

# Minister's optimism sparks hope for sector growth and expansion

Africa's Travel Indaba, which takes place from 7-11 May at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli Convention Centre, celebrated its official trade opening on Tuesday, 9 May.



Source: Supplied

Tourism Minister Patricia de Lille opened the show saying that the 2023 Africa's Travel Indaba, at near the pre-pandemic scale, demonstrates that South Africa can host world-class safe events as Africans.

"This year, at Africa Travel Indaba, we are working hard to exceed pre-Covid attendance numbers and have an estimated 6,000 people attending from all over South Africa, Africa and the rest of the world."

This year's Indaba sees more than 350 tourism products being showcased, 1,000 buyers from across the tourism ecosystem and just under 1,000 exhibitors. Attendees include destination marketing bodies, hotel groups, airlines, tour operators, and 10 African Tourism Boards and 21 African countries represented.

## Competition and collaboration

Minister de Lille said that competition is often considered the lifeblood of destination marketing and tourism. "However, it is important to note that competition should always be balanced with collaboration."

While healthy competition can drive growth and innovation, says Minister de Lille, unhealthy competition can lead to a race to the bottom, with businesses and destinations undercutting each other on price and quality.

“Therefore, as the tourism industry, let us foster a culture of healthy competition, where businesses and destinations are encouraged to compete on quality and innovation. Let us remember that long-term success in the industry depends not only on competing but also on recognising the value of collaboration and partnerships,” she said.

And so, each player in the value chain has a unique role to play, and by working together, we can create seamless and memorable travel experiences for visitors - that is the spirit of Africa’s Travel Indaba.

## **Supporting tourism enterprises**

As part of its Market Access Support Programme (MASP), the Department of Tourism is supporting 123 local small inbound tourism enterprises to showcase their products and services during this year’s show.

“The total value of support approved for the 123 enterprises amounts to R11.7m,” says Minister de Lille. This investment will enable small businesses to display their unique products and services, expand their networks, and foster partnerships that will drive the growth and sustainability of the tourism industry in South Africa.

Addressing buyers present, de Lille said that it’s critical in promoting Africa as a premier travel destination. “To all the African product owners, thank you for your contribution in creating a cohesive and thriving tourism sector that benefits communities and promotes faster economic growth.

“Whether you are an accommodation establishment owner, an airline partner, a travel agency, a tour operator or any other tourism product and experience – this is a call to you.”

## **Africa’s tourism sector performance**

South Africa has seen encouraging growth in its tourist arrival numbers between January and December 2022 where it reached nearly 5.8million with over 4 million of those arrivals from African countries. This represents an overall inbound increase of 152.6% for South Africa compared to January to December 2021.

“The future looks bright. We have, as a collective, weathered the Covid-19 hurricane and it should only propel us to exceed our targets,” said Minister de Lille.

After stronger than expected recovery in 2022, this year could see international tourist arrivals to South Africa return to pre-pandemic levels in Europe and the Middle East. These numbers demonstrate the immense potential of tourism in Africa, not only as a revenue generator but also as a job creator and a catalyst for faster economic growth, she adds.

## **Challenges to overcome**

In addition to collaboration across the value chain, there are other areas where the sector needs to work together to unlock the full potential of the African tourism sector.

One of these is the visa regime in all African countries, says de Lille.

“We must have a harmonised visa regime across the continent to make it easier for visitors to move from one country to another. We must also simplify the e-visa application process and reduce visa costs to make Africa a more attractive destination for both Africans and international travellers,” said Minister de Lille.

In this regard, says De Lille, South Africa has visa waivers for several African countries for a specified period and up to a maximum of 90 days, including SADC countries such as Tanzania, Namibia, Angola, Mozambique, Mauritius, Malawi and Botswana.

“We have also rolled out the e-visa system to several countries including Kenya, Nigeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Uganda, Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo and we are expanding the e-visa system to an additional 20 countries.”

## Strengthening airlift capacity

On the global stage, Africa is the strongest performer currently with international air connectivity in Africa, said Minister de Lille, “However, this growth has been uneven, with some African regions and countries having better airlift connectivity than others.

“I am looking forward to working with various partners in reducing the high cost of air travel in Africa as we know that this deters visitors and thereby limit tourism growth.”

Despite some challenges, there are some positive developments in the African aviation sector. For example, some African airlines are expanding their fleets and increasing their routes to meet the growing demand for air travel.

The African Union (AU) has also launched the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), which aims to liberalise air transport on the continent and promote greater competition and connectivity.

## Sustainable tourism

De Lille also emphasised the importance of prioritising sustainable tourism practices that addresses climate change, protects our environment and cultural heritage while promoting economic development.



### Tourism businesses encouraged to apply for Green Tourism Incentive Programme

2 May 2023



“One of the key projects the Department of Tourism in South Africa must help businesses mitigate climate change and adapt to energy constraints is the Green Tourism Incentive Programme (GTIP).”

The programme encourages and incentivises private sector tourism enterprises to move towards the installation of solutions for the sustainable management and usage of electricity and water resources through installation of solar system and water saving technologies.

The GTIP also ensures an uninterrupted visitor experience for tourists, reduce operational input cost and facilitates increased competitiveness and operational sustainability in the tourism sector.

Apart from providing funding to 130 tourism businesses under this programme, the Department of Tourism also invested R98.5m to retrofit 8 state owned tourist attractions.

Combined savings for all eight sites is estimated to be under R40m by the end of the 2022/23 financial year.

“We must invest in sustainable tourism to protect communities’ natural resources, cultural heritage, and social fabric while creating economic opportunities. Again, collaboration and partnerships between African countries and the public and private sectors will be critical in achieving this objective.

“We must also prioritise innovation and technology, which can help us develop and promote our tourism offerings more effectively and efficiently,” Minister De Lille added.

## **Promoting the African tourism sector**

De Lille said that business need to ensure that the benefits of tourism are distributed equitably and that all members of our communities can access the opportunities created by the sector.

“At the very least, that is what the future generation of African children expect and deserve. Through concrete actions, not just words, we are here as Africans, at Africa’s Travel Indaba to work to reposition ourselves in the minds of international travellers.

“Our top-notch hospitality, favourable weather, and unique wildlife are just a few examples of what makes Africa an attractive tourism destination.

On a domestic front, said Minister de Lille, South Africa must keep the country’s domestic sectors going.

“Countries with a strong domestic tourism sector are generally better equipped to withstand fluctuations in international demand as has been witnessed with the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak. For us in South Africa, growing our country’s tourism sector is a key aspect of the country’s Tourism Sector Recovery Plan and aims to ignite economic growth and create jobs.”

## **Sho’t Left Travel Week**

Minister de Lille invited all South African tourism companies to be part of this year’s Sho’t Left Travel week by providing discounted travel deals to South Africans.

“By offering discounts of up to 50% off during the week starting from 4 to 10 September, we will be encouraging South Africans to travel our beautiful, vibrant and diverse country.”

South African Tourism will promote all Sho’t Left Travel Week deals on various marketing platform. Register on [deals.southafrica.net](https://deals.southafrica.net) by no later than end of August 2023.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>