

Professionalising tour guiding, reviewing visa regulations to streamline tourism

By [James Vos](#)

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On Wednesday, 21 February 2018, we celebrated International Tour Guide Day which gives prominence to the role that this sector plays in the tourism industry. The celebration holds a special meaning to me as I recently completed a course in tour guiding. I will soon be joining the ranks of these dedicated men and women to promote our country and its unique cultural and natural heritage. I will enjoy giving insight to visitors on the significance of the places they will be visiting.

Tour guides play an important role in creating a positive image of our country, an undertaking that has cumulative spin-offs for the economy. Critical as they are, it is sad to note that the importance of tour guides and their role in the economy is often overlooked.



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The first step in reversing this trend is to professionalise tour guiding. To ensure that tour guides are geared towards service excellence, the industry must be well regulated, reliable and professional. This also involves dealing with the vagaries of and challenges posed by illegal tourist guiding. I will make use of parliamentary processes to highlight these issues and look forward to working with the industry to find ways to make improvements.

According to StatsSA, one in 22 employed people in South Africa work in the tourism industry, representing 4.5% of the total workforce in our country. The [High-Level Panel Report on the Assessment of Key Legislation and the Acceleration of Fundamental Change](#) released last year by former president Kgalema Motlanthe indicates that 1.4 million people are employed in the tourism industry, with one in seven people relying on the sector for their livelihood. These statistics demonstrate why tourism is such an integral part of our economy, acts as a key driver of income generation and creates opportunities for jobs and entrepreneurship.

Recovering from the visa debacle

South Africa's tourism industry is still recovering from the disastrous visa regulations debacle, which, according to South Africa Tourism Service Association, resulted in an estimated R7.5bn loss to the tourism economy and decrease of about 600,000 tourists. Make no mistake, these regulations, coupled with the superfluous unabridged birth certificate requirement, will continue to hurt our tourism industry if we don't implement measures such as electronic visas that will make it easier

and safer for tourists to apply.

Following the president's announcement in the State of the Nation Address to consider "further measures to reduce regulatory barriers" it certainly sparked optimism in the tourism industry. I will, therefore, be writing to President Cyril Ramaphosa highlighting solutions that will streamline tourism facilitation to our country such as the introduction of electronic visas and the scrapping of the birth certificate requirement. After all, it was he who chaired the Inter-Ministerial Committee tasked with reviewing these visa regulations and sadly not much was achieved during that time.

The financial cost of introducing these measures will be much lower than the economic cost of scaring off tourists, trade and investment.

South Africa's tourism sector is a vibrant and growing one. Tourism growth potential does not just happen – we have to work together to make it happen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Vos, Shadow Minister of Tourism

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