

SAMSA plans to extend ocean festival countrywide

South Africa's oceans and inland waterways are a natural resource that has the potential to unlock a largely untapped economic industry.



The success of the 2014 Open Ocean Festival, which a year ago formed part of the 2014 Volvo Ocean Race (VOR) Cape Town stopover offering, has been used as a platform from which to develop a nationwide annual Ocean Festival series linked to ocean-sector initiatives.

The idea of an annual ocean festival in Cape Town was conceived by the V&A Waterfront and Worldsport, to encourage local interest and involvement with the ocean and watersports. Mandated to support and develop South Africa's oceans economy, the South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA) recognised the ocean festival as a unique platform through which to realise their mandate.

As a result, South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA) and Worldsport have together elected to take the ocean festival further, spreading it to other provinces and encapsulating inland waterways. The first South African Ocean Festival in Cape Town, currently under way, is again co-sponsored by the V&A Waterfront and SAMSA.

New strategy

The annual festivals will form part of South Africa's new Marine Tourism and Leisure Strategy, which was formally announced recently at an event at the V&A Waterfront.

In addition to the Cape Town-based festival, a broader plan exists to extend the festivals nationwide as of 2016, to include inland waterways such as dams and lakes, both of which have unique economies SAMSA believe should not be overlooked.

"Our strategic vision is to ensure that, by 2030, South Africa will be the premier experienced-based marine tourism destination in Africa, as well as the top marine tourism destination globally, with a unique range of offerings for all visitors," said Commander Tsietsi Mokhele, CEO of SAMSA.

Through the festival, it's hoped that locals and tourists alike will celebrate and make use of South Africa's more than 3,000km of ocean coastline and inland waterways through water sports, music, food and education, thereby promoting destination-tourism and much-needed opportunities for smaller businesses, skills-transfer, development and job-creation.

New company

Additionally, the hosting of ocean festivals in other provinces will necessitate the creation of a national ocean festival company or entity that will be entrusted with management of the events. This new company will be responsible for marketing and event management of festivals in other cities, and will create an opportunity for the establishment of business partnerships that will contribute to transformation, creation and sharing of wealth.

Marine tourism ranks in the top four sub-sectors of South Africa's maritime economy, with enormous growth projected for the next two decades. The maritime economy contributed R19bn to the country's GDP in 2013, with projections currently indicating that this is likely to rise to around R44bn in 2020, and grow to as much as R134bn by 2033. The economic potential should be fostered and encouraged by government and private sector alike.

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