

ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR FINANCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM, MR SIKHUMBUZO ERIC KHOLWANE, MPL, DURING THE LAUNCH OF THE 2016 TOURISM MONTH AT THE LOWVELD BOTANICAL GARDENS, MBOMBELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

Thursday, 01 September 2016

- Programme Director;
- The Head of Economic Development and Tourism, *Babe Muzi Mkhize*;
- Deputy Chairperson of the Board of the MTPA, *Make Nomaswazi Shabangu-Mndawe*;
- Other Board Members present;
- The Acting CEO of the MTPA, *Babe Abe Sibiya*;
- Captains of the tourism industry;
- Officials from both the Department and our Public Entity – the MTPA;
- Distinguished guests;
- Members of the media;
- Ladies and gentlemen;

San'bonani/ Good Morning

Programme Director;

1. Novelist and poet, Wendell Berry once said and I quote:

“Nobody can discover the world for somebody else. Only when we discover it for ourselves, does it become common ground and a common bond, and we cease to be alone.” – Unquote.

Ladies and gentlemen;

2. Nothing can better explain the tourism industry, which allows people to **discover their world** for themselves.
3. It allows individuals to explore their localities, as well as other areas within and outside their countries;
4. Travel and tourism knows **no colour, no race and no gender** of a person. It is truly a **non-racial, non-sexist and non-discriminatory** industry which should be exploited and enjoyed by all citizens of the world.

5. This confirms Wendell Berry's assertion that ***“Nobody can discover the world for somebody else”***.
6. It is against this background, that **September has been declared as the World Tourism Month** by the United Nations' World Tourism organisation (UNWTO).
7. The UNWTO annually comes up with a theme to promote world – wide travel and tourism and South Africa follows a similar theme, while adopting it for national relevance.
8. This year, the UNWTO's theme is: **“Tourism For All”**.
9. During this month, we encourage our people **to travel, explore and know their beloved country**, South Africa.

Programme Director;

10. Tourism is a lucrative industry that has the **potential to create the much needed job opportunities** in order to fight the **triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality** currently characterising our communities.

11. As a result, we have identified it, in our Provincial Economic Growth and Development Blueprint – the **Mpumalanga Economic Growth and Development Path (MEGDP)**, as one of the priority sectors to be exploited.
12. Globally, tourist arrivals grew by **4.4 percent** in 2015 to reach a **record 1 billion 184 million arrivals**, contributing **1.4 trillion US dollars** in revenue.
13. The foreign tourist arrivals to South Africa decreased from **9 million, 549 thousand and 236 visitors in 2014 to 8 million, 903 thousand and 773 visitors in 2015** - a decrease of **6.8 percent**.
14. The decrease was mainly due to a combination of factors, namely: unfounded fears to contract Ebola in South Africa, continual global economic challenges and the unintended consequences of our new immigration regulations.
15. Foreign tourists contributed revenues of **71 billion** rand to the South African economy while total direct tourism spend reached over 113 billion rand.

16. Despite the national decline, Mpumalanga recorded an increase in foreign tourist arrivals from **1 million, 144 thousand and 021 visitors in 2014 to 1 million, 300 thousand and 271 visitors in 2015.**
17. This represents an annual **increase of 14-percent over 2014.**
18. However, Foreign Direct Spend in Mpumalanga decreased from **4-billion, 650-million, 340-thousand, and 195 Rand in 2014 to 4-billion, 608-million, 735-thousand, and 526 Rand in 2015, representing a -0.8 percent decrease.**
19. On the domestic front, the Province experienced fewer domestic trips in 2015 due to lack of disposable income, recording a decrease from **3-million, 330-thousand in 2014 to 2-million, 156-thousand domestic trips in 2015.**
20. The above picture I have just painted, calls on us to focus on the domestic tourism markets through **product innovation and robust marketing.**

21. Tourism is credited as the largest contributor to job creation in South Africa, as **one (1) in 12 people employed**, is working in the tourism sector.
22. Today, tourism remains an integral part of the lifestyle of much of society. It carries significant weight in the economies of many countries, and is one of the leading elements of international trade.
23. **It is therefore against this background, that we** should nurture this industry for the lifetime benefit of our people.
24. One of the major things we can do to nurture this industry is by **providing excellent customer service and experience** to our customers and these will in turn, indirectly market and sell our province - Mpumalanga.
25. Tourists deserve **'out-of-this-world' experiences and customer care.**
26. This is **one priceless and effortless gesture** we can ever plough into this industry, which is the **crown jewel of Mpumalanga – the Place of the Rising Sun.**

27. When we treat tourists well, they go back to their places and share their experiences with others. Unfortunately, the same goes when they receive bad experiences.

Programme Director; Ladies and gentlemen;

28. No one can ever dispute the fact that our beautiful Province offers a wide range of natural attractions which are any tourist's '**must-see**' **dream destinations**.

29. In the month of September, we should work even harder to inform potential visitors about our beautiful tourism offerings.

30. This year's Tourism Month is celebrated with emphasis and focus on "**Universally Accessible Tourism**", which calls on us to make sure that all people who live in our country and beyond, have equal and unhindered access to tourist facilities.

31. Our intention in the Province, through this theme, is to showcase the manner in which **universal accessibility** has succeeded in **including tourism as part of the daily lives of those physically challenged and the elderly**, to really show that tourism is for all.
32. We want to **demystify the myth** that only able-bodied individuals can become tourists.
33. With its real and potential contributions to social development and economic growth, it is important to ensure that **tourism is developed in a sustainable and inclusive way, and that it is accessible to all**.
34. Universally accessible tourism experience requires us to adopt a collaborative approach, both government and industry as partners.
35. In this regard, in order to advance “Accessible Tourism for All”, our Province, through the MTPA should encourage the tourism products to retrofit their facilities to cater for universal access to all citizens.

36. For those who are still planning to build new facilities, they should include universal access as part of their building designs and plans.
37. The National Department of Tourism already provides incentives for tourism products who comply with their universal access policy for rebates on grading and other issues through the Tourism Incentive Programme.
38. The high demand for **Universal Accessible tourism products** remains a priority in our Province, Mpumalanga.

Programme Director;

39. We are proud that as South Africa, we have joined the rest of the world by adapting to the **international trend of ensuring Universal Accessibility for all the people.**
40. Accordingly, we must **ensure that travelling packages and tourism products** are designed to meet and exceed the needs of people with disabilities, senior citizens and families travelling with children.

41. It is, therefore sensible for the tourism service providers to consider the **merits of accelerating measures to address the needs of this sector**, based on the predicted demand which far exceeds the current availability of Universal Accessible accommodation, services and facilities.
42. The benefits of such an improvement will not only result in economic spin-offs to the tourism industry, but will also **assist in the overall social integration project**.
43. As Mpumalanga, we lead by example hence we have **developed successful models for improving accessibility** in the industry, that will assist to achieve social inclusion of our people.
44. Our Public Entity, the MTPA, is ready and willing to implement such models in order **to improve universal access to its nature reserves** for hassle-free enjoyment by all citizens of our Province and the country at large.

45. The MTPA has started to upgrade the viewing sites in the Blyde River Canyon and it is my belief that these sites will provide improved access to all our visitors in the near future.

Ladies and gentlemen;

46. Tourism Month is meant to **promote the less visited areas** in the country, and to **give exposure to tourism attractions** in those areas.

47. As we launch this month today, we have invited journalists from across the country, to partner with us in giving exposure to such attractions which are in abundance in our Province.

48. We will take them on a **Sho't Left trip** to showcase our God-made, must - see tourist attractions, with the hope that they will go back to their respective places, to spread the word.

49. May I take this opportunity, to express our gratitude for the partnership we continue to strengthen with the media in this regard.
50. As we launch the Tourism Month today, we will also **unveil our Plan or Itinerary of Activities** for the Month.
51. Amongst other activities for Tourism Month 2016, the MTPA will host the **annual Lilizela Awards on 09 September** to recognise service excellence in the tourism industry.
52. On **17 September** during the **Provincial World Tourism Day celebration at Mgwenya (Waterval Boven)**, the MTPA will also **launch the Mpumalanga Convention Bureau** that will bid and focus on **business events**.
53. We know that Provinces which invest in business events, have shown a dramatic increase in the number of domestic tourism arrivals.

54. Mgwenya (Waterval Boven) is one of those towns that need our intervention through tourism to boost the local economy and create jobs for the people there.
55. The MTPA will again this year host the **Mpumalanga Parks Week** that was introduced in 2015.
56. The 2016 Parks Week will include a sponsored tour of **senior citizens** to some of our nature reserves and attractions.
57. These are some of our people who have never in their lives, had the opportunity to see some of our natural wonders.
58. The Tourism Month activities will culminate in the **National World Tourism Day celebrations in Parys in the Free State province on 27 September 2016.**
59. In closing, in the spirit of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation, let us move forward and realise ***“Tourism for All, [by] Promoting Universal Accessibility”***.

Ladies and gentlemen;

60. It is therefore my pleasure and honour to **officially launch the 2016 Mpumalanga Tourism Month.**

61. ***Together we move Mpumalanga forward*** by ensuring **Universally Accessible Tourism**

I thank you!