



tourism

Department:
Tourism
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



MEDIA STATEMENT

CLEANER AND SAFER BEACHES TO BOOST ECOTOURISM

05 April 2019

The Department of Tourism hosted a graduation ceremony to honour 18 women and 17 male beach stewards from the KwaZulu-Natal who participated in the Blue Flag Training Programme, at the Carousel Holiday Resort, Hibberdene, this morning.

Officiated by Deputy Minister Elizabeth Thabethe, learners received certification in Environmental, Education, Training and Development, Practices - Sector Education and Training Authority (EETDP – SETA), under the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), which carries an NQF level 5 accreditation. The programme ran over a period of 28 months from October 2016 to March 2019.

Implemented by the Wildlife, Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA), the Blue Flag Programme aims to improve tourism facilities and services offered at 46 Blue Flag beaches across the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape as well as 25 pilot sites.

The Blue Flag Training Programme promotes sustainable livelihoods by capacitating youth with relevant skills for employment in the environmental and tourism sector. The project has also assisted in increasing Blue Flag beaches which has led to cleaner and safer coastal ecosystems for tourists visiting the beaches and communities living adjacent to the beaches.

“The value of the Blue Flag project is not just to environmental management and education, but also to economic development and job creation of youth in the conservation and tourism. The Blue Flag beach stewards improve the services at beaches by providing environmental awareness and actively engaging with visitors thus promoting sustainable tourism along South Africa’s coastline”, explained the Director for Education and Youth at WESSA, Nontobeko Sibisi.

Congratulating the stewards, the Deputy Minister emphasised the importance of utilising the skills attained as a tool to not only seek employment, but also create entrepreneurial opportunities that will further create jobs and help government to curb the unemployment rate that the country is currently facing.

“Our government has prioritised skills development as one way to bridge the gap between experience and qualification, as a way to enable our youth to be exposed to the corporate environment, with the hope to have a skilled workforce”, said the Deputy Minister.

“At the education centres, we recognise that the most effective way to protect nature is to influence the behaviour of society and to be much more appreciative of education about biodiversity, ecology and sustainable tourism. Our passion is to create environmental awareness through practical hands-on lessons to various levels of education. This was evidently shown by stewards who had the opportunity of being hosted at the centres”, said Taryn van Neel, Centre Principal at the WESSA Treasure Beach, who spoke on behalf of the host employer.

The stewards conducted outdoor environmental education classrooms for previously disadvantaged schools thereby fostering environmental education and awareness at a grassroots level within their local

communities. They also help promote and market Blue Flag beaches to visitors thus boosting coastal tourism and the oceans and marine economy in the context of Operation Phakisa.

Former learner of the programme and current Junior Environmental Education Officer at the WESSA Umngeni Valley Education Centre Yethu Mthembu expressed gratitude to both the Department of Tourism and WESSA for the opportunity that led her to be permanently employed.

“I have found something that gives me purpose and passion. I am now looking for ways to improve myself in this field”, said Mthembu.

ENDS.

NOTE TO THE EDITORS:

Four criteria for beaches to be declared Blue Flag Status:

1. Environmental management
2. Environmental education
3. Water Quality
4. Safety and security

There is a national jury comprising of various stakeholders that evaluates all the country’s beach statuses and award the Blue Flag status to beaches that comply with the criteria. This jury reports to the Foundation for Environmental Education an international body responsible environmental education.

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