

Tourism Summit must reap rewards for industry

By [Eddy Khosa](#)

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The inaugural SA Tourism Summit in October was an intense and productive gathering of industry leaders and I am optimistic that the summit will reap medium to long-term benefits for tourism in the country.



The spirit of the event for me was most evident in the closing of the two-day event, with the symbolic holding of hands by keynote speakers, and also in the delegates' commitments through writing their "vows" to "make things happen" on paper "leaves" and hanging these on the Tree of Commitment placed in the auditorium.

The newly established Maslow Agreement - which follows the 2011 Turbine Hall Declaration - again shows industry's commitment to work together in promoting the country as a top 2020 destination as well as embracing responsible tourism practices. The latter includes the development of women in tourism and I wish to suggest that the industry invites the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande, to address the industry on the training and development of women in the country and specifically in our sector.

"Making it happen starts here!" is an important slogan as we set out to make commitments. Fellow panellist Mmatšatši Ramawela's final comment on this subject was that the industry needs to turn Johannesburg "round" like destination marketers did with the Melbourne case study presented at the summit, and to make it the powerhouse of the Gauteng province and the country. As Ramawela mentioned, this will involve partnerships between government and the private sector and then specifically working across all government departments, such as transport, home affairs, the DTI, education.

Also, Africa, Ramawela contended, is the country's biggest source for tourism and remains a tremendously unexplored market in terms of the value that African countries can bring to our sector.

A co-ordinated approach is needed

I am in agreement, too, with fellow panellist Rashid Seedat that there's "fragmentation" in government departments when it comes to tourism and that a co-ordinated approach is needed to put into place the visions of the National Development Plan and, specifically, also to co-ordinate all metros, districts, and regions into action. The private sector has a pivotal role to play and, with the focus on Gauteng, the private sector and the GTA need to build tourism's infrastructure in line with the summit's discussions on the importance of "visibility".

As GTA CEO Dawn Robertson said, the "value" for travellers relates to authentic experiences and she believes it is the right time to put plans into action that will build this province's tourism economy through a people-centred approach. I reiterate that the training and development of women in tourism is imperative and specifically to shatter any glass ceiling that might exist.

The conference has set the tone for future engagements and initiatives to promote:

- Infrastructure developments and planning to make our cities more "liveable" and more "visitable" for travellers;
- Partnerships between the private and public sector within the grander visions of the National Tourism Sector Strategy;
- Opening up this sector to other African countries and engaging meaningfully with RETOSA (Regional Tourism Organisation of Southern Africa); and
- Service excellence throughout the tourism value chain.

To every summit delegate, there are definite things for us all to do to make it happen for the country as a whole; it was a privilege to be a part of a summit that is likely to have far-reaching repercussions for the tourism industry - and for South Africa as a whole.

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