



# TOURISM TUESDAYS

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

#TourismTuesdays

JANUARY 2026 EDITION



*Inspiring new ways*



# NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

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**W**elcome to the first edition of *Tourism Tuesdays* for 2026! We're excited to kick off the year with updates that showcase South Africa's dynamic tourism sector, celebrate achievements, and highlight opportunities for growth and connection.

We trust you had the chance to explore some of the tourism experiences and products shared over the festive period. The South African tourism industry is off to a busy start this January and, in this edition, we take you on a journey from positioning South Africa on the global stage to celebrating local experiences.

**Ministerial highlights** Today, the Minister held a special engagement reviewing South Africa's tourism performance and outlining major industry milestones. The session covered tourism arrival numbers from January to December 2025, highlighting trends shaping South Africa as a premium tourism and MICE destination. The Minister also shared updates on the upcoming 20<sup>th</sup> edition of Meetings Africa, from 23–25 February 2026, celebrating two decades of connecting Africa to the world through business events.

**Tourism on the world stage** Discover how South African Tourism, led by Minister De Lille, advanced destination marketing and investment policy dialogue at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, reinforcing the country's position as a key player in global tourism.

**Love is in the air!** With Valentine's Day approaching, explore how South Africa offers the perfect escape for romantic couples, where breathtaking landscapes, cultural connections, and shared experiences create unforgettable moments.

**Market access in North Europe** Learn how South African Tourism expanded market opportunities following Vakantiebeurs and the seven-city 'Come Find Your Joy!' Roadshow (13–21 January 2026) across Utrecht, Den Bosch, Rotterdam, The Hague, Antwerp, Brussels, and Amsterdam. The programme enabled direct engagement with travel trade partners and media in the Netherlands and Belgium.

**Sport and leisure** We look forward to the launch of the LIV Golf event this week at Steyn City, Gauteng, showcasing world-class sports tourism opportunities.

**Innovation in travel** Meet Siyanda, our new AI travel assistant for North American travellers, designed to inspire and guide visitors from the USA and Canada as they plan joy-filled journeys across South Africa.

**TGCSA Corner** Celebrate excellence in the sector with updates on premium awards and benchmark properties.

As we begin this new year, *Tourism Tuesdays* remains your window into the vibrance, innovation, and potential of South Africa's tourism landscape. We hope these stories inspire, inform, and remind you of the power of travel to create connection, joy, and opportunity.

**Happy reading and here's to a joyful 2026!**

**Regards,  
Tourism Tuesdays Team**





# A Standout Year for Tourism

Tourism policy is economic policy: Minister de Lille celebrates record-breaking 2025 arrivals and looks ahead to Meetings Africa.

**“T**ourism is not a soft sector; tourism is solidly economic policy. And the numbers prove it.” This was the core message delivered by Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille, during today’s press briefing held at GCIS in Pretoria.

In a review of the sector’s performance, the Minister revealed that South Africa welcomed 10.48-million international arrivals between January and December 2025. This represents a 17.6% increase compared to 2024, marking the highest number of arrivals on record.

## Global recognition and governance

Global confidence in the destination remains high. The Minister said it’s no surprise that South Africa was recently named ‘Best Destination: Africa 2025’ by the *Travel Weekly* Reader’s Choice Awards.

**“Tourism is working. Tourism is delivering. And tourism will continue to be a cornerstone of inclusive growth, investment, and job creation in South Africa.”**  
– Patricia de Lille, Minister of Tourism

Updates on governance were also shared, with the confirmation that South African Tourism has strengthened its leadership foundation through the permanent appointments of a Chief Financial Officer and Chief Audit Executive, ensuring operational continuity and accountability.



## Unlocking growth through access and safety

The Minister attributed the sector's success to deliberate policy choices, including:

- **Ease of Access:** The Department of Home Affairs is rolling out the Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) system to key markets including India, China, Mexico, and Indonesia.
- **Safety:** The Minister highlighted the Tourism Safety Forum's progress and the private sector's establishment of a crime call centre linked to the Secura App for rapid emergency response.

- **Investment:** Investor confidence is evident in projects like the R2.5-billion Club Med development in KwaZulu-Natal, set to open in June 2026.

**“Following the success of the G20, the World Economic Forum will host a Special Davos Meeting in South Africa next year, a significant endorsement of our capacity and credibility.”**



## The road to Meetings Africa 2026

The briefing also shed light on one of the continent's most significant industry events. The Minister confirmed that preparations are well on track for the 20th edition of Meetings Africa, taking place from 23–25 February 2026.

The meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) sector continues to deliver strong returns. In the current financial year, South Africa secured 51 bids, generating an economic impact of R894.5-million.

Beyond the arrival statistics, the Minister highlighted the sector's pivotal role in the Government of National Unity's priority of job creation, noting that tourism currently sustains

1.8-million direct and indirect jobs – with estimates suggesting one new job is created for every 13 international arrivals.

This economic momentum is further bolstered by South Africa's growing status as a host for high-level global dialogue. Following the success of the G20 Tourism Ministers' Meeting, the World Economic Forum will host a Special Davos Meeting in South Africa next year, serving as a powerful endorsement of our capacity and credibility.

“Tourism is working. Tourism is delivering. And tourism will continue to be a cornerstone of inclusive growth, investment, and job creation in South Africa,” Minister De Lille concluded.



# Tourism Advances Destination Marketing & Investment Policy

South Africa's participation at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, set us up as a credible collaboration and investment partner.

**S**outh African Tourism marked a significant milestone with its participation at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos, positioning tourism firmly within the global economic conversation.

Led by our Minister of Tourism, Patrica de Lille, South Africa's engagement focused on two clear strategic objectives: strengthening destination marketing and advancing dialogue on tourism investment and policy creation.

As one of the world's most influential global platforms, the World Economic Forum convenes heads of state, business leaders, investors and

multilateral institutions to shape global economic priorities.

South Africa's presence through tourism reflects a deliberate shift in how the sector is positioned, not only as a driver of travel demand, but also as a strategic contributor to economic growth, investment and inclusive development.

A big win was the announcement that the World Economic Forum selected South Africa to host Spring Davos in 2027. Following a successful G20 Summit, this decision further demonstrated that South Africa has world-class, quality-assured accommodation establishments and venues.



## Driving destination marketing

Through its engagement at Davos, South African Tourism reinforced the country's global brand visibility, positioning South Africa as a compelling, competitive and trusted destination.

The organisation showcased the country's diverse tourism offering spanning culture, heritage, golf, lifestyle, business events and experiences under our global brand campaign, 'Come Find Your Joy!'

## Shaping investment and policy dialogue

The second focus area centred on strengthening conversations around tourism investment and enabling policy frameworks.

Engagements explored opportunities for long-term collaboration across accommodation, attractions, experience-based tourism, precinct development and heritage assets.

These discussions reinforced tourism's role as a critical economic sector capable of driving job creation, stimulating investment and enabling inclusive growth across urban, township, rural and coastal economies.

## Tourism as an economic contributor

Tourism remains one of South Africa's most labour-absorbing sectors, contributing around 8.8% to GDP and supporting more than 1.8 million jobs, and showing strong growth potential towards 2030.





## LOVE, ACTUALLY

### South Africa knows your type

A romantic couple's escape to South Africa will grow your connection, thrill your senses and fill those intimate moments with joy.

In South Africa, love has always travelled – across valleys and oceans, through [beadwork](#) and song, in stories around crackling fires, and down those long roads home. Here, *uthando*, *lerato*, and *die liefde* mean 'love' in different languages, and all show how connection is built through shared experiences.

According to [South African Tourism](#), as a loved-up couple visiting South Africa on holiday, the country will delight you, but it'll also sweep you off your feet, with stories you'll enjoy telling long after you're home.

Here, luxury comes with soul, beauty reveals itself around every corner, and every shared moment – from adrenaline spikes to candle-lit stillness – feels like it could last forever.

Mzansi offers couples from around the world myriad choices in how they'd like to experience romance: we have nine provinces, countless beautiful landscapes, and the ability to shape your journey around exactly the kind of things that [bring you joy](#).

Imagine days that start before dawn and stretch long long into the night, so your South African romance or honeymoon can become a tale of indulgence and thrills, or stillness and sparkle. You'll also be able to enjoy local gourmet food and wine, our cultural heritage and experience a thousand smiles.

So harness that main character energy and 'Come Find Your Joy!' – we'll help you write a love story that's a stunner!



## Adventure-loving duos

For couples who fall hardest for each other when their pulses rev, South Africa delivers shared exhilaration against unforgettable backdrops.

In the Eastern Cape, stepping off the [Bloukrans Bridge](#) to bungee together makes memories after the thrill settles: the laughter, the shaking hands, and the rush of realising you trusted each other completely and did something insane together.



## Nature-loving and slow-travel couples

If your love story thrives on space and silence, the Northern Cape is made for the slow-burn. At [Bushman's Kloof Wilderness Reserve and Wellness Retreat](#), days move gently between river walks, ancient rock art explorations and unhurried meals made from fresh local produce. The nights belong to cozy fireside conversations, gazing at stars bright enough to feel an arm's-length away.

In the Free State, the small town of Clarens offers a softer rhythm. Morning coffee smells entice you into taking laid-back village wanders.

In the afternoon, hike through the [Golden Gate Highlands National Park](#), where honey-coloured rocks glow as the sun sinks low.





## Food, wine and urban culture lovers

In South Africa, food is rarely just fuel; it's how culture, history and love are shared. For couples who flirt through flavours, South Africa's sense of romance is easy to find along the Orange River in the Northern Cape. Here, [vineyards along the region's wine route](#) carve green lines through the desert, inviting long wine tastings and lingering gourmet feasts beside the water.

In Johannesburg, Gauteng, leafy boutique hotels and thoughtful design spaces offer calm in-between the buzz. Days unfold exploring the [Maboneng precinct's](#) galleries, bookshops and taking looooong lunches; nights stretch into cocktails, live music, poetry readings, theatre and sharing conversations that refuse to end.



## Wellness and reconnection seekers

Some chapters in great romances are written quietly. Along KwaZulu-Natal's northern coastline, [Thonga Beach Lodge](#) offers barefoot luxury, ocean air and the Indian Ocean as it laps on warm white sand. Days are for snorkelling, swimming, time spent in the spa, and naps that drift into sunset, followed by wholesome local cuisine.

In Mpumalanga, [Kruger Shalati](#) offers a singular bushveld experience where a historic train has been

reimagined as a place of relaxation, suspended on a bridge above the Sabie River, where wildlife moves silently below. It's luxury romance without even trying.

South Africa understands how love is marked, through moments, objects and stories that last.

From roadside dice games and adventures that leave you breathless, to grand gestures beneath endless skies, South Africa is where love is celebrated loudly and lived deeply.

***Our invitation is simple: bring your kind of love, and we'll meet you there. Romance awaits. Come Find Your Joy!***



## Vakantiebeurs and North Europe Roadshow

Vakantiebeurs has again proven to be a prime platform for amplifying South Africa's tourism potential. We were excited to carry this momentum into the roadshow, where our exhibitors had the opportunity to engage more intimately with travel agents and tour operators across North Europe.

**S**outh African Tourism has successfully concluded its participation at Vakantiebeurs 2026 in Utrecht, followed by the seven-city 'Come Find Your Joy!' North Europe roadshow, reinforcing South Africa's appeal across the Netherlands and Belgian markets.

Building on strong engagement at Vakantiebeurs, the seven-city roadshow ran from 13–21 January 2026, taking South Africa's tourism offering to Utrecht, Den Bosch, Rotterdam, The Hague, Antwerp, Brussels, and Amsterdam. The programme enabled direct engagement with travel trade partners and media in the Netherlands and Belgium.

### A diverse tourism ecosystem

The roadshow featured 18 South African tourism products, including local SMMEs, provincial tourism authorities, tour operators, safari lodges, and accommodation establishments, showcasing the depth and diversity of the country's tourism ecosystem.

Through targeted B2B workshops and networking sessions, participants strengthened relationships, explored new business opportunities, and

highlighted South Africa's immersive travel experiences, from wildlife and adventure to culture, community, and culinary journeys.

As part of its ongoing strategy to grow arrivals from Northern Europe, South African Tourism continues to leverage high-impact consumer platforms and focused trade engagements to drive demand, build confidence, and keep South Africa top-of-mind in key source markets.

### It's about our potential

Speaking on the initiative, Abby Jacobs, South African Tourism's Marketing and Promotions Manager for the North Europe Hub, said: "Vakantiebeurs is a vital platform for amplifying South Africa's tourism potential directly to consumers, while the roadshow allows for deeper, more personalised engagement with the travel trade."

She also noted that the objective of participating in this prestigious event is to ensure that the North European market travel trade gets to understand the diversity of South African tourism experiences. This ensures products stay top-of-mind, accessible, and responsive to consumer travel needs.





# LIV and Let Drive

**South African Tourism joins forces with LIV Golf to tee up a world-class event and invite golfers to explore the country beyond the 18<sup>th</sup> hole.**

**S**port has always been a major part of South Africa's story. We have a proud legacy of memorable sporting moments that have made global headlines and inspired unity.

From celebrating legends on the field to rising stars across disciplines, South African Tourism has recently entered into a bold new partnership with LIV Golf, to help us carry that legacy forward on the world stage.

LIV Golf is the global league tournament that's been shaking up the sport internationally since 2021 and, from March 2026, it's coming to South Africa for the first time, drawing some top-name-golfers to 'Come Find Your Joy!' on some of the best championship golf courses we have to offer.

## A big swing for tourism

The inaugural LIV Golf South Africa Tournament tees off on 19–22 March 2026, at Steyn City Golf Club in Gauteng, drawing the likes of Jon Rahm, Cam Smith, Bryson DeChambeau and local champion, Louis Oosthuizen, who'll be representing his home turf with his all-Southern Guards GC.

The tournament will definitely not be your dad's golf game. It's four days of unmissable, electrifying golf history in the making, where fans can enjoy so much more than just the game of golf. There will be delicious food and cocktails on offer; the 16<sup>th</sup> hole will be transformed into a 'Party Hole' where fans can enjoy non-stop energy, noise and hospitality;



and each day will be rounded off with a massive live music concert featuring local music greats.

## Not just another event

“South Africa hosting LIV Golf for the first time is a landmark moment for our tourism sector and for the country’s global brand,” says Thandiwe Mathibela, Acting Chief Marketing Officer of South African Tourism. “This partnership allows us to showcase our exceptional golf offering while highlighting South Africa as a destination that delivers world-class experiences beyond the fairway.”

And for a game with such deep roots, it’s a moment that many in the industry have been waiting for.

“The beauty of this partnership is that it introduces people to South Africa through something they love and encourages them to stay longer, see more, and connect more deeply,” says Mathibela.

## THE BIGGER PICTURE

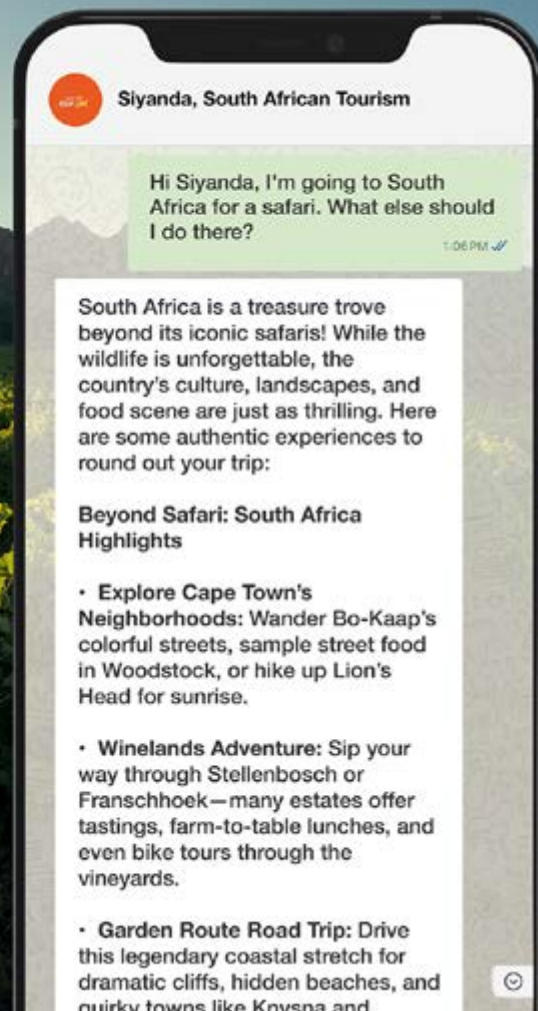
With South Africa's strong track record for hosting world-class, large-scale international events, LIV Golf's arrival here is an opportunity for our local hospitality, transport, tourism, events and creative industries to step into the limelight. For our trade partners and investors, it's a reminder that South Africa is open for business, capable and confident.

“Through this partnership with LIV Golf, we get the chance to share the full picture of South Africa’s spectacular courses and scenery,” says Mathibela. “They’ll also get to see the creativity, warmth and spirit that make this country unforgettable. It may start with a game of golf, but we hope it draws visitors back again and again.”



*Siyanda AI*

# WE ARE GROWING!



## South African Tourism launches 'Siyanda', a new AI travel assistant for North American Travellers.

South African Tourism's North America team has officially launched Siyanda, a custom-built artificial intelligence (AI) travel assistant designed to inspire and support travellers from the USA and Canada as they plan trips to South Africa.

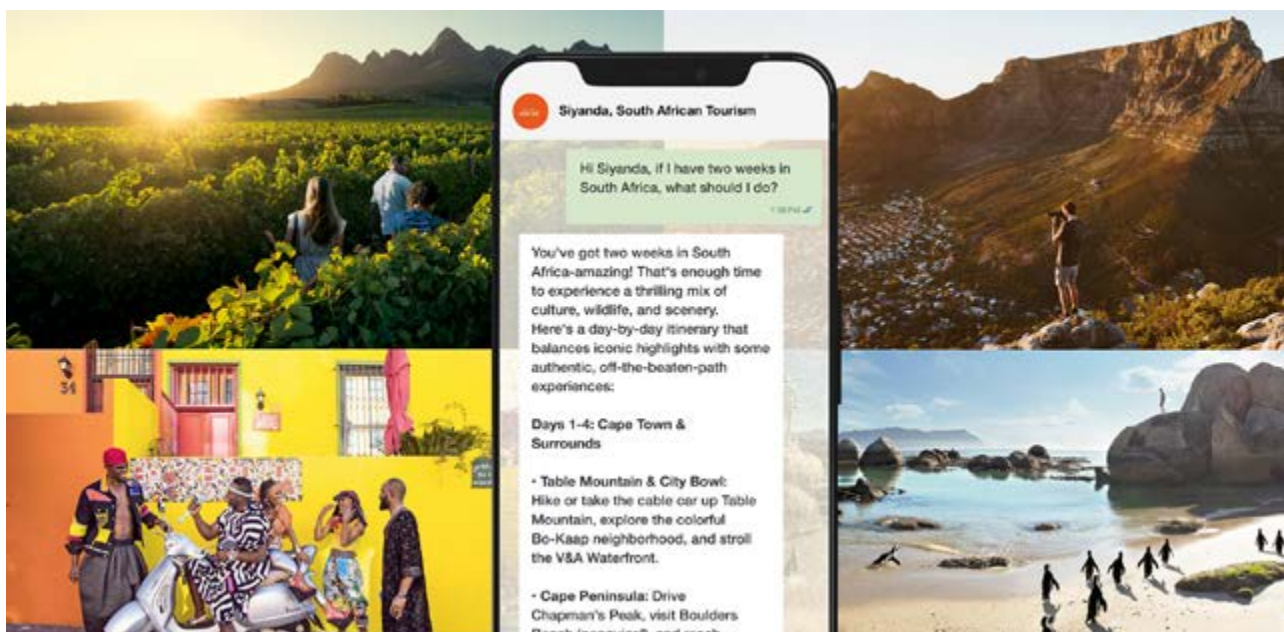
Built on Matador Network's industry-leading GuideGeek chat platform, Siyanda strengthens the organisation's digital engagement with tech-savvy travellers and travel trade partners seeking joy-filled journeys across South Africa.

Travellers can prompt Siyanda to plan full itineraries or answer specific questions about safaris, hiking trails, local restaurants, historical landmarks, and more. Responses are personalised and generated in real-time by AI-trained on extensive data from [SouthAfrica.net](https://SouthAfrica.net), combined with more than 1 000

travel information integrations from GuideGeek's award-winning technology. GuideGeek was named the recipient of the 'Best Use of AI' award in Skift's 2025 IDEA awards and recognised as one of *Fast Company's* Most Innovative Companies in Travel.

"The name Siyanda is from isiXhosa, one of our 11 official languages, and means 'We are growing. We are increasing,'" explained Darryl Erasmus, Chief Operations Officer of South African Tourism.

"The USA became South Africa's largest overseas market in 2024, and we've built a strong bond with American travellers. Siyanda enables us to grow that connection by reaching travellers who are now using AI alongside traditional channels to research and book trips. We're incredibly proud of our New York-based team's innovation and dedication to keeping



South Africa top-of-mind for North American travellers seeking immersive, authentic experiences.”

## More than just trip-planning

South Africa is the first African destination to launch a custom AI trip-planning tool with GuideGeek. We join other destinations like Greece and New Zealand in leveraging GuideGeek AI to help visitors plan trips and build a relationship with the destination before their plane takes off.

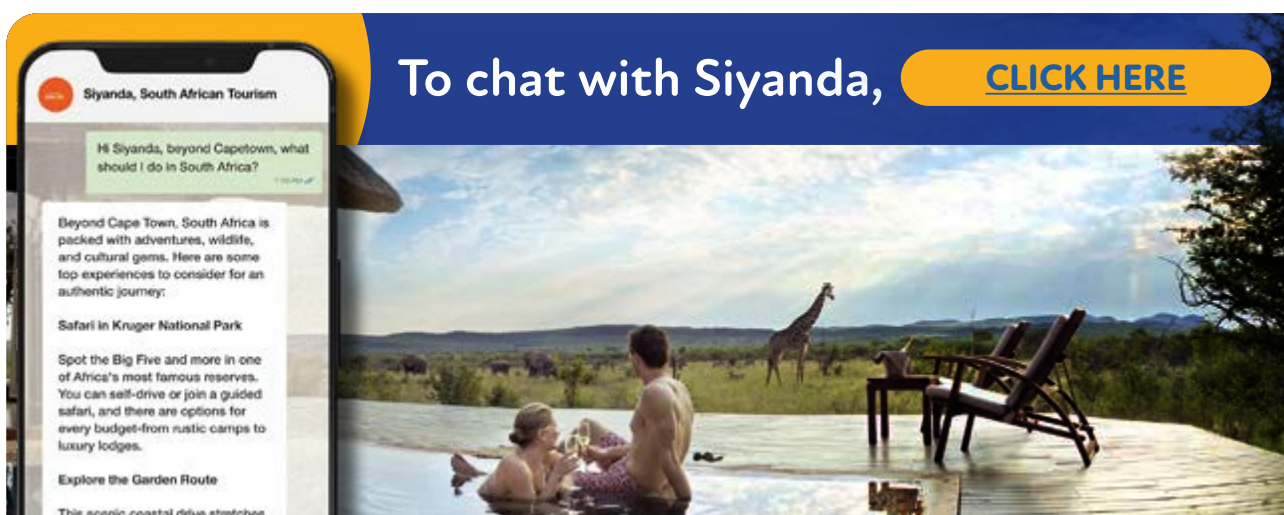
In addition to serving curious travellers, Siyanda is also a valuable tool for travel advisors looking to deepen their expertise on South Africa, and to better serve their clients.

Available 24/7, the AI assistant can instantly answer destination-specific questions, suggest tailored itineraries, and provide real-time insights on

everything from wildlife experiences to local cuisine, empowering advisors to save time, personalise recommendations, and stay ahead of client expectations.

“South Africa is an affordable destination for North American travellers,” Erasmus added. “By chatting with Siyanda, potential visitors from the USA and Canada, and the travel advisors assisting them, can build dream itineraries that fit their budgets. They’ll also discover just how far their dollars can stretch, whether they’re diving with sharks, enjoying world-class wines in Cape Town, searching for lions on safari, or engaging with local communities.”

As South African Tourism continues to evolve its digital engagement strategy, Siyanda represents a powerful new tool to keep the destination top-of-mind for travellers and to support industry partners in converting interest into travel.







TOURISM GRADING COUNCIL SA

# TGCSA CORNER

JANUARY'S

## Premium Property

The property in this month's showcase is exceptional and well worth a visit!

The Tourism Grading Council of South Africa's 5-Star Premium classification recognises the country's most exclusive accommodation: establishments offering exceptional quality, personalised service, and unforgettable experiences that exceed standard 5-star expectations.



### Sabi Sabi Earth Lodge

**Location:** Sabi Sand Game Reserve, Mpumalanga

Sabi Sabi Earth Lodge redefines luxury African safaris through innovative design to create one of Africa's most environmentally sensitive lodges. Guests embark on twice-daily Big Five game drives led by expert rangers and Shangaan trackers. They can also enjoy world-class amenities, including the Amani Spa, meditation garden, and art gallery, as well as dining experiences that overlook an active waterhole in the heart of the renowned Sabi Sand wilderness.

#### Contact details

✉ [privatetravel@sabisabi.com](mailto:privatetravel@sabisabi.com) ☎ +27 11 447 7172

🌐 <https://www.sabisabi.com/lodges/earth-lodge>





JANUARY'S

# Benchmark Properties

An array of outstanding properties that make every visit a pleasure.

Benchmark properties are handpicked by the TGCSA Property Approvals Committee for their outstanding offerings, regardless of category or grading. They are referred to South African Tourism's Brand Experience team to support inclusive growth and geographic diversity.



## The Cole

**Location:** Cape Town, Western Cape

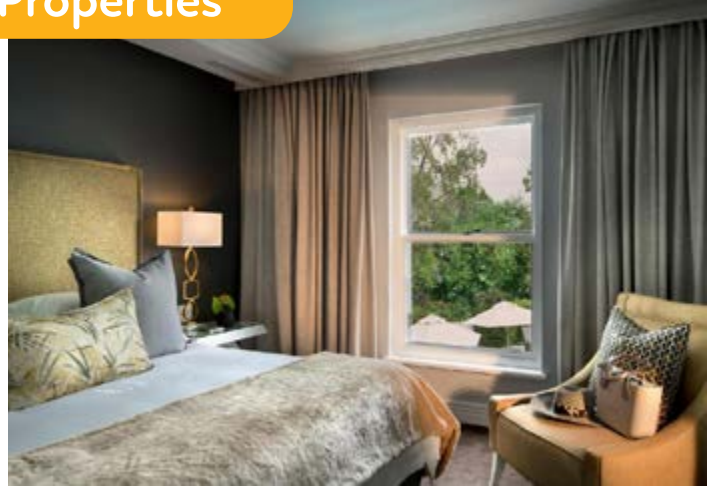
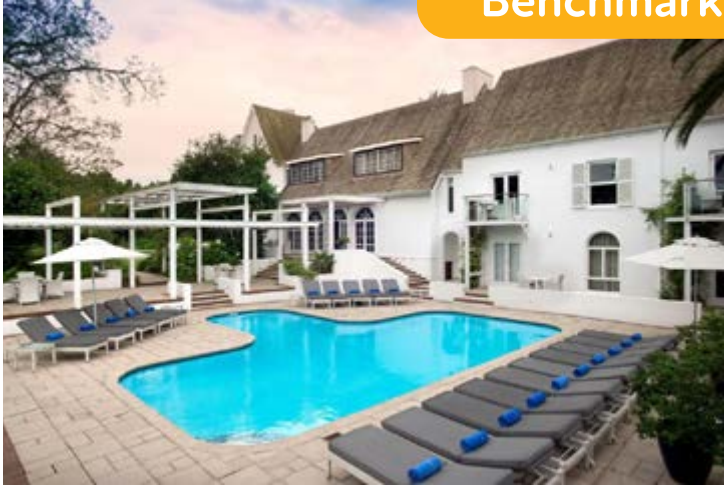
The Cole is a sophisticated boutique hotel from the Kove Collection, positioned in the vibrant coastal suburb of Sea Point. It has sweeping ocean and mountain views and is just minutes from Cape Town's most celebrated attractions. Guests enjoy rooftop dining at Figo restaurant, with panoramic ocean views, while Script lobby bar provides artisanal cocktails. There's also a boutique spa with a cold plunge pool and a sauna, an outdoor pool, and access to the Sea Point Promenade, V&A Waterfront, and Table Mountain.

### Contact details

✉ [stay@thecole.co.za](mailto:stay@thecole.co.za) ☎ +27 21 013 8999  
🌐 <https://thecole.co.za/>



## Benchmark Properties



### The Manor House at Fancourt

**Location:** George, Western Cape

Built in 1859 as Fancourt's original homestead and now a protected national monument, The Manor House has been meticulously rejuvenated as an award-winning luxury boutique hotel. Set on 613 hectares of lush countryside with the majestic Outeniqua Mountains as its backdrop, guests enjoy exclusive access to championship golf courses, a full-service spa, outdoor pool, world-class dining, and the ideal combination of Old-World charm and contemporary luxury in the heart of South Africa's renowned Garden Route.

#### Contact details

✉ [reservations@fancourt.co.za](mailto:reservations@fancourt.co.za) ☎ +27 44 804 0000 🌐 <https://manorhouse.fancourt.co.za/>



# Upcoming Events

EVENT NAME	DATES	LOCATION
LIV Golf Media Launch	29 January 2026	Steyn City, Gauteng
Meetings Africa 2026	23 – 25 February 2026	Sandton Convention Centre, Gauteng
ITB Berlin	3 – 5 March 2026	Berlin Expo Center, Berlin, Germany
LIV Golf South Africa Tournament	19 – 22 March 2026	Steyn City Golf Club, Gauteng