

Dramatic decline in visitor arrivals

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The devastation brought on the tourism industry by the Covid19 lockdown over the festive season, when it had hoped to recoup early 2020 losses, was laid bare in data released by the government this week. Foreign arrivals fell by 82.1%, from 1.5-million arrivals in December 2019 to 279,539 in December 2020.

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Reports released by Stats SA show a sharp decrease in the number of tourists visiting SA in December last year and a resultant loss of income for the tourist accommodation industry. Tourism Business Council of SA CEO Tshifhiwa Tshivhengwa said on Wednesday that the tourist accommodation as well as tourism and migration statistics for December 2020 were consistent with numbers industry members had encountered.

“We have seen that there is hardly any satisfactory tourism business. For us it is not a surprise at all. Things are not looking good. This is reflected in arrivals and accommodation,” Tshivhengwa said.

Stats SA’s data showed that income for the tourist accommodation industry decreased by 57.7% in December 2020 compared with a year earlier.

Another report by Stats SA on tourism and migration showed that foreign arrivals fell by 82.1%, from 1.5-million arrivals in December 2019 to 279,539 in December 2020.

The report showed that while 163,335 tourists came from Europe in December 2019, only 26,880 arrived from the continent in December last year. While 772,945 visitors came from other African countries in December 2019, only 161,358 arrived a year later.

Tshivhengwa said the Tourism Business Council of SA made a presentation before the tourism portfolio committee this week on how bad the situation was and how it was deteriorating daily.

He said the restrictions put in place at the end of December, when President Cyril Ramaphosa placed the country on adjusted level 3 lockdown, did not help.

“January will reflect even worse numbers because of the closure of beaches and rivers and the ban on the sale of alcohol. We will continue to shed jobs.”

Tshivhengwa said the numbers reflect the situation in which the industry finds itself.

“Transport companies [aimed at ferrying] tourists are not operating, some guests houses have hardly anyone staying in them. People have cancelled vacations. We are not surprised.”

He said the situation is far worse because informal sector tourism businesses are not accounted for in the statistics. These include people selling merchandise, such as arts and crafts, to tourists.

“The picture is bleaker than it is because of informal tourism traders. Women who are breadwinners and who make all these paraphernalia to sell have no tourists to sell to.”