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Tourism KwaZulu-Natal



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## Media Release

For immediate release

**To:** All media

**Attention:** News Editors and Journalists

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### **KWAZULU-NATAL WELCOMES TOURISM BOOST FROM MEGA SPORTING EVENTS**

KwaZulu-Natal Midlands is abuzz with activity as it prepares to welcome thousands of visitors to two iconic international sporting events - **the 50<sup>th</sup> aQuelle Midmar Mile**, happening on 11 and 12 February 2023 and **the FNB Dusi Canoe Marathon** happening on 16 to 18 February 2023 – which are expected to provide a multi-million-rand economic boost to the region.

Prior to the Covid years, the Midmar Mile generated a welcome shot in the arm for Midlands' tourism businesses. Research following the 2019 Midmar Mile showed that this event attracted 22 737 visitors who had had an estimated direct impact of between R40.9- million and R71,9-million on the region. The event prior to Covid-19 had injected an estimated R142-million into the regional economy.

In 2019, the Dusi delivered an estimated direct impact of between R1.7-million and R3.1-million with an estimated total direct impact of up to R6-million. The estimated number of visitors in 2019 was 2 815.

Nhlanhla Khumalo, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Tourism KwaZulu-Natal (TKZN) said it was difficult to forecast this year's potential economic impact because for the past two years international sporting events had been interrupted by Covid, and were not yet where they

used to be. “Nonetheless we expect a similar if not marginally higher economic impact than that of 2019.”

He said it was fitting that the Midmar Mile – the world’s largest open water swim - was celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary when all was back to normal. As with other important international events, the previous two Midmar Miles had been negatively impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns which had severely limited travel and the number of spectators who could support contestants.

This year’s event is also attracting international competitors such as open water world champion over 10 km, Sharon van Rouwendaal from the Netherlands, UK swimmers, Ashley Hogg and Bailey Hairsine, US champions Catherine Breed and Chad La Tourette while Durban’s Connor Buck and Pretoria’s Stephanie Houtman will be defending their first Midmar Mile championship titles won in 2022.

“It’s good to know that KwaZulu-Natal will once again be a hot spot for athletes and swimmers this February as we welcome thousands of participants in the 50<sup>th</sup> aQuelle Midmar Mile. With Valentine’s Day between these two high profile sporting events, the hospitality and tourism industry are anticipating a bumper February which will go a long way to cement the provinces quest to go back to the no.1 domestic tourism destination,” pointed out Khumalo.

Research conducted by TKZN in 2018 showed that 55 percent of those travelling for the Midmar Mile came from KZN, followed by 33 percent from Gauteng. Most visitors spent an average of two days in the region at local hotels and Bed and Breakfast establishments, with 45% opting to stay nearby in Howick, Pietermaritzburg, or in the Midlands.

Khumalo said that participants, their families, and supporters were likely to support tourism businesses in the region, visiting local tourism attractions such as the Mandela Capture Site near Howick. They are also likely to visit outlets along the Midlands Meander which will further boost tourism businesses in the region.

“We look forward to welcoming back the many swimmers who missed the previous events due to Covid restrictions. When approached by TKZN researchers in previous years, 95% of the visitors said that they would attend the event again. I am sure this is just the beginning of seeing athletes and their families return to KZN’s iconic events as the province re-establishes itself as the country’s premier sporting destination,” he said.

A celebration of a different kind also takes place this weekend February 11 in far Northern KwaZulu-Natal – the uMthayi Marula Festival. Now in its 25<sup>th</sup> year the festival is a traditional African celebration of the harvesting of the first marula fruit in the Kwa-Ngwanase District.

The festival draws hundreds of local and international visitors who come to enjoy the song, dance, and ceremony as Tembe’s clans’ older women deliver a brew made from the first fruits of the Marula harvest to their chief, Inkosi Mabhudu Tembe at the eMfihlweni Royal Residence.

**ENDS**

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**For media queries:**

Contact: Nhlanhla Ngwenya: Communications Coordinator

Tourism KwaZulu-Natal

031 366 7551 / 063 698 7455

[nhlanhla@zulu.org.za](mailto:nhlanhla@zulu.org.za)