

Democratic Alliance statement by
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Joburg Tourism: Potential golden goose? Or dead duck?

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Tourism can contribute many more jobs in Joburg than is currently the case.

I recently joined the two-hour Red Bus Tour around the city, to see what Johannesburg offers tourists.

As an entrepreneur turned mayoral candidate, I wanted to see what the city can do to attract tourism and thereby create jobs for the city's unemployed.

Tourism could undeniably boost employment, especially through entrepreneurs, and this was proven at every stop where informal entrepreneurs have set up shop to cater for the tourists that hop off the bus to visit the formal tourism sites.

However, the bus was not fully booked, not to the extent it would have been in Cape Town or London or Nairobi. Unfortunately, for many tourists, Johannesburg is merely a transit city, and if Johannesburg is to harness the hordes of tourists that arrive at OR Tambo, then it is going to have to offer more robust attractions to the tourist.

Johannesburg is going to have to become competitive. Tourism sites must be relevant, well-manned, and maintained. Johannesburg must become a destination site on its own terms.

We have to promote what is only to be found in Johannesburg, and what we don't have we need to create. Internationally, top tourist competitors such as Singapore, constantly evolve in what they offer tourists. The traditional tourist sites attract, but it is innovations that turn cities into destinations – Johannesburg must become a destination city to earn its rightful share of tourism.

I'm a great supporter of tourism because it generates employment, both directly in terms of jobs and in a host of supporting jobs and industries – it has a good knock-on effect.

Most importantly it brings in income without anything having to leave our shores, so it's a net importer of currency and capital, and that's a good deal for a businessman. The money stays in circulation in the country.

One thing that does bring tourists to Johannesburg is international sports.

A game between South Africa and the All Blacks brings in thousands of fans spending millions of rand creating hundreds of jobs.

If we want to be known as a tourist friendly, then we need to stop introducing ill-considered policies that discourage tourism, even sports tourism.

On the contrary, the City of Johannesburg should coordinate the offering of tourism products that leads sports fans or business visitors to bring their families and stay 2 or 3 nights longer in Joburg than they currently do, before going off to other places like the Kruger Park.

Tourism leads to business development. Thousands of small businesses have been started in SA by people who have first come here as tourists and have seen the multitude of opportunities that exist within our economy, opportunities that don't exist in highly developed countries. This results in lots of small businesses opening.

Government intervention, however well-intentioned, can have disastrous consequences.

Sports minister Fikile Mbalula's announcement that South Africa will no longer be allowed to host certain sporting events will decrease the number of tourists to Johannesburg and will crush opportunities for small businesses and will kill jobs.

By nullifying potential international tournaments, we're smashing down tourism. These sporting codes have huge fan bases that follow the teams, and we're rejecting them.

Rather than a slap-down interventionist policy, there should be co-operative engagement to help meet the challenges the sporting codes face where it achieves the most, at developmental level.

The City of Johannesburg would do well to clean up shabby areas and crack down on criminal activities that deter tourists. It is difficult to attract tourists once an area gets a bad reputation for crime.

As Mayor of Johannesburg I will help small tourist businesses to become successful. I know how this can be done. In so doing, there will be opportunities for more and more jobs.

But a national government bent on bad policy for electioneering purposes will make this more difficult. My job would be to lobby against such policy so that my city and its citizens can thrive.

Because where the DA governs, life is better.

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