

Illembe District enjoys a whopping R2.2bn boost in just 6 months

Tourists flocked to iLembe District in the first half of 2023, spending a staggering R2.2bn. This momentum is expected to continue, potentially doubling in December, as KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) braces for a thriving summer season. Enterprise iLembe reports near-capacity bookings (80%) on the North Coast, with full occupancy anticipated between 15 December and 5 January 2024.



Image source: [Gallo/Getty](#)

Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs MEC, Siboniso Duma, said that visitors were yearning to return to the coast and paddle out in the early morning at the Durban's beachfront, Ballito, Amanzimtoti, Shelly Beach, Margate, Richards Bay up to Kosi Bay.

"Through our entity, KZN Tourism Authority, we have teamed up with events planners, tourism agencies and associations to ensure a line-up of activities throughout the corners of the province. We can confidently state that we have something for everyone, from young to senior, from beachgoers to nature lovers."

Safety of visitors

He added that the safety of visitors was critical and law enforcement agencies have been deployed to ensure visibility. "We are also requesting beachgoers not to drink and swim. Let us also maintain the cleanliness of our beaches to ensure that the next person has quality time throughout the festive season."

iLembe District Municipality Mayor: Councillor Thobani Shandu says that the combined international and domestic visitor spend of R2.2bn in the first six months of 2023 in the district was more than double that for the same period of 2022. This translated into a R3.4bn contribution to the province's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), supported 7,255 jobs and contributed R816m to local household incomes.

To date, international tourists to the district have risen to 23% while domestic visitors continued to be the biggest tourism supporters at 77%. The international tourists were from Germany (26%), the UK (18%), the Netherlands (6%), Australia (6%) and the USA (5%).

For MEC Duma these figures were a good indication that the international tourism sector on the North Coast was starting to recover and the development of a Club Med Resort at Tinley Manor, will result in a further influx of international tourists to this area in the future.

"We hope that other developers will follow Club Med's example by developing other major resorts along the pristine north coast which is close to many Big Five game reserves and the Isimangaliso Wetland Park World Heritage site," he said

Increase in tourist numbers

"We have always enjoyed support from our domestic travellers whose numbers increased by 5% in the first half of the year, the majority of which were from Gauteng, and we are looking forward to reporting a great increase in tourism numbers early next year," he said.

He pointed out that the North Coast was proud of its four Blue Flag pilot beaches, Salt Rock, Thompson's Bay, Willard and Blythdale. "To be a Blue Flag pilot beach we must meet and retain Blue Flag Beach criteria for three years before we can obtain full status. This is our second year of pilot status."

KwaDukuza Mayor Councillor, Lindiwe Nhaca supported the view that the district's tourism sector was recovering well. Looking at beach safety she said the municipality had laid on 50 lifeguards and 30 beach ambassadors for the festive season.

Based on the 2022 record-breaking holiday season turnout, KwaZulu-Natal was expecting a 69% occupancy over December and some 845,000 visitors of which 52,000 will be international tourists. The expected contribution to the provincial economy is estimated to be around R3,6bn.

The total number of international tourists to KZN rose by 22% in the first six months of 2023 compared to the same time last year. From January to June last year, KZN welcomed 258,411 international tourists while, this year, the province welcomed 316,468 international tourists.

Acting chief executive for the KZN Sharks Board, Harry Mbambo, said the organisation was ready for the 2023 summer holiday season.

"Our bather protection services remain vital in promoting the beach tourism of the KZN province. We'd like to remind all the visitors who have chosen to visit our beautiful province for our beautiful beaches to take all the necessary safety precautions whilst swimming. This includes swimming at protected beaches of which there are a wide variety stretching from Richards Bay in the North to Port Edward in the South," he said.

Festive season campaign

In efforts to ensure that visitors to KZN are safe a multi-stakeholder festive season campaign will roll out from 15 December at the Umvoti Toll Plaza on the north coast.

Led by the KwaZulu-Natal Liquor Authority, the campaign targets KwaZulu-Natal's various entry points and aims to encourage tourists to be vigilant as road users. Other entities supporting the campaign include the Road Traffic Inspectorate, law enforcement agencies, TKZN and Sanral.

The campaign aims to raise awareness, on issues of over-consumption of alcohol which leads to domestic violence crime and accidents, especially during the festive season.

MEC Duma thanked the tourism trade for being resilient through tough challenges and rising above extreme issues. "Most importantly, I want to reassure everyone that there is no Summer like a KZN Summer!"

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