

Free State Flower Festival to stimulate the provincial industry

A joint venture between the Free State and the government of Madeira, which hosts the world's largest flower festival on the Portuguese island every April, the Free State Flower Festival will take place 11-12 November in Parys.



Some of the major attractions at the festival include 600 performers, five massive floats, giant flowers and fireworks, alongside a floral storytelling precinct.

The Flower Forum will feature a gathering of local and international experts from the flower industry, incorporating presentations on local, national and world trends. Attendees and speakers will include botanists, floriculturists, horticulturists, farmers, retailers and wholesalers. A key theme of the forum will be the unlocking of flower export opportunities.

Another highlight is the Flower Parade, featuring some 600 choreographed performers, adorned in flower and floral outfits. Participants, many of whom will be children, will parade in one choreographed movement through the main tourism street of Parys. They will be on float processions, in dance groups or featured in floral displays.

Floral exhibits in the Flower Precinct

In the Flower Precinct, where several floral exhibits will be located, regional exhibitors, wholesalers, retailers and food and beverage providers will be found. Various activities and events will be staged over the two-day festival providing entertainment for the entire family. The highlight of the Precinct will be the staging of a night-time theatrical performance, "The Gathering of the Flowers". Featuring giant luminous flowers, the show is narrated by the renowned Gcina Mhlope. The story sees the coming together of a variety of flowers to fight the drought afflicting the land. Described as a spectacular, it also features magnificent costume design and lighting and original music by Themí Ventúras, Tiki Nxumalo, Mamikey and Dawn Selby. The Precinct will also include a variety of other activations including kiddies activities, drum circles, marimba and steel drum bands, cultural performances, flower decorative sessions and a Miss Flower Festival contest.

Trade and tourism benefits

"This event is the brainchild of Free State Premier Ace Magashule and Madeira President Alberto Joao Jardim and follows a trade visit to the Portuguese island in March this year," says Free State Tourism

Authority CEO Dhilosen Pillay. "The event has both trade and tourism benefits. The main objective of the festival will be to stimulate the flower industry in the province and to fast-track opportunities around export. As a tourism authority, we will also use the event to stimulate tourism to the region and draw in thousands of visitors from Gauteng and surrounding provinces to the event."

Pillay said the bulk of African flower exports into Europe currently emanated from Kenya and it is hoped that through the Madeiran link, the event will unlock critical opportunities for South African growers.

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