

**REMARKS BY THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TOURISM AND
ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS, REV. MUSA ZONDI**

TOURISM INVESTMENT FORUM (TIFA) 2025 SUMMIT

Beyond the Beach: Investing in the Engine Room of Africa's Growth

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THEMBELA VENUE, EMPANGENI

It is my honour to welcome you to KwaZulu-Natal for the 3rd Annual Tourism Investment Forum Africa.

Allow me first to acknowledge our Honourable Premier, whose leadership continues to anchor this province's economic transformation agenda. We are privileged that he will shortly deliver the Official Opening Address of this important Forum.

Today's gathering brings together the most important voices in investment and development. You - the investors, financiers, and business leaders - are the engines of growth. Your choices, your capital, and your partnerships will shape not only the future of tourism in KwaZulu-Natal, but the broader trajectory of our economy.

This Forum is therefore not just a platform for dialogue. It is a space where opportunities must be matched with capital, where government must demonstrate seriousness, and where partnerships must be forged for long-term impact.

The Strategic Case for Investment

KwaZulu-Natal is often celebrated for its natural beauty, but today I speak of a province that is also an economic powerhouse and a strategic gateway to Africa's growth.

Our province's is a strategic gateway - not only to South Africa's economy but to key markets across the Southern African region. Our position is underpinned by formidable assets: the continent's busiest port in Durban, the bulk-handling giant that is the Port of Richards Bay, and the King Shaka International Airport aerotropolis.

The City of uMhlathuze is advancing plans to relocate Richards Bay Airport, with the feasibility study near completion. The project, aligned with national development goals and the RBIDZ 50-year plan, aims to boost tourism, trade, jobs, and regional services, including medical transport, reinforcing the airport's role as a key driver of local and regional economic growth.

These are not just facilities; they are the foundational pillars of a modern, export-oriented economy, seamlessly integrating logistics, manufacturing, and the high-yield services sector, within which tourism is a central protagonist.

The Investment Landscape: From Vision to Projects

But we are not here to sell ideas. We are here to showcase bankable projects - investment opportunities that are shovel-ready, impactful, and capable of delivering strong returns. Let me mention just a few.

- **The Ridge Development, uMhlathuze:** A transformative mixed-use urban precinct designed to reshape the city skyline with commercial, residential, and lifestyle offerings.
- **Richards Bay International Conference Centre Precinct:** A flagship, mixed-use development that will boost the MICE sector and attract global conventions into Zululand and Maputaland.
- **Waterfront Precinct Development:** 153 hectares of prime coastal land earmarked for tourism, leisure, retail, and education infrastructure - integrated with the maritime economy.
- **Richards Bay Industrial Development Zone (RBIDZ):** A premier hub offering unparalleled access to industrial, tourism, and logistics opportunities, supported by national incentive frameworks.
- **New Hotel and Lodge Developments:** From luxury eco-lodges in the Drakensberg to premium coastal resorts along the North Coast and Ballito-Zimbali corridor.
- **Adventure and Cultural Tourism Projects:** From zip-line concessions in the Drakensberg to high-end cultural lodges in Zululand and the Battlefields.

These projects are not theoretical, they are ready for capital, ready for partnership, and ready for impact.

Government as Enabler, Not Obstacle

We recognise that investors require certainty and support. The Government of KwaZulu-Natal is committed to being an active partner in facilitating investment.

- The **KwaZulu-Natal Tourism and Film Authority (KZNTAFA)** operates as an *entry points* for tourism investment facilitation, ensuring that investors receive coordinated support.
- The **KwaZulu-Natal Convention Bureau** provides market assurance by continuously securing international conferences and events, guaranteeing demand for new hotels, venues, and related infrastructure.
- We are aligned with **national incentive programmes**, including the Enterprise Investment Programme and tax allowances that support capital investment in tourism infrastructure.
- We actively promote **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)** to share both risk and reward on catalytic infrastructure projects.

In short, government is not here to slow you down. We are here to enable, to facilitate, and to partner with you in ensuring that investments translate into measurable growth.

Evidence of Confidence: Success Stories

Investors have already placed their confidence in KwaZulu-Natal, and their success tells our story better than words.

Take the example of **IFA Hotels & Resorts**, whose Zimbali developments on the North Coast have become a benchmark for integrated resort living in South Africa. Their continued reinvestment demonstrates not only profitability, but long-term faith in KwaZulu-Natal as a stable and attractive investment environment.

Similarly, **Premier Hotels & Resorts**, and **Southern Sun Group** are proudly South African brands, who have expanded aggressively across our province - most recently with new properties and forthcoming upgrades in Durban, Umhlanga and Pietermaritzburg. Their growth reflects confidence in both the business travel market and in the expanding leisure sector.

On the global stage, **Club Med's decision to establish its latest resort in Durban** is particularly significant. It sends a clear message that KwaZulu-Natal competes not just regionally, but internationally, as a destination of choice for world-leading

hospitality brands. This investment will bring thousands of jobs, skills development opportunities, and millions in annual economic spin-offs for local communities and supply chains.

These are not isolated cases. They are proof points in a pattern - a pattern of investors choosing KwaZulu-Natal, expanding in KwaZulu-Natal, and achieving success in KwaZulu-Natal.

Together, these examples demonstrate that our province does not just offer opportunity, but also certainty, scalability, and sustainable returns. They are a living endorsement of KwaZulu-Natal's positioning as Africa's most compelling tourism investment destination.

A Call to Action

Colleagues, the theme of this Forum is clear: ***Tourism and Infrastructure Investment: Driving Economic Transformation and Enhancing Community Well-Being***. This is not rhetoric. It is our roadmap.

KwaZulu-Natal is positioning itself as the engine room of Africa's tourism economy - a place where world-class infrastructure, cultural richness, and natural beauty converge to create unparalleled investment opportunities.

I therefore extend a direct invitation:

- Engage with our officials from the KwaZulu-Natal Tourism and Film Authority during this Forum.
- Examine our Investment Portfolio of shovel-ready projects.
- Commit to partnerships that will not only generate returns, but also leave a lasting legacy of transformation in our communities.

The time for spectatorship is over. The time for decisive investment is now. The province of KwaZulu-Natal stands ready to partner with you - to turn opportunities into outcomes, and strategies into success stories.

Together, let us build a province where growth is inclusive, where communities thrive, and where investors prosper.

Join us. Invest in KwaZulu-Natal. Invest in the future of Africa.

It is now my honour to welcome a leader who is driving this vision with clarity, conviction, and courage. A leader who understands that the prosperity of KwaZulu-Natal rests in strategic partnerships, ethical leadership, and an economy that works for all.

Ladies and gentlemen, please rise and join me in welcoming the Honourable Premier of KwaZulu-Natal, Honourable Thamsanqa Ntuli.

I thank you.