



A dinner fit for a KING

On 17 July 2018, the Johannesburg Expo Centre played host to one of its most prestigious events yet – the official Nelson Mandela Centenary Dinner. **Meetings** explores the venue's unique value proposition and how one of South Africa's oldest eventing establishments remains a top choice for organisers.

A spotlight was shone on South Africa during the month of July, when the world celebrated one of history's most pioneering political leaders and human rights advocates: the late, great Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela.

This year marks 100 years since the birth of a man who can only be described as a legend. Born in the Eastern Cape in 1918, Mandela gained international recognition when he was imprisoned during the apartheid era. He fought fiercely for equality and the fair treatment of all and his legacy lives on, continuing to inspire countless numbers of people.

The Johannesburg Expo Centre (JEC) played a noteworthy role in honouring the centenary of Nelson Mandela and was the venue of choice for the official gala dinner that saw approximately 1700 state officials – with VIPs such as Barack Obama and President Cyril Ramaphosa – in attendance.

FROM A DREAM TO REALITY

The JEC has strategically positioned itself within the market as one of Gauteng's most

sought-after exhibition and event venues. It offers flexibility across both its indoor and outdoor multipurpose facilities, with the premises covering over 150 000 m². And with more than 20 000 bays, parking is a breeze.

"The JEC provided a world-class venue for the organisers, who experienced no challenges working with us. As one of the oldest venues in South Africa, guests were pleasantly surprised," notes Craig. Surrounded by choice four- and five-star hotels, the JEC is home to outstanding facilities that won it the PMR.africa Award in 2007, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2015 and again in 2016. Its location within Gauteng also means that it is accessible from all highways and only a 30-minute drive from major airports.

When working with the JEC, organisers can rest assured that their event will run smoothly. The venue ensures that all service providers relating to each event are on-site at all times to assist with all aspects of executing a successful event.

MATTER OF NATIONAL SECURITY

The VIPs in attendance at the Nelson Mandela Centenary Dinner were exceptional and, as was to be expected, chaperoned by a remarkable

security detail. The JEC has had ample previous experience handling official government and state functions, and is well equipped to manage events at this level.

"Given the nature of the event, security measures were a top priority. Fortunately, the layout of the venue made it easy for SAPS to secure the area and the design enabled optimal security standards to be put in place, which was obviously necessary for an event of this size and nature," says Craig. The JEC also has a registered helicopter landing base, so the venue is accessible by air too.

CONTINUING TO SHINE

The JEC handles some of Africa's largest events, with the Rand Show being one of its oldest and biggest. This year, the event attracted R50 million in consumer spend over 10 days, highlighting the valuable contribution made to the economy by an event of this scale. The event attracted more than 200 000 visitors in 2018 and shows no signs of slowing down.

"The Rand Show is an annual celebration of so many things that make South Africa great:

our strong sense of history and community, our excitement about mega-displays and events, and our commitment to shopping around for the best deal. Thousands of people return every year because they know they're in for a great time, with access to great offers on the products they need; however, every year, the show also piques the interest of new visitors and exhibitors who want to make the most of all the experiences and deals available," says Craig.

The JEC is a member and affiliate of all major industry associations, including the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry (UFI) of which Craig is the current president. At UFI, his mandate is to further consolidate the industry to ensure that there is greater cohesion among venues and the exhibition industry, focusing on Africa and the Middle East in particular. His appointment also further cements the JEC's position within the market and strengthens its offering.

"The fact that the JEC is able to host such large and prestigious events is also testament to the fantastic facilities we offer," Craig concludes. **M**



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