



HOSPITALITY GROUP CELEBRATES ITS BUSIEST YEAR EVER AS TOURISTS RETURN TO VICTORIA FALLS

Africa Albida Tourism is celebrating its busiest year ever, as tourists flock to Victoria Falls, with its flagship property Victoria Falls Safari Lodge enjoying 80-plus per cent occupancy over the past six months.

In the year to September 30, occupancy at Victoria Falls Safari Lodge, Africa Albida Tourism's (AAT) flagship property, was 81.5 per cent, compared to 71.7 per cent over the same period last year, and similarly, across ten hotels measured in the resort town, year on year occupancy rose from 53.6 per cent to 58.7 per cent.

Ross Kennedy, AAT chief executive said, "The new Victoria Falls Airport, with its geographical hub location, plus much enhanced route access and connectivity, has played a part in the growth of the destination".

In addition, Victoria Falls Safari Lodge had its busiest August ever this year, with an occupancy rate of 88 per cent.

This comes as AAT upgraded some of its properties, introduced new activities, expanded its already extensive corporate social responsibility program and took home several national awards.

Victoria Falls Safari Club underwent a \$600,000 redevelopment in March which included the addition of a swimming pool, sundeck and gazebo, and an expansion and upgrade of its central building, which doubled the size of its existing deck, increasing the lounge space, and creating a new restaurant, with a dedicated kitchen.

A fitness room with six free-standing exercise machines, as well as weights, a bench and exercise balls was built at Victoria Falls Safari Lodge, boasting an unrivalled view of bushveld to the horizon, with the opportunity to spot wildlife at the onsite waterhole.

The sunset-facing glass-fronted fitness room opened in September, as part of a \$150,000 redevelopment, which also included the replacement of the decking at the Victoria Falls Safari Lodge swimming pool directly above the new fitness room.

The value-for-money Lokuthula Lodges also underwent an upgrade, which included the installation of air-conditioning and new queen size beds in the main bedrooms, and soft refurbishments in the living areas.

Both Victoria Falls Safari Lodge and Ngoma Safari Lodge underwent soft refurbishments, which included an update and refreshment of the interiors.

Following the construction of a jetty at Ihaha in Chobe National Park, two new scenic, game viewing river-based safari activities were introduced at Ngoma Safari Lodge – guided mokoro trips, and exclusive cruises along tranquil stretches on the Chobe River.

In September, \$30,000 was raised through the Victoria Falls Anti-Poaching Unit (VFAPU) golf day, coordinated, hosted and sponsored by AAT, bringing the total raised through this annual event over the past seven years alone to nearly USD150,000.

In 2018 AAT launched Victoria Falls Recycling to protect the environment around one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World, by recycling as much waste as possible, thereby reducing the volume of litter on the streets and going to the Victoria Falls dumpsite.

The project is co-ordinated by well-known conservationist Charlene Hewat, who was appointed as consultant to AAT's corporate social responsibility program.

Local hotels, retailers and residents are participating in the initiative, which is recycling plastics and papers, and is set to expand to include glass and beverage cans in due course. Victoria Falls Recycling is a partnership with Greenline Africa Trust, PetrecoZim and Victoria Falls Municipality.

As part of AAT's commitment to reduce plastic, and to minimise its carbon footprint, the group is about to introduce the environmentally friendly Natura water system, where water is purified onsite using a three-stage filtration system. Impurities are removed to produce top quality, great-tasting water, provided to guests in glass bottles, which will then be left behind for the next guest to use.

The year began with AAT winning two prestigious Zimbabwe Council for Tourism awards, with operations and finance director Nigel Frost being named Tourism Personality of the Year in recognition of successfully spearheading a campaign by the tourism sector to reverse the application of backdated VAT to hospitality billings in the country. In addition to this award, AAT also won the Achievement in Marketing Award for the Africa's Living Soul tourism survey, which provides tourism data of the Victoria Falls region.

AAT won the Environmental Award at the 25th Annual Association of Zimbabwe Travel Agents (AZTA) Awards ceremony in September, in recognition of launching Victoria Falls Recycling; in addition AAT's flagship property Victoria Falls Safari Lodge won Best Resort Hotel for the 22nd consecutive year; Victoria Falls Safari Club was named Best Boutique Hotel; Lokuthula Lodges won the Best Self-Catering category; AAT Sales Executive Wendy Bourne, was honoured with the award for Most Outstanding Voluntary Service to travel agents.

Last week AAT was named Recycling Champion of the Year by the Corporate Social Responsibility Network Zimbabwe in recognition of the Victoria Falls Recycling project.

AAT operates a portfolio of products in Victoria Falls, including Victoria Falls Safari Lodge, Victoria Falls Safari Club, Victoria Falls Safari Suites, Lokuthula Lodges and The Boma – Dinner & Drum Show, as well as Ngoma Safari Lodge in Chobe, Botswana.

IMAGE CAPTION: Victoria Falls Safari Lodge

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