

Finders Keepers puts Mpumalanga back on the map

Tourism in Mpumalanga has seen a decline in the past few years, reportedly falling from second to fourth place on the list of SA's most visited provinces, with around 1, 2 million foreign arrivals reported in 2013 (the most recently available statistics). On the bright side, domestic tourism appears to be picking up.



On the road Mpumalanga

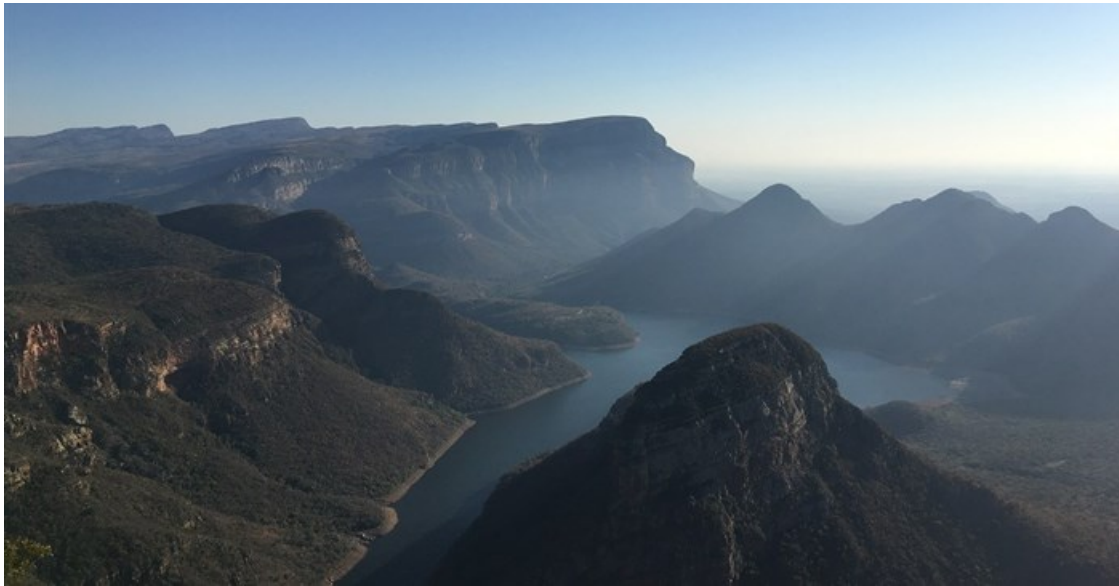
Bringing in an estimated R10 billion a year, tourism is a vital part of the province's economy (as it is for South Africa as a whole). Hence the importance of TOMSA, a tourism levy collected by participating tourism establishments, which goes towards the marketing of destination South Africa. TOMSA is currently partnering with the Sunday Times Finders Keepers competition, which offers readers the chance to win R1 million and simultaneously sets out to encourage domestic tourism.

The [TOMSA Sunday Times Finders Keepers](#) team recently reached Mpumalanga, where they set out to highlight some of the province's many attractions. The team was particularly taken with the Sudwala Dinosaur Park, where visitors can encounter various species of dinosaurs roaming amid the verdant bush. (They're replicas, of course). This park can be found alongside the Sudwala Caves, another of the region's popular attractions.



Dinosaurs of Mpumalanga

The team also visited the Blyde River Canyon, "Three Rondawels" and God's Window. While these places are already famed for their spectacular views, plans are underway to further leverage these attractions through the creation of three flagship projects in the Blyde River Canyon nature reserve – a skywalk, which will allow visitors to walk on a glass cantilevered structure out over the Blyde River Canyon, with a vertiginous drop below them – as well as a cableway and hotel. The team's road trip also took in sections of the spectacular Panorama Route, famous for the lovely Lisbon, Berlin, and Mac Mac waterfalls.



Blyde River Canyon

The team also took a game drive in the Kruger National Park, where a skilful guide led them to all of the big five. The Kruger National Park attracts an estimated one million visitors a year, making it one of the world's most-visited parks. The Kaapsehoop horses, on the other hand, are not so well known, yet they draw visitors keen to catch a glimpse of the wild horses, whose origins are shrouded in mystery. One theory holds that they escaped from a travelling circus bus that crashed in the mid-1800s. Another theory is that they were abandoned cavalry horses from deceased soldiers in the Battle of Delville Wood in 1916.



Horses of Kaapsehoop

Mpumalanga is also famous as the home of Percy Fitzpatrick's Jock of the Bushveld, with many attractions dedicated to one of the world's most famous dogs. The team, therefore, included a visit to his statue in the old gold mining town of Barberton. And there's another reason to head to this area: Barberton is surrounded by some of the oldest mountains on earth, said to date back around 3.5 million years. For this reason, the Barberton Makhonjwa Mountains of the Barberton Greenstone Belt have been included on the tentative list for UNESCO's World Heritage Site status. The "geo trail" that

snakes through this area is a must-see for anyone interested in peering through the ancient mists of time.



Eating on the run at Stefano's

During their whirlwind visit, the TOMSA/Sunday Times Finders Keepers team stayed at a number of excellent establishments: Forever Resorts Blyde River, Sabi River Sun Resort, Town Lodge Mbombela and Protea Hotel Malaga. All of these great hotels are contributing to the marketing of destination SA, and therefore to the stimulation of local tourism and the local economy. They are excellent points from which to explore a region celebrated for its scenic beauty, wildlife, waterfalls - and even its dinosaurs.

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