

SANBI

Biodiversity for Life

South African National Biodiversity Institute



Biodiversity is a tourism asset

South Africa's biodiversity is a competitive advantage for the tourism economy

Tourism is a large and growing contributor to the South African economy. The country's striking natural scenery and rich biodiversity are popular drawcards, with beaches, wildlife and mountains some of the top tourism attractions. Biodiversity tourism is tourism that involves the use or enjoyment of biodiversity. In 2019, domestic and international biodiversity visitors collectively spent R60.6 billion in South Africa, providing 91 836 jobs. Protecting South Africa's wealth of biodiversity assets will safeguard one of the country's most competitive tourism advantages, and ensure that biodiversity tourism can increasingly create revenue and jobs.



Environment, Forestry and Fisheries
Statistics South Africa



What is tourism?

Tourism comprises the activities of people traveling to, or staying in, places outside their usual environment for leisure, business or other purposes. Visitors travel to view a place of interest, experience another culture, or participate in events or activities. Globally, tourism is an expanding economic sector. Especially for developing countries, it has the potential to be a substantial contributor to income and employment.

Tourism in South Africa

South Africa is a competitive tourist destination, with natural, cultural and heritage attractions combined with friendly people and excellent customer service. Annually, South Africa welcomes millions of foreign visitors from Africa and beyond, while locals travel extensively on overnight and day trips.

Tourism makes a considerable contribution to the economy of South Africa and is a significant employer.

What is biodiversity?

Biodiversity is the variety of life, including the genes of individual plants or animals, the huge number of species and the different ecosystems in which they live.

Biodiversity in South Africa

South Africa is one of the most biodiverse countries on Earth. It has exceptionally high numbers of plant species, including many found nowhere else. It contains three of the 36 biodiversity hotspots of the world: the Cape Floristic Region, Succulent Karoo and Maputaland-Pondoland-Albany Hotspot.

South Africa has a range of climatic and geological conditions that create many diverse ecosystems. It has nine biomes, ranging from deserts, to grasslands, and forests.

South Africa also has a long coastline and vast marine territories across three oceans, with many little-known marine species and undersea ecosystems still to be explored.

What is biodiversity tourism?

SANBI and Statistics South Africa have collaborated to quantify just how much of the tourism sector is dependent on biodiversity. To set the scope for measuring this, biodiversity tourism was defined as: ***“tourism that involves the use or enjoyment of biodiversity, including trips by domestic and foreign visitors to experience South Africa’s ecosystems and species”***. Visitors engage with biodiversity to varying degrees, from the many who enjoy natural areas incidentally, to the few who insist on only eco-conscious travel.

Eco-conscious: A small number of visitors take extra care that their travel has little impact on the natural environment. They select destinations that promise ecological sustainability.

Active support and involvement: Some visitors make sure that they contribute time or funds that support biodiversity causes. They engage in activities that actively support biodiversity conservation.

Nature-centred: Many visitors travel to destinations like South Africa specifically to view its unique natural landscapes and iconic species. For these visitors, experiencing nature is central to their travel, not an afterthought.

Incidental enjoyment: For lots of visitors, nature is not the primary purpose of their travel, but they often still view natural areas and appreciate the biodiversity that they come across.



South Africa's biodiversity tourism assets and activities

South Africa has a vast range of biodiversity tourism assets, where visitors can view, experience and enjoy the country's biodiversity.



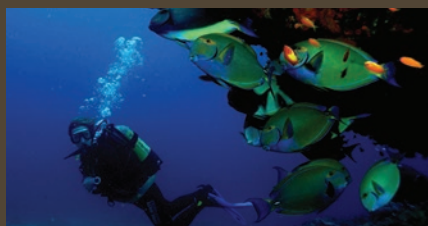
WILDLIFE: South Africa is a safari destination where visitors can view Africa's iconic species and ecosystems. Activities include 'Big-Five' game viewing, birding, botanical viewing and more. More than 3 million domestic visitors and more than 1.8 million foreign visitors experienced wildlife attractions in 2019. The Kruger National Park is one of the country's most visited natural attractions.



BEACHES: South Africa has an extensive coastline with long stretches of famous beaches. People visit the beach to relax, take part in water sports, go snorkelling or view species such as turtles and penguins. Beaches are the most popular biodiversity asset for domestic tourists, with as many as 5.8 million local trips to beaches in a year. More than 1 million foreign visitors spend time at South African beaches each year, with the Durban beach front and Wild Coast beaches among the favourites.



MOUNTAINS: Beautiful mountain scenery is found across South Africa. Visitors enjoy mountainous areas for the scenic views, hiking, climbing, mountain biking, birdwatching and more. More than 2.3 million locals visited a mountain area in 2019. Table Mountain and the Blyde River Canyon are popular mountain destinations.



OCEAN TOURISM: South Africa has vast oceans. Visitors may take boat trips to view species like whales, dolphins, sharks or seals. Scuba diving, deep water fishing and water sports are also popular. Cruising even takes accommodation and entertainment to the open seas. Marine tourism is a focus of the government's Oceans Economy Lab of Operation Phakisa, aspiring to create a uniquely South African, world class marine and coastal experience that is a top tourism destination.

Niche tourism – unique visitor experiences

Niche tourism focusses on specialised visitor experiences that appeal to enthusiasts.

ADVENTURE: Outdoor areas are a favoured setting for a range of adventure sports and activities, such as mountain biking, rock climbing, white-water rafting, camping, multi-day hikes and more. South Africa has good potential as an adventure destination, but needs to enhance its competitiveness. Nearly 2 million local trips involved adventure activities in 2019, and international visitors increasingly take part in adventure activities.



HUNTING: South Africa is a sought-after hunting destination with an expanding game ranching industry. Trophy and biltong hunting trips are popular among both foreign and domestic hunters. In 2019, over 300 000 domestic trips included hunting activities. The Endangered Wildlife Trust estimated that in 2015 hunting generated approximately R3 billion in revenue and 65 000 jobs.

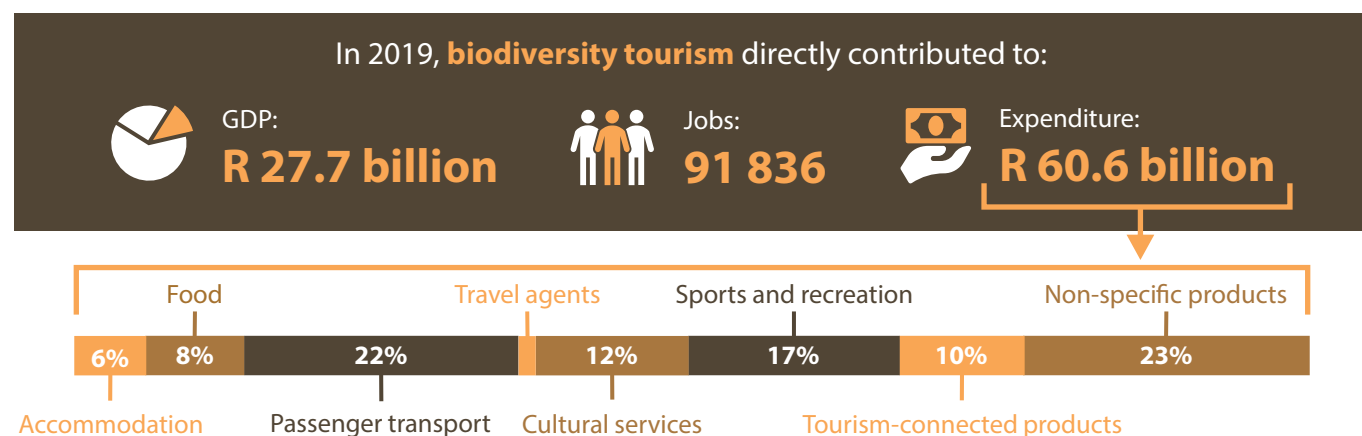
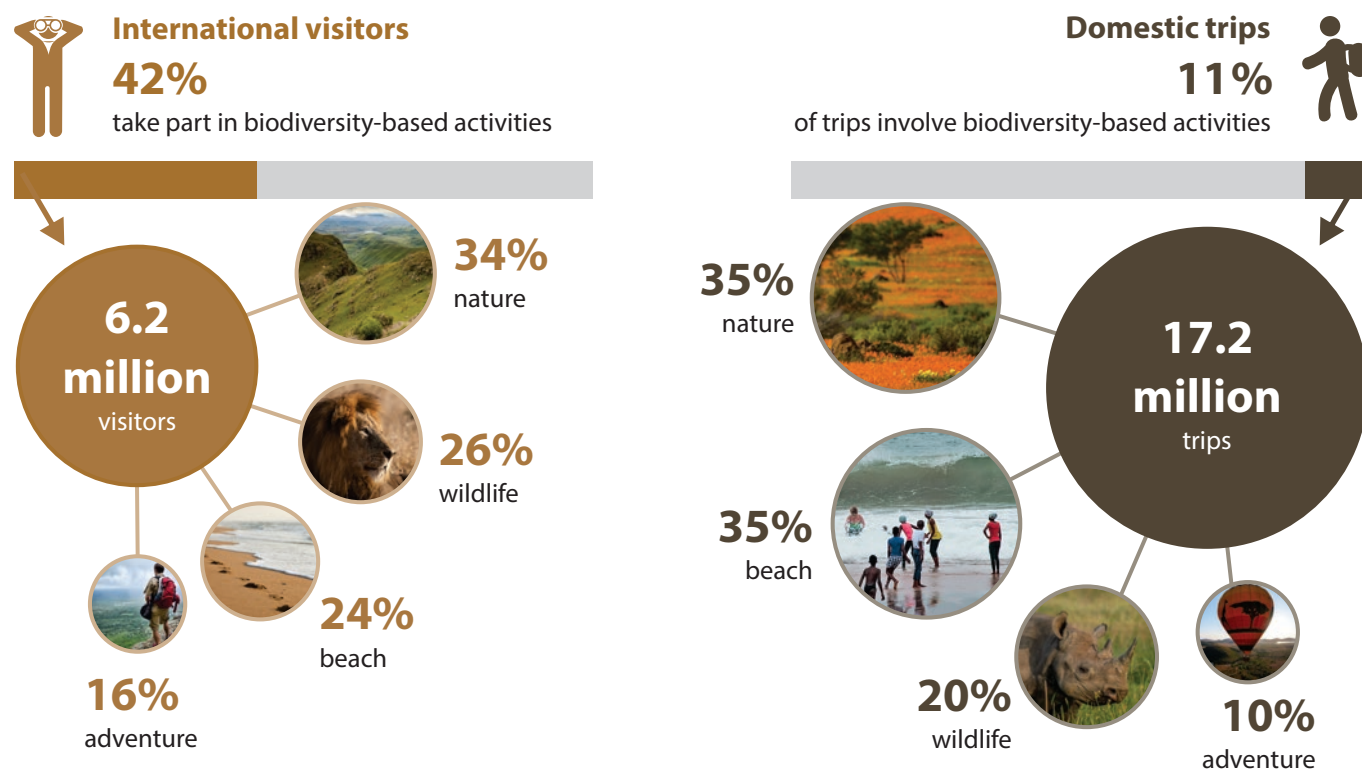


BIRD WATCHING: Avitourism is one of the largest niche tourism markets and its popularity is growing globally. These visitors travel to view South Africa's more than 800 bird species in their natural habitats. The Department of Trade and Industry estimated in 2010 that there were as many as 40 000 avitourists in South Africa per annum, 16 000 of whom travel from overseas. These avitourists spend between R309 million and R618 million a year.



Biodiversity tourism: facts and figures

The *Experimental Biodiversity-based Tourism Estimates for South Africa* were published by Statistics South Africa in 2024. Looking at the reference period of 2013 to 2019, they estimate how much of South Africa's tourism industry is based on biodiversity. The estimates draw on the established Tourism Satellite Account for the country, as well as tourism surveys conducted by Statistics South Africa and South African Tourism. The results provide an estimate of the contribution of biodiversity-based tourism to the South African tourism sector and the South African economy.



Information sourced from:

Stats SA. 2024. Natural Capital Series 5: Experimental Biodiversity-Based Tourism Estimates for South Africa, 2013 to 2019. Discussion document D0401.5. Produced in collaboration with the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) and the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE). Statistics South Africa, Pretoria. https://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=1854&PPN=D0401.5&SCH=73953.

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Citation: SANBI. 2025. Biodiversity is a tourism asset South Africa's biodiversity is a competitive advantage for the tourism economy. 2nd edition. SANBI factsheet series. South African National Biodiversity Institute, Pretoria.

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