

2018 Lilizela Tourism Awards winners announced

Last night, 33 of KwaZulu-Natal's top tourism and hospitality businesses were honoured at the provincial sixth Lilizela Tourism Awards in KwaZulu-Natal. Nominees were selected from 1,385 entries and were recognised for their service excellence.



The Lilizela Tourism Awards is an initiative of the National Department of Tourism and is spearheaded by South African Tourism.

"The honorees represent the creme de la crème in the KwaZulu-Natal tourism sector, who make providing excellent service not just a practice, but a way of life," said Sihle Zikalala, the MEC for economic development, tourism and environmental affairs at the gala event hosted at the Sani Pass Premier Resort in the southern Drakensberg.

Zikalala shared with guests that the winners and finalists are able to impart their expertise with visitors who are often times keen to learn about our culture and heritage, thereby positioning the KwaZulu-Natal experience as a must do for travellers. "This is a highly competitive global industry and success does not happen overnight. It takes exceptionally hard work and a tireless commitment to make every tourist's stay memorable, ensuring that each visitor has such a good, authentic experience that they return home as word-of-mouth ambassadors and mobile billboards for the province."

Zikalala reminded guests that as it was Tourism Month, it was also a time to celebrate the Mandela centenary and KwaZulu-Natal was privileged to have rich historical ties with the great statesmen. The Nelson Mandela Capture Site and Ohlange Institute are iconic places where visitors can immerse themselves in the rich history and walk through the footsteps of some of our great leaders.

Tourism opportunities for lower-income holders

He called on tour and travel agents to take visitors to such sites to trace the footsteps of Mandela and to help generate revenue, create new jobs and provide opportunities for small businesses.

While there was no shortage of unique and wonderful experiences in the province for visitors to enjoy, Zikalala called on the industry to come up with more value-for-money products so that people on lower incomes can afford to go on holiday. "Let us explore the potential of this largely untapped market," he urged. "We need to change how we think –we need to visualise opportunities - generate new ideas – embark on new initiatives."

Phindile Makwakwa, the acting chief executive officer of Tourism KZN, is hopeful that there are even more entries next year, as she is confident that there are a lot more deserving businesses in the region that also go the extra mile and are world-class. "Service excellence is everything in today's global tourism environment. The way a product or service is delivered to a visitor can make or break a destination. We want to see KwaZulu-Natal positioned as a globally competitive destination that provides quality service way beyond our visitors' expectations.

"Today, we are celebrating tourism players that go beyond the call of duty to provide a world-class service to our visitors. They raise the bar in terms of enhancing the visitor experience and reinforce the value of our tourism workers and the sector to provide a complete exceptional #DoKZN experience."

Digital tourism revolution

With the Tourism Month theme being *Tourism and Digital Transformation*, Makwakwa added that "the absolute necessity of tourism businesses being part of the digital world cannot be over-emphasised."

Technology and digitalisation have revolutionised the tourism industry and any business that does not have one of the many platforms, or Wi-Fi or a website, would be left behind. She called on them to up their game and get connected as soon as possible.

This year's special MEC's Award went to Makhosi Msimango, the founder and owner of Ndzenga Tours and Safari Tours that specialises in cultural heritage and township experiences. Msimango, who is also a motivational speaker, is a member of the executive committee of the 1000 Hills Community Tourism Organisation said: "I am ecstatic to receive this coveted prize. We have tour guides who speak German and French and I believe our service excellence was well received."

[View the list of 32 winners here.](#)

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