enticing offers were advertised on the Shot Left website, and I am delighted to report that many South Africans seized the opportunity. The results are remarkable: 920 deals were loaded for the Sho't Left Travel Week (32 in the Eastern Cape)

We had 94 660 people come to our website in that week.

The "Book now" button was clicked on 10 481 times - this is the number of leads that we managed to create for the trade partners that loaded their deals.

The most popular deals were those that offered on average R3 000 for 2 people or R5 000 for 4 people.

The above shows the power of the greater industry in helping domestic travellers explore their country.

There are many other initiatives through which the industry continues to show that it is dedicated to ensuring that exploring South Africa remains accessible and enjoyable for everyone.

Encouragingly, there is notable interest in domestic travel sustained by a strong desire to explore. Hence, domestic travel has now exceeded the pre-COVID figures.

International Travel performance

International travel is also making a robust comeback, with promising 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.

However, we are encouraged by these figures. Within this of 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.

This reflects a substantial 61.5% increase compared to the corresponding period in the previous year.

Among European nations, the United Kingdom continues to be a pivotal source market for South Africa.

Africa's international tourism. A staggering 204,885 UK tourists ventured to South Africa during this period, registering a remarkable 45.7% growth in comparison to previous years.

Germany also exhibited strong growth, with 132,302 German tourists arriving, constituting a 73.3% increase in arrivals.

Similarly, the Netherlands sent 68,421 visitors, a commendable 60% rise. These statistics indicate a promising trajectory for international travel, suggesting a steady resurgence and a hopeful return to pre-pandemic levels.

Message to South Africans – Let us be hospitable and welcoming

At this moment, I'd like to passionately encourage each one of us to embrace the spirit of hospitality towards all visitors, be they from our own nation or from abroad.

Let us treat people the way we want to be treated. Whether we are locals, tourism establishment owners or restaurant owners and staff. Let respect, love and Ubuntu lead us.

South Africa has always been renowned for the genuine warmth of her people, a sentiment beautifully embodied in the concept of Ubuntu.

Let us wholeheartedly adopt this ethos of welcome, understanding that each tourist represents a catalyst for numerous jobs and livelihoods, spanning a wide spectrum of industries.

By opening our hearts and doors, we not only enrich our nation's cultural tapestry but also sustain and uplift countless lives within our vibrant communities.

Being hospitable means Treating travellers with equality.

Ensuring a hospitable welcome for tourists also means making sure that our establishments and offerings are truly inclusive and that they are spaces where everyone, without exception, feels a warm sense of welcome.

During Africa's Travel Indaba in May this year, a significant milestone was reached when various stakeholders, including industry representatives and operators, came together to endorse the inclusivity pledge.

This pledge signifies the industry's unwavering commitment to fostering an environment that is not just hospitable but also genuinely inclusive for all travellers.

At its core, this pledge underscores the paramount importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in tourism.

Through this heartfelt commitment, the industry declared that members of the LGBTQ+ community, individuals with disabilities, and people from diverse races and religions must all find themselves embraced and valued within our travel destinations.

It does not end there. For there to be true inclusivity we must also strive to transform our workforce to ensure that it mirrors the rich diversity we aspire to welcome at our destinations.

Such inclusivity will also provide a much-needed platform for historically marginalised voices to influence how we promote tourism and extend an authentic, heartfelt welcome to all travellers.

What is particularly noteworthy about this pledge is the mutual commitment among its signatories to hold each other accountable for the tangible actions and progress made in this essential journey towards a more inclusive and inviting tourism industry.

Addressing safety

Another one of our primary areas of focus, as we strive to boost tourism figures, is the paramount issue of safety. We acknowledge the legitimate concerns that have arisen due to unfortunate incidents involving tourists.

We want to provide unequivocal assurance to the public, domestic travellers, and those planning visits to our country in the near future that we are vigorously advancing our efforts to enhance safety for all.

Our strategy encompasses a range of initiatives, including substantial investments in technology and human resources.

I am delighted to announce that we have earmarked R174.5 million for the training of over 2,300 Tourism Monitors nationwide during this financial year. 150 of the tourism monitors will be

deployed to the Eastern Cape in addition to tourism monitors that will be deployed to airports and national parks.

These monitors will be strategically deployed to all provinces before the peak summer season starts to assist in safeguarding top tourist attractions and national parks.

Their responsibilities include patrolling identified attractions, promoting tourism awareness, providing essential information to tourists, and promptly reporting any criminal incidents to SAPS and other pertinent enforcement agencies.

These young individuals will receive an NQF 3 certification and additional training from the South African Police Service. Their deployment is scheduled for late October to early November 2023, perfectly aligning with the upcoming summer tourist season.

Furthermore, I'm pleased to share that the Department of Tourism now has a representative on the Stability Priority Committee at NatJoints with members from all law enforcement agencies, reinforcing our commitment to safety.

Moreover, a strong move from the private sector to enhance tourism safety is the Secura app, which has been launched by the Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBCSA).

The App seamlessly connects travellers and tourism stakeholders with a multitude of emergency service providers, ensuring swift assistance when every second counts. To manage this technology, TBCSA has set up a dedicated Tourism Operations Centre.

We have also collaborated with SAPS to develop tourist safety tips, conveniently accessible via a QR-code scan.

These safety tips have also been integrated into the MY-SAPS App for easy reference.

SAPS is actively working on enhancing its app's features and promoting greater awareness about its availability.

All these multifaceted measures and collaborations underscore our unwavering commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of all tourists exploring our beautiful nation.

Collaboration within the sector

In our effort to address the myriad challenges before us, collaboration becomes paramount. The period we are emerging from has imparted a valuable lesson – that through collaborative endeavours, we can achieve the seemingly impossible.

Competitiveness in our industry hinges on collaborative efforts. Indeed, collaboration has emerged as the driving force for progress.

That is why within government we are working closely with departments such as Home Affairs and Transport to unlock some of the bottlenecks affecting tourism recovery.

For example, Home Affairs has substantially expanded its e-visa program, which covers 34 countries in 2023, a significant increase from the 14 countries in 2022.

Minister Aaron Motsoaledi has assured us of his commitment to help us achieve our tourism arrival targets while upholding national security.

The Department of Transport has also partnered with TBCSA to streamline the process of granting tourism vehicle operating licenses. The department has also, ceased issuing penalties on tour operators awaiting license renewals from the department.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is with great enthusiasm that we declare our readiness for an exceptional summer season ahead.

Anticipation is high as this upcoming season holds the promise of being the most remarkable we've witnessed since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As we step into this season, we do so with renewed optimism, fuelled by the sector's notable recovery in recent months.

I want to thank the tourism sector – public and private stakeholders - for all their hard work to grow tourism and let us continue working harder to welcome more visitors and exceed 10 million arrivals by the end of March 2024.

To all the travellers both local and international - our establishments are primed and eager to extend a warm welcome to you.

Our vibrant communities are poised to share their rich stories and experiences with you. We stand ready to assist you in crafting cherished memories.

We invite you to become a part of our exceptional narrative. Come embark on a journey to explore the myriad attractions this summer has to offer.

We look forward to welcoming all our visitors and enjoying a safe, happy and busy summer tourism season with you all.

Come visit. Zwakala. Thank you and God Bless.

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