

MEDIA RELEASE

ATTENTION: NEWS EDITORS/BUSINESS DESK

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

31 MARCH 2026

KZN Targets R1 Billion Easter Tourism Boost

KwaZulu-Natal is entering the 2026 Easter period with sustained tourism momentum - with projections targeting nearly R1 billion (R902 million) in tourism spend, alongside approximately 312,814 domestic trips and 57,106 international visitors between 30 March and 5 April 2026.

This outlook builds on a strong festive season performance, which recorded over 1.2 million visitors across the province, with some districts exceeding 80% occupancy during peak periods. This reflects continued travel activity across coastal, inland and northern tourism regions, reinforcing the province's ability to distribute demand across multiple geographies.

International tourism continues to recover, with 291,324 foreign arrivals recorded in December 2025, representing a 14% year-on-year increase. This upward trajectory strengthens KwaZulu-Natal's position within the broader national tourism recovery and signals renewed global confidence in the destination.

At a district level for Easter, performance is expected to remain stable, with uMkhanyakude (56%), iLembe (53%) and uThukela (53%) projected to exceed 50% occupancy. Coastal regions such as Ugu (49%) are expected to follow closely, while inland districts including Amajuba (38%), King Cetshwayo (39%), Harry Gwala (39%) and uMgungundlovu (35%), are forecast to maintain steady mid-range occupancy levels.

MEC for Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, Reverend Musa Zondi, said KwaZulu-Natal is entering the Easter period on the back of measurable tourism performance, with projections of R902 million in tourism spend and over 300,000 domestic trips expected across the province. He added that this reflects not just demand, but a tourism sector that is consistently converting movement into real economic activity across districts.

"What we are seeing is a continuation of the momentum built during the festive season, where strong occupancy levels and visitor volumes translated into widespread economic participation. Easter builds on that foundation, with travel activity spread across coastal, inland and rural areas", said MEC Zondi.

Religious tourism remains a key driver of movement during this period, with large pilgrimages expected to draw thousands of worshippers to churches and sites such as Ekuphakameni(Inanda) and Nhlankazi (Ndwedwe). This is supported by a wide range of church gatherings, conferences and revival services taking place across both urban and rural communities, generating demand across accommodation, transport, hospitality and informal sectors.

Industry stakeholders indicate that while travel demand remains consistent, consumer behaviour continues to evolve in response to economic conditions.

Mandy Massey, Deputy Chairperson of the Federation of Hospitality Association of South Africa (FEDHASA) KZN & Eastern Cape, said: "Occupancy projections across KwaZulu-Natal for Easter 2026 are strong, with many areas tracking in line with - and in some cases exceeding - 2025 levels."

"Key trends include increased shared accommodation and group travel to optimise costs. More deliberate, value-driven spending decisions during the stay. A very positive continued move toward advanced bookings, rather than last-minute travel. Stable length of stay, with no significant decline compared to last year."

On the North Coast, forward bookings are showing clear strength, supported by accessibility and repeat domestic travel. Siyabonga Mazibuko, CEO of iLembe Enterprise, said: "The North Coast's outlook shows early indicators of strong forward bookings, with demand notably higher than the same period last year."

Coastal destinations such as Ballito and Salt Rock remain particularly popular for the Easter period, driven by domestic family travel, short-stay leisure breaks and repeat visitors who value the region's accessibility from major economic hubs such as Gauteng.

The Drakensberg continues to perform strongly as a key inland destination during the Easter period.

James Seymour, Chairman of the Thukela-Drakensberg Tourism Cluster, said: "Easter is one of the most important tourism periods for the Drakensberg. The occupancy level for the Central Drakensberg will be in the order of 80%. Easter is a long weekend - and the Drakensberg is easily accessible for shorter breaks for periods like long weekends - only about 5hrs from Gauteng and 2,5 hours from Durban/ PMB."

In the Midlands, sentiment remains cautiously positive, supported by coordinated preparation across the region. Midlands Meander Association representative Kate Kelly said businesses were actively preparing their establishments, putting in long hours, rolling out Easter promotions, enhancing facilities, collaborating locally, and extending trading hours with increased staff capacity.

Planning is streamlined through the Midlands Meander “What’s On” platform and new mobile app, which helps travellers explore local businesses and access deeper insights into the region’s natural heritage.

Dr Vusimuzi Sibiya, CEO of South Coast Tourism & Investment Enterprise, said accommodation establishments are seeing a consistent flow of bookings, with strong momentum expected to push occupancy levels significantly higher as the long weekend approaches.

Within the hotel sector, performance remains more constrained, reflecting broader travel conditions and cost sensitivity. Samantha Croft of Southern Sun said: “The Easter period is looking very soft - across the board. We are hoping for last-minute pick up (following Ramadaan), the trend in the past is that this market only books after Eid. I do think that there is a nervousness with the fuel situation with the War in the Middle East.”

“The resort properties seem to be doing better than traditional hotels, although they are not full currently, with 65% occupancy.”

MEC Zondi added that KwaZulu-Natal’s strength lies in its ability to convert travel into impact - across accommodation, transport, local enterprises and community-level economic activity.

The projected figures for Easter reflect a province that is not only attracting visitors but sustaining value across multiple sectors.

As the province enters one of its busiest travel periods outside the festive season, the combination of sustained domestic travel, recovering international arrivals and a diversified tourism offering is expected to maintain activity across districts.

Easter 2026 is positioned not only as a peak travel period, but as a continuation of KwaZulu-Natal’s broader tourism performance - delivering measurable economic impact across regions, sectors and communities.

//ENDS

Media enquiries and interview requests to be directed to:

KZN Tourism and Film Authority

Communications Officer

Nhlanhla Ngwenya

063 698 7455 nhlanhla@visitkznsa.com

OR

Sinenhlanhla Mthembu

KZN EDTEA

Media Liaison Officer & Spokesperson

083 461 0113 sinenhlanhla.mthembu@kznedtea.gov.za