



tourism

Department:
Tourism
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

BLUE FLAG MEDIA STATEMENT

For further details contact Alison Kelly, Blue Flag Program Manager for South Africa **0823371273** or 033-3303931 ext 135 (WESSA) or alisonk@wessa.co.za

National Marine Month in October 2009 came to an end on a high note when the new season of Blue Flag South Africa was launched at Muizenberg beach on Thursday 29 October 2009. National Marine Month is aimed at creating awareness of South Africa's marine and coastal environments and the benefits that our oceans and coast bring to our country.

Since the inception of the Blue Flag programme in November 2001, when the South African government (through the Marine and Coastal Management division of the former Department of Environmental Affairs & Tourism) and WESSA (the Wildlife & Environment Society of South Africa) launched the programme, Blue Flag South Africa has grown significantly and sustainably.

Speaking at the launch Minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk, Minister of Tourism, said the increase of Blue Flag beaches from 19 last year to 29 this year was extremely good for tourism in South Africa. "In order for South Africa to optimise its tourism potential, it is critical that we offer both domestic and international visitors clean, safe and well-managed beaches.

"The main catalyst for the increase in the number of Blue Flag beaches has been the opportunities that have arisen as a result of the 2010 Soccer World Cup. Municipalities participating in the programme have seen the benefits of having Blue Flag beaches and wish to be in a position to offer and promote their Blue Flag beaches to 2010 visitors and those who plan to return to South Africa in the future. Six new municipalities joined the programme this year and all existing municipalities have added additional beaches to their suite of Blue Flag beaches," the Minister said.

"South Africa's Blue Flag beaches increase our desirability and reputation as a world class destination. With the exception of Morocco, South Africa is the only African country implementing Blue Flag and we have done so with increasing success since 2001," Minister van Schalkwyk said.

Minister van Schalkwyk announced that 29 beaches in South Africa have been accredited with the Blue Flag, a significant increase in the number of world-class Blue Flag beaches in our country. During the 2008 season, South Africa had only 19 full status Blue Flag beaches.

The accredited beaches received Blue Flags at a ceremony held on Muizenberg beach, Cape Town.

“The success of the Blue Flag programme in South Africa can be attributed to the commitment of participating municipalities to provide beach-goers and holiday-makers with world class beaches offering safe, clean and well-managed facilities,” says Alison Kelly, WESSA’s Blue Flag Program Manager. “At a time in our country when there is great concern about service delivery at local authority level, these municipalities managing Blue Flag beaches are showing that high levels of excellence and delivery of services to benefit both local and international visitors are possible. Blue Flag as an organized and internationally managed accreditation programme provides a viable system for service excellence on our coastline and those municipalities receiving accreditation today should be acknowledged for what they have achieved” Kelly went on to say.

Research has shown that the commitment of municipalities to Blue Flag makes sound economic sense within tourism, e.g. research on Margate beach indicating that the value of Blue Flag status at the beach could generate income amounting to tens of millions of rands per annum.

Minister van Schalkwyk said research feedback has shown that both international and domestic tourists value the quality assurances that Blue Flag beaches offer. “With a 23 year history of implementation in Europe, international visitors to South Africa are familiar with the Blue Flag brand. As the number of Blue Flag beaches increases in South African, domestic visitors are increasingly exercising their choices in which beaches they visit and, as with international trends, our Blue Flag beaches are becoming the “beach of choice”.”

Blue Flag as an environmental programme also brings significant benefits in terms of improved environmental management of our coastline. This is clearly manifest in the highlighting of issues relating to bathing water quality and the need to ensure that infrastructure is effectively managed to minimize impacts on coastal environments.

South Africa was the first country outside of Europe to implement the Blue Flag programme and since 2001, the programme has become a truly global initiative with 38 countries participating and a further seven countries undertaking the feasibility stage.

The South African beaches that have received Blue Flag accreditation are:-

MacDougall’s Bay, Port Nolloth (new)
Yzerfontein Main beach, Yzerfontein (new)
Big Bay beach, Bloubergstrand Cape Town (new)
Clifton 5th beach, Cape Town
Camps Bay, Cape Town
Muizenberg, Cape Town
Strandfontein beach, Cape Town
Mnandi beach, Cape Town
Bikini beach, Gordon’s Bay
Kleinmond beach, near Hermanus (back in program)
Hawston beach, near Hermanus
Grotto beach, Hermanus
Lappiesbaai, Stilbaai, Southern Cape
Santos beach, Mossel Bay (new)
Hartenbos beach, Mossel Bay (new)
Robberg 5 beach, Plettenberg Bay (new)
Dolphin beach, Jeffrey’s Bay
Humewood beach, Port Elizabeth
Hobie beach, Port Elizabeth

Wells Estate, north of Port Elizabeth
Kelly's beach, Port Alfred
Kariega Main beach, Kenton-on-Sea (new)
Boknes beach, Kenton-On-Sea (new)
Gonubie beach, East London (back in program)
Trafalgar beach, south coast Kzn (new)
Marina beach, south coast Kzn
Ramsgate beach, near Margate
Margate beach
Alkantstrand, Richards Bay (new)

These beaches have achieved world-class standards during the past season and have been adjudicated by both a South African and an International Blue Flag Jury to meet the standards of excellence Blue Flag beaches must achieve.

Over the past 3 years, high seas with waves in some cases in excess of 10m have wreaked havoc on many of South Africa's beaches. Just days before the start of the new Blue Flag season and the 2009-10 Blue Flag National Launch, extreme weather conditions on the eastern Cape coast resulted in damages to two beaches in Port Elizabeth, Kings beach and Pollok beach, resulting in a set-back in terms of Blue Flag accreditation. As a result the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro has decided to withdraw the two beaches to allow time to rehabilitate and restore the beach, dunes and infrastructure to meet the imperative requirements of Blue Flag.

An ongoing challenge for many South African beaches will be the need to manage the damages caused to infrastructure and the coastline as a result of changing climatic conditions. Notwithstanding these challenges, municipalities participating in Blue Flag have devoted resources to the rehabilitation of these beaches and the standards necessary to fly the Blue Flag have been quickly re-established.

Blue Flag is an international annual award given to beaches that meet excellence in the areas of safety, amenities, cleanliness, environmental information and environmental management. The Blue Flag programme is currently run in over 40 countries globally and interest in the programme continues to grow. There are now almost 4,000 Blue Flag beaches and marinas around the world. In South Africa, the programme is run by WESSA, the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa in partnership with participating local authorities, Blue Flag helps to contribute to the aims of the White Paper on Sustainable Coastal Development.

For more information on Blue Flag, visit www.blueflag.org or contact the Blue Flag National Manager, Alison Kelly on alisonk@wessa.co.za or 033-3303931 ext 135 or 0823371273.

[Ends]