

ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM, Ms. MC MASILELA, MPL, DURING THE OCCASION OF THE 2024 PROVINCIAL TOURISM AWARENESS DAY HELD IN MASIBEKELA, NKOMAZI LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

Saturday, 14 September 2024

Programme Director; Cllr Hilda Nyambi

Executive Mayor of Ehlanzeni District Municipality, Cllr Terror Shabangu;

Executive Mayor of the Nkomazi Local Municipality, Cllr Phindile Magagula;

Other Councillors present;

Bukhosi baka Mahlalela, (Ndabezitha!!!),

Nabo bonke Bukhosi lobukhola kulo mbutfwano wanamuhla (Bayede Bondabezitha!!!);

Acting Head of the Department of Economic Development and Tourism, Mr. Lemmy Mdluli;

MTPA Board Chairperson, Mr. Victor Mashego;

Other MTPA Board members present;

Acting CEO of the MTPA, Mr. Justus Mohlala;

Professional Grading Assessor from TGCSA, Ms Rose Makoma;

Provincial Coordinator of SATOVITO, Ms Carol Nake;

Local Tourism Organisations and Tourism Product Owners present;

Officials from the Provincial Government, Municipality and the MTPA present;

Our most valuable guests, the people of Mpumalanga – *the Place of the Rising Sun*;

Members of the media;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Sanibonani!! Good Morning!!

1. Programme Director, tourism is one of the key pillars of Mpumalanga's economy. The sector has the potential to address the triple challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality through the creation of decent jobs. Apart from generating revenue, the sector provides the economic opportunities for women and youth, supports the development of SMMEs through enterprise development.
2. Programme Director; **tourism is our gold mine** in the Province; it is the goose that lays the golden egg for us. Tourism contributes 3, 7% to South Africa's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), thus, adding a significant value to the economy and overall development of our country.
3. During the Covid 19 pandemic, the tourism sector was one of the most vulnerable sectors of the economy. The devastating impact of the pandemic brought the tourism sector to its knees. Our Province, Mpumalanga was not spared and that majority of the businesses in the sector could not survive.
4. The tourism sector has had a strong recovery over the last three years but still has some way to go to fully reach the sector's 2019 performance.

5. Programme Director, we are however, encouraged as international tourism is making a GREAT comeback as per the statistics reported by StatsSA. From January to March 2024, the international tourist arrivals in South Africa reached **90.5 percent** of 2019 levels, reaching a total of **2.4 million**, which represent an increase of **+15.4 percent** more than quarter one of 2023.
6. Our Province, Mpumalanga – has also improved significantly in the first quarter of 2024 (January – March 2024) by reaching **549.4 thousand** international visitors. This is an increase of **24.1 percent** in comparison with the same period in 2019. This improvement paints a picture of Mpumalanga's continued attractiveness as the 2nd most preferred Tourism Destination of Choice after the Western Cape Province.
7. Programme Director, I am deeply concerned about our provincial performance on the domestic tourist arrivals, having recorded 700 thousand visitors in the first quarter of 2024. Notably, the domestic tourism has contributed **R3.2 billion** into the economy of the Province during the first quarter of the 2024.
8. During my maiden Departmental Policy and Budget Speech last month in August, we committed to create around **100 000 new and sustainable jobs every year** if we are to achieve the Mpumalanga Vision 2030 employment target of **2.1 million** by 2030.

9. It is clear that our Province remains a destination of choice, captivating the hearts of many with its rich cultural heritage, diverse landscape and remarkable wildlife. To reach our ambitious target of 2.1 million jobs, we must flip the script and drive a clear well illuminated united path to our destination marketing.
10. Programme Director; worldwide, **September has been declared as Tourism Month** by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), to foster awareness among the international community, about **the importance of tourism and its social, cultural, political and economic value**.
11. And in our Province, the norm is to coordinate efforts to **create awareness on the less visited sites and to encourage our people to explore their Province**, thereby promoting domestic tourism. Programme Director; I am, therefore, honoured and privileged, to celebrate this year's Tourism Awareness Day, under the theme: ***"Tourism and Peace: 30 years of connecting people, places and culture"***.
12. It is through this theme, that as government and our partners we acknowledge that this sector is one of the priority sectors of the economy that has been consistent in contributing to the economy and job creation. For the past 30 years, this sector has demonstrated its ability to unite the people of South Africa – hence is the sector made by the people and for the people.

13. We must also be aware that 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. Therefore, this calls for us to continuously nurture tourism and expose our people to it, as tourism has the potential to produce lifetime benefits for our people.
14. Therefore, the essence of today's event, is **to raise awareness about the significance of tourism in growing our economy**, which subsequently creates jobs for our people.
15. We should bear in mind that **when we travel, we create jobs**, and this highlights the tourism sector's unique ability to create more and better jobs, as we strive to build a better future for millions of people around our Province, South Africa in general, and the world-over.
16. Programme Director; the Bible tells us that God worked for six (6) days to create heaven and earth, and on the seventh day, He rested. Now, given the natural scenic beauty and our serene environment, who can disagree with me when I assert that I believe God began His creation here in our Province, and eventually even rested in our Province?
17. There is much evidence to corroborate my believe. This is because **the sun, which symbolises the genesis of life, rises in our Province**. Further evidence can be found at the Barberton Makhonjwa Mountains World Heritage Site, which is home to **the best-preserved succession of volcanic and sedimentary rocks**, estimated to be between 3.2 and 3.6 billion years old.

18. Programme Director, Nkomazi remains a basket of tourism activities and experiences. It is here in Mbuzini area, where the most decorated and first President of Mozambique after the country's independence, comrade Samora Machel had his last breath on the 19th of October 1986.
19. The strategic location of this Municipality to Mozambique and the Kingdom of Eswatini presents an opportunity for visitors to experience three (3) countries in one day.
20. It is here where the TRILAND initiative has its true meaning – because visitors can easily have BREAKFAST and experience the culture and tradition of emaSwati in the Kingdom of Eswatini, have LUNCH in South Africa and interact with the wildlife experiences in Nkomazi and the Kruger National Park and finally enjoy dinner and NIGHT LIFE experiences in Mozambique.
21. Programme Director; in our quest to create awareness on tourism, this year we chose Masibekela Recreational Park Site. This is a pristine Site located within the deep rural village of Nkomazi Local Municipality. We did so because we want to stimulate the rural and township tourism to diversify and disperse the benefits of tourism to the rural areas of our Province.
22. Honorable Executive Mayor, we are very glad as the Department that Nkomazi Local Municipality commissioned a Feasibility Study with the view to redefine and redirect the development of tourism to the marginalized areas of the Municipality, including the villages of Mbuzini, Masibekela and Mananga in the rural south.

23. I want to assure you honorable Executive Mayor that my Department together with the MTPA we will support this initiative because it speaks directly to what we are advocating for to promote township economy.
24. Programme Director, to give effect to the rural and township tourism in our Province, the MTPA signed a ground breaking **Partnership Agreement (MOA)** with **SATOVITO (South African Township and Village Tourism Association)** at the 2023 Tourism Awareness Day, held in Nkangala District. The two parties agreed to support Mpumalanga tourism enterprises operating in the townships and village's tourism hubs.
25. We are delighted to announce that the leadership of SATOVITO led by **Ms Carol Nake** (who is the Provincial Coordinator) – has decided to bring the 2024 Third (3rd) Annual National SATOVITO Intra Trade Conference/ EXPO to Mpumalanga, Nkomazi area, in November 2024. This EXPO seeks to create a platform to promote township and village tourism as an essential part South Africa's travel offerings.
26. Programme Director, we have invited a number of exhibitors to share information on government services to businesses and communities at this event. We encourage all attendees to visit the exhibition stalls, including the Development Finance Institutions like SEDA, MEGA, NEF, SEFA, NYDA, MTPA, MER etc.
27. As part of our 2024 Tourism Month Legacy Programme, our Department has identified and will **fund the grading project for ten**

(10) accommodation establishments from Nkomazi Local Municipality, namely, (1) Elephant Park Guesthouse, (2) Leftton's Guesthouse, (3) Halfway House Guesthouse, (4) NDN Park and Conference, (5) Guduza Guesthouse, (6) Matsamo Lakeview Hotel, (7) Umbomvu Guesthouse, (8) Nico's Guesthouse, (9) Elangeni 2 Self Catering Apartment, and (10) Shonga Events.

28. As part of the Tourism Month Legacy programme for last year 2023, I would like to confirm that the Department has successfully completed the Star Grading of four (4) tourism product in Thembisile Hani Local Municipality, through the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa.

29. It is my honour, therefore, to indicate that the following four (4) tourism businesses will **receive their Tourism Grading Certificates** today, as part of the 2023 Tourism Month Legacy Project:

- **Blackwood Eco Lodge**
- **The King's Empire Palace**
- **Morolo Lodge**
- **Leisure 45 Events**

30. Programme Director; what is also **significant to tourism growth, is excellent customer care**. We must treat tourists as if they are kings and queens. If we treat our visitors well, they will come back for more; if we make our visitors feel welcomed in our Province, they will become our tourism ambassadors as they will share their positive experiences with others.

31. Coupled with excellent customer care, is tourism safety. We, therefore, **encourage all communities to work with law enforcement agencies, to promote tourism safety.** Let us welcome and make all our visitors feel safe within our communities, tourism sites and tourism routes. We must show them that we care for our visitors.
32. As I retreat, we must at all times, remember that **without tourists, there's no tourism; and without tourism, there will be less jobs created.**
33. Once again, we must always remember that **tourism is our 'new gold mine'**; and we need to nurture it, if we want to continue to reap its sweet fruits.
34. Programme Director; the rationale behind today's gathering is, thus, better captured by the words of UK historian, Michael Kitson, who once said, and I quote: ***"Awareness is a key ingredient in success. If you have it, teach it, if you lack it, seek it"***, unquote.
35. ***Leave No One Behind; and Let's Grow Mpumalanga Together,*** through ***"Tourism and Peace: 30 years of connecting people, places and culture"***.

Ngiyabonga!!!