



Violence in South Africa – the truth behind the news

A message to the tourism industry concerning current events in South Africa, from Mike Speed, President of the Southern Africa Tourism Services Association

I am sure all of you have been watching with increasing concern, as I have, the television news bulletins that have been reporting on the current violence being experienced in South Africa. My message to you is that this violence has been confined to very specific areas, and **has not affected popular tourism areas**.

As usual, the news on television reports the truth – but not the whole truth. And some perceptions are being created concerning tourism that are most certainly not true.

1. The South African tourism industry is **very much open for business**. We are all conducting **business as usual**, obviously with a special regard to client safety. The current unrest has been very localised and restricted to very limited and specific areas; mainstream tourism areas (including all airports) have NOT been affected, and it is very unlikely they will be.
2. **It is still safe to visit South Africa**, with our vast array of attractions, wildlife and scenic beauty; and we all stand ready to welcome our guests with open arms. There is no need at this stage for anyone to cancel any tourism activity. It is sensible for us all to proceed cautiously, and keep informed on a daily basis regarding developments. In particular it would be sensible to proceed with caution with regard to township activities, and be sensitive to local developments. Whilst this xenophobic violence is a serious crisis, there is quite simply no need for blind panic and total doom and gloom in the tourism sector. And you can be confident in advising your partners and customers accordingly. Please go out and communicate this as widely and actively as possible.
3. **The South African government has today decided to deploy the army**, the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), in areas where they are most needed. This is welcome news. The SANDF has a great deal of hard-won experience in handling situations of this kind, gained in its extensive work in peacekeeping in many countries. They are both well trained and well equipped to assist the police, who have already done good work and arrested many troublemakers, and we are confident the SANDF will very soon help the police to get the situation under control.

It is unacceptable to all decent South Africans that people should be persecuted in 2008 in this country because of their race or nationality. We, as an association and the inbound tourism industry, condemn in the strongest possible terms this appalling behaviour - these mobs do not represent us as South Africans, and our people demand that these thugs must be swiftly brought to justice. The police and army have the unreserved support of the vast majority of the population.

It would be a huge tragedy if all the hard work that has gone into marketing South Africa in recent years was to go to waste. Indaba 2008 shattered last year's record with more than 13,200 delegates attending this year's show compared to last year's 12,340, so confirming Indaba's status as one of the top three travel shows in the world, and certainly Africa's top travel trade show. The programme was well organised and overall a very good event.

Many of the people who have benefited from the growth in tourism are enterprising ordinary people who have started their own small businesses, and they are the people who will suffer most from any downturn in tourism.

We ask you all, most sincerely, not to make any hasty decisions for future tourism plans until the situation is resolved. South Africa needs you, as her friends, to support the tourism industry in difficult times. Tourists do more good by coming to our country, and continuing to build our industry than they do by staying away.

In Africa, everyone is a welcome guest.

ENDS:

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NOTE TO EDITORS

The **Southern Africa Tourism Services Association (SATSA)** is the leading body representing the private sector of the inbound industry. Small to big business, and everything in between, find a home in **SATSA**. Ours is a non-profit, member-driven, association of tourism service providers who are committed to providing the best tourism experience for visitors (domestic, regional and international) to Southern Africa. Over the years, **SATSA** has established a reputation for integrity and professionalism by ensuring that our members comply with strict criteria and a Code of Conduct. The appearance of the **SATSA** logo anywhere is a sign of quality and commitment to service excellence for the tourist.

For more information, please visit our website at <http://www.satsa.com/>