

Proactive visitor safety plan for Cape Town

Following the hijacking and murder of British tourist Anni Dewani in Cape Town this past weekend, Cape Town Tourism and other bodies have issued a statement regarding visitor safety for the forthcoming holiday season.



Cape Town Tourism CEO, Mariette du Toit-Helmbold responded to news of the hijacking and murder of British tourist Anni Dewani in Cape Town over the weekend with shock. "Cape Town Tourism is deeply saddened and dismayed by this senseless murder of a young woman in our city. We offer our heartfelt condolences to her husband Shrien Dewani, family and friends."

The tragic incident took place while the newlywed couple was experiencing an impromptu tour of township nightlife and highlights the importance of integrated visitor-safety programmes, visitor education and community awareness of the importance of tourism. Alderman Felicity Purchase, executive mayoral committee member for economic development and tourism said: "Visitor and tourist safety remains a top priority in Cape Town. We are appealing to the tourism industry and the public to be vigilant around tourism safety, and to caution visitors not to enter unfamiliar areas, especially at night."

She continued: "We hosted an incident-free World Cup and are now facing the very real risk that tragic incidents like this will negate our hard-won positive reputation and create another spiral of Afro pessimism. It remains our duty as hosts to ensure that our visitors are protected and cared for. As one of the top economic contributors to the Western Cape region, tourism is essential to our economic well-being."

Biggest stumbling block

Safety and security concerns remain the biggest stumbling block to tourism growth in South Africa. Cape Town Tourism, in conjunction with provincial and city partners and key stakeholders from the safety and tourism sector, has been working to find proactive solutions to deal with this issue. A Cape Town Visitor Safety and Support plan was developed in 2005 and outlines an integrated approach to incident management. No single agency, business or service can plan or react to visitor incidents alone. The plan includes proactive and reactive programmes, as well as a dedicated Visitor Safety and Support Programme (VSSP). A Visitor Safety and Security Forum is also in place, where interested Cape Town Tourism industry members, safety and security agencies, stakeholders and major attractions collectively work to formulate, activate and track the progress of projects that ensure a safer city for visitors.

Assist in warning tourists

With the peak season approaching, visitor safety is even more critical. Du Toit-Helmbold, said: "We are appealing to the public to extend the hospitality we showed visitors during the World Cup by taking joint responsibility for tourism safety, especially over the next few months." Capetonians are asked to assist in warning tourists about the dangers of walking around with obvious valuables on their person, and to steer them away from walking around alone after dark.

Authorities have identified key sites and tourism hotspots around the City for intensified patrols with increased security measures and personnel. This includes all areas of Table Mountain National Park. Police officers will be able to communicate with visitors in a variety of languages after receiving training prior to the World Cup, and various safety programmes are being run by tourism centres across the city. Residents can also assist the police by reporting any suspicious activity around tourist sites.

The next Cape Town Tourism Safety Forum will take place on 18 November, 2010. Key stakeholders including the Western Cape Provincial Government, the City of Cape Town, SANParks, major hotel groups, the Backpackers' Association and Cape Town Partnership will discuss proactive strategies for ensuring visitor safety during the festive season.

Keep these numbers handy

To report any safety incidents, visitors can call the following numbers:

- All emergencies from your mobile phone - 112
- All emergencies from a landline - 107
- South African Police Service (SAPS) - 10111

The Cape Town Visitor Safety Plan covers the following key aspects:

Safety Support for the Tourism Industry:

- Cape Town Tourism supplies all of its members with key security procedures and contact numbers while partnering with SAPS and the various Cape Town Improvement Districts to prevent crime against visitors through the Cape Town Visitor Safety and Support Plan.
- Cape Town Tourism supplies members with a Safety and Security flyer.
- Cape Town Tourism provides a practical manual to assist members and their teams to be aware of the importance of visitor safety and security, thereby developing a safe and secure environment for visitors.

Visitor Safety Support:

- In conjunction with the City of Cape Town and the Provincial Tourism Safety and Support programme (TSSP) we print a Safety and Security Flyer with tips for visitors. This is distributed through all the Visitor Information Centres and through tourism industry members.
- Cape Town Tourism provides safety and security tips in the Cape Town Official Visitors Guide, which is distributed free of charge to visitors, and on www.capetown.travel.
- Cape Town Tourism offers a "band-aid" programme, whereby members provide assistance for victims of incidents, including providing accommodation free of charge or a complimentary meal at a restaurant.
- Cape Town Tourism provides information on safety tips pertaining to hiking, using the beaches and engaging with baboons.

Reactive mechanisms:

- The Tourism Safety and Support programme includes:
- Practical and emotional support for visitors in need.
- Facilitating trauma counselling.
- Visiting hospitals or facilitating medical treatment.
- Helping with short-term accommodation.
- Helping to contact family and friends.
- Facilitating embassy and consular involvement.
- Assisting with language difficulties.
- Assisting with legal processes where possible, including with the police.
- Assisting with replacement documentation - e.g. passports and flight tickets.
- Facilitating transport arrangements.

As in all world cities, visitors are encouraged to take shared responsibility for their own safety. Cape Town Tourism urges travellers:

- To avoid carrying large sums of cash or valuables in plain sight.
- Not to leave belongings unattended.
- To heed the advice of their Cape Town hosts on the various suburbs of the city and the more dangerous parts of town.
- Not to walk alone at night and to take special precaution at lonely lookout points, especially at dusk or after dark.
- Not to allow strangers to assist in any way at cash points.
- To refrain from giving money to beggars.
- To park in secure, well-lit areas at night.
- To keep certified photocopies of all valuable documents in a safe place.

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