

ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR FINANCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM, MR SIKHUMBUZO ERIC KHOLWANE, MPL, DURING THE PROVINCIAL TOURISM AWARENESS DAY AT eMGWENYA/WATERVAL BOVEN, EMAKHAZENI LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

Saturday, 17 September 2016

- Programme Director, Chief Whip of eMakhazeni Local Municipality, Councillor Themba Masha;
- Executive Mayor of Nkangala District Municipality, her Worship Councillor Linah Malatjie;
- Executive Mayor of eMakhazeni Local Municipality, his Worship Councillor Thomas Ngwenya;
- Mozambican Consul to South Africa, her Excellency Ms Elizabeth Fernando Tondo;
- MMCs for Local Economic Development present;
- Councillors present;
- The Head of Economic Development and Tourism, Mr Muzi Mkhize;
- Chairperson of the Board of the MTPA, Mr Thulani Nzima;
- Other MTPA Board Members present;
- The Acting CEO of the MTPA, Mr Abe Sibiya;

- The representative of the Local Tourism Association, Ms Trina Matheson;
- Government officials present;
- Distinguished guests;
- Members of the media;
- Ladies and gentlemen;

San'bonani/ Good Morning

Programme Director;

1. In the words of English writer, poet and philosopher, **Gilbert Keith Chesterton**, and I quote:
2. ***“The traveler sees what he sees, [but] the tourist see what he has come to see”*** [unquote].
3. I have deemed this quotation as being relevant to today's event, given that we are here to **create awareness about the significance of tourism** in our daily lives and in turn, in the economy of our Province.

4. The tourism industry alone, contributes about **10% to the economy of South Africa**, given that it has **contributed R357 billion to the country GDP** (Gross Domestic Product) in 2014.
5. And this figure is forecast to increase tremendously in the next ten (10) years.
6. It employs **about 1, 5 million people** in our country, thus claiming a share of about 10% of South Africa's employment figure.
7. This is supported by the fact that **one (1) in every 12 people employed** are employed in the tourism industry.
8. As a result, tourism remains an **integral part of the lifestyle of much of our communities**, as it carries significant weight in the economies of many countries, and is one of the leading elements of international trade.
9. It should therefore continue to be **nurtured and exposed to our people**, as it has the potential to produce lifetime benefits to our people.

10. Our people should understand that being a tourist, **does not mean you have to come from outside your area** or Province of residence.
11. By merely travelling outside your area of residence, makes you a tourist of note.

Ladies and gentlemen;

12. Tourism has experienced a significant revolution over the past 50 years. In 1950, there were **only 25 million international tourists worldwide, and today there are around 1, 3 billion people travelling and exploring the world.**
13. When we travel, we come across new people, new sights and new ideas. Our perception of the world changes as we see more of it.
14. However we acknowledge that travelling can be quiet a difficult process for others, given the **accessibility hindrances they experience.**

15. According to the United Nations World Travel Organisation (UNWTO), **15% of the world's population is estimated to live with some form of disability.**
16. This **translates to one (1) billion people around the world** who may be unable to enjoy the privilege of knowing other cultures, experience nature at its fullest, nor experience the thrill of embarking on a journey to explore new sights.
17. To this end, **accessibility for all should be at the centre of tourism policies and business strategies** – not only as a human right, but also as a great market opportunity.
18. If we prepare now, all of us will benefit sooner or later from **universal accessibility in tourism**, given that the world's population is continuously ageing.
19. It is against this background, that this year's Tourism Month is celebrated under the theme, **“Universally accessible Tourism”**.

20. Through this theme, **we call on all stakeholders in the industry**, to make sure that all people enjoy equal and unhindered access to the tourism infrastructure.
21. With its real and potential contributions to social development and economic growth, it is thus important to ensure that **tourism is developed in a sustainable and inclusive way, and that it is accessible to all**.
22. Our intention is to **demystify the myth** that only able-bodied individuals can become tourists.
23. Accordingly, the National Department of Tourism has in June 2014, **published a Report on the State of Universal Access in all provincial parks**.
24. The study assessed the current status of Universal Accessibility Compliance in all provincial parks in South Africa.

25. This was meant:

- **To increase access to tourist attractions by people with disabilities or the elderly and those with accessibility needs;**
- **To enhance South Africa's ability to compete for events and conferences that require Universal Accessibility destinations; and**
- **To encourage the development of tourism experience attractions and destinations which are universally accessible.**

26. The findings of the study have however painted a dull picture, in terms of universal accessibility to provincial parks in South Africa.

27. It indicates that there are **232 government-owned provincial parks nationwide**, which provide different facilities and services, ranging from accommodation, restaurants, game drive and so forth.

28. The disappointing finding is that **only five (5) of these parks have been graded for Universal Accessibility on mobility**, and no assessment on vision or communication have been done.

29. A number of challenges were also identified, including the following:

- Lack of training or skills development on how to service customers with Universal Access needs;
- Lack of awareness about Universal Access and knowledge to implement Universal Access initiatives;
- Cost and capacity concerns in the implementation of Universal Access; and
- Lack of awareness around Provincial Departments and organisations managing provincial parks on the Universal Access agenda in its entirety.

30. It suffices to say that there is a common trend in the general hospitality industry that universal access, is not usually catered for.
31. It is therefore critical that all stakeholders should work together to improve the state of our tourism facilities, in order to address the issue of universal accessibility.

Programme Director;

32. As we celebrate the Tourism Month, let us continue to encourage our people to explore and know their Province and their country.
33. Today, we are here at eMgwenya, formerly known as Waterval Boven, to celebrate the **Provincial Tourism Awareness Day** which is aimed at educating our communities about the importance of tourism in our society.
34. eMgwenya/Waterval Boven presents an abundance **tourism and heritage opportunities**, given its historic sites and God-given scenic beauty.

35. It is in this area, where **63 Mozambican migrant labourers** perished in a train accident on the **16th of November 1949**.
36. This year therefore marks the **67th anniversary of that train disaster**. As the people of South Africa and Mpumalanga, we continue to grieve with our Mozambican brothers and sisters, who lost their beloved ones during that fateful day 67 years ago.
37. Despite being undesirable, the **disaster and the mass grave sites** however presents us an opportunity to commemorate those unsung African brothers and fathers on an annual basis, and at the same time, presents tourism opportunities for the area.

Programme Director;

38. This year also marks the **30th anniversary of the death of the first President of Independent Mozambique, Mr Samora Machel**, who perished at the mountains of Mbuzini in Nkomazi.

39. These two (2) incidents, thus presents a heritage tourism route which starts right here at eMgwenya until in Mbuzini.
40. It further unites the people of the two (2) countries who share the same grief.
41. In addition, the historic **ZASM Tunnel and the magnificent Waterfalls** are also tourism jewels to be explored and experienced by culture and nature lovers.
42. The magnificent mountains in the area also provide a **wide-range of hiking and adventure** type of adrenalin experiences.

Ladies and gentlemen;

43. In our continued drive to encourage people to travel during the Tourism Month, **the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA) will host the Parks Week from the 19th to the 23rd of September in all our Provincial Nature Reserves.**

44. The main objective of the Parks Week is to **provide day visitors free access into our provincial Nature Reserves.**
45. In addition, the MTPA, in **partnership with Standard Bank and Buscor in the Province, will undertake a fully catered special tour for the senior citizens** to some of our Nature Reserves, **from the 4th to the 7th of October 2016.**
46. This is part of our activation of the **social tourism programme** which is designed specifically for the active senior citizens of our Province.
47. Our clarion call to the people of Mpumalanga is clear **“Travel your Province like a Tourist.”**

Programme Director; Ladies and gentlemen;

48. The number of tourist arrivals in Mpumalanga has decreased in the past few years, and something needs to be done, to address the decline which is partly due to tough economic conditions.

49. Statistics indicate that the bulk of people cannot afford to travel, particularly in the domestic market.
50. It is against this background, that we have established the **Mpumalanga Conventions Bureau**, which aims to increase the number of visitors to our beautiful Province, **Mpumalanga – The Place of the Rising Sun**.
51. The Conventions Bureau is directly responsible for **bidding for business events, generally known as MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions)**.
52. Although it is still at an infancy stage, the Conventions Bureau will operate as a special unit within the **Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency**, and will provide business tourism support services, working together with industry partners.
53. We believe business events are a perfect catalyst feeding to our leisure tourism while adding significantly to revenue contribution and job creation in the province.

54. It therefore gives me great pleasure, to officially announce the establishment of the **Mpumalanga Conventions Bureau (MCB)**.
55. We trust that through this bureau Mpumalanga will be recognised as the most exciting and iconic business destination in the country.
56. As we continue to celebrate the Tourism Month, I would like to invite you to be tourism ambassadors in your localities.
57. I urge you to **practice responsible tourism, respect our culture and heritage, as well as strive to provide an excellent service.**
58. Excellent customer care is the cornerstone of any thriving business.
59. Tourists deserve **‘out-of-this-world’ experience and customer care.**

60. By giving tourists who are our customers, an **excellent customer service and experience**, you will unconsciously be appointing them as our Tourism Ambassadors.
61. 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**.
62. Let us travel, explore and enjoy the hidden treasures of our Province.
63. At the same time, let us also ensure that **our tourism facilities are universally accessible for all**.
64. ***Together we move tourism in Mpumalanga forward by ensuring Universal Accessibility for all!***

I thank you!