

Tour guides critical to success, sustainability of tourism industry

Tourist guides from across the country recently gathered at the Rhino Conference Centre in Hoedspruit to celebrate International Tourist Guides' (ITG) Day and to engage on issues that affect the industry. The two-day themed event - 'Travel, Enjoy and Respect' - featured presentations on the state of the tourist guiding sub-sector; discussions on the regulatory environment for tourist guides, and the role of tourist guides in promoting responsible tourism practices to ensure the sustainable growth and development of the industry.



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Minister of Tourism, Derek Hanekom lauded the work done by tourist guides as destination representatives, as it contributes to the success and sustainability of the industry, with emphasis on the three P's - passion, pride and professionalism – guides should commit to: "The industry's success rides on the coat-tail of the memorable experiences shaped by tourist guides as they usher local and international visitors through our beautiful country. It is through your narrative that tourists are transported through time to experience our heritage and culture and are inspired to continuously choose our country as their preferred destination."

Ensuring sustainable development and growth

The tourist guiding profession in South Africa has grown steadily over the years with close to 12,000 registered guides. Through the revised National Tourism Sector Strategy (NTSS) 2016-2026, the department of tourism seeks to ensure sustainable development and growth of the profession in a manner that facilitates inclusive participation and employment creation.

"Our sector's total contribution to employment was 9.8% of the total employment of 1,533,000 jobs in 2016 and is expected to rise by 6.7% (2017) to 1,636,500 jobs. Tourism has the potential to double the number of jobs it creates in the economy, and we are confident that this can be achieved through strategic partnerships with key industry players, and a readily available skilled workforce."

"To this end, we have invested in capacity building programmes at our World Heritage Sites to up-skill tourist guides in customer care, interpretation and other areas as well as to train new entrants into the field of adventure and culture site guiding," added Hanekom.

Capacity building within the tourist guiding sector

Limpopo MEC for economic development, environment and tourism, Seaparo Sekoati spoke about the importance of capacity building within the tourist guiding sector as they serve as ambassadors for their provinces and South Africa: "To respond to the growing demand and to address the shortage of tourist guides, the province has made a commitment to train 200 young people as tourist guides this year."

Hanekom further emphasised that tourism growth could be achieved through innovative tourism offerings and a transformed and inclusive sector that caters for all South Africans: "The growth and sustainability of the industry rest on a thriving domestic tourism market. We must work together to grow domestic tourism by ensuring that we have exceptional tourism offerings that appeal to the domestic and international markets."

"In addition, we must address the regulatory barriers (visas and airlift issues) and make our country accessible, and an affordable holiday option for all tourists. Furthermore, tourism must provide opportunities that benefit all South Africans," concluded Hanekom.

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