

# Kruger Lowveld Tourism generates awareness through local tourism roadshow

Kruger Lowveld Tourism recently held its annual Tourism Month Roadshow, engaging local tourism organisations (LTO's) and governments across the region...

“KLT’s roadshows generate awareness around our activities and achievements over the past year, which are aligned to our three-year marketing strategy, and our plans for the future. They also serve as a platform to generate ideas to ensure tourism growth,” says Lisa Sheard, KLT’s executive director.



Lisa Sheard

LTOs and stakeholders from Lydenburg, Sabie, Pilgrim’s Rest and Graskop were all in attendance, with all LTOs across the region invited to KLT’s presentations, which were held in the various areas represented by the regional tourism body, including Bushbuckridge, Hazyview, Barberton, Nkomazi, Nelspruit, White River and Badplaas.

## The importance of growth in the tourism sector

Kicking off the sessions with the recently-launched destination marketing video, Sheard discussed how important tourism is as a growth sector in the economy and how the Kruger Lowveld/Ehlanzeni region performs in this regard.

“Tourism is one of the only growth sectors in our stagnant economy – an economy with negligible GDP growth, high and

growing unemployment and poverty rates, declining business confidence and very high levels of political turbulence and policy uncertainty. As such, tourism has been prioritised by the government as a major contributor to future GDP growth in South Africa,” says Sheard.

In light of the above, Sheard’s presentation focused on how the Kruger Lowveld is performing as a tourism destination in the domestic and international markets and provided some insight into how to improve performance.

## **Tourism growth across South Africa**

“South Africa’s tourism grew in tourist volumes by 2.8%, compared to 2015, with 34.3 million tourists visiting the country. In addition, a total tourism revenue of approximately R102.1bn was injected into the economy in 2016. This is an 11.1% increase compared to 2015. Almost 70% (R75.5bn) was generated from international tourists. There’s no doubt that tourism is a growth sector, two economic indicators prove this – direct contribution to the GDP and direct employment,” says Sheard.

The Kruger Lowveld/Ehlanzeni region is by far the most important tourism region in Mpumalanga, with a 52.1% share in the total spent by tourists in the province.

“The number of tourists to the region is increasing, with 46.7% of the total number of tourists that come to the province visiting our region. In addition, R9.4bn was spent in the region in 2013, the highest of all spend in the province’s three districts. Not only is this an increasing trend, it’s also over 50% of the total provincial spend,” says Sheard.

According to Sheard, tourism is a growth industry with great potential, but various things are needed to make this possible. “These include meaningful political buy-in to the tourism sector and its potential across all levels of government and many more tourism-savvy, skilled, passionate, empowered and energetic politicians and officials who understand their respective roles in tourism delivery and general economic growth at provincial, regional and local level.

## **Destination success**

The government needs to understand its role as a facilitator for tourism growth by maintaining and developing tourism infrastructure; public attractions and access; ensuring the delivery of municipal and other services, and providing a safe and secure operating environment. We need to clean up our towns and villages and provide 100% reliable services,” says Sheard.

One of Sheard’s proposals for the sector would be a tourism growth ‘think tank’ comprising of experts from both the public and private sectors, to build a collective structure, strategy, action agenda and resource financing plan which is measurable at all levels of government. “In addition, bigger tourism marketing allocations and smarter marketing techniques are needed to grow our domestic and international markets,” says Sheard.

She explains that the real tourism growth opportunities lie in leveraging off of established strengths.

“In Kruger Lowveld/Ehlanzeni, we need to build on existing strengths. For example, we should be upgrading and innovating product offerings along the Panorama Route – including the villages of Mathibiti, Moremela, and Leroro. In addition, finding an invigorating new model for Pilgrim’s Rest is an absolute must and needs to be done quickly. We also need catalytic projects to spark cultural tourism in our rural economy; an international signature event; the identification of tourism development corridors; and to elevate Mbombela / Nelspruit into a vibrant provincial capital city,” concludes Sheard.