

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR FINANCE,  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM, MR  
SIKHUMBUZO ERIC KHOLWANE, MPL, DURING THE  
LAUNCH OF THE *SONGIMVELO-MALOLOTJA 4X4 ROUTE*  
AT EBUTSINI CULTURAL VILLAGE, CHIEF ALBERT  
LUTHULI LOCAL MUNICIPALITY**

**Saturday, 05 December 2015**

- Programme Director;
- Executive Mayor of the Host Municipality, Councillor Busisiwe Shiba;
- Executive Mayor of the Gert Sibande District Municipality, Councillor Meshack Nhlabathi;
- Other Councillors present;
- Acting Head of the Department of Economic Development and Tourism, *Babe* Jacob Mgidi;
- Chairperson of the Interim Board of the MTPA, *Babe* Siphon William Lubisi;
- Other Interim Board Members present;
- Captains of the Tourism Industry
- Members of the media;
- Distinguished guests;
- Ladies and gentlemen;

San'bonani/ Good Morning

Programme Director;

1. We meet this morning, on the second anniversary of the passing away of the founding father of our democracy – *iSithwalandwe, tat'u*Nelson Mandela.
2. His towering presence still lingers on in the collective memory of the society past and the futuristic plans to Move South Africa Forward.
3. He has, undoubtedly, left behind a huge legacy which is revered by millions of South Africans, as well as the international community.
4. May I therefore request you to rise, and observe a moment of silence, in paying homage to this gallant struggle stalwart of our time – Comrade Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela.
5. **[PAUSE]**.....May his soul rest in eternal peace!

6. You may be seated.

Programme Director, ladies and gentlemen

7. The Provincial Government is committed to support the key productive sectors that will stimulate rapid economic growth and create decent employment.
8. We have thus identified Agriculture and Forestry, Mining, Manufacturing and indeed Tourism as key drivers of economic growth and job creation in the Province.

Tourism as economic growth driver

9. Tourism SA Tourism reports that tourism industry contributed R103, 6 billion to the GDP, or 2.9% between 2012 and 2013.
10. Tourist SA observed that the arrivals to South Africa grew by 6.6 percent or 587 thousand 6 hundred and 71 thousand to reach 9.5 million tourists in 2014.
11. At the Provincial level, tourists' arrivals in Mpumalanga grew by 1.0 percent from 1.132 million to 1.144 million in 2013 and 2014 respectively.

12. According to the latest available data, the total number of domestic trips increased by 11% in 2014 to reach 28 million trips compared to the 25.2 million trips taken in 2013.
13. The total revenue generated from domestic trips according to TSA was R26.8 billion in 2014, an increase of 11 per cent when compared to the R24.3 billion of 2013.
14. Our contention is that without tourists, our economy is bound for experience many challenges.
15. Without tourists, we cannot create enough jobs to respond adequately to the triple challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality in our Province.
16. The Honourable Premier DD Mabuza, in his State of the Province in March this year noted the same, and said, I quote

***Our natural resources and heritage are competitive advantages that we must leverage for the benefit of all the people of the Province.***

***To grow this sector, we will collaborate with industry players to enhance existing, and develop new, tourism products to***

***ensure that Mpumalanga becomes a destination of choice for domestic and international tourists.***

17. To this end, the Provincial Government has prioritised the diversification of the tourism product portfolio focusing specifically on the Blyde River Canyon, Loskop Dam Tourism Belt and the Barberton Development Clusters to take Mpumalanga Forward.

Programme Director;

18. Mpumalanga – *The Place of the Rising Sun*, is revered for its abundance of natural splendour and breathe-taking scenery which are catalysts for tourism growth.
19. We are home to the oldest and best preserved sequence of volcanic and sedimentary rocks in the world – the Makhonjwa Mountains situated on the South of the town of Barberton.
20. These rock formations which have been proposed to be listed as the World Heritage Site, dates back to 3, 5 billion years ago, hence the Makhonjwa Mountains.

21. The historic mountain area, forms part of the Trans-Frontier Conservation Areas (TFCA) development, which is one of government initiatives aimed at maximising tourism offering in the Province.
22. The Songimvelo–Malolotja Trans-Frontier Conservation Areas (TFCA) which is a mountain wilderness, offers adventure on off-road driving to support and promote expansion of tourism across borders.
23. We are therefore delighted to launch the 4X4 Route in this broader historic area of our Province which encompasses the greater Makhonjwa Mountain area.
24. The distance of the trails is between 20 to 30 kilometres.
25. The Somgimvelo’s Dunbar Trail offers many rivers-passing, and an opportunity, if you are fortunate, to see wild life in the form of elephants and buffalos.
26. The Ebutisini Trail is within a meandering mountainous terrain, and offers 4x4 drivers an adrenalin-pumping lifetime experience.

27. During this expedition, one will experience the unique mountainous terrain with spectacular scenic beauty and diverse fauna and flora, game viewing, cultural and historical experience through the Ebutisini Cultural Village, including learning about the history of mining gold in this area.
  
28. What this means is that, we offer you and our prospective tourists, an opportunity to explore both our breathe-taking Province of Mpumalanga and Swaziland via the Trans-Frontier Conservation Areas, unhindered by borders, in the comfort of your 4X4.

Programme Director;

29. We have resuscitated the *Triland Brand Initiative* to as part of promotion regional integration and to promote trade, investment and tourism between Mpumalanga, Swaziland and Mozambique.
  
30. This initiative is also at the heart of our strategy to develop and position TRILAND as a world-class tourism destination.

31. We therefore invite you to experience the wildlife, nature and breathe-taking scenery, which Mpumalanga is renowned for; the royal tradition and culture in Swaziland; and the pristine and exotic white sandy beaches of Mozambique.
32. As I close, may I also take this opportunity, to wish you and your families, a Merry Christmas and A Prosperous New Year!
33. *Together We Move tourism in Mpumalanga Forward!*
34. Ngiyabonga/ I thank you!