

ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR FINANCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM, MR PAT NGOMANE, MPL, DURING THE OCASSION OF THE LAUNCH OF THE PROVINCIAL TOURISM MONTH 2019 HELD AT MANYELETI GAME RESERVE, BUSHBUCKRIDGE LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

Tuesday, 27 August 2019

Programme Director;

Executive Mayor of the host Municipality, Councillor Ndlovu;

Chairperson of the MTPA Board, Mr Thulani Nzima;

Other Board Members present;

Acting Head of Economic Development and Tourism, Mr Nathaniel Sebitso;

CEO of MTPA, Mr Johannes Nobunga;

Chairperson of the Bushbuckridge Local Tourism Organisation, Mr S. Ndlovu;

Members of the Media;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good Evening! San'bonani!

1. Algerian philosopher and theologian, Saint Augustine, once said, and I quote: ***“The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only one page”*** – unquote.

2. Now, if I have to adapt this quotation to suit our locality, I would say, **Mpumalanga – *the Place of the Rising Sun* – is a book with exquisite pictures, and those who do not traverse it, read only one page of it.** You can quote me on this one.
3. In essence, when you read only one page of a book, you will never know the conclusion of the book; you will never know what you did not know before.
4. Essentially, **if you do not travel Mpumalanga adequately, you will never know what our Province has to offer**, and you will have yourself to blame.
5. This confirms the words of President Cyril Ramaphosa, during the closing ceremony of this year's *Travel Indaba* in Durban in May, when he said, and I quote: ***“Tourism is one of the most international industries as it showcases the country’s identity and offerings to the world. If you want to showcase what you produce, clothing, food and arts, tourism is that window all of us can present to the world”*** – unquote.
6. Our tourism product offerings confirm that we are, indeed, the **Province where God rested**, after working hard for six (6) days, to create the heaven, the earth and all in them.

7. This is confirmed by the fact that **Mpumalanga is the only Province in South Africa, where the sun rises**; and that it is the **only Province where God has created a window** to look over His people.
8. Surely, we are protected at all times, as God is watching us, from a distance! By implication, all our visitors will be protected by God's hand during their stay with us.
9. It is these rare product offerings and many others, that attract people from outside our borders, to our Province. As a confirmation, **1.6 million international tourists visited our Province in 2018 – which was an increase of 1% – up from 1.5 million visits in 2017.**
10. The increase was from all source markets, with the exception of **Mozambique**, which unfortunately recorded a decrease of 3.2% or seven-hundred and twenty-four-thousand, one-hundred and twenty-nine (724 129) visitors.
11. Three-hundred and three-thousand, one-hundred and nineteen (303 119) visitors came from **Eswatini**; eighty-four-thousand, five-hundred-and-forty-four (84 544) from the **USA**; seventy-eight-thousand, three-hundred-and-forty-six (78 346) from **Germany**; and fifty-eight-thousand, nine-hundred-and-five-eight (58 958) from the **UK**.

12. During the first quarter of 2019, we registered a further 12% increase of international arrivals.
13. As for domestic trips, the number **increased to 2.9 million in 2018**, up from 2.2 million in 2017. In addition, during their stay in the Province, both international and domestic tourists **spent 13, 1 billion Rands (R13, 1000, 000)**, and this has contributed significantly into the Provincial economy.
14. However, we were disappointed by the domestic tourism figures recorded in the first quarter of 2019, given that **66% of the people of Mpumalanga did not travel during this period**. We must always remember that, if we do not travel and explore our Province, the much-needed jobs will not be created, and the economy will not grow as required.

Programme Director;

15. Our meeting here this evening, is therefore, to **launch the 2019 Provincial Tourism Month Programme**, and to further share with you, why tourism is a significant economic growth propeller.
16. The purpose of the Tourism Month is thus to encourage South Africans **to explore, know and enjoy their country**, before others from outside our borders.

17. It would be a shame, if people from outside South Africa, become the ones who know our Province, more than our people. If you do not know your own Province, you are not patriotic.
18. **Patriotism is all about loving and knowing one's Province and Country.** It is all about being in the forefront, when it comes to promoting what your Province has to offer, to visitors. We should all **be selfless Ambassadors of our Province.**

Ladies and gentlemen;

19. The truth is **when we travel, we create jobs**; hence this year's Tourism Month is celebrated under the theme: ***"Tourism and Jobs: A Better Future for All"***. This highlights the tourism sector's unique ability to create more and better jobs, in order to build a better future for millions of people around South Africa and the world.
20. **Tourism contributes about 9.2% to the total South African workforce**, and is the 6th biggest sector in the economy.
21. Therefore, tourism is not only all about travel and leisure, but about how it **changes the lives of our people**, by creating the much-needed jobs.

22. The fact that Mpumalanga is largely a rural province, and that poverty and unemployment in South Africa is mainly dominant in the rural areas, **the tourism sector, therefore, becomes a solution to this challenge.** To exploit this opportunity, we will respond by developing the **Rural Tourism Plan** for our Province.
23. Rural tourism economy is an important aspect in the sustainability and livelihood of rural areas. **The plan will, thus, unearth all the tourism opportunities that can be exploited** in our townships and rural areas, in order to improve the socio-economic conditions of the people of Mpumalanga.
24. Tourism attractions in our townships and rural areas offer a unique experience, which is not found in urban areas. **Let's support them,** because their survival and sustenance, depend entirely on us.
25. Therefore, I implore you as members of the media, **to partner with us by helping us to promote our tourism product offerings.** That's the reason why we took you, on an expedition to explore our beautiful Province, this morning. We will continue even tomorrow, and our hope is that **you will translate your breath-taking and exceptional experiences into articles and audio-visual material,** that will promote our Province.

26. As part of the line-up for this year's Tourism Month activities, we will yet again, **open the gates of our Provincial Nature Reserves to our people for free**, during what we termed, the **Mpumalanga Parks Week**, from 09 until 15 September.
27. This is meant to **promote a culture of travel and to create awareness about our natural heritage**. The MTPA introduced the **Mahala Week** concept in 2015, and since then, a huge number of our people have taken advantage of this offer. In this regard, a total of **nine (9) provincial nature reserves will be opened** to the public during that week. This is, however, strictly for day visitors only.
28. Furthermore, on the 6th of September, we will once again, host the ***Annual Lilizela Awards*** to honour tourism players and businesses that work passionately to deliver world-class products and services.
29. We will also host the world renowned academic and lawyer, Professor Patrick Lumumba, during the **Annual Ray Phiri Memorial Lecture**.
30. Details of these activities, and many more, will be shared with you shortly.

Ladies and gentlemen;

31. I now have the honour, to **launch the 2019 Provincial Tourism Month.**

32. *Let's grow the tourism sector of Mpumalanga together,*
because tourism creates jobs.

33. *“Tourism and Jobs: A Better Future for All”*

34. **Ngiyabonga!**