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MPUMALANGA PROVINCE
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Mpumalanga

TOURISM AND PARKS AGENCY

An Entity of the Department of Economic Development and Tourism

MEDIA STATEMENT

Date: Thursday, 01 September 2022

Attention: Journalists, News Editors and Executive Producers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MPUMALANGA HOSTS THE PROVINCIAL TOURISM LEKGOTLA TO ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS AND PROPOSE INTERVENTIONS TO REVIVE THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

Mbombela – Mpumalanga MEC for Finance, Economic Development and Tourism, Mr. Prince Vusumuzi Mkhathshwa, says the high level of crime directed at tourists visiting the Province remains a major concern, and gives him sleepless nights. MEC Mkhathshwa said this when opening the two (2) day Provincial Tourism Lekgotla at *The Nutting House* Conference Centre in Burnside, Mbombela yesterday (31 August 2022).

“This unwarranted behaviour sends a wrong message to visitors and would-be visitors, that tourists are not welcomed in our Province. Common sense assumes that anyone who is not well received, will think twice before going back to the place where they felt unwelcomed. And that is why we will continue to work relentlessly, with our law enforcement agencies, to protect our tourist routes across the Province”, said the concerned Mr. Mkhathshwa.

Also present at the Lekgotla, was the MEC for Public Works, Roads and Transport, Ms. Mohita Latchminarian, who indicated that her Department has drastically improved the conditions of roads along the Province’s tourist routes by resurfacing them and patching potholes.

“Our department is working hard to rejuvenate the roads in the tourist routes. Just over the weekend, I was driving in one of such roads and I saw two (2) potholes; I immediately contacted the HOD to dispatch the team to repair those potholes, and this has already been done. In fact, most of the time I am in overalls because I am on the ground, making things happen. I therefore commit that all our roads will be attended to and accordingly repaired”, said Ms. Latchminarian.

MEC Mkhathshwa has also announced that another world-class tourist attraction facility under planning, following the groundbreaking skywalk currently under construction at the God’s Window near Graskop, is the development of a cable car at the Three-Rondavels in the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve, that will connect the area to the Swadini Dam.



“As the Province, we are also planning to develop a social activity-based hotel with 440 beds, and there might even be a need for the issuing of a casino license or even re-directing the awarding of the fourth casino license to this site of tourism product development. Ultimately, this will see Graskop becoming the core town of tourism in the Province”, added Mkhathshwa.

It is anticipated that these envisaged tourism products will triple the current number of tourist arrivals in Mpumalanga, once completed. Mr. Mkhathshwa further announced that the Province intends to develop four (4) towns as pure tourism towns; namely, Graskop in the Thaba Chweu Local Municipality, Hazyview and Barberton both in the City of Mbombela, and Emgwenya (formerly Waterval Boven) in the Emakhazeni Local Municipality.

One of the resolutions of the Lekgotla was the development of a new tourism product, to be known as *Mpumalanga@360 Route*, which will cover the three (3) districts of the Province in one, and will include the Province’s Heritage and Liberation Routes (starting from Delmas, going around through to Ermelo, Mkhondo, down to Mbuzini, KaNyamazane), continuing to the areas around Graskop, Bushbuckridge, Mashishing, Waterval Boven, Botshabelo, amongst others. This new Route will be packaged and launched in due course. All stakeholders have further agreed to collectively contribute financially, to provincial marketing campaigns, moving forward.

At the end of the Lekgotla, all stakeholders pledged:

1. To immediately revive the *Tourism Think Tank* of all relevant government and private stakeholders, as a structure, as per the signed 2019 agreement currently in place, which will meet at least quarterly;
2. That the *Think Tank* will be responsible for the roll-out of the 2019 signed Tourism Blueprint Agreement;
3. That the *Think Tank* will be responsible for the confirmation of the resolutions of the last two (2) days, and for the formulation and roll-out of an implementation plan to give effect to all of those resolutions.

The focus areas of the discussions at the Lekgotla included:

- The importance of tourism attractions and infrastructure, catalytic projects and funding thereof;
- Enhancing destination competitiveness in relation to marketing;
- Achieving transformation and skills training in the tourism sector;
- Tourism safety and security;
- The role of municipalities in tourism development;
- Achieving better cooperation, not only between the Private sector and Government, but also among role players in similar environments;
- Strengthened community involvement at all levels;
- Improved capacitation of tourism officials in all sectors;

- Exploitation of existing opportunities;
- Coordination and pooling of marketing, financial and product development resources;
- Promoting ambassadorship amongst all citizens of Mpumalanga.

-ENDS-

***Issued jointly by the Department of Economic Development and Tourism & Mpumalanga
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