

MICE industry meets 12 Oct to form federation

General consensus has been reached in the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) industries to move towards establishing a federation to advance their members' common interests in the business tourism sector, and the new body is expected to be ratified on 12 October. It will be known as the South African Meetings Industry Federation (SAMIF).

The associations include the Exhibition Association of Southern Africa (EXSA), the South African Association for Conference Industries (SAACI), the International Special Event Society (ISES), the Society for Incentive and Travel Executives (SITE), the Technical Production Services Association, (TPSA) and the South African Federation of Convention Cities (SAFCC).

As SAMIF, the industry has issued a joint statement, which highlights not only the synergies among its member associations, but also areas of duplication, where streamlining its efforts would be jointly beneficial.

Four major topics emerged as being priority initiatives for SAMIF:

1. The need for accurate combined industry statistics.
2. Skills development and industry training.
3. Safety and security.
4. The creation of a Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) Charter.

"Combined market research projects will assist us in determining the actual size of the South African meetings industry, which will in turn provide us with greater leverage and influence when it comes to lobbying with government," the statement reads.

In each of the remaining topics, organisations were at various stages of undertaking their own initiatives and combining resources would cut down significantly on effort and expense.

In addition to SAMIF's efforts to promote the interests of the business tourism sector in South Africa, the federation agrees with the views of the new chief of the South African Tourism's National Convention Bureau (NCB), Rick Taylor, that individual associations should continue to work towards aligning themselves with international bodies in their respective areas of interest.

These include Association International Palais de Congres (AIPC), the International Association Convention & Visitors Bureau (IACVB), Meeting Planners International (MPI) and International Congress & Convention Association (ICCA).

At a local level, SAMIF aims to work closely with South African Tourism's NCB to foster a closer working relationship and enhance communication and understanding, to the benefit of respective associations and their members, as well as to the

NCB.

"Forging these kinds of alignments is the only way forward, if South Africa is to participate successfully and achieve its full potential, in the worldwide business travel and tourism industry," the statement notes.

SAMIF is prepared for some resistance from people who do not yet understand the benefits of, and tremendous potential for, collaboration. It is confident that this opposition will disappear once critics understand the rationale behind its formation.

"We are not suggesting in any way that the associations represented on SAMIF merge, only that they share their knowledge and resources for the common good of the industry at large, which will in turn result in benefits flowing down to their respective members."

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