

**SPEECH BY CHAIRPERSON OF THE MTPA BOARD AT THE TOURISM MONTH
MEDIA LAUNCH ON 1 SEPTEMBER 2015
STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF TOURISM MONTH**

Programme Director, Councillor Mokoena, who is the MMC for LED in the Thaba Chweu Local Municipality;

MEC for Economic Development and Tourism, Mr S E Kholwane;

Executive Mayor of Thaba Chweu Local Municipality, Cllr S. Mashego

MMC of Ehlanzeni District Municipality, Cllr B Mokoena

Chairperson of the Tourism Committee of the MTPA Board, Mr T Keetse;

Ward Councillor of Thaba Chweu Local Municipality, Cllr S Molobela;

Acting CEO of the MTPA, Mr Abe Sibiyi and his Executive Management Committee;

Vice President of Cycling South Africa (Mpumalanga Cycle Tour Organisator), Mr H Wagener;

President of Mpumalanga Cycle Union (Mpumalanga Cycle Tour Director), Mr T Viljoen;

Executive President Mpumalanga Cycle Union, Mr B Harmse

Tourism Industry Stakeholders;

Representatives of Regional Tourism Organisations;

Officials of the Department of Economic Development and Tourism

Officials of the MTPA;

Officials of the Department of Culture, Sport and Recreation

Members of the media;

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Good morning!

Annually South Africa celebrates Tourism Month in September to provide the tourism industry with the opportunity for a heightened focus on the importance of tourism to the local economy. It also serves as an opportunity to promote domestic tourism and create a culture of travelling amongst South Africans.

Tourism Month is celebrated in September to inspire South Africans to explore our country and visit the various tourists and holiday destinations. September is also a Heritage Month and families are encouraged to visit our heritage sites to reconnect with our past.

During the month of September, the MTPA will be implementing a number of programmes aimed at showcasing various parts of the province. The MEC will today highlight some of those planned activities. Tourism Month is important for us as MTPA as we use it as a platform to promote domestic tourism and further educate our communities about the importance of tourism and preservation of our heritage.

Responsible tourism ensures the preservation of heritage and culture, while creating an environment for our communities to share in the economic benefits it generates. Small positive actions by tourists can go a long way in improving the lives of local communities.

It is important for our communities to understand the importance of tourism and how it can have a positive impact in their lives. Tourism provides the much needed business opportunities and create jobs. It is therefore important to protect tourists visiting our local areas and not make them to fall victims of crime. We want to encourage the youth that are currently studying or completed their studies to explore opportunities of starting their own

tourism businesses in areas like tour operating, tour broking, guest lodge owners and many more.

Mpumalanga boasts a lot of world class tourism experiences that awaits your visit. Some of the well-known attractions are Kruger National Park, God's Window, Three Rondavels, Bourke's Luck Potholes, an array of waterfalls, Makhonjwa Mountains, a number of cultural villages, Mbombela Stadium, and many more historical sites.

We also have a number of lesser known attractions that we intend showcasing this month. Areas like Wakkerstroom, known for its wetlands; the liberation route in the Gert Sibande District; Genesis route in Umjindi Municipality; Botshabelo cultural village in the Nkangala District; rock climbing and abseiling at Waterval Boven; ghost tours at Kaapschehoop; Samora Machel monument in Mbuzini and many others.

As we celebrate tourism month in the province, there is so much more to offer that we cannot mention now. **Did you know that:**

- South Africa's first stock exchange was built in the town of Barberton in 1884 during the gold rush. By far the world's largest underground coal mining complex is in Secunda, making Mpumalanga South Africa's mining powerhouse;
- Pilgrim's Rest was the second town in South Africa, after Kimberly, to be electrified and that it got its electricity long before London did. The electricity was generated from a hydro electrical plant in the Blyde River Canyon built in 1911;

- The giant footprint otherwise known as the Goliath's Footprint embossed on a rock on a farm near Ermelo is 6ft long.

In conclusion, ngesiSwati sitsi "*kuhamba kubona*", "*to travel is to see*". Whenever we travel we become part of a global movement that has power to drive positive changes within our province. September is Tourism month. So, take a short left and discover a million new tourism experiences on offer.

Thank you.

Mr. Siphon William Lubisi
Chairperson
1 September 2015