



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM REPUBLIC OF
SOUTH AFRICA**

**Statement by Minister Mmamoloko Kubayi-Ngubane – Tourism related activities
under COVID-19 Risk Adjusted Level 3 and response measures**

30 July 2020

Since the country entered level 3 of the Risk-Adjusted Strategy, the tourism sector also began its march towards full operation. The reality of the COVID-19 pandemic and the fluctuating risk of the virus spread has dictated that we pace ourselves in our efforts to reopen the sector. However, we believe that so far, one step at a time, we are walking in the right direction.

The impact of the pandemic has been devastating for the sector. Many businesses are at risk and many jobs have already been lost. However, we are doing everything we can to ensure that the impact is minimised.

Over the last four months, we've had to work hard in partnership with the private sector to develop health and safety protocols and find innovative ways for the early reopening of the sector. Successive discussions with industry representatives on stringent prevention protocols and guidelines for the tourism sector yielded results, along the way with various sub-sectors and activities opening under levels 3 and 4. This included restaurants, accommodation establishments, casinos, hiking, self-drives at game farms and professional services. Domestic travel for business purposes was also allowed as of June first.

Following discussions about the current risk levels, the national Coronavirus Command Council recommended to Cabinet for some restrictions to be eased to allow more tourism activities to reopen. Cabinet has approved the following:

Restaurants

In our recent discussions with the restaurant sector, two issues were raised with regards to current regulations. One was the crippling effect of the nine o'clock curfew to restaurant business operations and the second was the issue of alcohol sale.

To comply with the current curfew regulation, restaurants are unable to serve dinner to their customers which means that they are unable to operate at peak time of their business day. In response to this challenge, Cabinet has agreed to move the curfew to start at 10pm to allow for uninterrupted dinner service at restaurants. We believe that this change will go a long way towards increasing their revenue generation.

The sale of alcohol remains prohibited.

Accommodation for leisure

Cabinet has also agreed to ease the restrictions around leisure travel. Currently, individuals are not allowed to leave their homes for leisure purposes. After the release of the new regulations, individuals will be permitted to leave their homes for leisure purposes within the province where they currently live. Let me emphasise, it is only intra-provincial travel not inter-provincial travel. Individuals are still not permitted to travel between provinces for leisure purposes.

Accordingly, this change has implications for accommodation facilities that are permitted to operate under level 3.

- Accommodation establishments are now permitted to operate for leisure intra-provincially subject to the following: -
 - No more than two people per room except for a nuclear family (parents and their children). Establishments are already legally obliged to require and keep a copy of proof of identity.
 - Short-term home rental/sharing remain closed.

Tour operators

Tour operators, in the new regulations, will be allowed to conduct guided tours in open safari vehicles subject to directions and include provision for both social distancing and maximum ventilation.

These changes will come into effect as soon as the new regulations are gazetted.

Since the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic we have been having regular interaction with various stakeholders. These interactions, which are almost on a weekly basis, have helped us to gather inputs from all stakeholders on how best to reopen the sector and support the recovery going forward.

These interactions have also helped to share information regarding how our government is managing the pandemic. Going forward we will invite health practitioners who are advising government on how best to manage the pandemic to meet with our sector so that together we can strategise on the way forward and are armed with all the necessary information.

We have also agreed to formalise our working relationship with sector players through a formation of a task team that brings together a broad spectrum of private sector players and officials from the Department of Tourism to work towards reopening the sector and resolving other sector challenges.

RELIEF AND RESPONSE MEASURES

In supporting the tourism sector in this crisis period, the Department redirected R200 million through the Tourism Relief Fund (TRF). Of the 7284 valid applications submitted, our resources could only assist 4,000 businesses in the tourism and hospitality sector.

Allocation of funds was conducted in line with government policies and ensured that there was equitable share of the resources across all regions of the country, including rural areas and small towns/dorpias. We are encouraged by the many letters of appreciation from patriotic South Africans, black and white, who did not listen to the misleading noise that the relief was specifically for Black people. This ultimately confused and discouraged even those who qualified for the grant not to apply.

PROVINCIAL BREAKDOWN	
	Count of Application Numbers
Eastern Cape	457
Free State	134
Gauteng	1017
KwaZulu Natal	607
Limpopo	294
Mpumalanga	238
North West	162
Northern Cape	124
Western Cape	967
Grand Total	4000

We regret that a total of 3,284 applications were not funded due to depletion of resources, despite the fact that some qualified. Reasons for non-approval ranged from enterprises with an annual turnover R5 million and above, non-tourism enterprises, enterprises not covered under the TRF guidelines like franchise restaurants, applications with outstanding mandatory document such as a valid tax certificate, and those without supporting documents. Letters detailing the reasons for unfavourable considerations are being prepared and will be issued to all unfunded applicants soon.

RELIEF FUNDING FOR TOUR GUIDES

A month ago, I announced that we have set aside R30 million to provide financial relief for freelance tourist guides over a period of two to three months. The processing of payments has taken longer due to some provincial offices closing down after they had positive Covid-19 cases.

We have since received a list of 9,380 tourist guides from the provinces. It has come to our attention that some of the tourist guides are registered with UIF. To avoid double-dipping, we have initiated a verification process to ensure that only those who are not receiving income benefit.

The first batch of payments to 1,378 verified eligible beneficiaries have been made. The second batch will be paid upon completion of the verification process. The verification process will be completed tomorrow, 31 July 2020.

Other Government relief measures

In addition, we welcome the decision by the Minister of Finance to review and change the qualifying criteria for the R200 billion Covid-19 Loan Guarantee Scheme, so that more businesses can gain access to the funds. We encourage businesses in our sector to exploit this opportunity.

Similarly, we welcome the announcement by Minister Nxesi of the extension of the Temporary Employer/Employee Relief Scheme (TERS), until 15 August 2020. This will go a long way for many businesses and employees.

Recovery plan

In the past three months we have been working on developing a tourism recovery strategy. In this regard, the CEO of SAT working with the team from the Department have been gathering inputs from the sector through a series of webinars, some of which I personally participated and also received written inputs from the sector players. This work has culminated in a draft Tourism Recovery Plan document. Let me take this opportunity to thank the team that worked hard to produce this document, SAT CEO Mr Sisa Ntshona and his team and the team from the Department led by DDG Aneme Malan.

In light of every evolving Covid-19 situation, I have decided to release the draft plan for further consultation to all the stakeholders and the general public before we finalise it for submission to cabinet. The window for making inputs will start the on 1 August 2020 when I release the document until 15 August 2020.

Inputs can be submitted at the following email address: recovery@tourism.gov.za

Way forward

I stand here today on the eve of Women's Month. Throughout the coming month there will be strong focus on the various challenges that women in our country are facing including the important issue of gender mainstreaming. Gender based violence remains a big challenge which our society must confront. Moreover, the issue of gender equality remains a thorn in the various sectors of the economy, including the tourism sector.

As a woman leader in the tourism sector, I call on all women who are part of the tourism, to draw inspiration from women such as Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Lilian Ngoyi, Charlote Maxeke, Mama Albertina Sisulu and others, on whose shoulders I stand, and continue the fight for increased women participation in the sector and the economy in general.

As we work towards the recovery, let us ensure that we rebuild a sector that embraces women as equally capable economic actors. A sector that is not inclusive is not sustainable.

We understand that these are extremely difficult times for the sector, however, we believe that this situation demands that we work together to weather the storm going forward. As government, we continue to be seized with finding stability and solutions as we traverse the turbulence.

Let's protect ourselves, let's wear masks, let's wash our hands and let's continue to practice social distancing.

Ends

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