

AA Travel Guides cautions against industry over-regulation

AA Travel Guides, publishers of information about tourist accommodation and travel options in South Africa for the past 18 years, has warned against over-regulation of the tourism industry. This follows the release of the draft Tourism Bill, which called for industry comments and input.

MD Vanessa Sand says while compulsory registration of tourism businesses does make sense, as one needs an indication of the size of the industry, this could be very expensive and lead to more bureaucracy.

"There is an existing national tourism database which can simply be expanded upon by information submitted by representative industry associations. This will avoid unnecessary over-regulation. The tourism industry in particular, through its very nature, needs to be self-regulated and cannot be held back by mandatory and costly systems," says Sand.

Star-grading should not be compulsory

Although the Bill does not say openly that it is authorising star grading to be compulsory, it could be interpreted as hinting at this in sections five and six, where it refers to the setting up of a national information and monitoring system and to "particulars relating to the classification and grading of the tourism business".

"We do not believe that the Bill should leave any door open for a future tourism minister or for the National Department of Tourism to make star-grading compulsory. If, indeed, this did happen there would be strong resistance from the industry. Ultimately tourism businesses should have the freedom to operate and promote themselves in terms of how they want to be positioned in the market. We trust that government will accommodate this industry feedback before the Bill is ultimately written into law," says Sand.