

MEDIA LAUNCH

TOUR De FREE STATE 2012

VENUE: CoCo C RESTAURANT AND CHOLOLATIER

DATE: 20 APRIL 2012

Programme Director

Honoured Guests

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentleman

Programme director, today, just two days after the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee launched the 100 days of countdown to the London Olympics, we are gathered here to witness the inauguration of the 2nd Tour de Free State which is an ambitious tourism initiative by the Free State Provincial Government to unbolt the Free State tourism potential through cycling to national and international audiences.

The first race saw local, national and international cyclists racing through 6 chosen towns of the province competing against each other. We believe that the initiative was a success given the publicity and the interest it generated here at home and abroad. International cyclists who participated in the inaugural race confirmed and attested to the professional manner in which the event was organized but most of all praised the beauty of our province, the primary aim of this event.

The success of this event secured the inclusion of the event to the annual cycling calendar of Cycling South Africa and that is recognized by the International Union of Cyclists, making it the only Olympic qualifying road cycling race for women in Africa.

The women`s teams participating in this year`s race represent thirteen countries and they are Belgium, Eritrea, UK, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Luxembourg, Ukraine, Mauritius, Zimbabwe, Holland, USA and SA. These teams will bring along a total of 150 people who we expect will be accompanied by a further 300 people who will be our tourists during the race. In this way we will be exposing the Free State to an international audience and positioning it as the most significant tourism event destination in the country. With this initiative, we plan to promote tourism through cycling because we believe that sports tourism is an integral part of economic development.

During the budget Vote speech on the 19th of March, I indicated that for Free State to increase its market share of the number of tourists that visit South Africa on an annual basis, we need to work on developing offerings, based on the Free State competitive and comparative advantages that will differentiate us from other provinces. We have to develop a compelling value proposition for the province so that we can give people a reason to come here for a holiday. Tour de Free State is one of those exercises.

Ladies and Gentlemen, one other added and significant aspect of Tour De Free State 2012 is that the Free State is also contributing towards the success of the South African Women`s team that has been struggling to obtain enough points to qualify for the Olympics as most of the qualifying races are in Europe. Tour de Free State gives them the opportunity to qualify a full team of four cyclists, the maximum that is allowed at the Olympics, giving them a better chance to compete successfully at this year`s games.

2012 is undoubtedly a special year for the Free State because we are the hosts of the Centenary Celebrations of the African National Congress and now we are contributing towards Team SA`s preparations for London Olympics.

We want to emphasize that that Tour de Free State 2012, it`s sporting significance notwithstanding, to us it is a tourism initiative which chose cycling because unlike many sports cycling is not confined to one place but can criss cross the length and breadth of the Free State and through

the coverage it generates both local, national and international markets will know about the Free State.

This year, starting on the 23rd May, the tour will go through 12 towns starting at Willem Pretorius Game Reserve. This reserve has the largest herd of black Wildebees in the world, moving on to the gold industry metropolis of Virginia, through Theunissen and ending in Brandfort, the town where Winnie Mandela was exiled during the apartheid era, a true historical destination.

Then the Tour takes us to Jagersfontein, with the deepest diamond mine hole in the country then move into the capital of the Free State, the City of Roses, Bloemfontein. The tour then presents Clarens, the jewel of the Eastern Free State, Bethlehem perfectly situated on the Liebenberg River as well as the charming town of Fourisburg. Finally we tour the historic town of Kestel, and Phuthaditjhaba, the meeting place of the tribes.

It is my strongly held view that the Free State has enormous natural beauty and resources and I do not believe we have to necessarily copy other countries to become a tourism destination- we must exploit our own natural talents and resources. We have to work hard to cultivate a culture of travelling among the people of the Free State and turn each and every one of us into a tourism ambassador.

We have to work together with our local tour operators to promote sport tourism, agri-tourism, stokvel tourism which will incorporate kasie tourism, cultural and heritage tourism and all tourism products to promote tourism in our province.

With international television crews and the coverage by local media, this event will ensure wide publicity for tourism in the province and showcase the best that is on the offer. The event will also generate an economic injection into the regional areas of the province and local participation in the international event.

We are confident that we will have yet another successful Tour De Free State.

I Thank You.

