

Tourism in Lowveld thrives in 2016

Trevor Hlungwani

WHITE RIVER - The value of tourism on the local economy entails much more than economic benefits in rand and cents.

This was the message by the minister for tourism, Mr Derek Hanekom, during his keynote address at the opening of the Southern Africa Tourism Services Association (Satsa) conference last week Thursday.

The theme for this year's conference was sustainability.

Hanekom said role players should use tourism to create cohesion in the sector and society as a whole.

"We need to prepare ourselves for inclusive tourism that will enable all of us to play a role to grow the sector," he said.

According to Hanekom, the industry has the potential to grow the country's economy

and it contributed R90 billion to the gross domestic product in 2015.

Domestic tourism has seen as steady growth. According to a report published by the Department of Tourism, more than 760 000 tourists arrived in the country in May.

That figure is 11 per cent more than that of May 2015.

Local tourism is also improving.

According to Ms Lisa Sheard from Kruger Lowveld Tourism, there has been a steady increase in international visitors to the Lowveld.

She said local tourism has returned to its triumphant state of 2014.

"Last year was bad because of the visa regulations and the unabridged certificate requirement from home affairs," she said.

The controversial visa law required all minors travelling to or from South Africa

to have unabridged birth certificates.

Some tourists entering the country from other parts of the world were, however, not aware of this requirement when visiting the country.

Sheard added that the industry was also plagued by other governmental regulations which hinder its growth.

Hanekom mentioned that it was very important for industry leaders to work with sectors of government to make sure there is no blockage of tourists who want to enter the country. He called on all stakeholders to provide good services to make sure that the visitors' experience was good so that they would return for more.



MEC for economic development and tourism, Mr Eric Kholwane and minister for tourism, Mr Derek Hanekom.



Ms Emma Trappler, Unanda Erasmus and Sally Wille and Mr Craig MacFarlane.



Ms Lindi Mthethwa, Paola Cotinella and Simone Battani.