

# National Minimum Standard for Responsible Tourism launched

A National Minimum Standard for Responsible Tourism has been announced by the Minister of Tourism, Marthinus van Schalkwyk, as South Africa's natural environment is one of its greatest tourism resources, therefore the tourism industry needs to be actively involved in conserving and protecting it.

The minister said that the primary objective of the National Department of Tourism (NDT) is to retain the economic and social advantages of tourism development and growth while reducing the undesirable impacts on the natural, historic, cultural or social environment.

"Through the application of responsible tourism practices, we will develop the tourism sector as a national priority in a sustainable and acceptable manner, integrating tourism to the broader social and economic processes in society," the minister emphasised.

The NDT commenced with a process of developing the National Minimum Standard for Responsible Tourism (NMSRT) in 2009, as part of its strategic objective of creating a sustainable tourism industry. South Africa was amongst the first countries to include "Responsible Tourism" in its national tourism policy, the 1996 White Paper on the Development and Promotion of Tourism in South Africa. Following the White Paper, the then Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) also produced the National Responsible Tourism Guidelines in 2002, which emphasised the need to address the triple bottom line of sustainable development (economic, environmental, and social sustainability).

## The core aspects of sustainability

The draft National Minimum Standard for Responsible Tourism was finalised by the department in 2010, where it later underwent a rigorous process through the South African Bureau of Standard (SABS) in order for it to become a South African National Standard (SANS). The draft was then subsequently published as a South African National Minimum Standard for Responsible Tourism (SANMSRT) on 28 March, 2011. The SANMSRT consists of 41 criteria, covering the core aspects of sustainability and divided into four categories, namely: sustainable operations and management; economic; environmental; and social and cultural. This standard serves three purposes:

- To establish a common understanding of the minimum criteria for responsible tourism
- To promote responsible tourism in the tourism sector, including accommodation, hospitality, travel distribution system, as well as all organs of state and entities, organised labour and communities involved or interested in the tourism sector in South Africa
- To establish the minimum criteria for certification of the sustainability of organisations in the tourism sector.

## An important milestone

The NMSRT will be utilised by tourism organisations such as Local Tourism Organisations or sector organisations to create awareness amongst their members about responsible tourism, and this document can be used as a benchmark for their members to work towards attaining the goals set by the national Responsible Tourism Guidelines of 2002. It can also be used by tourism businesses and organisations preparing for certification or simply evaluating the organisation's progress in respect of sustainability.

The minister concluded in saying that the launch marks an important milestone in the promotion of responsible tourism and the raising of awareness amongst tourists on the value of conserving our natural resources for sustainability to ensure continued growth in the tourism industry for years to come.

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