



MEDIA STATEMENT

CELEBRATING THE BEST IN TOURISM

The absolute best in tourism were celebrated, praised and ululated at the 2015 Free State Lilizela Tourism Awards which was held at Bloem Spar Hotel on the 03 of September 2015. The awards are a way of recognising and celebrating excellence in the tourism industry.

Staged by Department of Economic, Small Business Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs in the Free State Province, the Lilizela Tourism Awards are an initiative of the National Department of Tourism to showcase tourism role players who work tirelessly and passionately to make South Africa one of the preferred destinations of choice in the world through the delivery of the best service excellence.

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in South Africa and globally making excellence, brilliance and innovation vital ingredients to grow the country's global destination competitiveness. The awards will encourage other role players to participate and strive for excellence whilst also making tourists aware of their role to insist on service excellence.

The awards take place during the important month in the tourism space which is tourism month and through the tourism efforts poverty and unemployment can be addressed. The focus for tourism month in the Free State is not to compete with any province but to promote the tourism offerings within the province and attract visitors.

The Free State pride itself with unique tourism offerings in accommodation, heritage sites, picturesque landscapes of the eastern parts of the Free State in Clarens and the 14 state owned reserves and resorts that can be found here. Service excellence that gives tourists or travellers a unique and memorable experience coupled with the warmth of the people of the Free State.

The 52 entrants battled it out for service excellence in the following 6 categories; Accommodation category which had 6 different sub categories ranging from bed and breakfast, caravan and Camping, country house, guest house, hotel and lodge.

For Visitor Experience category, judges were looking at the scenic beauty, roots and culture, adventure activities, lifestyle, and lap luxury and it was won by Cheetah Experience. Tourist Guides category which was awarded to Graig Martie looks at nature guides, adventure guides and culture guides.

Operators category was awarded to Thabile Tours and Shuttle Tour for affording tourists to experience the vast authentic experience in South Africa. The other category is ETEYA which was taken by Kamohelo Luxury recognises only black owned SMME's who have achieved notable success since starting up. The 6th category, the MEC's award, honours the role player who has contributed significantly to the development and promotion of tourism in



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the province went to Batlokoa Community/ Witsieshoek Mountain Lodge. The winner of this award also took home cash prize of R20 000.00.

Congratulating winners, MEC Sam Mashinini said that, “Free State is endowed with landscape and natural beauty. It is the responsibility of every Free Stater to work hard to demonstrate the potential of tourism in the province”.

One of the winners who was very excited to accept the award, Ethel Ndumo from Frontier Hotel in Bethlehem said that this is a great achievement for the establishment which shows that anything is possible through team work. Another establishment which did well and received an award is Xhariep Nature Resort/Reserve which is one of state owned resorts and reserves. Talking on behalf of the resort/reserve, Maryna Van Der Berg said that the award symbolises the passion for promoting tourism and striving for service excellence.

In total, 17 tourism products were announced as winners. These winners or role players will have a privilege to represent the Free State province during the National Lilizela Awards to take place on the 22 of October 2015.

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