

29 April 2020

MPUMALANGA TOURISM RESPONDS TO CONCERNS ABOUT ZITHABISENI RESORT AS A QUARANTINE SITE

The Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA) has taken note of the concerns and allegations by the people who have recently been accommodated at the Zithabiseni Resort and Conference Centre, situated at the Mabuse Nature Reserve in the Nkangala Region, which is one of the Province's Quarantine Sites.

Initially, 115 people were quarantined at the Zithabiseni Resort and Conference Centre, and out of that number, 20 were foreign nationals whilst 95 were South Africans. To-date, a total of eight (8) foreign nationals have completed their 14 days quarantine period, and have all tested negative and have since left the site. Currently, a total of 107 people are still under quarantine at the site.

It has now come to our attention that some people, who arrived at the Zithabiseni Resort and Conference Centre just this past Monday, 27 April 2020, have raised a number of concerns. We would, therefore, like to provide a detailed response to all the concerns raised, as listed below:

- 1. According to the parliament member just now, if they were aware of the conditions, they would not have approved the facility as a quarantine site:**

The Zithabiseni Resort and Conference Centre is a suitable facility that has been identified and accordingly approved by the Department of Health as one of the quarantine sites in the Province. We acknowledge that there are dilapidated buildings within the Resort, but we can confirm that the ones selected for quarantine are in satisfactory and habitable condition.

- 2. We have been in communication with a member of the National Assembly over the last 3 weeks, trying to repatriate from Mozambique to SA. We all came from Mozambique, a low risk area and have been under self-quarantine for more than 5 weeks.**

It is important to note that most of those repatriated from Mozambique are frustrated and do not want to be quarantined. As such, they are focused on ensuring that their quarantine period is reduced to three (3) days instead of the prescribed fourteen (14) days. We have noted their concerns that the accommodation provided at ZRCC does not meet their preferred and expected standards; hence their claim that they have already been under self-quarantine previously, and as such, there is no need to be quarantined again.

3. **Speed varied between 80 and 180kms per hour to keep up with their travel speed. We however eventually travelled for 7 hours where the distance warrant 4 hours.**

The general speed limits in terms of the South African National Road Traffic Act, 1989 and its regulations are: 60 km/h on a public road within an urban area; 100 km/h on public road outside an urban area which is not a freeway; and 120 km/h on freeways. Driving at 180 km/h is a serious contravention to the law, and is a matter that needs to be brought to the attention of the Traffic Department for further investigation.

4. **On arrival, they had no 'row-call' list and was not 'prepared' for our arrival as they were only notified the day before of our arrival.**

The roll call list was available upon arrival and was used for the allocation of chalets per family. The management of the resort received notification that the team would be arriving a day before. This was sufficient time to prepare for their arrival, as the Resort has been receiving various groups of people to be quarantined, since April 5, 2020 to-date. The management team of the Resort has continued to ensure that everything is in place, to receive guests at any given time.

5. **Run down, dilapidated facility, most of the rondawels are either burned down or ruins. Some are better (where we stay) but the ones all around are ruins, places for sickness and diseases to grow.**

The dilapidated chalets are located in the outskirts of the Resort, and are not in close proximity to the chalets currently in use for quarantine. Quarantined guests are confined within a limited space, and are not expected to linger around the Resort at any given time.

6. **Bathrooms disgusting, no toilet seats in most of the bathrooms, taps broken and falling off, tiles, baths and showers broken and very dirty. Cupboards rotten, cockroaches everywhere. I tried my best to jik the place down before I could bath my 3 and 1 year old at 11 pm last night.**

The management team of the Resort is currently in the process of addressing all minor maintenance challenges, as and when they arise. This includes procurement of toilet seats and fixing of broken showers etc. There is a maintenance team on standby at all times, to ensure that all reported emergency maintenance issues are attended to timeously.

7. **We are unable to get tested for Coronavirus: not last night, not today. They will only test us on day 11 or day 14. None of us currently have any symptoms nor have we been tested positive before. All other quarantine facilities get tested on day 1, and if negative, they go home after the results have been made available after 24 - 72 hrs. There is no standard for the facilities and clearly, we have drawn the short end of the stick;**

The Department of Health has screened all 64 clients who were found to be asymptomatic. All those who did not have masks, were provided with masks, and were informed of the various aspects of curbing the spread of Covid-19. This includes social distancing, no mingling, being confined to a limited space, thorough hand cleaning or sanitising, and so forth.

Each chalet has been provided with one 500ml bottle of sanitiser. They were also informed about the daily health monitoring that is conducted by the Department of Health. A record of all chronic patients has been taken, in order to ensure that they receive the necessary support and assistance.

- 8. No towels, toilet paper (first day), no cleaning services, no washing (clothes) facilities, no cleaning materials;**

It is important to indicate that towels and toilet papers were provided to everyone on-site. Cleaning services, washing facilities and cleaning materials are also made available for all the guests. Upon arrival, all guests requested a particular antiseptic and other branded cleaning materials, which the Resort unfortunately does not have, as they procure different brands. The resort has laundry facilities on-site and has further made provision for local laundry service providers to assist all the guests.

- 9. Water is undrinkable. They only told us that after the first day and then only provided 1 x bottle per day.**

Bottled water is continuously provided to all the guests. Upon arrival, the new guests were all given 5 litres of bottled water each. More water is available upon request.

- 10. Disgusting dumpsite on the premises, festering hole for all kinds of sickness and disease.**

The dumping site is far away from the quarantine site, where the guests are accommodated. The pictures that were posted on social media by the guests, provide a distorted view of the actual location of the dumping site. The Resort's management is currently working on clearing that site, as a matter of urgency.

- 11. Food is substandard. They laugh at the diabetic and do not support the need for diabetic food. Boiled eggs received for breakfast were cracked open (white of the egg showing) with a few households. Everyone complaining about the food, we are not eating it and currently providing for our kids from the limited supplies we were able to bring (some even received false eyelashes in their meal. Food are being delivered without gloves (everything manually wrapped in foil/ glad wrapp). Kitchen entrance dirty, staff engaging without gloves or masks. Not sure how they cook the food**

The menu which was supplied to the quarantine facility by the Department of Health was revised prior to the arrival of the group in question, and there is adequate food for each guest who is on site and the food meets the required standards. All staff members who provide catering service have been provided with protective clothing by the Department of Health. The food provided is well prepared and wrapped accordingly, and is continuously inspected by the Environmental Health Officers, who continuously provide the management of the Resort with the necessary report. Even though unlikely, the allegations of people laughing at diabetic patients and false eyelashes found in the food, are taken seriously and will be investigated as a matter of urgency.

- 12. We just came from 30 degrees so didn't pack any warm clothes. Our kids are cold without shoes, they said we can 'give them our bank card' and they will draw money/ buy for us.**

The weather conditions at ZRCC are acceptable at this stage. The country is currently in lockdown and clothing shops are not open to the public. An assessment will be made on the extent of the need for warm clothing. An allegation about staff members requesting the guests to give them their bank cards to withdraw money, to buy clothing for them, will also be investigated as a matter of urgency.

- 13. When I showed the photos and told the nurses this pm who came to screen us about the conditions they said it is not right and unhealthy conditions. One of them indicated they would not keep their child in such conditions;**

This is an allegation. The management of the Resort together with the Department of Health, will nonetheless, conduct an investigation into the matter.

ENDS

Responses issued jointly by the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency, Department of Economic Development & Tourism and the Department of Health.

For media enquiries please contact:

Ms Kholofelo Nkambule – 082 451 2548 | Dr Mohau Ramodibe – 060 989 4678 | Mr Dumisani Malamule – 081 790 6307