

BOUNDLESS SOUTHERN AFRICA FROM A CONSUMER PERSPECTIVE

22 October 2008

Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and gentlemen...

At Thompsons Africa we are fully committed to our slogan “**Dream** the Destination...Live the **Journey**”.

The **dream** of a Southern Africa where there are no boundaries to inhibit our priceless African heritage of wilderness and biodiversity, is one that some persons have long dared to dream. Among them were some of our most notable leaders and in particular here I can mention Dr Nelson Mandela, HRH Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands and Dr Anton Rupert

They dared to dream a dream that, like the place somewhere over the Rainbow, really could come true. Their dream has taken a **journey** of its own towards a Boundless Southern Africa and today’s event is an important milepost on the road to that destination.

We at Thompsons are committed to facilitate the reaching of that destination for the sake of the citizens of this region, and those of the world, for the destination is all about boundless World Heritage.....World Natural Heritage and, in parallel, Cultural Heritage

Tourism is the primary vehicle to enable world citizens, as consumers, to better access this heritage in a manner that builds increased understanding in sustainable societies without boundaries

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We strive towards providing our leisure travellers with extraordinary travel experiences. Leisure travellers often return as business travellers. In all cases they help deliver the future of Africa as tourism has increasingly been recognised as one of the single most important vehicles for sustainable African economies and Boundless Southern Africa especially helps deliver the integrated regional economies that Africa needs

As CEO of Thompsons Africa, I am extremely excited about the unlocked opportunities that Boundless Southern Africa will be offering our clients from across the globe, in the near future. From this vantage point one is in a good position to note not only how exciting this prospect is for our consumers of tourism products, but also what can be done from a consumers perspective to improve the enabling conditions for tourism to best operate with maximum benefits for all.

The key source markets to destinations in southern Africa can be found from amongst others, the UK, USA, Germany and Japan. Travelling to a long-haul destination is a costly and time consuming exercise. In this era of huge competition for the tourism spend. The question is, what do we offer our clients that provide us with a competitive edge to other long haul destinations? On the other hand marketing should also come from within the residents of the region who own that marvellous attribute known as national or shall I say regional pride.

The answer is simple, a choice of unique and multiple destinations under the Boundless Southern Africa brand.

Boundless Southern Africa links together nine Southern African countries with some of the most unique travel experiences that any tourist can ask for anywhere in the world, and overlaps with yet other regions in Africa.

Transfrontier conservation areas have multiple reasons for existence but one of them is expanding tourism potential and it makes perfect sense that a consolidated brand was developed to promote transfrontier conservation areas. This better enables visitors to experience a diversity of products hard to come by, and improves conditions for the necessary investments to underpin their sustainability.

There is a tendency in tourism circles to want to promote only “my product”, or “my province” or “my country”. We forget that consumers are bombarded with such a vast array of products from across the world. If we try and access the market with a number of smaller products all presented in their own way, it becomes very difficult to actually penetrate and attract visitors from our source markets.

Honourable Ministers, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, we need to think bigger rather than smaller when it comes to tourism marketing.

Rather than have the various destinations fighting each other for a slice of the tourism pie, it is important to work together in the spirit of regional partnership, and indeed broader international partnership, for the greater good.

The value of joint marketing can never be over-estimated. In our business we constantly look at joint opportunities and within the business of formalised tourism this is very much the norm – I encourage our region to do the same. No region can be sold as better than the next – only different with different attributes, cultures and interests.

While Boundless Southern Africa could only promote products within relevant areas of each of the countries involved, the uniqueness of Boundless Southern Africa lies in that it promotes the flow of tourists across international borders. That is exactly what we would like to see happen as operators and that is exactly what our consumers would like to experience.

Hopefully as the leading African tourism operator Thompsons will be able to play a meaningful contribution towards this goal.....helping to deliver a grander journey towards the larger dream.

We are all aware of the fact that world-wide there is a demand for unique and authentic tourist experiences. In parallel with our region's biodiversity there is richness in the cultural diversity of the peoples of southern Africa that makes travel in southern Africa so much more stimulating.

The Boundless Southern Africa brand will help the tourists of the world appreciate and participate in this kaleidoscope and the genuine warmth that will greet them.

I would like to make use of the opportunity to announce that Thompsons Africa will be including the Boundless Southern Africa destinations in our itineraries. The Thompsons Africa Team will be working together with the Boundless Southern Africa team to develop itineraries to the transfrontier conservation areas, supporting their onwards development in a suitable sustainable manner..

We are aware of the fact that at this point in time there is a lack of accommodation in many of the transfrontier conservation areas. We will however take one step at a time and include what is available and market the tourism product offering accordingly. Therefore this conference is a milestone in tourism

and socio-economic development for the region. We trust that these developments will also support the conservation goals of the transfrontier conservation areas.

As much as we all would like to explore faraway destinations and experience the excitement of mingling with foreign cultures, travelling can sometimes become tedious and stressful. Therefore it is imperative that as governments and as private sector, we strive to make the travel experience as seamless and easy as possible.

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Although time is short I would like to note some of the key issues that need government leadership and public/private partnership in order to improve the enabling conditions for tourism in this region, and especially for regional tourism products such as those of Boundless Southern Africa

Honourable Ministers, the implementation of a uni-visa that is applicable to as many of the countries of our region as possible is imperative to the success of Boundless Southern Africa. Without such a uni-visa, we will be challenged with a constant uphill battle to reap the benefits that Boundless Southern Africa can bring to the region.

In parallel I could mention other aspects of an improved institutional capacity such as facilitated border crossings, standardisation of health requirements, and logistics support for efficient transportation systems. An improved investment climate applicable to tourism products could help improve transport and tourism logistical infrastructure, expand the availability of airlines and air routings in Africa, bring down costs, and have African transport and tourism apply world class safety standards. Sustainable support for the conservation and preservation of our natural and cultural heritage is essential along with capacity building in all aspects of African national and regional tourism sectors including those of human resources. Our own companies expansion into the region has given us tremendous perspective with regard to the above.

Would it not be wonderful if we could train together – teaching every guide, driver, hotelier about each others region – bringing it all together in a huge workshop of amazing Southern Africa – lets work towards a Dream of uniting our region for opportunity.

In conclusion I would like to congratulate Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe for taking the initiative of promoting the region together to the international market. I can assure you that Boundless Southern Africa will position your incredibly special transfrontier conservation areas firmly on the global tourism map.

Thompsons is committed to work with its partners to help bring these treasures to the attention of the world and the tourists of the world to visit Southern Africa to appreciate them

Honourable Ministers. As Minister Van Schalk said this morning 'Africa's time has come', however, delivery is in your hands.

I thank you