

Tourism Business Council unpacks SONA highlights

A more dynamic, competitive and inclusive economy, as envisaged by the 2017 State of the Nation Address (SONA), could benefit the tourism and travel industry according to the Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBCSA). However, this will, especially in the case of the travel and tourism industry, require a greater level of collaboration between all the social partners to boost economic growth beyond the projected 1.3%, more effort to bolster trade investment and a real commitment to address major regulatory and structural issues that continue to hamper business on a daily basis.



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TBCSA has taken stock of SONA's core messages, particularly the focus on 'radical socio-economic transformation'. The council agrees that economic transformation should mean moving beyond share ownership schemes and stands ready to continue its work alongside government to address some of the industry-specific complexities involved in the implementation of the B-BBEE policy and other economic transformation programmes.

TBCSA CEO, Mmatšatši Ramawela says: "SONA 2017 included a number of notable highlights for the industry – amongst them the important issue of inclusivity. Fortunately, the industry has laid a foundation through the inclusive growth work stream that is part of the National Tourism Minister's Economic Boosting Initiative. We look forward to continue working with the Tourism BEE Council, the National Department of Tourism and the Department of Trade and Industry to further unpack the President's pronouncement on this matter at an industry level".

Other SONA highlights that are relevant for the industry include:

- Mention of the Invest SA initiative and planned provincial offices in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape – provinces which also happen to be key tourism nodes in the country. This will go a long way in facilitating the much-needed investment in the industry;

- The development of the Black Industrialists Programme – a programme that the council has earmarked to engage the DTI on in partnership with the National Department of Tourism to ensure the inclusion of the travel and tourism industry;
- The planned investment on critical and capital maintenance programmes to modernise harbours, which will have a significant impact not only for the fishing communities but also for travel and tourism activity in the affected areas;
- Policies and plans aimed at lowering the cost of data. Access to fast and affordable data is a must for the modern-day traveller. Thus, lowering the overall cost of data will ultimately lower the cost of doing business, while at the same time ensuring that South Africa remains competitive in the global travel and tourism marketplace;
- The fight against crime is an apex priority for government. The unfortunate attack at a restaurant in Vilakazi Street in Soweto and other similar incidents in different parts of the country that are reported to the TBCSA Tourism Safety Initiative (TSI) portal, highlight the urgent need for government to also prioritise tourist (and tourism business) safety and security.

Issue of land ownership has mixed implications for the industry

TBCSA, however, wished to hear the president providing more details about government's plan to address issues of land restitution and redistribution, on the one hand, transport and overall infrastructure development. The Council applauds government's stance on the land vs financial compensation, but notes that the broader issue of land ownership and usage is likely to have mixed implications for the travel and tourism industry. On the transport and infrastructure side, the focus for travel and tourism is of course on improving the state of the country's roads in key tourist areas.

Fast-tracking implementation of SADC Industrial Strategy

At a regional level, the council welcomes plans to fast-track the implementation of the SADC Industrial Strategy, as well as regional collaboration through the implementation of the SADC-COMESA-East African Community Trade Area. Ramawela says: "Amidst a growing level of global economic uncertainty, this augurs well for intra-Africa trade and will open more doors for intra-Africa travel and tourism opportunities. We hope these initiatives also result in the fast tracking of regional tourism initiatives such as the UNIVISA and foster collaboration with other African trading blocs"

We must be mindful of how the rest of the world sees us

TBCSA denounced the chaos and violent scenes that unfolded in and outside of Parliament during the SONA, saying this does not reflect well on the image of destination South Africa. "For the seasoned traveller, they may be able to understand the context in which the chaos took place. However, for someone wishing to visit the country for the first time, these types of scenes may be misunderstood. As a country, we need to be mindful of how the rest of the world sees us and be careful about the type of images and messages we send out to the world especially from a travel and tourism perspective".