

Ugu Lwethu - Our Coast. A profile of coastal KwaZulu-Natal

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8.1 Tourism

Some eight million tourists revel in KZN annually, attracted by its rich and unique natural environment and especially its coastline and beaches. Tourism to KZN has been expanding and forms an increasingly important component of the economy and future development of the Province.

Growth in tourism also underpins infrastructure development and employment.

The World Tourism Organization defines tourism as “the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year”.¹ Tourism is one of the most important and fastest growing industries, with one of the major spinoffs being job creation.² As a result, the South African Department of Tourism has focused on increasing the number of foreign tourists visiting South Africa.³

KZN is the third most popular province in terms of international tourism to South Africa, receiving just over 900 000 foreign visitors in 2011.⁴ The total tourism contribution to KZN's GDP in 2011 by these visitors was estimated to be R7.1 billion.⁴

KZN is also the domestic visitor's destination of choice, with 27% of all South African tourism-related trips taking place in KZN. Although 75% of these trips are intra-provincial (i.e. KZN holiday-makers), the remaining visitors from other provinces account for nearly 1.8 million visitors to per year. This amounts to a domestic spend of R3.3 billion annually.⁴ It has been estimated that visitors to KZN's beaches during their stay account for about 80% of the tourism spend in the Province each year.⁵

The KZN tourism industry experienced strong growth after the end of apartheid, rising from below 400 000 foreign visitors in

1995⁶ to 956 600 in 2010.⁵ In recent years however, the province's mean annual hotel occupancy rate has declined from a high of 71.9% in 2005 to 53.5% in 2010.⁷ This corresponds with a national downturn, exacerbated by the global economic downturn.

While Gauteng and the Western Cape have a higher dependence on the foreign tourist market, the international market remains relatively more valuable to the KZN economy than the domestic market. Hence the decrease in foreign tourist numbers is concerning, noting that foreign tourists spend an average of R7 215 per visit, compared to the R720 spent by the average domestic tourist.⁶

Tourism generally occurs across a range of sectors, including recreation and leisure, sports and business tourism, eco-tourism and rural and cultural tourism.

Tourists enjoying the sunny KZN south coast beaches.



Photo: Blue Flag



Recreation and leisure

People are attracted to the KZN coast for a range of leisure and recreational activities, as highlighted in *Section 7.4*. Key to the success of coastal tourism is the state of KZN beaches, in terms of facilities, cleanliness and safety. The need to ensure a quality beach experience resulted in the Blue Flag programme, an international beach accreditation initiative. In South Africa, it is facilitated locally by the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA) and participating municipalities.

Blue Flag certification originated in Europe as an environmental and tourism campaign that was intended to assure visitors that certified beaches had high standards of cleanliness, safety and environmental quality. The programme annually evaluates beach conditions based on bathing water quality, environmental management, safety and services provided. The criteria are set by the international co-ordinators of the programme, the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE).

In KZN, a number of beaches have attained Blue Flag certification. Beaches are evaluated each year and the list is updated, with new beaches added, and others removed if the standards are not maintained.

To enhance the safety of KZN beaches, shark safety gear is deployed by the KZN Sharks Board (*Section 7.4*). A questionnaire survey of beachgoers in Queensland, Australia, revealed that beach safety is a critical element of a beach experience and that beach safety is associated with protection from shark attack.⁷ Similar findings have been obtained for KZN, from research carried out on focus groups.⁸

Sports tourism

Sports tourism contributes more than R6 billion to South African tourism, with more than 10% of foreign tourists coming to South Africa to watch or participate in sports events per year.⁵ Events such as the Rugby World Cup (1995) and the FIFA World Cup (2010) have boosted tourism to the country.

In KZN, there are a number of world class events that attract international competitors. Coastal KZN features prominently in the International Surfing Association's calendar of events, annually drawing foreign participants and their teams. Other events that draw sport enthusiasts to the coastal region are a suite of yachting regatas, angling tournaments as well as cycle

and marathon events such as the Comrades Marathon, which is the biggest ultra-marathon in the world.⁵

Business tourism

Business tourism has become a major driver of economies worldwide. South Africa is ranked 37th in the world and first in Africa in terms of business meetings hosted in 2012. South Africa has over a 1000 world-class conference and exhibition venues, notably the International Convention Centre (ICC) in Durban. It is estimated that the ICC injects R170 million into the economy of Durban annually.²

Eco-tourism or nature based tourism

South Africa is the third most bio-diverse country in the world.⁹ It is also home to three of the world's biodiversity hotspots: the Cape Floristic Region, Succulent Karoo Biome, and the Maputaland-Pondoland-Albany Region. The latter hotspot is partly located within KZN's coastal zone, making it a sought-after eco-tourism destination. The KZN coast is also home to the iSimangaliso Wetland Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

There are a number of outstanding eco-related activities that attract visitors to KZN coast; such as the annual sardine run (*Section 5.2*), shark-cage diving, whale and dolphin excursions and experiencing the nocturnal viewing of the endangered loggerhead and leatherback turtles laying eggs on beaches of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park.¹⁰

Rural and cultural tourism

Rural tourism gives visitors personal contact with the rural environment and showcases the heritage and traditions of the local people. It also provides visitors with an opportunity to participate in the lifestyle activities of locals, such as fishing, walking and cycling.^{11; 12} The National Tourism Sector Strategy (launched in 2011) aims to increase the number of nights spent in rural areas by tourists.^{4; 13} Rural tourism can benefit a community through job creation for unskilled people, and has the potential to alleviate poverty in rural areas.¹²

A popular form of rural tourism is a "township tour", which allows locals to establish small enterprise businesses. The township tour of Durban, for example, includes a tour around

Cato Manor, Inanda, KwaMashu, Ntuzuma, Phoenix, Chesterville, Claremont, Lamontville, Umlazi, Chatsworth and KwaMakutha.¹¹ There are also a number of cultural museums which provide insight into KZN's and South Africa's history. The KZN Cultural Museum in Ulundi, for example, focuses on archaeology, Zulu culture and King Cetshwayo's Ondini residence; while the Dumazulu Traditional Village in Hluhluwe is a living museum where traditional Zulu dancing and cultural craftwork are demonstrated.

Spatial distribution of tourist activities and accommodation

Tourist accommodation, and thus the majority of tourist related activities, has historically been heavily concentrated in the southern half of the province. This uneven distribution can be traced back to the legacy of apartheid, where sections of coast were classified as "homeland" and subsequently held in trust by the state, making the land inalienable.

The total area occupied by resorts located within 1.0 km of the coast in municipalities south of the Thukela River is 311.1 ha, compared with only 34.5 ha in municipalities north of the Thukela. However, it is important to note that iSimangaliso Wetland Park is located in this area and supports a host of eco-tourism related activities. Importantly, associated with tourism are job opportunities, improved infrastructure and increased spending on tourism-related activities.

Tourism is a key element of the provincial economy, strongly influenced by the coast and its resources. KZN has successfully tapped into a number of coastal tourism activities, providing a range of revenue streams coupled with growing job opportunities. Nevertheless, as the tourism market grows and coastal development increases, authorities should be mindful of balancing the expansion of tourism with environmental sustainability. ■

Photo: Blue Flag



Photo: Camilla Floros



Top: Enjoying a Blue Flag beach.
Bottom: Surfer enjoying warm KZN waters.

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