



Drakensberg Times

Summer 2023/ 2024

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Contents

<u>Drakenberg Hoopoes</u>	3
<u>Berg Venture</u>	5
<u>Botha's Shelter</u>	7
<u>Mushroom Rock and Mhlonhlo Valley Loop</u>	8
<u>Hiking Sanitation</u>	10
<u>Drakenberg Events</u>	11
<u>Drakensberg's Tourism Market</u>	15
<u>Weather Charts</u>	17
<u>Tourism Directory</u>	19



In the Drakensberg, summer brings hot and balmy days followed by stunning electric thunderstorms, making it the perfect time to rise early and revel in the rugged beauty of South Africa's most magnificent landscape.

"I love how summer just wraps its arms around you like a warm blanket."—Kellie Elmore

Drakensberg Hoopoes

Hoopoes are colourful and commonly found in the Lower Drakensberg region. Their plumage, particularly on their heads, resembles the vibrant costumes of courtiers from the Middle Ages. These birds are found across Europe and Asia. However, in South Africa, hoopoes are considered part of the European species, which differs slightly from their Asian counterparts.

Hoopoes are well-known for their long, sharp beaks, which they use to dig energetically for insects. These happy birds are a delightful sight on a green summer lawn.



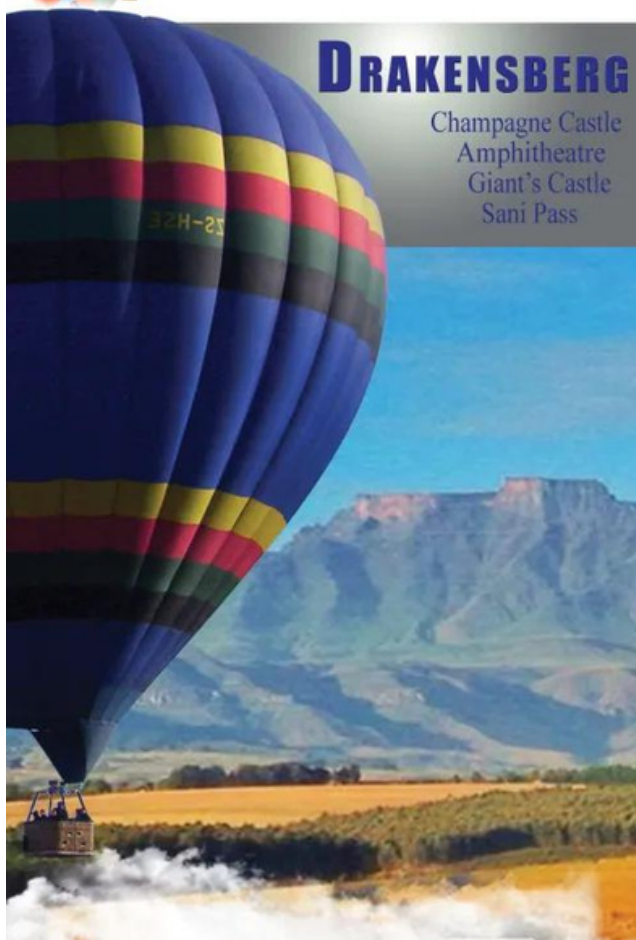
Hoopoe - Andy Morffew - Wikimedia Commons



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DRAKENSBERG

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WITH OUR EXPERIENCE *You Can* 

BergVenture - an outdoor education centre of excellence

The Champagne Valley is a significant centre of adventure tourism in South Africa. This is mainly due to a wide array of adventure services and venues.

One of the most significant providers is BergVenture, which was founded to offer South African youth outdoor education and adventure experiences. The venue also provides valuable internships and training for young individuals to become registered as professional adventure guides. Adventure guides require extensive formal training and experience to qualify as professional adventure guides in particular fields, such as mountain guiding in South Africa.

BergVenture is located within the 230-hectare Fernwood Lodge eco-estate in the Central Drakensberg, adjacent to the Monks Cowl Camp area of the Drakensberg World Heritage Site. The estate and the Drakensberg offer numerous outdoor education and adventure opportunities for youth groups visiting the centre annually.

At BergVenture, we believe in "finding adventure and creating memories." Encouraging today's youth to challenge themselves in our natural environment allows them to push their boundaries and grow.

The facilities at BergVenture can accommodate up to 100 attendees in dormitory-style rooms, modern bathrooms, and on-site rooms for facilitators or staff. The venue also features a large, fully equipped kitchen for groups and a central hall for dining, group discussions, and activities on rainy days.

The centre has operated for over 15 years and is managed by a team of well-trained youth education, adventure, and hospitality staff.

Whether you're interested in zip lining, tree climbing, abseiling, hiking, or cave camping, BergVenture offers various adventure activities suitable for school trips and other youth-based events.





Thukela Gorge

Botha's Shelter – one of Drakensberg's untouched masterpieces

As a KZN Wildlife Honorary Officer and a San Rock Art Custodian in the Drakensberg, I have the privilege of inspecting and observing some of the most significant San Rock Art sites in the region that are not open to the public. These visits are crucial to ensure these sites are properly managed and conserved. Recently, I audited Botha's Shelter, one of the most magnificent San rock art sites in Southern Africa.

Botha's Shelter is a crucial San Rock Art Site found in the Didima Gorge special conservation area, among the three most significant locations of such art in the Drakensberg. With over 10% of San Rock Art in the Gorge, it is a rich cultural heritage treasure trove. In the mid-1960s, Harald and Shirley-Ann Pager undertook a meticulous replication of more than 3,909 of these images for their book 'Ndedema,' published in 1971. Pager's work revealed that the majority of these images can be found in three shelters – eSibayeni Cave (1,146 paintings), Junction Shelter (1,134 paintings), and Botha's Shelter (899 paintings).

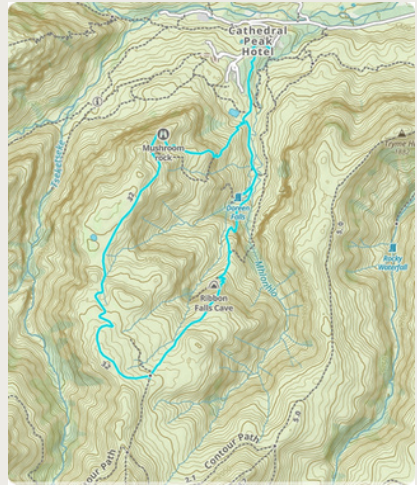
Here are some images from the recent site inspection.



Mushroom Rock and Mhlonhlo Valley Loop

Mushroom Rock is a popular hike from the Cathedral Peak Hotel. The loop, which includes the Mhlonhlo Valley Loop, makes it more of a challenge. Mhlonhlo Valley is renowned for Ribbon Falls and Doreen Falls. These are other favourite spots for visitors to the Cathedral Peak area.

This hike is some 10 kilometres. However, it has an elevation gain of over 650 meters, and the descent into the Mhlonhlo Valley is quite steep. Expect to be on the trail between four to five hours.



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Wellness Spa

Hiking Safely in the Drakensberg Part 2: Hiking Sanitation

Maintaining proper sanitation while hiking is a crucial aspect often overlooked and can significantly impact an area's overall experience and hikers' health. It is unpleasant, for example, to see human waste and toilet paper scattered along hiking trails and near exits to caves and rock shelters. Therefore, following the core guidelines developed for this purpose is essential.

When hiking, carrying a trowel for burying biodegradable human waste is important. Make sure to bury it at least 15 centimetres deep. If you need to use the toilet, walk at least 50 meters off the trail. Remember to bury your waste and toilet paper. Don't forget to take out any non-biodegradable hygiene products. Always have a designated toilet area at least 100 meters away from your campsite, cave, or rock shelter water source. When washing dishes, use biodegradable soap and wash away from any rivers. If you need to wash yourself, use biodegradable soap away from a river and then rinse off in a river. Collect water upstream and bathe downstream. Finally, carry all your litter, including orange peels and apple cores, back with you, as they can take a while to break down.

Hiking Tips

Sign the mountain rescue register;

Wear sturdy hiking boots and carry a walking pole;

Apply safe river crossing principles;

Wear a light rucksack even for a walk;

Ensure it contains food items for at least one day, warm clothing and a poncho (the weather in the Berg can change suddenly), sufficient water, a small medical aid kit, a cell phone, map, compass, torch, whistle and a box of matches; and ideally a bivvy bag;

If you encounter a bushfire, try to get to a small grove of trees or a large rocky area as quickly as possible or light a fire break around you. At worst, run directly through the fire and roll;

If caught in a lightning storm, urgently head for lower ground avoid being near a slope or single trees. At worst, squat over insulating material and ideally cover yourself with a poncho or raincoat. Discard any metal items and leave your backpack a distance from you. Do not lie down or stand under an isolated tree; and

Walk in a group of at least three people.



Wonder Valley



Drakensberg Events in the Central and Northern Drakensberg

Winterton Parkrun takes place every Saturday morning from the Waffle Hut starting at 08.00. Cannibal Cave Parkrun takes place in the Northern Drakensberg;

Cathkin Park Walking Group takes place every Tuesday. 8.00 in Winter and 7.00 in Summer. Contact Nick at 0794936424;

Central Drakensberg Hiking Group Saturdays and overnight hikes. Contact James Seymour for details. 0829255508;

Cathkin Park Community Projects Run takes place on the last Friday of the month at 17.00 in Summer and 16.30 in Winter at The Nest;

Drakensberg Boys' Choir School has a concert on Wednesday afternoons during term times at www.webtickets.co.za or 0364681012

Mountain Music Club occurs on the last Saturday of every month from 5 pm, usually at Mac's Café, Cedarwood Shopping Centre. Dave: 0724839049.

2023

23rd Dec: **Christmas Night Market** at Farmers' Lawn. 1 pm – 8 pm. Stall booking 0824647803

30th Dec: **Farewell 2023 Market** at Farmers' Lawn. 9 am–3 pm. Stall booking 0824647803

2024

4th Feb: **Wagondrift Challenge** at Wagondrift Dam. Shane: 0826157937

2nd – 25th Feb: **ABSA Icons MTB Event** at Alpine Heath

24th Feb: **Sterkfontein Swim** (3km, 100m and 500m) at Sterkfontein Dam. Caroline: 0828010817

26th – 28th Apr: **Ultra Trail Drakensberg** www.ultratraildrakensberg.com

4th – 5th May: **Yellow-billed Oxpecker**. www.theoxpecker.co.za

11th –12th May: **Red-billed oxpecker**. www.theoxpecker.co.za

18th – 19th May: **African Oxpecker**. www.theoxpecker.co.za

31st May–2nd June: **The Standard Bank Berg and Bush Descent**.www.bergandbush.co.za

8th June – 9th June: **The Standard Bank Berg and Bush 2 Day**.
www.bergandbush.co.za

22nd June: **Drakensberg Polar Bear Swim Challenge** Belinda Espag 0797377282

28th Sept: **Run The Berg**. www.runtheberg.co.za

Ann Gray 13 December 2023



Drakensberg's Tourism Market

Central and Northern Drakensberg has several major resorts that accommodate over 100 guests and a significant concentration of smaller self-catering, B&Bs, lodges and Guest Houses—easily accessed from this region's core markets, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. This area is about a four-hour drive from Gauteng and two-and-a-half hours from Durban. It is possible to fly into Pietermaritzburg and reduce the driving time to this destination.

The Drakensberg is positioned at the consolidation or mature stage of Butler's Tourism Area Lifecycle model in domestic tourism and the exploration phase concerning the foreign market. The domestic market mainly comprises leisure holiday tourists who self-drive to the area. They tend to be couples or family groups. Conference and incentive groups occasionally visit the area, particularly resorts such as Champagne Sports Resort, Alpine Heath and Drakensberg Sun. These are the 'Well-to-do Mzansi Families', 'Spontaneous Budget Explorers' and 'Seasoned Leisure Seekers'.

Foreign tourists are predominantly self-drive young and middle-aged adventure seekers (Next Stop South Africans and Wanderlusts from the Millennial and Generation X groupings). Attracted to the area for hiking and other adventure opportunities, such as zip-lining, hot-air ballooning, and helicopter flips.

According to South African Tourism, some 65,000 foreign tourists visit the Drakensberg annually. This segment is approximately 8% of the foreign tourists visiting KwaZulu-Natal and 1% of all foreign tourists visiting South Africa. This portion seems to be a growing market, as an estimated 47,000 visited this area in 2016.

The nature of this market can be assumed to be in line with the foreign makeup of the KwaZulu-Natal overseas tourism market, which is predominantly from the UK, Germany, the USA, and France. Tourism KwaZulu-Natal has determined that some 186,000 domestic tourists visit the Drakensberg annually. The key markets are the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng.

The overall Drakensberg tourism market is worth two billion Rand per annum.

Tourism growth for the Drakensberg and Midlands still seems to be slowing down—the year-to-end September occupancy figure was 55% vs 59.6% in 2022. This growth has been stifled by South Africa's poor economic performance and a struggling global economy.

September 2023 was a poor period, with an occupancy level of 51.2%. This was much lower than the 64% in 2022. Average Daily Rates (ADR) were up for this month at R1225,86 vs R1133,56 in 2022. Revenue per available room (RevPAR) was R628 vs R725 in 2022.

Corporates are also cutting back on the number and scale of domestic business meetings. On a positive note, there has been a notable increase in the number of foreigners visiting the Central and Northern Drakensberg. Many of them are self-drives; however, there is an increase in foreign group tour activity.

Globally, tourism is expected to recover to 2019 levels in 2024.



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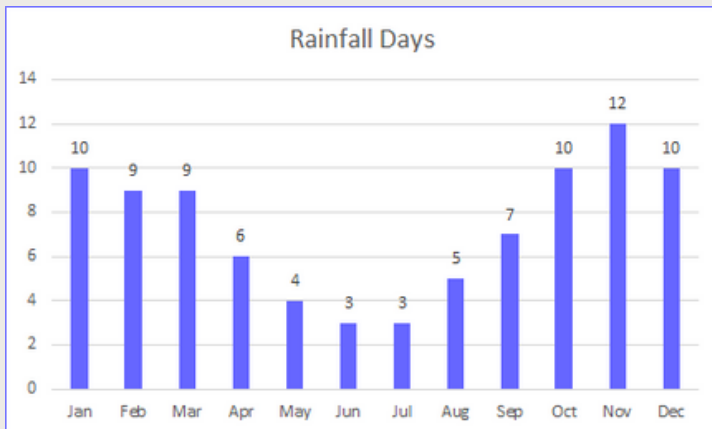
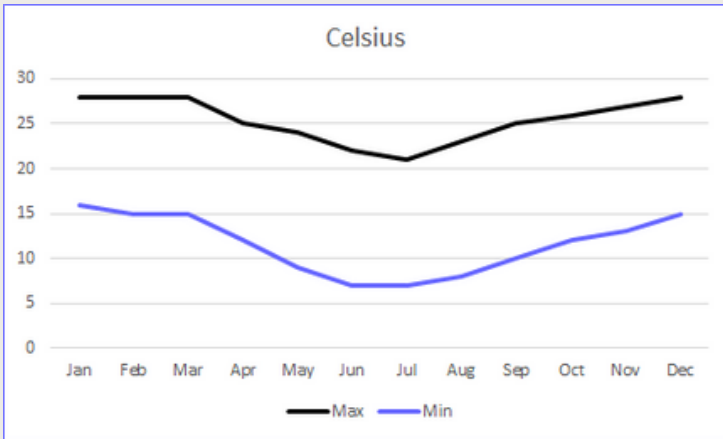
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Weather Charts





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Packages | Strategic Management

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<https://cathkinmanagement.com>

SATSA ▶
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Tourism Directory

Adventure Operators

All Out Adventures

Berg Adventures

Cathkin Trails for Mountain Bikers

Drakensberg Ballooning

Drakensberg Canopy Tours

Drakensberg Hikes

Drakensberg Mountain Bike Trails

Dragon Peaks Resort

Four Rivers Adventures

Hike The Berg

Hot Air Ballooning SA

Leap Adventures

Scoutours

The Northern Horse

Ushaka Horse Trails

ZAR Aviation

Battlefield Sites

Bloukrans

Colenso

Doornkop Laager site

Elandslaagte

Fort Durnford

Rensburgskop Battlefield

Siege of Ladysmith (various)

Spioenkop

Thukela Heights (Various)

Vaalkrans

Weenen

Willow Grange

Winston Churchill Capture Site

Zaailaager / Saailaager

B&Bs

Alkamia B&B

At Home

Bell Park B&B and S/C

Bingelela Restaurant / Pizzeria & B&B

Cathkin Cottage B&B

Easby B&B

Itumeleng B&B Bergville

Nzima B&B

Tugela Fall B&B

Backpackers

Amphitheatre Backpackers

Drakensberg Bush Lodge

Tourism Directory

Booking Agencies & Tour Operators

Africa Ignite

Berg Adventures

Cathkin Booking & Management Services

Cathkin Park Reservations

Golf got you

Ron Gold Historical Tours

Trek, Trip and Trails

Camping & Caravanning

Mountain Splendour Eco-Resort

Dragon Peaks Mountain Resort

Monks Cowl Camp

Royal Natal Camp

Injisuthi Camp

Coffee Shops & Restaurants

Bingelela Restaurant / Pizzeria & B&B

Canaan Coffee & Gifts

Champagne Bistro

Chocolate Memories

Drakensberg Brewery

Farmers Fork

Four Rivers

Mac's Coffee Shop

Pig & Plough

Scrumpy Jack Farmstall

The Coffee Patch

The Griller Restaurant

The Salesyard

The Tower of Pizza

Thokoziisa Restaurant

Valley Bakery

Waffle Hut

Conference Venues

Alpine Heath

ATKV Drakensville Resort

ATKV Drakensville Resort

Cathedral Peak Hotel

Champagne Castle Hotel

Champagne Sport Resort

Dragon Peaks Mountain Resort

Little Switzerland Hotel

Sandford Park Country Hotel

The Nest Hotel

Wits End Mountain Resort

Tourism Directory

Estate Agents

Chas Everitt – Pierre de Wet
0645120809

Game Reserves/ Conservation Areas

Kwaggashoek Game Ranch

Slievre Game Farm

Spionkop Nature Reserve

Weenen Nature Reserve

Zulu Waters Game Reserve

The Drakensberg World
Heritage Site

Golf

Hlalanathi Berg Resort

Champagne Sports Resort

Cathedral Peak Hotel

Monks Cowl Golf Resort

Guest Houses

Ashtonville Terraces
Guesthouse

Monte Vista

The Riverhouse

Lodges, Hotels & Resorts

Alpine Heath

Antbear

Ardmore Guest Farm

Blue Haze Country Lodge

Cathedral Peak Hotel

Champagne Castle Hotel

Champagne Sports Resort

Cheetah Ridge Lodge

Dragon Peaks Mountain
Resort

Dragons View Lodge

Esiweni Lodge

Ezulwini Berg Resort

Hlalanathi Berg Resort

Inkungu Lodge

Kwaggashoek Game Ranch

Little Switzerland Hotel

Mackaya Bella Lodge

Monks Cowl Golf Resort

Montusi Mountain Lodge

Sandford Park Country
Hotel

Spionkop Lodge

The Cavern Resort & Spa

The Nest Hote

Museums

Ladysmith

Sandra se Winkel

Winterton

Tourism Directory

Other Attractions

Cathedral Peak Wine Estate
Dragon Rock Reptile Centre
Drakensberg Boys Choir School
Drakensberg Brewery
Falcon Ridge Raptor Centre
H and D Honey Products

Public San Rock Art Sites

Injisuti Camp, guided tour to Battle Cave
Main Cave, Giants Castle Camp

Road Side Assistance

Tyre Roadside Assistance
0617821591

Self-Catering

Accommodation at Trek Trips & Trails
Alpine Heath
Ama Casa Self-catering Cottages
Amphitheatre Backpackers
ATKV Drakensville Resort
Bell Park B&B and S/C
Birdsong Cottages
Celtis cottage
Champagne Cottages
Champagne Lane Resort
Champagne Valley Resort
Dalmore Guest Farm
Didima Camp

Drakensberg Dream Cottage

Drakensberg Hikes

Drakensview S/C

Fernwood Shareblock (Pty) Ltd

Giants Castle Camp

Glenside Farmhouse

Goodhope Country Escape

Graceland Self-Catering Cottages

Highbourne Cottages

Hill Billy Cottages

Ihophe(Turtle Dove)

Ihophe(Turtle Dove)

iKhaya Lodge

Ikhayamalafu Mountain Hideaway

Ikhunzi Cave

Tourism Directory

Self-catering cont.

Ledges Retreat

Little Acres

Linglela Lodge

Nambiti House

Oak Cottage

Ondini Guest House

Ouma se Opstal

Peak View Cottage

Pumeleni

River Crossing

Rockwood Earth Lodge

Slievre Game Farm

Sungubala Eco Camp

Swallowfield Rondavels

Tendele/ Royal Natal

Vultures View

Wits End

Spas

Alpine Heath

Champagne Castle Hotel

Champagne Sports Resort

Drakenberg Dream Wellness
Spa

Monks Cowl Golf Resort

Spoilt Green Eco-Spa

The Cavern

The Nest Hotel

