

Tourism resumes limited operations in June

South Africans, who have been confined to their homes, will now be allowed to venture out for hikes from 1 June when the country moves to level 3 of the lockdown.



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As of this month, hiking is permitted - provided it is done in compliance with existing guidelines and not in groups.

Tourism Minister Mmamoloko Kubayi-Ngubane made the announcement when she outlined plans for the gradual return of the sector in a briefing on Saturday.

In addition to hiking, the public will be allowed to engage in hunting and gaming activities. Visits to public and private game farms for self-drive excursions are also allowed under level 3. These activities will resume, provided Covid-19 health, safety and social distancing measures are in place.

The tourism sector, which is largely interactive in nature, has been one of the hardest hit by the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to the Tourism Department, projections showed that almost 600,000 jobs were at risk if the sector does not come into operation by September 2020.

"This reality led to both government and the private sector working together innovatively and putting protocol guidelines in place to get the sector back into operation," said the Minister.

With the easing of restrictions and the reopening of the economy, tourist guides, tour operators, travel agents and tourism information officers have been given the greenlight to resume operations.

Other professional services, including the training of nature guides and other related services that are able to ensure a safe distance between patrons, are also allowed to return to work.

Under level 3 of lockdown, accommodation activities will resume in a limited capacity and will only cater to those on business or work trips.

"Accommodation activities are allowed, except for leisure, and establishments will no longer require a letter from the Minister of Tourism to operate.

"They are required to ensure that they accommodate those in the permitted services and keep records for inspections by the department," said the Minister.

Tourism related services

Due to the interlinked nature of the tourism industry, Kubayi-Ngubane said her department is encouraged by the resumption of car rental operations which are a critical enabler of tourism and movement of people.

Relief funding for tour guides

On the tour guide sub-sector, which is dominated by freelancers and independent contractors, the Tourism Department has unveiled a separate safety net for the sector.

"The tour guiding subsector is dominated by freelancers and independent contractors with no job security and for this reason, the government relief schemes, including the Tourism Relief Fund, did not cover them.

"In response, the department has come up with an additional financial relief mechanism for tourist guides. We have set aside a total of R30 million, which will provide financial relief over a period of two to three months," said Kubayi-Ngubane.

Beneficiaries of this scheme will include tour guides, who are registered with the registrar in terms of the Tourism Act; tour guides, who are not employed by any company, and those who have not formed their own companies.

Tour guides will also be provided with personal protective equipment (PPE).

With plans for the recovery of the sector underway, Kubayi-Ngubane said the first phase of the recovery for the sector will be driven by domestic tourism, followed by regional tourism and international tourism next year.

"Although we will be gradually opening up the sector in the coming months, depending on how the virus is spreading, we expect that the sector will only fully recover towards the end of this year," said the Minister.