



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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Launch of the Blue Flag season 2012

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With its rolling waves, mountainous backdrop and white sands, picturesque Grotto Beach is enjoyed by local and international and domestic visitors. It is also the site of the Blue Flag season launch this year. Grotto Beach this year celebrates its 11th year anniversary of maintaining and sustaining its Blue Flag Status. Congratulations to the Overstrand municipality for this great achievement.

Blue Flag originates from Europe in 1987 with the sole purpose of encouraging beaches to comply with the European Union's Bathing Water Directive. From that starting point, the programme has grown and developed significantly. Internationally, this year sees the programme running successfully for 25 years. According to the World Tourism Organization, the international Blue Flag is the most well-known and oldest thriving eco-label of its kind. Currently, more than 40 countries across Europe, South Africa, Morocco, Tunisia, New Zealand, Brazil, Canada and the Caribbean are participating in the programme. In 2012, 3 849 beaches and marinas were awarded Blue Flag status.

In South Africa, since the inception of the Blue Flag programme in November 2001, by the Marine and Coastal Management division of the former Department of Environmental Affairs & Tourism and WESSA (the Wildlife & Environment Society of South Africa) it has also grown significantly and sustainably. Our country was the first country outside of Europe to implement the Blue Flag programme and since 2001, the programme has become a truly global initiative.

This year, South Africa celebrates its 12th year of running the Blue Flag successfully. High on our list of achievements we celebrate the growth of Blue Flag beaches, from only three beaches in the first year to 36 for this year. 17 Beaches also holds pilot status. Growth has been significant and sustainable for most coastal municipalities and each year sees new beaches being introduced to the programme.

This year, for the first time, 4 full blue flag status was awarded to Marinas namely the Yachtport in Saldanha, Granger Bay Water Club and False Bay Yacht Club in the City of Cape Town and the Royal Alfred Marina in the Ndlambe Municipality in the Eastern Cape. The voluntary eco-label is given to beaches that meet 32 main criteria spanning over three aspects of coastal management: water quality, environmental education and

information, environmental management and safety and services, which include excellent life-saving standards, top-rate parking and sparkling ablution facilities.

This is indeed the golden time for tourism in our country: It is the third-largest industry of job creation in our country, with the financial services and education sectors taking the lead. Travel receipts increased again in the second quarter of 2012, rising by R5 billion to R83.5 billion. Tourist arrivals to our country increased by an overall 10,5% year-on-year during the first quarter and overseas arrivals increased by nearly 18%. Travel and tourism exports constituted 67,9% of all services exports from our country in the year 2011. Our domestic tourism statistics indicated that in the first quarter of 2012, 5,5 million domestic trips were undertaken which contributed R5,2 billion to the economy. It is of critical importance that all role-players in the industry continue to contribute towards the growth and development of our sector. This is exactly what WESSA has done as research indicated that the Blue Flag programme has impacts in terms of economic benefits, job creation and improved environmental management. Minister Van Schalkwyk said: “tourism is one of the largest industries in the world and one that is heavily dependent on the natural resource base. Attractive coastal landscapes such as estuaries, and coastal lakes are also preferred sites for tourism development. Hence, uncontrolled and ill-planned tourism significantly degrades the environment. Our environment is one of our greatest tourism resources. As the global sector grows, its impact on natural resources also grows, and therefore the need for sustainable planning and management become imperative for this industry.”

Currently South Africa is promoted largely around its “safari-type” experiences and its “beaches” and our status as a premier global leisure destination is now firmly established. We have the capability and the means, the welcoming culture, and the varied, textured, beautiful destination that the world’s travellers – ever more demanding and discerning – want when they choose a destination. As the number of Blue Flag beaches increases in South Africa, domestic visitors are increasingly exercising their choices in which beaches they visit and, as with international trends, our Blue Flag beaches are becoming the “beach of choice”.

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