

Tourism grows when it is allowed to flourish

by **Manny de Freitas MP** – DA Shadow Minister of Tourism

At the International Tourism Day celebrations last year, the Minister of no Tourism, Mmamoloko Kubayi-Ngubane unbelievably stated that we had much to celebrate in tourism. Perhaps she could tell us exactly what there was and is to celebrate.

We continue to be on the red lists of a number of countries that are strategically important to us, these include the United Kingdom and Germany.

Stats SA released statistics on tourist accommodation that revealed that income in this sub-sector had decreased by 57,7% compared to December 2019, with foreign arrivals decreasing by over 81%. This means that where we had 1.5 million arrivals in December 2019, only 279 539 arrived on our shores a year later. Besides the pre-Covid negative image of the country, the year plus lockdown has only exacerbated it.

Billions have been lost in this sector, as have hundreds of thousands of jobs. This has been admitted by government itself. Most of these losses have occurred within small and medium enterprises. Instead of focusing on real assistance for small and medium enterprises who had suffered the most, it provided only a R200 million Tourism Relief Fund.

The R1.2 billion Tourism Equity Fund, on the other hand, was created with the aim to improve participation of black South Africans in the tourism sector. However, this one-dimensional government solution ensures that only a selected number of elites, hand-picked by government, benefits.

Creating a new tourism elite who have connections to the governing party will do little to grow and develop the tourism sector and create jobs.

If government ensured that the basics were done, it would go much further than the limited elites that will benefit from extravagant assistance. Our tourism sector would grow faster and would ensure a more inclusive and growing sector if the various spheres of government improved and maintained tourism infrastructure, tourism sites and related infrastructure, such as the construction of roads to inaccessible or hard-to-reach tourism sites and access to water and electricity to tourism attractions.

By doing this, more people would be able to participate in the tourism sector without reliance of government funding which, based on this government's performance, will be pilfered, lost by corruption and maladministration or distributed to those within the inner circle of the ANC.

Incentives, such as training incentives for entrants in the sector, and tax incentives as a relief to those hit hard during lockdown, would go much further.

Finally, our tourism sector will not pick up until there is an effective Covid vaccine roll out which would ensure that local and international travelers feel safe against the virus. Tourists also need to know that they are safe from a crime and security perspective.

What the sector now needs is stability and policy consistency as these are the main criteria used by most of our greatest tourism markets. This will ensure that tourists from all over the world will come flooding back to our shores, which will allow the sector to rebuild and jobs to be created again.

The current state of the world means South Africa is in competition with other destinations that will work hard to attract much needed and overdue tourism. As a result, we have to be attractive, convenient and interesting so that tourists will make our country their destination of choice.