



Whale watching aboard the Romonza in Mossel Bay. Photo: courtesy Romonza Boat Trips.

Whale season begins

The first southern right whales of the winter have been spotted in Mossel Bay - marking the start of the whale watching season for the popular Southern Cape Town. They were seen from their balcony in Reebok, Little Great River by the owners of At Whale-Phin Guest House, Joy and Louis Cook, on the morning of June the first.

"We saw two this morning slowly moving from the Hartenbos area in the direction of Great Brak River," said Ms Cook. (Mossel Bay is ideal for both land-based and boat-based whale- and dolphin watching and, according to Marcia Holm, COO of Mossel Bay Tourism, the whales were seen in the area of the Bay in which fishing company I&J wish to erect a controversial and unpopular fish cage farming).

"It's a thrill and an honour to welcome the southern right whale - back to their winter mating and calving grounds," said Mossel Bay Tourism chairman, Neels Zietsman.

"Although the other species, like orcas and dolphins, can be seen here throughout the year, the southern rights, which are known for their gentleness, their inquisitiveness, and their endearing behaviour, represent something really good in the world - and seeing them is always exciting."

He said that visitors were beginning to learn what the locals have known all along

and dolphin watching destination.

"And it's becoming a well rounded water-sports destination, too, with more and more water-based attractions opening up all the time."

In December last year, the Mayor of Mossel Bay, Alderlady Marie Ferreira, agreed to apply to have three of the town's beaches registered with the internationally recognised Blue Flag programme.

"At the moment, the beaches - Santos, Diaz, and Hartenbos - are still under observation, and they'll get their Blue Flag status after a year-long probation if the Foundation for Environmental Education is satisfied that they are managed according to strict criteria," said Ms Holm.

The Blue Flag Programme aims to encourage sustainable development through appropriate environmental management. Water quality, environmental education, safety, infrastructure, and services such as the supply of information are vital facets of the programme.

"It's exactly because the Bay is so clean that it's also a brilliant shark-watching destination, and last year one of the owners of one local company - Ryan Johnson of the South African Marine Predators Lab, which is involved in formal scientific research into these fascinating animals - produced a National Geographic video that examined why shark-human coexistence is

in Mossel Bay," said Mr Zietsman.

Although the ocean plays a major role in the life of the town (Mossel Bay has the smallest commercial harbour in South Africa, and the presence of shellfish influenced the development of modern human behaviour, which emerged in the area 165 000 years ago), the attractions of the water aren't limited to the sea.

"We have two heated indoor swimming pools, and Mossel Bay hosted South Africa's Underwater Hockey Junior Championships in February - when our local South Western Districts team won both a gold and a silver medal," said Mr Zietsman. Mr Zietsman said that the fact that Mossel Bay offered so many things to do was the secret behind its success. "But we have to be vigilant about protecting our playground," he said.

"Mossel Bay's clean, shallow and protected waters make it as attractive for people as it is for animals, and the arrival of the whales is another reminder both of why it's so important to constantly protect our environment, and why Mossel Bay Tourism will always exercise its legally imposed 'general duty of care'.

"We want to be absolutely sure that our children's children can enjoy the whales as we can today," he said.

More information at www.visitmossel-