

# Ocean safaris a boon for Nelson Mandela Bay tourism

With offerings such as ocean safaris and boat-based whale watching excursions, Nelson Mandela Bay (NMB) is increasingly popular for its coastal and marine tourism. The Department of Environmental Affairs recently awarded boat based whale watching business permits to NMB operators namely AB Marine Charters and Raggy charters.



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Ocean safaris provide an opportunity for visitors to immerse themselves in the marine diversity of Algoa Bay and a chance to observe the ocean's majestic giants in their natural environment by opting for a boat-based whale watching tour. There are a wide range of ocean cruises to choose from which include the island cruise, sardine run cruise, penguin island cruise or a dolphin watching cruise to name a few.

## Wildlife conservation

Bird Island and St. Croix Island in Algoa Bay were proclaimed part of Addo Elephant National Park in 2005 leading to the unique disposition of NMB being Home to the Big 7 - lion, leopard, buffalo, elephant, rhino, the Southern Right Whale and the great white shark. This also enables rangers to patrol the islands in an effort to conserve and protect the endangered African penguin whilst allowing visitors to experience a land safari alongside an ocean safari.

St. Croix Island is home to 22,000 breeding pairs of the endangered African penguins, the largest breeding colony found in Africa. Bird Island supports the largest breeding colony of Cape gannets in the world (over 160 000 birds) as well as other birds such as African penguins and rare roseate terns. Seal Island (near Bird Island) supports a breeding colony of Cape fur seals.

## Developing NMB's marine tourism economy

“This is an exciting time for Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism who remains on the forefront of an ever-expanding marine

tourism economy that is also included on the National Coastal and Marine Tourism plan as one of the six clusters to be developed over the next five years,” said Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism CEO, Mandlakazi Skefile

NMB has great potential as a coastal and marine tourism destination because of the natural resources and prolific environmental heritage. Due to the incredible marine biodiversity Algoa Bay is also an internationally acclaimed Hope Spot. Mission Blue defines Hope Spots as special conservation areas that are critical to the health of the ocean.

## **Year round sightings**

The Southern Right Whale visits our bay in the winter months between July and November. During July to December the humpback whale can be spotted and wondered at in our Bay and the Bryde's whale can be seen year-round.

Indo-pacific bottlenose are the most sighted dolphins in the Bay throughout the year in groups ranging between 10-400. Common dolphins are seen in groups of 1,000-2,000 from January to June as they follow large shoals of baitfish which move past the Bay. Smaller groups of between 1-20 humpback dolphins are spotted in the summer months.

Humpback whales can be seen in Algoa Bay between June and early January, reaching peaks in July/August and again in November/December. Southern Right whales can be seen from July to October as they enter the safety of the Bay to give birth.

The renowned and exhilarating sardine run happens over roughly four weeks between mid-April to mid-May. The sardine run is a phenomenon to witness and as bait fish simultaneously attracts predators such as dolphins, penguins, seals and sharks creating an all-round viewing and exceptional ocean safari conditions.

## **Unlocking oceans economy potential**

Coastal and marine tourism brings about great economic benefits for a destination which relate to employment and business opportunities but also supports conservation, research and community projects. The oceans economy will unlock the economic potential of South Africa's oceans, providing significant GDP growth and job creation potential. Tourism is the biggest contributor to ocean economy and coastal tourism contributes R26bn to the GDP.

Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism strongly advocates sustainable and responsible tourism to protect and conserve the natural resources. This includes viewing of species in the natural environment while in a respectful manner versus captive spaces. The same principles apply for ocean safaris to ensure that all ecotourism related activities related to whales and dolphins are sustainable.