

By working as a team, we can restore our iconic tourism destinations

By Greg Krumbock MP – DA Member on the Portfolio Committee on Tourism

Ramping up our international tourist arrivals is the key to unlock our country's economic potential, and to expand opportunities to many more of our citizens.

Hence, it is very disappointing that our 2018/2019 international arrivals have dropped by 0.6% compared to 2017/2018. Included in this figure is a decline of 5.7% from Europe, where a strong Euro can buy you an exotic dream holiday in our country, at attractive currency rates, and a close to 1% drop in our market of the great potential from Asia.

South African Tourism mention five factors that have impacted negatively on our ability to attract international arrivals. With determined political will, all but one can be fixed. They are:

1. We have decisively defeated Day Zero in Cape Town and increased our resiliency to climate change. Our overseas advertising can easily turn this into a positive attractor;
2. Our wildlife interaction is seen as inappropriate at best, and shocking at worst. The tourism benefits flowing from wildlife best practice internationally far outweigh the alternative;
3. There is still room to improve our VISA regime; and,
4. Negative reporting about expropriation without compensation has impacted on international arrivals. We need to settle concerns sensibly internally, and market this settlement effectively overseas.

Fears about safety and security is the fifth issue that keeps international tourists away.

Providing a safe environment for everyone is a far greater challenge to meet than any of the other four factors mentioned by SA Tourism, but it does illustrate the point that tourism is fundamentally affected by other hard realities and challenges in our country. Along with safety and security, local government, arts and culture and transport all impact on our tourism offering.

This is why the Democratic Alliance (DA) has always argued passionately for an inter-ministerial committee that can jointly tackle the degradation of our most iconic tourism destinations. That is non-negotiable in the age of Trip Advisor.

The best example of this lack of inter-departmental co-operation is the Howick Falls, a subject I have raised several times in committee and in this house.

Howick is the only town in South Africa which has a major waterfall in its CBD. A quarter of a million people used to visit this spot every year. But crime, potholed roads, public drunkenness, littering, drag racing and other x-rated activities have blighted this tourist mecca.

To make things worse, the conservancy area leading down the gorge of the falls is degraded by animals being slaughtered in the sanctuary, fires, the bridge being stolen, and the Heritage stone path destroyed.

Inevitably, business has declined by 40%, while the number of visitors has declined by a quarter. Jobs and opportunities have been destroyed. In desperation, 750 local residents and businesses signed a petition to council to address this crisis. After buck-passing the issue from Exco to a cluster committee, the council eventually failed to act at all, blandly saying “there is no money.” The South African Police Service, in turn, have refused to respond, claiming that illegal activities are a municipal issue.

Collectively, every department washes its hands of the problem, as another prime tourist destination falls into disrepair and decay, crushing jobs as it stumbles.

We can do better than this, Minister. If you do nothing else in your term of office, at least work together with your applicable cabinet colleagues to address these issues holistically. Don't let tourism jewels turn into spoilt goods.