



Durban wants to be a whale heritage site

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Durban's whaling history is now being used to promote conservation and responsible whale-watching. Picture: Ken Finlay

Durban's w
Ken Finlay



DURBAN – With the 2017 World Whale Conference taking place in Durban from June 24 to 29, tourism operators have set their sights on the city becoming a World Whale Heritage Site.

Hosted by the Durban KwaZulu-Natal Convention Bureau and eThekweni Municipality, the conference brings together conservation stakeholders from around the world to discuss strategies to ensure greater protections for marine mammals.

It also aims to promote responsible whale and dolphin tourism and will include the 2nd Whale Heritage Sites Summit – an initiative launched by the World Cetacean Alliance in April last year.

“Whale heritage sites are becoming the gold standard for responsible whale watching destinations worldwide,” said Jean-Michel Cousteau, the honorary president of the alliance and founder of the Ocean Futures Society.

“By interweaving natural and cultural elements and placing communities at their very heart, these sites will become places where people respect, celebrate, and protect cetaceans and their habitats long into the future.”

So far, six world renowned whale watching destinations have applied for whale heritage site status. They are North Vancouver Island (Canada), Hervey Bay and Port Stephens (Australia), Peninsula Valdes (Argentina), Nantucket (US) and the Azores (Portugal).

Organisers and various tourism stakeholders are hoping eThekweni will also put in a bid to become a whale heritage site.

“We have been hugely impressed with KwaZulu-Natal, its friendly people, and its focus on conservation and sustainability – all key ingredients for this conference and summit,” said Dylan Walker, World Cetacean Alliance chief executive.

The chairman of Durban South Tourism, Helga du Preez, said the drive for Durban to become such a site was being spearheaded by Wildland's WhaleTime project – a citizen science initiative which engages the public in monitoring the annual migration of whales along the KZN coast.

With Durban once having had the largest land-based whaling station in the world, WhaleTime project manager Rachel Kramer believes that the city's whaling past could be developed into a signature eco-tourism enterprise.

At Port Natal Maritime Museum a growing archive of artefacts, photos, and associated documentation from the old whaling station on the Bluff have already become the mainstay of WhaleTime tours.

"We hope to turn this all into a conservation success story," said Kramer. – www.rovingreporters.co.za

These stories form part of Roving Reporters Ocean Watch series supported by the Human Elephant Foundation.

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