

Tourism recovery the latest chapter in KwaZulu-Natal's story

SOUTH AFRICA, Johannesburg – Friday, 24 December 2021: For Tourism KwaZulu-Natal's (TKZN) CEO, Phindile Makwakwa, the sector's story does not end with the pandemic. Instead it begins right now, with the rebuilding of tourism.

KwaZulu-Natal brought the South African Pavilion's Provincial Showcase to a close at the Expo 2020 Dubai on Thursday, 23 December. The series took South Africa's nine provinces to a global audience of travel trade expert and product owners. It also promoted their business and leisure tourism opportunities to potential investors.

Makwakwa said that the pandemic had prompted the KwaZulu-Natal's tourism sector to draw up a new strategy to mitigate its effects. The plan, she said, started by focusing on attracting domestic travellers and creating a sustainable environment where tourism could thrive. "We came together with our trade partners to work on a recovery plan. We were in survival mode. We wanted to ensure that, domestically, we were able to get the numbers going. We worked very hard to put together packages that were affordable.

"Much of the work we have done was with the tourism trade in the country. We realised partnering with businesses big and small was key in building a sustainable sector. We will continue to work with our partners to broaden the reach of our offerings and continue to have hard hitting campaigns that will see all tourism establishments thrive in the future."

To remain top of mind with the international market, Makwakwa said that they workshopped solutions with international tour operators. However, the red listings in key source markets were obstructive. But she sees an opportunity on the horizon. "As we recover, and learn that travel bans are not the way, we are starting to engage with a number of airlines to make us accessible again. Also, South African Tourism has a Global Advocacy Campaign that we cannot wait to be a part of. KwaZulu-Natal wants to be at the forefront of that drive."

Make KwaZulu-Natal great again

General Manager of Marketing at TKZN, Mpho Mbuli, said that when marketing the province to potential visitors, the main aim was to make it the number one destination in the province. To reach this goal, she said TKZN upheld Covid-19 rules, ensured relationships with stakeholders were in place, and launched campaigns with a purpose. “We had done a soft campaign, saying we were missing people during the pandemic.”

When marketing to an international audience, technology was at the forefront, said Mbuli. “We have been engaging with buyers and tour operators virtually. We have kept the traditional marketing mediums, but we are going very big on mobile.”

Keith Matthews, TKZN’s Regional Manager for Europe, said that all tourism stakeholders in the province had to speak as one if they were to be ready for visitors again. “As a marketing agency, your work is in the backend, preparing people, having a lot of consultations. All of us were lobbying and speaking in one voice – that is to do everything to resuscitate our sector. The work we are doing now, this is the end product of everything we have been doing to ensure a safe destination.”

MICE still top of mind for KZN

With the advent of the Coronavirus, the business events sector was hardest hit and had to evolve in an unprecedented way. The industry had to create what is now termed hybrid events – a mixture of physical and virtual gatherings.

“Business events are very important to us,” said Makwakwa. “We understand that they are low lying fruit. If there is one sector of tourism that adapted to ensure movement of people, it is this one.”

Durban hosted the Intra-African Trade Fair last month, which turned out to be a great success. Makwakwa said this has given the province confidence to start hosting large events again – such as Africa’s Travel Indaba which was held in Durban for a number of consecutive years. “The Intra-African Trade Fair was our rehearsal to see if we are ready to bring in

visitors and host these events. So we are going the hybrid route. It is to stay here with us for a long time.”

Makwakwa added TKZN has worked closely with the Durban International Convention Centre and the Durban KwaZulu-Natal Convention Bureau to secure large-scale events over the next couple of years.

In the New Year, you can continue following the South African Pavilion on Twitter using the handle TeamSA_Expo2020. Follow the events at the pavilion using #ThinkOpportunity #Expo2020SA #ShareSouthAfrica.
