

Tourism Is South Africa's New Gold

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Foreign exchange from tourism earns South Africa nearly US\$3bn per annum more than gold mining

Tourism's significant contribution to South Africa's GDP and employment is widely recognised. The industry last year eclipsed gold mining as a foreign exchange earner for South Africa by US\$3 billion and has created more than 700 000 new South African jobs in the last ten years.

Dr Danisa Baloyi, Deputy Chairperson of the Board at South African Tourism told delegates to the G8 Business Summit on Africa today in London that South Africa had taken its place as a premier global destination and that tourist arrival figures to South Africa were set to grow further. Independent economists predict a three percent growth (from a base of more than 6.5million) in arrivals in the next year.

Eleven years ago, she said, before South Africa's first democratic election, the destination was attracting 600 000 tourists a year. By 2003, that figure stood at more than 6.5 million tourists.

'It is especially opportune now, on the eve of the Gleneagles G8 summit, to focus on an industry that provides jobs, is growing the South African economy and is making a real contribution to the economic emancipation of South Africans,' she said.

Environmental degradation to some extent was universally associated with development for economic growth. Tourism, however, had very little (if any) impact on the environment. It was, in fact, in the best interests of the industry to protect South Africa's natural beauty as its beaches, mountains, rivers, deserts and wildlife were among the destination's biggest draw cards.

Dr Baloyi was addressing delegates to a luncheon hosted by South African Tourism at the G8 Business Summit on Africa in London today. The event was part of a programme of events co-sponsored by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and brought together business leaders from Africa and across the G8. It was transmitted to the Chair of the G8, Mr Tony Blair.

South African Tourism is the organisation mandated to market South Africa as a tourist destination. At the heart of the organisation's work, Baloyi said, was the Tourism Growth Strategy that aimed to:

- œ Increase the number of tourists to South Africa;
- œ Encourage travelers that did come to stay for longer;
- œ Persuade travelers to spend more money in South Africa;
- œ Encourage travelers to discover all of South Africa (not only the tourist hot spots);
- œ Get them to visit all year round and not only during the South African summer months;
- œ Get them to be ambassadors for the destination and persuade friends, family and colleagues to visit; and
- œ Vitaly and crucially, to transform the industry so that all South Africans benefit from tourism and so that the industry becomes a key catalyst for righting past socio-economic injustices

The organisation considered itself in 'partnership for profitability', she said, with the global travel trade and was investing in providing the trade with tools to make South Africa an effective and easy sell. However, South African Tourism continued to invest in the front end of its marketing business by making the destination attractive to consumers.

South African Tourism recently premiered in New York the only 3D Imax destination cinema production in the world. The film (Wild Safari 3D, a South African Adventure) was a major success and was the 30th most popular movie in the US... holding its own against the big Hollywood hits.

Transforming the industry was a major focus of South African Tourism's work, she added. The organisation's annual Emerging Tourism Entrepreneur of the Year Award (ETEYA) was directed at achieving the meaningful participation of previously disadvantaged people and small, medium and micro enterprises in South Africa's tourism sector.

'Only when these groups begin participating significantly in the industry, will the country see real and equitable sharing of the industry's benefits to all South Africans.'

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