

ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR FINANCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM, MR SIKHUMBUZO ERIC KHOLWANE, MPL, DURING THE LAUNCH OF THE 2015 TOURISM MONTH AT FOREVER RESORT BLYDE IN MATIBIDI, THABA CHWEU LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

Tuesday, 01 September 2015

- Programme Director, Councillor Mokoena, who is the MMC for LED in the Thaba Chweu Local Municipality;
- MEC for Culture, Sport and Recreation, Ms Norah Mahlangu;
- Chairperson of the Interim MTPA Board, Mr William Lubisi;
- Acting CEO of the MTPA, Mr Abe Sibiya;
- Tourism Industry Stakeholders;
- Representatives of Regional Tourism Organisations;
- Officials of the Department and the MTPA;
- Product owners present;
- Members of the media;
- Distinguished guests;
- Ladies and gentlemen;

Good Morning

Sanibonani

1. Let me once again start by thanking the women and men who participated and contributed in whatever small way to advance the cause of eliminating gender based discrimination and violence during the August month, I do hope that the revolutionary consciousness of a non-racial, non-sexist democratic country will remain a permanent feature of the society 24/7, and 365 days a year.
2. Accordingly the premise of my address this morning seeks to illustrate a seamless flow of focus from August to September month.
3. The empowerment of women across all economic sectors was the subject of intense scrutiny during the month of August. Today we are launching Tourism month and there is no doubt that the performance of the tourism industry when it comes to the transformation agenda will be measured by good stories to tell on peoples empowerment and job creation targeting women, youth, disabled people, SMME's and co-operatives.
4. At the heart of meaningful participation of women in the tourism industry, it is the structure of ownership, partnerships and management. It should not just be limited to bed and breakfast establishments.

5. We want to see more women in the driving seat of tourism investment promotion, tourism product development and ownership.
6. This approach underlines the macro-economic policy of the ANC led Government geared toward re-distribution of wealth, income and opportunities in favour of the poor and the historically disadvantaged.
7. In pursuit of these objectives the emphasis of our tourism policy and strategy should be on:
 - Job creation and sustainable livelihoods;
 - Transformation of the industry;
8. Ladies and Gentlemen,
The need to reassert the importance of collaboration between government, industry players and civil society cannot be over-emphasised.
9. To achieve the full potential of the tourism sector, tourism must be government led, private sector driven, labour conscious and community based.

10. Our intention therefore through the Tourism month is to project the country through Mpumalanga Province as an attractive, affordable and safe destination for tourists in search of unique experiences.
11. This annual event seeks to promote domestic tourism as the engine room of our growth and development strategy to maximise the tourism potential of our Province.
12. It is during the same month, that the world celebrates ***World Tourism Day*** on the 27th of September under the banner of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (*the UNWTO*).
13. The UNWTO is the UN's agency responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism. According to UNWTO, the main purpose of *World Tourism Day* is to foster awareness among the international community about the importance of tourism and its social, cultural, political and economic value.

14. The critical element of our approach is to put emphasis on the balance between domestic and international tourism.
15. Ladies and Gentlemen,
The Mpumalanga Tourism Growth Strategy currently under review speaks to inter-alia positioning Mpumalanga as a leader of tourism excellence, responsible and sustainable tourism for the benefit of all communities in the province and beyond.
16. I hope going forward we will celebrate tourism month by handing over tourism empowerment projects targeting women, youth, people living with disabilities, SMME's and co-operatives not just speeches. We must start to do more and talk less.
17. A crucial part of our tourism strategy is the significant shift of focus in township economy and rural tourism underpinned by cultural heritage.
18. The presence of the MEC for Culture, Sports and recreation Honourable Norah Mahlangu is at the heart of integrated tourism governance guided by inter-governmental relations to support local municipalities.

19. Sustained relationships with Sanparks remains a matter of strategic importance for the province.
20. I have realised for example, that at the annual **Tourism Indaba** in Durban, we go there under different umbrellas though we come from the same Province. You will find municipalities on their own, even other government Departments.
21. I therefore propose that moving forward, we must come under one umbrella of ***Mpumalanga – the Place of the Rising Sun*** at such marketing platforms such as the Indaba and many others. I urge the private sector as well, to partner with us, as we promote one destination.
22. In terms of International relations and co-operation Mpumalanga Province has developed a trustworthy brand that is known for its value for money, to get return on investment we must therefore prioritise the right markets by strengthening the traditional markets and give specific attention to the African continent, regional and sub-regional focus such as the Tri-land agreement.

23. Other opportunities of critical importance which I don't see in our plans would include edu-tourism through the Mpumalanga University, the influx of international students who may come to study and live in Mpumalanga will be a potential source of large revenue.
24. Equally important if we are to successfully achieve the ambitious targets we have set ourselves, we must deal decisively with the challenges at hand mainly:
- Safety and security of tourists;
 - Market access, noting that international markets are dominated by established tourism companies;
 - Limited resources to roll-out tourism infrastructure and marketing which ordinarily would include signature events like the Mpumalanga Business Expo and cultural festival;
 - Lack of ICT infrastructure;
 - Poor financial management skills;
25. We are happy that the national government has established an Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) to deal with the concerns of the tourism industry to ensure that our

immigration regulations do not negatively affect our tourism growth.

26. Government prioritises the review of visa regulations to strike a balance between national security and tourism growth. Work is currently being done to address some of the industry concerns raised during the Minister's stakeholder engagement in June 2015.
27. It is therefore important to note that these challenges also constitute a barrier to radical economic transformation.
28. The establishment of the provincial convention bureau remains a priority. It is a must have in order to focus on promoting our province. Commercialisation of some of our game reserves as pronounced by the Honourable Premier on the SOPA remains our priority, whilst transactional advisors in relation to the skywalk and cable car projects will be appointed soon.
29. I am pleased to advise that we held our inaugural Provincial Tourism Intergovernmental forum, attended amongst others by the Executive Mayors, Members of

Mayoral committees responsible for tourism and other stakeholders.

30. The forum resolved that much focus must be paid to local tourism organisations and regional tourism organisations to enhance the potential of tourism in the province.
31. Programme Director;
As the Member of the Executive Council responsible for tourism in Mpumalanga, I am therefore delighted to **launch the 2015 Tourism Month**. Our Public Entity responsible for tourism growth in the Province, the MTPA, has planned a jam-packed programme of activities for the month of September with the aim of encouraging local communities to travel within their own Province, and explore a million new tourism experiences on offer.
32. This comprehensive programme of events will be made available to the members of the media, and will be published on the MTPA and DEDT's websites.
33. On Facebook this morning, Ms Daphney Bapela asked **"MEC where can I view specials for holidays so that I can take advantage of tourism month?"**

34. Ladies and Gentlemen;
The hosting of major sporting and entertainment activities has a significant role towards economic growth. As a Province, we welcome and appreciate such events, and will do our best to attract them to the Province.
35. We are delighted that we will host the Cycling Tour scheduled for some time next month, hence we implore on tourism product owners to become our Ambassadors and make those cyclists and others feel at home. The people of Mpumalanga are warm people, and we must capitalise on that strength.
36. Let's work together to make our tourism industry one of the best in the world.
- 37. *Together we move Tourism in Mpumalanga forward***
38. I now have the honour to declare and open September as the Tourism Month under the theme:

"A million new experiences awaits" you!

39. Enjoy Mpumalanga, the province of the rising sun...

40. **I thank you**