

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR FINANCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM, MR PV MKHATSHWA, MPL, DURING THE OCCASION OF THE 2022 TOURISM MONTH MEDIA LAUNCH HELD AT MFULENI PARK, KANYAMAZANE, CITY OF MBOMBELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

Monday, 05 September 2022

Programme Director, who is the acting CEO of the MTPA;

Executive Mayor of the City of Mbombela Local Municipality, Councillor Sibongile Makhushu;

Acting Head of the Department of Economic Development and Tourism, Mr Nathaniel Sebitso;

MTPA Board Chairperson, Mr Victor Mashego;

Other MTPA Board members present;

Our partners in the tourism sector;

Members of the media present;

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Good evening!

1. There is a notion that **travel is an investment in yourself**; through travelling, you will come to know about things you never knew about before. Simply put, **travel and tourism expand your wealth of knowledge**, and that is why we have all converged here this evening.
 2. Programme Director; thank you very much, therefore, for affording me this opportunity and platform, to talk to our stakeholders, most notably, our media, who we have invited to this year's official **Launch**
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of the Tourism Month. You are all aware that September is celebrated annually in South Africa, as the **Tourism and Heritage Month**; it is during this month, that we go all out **to promote domestic tourism** and to celebrate our heritage as South Africans, united in our diversity.

3. During this month, our quest is **to encourage South Africans, in the main, to travel and explore their country** so as to revive the sector, as well as to promote nation building and social cohesion through the iconic *Sho't Left* campaign, amongst others.
4. We are all aware about the negative impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on our tourism industry, over the past two (2) years; and what better way of reviving it **by taking a *Sho't Left to the Place of the Rising Sun***, our beautiful, serene, tranquil and picturesque Mpumalanga.
5. Undoubtedly, the Tourism Month **provides us a platform to celebrate, reflect and commemorate our country's milestones, in relation to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.**
6. Programme Director; Ladies and Gentlemen; we therefore celebrate September as the Tourism Month, purely **to highlight Mpumalanga's diverse tourism offerings**, as well as the tourism sector's significant contribution to our Province's and the country's economy, in general.

7. I have, and will continue to assert – without a shadow of doubt – that **tourism remains our gold mine; it is the goose that lays the golden egg for us in Mpumalanga.**

8. I am not being arrogant when I say that, but I am merely telling the truth as is, given the amount of undisputed archaeological evidence which proves that **Mpumalanga is the place where God rested** on the seventh day, after working very hard to six days to create Heaven and earth. Nowhere else in the world, except in our Province, **where God has a window** to look over His people!

9. Programme Director; before I dwell deeper into my talk, allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate **Team MTPA**, under the stewardship of Board Chairperson, Mr Mashigo, and yourself as the acting CEO, **for the job well done in obtaining a clean audit outcome; the first ever clean audit outcome** since the establishment of the Entity after the merger of the defunct Mpumalanga Tourism Authority and Mpumalanga Parks Board. Let us give them a round of applause!

10. Please receive my gratifying well wishes and congratulatory message Chairperson; this can only mean that this is the beginning of great things to come. Now, **the challenge I am giving you is to maintain the clean audit from now on; you can never regress henceforth.**

11. Programme Director; it is now a known fact that the tourism sector was ravaged by the shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic, and many businesses in the **tourism value chain** had to shut-down their

operations because of the restrictions imposed, in an attempt to contain the virus, and consequently, many people lost their jobs. However, all is not doom and gloom, given that our Department, working with the MTPA, have **mounted key and strategic plans to revive the sector**. And we are pleased that all our efforts and hard work is beginning to show positive results, as the sector is picking up and gravitating closer to the pre-pandemic levels.

12. In this regard, we have unleashed key initiatives and relief schemes aimed at helping businesses operating in the tourism and hospitality sector, to recalibrate and bring their businesses into full operation since the easing of the lockdown restrictions.
13. And in the context of **tourism performance** post the pandemic, it is indeed clear from the first-half figures, especially from January to June of 2022, that the tourism sector is bouncing back, and that the outlook is undoubtedly positive.
14. Earlier this year in Durban, we have, during Africa's Travel Indaba, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Tourism Authorities of the Kingdom of Eswatini and the People's Republic of Mozambique, to reactivate the **TRiLand Regional Brand Initiative**, which seeks to enhance the marketing of our tourism products, and ensure access to our markets in the tourism value chain.
15. Surely, we are on the cusp of turning the tide as the sector, as domestic tourism figures this year to-date, has exceeded pre-pandemic levels. However, inbound figures still have a way to go

before pre-pandemic levels are reached. And during her address to the media on the **‘Tourism Performance Post COVID-19’** last Thursday, the Minister of Tourism, Ms. Lindiwe Sisulu, indicated that Europe remained South Africa’s key overseas market, despite external shocks such as war in Ukraine.

16. Our industry is, indeed, beginning to show signs of positive growth; hence the need for us to double our efforts in ensuring that the tourism and hospitality industry in South Africa is underpinned by safe and secure environment. What continues to give us sleepless night, is the amount of crime directed to our visitors and tourists alike.
17. This has prompted us, together with the National Department of Tourism, to continue to strive to keep our tourists safe. Just last Friday, the Deputy Minister of Tourism, Mr. Fish Mahlalela and I, hosted a successful **Tourism Stakeholder Engagement to get to the bottom of this worrying and seemingly spiraling issue.**
18. The same issue was also raised by stakeholders, during the Provincial Tourism Lekgotla, also held last week. In this regard, all stakeholders which included municipalities and the private sector, have agreed to **collectively enhance our tourism safety strategies, and ensure there is an additional deployment of Tourism Safety Monitors in the notorious hotspots.** We further agreed to **strengthen relations with the private security companies** to create a safe and secure environment for tourists.

19. Another worrying issue is the protection of our engendered species; hence we are **enjoined to jealously safeguard our beautiful fauna and flora** against the backward criminal elements.

20. Programme Director; and as we kick-off the activities of the Tourism Month, in our quest to boost the Mpumalanga tourism ecosystem, we will simultaneously **celebrate and strive to preserve our culture and heritage**. One such culture in our diverse Province, is the Ndebele Culture, through the eyes of the world-renowned artist and icon, *Gog' Esther Mahlangu*. As part of our contribution, **we will erect a perimeter security fence around her homestead**.

21. Ladies and gentlemen; media of the media; we have an existential obligation to robustly market our tourism products as the Province, and it must be well captured that during this month of September, we will once again roll-out the **'Parks Week'** campaign, which is aimed at encouraging locals to perpetually visit our Nature Reserves, in order to promote a culture of travel and create awareness about our natural heritage.

22. Amongst many other important events we have in store for you this month, is the **Provincial Tourism Awareness Day** on the 17 of September, which is aimed at creating awareness about the importance of **Rural and Township tourism**. This Event will be held at **eManzana (formerly Badplaas) in the Chief Albert Luthuli local Municipality**. And Chairperson, we do this not oblivious of the fact that transformation in the tourism sector is moving at a snail pace; hence we have an existential obligation to promote rural and township

tourism to benefit our people. It is for this particular reason, that **we decided to host this year's Tourism Month Launch right here in Kanyamazane**, in order to boost the Rural and Township tourism. We are pragmatic, we do not only postulate about our quest to build a competitive rural and township tourism as destination of choice, but we take decisive actions.

23. Before I retreat, let me go back to the performance of tourism post-the COVID-19 pandemic; as indicated Minister Sisulu, the African region performed well at 50% below 2019 levels, with the African air market bringing over 80 000 arrivals. And according to the Minister, the **African air market visitors were mainly 'bleisure' travellers**; bleisure – meaning travelling for both business and pleasure – what is commonly referred to as 'mixing business and pleasure'.
24. In this regard, the biggest market was the African land market which saw a 109% increase in arrivals (over 1.6 million tourists) when compared with the same period in 2021. These numbers were mainly from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Lesotho.
25. Ladies and gentlemen; our tourism industry also receive a significant boost out of these markets, as at the end of last year, as our hotels and BnBs were fully booked, thus bringing positive spin-offs to the tourism value chain.
26. Programme Director; as I close, I would like to invite all and sundry, to visit Mpumalanga; we are unashamedly the best tourism destination of choice; we are an ideal destination for those who are

seeking a unique sensory awakening, and we commit that tourists we will leave an indelible and memorable experience in the minds of prospective tourists.

27. I leave you with the inspiring words of the renowned theologian and prolific writer, Saint Augustine, who was the Bishop of Hippo (now Annaba) in Algeria, and I quote: ***“The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page”***, unquote.

28. Are hope **you’re not all one-page readers** of what is available to see in Mpumalanga.

29. Please continue to share our Hashtags as you interact on social media platforms.

#VisitMpumalanga!

#ExploreMpumalanga!

#MpumalangaSinilindzile

30. It is my profound pleasure, to **launch the 2022 Tourism Month; Mpumalanga tourism is, indeed, open for business!**

31. ***Let’s grow Mpumalanga tourism together!***

Ngiyabonga!