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MINISTER ANNOUNCES 27 SOUTH AFRICAN BLUE FLAG BEACHES

South Africa can proudly celebrate ten years of the Blue Flag programme in the country this year with 27 beaches being awarded Blue Flag status for 2010/2011, Minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk, the Minister of Tourism, said today.

“Blue Flag has grown from only three beaches in the first year to 27 for this, the tenth year of the programme. Growth has been significant and sustainable for most coastal municipalities and each year sees new beaches being introduced to the programme,” the Minister said at a ceremony held at Santos beach in Mossel Bay.

“Our government, in close cooperation with the tourism industry, is continuously investing in tourism services and facilities in order to provide domestic and international tourists with an exceptional experience. The success of the 2010 World Cup must motivate all of us to continue to strive towards the highest standards.

“I have always maintained that tourists vote with their feet and if the latest arrival figures to South Africa are anything to go by, our country is getting a resounding vote of confidence from visitors. Foreign arrivals for January to July 2010 show an increase of 18.1% across all markets compared to the same period in 2009.

“In the first seven months of this year foreign arrivals to South Africa totalled more than 4.5 million (4 566 983), compared to about 3.8 million (3 865 710) for the same period last year. We saw growth in foreign arrivals from all our source regions, with increases of 11.5% from Europe, 23.6% from North America, 173.1% from Central and South America, 21.9% from Australasia, 36.4% from Asia, 27.5% from the Middle East and 14% from Africa.

“I have no doubt that 2010 is going to be a bumper year for tourism in South Africa and by launching the Blue Flag beaches today we kick off the summer holiday season in the country. I invite local and international visitors alike to enjoy the fantastic tourism offerings of our municipalities and I would like to congratulate all 27 Blue Flag beaches on flying the flag high for South African excellence,” Minister van Schalkwyk said.

South Africa was the first country outside of Europe to implement the Blue Flag programme and it was launched here in November 2001 as part of the South African Government’s CoastCare initiative. Since 2001, the Blue Flag programme has become a truly global initiative with over 42 countries participating and a further seven countries undertaking the feasibility stage.

Minister van Schalkwyk said research has shown that the investment that coastal municipalities make in meeting and sustaining the international quality assurances that Blue Flag accreditation brings, pays off.

As the number of Blue Flag beaches on offer in South Africa increases, visitors will now have more choice in terms of visiting our world-class Blue Flag beaches, the Minister said.

He announced that the South African beaches that have received Blue Flag accreditation for the 10th year of Blue Flag in South Africa are:-

MacDougall's Bay, Port Nolloth
Yzerfontein Main beach, Yzerfontein
Clifton 4th beach, Cape Town
Camps Bay, Cape Town
Muizenberg, Cape Town
Strandfontein beach, Cape Town
Mnandi beach, Cape Town
Bikini beach, Gordon's Bay
Kleinmond beach, near Hermanus
Hawston beach, near Hermanus
Grotto beach, Hermanus
Lappiesbaai, Stilbaai, Southern Cape
Witsand at the mouth of the Breede River
Santos beach, Mossel Bay
Hartenbos beach, Mossel Bay
Robberg 5 beach, Plettenberg Bay
Dolphin beach, Jeffrey's Bay
Humewood beach, Port Elizabeth
Wells Estate, north of Port Elizabeth
Kelly's beach, Port Alfred
Kariega Main beach, Kenton-on-Sea
Umzumbe (Pumula) on the south coast Kzn (new)
Lucien beach near Margate (back in the programme)
Trafalgar beach, south coast Kzn
Marina beach, south coast Kzn
Ramsgate beach, near Margate
Margate beach

These beaches have achieved world-class standards during the past season and have been adjudicated by both a South African and an International Blue Flag Jury to meet the standards of excellence Blue Flag beaches must achieve.

There are currently 14 beaches that have applied to run a pilot or developmental stage of Blue Flag. For further details of these beaches, visit www.blueflag.org.za

"The success of the Blue Flag programme in South Africa over the past 10 years can be attributed to the commitment of participating municipalities to provide beach-goers and holiday-makers with world class beaches offering safe, clean and well-managed facilities," said Alison Kelly, WESSA's Blue

Flag Program Manager.

“The municipalities managing Blue Flag beaches are showing that high levels of excellence and delivery of services to benefit both local and international visitors are possible. Blue Flag as an organised and internationally managed accreditation programme provides a viable system for service excellence on our coastline and those municipalities receiving accreditation today should be acknowledged for what they have achieved” Kelly said.

An ongoing challenge for many South African beaches will be the need to manage the damages caused to infrastructure and the coastline as a result of changing climatic conditions. Notwithstanding these challenges, municipalities participating in Blue Flag have devoted resources to the rehabilitation of these beaches and the standards necessary to fly the Blue Flag have been quickly re-established.

Blue Flag as an environmental programme also brings significant benefits in terms of improved environmental management of our coastline. This is clear in the highlighting of issues relating to bathing water quality and the need to ensure that infrastructure is effectively managed to minimize impacts on coastal environments. A significant potential threat to Blue Flag sustainability into the future will be the potential negative impacts of land-based pollution on sea bathing water quality.

“We are noticing slow deterioration in bathing water quality along most of the coast and this appears to be related to poor sewerage and stormwater management within the broader catchment that leads to the beaches,” said Kelly. She noted that water quality in rivers and estuaries is deteriorating markedly.

“The release of the Green Drop report earlier this year highlights the very real challenges this country faces in managing waste water management systems and the need for us to ensure that the necessary skills and technical ability is in place at local government level,” Kelly said.

[Ends]

Blue Flag is an international annual award given to beaches that meet excellence in the areas of safety, amenities, cleanliness, environmental information and environmental management. The Blue Flag programme is currently run in over 42 countries globally and interest in the programme continues to grow. There are now almost 4,000 Blue Flag beaches and marinas around the world. In South Africa, the programme is run by WESSA, the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa in partnership with participating local authorities, Blue Flag helps to contribute to the aims of the White Paper on Sustainable Coastal Development.

For more information on Blue Flag, visit www.blueflag.org.za or contact the Blue Flag National Manager, Alison Kelly on alisonk@wessa.co.za or 033-330-3931 ext 146 or 082-337-1273.

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