



MINISTRY OF TOURISM REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Address by Tourism Minister Derek Hanekom at the gala dinner for the International Tourist Guides' Day Celebrations in Cape Town

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The Deputy Minister of Tourism, Tokozile Xasa
The Director-General of Tourism, Victor Tharage
Officials of the provincial and national government present,
Local and international tourist guides,

It's always an honour and a privilege for me to be among the leading lights of our country, so I'm really delighted to join all of you here in celebrating International Tourist Guides' Day.

All of you, who are involved in the wonderful world of tourism in some way, are leading the way, and lighting the way, for many others to follow in your footsteps.

Some of you are involved in eco-tourism that protects our environment and preserves our planet, and some as innovative entrepreneurs and operators of businesses that keep our economy going.

Whatever it is, one thing is certain - your work in tourism leads people to get together and understand each other better and it strengthens the social bonds between people.

This is why tourism makes the world a better place – one which is more socially, environmentally and economically sustainable.

Tourist guides are leading lights in many ways. You are leading the way on a whole new career path, and many others will follow in your footsteps.

You are leading tourists to more meaningful and more memorable experiences – even life changing experiences. And, by doing so, you are taking the entire tourism industry, and the contribution it makes to our country, to greater heights.

Tourist guides have it within their power to create that magical moment of shared truth, by telling tourists accurate stories about places, people and events in a way that illuminates their understanding of our history, our heritage, and our culture.

Tourist guides are absolutely critical to the continuing success and growth of tourism in our country.

Everyone involved in the long and wide tourism value chain, whether as tourist guides, or as other links in the chain, has reason to feel very proud of how our sector is performing right now.

We enjoyed phenomenal growth last year, with more than 10 million international tourists arriving in South Africa.

Overseas arrivals grew by 18%, and arrivals from Africa improved by 11% over the previous year.

Now, we must aim our sights even higher.

We are nowhere near the ceiling of what we can achieve in tourism, and we are nowhere near the limits of what tourism can achieve for our country.

The Department of Tourism is already enhancing many of our destination's diverse offerings, and training more of our people to offer excellent service.

Those of you who were on Robben Island today would have felt the positive impact of our service excellence training programme. You may have seen the solar power plant that will enhance the island's sustainability when it comes into operation in a few weeks from now.

South African Tourism is marketing the magnificence of our country more efficiently and effectively abroad.

Government, the travel and tourism trade, and our many partners are working closely together to extract value from opportunities in domestic and international tourism as they arise.

But, we can all do a lot more.

We can continue to grow and enhance tourism, making it bigger and better every year.

We can grow tourism in a way that transforms the sector in a positive way and broadens ownership of tourism products. In growing tourism, opportunities are created for producers and suppliers of the broad range of equipment and consumables required by the tourism industry, as well as for entrepreneurs who find innovative ways of serving the needs of tourists.

Tourism already supports about 1.5 million jobs directly and indirectly in South Africa.

We can grow tourism in a way that creates and supports even more jobs, especially jobs for the youth, women and people living in rural areas.

Tourist guides are at the coalface of our efforts to enhance the tourism experience and to grow tourism here in South Africa and throughout the world.

We can rightfully claim that South Africa is at the forefront of the global development of tourist guiding. I felt extremely proud when I heard that Aluschka Ritchie has been chosen to lead the World Federation of Tourist Guides Associations.

Aluschka is here with us today - let's congratulate her on this wonderful achievement.

Many of you may know her from her time as the Chairperson of the Cape Tourist Guides Association, as a director on the Cape Town Tourism Board, or as the Western Cape representative of the South African Travel Services Association.

Our National Department of Tourism has put in place many measures to develop tourist guiding.

We now have 11 767 registered guides in South Africa. The Department of Tourism's training programmes are helping our guides to create memorable experiences for tourists.

At the Cradle of Humankind in Gauteng, and at iSimangaliso Wetland Park in KwaZulu-Natal - two of our eight very valuable World Heritage Sites - over 70 tourist guides have already been trained, and many have upgraded their qualifications. This program will be extended to other World Heritage Sites in the future.

Fourteen tourist guides are among the first intake of 28 frontline staff who are being trained in Russian and Mandarin, so they can assist tourists from the fast growing source markets of Russia and China.

To keep pace with rapid change in the tourism environment, a Continuous Professional Development programme will soon be offered to help guides update their knowledge and enhance their services throughout their careers.

A national database for tourist guides has been created, and a mobile application is being developed to help tourists to access registered tourist guides in the area they are visiting.

Turning to the future, the Department is developing a cross-border guide training programme, which we will pilot in collaboration with Namibia.

We are finalising new Regulations for Tourist Guiding to improve the process of registering tourist guides, and to ensure more effective compliance with the regulations.

The Department will also develop suitable content material for guides. The rich historic and cultural aspects of many of our tourist sites require careful documenting, so that tourist guides can access accurate and insightful content to tell their stories more meaningfully.

With these programmes in place, tourist guiding can contribute to responsible and sustainable tourism development, to the inclusive growth of tourism, and to peace and development.

I'm sure that those of you who spent the day on Robben Island would have been eager to visit the cell that held the world's most revered prisoner of conscience, Tata Nelson Mandela.

Without a guide, without any information about the person who occupied this cell, it would be just another prison cell in a block of identical cells.

But when a guide relates the story of Nelson Mandela, it is no longer just a story about a tiny, bare room designed to break the spirit of its inhabitants.

It becomes a most remarkable story about integrity and forgiveness, a story of how the human spirit triumphed over adversity and emerged stronger, with more humanity, and more compassion for people.

It is no longer only a story about a thin blanket folded neatly on the cold, hard floor of a prison cell.

It becomes a narrative about the warmth of the heart, about the beliefs and values that drove a man to emerge from this cell, without hatred and bitterness, to become the first democratic President of our country.

It raises profound questions within ourselves, about our own values, about our own sense of integrity, and our own commitment to serve our people, and all of humankind, in whatever ways we have chosen.

A visit to this cell becomes about finding the Madiba within each of us, and releasing the humanity within all of us.

In the hands of an accomplished guide, a visit to this cell can become a life-changing moment of shared truth.

By telling the South African story in compelling and meaningful ways, tourist guides are telling a story that has universal significance for the whole world.

Through this story, we can convey the things that really bind the people of the world together.

Through this story, tourism can promote understanding, tolerance and peace among people.

Dear friends, it has been a great pleasure to address you tonight.

I wish all the tourist guides here all the very best in your careers. Continue your important work with authenticity and passion.

You can be assured that you are making a difference in developing tourism, supporting our economy, and making the world a better place for all of us.

I thank you.

ISSUED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM