



AVE: 16878.67 (ZAR)

# SA must brace for bumper tourism year

Investment essential in key sites, says minister

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**M**INISTER of Tourism Derek Hanekom was optimistic that 2016 would be a bumper year for tourism.

He said at yesterday's opening of the Tourism Indaba at the Durban ICC that the UN's World Tourism Organisation estimated that international tourism arrivals to the country would grow by 4 percent.

Even when grilled by CNN reporter Richard Quest if Sport and Home Affairs had consulted his department about imposing a sports ban, and visa and birth certificate regulations respectively, he remained poised.

"Some of the challenges we experienced in South Africa last year, including visa and immigration regulations, did result in dwindling tourism numbers. That is behind us, and we are experiencing spectacular growth. By all indications, tourism is poised for growth across Africa.

"Investment in tourism across Africa is making the sector a key economic driver. Tourist arrivals are expected to reach 130 million by 2030. This is more than double the 50 million we are receiving," he said.

Hanekom said SA Tourism had a strong relationship with the government and "last year's adversities helped us get together. There are still setbacks but we are making headway. However, there needs to be regular consultation processes with other ministries to ensure the laws they pass do not dampen the tourism sector, which helps with the economic growth of our country.

"Africa is a continent of unparalleled opportunity, and tourism is where the greatest untapped opportunity lies. In South Africa we are investing in our key sites, and training our people to enhance the visitor experience at these destinations. As we build our des-



Lindiwe Rakharebe, ICC Durban chief executive, Derek Hanekom, Minister of Tourism, and Sthembiso Dlamini, acting chief executive of SA Tourism, at Africa's top travel show, the Tourism Indaba.

Picture: TERRY HAYWOOD

tinuation, we are also adjusting our marketing efforts to keep pace with global trends. Indaba provides us with the ideal platform to do this."

The minister sat alongside a panel of three other tourism experts, the chief executive of the Tourism Business Council of SA, Mmatsatsi Ramawela, the Deputy Minister of Tourism, Tokozile Xasa, and the head of advisory services at Grant Thornton, Gillian Saunders.

Other issues discussed were the future of SAA, and the need for air transport services. The panel said, with the right management, the national carrier could be turned around, although they did not shed much light on the strategies that could achieve this.

Hanekom said that air transport services remained a key constraint.

"Many major airlines fly to Africa from North America, Europe, and Asia. However, once visitors reach this continent, they encounter difficulties in travelling from country to country.

"If one quarter of African countries were to implement the Open Skies for Africa decision and facilitate greater air access between our countries,

an additional 155 000 jobs and \$1.3 billion (R19.4bn) in gross domestic product could be generated, with obvious benefits for tourism," he said.

It was a fusion of culture and colour at the opening of Africa's largest travel trade show. Among the list of high-profile dignitaries were the mayor of eThekweni, James Nxumalo, and ministers from Burkina Faso, Ghana, Lesotho, Namibia, Seychelles, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

MEC for Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, Michael Mabuyakhulu, said the indaba helped build partnerships with other cities and countries within Africa. He said KwaZulu-Natal was working well with Lesotho, Mozambique and Swaziland, and its sister provinces, Mpumalanga and Free State to share ideas and work together.

Nxumalo said eThekweni was honoured to host the indaba, which helped the city become competitive in the global market. The indaba finishes tomorrow. Some highlights include a speed marketing session on adventure and the exhibition stand awards.

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