



KLCBT

Changing of Guard – A United Future

.Kruger Lowveld Chamber of Business and Tourism
A reflection, a handover, and a call to keep building the
Lowveld
Prof David Mabunda • 30 July 2026

A moment of gratitude and transition

- Today marks a handover — not an ending.
- It is an opportunity to thank members, partners, directors and staff for their commitment.
- It celebrates a Chamber that has kept business and tourism voices together during difficult times.
- It invites the next leadership to build on trust, unity and practical action.

“Leadership is stewardship: we leave institutions stronger than we found them.”



The Chamber's mandate in the Lowveld

- Official representative body of business and tourism in the Kruger Lowveld / Ehlanzeni District.
- Promotes the region as a tourism and investment destination.
- Provides networking, marketing and business-support opportunities to members.
- Serves as a private-sector voice in engagements with government and strategic partners.
- Connects a broad base of local businesses, tourism operators and community-facing enterprises.



KLCBT

Voice of the
Kruger Lowveld

PRIVATE-SECTOR VOICE • DESTINATION PROMOTION • PARTNERSHIP BUILDING

Economic pulse: low growth, high pressure

+0.5%

South Africa real GDP growth, Q1 2026 q/q

7.0%

SARB repo rate held in July 2026

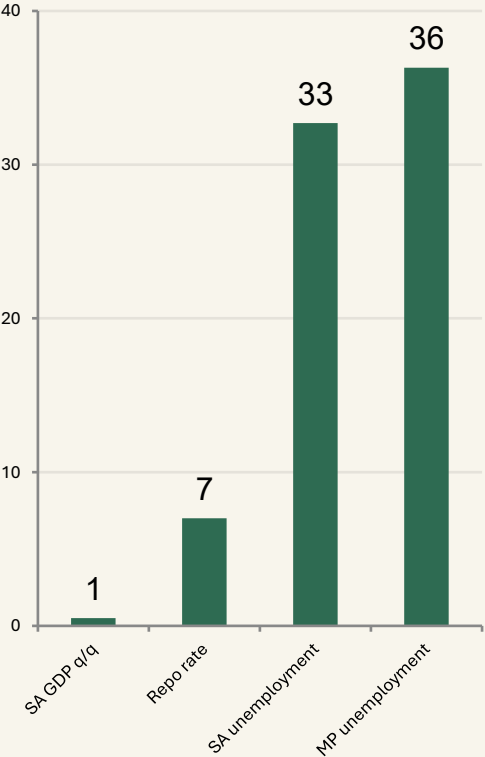
36.3%

Mpumalanga unemployment, Q1 2026

4.22m

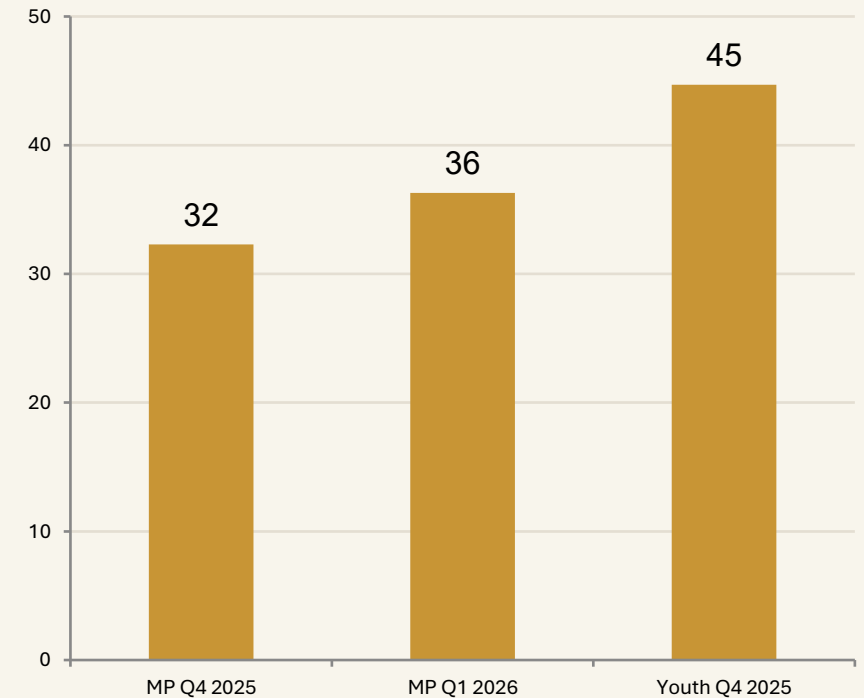
SA international arrivals Jan–May 2026

- Growth remains positive but too weak to absorb unemployment and business-cost pressures.
- Consumers remain cautious as inflation and interest rates strain household budgets.
- Mpumalanga’s unemployment rose sharply in Q1 2026 after an improved Q4 2025 position.
- Tourism is still expanding nationally, giving the Lowveld a real platform for recovery and investment.



Local economy indicators: what the numbers signal

- Provincial GDP growth has been modest: Mpumalanga indicator reported 0.3% for 2024.
- Mpumalanga employment reached about 1.28 million in Q4 2025 before the Q1 2026 setback.
- Provincial unemployment improved to 32.3% in Q4 2025, then increased to 36.3% in Q1 2026.
- Youth unemployment remained a critical constraint at 44.7% in Q4 2025.
- These indicators confirm that the Lowveld must grow through tourism, agriculture, trade, construction, SMMEs and services.



“The goal is not to wait for growth; it is to organise, invest and collaborate until growth arrives.”

How low growth is felt by local businesses



- Thinner margins as input costs, compliance costs and finance costs rise faster than revenue.
- Cautious customers trading down, delaying purchases or choosing shorter, lower-cost trips.
- Pressure on cash flow, especially for small enterprises carrying staff, leases and stock.
- Infrastructure and safety concerns affecting visitor confidence and business operating costs.
- A greater need for collaboration, joint marketing, reliable data and stronger advocacy.

THE KEY RESPONSE: DISCIPLINE, DIFFERENTIATION AND UNITY

Tourism remains the Lowveld's strategic anchor

- Mpumalanga ranked second nationally for international tourist arrivals in 2024.
- The province received about 2.1 million international tourists in 2024, up 15.6% from 2023.
- The province also received about 3.2 million domestic visitors, with domestic travel sustaining many businesses.
- Tourism spend is still below potential — product renewal, safety and experience quality are essential.
- The Lowveld must package Kruger, Panorama Route, culture, cuisine, events and business tourism as one compelling region.

2.1m

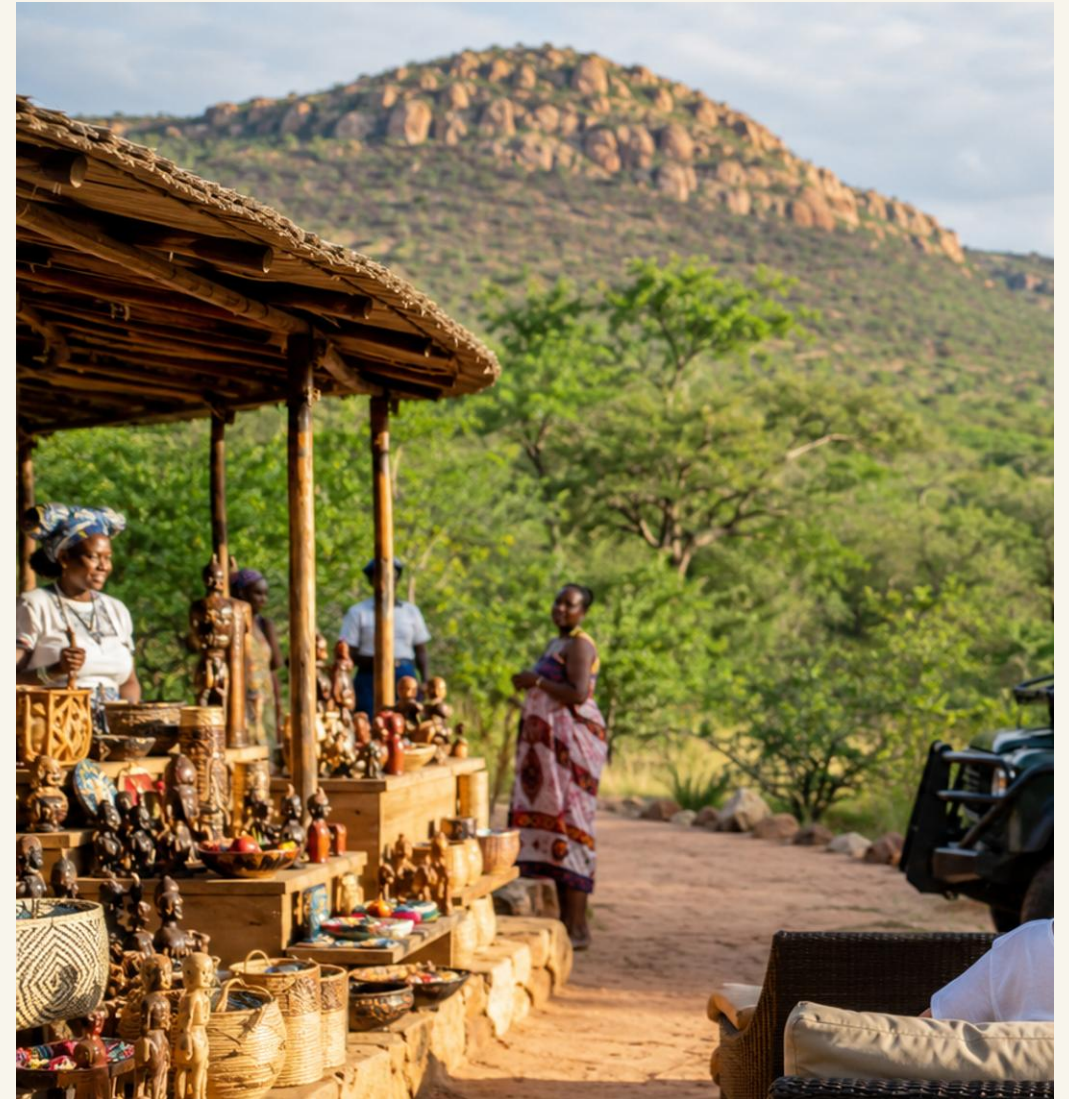
International tourists to
Mpumalanga, 2024

3.2m

Domestic visitors to
Mpumalanga, 2024

R7.5bn

International tourist spend,
2024



A resilience playbook for businesses under pressure

1

Protect cash

- Shorten payment cycles
- Track margins weekly
- Renegotiate where possible

2

Win locally

- Source locally
- Cross-sell members
- Build repeat customers

3

Differentiate

- Package experiences
- Improve service quality
- Use digital channels

4

Collaborate

- Share data
- Market jointly
- Advocate with one voice

“Resilience is not merely surviving difficult conditions; it is using them to become sharper, leaner and more trusted.”

What KLCBT has stood for

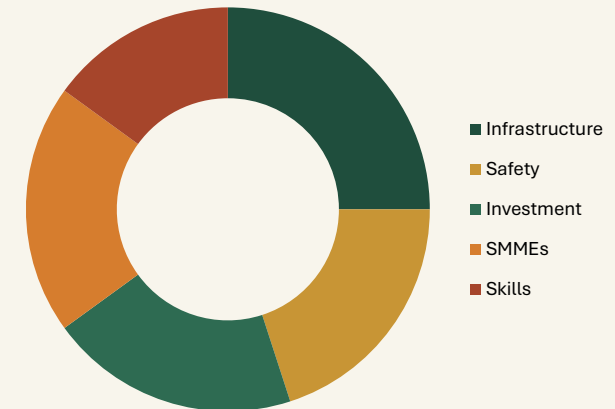
- A united voice for businesses and tourism operators across the Kruger Lowveld.
- Constructive engagement with government on infrastructure, tourism safety and destination competitiveness.
- Practical member value through networking, marketing, events and shared information.
- Commitment to tourism safety, including the publicised 24-hour Tourism Help Line and road-safety messaging.
- Promotion of a “buy local, visit local, invest local” mindset to keep value circulating in the region.

- **Representation**
- **Destination marketing**
- **Advocacy**
- **Member service**
- **Regional pride**

A CHAMBER IS STRONG WHEN MEMBERS ACT AS ONE ECONOMY

Priorities for the next chapter

- Infrastructure: roads, signage, digital connectivity, reliable utilities and clean public spaces.
- Tourism safety: visible response systems, route safety, anti-corruption action and visitor confidence.
- Investment packaging: bankable tourism, agro-processing, property, events and conservation-economy opportunities.
- SMME growth: access to markets, finance readiness, procurement linkages and basic compliance support.
- Skills and youth: hospitality, guiding, digital marketing, artisan trades and enterprise mentoring.
- Regional brand: position the Lowveld as South Africa's most complete nature, culture and business-tourism region.



A message of encouragement to local businesses

- Do not mistake a difficult cycle for a weak future — the Lowveld's fundamentals remain strong.
- Every business that keeps people employed is performing a public service.
- Price pressure must not become quality pressure: service excellence is our strongest marketing tool.
- Build partnerships before you need them; in a low-growth economy, networks become working capital.
- Keep investing in trust — reliability, safety, fairness and professionalism always outlast market turbulence.

“When conditions are hardest, disciplined optimism becomes a competitive advantage.”

“The Lowveld has survived many seasons. Its strength is people who refuse to stop building.”

The handover charge: build the Lowveld together



- To the incoming leadership: protect the unity of the Chamber as its most valuable asset.
- To members: remain active, vocal and generous with one another — the Chamber works when members participate.
- To partners in government: keep the door open for practical, measurable public-private collaboration.
- To young entrepreneurs: claim your place in the Lowveld economy; innovation is not a luxury, it is a necessity.
- To the whole region: let us compete with the world, not with each other.

A STRONGER CHAMBER • A STRONGER DESTINATION • A STRONGER ECONOMY

Sources consulted

- KLCBT website — official mandate, member focus, tourism helpline and current news notices.
- Mpumalanga Department of Economic Development and Tourism — provincial indicator dashboard.
- South African Government / Stats SA reporting — GDP Q1 2026 and tourism arrivals statements.
- Reuters / South African Reserve Bank reporting — July 2026 repo rate and inflation context.
- Stats SA QLFS coverage — national and Mpumalanga unemployment movements in Q1 2026.
- Mpumalanga Premier SOPA 2026 — employment, growth and sector priorities.
- Lowvelder / Mpumalanga tourism coverage — provincial arrivals, tourism spend and domestic visitor figures.
- Generated visuals are illustrative and designed for presentation use.

“Thank you — may KLCBT continue to be a trusted voice for business, tourism and regional growth.”