Chairman, Tourism Business Council of South Africa

TBCSA Tourism Leadership Conference 2026

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30 Years On: Tourism Still Matters

Programme Director,

Representatives of government at national, provincial and local level,

Members of the TBCSA and TOMSA Boards,

Industry leaders, our partners, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the 2026 TBCSA Tourism Leadership Conference, as we celebrate a significant milestone — 30 years of representing, supporting and championing South Africa's tourism industry.

Our theme this year is 30 Years On: Tourism Still Matters.

And I would argue that tourism matters today more than ever before.

It matters because of its contribution to our economy, the jobs it creates and its ability to bring economic opportunities to communities that have historically been excluded from meaningful participation in our economy.

Thirty years of building an industry

When the TBCSA was established in 1996, South Africa was a young democracy finding its place in the world.

Our tourism industry was entering a new era of opportunity, and there was a need for an organised private sector voice that could work with government to develop and grow the sector.

Over the past three decades, the TBCSA has played that role.

From establishing the Tourism Marketing Levy, known as TOMSA, to advocating for visa reform, improved air access, tourism safety and investment, the Council has worked to create an environment in which tourism businesses can operate, compete and grow.

We have also had to navigate difficult periods, none more challenging than COVID-19, when the Council worked alongside government and industry stakeholders to advocate for the safe reopening of tourism and the protection of livelihoods.

Today, the importance of this work is reflected in tourism's contribution to our economy.

In 2024, total traveller spending amounted to R779 billion, with domestic tourism accounting for the majority of that expenditure.

The sector contributed 4.9% to South Africa's GDP, while one in every 18 jobs was supported by tourism.

Behind these numbers are people, families and communities whose livelihoods depend on the success of this industry.

As we celebrate 30 years, I want to acknowledge the leaders who came before us, our partners in government and the many businesses that continue to invest in South African tourism.

This milestone belongs to all of you.

A new moment for tourism

Ladies and gentlemen,

When we gathered here last year, we made a commitment that this conference must be more than a talk shop. That our discussions must lead to meaningful action and measurable outcomes for our industry.

And I am encouraged that we are seeing important progress.

Through Business for South Africa, or B4SA, organised business has been working closely with government to address the structural challenges holding back our economy and unlock opportunities for growth.

In August this year, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the third phase of the Government-Business Partnership, with the ambition of lifting South Africa's economic growth above 3%.

For the first time under this partnership, tourism has been included as one of the priority sectors for economic growth, alongside mining and agriculture.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is a significant development for our industry.

For years, we have argued that tourism is not simply about leisure and hospitality. It is an economic sector capable of attracting investment, creating employment and supporting businesses across our country.

Its inclusion in this national growth partnership is an important recognition of that contribution.

But being recognised as a priority sector is only the beginning.

We must now demonstrate what this partnership can deliver through improved air access, a more enabling environment for investment, greater support for small businesses and opportunities for tourism development in rural communities.

We already have an important foundation through the Tourism Growth Partnership Plan, which identifies the areas where government and the private sector must work together to unlock the industry's potential.

Our responsibility now is to turn these commitments into results.

Because ultimately, the success of our partnerships will not be measured by the meetings we hold or the agreements we sign, but by the businesses that grow, the jobs we create and the communities that benefit.

Taking tourism beyond traditional destinations

One area that remains particularly important to me is rural tourism.

South Africa is blessed with extraordinary tourism assets, many of which are found beyond our major cities and established destinations.

Across our rural communities, we have rich cultural heritage, remarkable landscapes and people with the creativity and ambition to build successful tourism businesses.

Yet too often, these communities remain on the margins of the tourism economy.

We are gathered here at Sun City, one of South Africa's most recognisable tourism destinations.

But we must also remember the communities beyond the gates of this resort.

For many young people in those communities, the opportunities created by tourism remain out of reach.

We cannot call tourism a success simply because our hotels are full. We must also ask whether the communities around our tourism assets are benefiting from the economic activity taking place.

A tourist travelling to a rural community should represent an opportunity for the local guesthouse, the restaurant owner, the tour guide and the young entrepreneur trying to establish a business.

But these opportunities do not happen automatically.

Rural tourism businesses need access to markets, financing and reliable infrastructure.

They need roads that are maintained, access to water and electricity, and municipalities that understand the importance of tourism to their local economies.

This is why collaboration with government, particularly at provincial and local level, is so important.

We cannot expect small tourism businesses to thrive where the basic conditions for doing business do not exist.

The future of South African tourism must include the small business owner in a rural village just as much as it includes the large hotel group in one of our major cities.

There is room for both to succeed. In fact, we need both to succeed.

Investing in the next generation of tourism leaders

As we reflect on 30 years of the TBCSA, we must also ask ourselves an important question: who will lead this industry over the next 30 years?

For the fourth year running, the TBCSA has invited young tourism entrepreneurs to participate in this conference at no cost, giving them access to industry leaders, potential partners and opportunities that might otherwise be beyond their reach.

This year, we have four outstanding young people joining us from four different provinces.

Sandile Popi from Gauteng, Oyama Bam from the Eastern Cape, Inam Amy Siyengu from the Northern Cape and Thalente Tshezi from KwaZulu-Natal.

Their businesses span educational tourism, cultural experiences, nature and adventure tourism, and traditional crafts.

What excites me is that these young people are not waiting for someone to create opportunities for them. They are already identifying opportunities within their communities and building businesses around them.

[Pause and invite the four young entrepreneurs to stand for acknowledgement.]

To our young entrepreneurs, I want to say: you belong in this room. You are not simply the future of tourism. You are already part of its present.

Make the most of these two days. Ask questions, introduce yourselves and build relationships.

And to my fellow industry leaders, I have a request.

When one of these young people approaches you during a tea break, over lunch or in the corridors, please give them your time.

Share your experience. Offer advice. Make an introduction where you can.

Sometimes, what stands between a young entrepreneur and the next stage of their business is simply access to the right person or the right opportunity.

If we want to build a stronger tourism industry over the next 30 years, we must be prepared to invest in the people who will lead it.

The importance of this conference

This year marks the fifth year of our Tourism Leadership Conference.

Over these five years, we have created a platform that brings together government and business leaders to engage on the issues shaping the future of our industry.

But the value of this conference must extend beyond the conversations we have in this room.

We should not leave Sun City having simply repeated the challenges we already know.

We must leave with a clearer understanding of what needs to be done, who needs to do it and how we can work together to make progress.

Over the next two days, we will discuss the investment needed to grow tourism, the importance of functioning cities and municipalities, and how we can create a more inclusive tourism economy.

These conversations matter because South Africa needs every sector capable of generating growth and employment to perform at its full potential.

And tourism has an important contribution to make.

Looking to the next 30 years

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we celebrate the TBCSA's 30th anniversary, we should be proud of the role the Council has played in bringing our industry together.

But our greatest contribution must still lie ahead.

The next chapter must be defined by a tourism economy that grows faster, reaches further and creates opportunities for more South Africans.

An industry in which small businesses have a genuine opportunity to succeed.

An industry in which rural communities benefit from the extraordinary tourism assets on their doorsteps.

And an industry in which government and the private sector work together, not only when there is a crisis, but consistently, to unlock our country's potential.

Thirty years ago, the TBCSA was established because the tourism industry needed a collective voice.

Today, that voice remains just as important.

But our task is no longer simply to make the case for tourism.

Our task is to ensure that tourism delivers on its promise.

Let us celebrate what has been achieved over the past 30 years, acknowledge the work that remains and commit ourselves to building a stronger, more inclusive tourism industry.

Because 30 years on, tourism still matters.

And what we do next will determine just how much more it can achieve.

Thank you.