

SA National Parks Week sees 24% growth

During South African National Parks Week - from 18 September to 22 September 2017 - South African National Parks (SANParks) saw 77,340 visitors, a 24% increase from 2016's 62,312. The campaign, under the theme *Know your National Parks*, allowed locals to spend a day at a national park free of charge.

“ SA National Parks Week aims to create a culture of pride in all South Africans in their relationship with the country's natural, cultural and historical heritage. When people start to take pride in the national parks, then we believe that they will start to understand the importance of conservation. ”



Mbongateclimber via [Wikimedia Commons](#), Karoo National Park

The top three parks with 202%, 138% and 119% increase respectively were Mapungubwe National Park and World Heritage site, Karoo National Park and Marakele National Park.

According to SANParks CEO, Fundisile Mketeni the objective of the week is to give all South Africans a chance to enjoy and experience the beauty and majesty of our breath-taking national parks. “We had an increase of just over 24% this year from last year’s 62,312 visitors. It was good to see smaller parks such as Tankwa Karoo and Bontebok National Park had an increase in their numbers compared to previous years. SA National Parks Week aims to create a culture of pride in all South Africans in their relationship with the country’s natural, cultural and historical heritage. When people start to take pride in the national parks, then we believe that they will start to understand the importance of conservation”.

More people are taking advantage of free access

The feature element of this campaign is the free access granted to all South African day visitors carrying their official Identity Documents. Since its inception in 2006, National Parks Week has seen an influx of 364,275 day visitors in all participating parks. “These numbers are encouraging and tell us that more people are taking advantage of this free week at our national parks and importantly we are beginning to see parks like Marakele and Karoo National Parks show promising numbers,” said Mketeni.

Since 2006 each of the regions has seen an influx of day visitors during SA National Parks Week. The Cape region (Agulhas, Bontebok, Table Mountain, Tankwa and West Coast National Parks) have seen 85,012 day visitors come through their gates with a total of 14,164 visitors this year. The Frontier Region (Addo, Camdeboo, Garden Route, Karoo, and Mountain Zebra National Parks) realised 74,959 day visitors since 2006 with 20,092 visiting this year.

The Arid Region (Augrabies, Kgalagadi, Mokala and Richtersveld National Parks) have had 15,317 day visitors with 3,837 in 2017. The Northern Region (Mapungubwe National Park and World Heritage Site, Marakele and Golden Gate Highlands National Parks) welcomed 27,815 day visitors in the past 11 years, with a total with 8,578 this year. The iconic Kruger National Park has seen a total of 161,172 since the inception of SA National Parks Week, of which 30,669 were visitors in 2017.

Educating the public on role of SANParks, natural heritage and conservation

All of the parks managed by SANParks excluding Namaqua and Boulders at Table Mountain National Park participated in the initiative to give the public an understanding of the role that SANParks plays as custodian of the country's natural heritage. Each park hosted activities during the week which were aimed at education. "We are focused on involving young people and communities, to cultivate knowledge of the importance of conservation and an appreciation for the country's natural heritage," said Mketeni.

The annual SA National Parks Week has been made possible with support from First National Bank (FNB) and Total South Africa. "Our partnerships are critical because it enables development outcomes that are not only a social responsibility, but also more socially inclusive and cultivate sustainable relationships. Adopting more socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable business operations helps cultivate sustainable relationships that allow us to tackle important national and global issues."

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