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Planning to visit Cape Town and the Western Cape? Come and enjoy, but be mindful of the drought

Come enjoy....

Cape Town and the Western Cape are open for business in spite of the current drought. Visitors are arriving in a place with a significant breadth and depth of experiences, and exceptional beauty. However, as beautiful as it is, the Western Cape is a water-scarce part of the world (much like other successful tourist regions like Southern California and Western Australia) and is vulnerable to the effects of climate change and susceptible to periodic droughts.

At present the Western Cape is experiencing a significant drought. This is a one in 1000-year occurrence. To counter the short-term effects of the drought, the City has put in place a number of initiatives to increase the supply of water and make provision for extreme water shortages.

There are still many places across the Western Cape that are not as severely affected by the drought such as the nearby Garden Route and the Cape Overberg.

...but be mindful

Below average rainfall over a number of years has forced everyone who lives in, or visits, Cape Town to rethink how they use water. Responsible consumption of water is the new normal – not just in Cape Town, but in many other water-scarce places in the world.

Some parts of the tourism and hospitality industry have proactively adjusted how they utilise water to reduce their consumption – giving guests peace of mind that every drop is being used responsibly.

In the event of what the City of Cape Town refers to as ‘Day Zero’, there will be available water for tourists’ and locals’ critical needs. These are considered to be water for personal hygiene and consumption. ‘Day Zero’ is when the City of Cape Town cuts the regular flow of water.

‘Day Zero’ is a projected date that is entirely dependent on current rates of water consumption: If all stakeholders adhere to the required water savings target, ‘Day Zero’ can be avoided.

Much like locals, tourists need to treat water with the utmost respect.

Frequently asked questions

What is the current water restriction and how will this affect tourists travelling to Cape Town?

- Level 6b restrictions will go into effect from February 1, when daily water consumption per person per household will be limited to 50 litres. All people residing in the city should already reduce their consumption to 50 litres immediately.

If tourists visit Cape Town / The Western Cape will there be water?

- There is adequate water for tourists' essential daily needs such as washing, using the toilet, and daily hygiene. In the event of 'Day Zero', water will be severely rationed. At present water restrictions are in place in the City of Cape Town, and residents and tourists are requested to adhere to them.

Is it irresponsible for tourists to come to Cape Town/ Western Cape during the drought?

- During peak season (November – January) international tourists only add 1% to the population of the Western Cape. This number drops from April – September. If the tourists follow the daily usage guideline the impact would therefore be negligible.
- The tourism sector supports approximately 300 000 much needed jobs across the Western Cape. It is vital to preserve these jobs.

What does 'Day Zero' mean?

- 'Day Zero' is when the City of Cape Town cuts the regular flow of water.
- 'Day Zero' is a projected date (in approximately three months' time at current projections): if all stakeholders adhere to the required water savings target, 'Day Zero' can be avoided.
- Tourists would still be able to enjoy the diverse and world-class experiences Cape Town and the Western Cape has to offer.

Will tourists have to queue for water if the regular flow of water is cut?

- You are advised to find out from your accommodation establishment or your host what the water arrangements they have made should Day Zero arrive. Many hotels contacted by Wesgro have indicated that they have put in place alternative water arrangements.

If "Day Zero" arrives, how long will the ordinary flow of water be cut?

- Cape Town is located in a winter rainfall area. Historically the winter rains have started in April, but they can start as late as June. We should be prepared to live with very little water for around three months, with the hope that by the end of winter, enough rain has fallen to switch the water system back on, but it all depends on when rain falls in the catchment areas that feed the dams.

How widespread is the drought in South Africa?

- The drought and resultant water restrictions are mostly limited to parts of the Western Cape – particularly the City of Cape Town and some surrounding areas.
- Nearby regions such as The Cape Overberg and The Garden Route are less impacted by water restrictions. It's important to remember that South Africa in general is a water-scarce country.

Will tourists have access to drinking water?

- Yes.

Will tourists be able to bath, shower or use a swimming pool?

- At present, tourists will be able to shower and maintain daily hygiene. Recommended guidelines suggest a shower of 90 seconds. The use of baths is entirely discouraged. Some swimming pools at hotels have been converted to salt (ocean) water.
- The majority of tourism establishments have put in place measures to ensure their water usage is reduced, and many have developed plans for alternative supplies.

Will restaurants and bars still be in operation?

- In the event of 'Day Zero' - yes. Many parts of the hospitality industry have proactively implemented water savings and water augmentation solutions to ensure ongoing availability of water in their establishments.
- Restaurants and bars are required to adhere to the water restrictions but have not, to date, been negatively affected.

Which tourism activities could be impacted?

- Tourists will still be able to access and enjoy primary tourism attractions such as our iconic Table Mountain, Cape Point, and Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens.
- Specific river-based experiences may be impacted.

Will emergency services still function in the event of 'Day Zero'?

- Yes. All critical emergency services (hospitals, clinics, fire stations and police services) will continue to function.

Will major events still be staged by the City?

- Yes. All major events have proactively put in place plans to ensure that events have a zero - or heavily reduced water - footprint e.g. bringing in water from outside of Cape Town/the Western Cape.

Will there be any areas exempt from water restrictions?

- Yes. Details will be provided by the City when they are available.