

R35m in irregular payments recovered by SA Tourism

Tourism Minister Patricia de Lille says R35m linked to irregular payments for services not rendered has been returned to the SA Tourism account.



Source: Archive | Minister of Tourism Patricia de Lille

Several irregular payments were made for services not rendered by South African Tourism's US and South Africa offices.

SA Tourism is the official tourism marketing agency of South Africa and an entity of the Department of Tourism.

As part of its mandate, SA Tourism has hub offices in key source market countries around the world to enable officials to interact with key partners in executing their duties of promoting and marketing South Africa as a top travel destination.

"I was recently informed by SA Tourism that there had been several irregular payments and invoices noted, which do not meet the definition of compliant and valid or internal control verification standards.

"Several irregular invoices were created about three days before the previous financial year end, which ended on 31 March 2023 and processed piecemeal to override banking controls," De Lille explained.

Executives who are no longer working for the agency, the Minister said, processed these payments, from the United States and South Africa offices of SA Tourism at the end of March 2023.

“This discovery was triggered by a review by SA Tourism, which confirmed that a significant portion received by a media agency during March 2023 and signed off by the then-acting chief financial officer, chief operations officer and the then acting CEO were for services not yet rendered at the time of disbursement,” De Lille said.

The service provider was notified and acknowledged that they had received a significant sum of money, which was approved by the former acting chief financial officer, acting chief executive Officer, and the then COO of SA Tourism.

However, it was discovered that the services for which the payment was made were not provided.

“These irregular payments are completely shocking and it is unacceptable that officials entrusted with public funds continue to act with such contempt of public finance laws and regulations. We will not leave this matter unaccounted for. The internal audit report is being finalised and the matter has also been reported to the Auditor-General of South Africa to investigate,” De Lille said.

Communication ensued with the respective media agency to pay back R35m for services not rendered.

“We are relieved that all the money has been recovered from the irregular payments. I can also confirm that the Auditor-General of South Africa is in the process of finalising a delegation from the AG’s office to do an audit on the SA Tourism New York office,” she added.

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