
Tourism KwaZulu-Natal



Zulu Kingdom. Exceptional

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To: All media

Attention: News Editors and Journalists

EXPLORE THE LEGENDARY ROUTE 66 – AFRICA STYLE!

Route 66, which traversed the American Midwest between the 1930s and 1960s, supporting small towns and inspiring music, novels, and movies, now has an African version – one which still echoes with the historical drumbeats of the Zulu Kingdom.

Winding its way for 250km through the sugar cane clad hills of northern KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) through the now bustling towns of Gingindlovu, Eshowe, Melmoth, Ulundi, Nongoma, Mtunzini and Phongolo, KZN's Route 66 was one of the oldest trade routes traversed on horse and ox wagon by transport riders, missionaries, soldiers and farmers.

The busy highway – now known as the R66 – still ferries everything from sugar cane to groceries and everyone from school children to businessmen to the busy N2 highway that links up with the world class ports of Durban and Richards Bay. But it also provides curious travellers with the perfect way to explore the very same place that was home to the iconic King Shaka Zulu who has captured the imagination of the world and inspired television epics like Shaka Ilembe as well as novels and films.

Punctuated by monuments, museums and memories that date back to a time filled with bloody clashes that changed the course of the region's history - the tribal wars of the early 1800s,

the Voortrekker-Zulu War of 1838, the Anglo-Zulu War of 1878 and the Bhambatha Rebellion of 1906, Route 66 is perfect for history buffs and nature lovers alike.

It is anchored by the town of Eshowe. Visit Fort Nongqayi , a picturesque turreted white structure that was originally built by the British in 1883. The precinct includes the Mission Museum which pays tribute to the early Norwegian Christian missionaries and the Vukani Museum of Zulu Art and Culture which showcases some of the province's best pieces of pottery and basketry.

In Eshowe, there's also the Dlinza Forest Aerial Boardwalk that magically traverses the tree canopy, offering a bird's eye view of the forest with its giant trees, orchids and winged residents and ends at a 20-metre high viewing tower with breath taking views all the way to the coast.

Route 66 offers a wonderland of unexplored indigenous forests, including the Ntumeni Nature Reserve and the Nkandla Forest, a 1 600-hectare mist belt forest with deep gorges and steep ridges that's a place of mystery and legend.

The Siyaya Coastal Park comprises 42kms of unspoilt coastline stretching from the mouth of the Mlalazi River to the southern boundary of the Amatigulu Nature Reserve. It's two nature reserves span a pristine coastal dune forest, mangrove forests, swamp forest, grassland and ilala palm bushveld, providing homes for everything from fiddler crabs and mudskippers to herds of zebra and giraffes grazing on grasslands overlooking the ocean.

Heading to Melmoth and Mtonjaneni, one finds the eMakhosini Ophathe Heritage Park and the Spirit of the eMakhosini Monument that overlooks the Valley of the Kings. This rugged park boasts spectacular krantzes overlooking the White Mfolozi River and offers sanctuary to the endangered black rhino.

Then, there's the Zululand capital, Ulundi, where the decisive battle on Gqokli Hill that was integral to King Shaka's rise to power took place.

After extensive archaeological excavation, King Cetshwayo's residence at Ondini has been recreated on the exact site of the Royal capital. Travellers can also visit the Ondini Heritage Site and the KwaZulu Cultural Museum with a collection of fascinating artefacts that includes the silver friendship cup presented to King Cetshwayo by Queen Victoria when the Zulu King visited England after the Anglo-Zulu War.

ENDS

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