

# Tourism positive, but there are dampers

South Africa's hospitality sector is one of the country's key drivers of growth and has proved to be resilient despite a difficult 2014, Tourism Minister Derek Hanekom said in Durban at the weekend...



This year's edition of Tourism Indaba in Durban has attracted thousands of delegates and is hosting 1,013 exhibitors, down from last year's 1,198.

Photographer: Rajesh Jantilal

The minister was addressing delegates at one of Africa's biggest hospitality marketing events, Tourism Indaba, which began on Saturday and ends today.

Though recent xenophobic violence in the city led to some delegates pulling out, most notably from Mozambique, more than 9,000 visitors attended Tourism Indaba, which is expected to rake in R140m for Durban.

Tourism had created millions of jobs and accounted for 8.1% of Africa's gross domestic product (GDP), the minister said.

"Driving the growth of tourism are a wealth of wonderful tourism assets: our landscape and biodiversity; our wildlife; our people and our cultural heritage. We have also developed a wide range of products and services that create memorable experiences for tourists."

Also, SA climbed the rankings of the world's most tourist-friendly countries, coming 48th out of 141 states on the World Economic Forum's travel and tourism competitiveness index. However, observers warned the country's recently unveiled onerous travel regulations had the potential to put a damper on a sector which has been a consistent performer.

SA's safety woes also came under the spotlight. Durban Tourism boss Phillip Sithole said yesterday the city was determined to lay to rest the ghost of xenophobic attacks.

"We are telling the world that visitors are safe to come to our city and enjoy themselves.

"Journalists who have been taken on tour throughout our city would attest to the fact that everything is calm. Our focus now is to restore stability in the hospitality industry, regain our visitor confidence and continue with our exciting marketing plans of taking Durban to the world," he said.

South African Tourism CEO Thulani Nzima agreed with Sithole and said his organisation's objective was to expand Tourism Indaba into a Pan-African show.

More than 24 African destinations were represented on the tradeshow floor.

"The Tourism Indaba is poised, now more than ever, to give buyers from around the world access to the widest diversity of African leisure travel products and experiences," Nzima said.

**Source:** Business Day

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