

Durban ready for the July Handicap

Durban hotels, B&Bs, retail outlets and restaurants are bracing themselves for a bumper week when more than 55 000 revellers descend on the city for the much anticipated Vodacom Durban July.

By Nce Mkhize 4 Jul 2013



Hotels are nearly 100% fully booked and shoppers are making last minute purchases of exotic outfits for the occasion. On the race front jockeys and their horses are in the final stretch of their preparations.

Although most of the visitors are expected to be South Africans, a sizable number could come from abroad.

Tourism KwaZulu-Natal's chief executive officer Ndabo Khoza said for the first time this year his organisation had partnered with Air Botswana in a joint marketing agreement that would see the airline carrying a chartered planeload of tourists to the event.

He said this was part of efforts to attract tourists from the SADC region.

"Tourism KZN will also be hosting travellers from Botswana, Zimbabwe and Zambia during this event as part of a week-long tourism educational of the province."

Khoza said the province was expecting to reap more than R200m this weekend.

Weather, fashion, glitz

He said the usually sunny Durban skies at this time of the year allowed visitors to experience the glitz and glamour associated with the July.

"The perfect weather coupled with the timing of the event - over a weekend in the midst of the winter school holidays - encourages visitors to arrive earlier and stay longer, lengthening their stay by an average of three nights.

"Home-grown events such as the Durban July, established in 1897, are crucial to KwaZulu-Natal's tourism marketing strategy as its equity is grounded within the province. This 116-year-old event is the oldest of its kind in Africa and the biggest horse racing event on the African continent.

"Destination awareness is also boosted tremendously through social media platforms as visitors share the experiences of the event and the destination while sending real time images and footage around the world," said Khoza.

SA's most popular race

Charles Preece, head of the east coast region of the Federated Hospitality Association of Southern Africa said hotels in Durban and surrounding areas were already booked to capacity.

"This is the most popular race in SA and we are not surprised by the interest that is shown by people from over the country. Hotels, restaurants, bars, retailers and even petrol stations will experience a boom," he said.

"People spend money on accommodation, food, drinks and other entertainment. This is a God-send weekend for many businesses especially as it comes during the dry season," said Preece.

Anton Gwala, a taxi driver, said the Durban July weekend had always been a money spinner for him and his peers.

"The majority of our clients are students and they have left for winter holidays. As a result business is very bad.

"But this weekend we will be busy from Thursday until Sunday. I am looking forward to the spectacle, which comes with fairly eccentric clients," Gwala added.

Apart from fashion and the social event, ordinary punters are hoping their luck is in. The winning horse's owner/s, jockey and trainer take home a large chunk of the R3.5m prize money.

Favoured horses include last year's winner Pomodoro (5-1), Run For It (6-1), Jet Explorer (7-1) and Capetown Noir (13-2), but punters are already spreading their bets far and wide.

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