

Protect domestic tourism during fourth wave, urges Minister Sisulu

Protecting the country's domestic tourism has been identified as the main priority after South Africa was placed on a travel ban by several countries, following the identification of the Omicron Covid-19 variant.



Source: [SAgovnews](https://www.sagovnews.co.za)

This was consensus reached by relevant stakeholders during an urgent meeting with the Tourism Minister Lindiwe Sisulu on Sunday.

In a statement, the Ministry said the meeting was held to identify how public and private sector stakeholders could proactively collaborate to mitigate the effects instituted by the travel bans. The travel bans came after the South African Health Department revealed the discovery of the variant last week.

The Ministry said in the meeting that the red listing of South Africa and other SADC countries was a "knee jerk reaction" that would negatively impact the peak inbound tourism period.

Professor Marc Mendelson, infectious diseases and HIV medicine head at the Groote Schuur Hospital, provided a scientific perspective on what the next steps would be in determining the extent to which vaccines would be effective against the new variant.

Minister Sisulu said the meeting was the first of many the Ministry would be holding as a public-private tourism sector war room to deal with crises such as this.

The team, she said, would also address legacy issues that hinder the extent to which tourism could contribute to South Africa's economy.

The war room was expected to meet regularly to roll out and follow up on practical actions adopted by industry stakeholders to deal proactively with challenges that beset the sector.

She said the immediate priority was to preserve domestic tourism over the upcoming festive season to secure livelihoods.

"While we await scientific certainty surrounding this new variant, the impact to Brand South Africa and the deep tourism value chain has been devastating," she said.

To this end, the Ministry said stakeholders in the meeting provided several alternatives. These included reducing the size of indoor gatherings, expanding curfew and prioritising vaccination to mitigate the impact on the country's healthcare system.

Rosemary Anderson, chairperson of Fedhasa said there was no question that South Africans needed to get vaccinated as a "matter of urgency".

She said: "We depend on tourism for jobs and livelihoods."

Anderson added that the country could not afford a repeat of December 2020 where restaurants and hospitality businesses bore the brunt of Covid-19 regulations.

"Our industry has had to endure being thrust from wave to wave for the past 20 months and it simply isn't sustainable to keep businesses open and livelihoods intact. It is up to South Africans to do their part and help us keep our doors open by complying with the protocols and getting their #jab4tourism," she said.

TBCSA, Satsa, SAACI and Cape Town Tourism were among industry associations that attended the session.

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