

**MEDIA RELEASE - 18 March 2003**

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**KNP EXCEEDS ONE MILLION GUESTS FOR THE FIRST TIME**

For immediate release

History was made when visitor numbers to the Kruger National Park reached and exceeded one million for a year for the first time ever this month.

In fact, the magical million mark was reached on March 8, 2003 and tourism authorities predict that the number will increase to 1 040 000 by the end of March. This represents an increase of 11,4% over the previous year.

Since the Kruger National Park was first opened to visitors in 1927, tourism figures have gone through various stages of growth. That year, 27 guests in three vehicles entered the Kruger National Park.

The first camps were build during the late 1920s and, within 10 years, more than 30 000 guests were recorded. Kruger National Park was closed during the latter part of World War II due to a lack of supplies and personnel who were called up for duty.

From 1946 to 1951, tourism figures doubled to over 80 000. After this date, the phenomenal growth eased as facilities available were limited. The early 1960s were also characterised by rapid growth when total number of annual guests increased from 152 864 in 1961/2 to 306 347 in 1968/9.

These figures are perhaps even more impressive if you consider that the Park only opened all camps throughout the year from 1970. Prior to that, many (and initially all) camps were closed during the summer months.

When political tensions surfaced in the 1970s, growth figures became less predictable and the 400 000 mark was reached only in 1981/2. Here was a significant drop in numbers due to pre-election jitters in the early 1990s, which was followed by a steep growth, which took the figure up to a record 954 732 in 1997/8.

The floods of 2000 caused a significant downturn in numbers due to camps being closed for extended periods and access roads to the Kruger National Park being washed away.

Since 2000/1 when 804 060 guests visited the Kruger National Park, there has been a 16,1% increase to 933 488 for 2001/2 and a 11,4% rise to a predicted 1 040 000 guest level on March 31, 2003.

Kruger National Park management has set as one of its objectives the need to enhance the quality of a Kruger National Park experience while concentrating on quantity of guests visiting the various facilities.

"If we are able to combine the two in such a manner that accessibility is maintained and even broadened, then this will be in the best interests of SANParks and South African society at large," said acting Kruger National Park director, Mr Josias Chabani.

There are 4 263 beds administered by SANParks and 150 beds administered by concession operators in the Kruger National Park.

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