

SPEAKING NOTES
MEC SAM MASHININI
GALA DINNER
FOR
2016 WORLD TOURISM DAY CELEBRATIONS
VENUE: PARYS,
DATE: 26 SEPTEMBER 2016

Minister of Tourism: Honourable Derek Hanekom

Premier of the Free State: Honourable Premier Ace Magashule

Executive Mayor of Fezile Dabi District Municipality: Councillor Mme Oumi Oliphant

Mayor of Ngwathe Local Municipality: Councillor Mme Joey Mochela

HOD Matilda Gasele

Management of the Department

Honoured Guests

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentleman, Good Evening. We may not have the sea, we may not have the Table Mountain, neither the Kruger National Park, nor Sun City or even Mapungubwe in Limpopo or God's Window in Mpumalanga. But here is the heart of South Africa, not only the heart but also the pivot on which everything turns.

This beautiful province is the big sky country giving the traveller the opportunity to enjoy the solitude of travelling in the open country, breathe clean, crisp air and the sights and sounds of nature. It's a gem waiting to be discovered. We could not have chosen a better destination for a tourism event of this magnitude than Parys this evening. Parys is part of the Lion's Route, one of the Big Five tourism routes includes northern parts of the Free State along the monstrous Vaal River which is a much sort after weekend getaway that includes: Parys, Sasolburg, Deneysville and Vredefort.

This beautiful town of Parys being on the banks of the Vaal River, has become a firm favourite for both art and adventure lovers. With so many attractions such as:

- Restaurants and a wide variety of arts and crafts shops.
- Round of golf on Golf Island in the middle of the Vaal River.
- Various water sports.

- Tumahole Township– birthplace of Free State Premier, Mr Ace Magashule.
- Vredefort Dome – A world heritage site.

Once again Minister, we should thank you heartily for deciding that the World Tourism Day Celebration should be in the Free State. This effort is very much appreciated, our engagement with you when we launched Tourism Month on the Southern tip of the Free State at Gariiep Dam, will for the long time remain a launching pad of all our tourism marketing initiatives. #TourismForAll

Earlier today, you further emphasised the importance of Universal Accessibility during the tourism lecture at the Central University of Technology. Universal access refers to the ability of all people to have equal opportunity and access to a service or product from which they can benefit, regardless of their social class, ethnicity, ancestry or physical disabilities. On the international front, Universal Accessibility has taken the centre stage. South Africa has followed suit and the tourism industry is slowly but surely adapting to the international trend by ensuring Universal Accessibility to this important sector of the market. In order to conform to Universal Accessibility standards, travelling packages and tourism products should be designed to meet and exceed the needs of people with disabilities, senior citizens and families travelling

Our objective during this time is to encourage domestic travel throughout the province and South Africa as a whole. We encourage travellers and locals to “Take a Short Left” and explore the Free State. Research conducted recently by South African Tourism revealed South Africans are slowly getting to grips with touring their own back yards. The negative mind set of yesteryears when travelling was preserve of the privileged few has been slowly wiped out.

Exploring the Free State will keep even the best of globetrotters spellbound because the Free State offers what you cannot find anywhere else. Your experience of the Free State will surely sound like the words of the French painter Henri Rousseau when he said “when I go out into the country side and see the sun and the green and everything flowering, I say to myself, yes indeed, all that belongs to me!”

To give expression to Rousseau’s sentiments all tourism entrepreneurs in the Free State have to have one vision only, to make the Free State an inland tourism destination of choice. **We will market the province, you should market your product.** #FreeStatelikewildfire

Despite the ups and downs the local economy has experienced over the years, the tourism sector continues to offer stable business conditions for small business, especially now, as tourism figures continue to increase year on year. Recent study suggest that the international visitor numbers were up by 16% for the period January to April this year. Statistics S.A reports that in 2014, 4.5% of the total workforce of South Africa was directly involved in the tourism industry.

Not only does this market offer huge growth potential for entrepreneurs but it also offers job creation, which is the country's vital need. In deed the Free State plays a big role in this sector, we made an impressive growth in the recent past. There has been a steady improvement over the last three years. In 2013 the Free State posted 3.1% growth and in 2014 growth was 3.7% and in 2015 growth was 4.3%. On international arrivals, the Free State posted 8.4% in 2014 and 8.9% in 2015 and an impressive 10.6% in 2015.

To help us live up to the challenge of the Minister and the tourism industry at large, we call upon tourists to discover and explore the Free State. In addition to our Lions Route in our Big Five tourism routes, we want people to explore some of the exciting routes.

Responding to these challenges, the Department of Economic, Small Business Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs has developed the Provincial Tourism Sector Strategy which has at its core:

- Heritage and Culture tourism
- Agri tourism
- Edu tourism
- Kasie tourism
- Stokvel tourism and
- Sport tourism

Our province is a melting pot of culture and heritage, ranging from historical graves, historical buildings and monuments, nationally acclaimed caves like Lekgalong la Mantsopa, Motouleng, Nkokomohi and Haheng la Wetsi, the rich political history of the African national Congress with the Waaihoek, Wesley Church, Maphikela House, Digarteneng. These also include the women's memoriam in Bloemfontein and the Monument in Winburg.

We believe we have the wherewithal to leverage the declining agricultural throughput and by successfully introducing agri tourism. Festivals like Nampo, Cherrie Festival, Witblits and others can attract new revelers and make a huge contribution. We believe that many urban dwellers can enjoy a trip to the farm where they can be introduced to all aspects of agriculture and the life on the farms.

Edutourism presents a huge opportunity to tour operators where school groups can be taken to different parts of our province like to the dams, resorts and reserves where they can learn about nature conservation.

We have also recently started with a very ambitious plan of introducing sections of our community to areas just around them where they hitherto never thought of visiting. This is Kasie Tourism where we introduce people who traditionally live in white suburbs into townships where they can chill and make new friends.

Our stokvel tourism is aimed at groups who do not have the culture of going on holidays or those who save money and travel elsewhere than their own province. We would like to cultivate the culture of travelling among stokvel members and incentivize them to save and travel in the Free State.

Let me take this opportunity to mention just few of the major tourism promotion activities we have packaged for the Province

- Stars and Planets

Realising that the Free State's open skies have the potential to become a "playing ground" for amateur astrology enthusiasts, we introduced the Stars and Planet project aimed at attracting what has become a big pool of astrology enthusiasts to Free State Reserves and Resorts to admire the wonders of the heavens through telescopes.

As part of our tourism routes, we also have the Maluti Drakensburg Route which is the longest signed Tourism Route in Southern Africa and it incorporates three provinces and one country, the Free State, Kwa Zulu Natal, Eastern Cape and Lesotho. It introduces local and international tourists to a unique travel and cultural experience founded on generations of Xhosa, Basotho, Zulu, British and South African history. We also have a shepherds trail in the Free State, this trail takes the tourist into the life of shepherds, where a traveller can also camp and listen to their stories and experience their mysterious lifestyles.

As I conclude, I would like to congratulate Tourism Marketing South Africa (TOMSA) for their campaign of adding value to tourism during this tourism month. Their campaign of the Finders Keepers on Sunday Times not only also put the Free State on the tourism landscape but has created awareness of what the Free State has to offer.

Programme Director, our efforts to place the Free State firmly in South Africa's most visited provinces we have to be inspired by the words of Mahatma Gandhi's when he said, "A customer is the most important visitor on our premises. He is not depended on us. We are dependent on him. He is not an interruption on our work. He is the purpose of it. He is not an outsider on our business. He is part of it. We are not doing him a favour by serving him. He is doing us a favour by giving us an opportunity to do so."

Thank You!! Siya Qhoba!!