

Let's support President Ramaphosa's dream for a better South Africa

The tourism industry is ideally placed to help President Cyril Ramaphosa achieve his dream for better South Africa through job creation and increased investment.

By [Nomvuselelo Songelwa](#) 28 Jun 2019



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"As South Africa enters the next 25 years of democracy, and in pursuit of the objectives of the NDP, let us proclaim a bold and ambitious goal, a unifying purpose, to which we dedicate all our resources and energies," said the President.

Amongst other things, the President promised an economy that will grow at a rate far greater than our population, as well as doubling international tourist arrivals to 21 million by 2030.

He mentioned the country would focus on the renewal of the country's brand, introducing a world-class visa regime and a significant focus on Chinese and Indian markets and air arrivals from the rest of the African continent.

To achieve the President's ambitious goal, it will be essential for government and the tourism industry to have access to reliable data about the tourism sector.

Tourism is a significant economic sector that represents 10,4% of global GDP and 313 million jobs in 2017. In South Africa, the sector makes a substantial contribution to our economy and represents 9% total GDP. The sector creates 1.5 million jobs, which accounts for 9.5% of total employment in South Africa.

To prove the tourism sector's importance in the South African economy, and predict its potential to grow its contribution, we need meaningful data. However, official statistics so far have been one-dimensional and focus solely on total international arrivals.

There is currently no clear 'overall' indication of source markets, traveller behaviour, or indeed investment opportunities in promising regions of the country.

Car rental companies, hotels and various booking engines and platforms have been analysing their own data to create visitor profiles. They gauge average length of stay, hotel nights and ordinary travel spend. But this valuable data is being collected in silos.

As the first private-public partnership of its kind, the newly launched data technology company, Jurni, aims to address this challenge by consolidating the existing data sources and plug any data gaps by creating new data platforms. Jurni will equip businesses with valuable business insights and accurate forecasts as well as develop a booking tool and visitor portal that will showcase more tourism products.

By showcasing the lesser-known tourism products in our country, we will be able to significantly boost investment to our country, another focus point for President Ramaphosa as he announced an intensified investment drive.

Removing red tape

“In discussions with business, government has committed to remove the policy impediments and accelerate implementation of these projects. We are urgently working on a set of priority reforms to improve the ease of doing business by consolidating and streamlining regulatory processes, automating permit and other applications, and reducing the cost of compliance,” said President Ramaphosa.

“We must reach a point where no company need wait more than six months for a permit or licence and new companies should be able to be registered within a day.”

This is fantastic news for tourism companies who are keen to invest in our country, not only in the tried-and-trusted locales, but also in the lesser-known tourism destinations.

Reliable data and statistics will put South Africa's 'hidden' tourism gems on the map, allowing these areas to attract much-needed investment. A centralised data hub, where credible data from different sources (car rental, entrance fees, tolls...) is consolidated, can help identify who the visitors are, pinpoint where regions should focus their marketing efforts, and answer other important questions about the tourism sector.

The high-speed rail network, promised by the President during SONA, will go a long way to not only connect South African cities with the remotest areas of our country for local South Africans but also for international travellers.

Buy local

Local South African products are another focus point for the president. “The suit, the shirt and the tie I am wearing today was locally made by South African textile workers working at the House of Monatic here in Simon's River Cape Town. Let us all buy locally-made goods to drive up demand in our economy,” the President said.

By attracting more tourists to the rural and 'authentic' areas of our country, the tourism industry can help the President stimulate the 'Buy Local' campaign.

According to the President, government will support tech-enabled platforms for self-employed youth in rural areas and townships. "We will expand our high tech industry by ensuring that the legal and regulatory framework promotes innovation, scaling up skills development for young people in new technologies, and reducing data costs."

This is great news for the rural tourism industry, especially as Jurni has undertaken to bring technology to more remote areas of our country to allow entrepreneurs in these areas to better market their offering. We want to provide a platform that will allow smaller tourism SMMEs to promote their experiences or properties to South Africa's source markets in the same way the bigger providers promote their offering.



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Through Jurni's data and technology, young people from around South Africa will be better equipped to start and market their own tourism enterprises. But this technology will do more than create opportunities for young entrepreneurs, it will also create more diverse jobs in the tourism sector. Jobs in the travel sector are often identified as travel agent jobs, tour operators, chefs, and game rangers. However, as the industry increasingly embraces technological innovation and data analytics, many exciting high-tech jobs have emerged, which are a perfect fit for our younger South African professionals.

Following the President's SONA, it is important for us to raise the level of debate on the importance of tourism as a key economic and social driver. As the President said: "Working together there is nothing we cannot be, nothing we cannot do, and nothing we cannot achieve."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nomvuselelo Songelwa is CEO of Jurni, a public-private venture that will revolutionise and transform South Africa's travel and tourism industry.

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