

The International Tourist Guides Day Speech

By Sidney Mikosi Fhumulani

Greetings

Colleagues from the Tourism guiding fraternity, Ministers and all the dignitaries, Tourism Department and all it's stakeholders I greet you all.

for the benefit of those who have not met me before , I'm Fhumulani sydney Mikosi affectionally known as Sydney the jungle Encyclopedia of Southern africa .

I am standing here today under the theme "*Peace and Development through Guiding.*" And as a point of departure I would like to mention that when one is repeatedly commended, held high and awarded the highest ranks for service in your field of expertise, you can be regarded as the best! Today you are not listening to just a plain Sydney Fhumulani Mikosi, you are really paying attention to the most Jubilant Best Guide of SA 2016.

After a lengthy process of nomination, Provincial interviews, Provincial Awards, National interviews, it was such a great honour to be announced the national winner for being the best Nature guide in South Africa.This award to me means a lot because it shows that the hardwork that I put in every day is recognised.this is just a confirmation that people recognise the good work I am doing and that is extremely humbling, it really shows that my contribution in Tourism Nature Guiding has been noticed by both the provincial and National adjudicators and is highly appreciated by both Provincial and National Tourism of South Africa..

I am currently the Head Field Guide of Marakele National Park which is a park folling under the Nothern region of the South African National Parks(SANParks).I am also serving as the Chairperson of the Limpopo Guides Associationa while at the same time serving as the Deputy Chair of the Waterberg Guides Association. Is just that there are still challenges to get all those asociations rolling.

I come from the Mikosi Royal Family that originates from a kingdom that was known as Tshivhase. Since a young age I was very interested in nature, but at first it was hunting activities that included fishing and catching birds that fascinated me, but somewhere along the way this changed to a more conservation related interest of learning as much as possible of nature's ways.the inspiration came from my parents who had a vision for me to acquire a qualification in Tourism and Nature Conservation – in which they have also been a constant encouragement and support.I was also inspired by my teachers of the secondary school where I attended especially in the agriculture learning area that included biology, geology, geography, reproduction, taxonomy etc.I loved watching 50/50 and at all primary schools I have attended they used to make us pay 50c and organise us people to come and play us 2 films and one was a kick boxer whereas the other one was for animal behavior and this built up a hero-worship for some of the presenters of this programmes.

I was born and raised up in deep rural areas of venda which is in the north east of south africa, I have started my school career in the Gondeni Ha Mabilu village, in the Mikosi Junior

Primary School and then I moved on to Gondenani where I completed my senior primary phase and ultimately attended the Frans Rasimphi Secondary School in Ha Radali in Venda, Limpopo. I concluded my school career in 2005. Hereafter I went to the Limpopo Field Guiding Academy where I received my bush related training. I also completed the Theta National Certificate in Tourism Guiding. In 2007 I was employed by Mabula Game Lodge for a guiding job, due to my exceptional talent that was shining through brightly. Here I put my skills to the test and further expanded my guiding potential. I was head Hunted by SANParks in 2009 in Marakele National Park. In 2011 I attended the Outcome Based Assessors Course at the African Wildlife College. I am currently registered with UNISA for the acquirement of my Nature Conservation Diploma of which I will be done just now by June.

During my relatively short career, I have managed to line up an impressive number of awards. In 2009 -2010 I received an award for Best Guide of Limpopo. In the same year I was also awarded the Best Provincial Guide of South Africa, as well as the SANParks award for the Outstanding Customer Service. In 2010 I further received an award for Guiding Excellence from the Limpopo Field Guide Academy. On top of all these exceptional achievements, I was also awarded the Chief Executive Award for Excellent Performance at Workplace, as well as the Chief Executive Award for Overall Best Performer in SANParks at the lustrous Annual Kudu Awards event in 2010. In 2011 I received yet another SANParks award for Best Customer Service and further received the Overall Achiever for the Limpopo province in 2011 Welcome awards, in 2012 I received an award for best customer service and then again did receive an award for the outstanding customer service in 2012 SANParks and received another SANParks award for the outstanding customer service in 2013, this young man got the Limpopo Provincial Best Nature Guide Lilizela award in 2016, this award stories does not end here I got recently awarded the Best Nature Guide of South Africa Lilizela award By the Honourable Minister of SA Tourism **Derek Hanekom** – and, not long after that at the SANParks annual Event called the Kudu Awards I received the CEO special award from the CEO of SANParks the Honourable MR Fundisile Mketeni and this brought all the achievements for Sydney Fhumulani Mikosi to the total of 14 awards

- Mindboggling and with no doubt most extraordinary achievements isn't it!

South Africa is a very rich country in terms of the Biodiversity and in order to be regarded as the Best or Jungle Encyclopaedia with regards to the interpretation of this Biodiversity one got to start from somewhere and the success to a phenomenal knowledge is determined by the enthusiasm about your career, one of the reasons why my clients described me as the Best or the Jungle encyclopaedia is that I strongly don't believe that nature Guiding in South Africa is about the Big Five as there is whole lot of fascinating tiny little stuff which has got to be studied by every nature Guide if possible and these small things are more exciting than the big animals, to me the big five animals are like a bonus if I find them, if I was to take you for an activity now, I can guarantee you that it was going to take us 3 hours or more to walk or drive for a distance of approximately 200m because when it comes to the familiarization of the natural environment to the tourist, I am not selective I talk from the small five and I don't have to find animals in order to talk about them as the animals leave behind a lot of evidence in their territories and home ranges I can link and talk about the behaviour of animals that are not there. What if you go out for a game drive don't find animals, can you see that the big five is there as an attraction but is not a key to entertain the tourist in South Africa.

I am getting all this awards because I strongly believe that professionalism is a key to every Tourism Business entity , when it comes to the client service I don't check who you are what you are and where you come from ,all my tourist both domestic and international are treated like king and queens even if you come from my village Gondeni La Ha Mabilu I will treat you like an international Guest ,clients must leave the Marakele National Park and South Africa with an unforgettable experience and not unforgatable experience because it was bad but because it was incredible , I don't wake up everyday to go to work, in tourism we wake up to go run Business so Guiding to me is not Just a Job but a Business .

People must remember that Nature Guiding is an institution at its own and as a Guide I have got a very huge responsibility of representing and Marketing my country South Africa everyday and this is by competing with the other Guides from the Neighbouring countries ,because I am sharing the same tourist with the other Nature Guides From the neighbouring African Countries who are offering the same kind of experiences so if I don't treat my clients professionally ,obviously my country South Africa and my Employer SANParks won't be recommended by the clients to their family and friends , I have got to be competitive enough to dominate other Guides From the African continent and other parts of the world .a lot of people think competition in tourism is just about the Lilizela,

I was also recently involved in a number of SABC Radio stations on SABC education and a TV programme that has been filmed in a number of parks across the country. In reaction to my involvement and support during the film team's visits to Marakele, the CEO of the EcoAfrica Group of Companies who was leading this assignment and who has worked across the world wrote a letter of commendation for Sidney, which people, as well as SANParks at large, can be extremely proud of! To enable one to grasp the quality of commendation on the level of service, performance and appreciation of the 'client', a few snippets from the letter are quoted below:

".....your professionalism as a guide outshines anything we have come across in the other ten national parks where we have worked thus far... if there were more guides of your caliber around, our tourism industry would surely boom to new heights. In my books you are a guide without equal...we have experienced the services of guides in many countries, and to be honest, I cannot recall a guide that has impressed me as much as you did....."

With this sound and proud track record, I am without a shadow of doubt a role model to all of us as I take extreme pride in my work, and I have exceptional work ethic and never let an opportunity go past to give my best and achieve the highest accolades!

my secret is that guiding is not only a job, but it is a business, and it is not only about knowledge, but it is a lot more about the way in which you as a guide conduct yourself when you're with the clients!

A large number of both local and international tourists who visit the South Africa are highly concerned about shortage of professionalism, good quality knowledge and innovation in the way guiding is conducted in our Country as compared to the neighbouring contrys ,

The abovementioned matters triggered the thoughts, and I came to realise that more concerted efforts should be made to create skills developments programmes in order to equip, impart knowledge and skills and to motivate and motivate existing hopeless guides in this regard to make the difference in the field. The skills transfer programme as a communication mechanism will be an ideal medium for me to reach a large number of Nature Guides and to create a platform where Nature Guides can learn from, and interact with knowledgeable people in this field, who can present/co-present the programmes. This will largely contribute towards educating and empowering SANParks Nature Guides on matters which are generally foreign to them and hereby strengthen the SANParks vision of 'Connecting to Society'.my dream which has always been my ambition is to take the above mentioned responsibility upon my shaulders in a position called the Tourist Guide activities Coordinator .

As my every day task is to work with customers, I would like to speak with great dedication, passion and pride! Let this serve as an encouragement and motivation for each one of us in our specific efforts of also contributing towards enhancing our customer service and taking it to another level – that counts for every person working with customers in different ways and in very unique situations! Pick up on Sidney's tips and take on this challenge of becoming an equally awarded gem within our very competitive and respected tourism business!

On my conclusion I would like to mention that as nature Guide is so sad to on a Game Drive or a Guided walk with Tourists come across a dead animal such as a Rhino or any animal as a result of poachingand activities and this is something which is not supposed to hapen but if we can work together as team like ants, bees and termites we can surely maintain 0 paoching and save this majestic animals for our grand childrens and grand grand childrens .

And most of all I would like to gratitude the NDT for giving me the oppotunity to come be a speaker here in this ceremony and thank you the programme director .