

**ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM,
MRS YN PINKY PHOSA, MPL DURING THE LAUNCH OF THE 2013 TOURISM MONTH AT THE
LOWVELD BOTANNICAL GARDENS IN NELSPRUIT, MBOMBELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY.**

Tuesday, 03 September 2012

Programme Director;

Executive Mayor of Mbombela Local Municipality, Councillor Cathy Dlamini;

Acting Chairperson of the MTPA Board, Ms Clara Ndlovu;

Board Member of the MTPA, Mr Elliot Ndala;

CEO of the MTPA, Mr Jacques Modipane;

Tourism industry stakeholders;

Regional Tourism Organisations;

Product owners;

Members of the media;

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Good Morning

Annually September is celebrated as the *Tourism Month*, in order to promote domestic tourism to encourage South Africans to visit and explore their own country. As a result, the Minister of Tourism, Mr Marthinus van Schalkwyk, has launched a new domestic tourism marketing campaign, known as, ***Nothing's More Fun than a Sho't Left*** that emphasises the fun of a domestic leisure getaway, and encourages South Africans to take short breaks. It reminds South Africans to take well deserved holidays to experience new places, new people and new things.

During the same month, the world celebrates ***World Tourism Day*** on the 27th of September under the banner of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (*the UNWTO*). The UNWTO is the UN's agency responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism. UNWTO advocates for the celebration and create awareness on the enormous contribution that the tourism industry makes to the provincial and national economic growth and job creation efforts.

The month has been selected because the UNWTO believes that celebrating World Tourism Day on September 27 is appropriate, given that comes at the end of the high tourist season in the northern hemisphere, and the start of the tourist season in the southern hemisphere, when tourism is of contemporary interest to many people worldwide, particularly travellers and those working in the tourism sector.

In South Africa, the hosting of these celebrations traditionally rotate in the less visited provinces, with the aim of addressing geographic spread by raising awareness of the hidden treasures in those provinces. In Mpumalanga, we have an abundance of such hidden treasures and unique tourism attractions.

Amongst others, we boast of the *God's Window* – which is a rare and unique site which I believe can link you with your Creator (the Almighty God). God's Window provides breath-taking views which in fact make you feel being closer to your God. We are home to the world's renowned Kruger National Park, the Blyde River Canyon and the oldest rock formations at the Makhonjwa Mountains in Barberton which dates back 3,5 billion years.

One of the hidden treasures which continue to be untapped, is the Wakkerstroom area. I don't know how many of you know that the area has got unique bird species that can only be found in this Province. Others are the oldest mining town of Pilgrim's Rest, the Lone Creek Water Falls in Sabie, and *Goliath's Foot Print* near Lothair in the Mpuluzi area in the Gert Sibande District.

Earlier on, I mentioned *God's Window*, and *Goliath's Foot Print* which is sometimes referred to as *Adam's or Jesus' Foot Print*, stresses the argument that indeed God started His creation in Mpumalanga. I implore all those who have not seen this giant foot print I am talking about, to take a *Sho't left* to the site and experience fun. Indeed Mpumalanga is the Alpha of the world, and no one can disagree with that.

Ladies and gentlemen;

The **2013 Tourism Month theme** is ***"Tourism and water – Protecting our common future"***.

What it means is that water is a vital resource in the tourism industry. We are all aware that South Africa is a water-scarce country, and as such the shortage our water will influence the growth of the tourism sector. It is against this backdrop that the Department of Water Affairs continues to

strengthen its *Water Wise Campaigns* to enlighten communities about the importance of this scarce resource.

Tourism remains one of the most crucial sectors towards economic growth and job creation, hence statistics indicate that **One (1) out of 11 people** who wakes up every morning is employed in the sector. This is one of the key sectors which the Province has identified in the **Mpumalanga Economic Growth and Development Path (*the MEGDP*)**, as having the potential to create the much needed job opportunities. We have to exploit this “gold” if we are to **reduce poverty, unemployment and inequality**, which are the triple challenges facing our Administration.

To show how much we value this sector, we have allocated **40% of the total allocation of R821 million 567 thousand** of the Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism in the current financial year, to tourism and bio-diversity.

Ladies and gentlemen;

Mpumalanga remains a lucrative tourist destination, especially for international tourists. I am proud to announce that we have improved from **position three (3) in 2011 to position two (2) in 2012**, in terms of international arrivals, according to figures released by the *South African Tourism*. During the reporting period (2012), we received almost **1.4 million international tourists** as compared to 1.3 million in 2011. Our main source markets remain Europe, the US and Asia, with the US and Asia being the fastest growing markets.

In relation to domestic tourism, I also delighted to announce that we moved from **position six (6) to position four (4)**. This has been attributed to the increasing number of South Africans visiting the province, which saw the number increasing from 2.2 million in 2011 to 2.9 million in 2012. I believe that the dream for the number one (1) spot is in the horizon.

Ladies and gentlemen;

We intend to improve our standings even much further come next year. It is against this objective, that we have lined up a number of activities for the month. We have planned to activate quite a number of activities in celebration of the Tourism Month in the Province. Amongst others is:

1. **The National Parks Week (09-13 September 2013)**

This week has been dedicated to give the public free access to the Kruger National Park by SANParks.

2. **The Tourism Safety Roadshows (17-20 September 2013)**

3. **The Tourism Awareness Day (21 September 2013)**

This event will take place in Chrissiesmeer.

4. **Women in Tourism Symposium (24 September 2013)**

This event will take place in Middelburg, targeting women who own tourism businesses in the Province.

5. **World Tourism Day celebrations (27 September 2013)**

On this day, we will join the country in celebrating World Tourism Day in the North West Province.

Ladies and gentlemen;

It is critical that you must know your country and your Province first – before being overtaken by outsiders. As the people of the "**Province of the Rising Sun**," we must take pride in selling what our province has to offer, whilst at the same time enjoying our product offerings. As they say, charity begins at home, and home is Mpumalanga.

Let the Sun continue to guide our prosperous way towards economic growth.

In Mpumalanga, we are indeed ***Inspiring new ways!***

Working together, we can do more to grow our tourism sector in order to reduce unemployment, poverty and inequality.

It is therefore my pleasure to launch the 2013 Tourism Month, under the theme: "***Tourism and water – Protecting our common future.***"

I thank you!