

## COVID-19 AND COASTAL DESTINATION IMPACTS: THE CASE OF SOUTH AFRICA

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**Citation:** Rogerson, C.M., & Rogerson, J.M. (2022). COVID-19 AND COASTAL DESTINATION IMPACTS: THE CASE OF SOUTH AFRICA. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 42(2spl), 767–774. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.422spl16-887>

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**Abstract:** The COVID-19 pandemic underlines the importance of geography and geographical analysis to tourism scholarship. This paper utilises a spatial approach to examine the impacts of the pandemic on tourism flows and examine the comparative performance of coastal tourism destinations in COVID-times. The case research is on South Africa one of the worst-hit countries in sub-Saharan Africa for the pandemic. Existing international literature points to a geographical change in consumer preferences for coastal destinations with reduced flows to traditional mass coastal destinations. The South African findings demonstrate the highly negative effects of the pandemic upon coastal tourism as a whole with the largest coastal cities experiencing the worst impacts. COVID-19 has caused a reversal of trends recorded for the past two decades for the benefits of coastal tourism to be concentrated in South Africa's large coastal cities. Instead, it has resulted in the relative improvement of smaller coastal centres and in particular of centres which are relatively well-located for access to the domestic markets offered by large cities. These South African findings signal potential shifts in consumer psyche and travel behaviour as an outcome of COVID-19.

**Key words:** COVID-19, tourism spatial impact, coastal tourism, South Africa

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### INTRODUCTION

According to Perillo et al. (2021: 1) “COVID-19 has become what may be the most troubling and complex pandemic that humanity has endured”. Verma and Gustafsson (2020: 1) observe that the COVID-19 pandemic “has been labelled a black swan event that caused a ripple effect on every aspect of human life”. For Adey et al. (2021: 1) the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in “many everyday human mobilities brought to an abrupt halt, while others were drastically reorganized”. Undoubtedly the “pandemic has dramatically impacted prevailing social and economic systems and practices” as well as catalysing “profound human health, development and socio-psychological impacts on individuals, families, social groups, enterprises and nations around the world” (Perillo et al., 2021: 1). As is observed by Wen et al. (2022: 1): “Bidding farewell to 2020 and 2021 turns out to bring neither the end of the pandemic crisis nor the return to business-as-usual”. Yet with the roll-out of vaccines it is suggested increasingly that, for certain parts of the world at least, the peak of the COVID-19 ‘storm’ may have passed. Nevertheless, it remains that the “human and economic debris left when the COVID-19 pandemic is finally brought under control will be picked over by a vast array of investigators in the coming years” (Rivera et al., 2021: 10). The tourism and hospitality sector is one of the economic sectors that suffered considerably from the pandemic as a consequence of actions implemented by governments to mitigate the virus spread including imposition of travel bans and thwarting internal mobility (Hall et al., 2020; Sigala, 2020; Robina-Ramírez et al., 2022). COVID-19 has engendered anxiety about the virus’s persistence and spread placing the tourism industry in a precarious situation. Much research and scholarly debate centres on the longer-term consequences of COVID-19 and travel and how these might be harnessed for the future re-orientation and resetting of tourism (Herman et al., 2019; Brouder, 2020; Cheer, 2021; Gössling et al., 2021; Rivera et al., 2021; Lew et al., 2022). For example, Sigala (2020) views COVID-19 as a transformational opportunity for the tourism sector with potentially profound and long-term structural changes to the sector. One aspect of the longer-term consequences is changing consumer preferences and destination choices. It is widely recognized that the destination preferences of tourists have been significantly reshaped by the COVID-19 pandemic (Li et al., 2021; Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021a). Zenker and Kock (2020) point to mind-shifts in tourist travel behaviour and stress that pathogen threats make people more alert of and avoid ‘crowdedness’. Behavioural changes in tourist preferences in COVID-19 times are underlined by Marques-Santos et al. (2020) and Afroz et al. (2022). Assaf et al (2021) confirm that the implications for consumer behaviour of the pandemic are substantive and most especially the expanded importance of safety, risk reduction, cleanliness and threat anticipation. Kock et al. (2020: 1) maintain that the “pandemic will eventually fade and travel barriers will be lifted, yet some tourists’ psyche will likely settle on a new equilibrium”.

Nursey-Bray (2020: 1) points out that COVID-19 has demonstrated the significance of and evolving nature of place” and the importance of geography and geographical practices in articulating visions for a future COVID-19 world. It is argued that geography’s focus on “the relationship between people, space, scale and place matters more than ever now” (Nursey-Bray, 2020: 1). In addition, as geography is a discipline that integrates the physical with the human in its

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investigations it facilitates a transition from theory to practice. COVID-19 has exerted uneven economic impacts within territories (Visagie and Turok, 2021). Work by the OECD (2020) has underlined the territorial impact of COVID-19 and especially that lockdowns and confinement measures affect localities differently and dependent on their areas of economic activity. Indeed, Higgins-Desbiolles (2022) pinpoints that the pandemic throws a spotlight on issues of tourism dependency. It is against this backdrop that this study applies perspectives from tourism geography which is a flourishing area of scholarship in South Africa (Rogerson and Visser, 2020). Our aim is to utilise a spatial approach to examine the impacts of the pandemic on tourism flows and examine the comparative performance of coastal tourism destinations in COVID-times. The case study for investigation is South Africa, one of the worst-hit countries in sub-Saharan Africa for the pandemic (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021b). In a parallel with the rest of the world the tourism industry of South Africa was severely impacted by the outbreak and spread of COVID-19. Its impacts for tourism were immediate and followed upon the declaration of a National State of Disaster on 15 March 2020 by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa. The shutdown of South Africa's international borders, restrictions on internal inter-provincial travel, social distancing requirements and lockdowns were among the policy interventions which were enacted by national government to halt the virus spread (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2020a, 2020b). The legislation relating to the National State of Disaster in South Africa continued in force for more than two years and was lifted only on 5 April 2022. The severest curbs on international and local travel were experienced by the tourism sector during 2020 with a gradual easing of restrictions taking place in 2021. Of necessity, tourism businesses in South Africa undertook a wide range of adaptive responses to the pandemic's impact on diminishing tourist flows and in particular re-oriented their operations to the domestic travel market (Giddy and Rogerson, 2021; Lekgau and Tichaawa, 2021; Rogerson, 2021; Rogerson et al., 2021; Giddy et al., 2022; Booyens et al., 2022). Two sections of material are presented. The next section provides a setting for the study by presenting a literature review on coastal tourism within the context of COVID-19. This discussion is followed by a geographical analysis to unpack the pandemic's effects for coastal tourism destinations in South Africa.

### COVID-19 AND COASTAL TOURISM

As is stated by Craig-Smith et al. (2006: 108) the "coastline is a particularly unique element of the landscape being the edge of the land where it meets the marine environment". Coastal regions are places where many global environmental changes and shocks intersect, including sea level rise, biodiversity loss and extreme weather events, creating many uncertainties and vulnerabilities (Lamers and Student, 2021). Environmental sustainability and unplanned urbanisation are critical issues that impact coastal development in several parts of the world (Dwyer, 2018; Rogerson, 2020; Uğuz et al., 2022). In particular, coastal regions are highly vulnerable to the threats from global climate change (Moreno and Becken, 2009; Pandy and Rogerson, 2021). The onset of COVID-19 introduced another layer of challenges and threats to livelihoods and economies of coastal regions. Perillo et al. (2021) stress that in the context of the pandemic there is an increased need for research on ocean and coastal issues, including for coastal tourism. Carvache-Franco et al. (2022) identify the value-addition of using social media communication to explore topics under discussion for coastal and marine destinations in the pandemic. Armenio et al. (2021: 1) observe that the COVID crisis "constrained world governments to impose measures of restraint and social distancing which also involves coastal areas". Indeed, COVID-19 affected coastal zones around the world by transforming social structures and livelihood opportunities (Pedroza-Gutiérrez et al., 2021). It has been observed that the "COVID-19 pandemic brings to the fore the complex interconnections between human and social-ecological system health and coastal governance in an age of climate and global change" (Perillo et al., 2021: 1). In terms of re-configuring of social and human-environmental interactions the pandemic has "significant impacts and implications for coastal cities and settlements, including how to manage coastal and marine activities" (Perillo et al., 2021: 1). Since the onset of the pandemic difficult policy decisions faced many coastal tourism destinations in terms of balancing between lockdowns and business closures for the sake of public health, and attempts to partly or temporarily open up again for the sake of the economy and local livelihoods (Lamers and Student, 2021). As Zielinski and Botero (2020: 1) point out key issues arise in terms of beach management such that the economic importance of beach tourism for many destinations caused many governments to reopen tourist beaches as soon as the number of infection cases began to decline.

Globally, coastal tourism has been highly impacted by restrictions such as the closure of international and internal borders, restrictions on access to restaurants, parks and beaches, and low consumer demand. The importance of tourism for many coastal destinations resulted in many uncertainties and vulnerabilities which are magnified especially in tourism-dependent localities (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2020b; Lamers and Student, 2021). As is shown in the case of Korea, new management and development strategies often are required for coastal tourism destinations in the environment of COVID-19 (Sohn et al., 2021). Among others Kane et al. (2021: 1) demonstrate that coastal tourism localities "are impacted by the pandemic" and "continue to grapple with how best to sustain coastal visitation during the COVID-19 pandemic". Gabe (2021) unpacks the pandemic's negative economic implications in the USA for one coastal destination, Bar Harbour in Maine. In one detailed Spanish study De Aldecoa Fuster (2021) analysed spatial patterns of usage of credit cards in terms of three sets of destinations, namely urban, rural and coastal destinations. The research revealed an erosion of tourism business in the 'less urban' regions of Spain which has been far lower than in traditional coastal mass tourism destinations. These findings are a signal that as a result of risk perceptions tourists have avoided large urban destinations as well as major coastal tourist hotspots or spaces where the highest concentrations of people could occur. On Peru Carvache-Franco et al. (2021: 1) highlight that in the pandemic environment, certain coastal centres offer great ecological, cultural and economic benefits which link to an untapped potential for tourism. In Brazil it was shown by Pereira et al. (2021) that public perceptions of COVID-19 risk on beaches varied with less risk perceived at traditionally 'less crowded' destinations.

The above suggests a geographical change in consumer preferences for coastal destinations. Such a shift is indicated by research in Spain which showed the areas least affected by the pandemic's impacts were coastal localities which normally attracted fewer tourists (Donaire et al., 2021). Indeed, what Donaire et al. (2021: 12) describe as "charming coastal cities" were perceived as alternatives to Spain's traditional coastal resorts. Another factor that can account for internal differences in the performance of coastal destinations is that as people avoid large coastal centres they often favour instead the use of the coast closer their residence (Armenio et al., 2021). As stated by Donaire et al. (2021:12) this emphasizes the significance of location and of "proximity to home". In Australian research the importance of self-drive tourism is highlighted for supporting tourism in traditionally less favoured areas (Butler and Szili, 2020). Butler et al. (2021) stress how private vehicles can be viewed as sanctuaries or 'safe havens' and thereby reduce tourist exposure to crowded environments and unpredictable situations in relation to changing COVID-19 regulations. In particular, automobiles and the private vehicle offer a sense of flexibility and especially the flexibility to avoid crowded destinations. For less favoured coastal destinations therefore self-drive tourism can play an essential role "in offering tourists a sense of safety during COVID-19 that other modes of transport simply could not offer" (Butler et al., 2021: 6).

Arguably, in the stressful COVID-19 environment certain coastal destinations can be viewed – alongside nature areas – as 'therapeutic landscapes'. Individuals can 'consume' the coast variously for physical activity, restoration, social activities, relaxation and reflection. Coastal tourism offers potential opportunities to satisfy the demands of pandemic tourists who seek stress-relief and rejuvenation within a therapeutic environment and engagement with physical and psychological well-being activities (Cooper and Buckley, 2021). Jellard and Bell (2021: 1) therefore can isolate an expanding body of research which "suggests positive links between coastal proximity, interaction, human health and well-being". These authors maintain that there is "growing awareness of positive links between coastal proximity, human health and well-being" (Jellard and Bell, 2021: 1). This implies that coastal areas can be viewed as 'healthy spaces' and function as 'therapeutic landscapes' or spaces of psychological healing. This recalls an earlier historical era for the development of coastal tourism resorts in many parts of the world. By the end of the nineteenth century physicians were according considerable attention to the curative attributes of the sea, sea voyages therapy and the healthful powers of English seaside resorts many of which were 'selling air' as their major attraction (Gilbert, 1939; Beckerson and Walton, 2005). The pattern of many coastal resorts emerging and growing on the basis of their 'invigorating sea air' and their generally 'health-restorative environments' has been documented also in the historical trajectories of certain coastal resorts in South Africa (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2020c).

## COVID-19 AND COASTAL TOURISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

This section interrogates the ramifications of the pandemic for coastal tourism in South Africa. Initially a context is provided with a brief overview of the shifting policy environment that particularly impacted coastal areas and a discussion of methods, sources and study scope. This is followed by the analysis and discussion of the absolute and relative tourism performance of coastal destinations.

### Policy Context, Methods and Scope

The radically changed policy environment triggered by the pandemic clearly impacted South Africa's coastal destinations. The resulting crisis underscores Saarinen's (2021) observation that tourism is a dynamic phenomenon which operates in an environment of permanent change and necessitates strategies for change management. The imposition on 27 March 2020 of a lockdown on the country in order to combat the spread of COVID-19 was a turning point (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2020a). To manage the pandemic risks five different levels of lockdown were applied beginning with level 5 which required a total shutdown of all sectors of the economy (excluding essential services and retail of essential goods), a ban on public gatherings, a ban on sales of alcohol as well as cigarettes, and severe restrictions on mobilities. These hard lockdown restrictions lasted one month until 1 May when government announced level 4 which allowed some sectors to reopen. Nevertheless, mobility restrictions remained with curfews (Visagie and Turok, 2021). On 1 June 2020 most sectors reopened under level 3 albeit inter-provincial travel remained banned. On 17 August lockdown restrictions were lowered further to level 2 and down to level 1 from 21 September. This change permitted a relaxation of restrictions on domestic travel. Two weeks later on 1 October South Africa's international borders were reopened partially for international business and travel but with controls still remaining in place for 22 'high risk' countries (Visagie and Turok, 2021). With the onset of another wave of the pandemic in December a further suite of stringent regulations were introduced. Looked at in a comparative international context Müller-Mahn and Kioko (2021: 219) point out that "the South African government imposed a particularly tough lockdown which was enforced by the army". From 16 December full beach closures were imposed on Eastern Cape and Garden Route resulting in a massive swathe of cancellations at the height of the summer season for domestic travel. A survey report produced by the Tourism Business Council of South Africa (2021) indicated up to 70 % cancellations and for the period October-December 2020 with 97 % businesses operating at a loss in Plettenburg Bay on the Garden Route. Following the President's announcement of new lockdowns and beach restrictions, cancellations of bookings were immediate. It was reported that at least 20 000 bookings meant to arrive in December and January were cancelled within two weeks of the President's announcement. Hardest hit were Garden Route destinations, such as Knysna, Mossel Bay and Plettenburg Bay (Bitou) (Tourism Business Council of South Africa, 2021). The reasons cited for cancellations were the 'hotspot declarations' making travellers feel unsafe to travel, fears of contracting COVID-19, beach closures, the cancellation of a youth tourism festival (Plett Rage), flight cancellations and new curfews which made flight times impossible particularly for travellers from Gauteng (SAPeople, 2020). The policy environment for coastal tourism deteriorated further on 28 December 2020 when all beaches, rivers, dams, lakes and parks in the Western Cape and KwaZulu-

Natal were closed at the height of the festive season. In addition, alcohol sales and restaurant and bar consumption was banned. Further bans on beach access were imposed across all coastal destinations with the only exceptions in Northern Cape. Regular police patrols were undertaken and even visits by the Minister of Police to check the observance of the beach ban.

The time period under scrutiny for this study is between 2019-2020 and is an analysis of the immediate impacts of COVID-19 for the coastal tourism destinations of South Africa. The data used in this study is sourced mainly from the local data base which is maintained by IHS Global Insight (which in 2022 merged to become part of S&P Global), a private sector consultancy. This data base contains information about all local municipal authorities in the country. In terms of tourism, the data is collected about, *inter alia*, tourism trips differentiated by primary purpose (leisure, business, visiting friends and relatives [VFR] and other), and origin of trip (domestic or international); bed-nights by origin of tourist (domestic or international); tourism spend; and, of contribution of tourism to local gross domestic product (GDP). Given the lack of any official tourism data at the local municipality level the IHS Global Insight data base is commonly used as a base for local economic development planning in South Africa. Rogerson and Rogerson (2021c) record that the data is collated by IHS Global Insight regularly from a cross-section of both official and non-government sources. Importantly, the primary data is re-worked to ensure consistency across variables through the application of national and sub-national verification tests ensuring that the model is consistent for measuring business activity, including tourism. Coastal tourism in South Africa includes four of the country’s nine provinces - Northern Cape, Western Cape, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. The study utilises data at the local municipality level for 43 coastal areas. Among these 43 municipalities are four metropolitan areas, namely the City of Cape Town in Western Cape, Nelson Mandela Bay and Buffalo City (with East London its core) in Eastern Cape, and eThekweni (centred on Durban) in KwaZulu-Natal province. The other 39 smaller local municipalities include three in Northern Cape, 12 in Western Cape, 13 in Eastern Cape and 11 in KwaZulu-Natal. It should be understood that the analysis undertaken here is at the most fine-grained scale using local municipality data as compared to an earlier geographical investigation of the development of coastal tourism in South Africa for the period 2001-2015 which utilised data at the scale of district municipalities (Rogerson and Rogerson 2020d). The location of the 43 coastal local municipalities is shown on Figure 1.

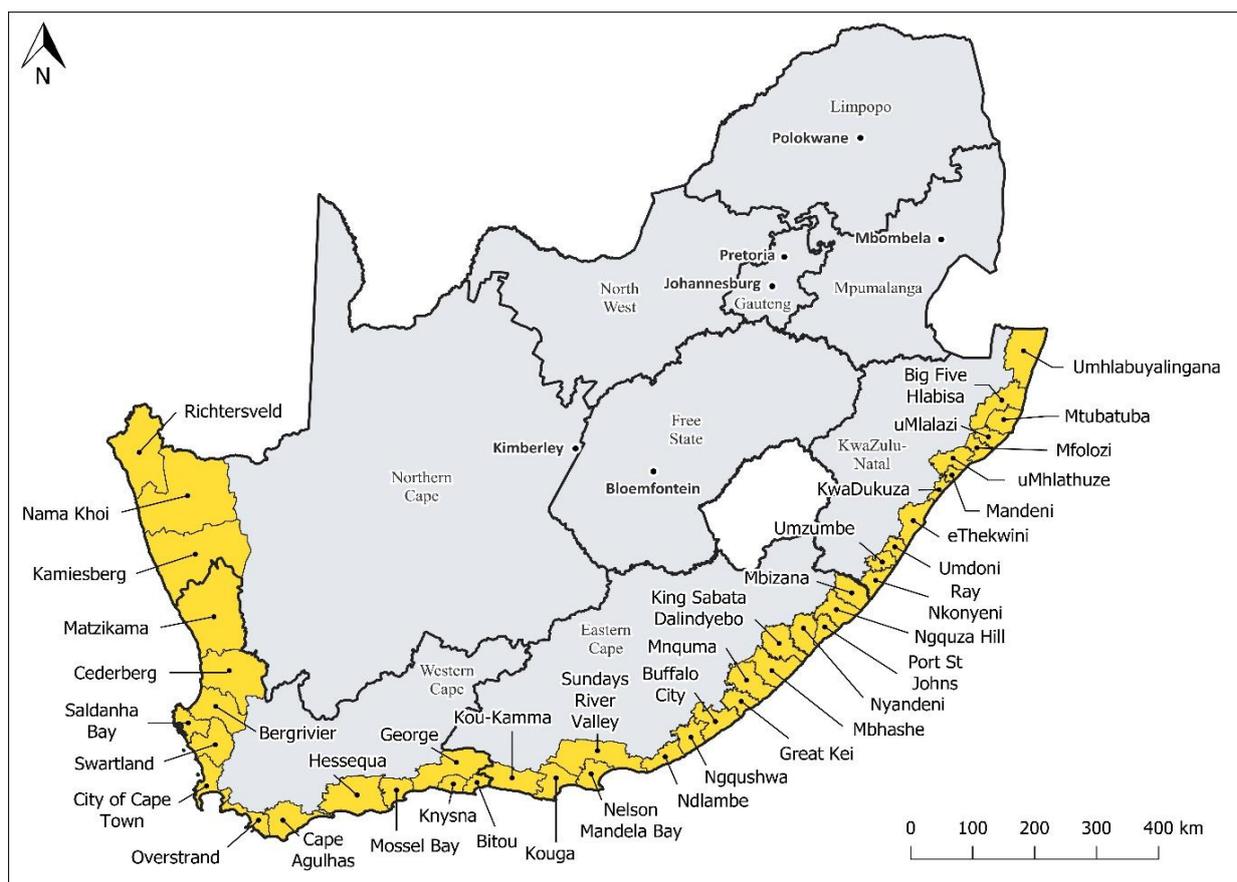


Figure 1. South Africa’s Coastal Local Municipalities (Source: Authors)

**Findings**

Coastal tourism in South Africa historically has evolved largely around the domestic leisure market (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2020d). Until recently, it has largely remained off the radar screen of national tourism policy makers who have traditionally concentrated on promoting South Africa as a destination to international travellers for its nature tourism attractions. In the post-1994 period Cape Town and its surrounds as well as the Garden Route emerged as a popular focus for international tourists. Most other coastal destinations in South Africa remained strongly oriented to the domestic market. This is particularly the case with the three metropolitan centres of eThekweni (Durban), Nelson Mandela Bay and Buffalo City.

Table 1. COVID-19 impacts on coastal tourism in South Africa 2019-2020  
(Source: Authors based on IHS Global Insight)

Indicator	2019-2020 Net Change (-)	% Loss
Total Tourism Spend (R'000s)	67941.0	70.1
Total Trips ('000s)	6933.7	66.4
Total Bednights ('000s)	47827.8	67.5
Leisure Trips ('000s)	2113.6	65.2
Leisure Bednights ('000s)	16643.6	64.7
Business Trips ('000s)	530.9	70.7
Business Bednights ('000s)	4604.2	70.2
VFR Trips ('000s)	3766.7	67.0
VFR Bednights ('000s)	23429.9	69.3
Other Trips ('000s)	532.5	65.1
Other Bednights ('000s)	3150.0	66.3
Domestic Trips ('000s)	5593.7	66.5
Domestic Bednights ('000s)	28173.7	68.1
International Trips ('000s)	1350.0	66.7
International Bednights ('000s)	19654.3	66.7

Table 2. Individual local municipalities: select key decline indicators (Source: Authors based on IHS Global Insight)

Rank	Total Spend Absolute Decline (R'000s)	Leisure Trips Absolute Decline ('000s)	Domestic Trips Absolute Decline ('000s)	Total Trips Absolute Decline ('000s)
1	Cape Town 22 506	Cape Town 506	eThekweni 1466	eThekweni 1674
2	eThekweni 20 828	eThekweni 492	Cape Town 1238	Cape Town 1668
3	Nelson Mandela Bay 4 660	Overstrand 100	Buffalo City 478	Buffalo City 524
4	Buffalo City 2 798	Ray Nkonyeni 92	Nelson Mandela Bay 285	Nelson Mandela Bay 366
5	Saldanha Bay 1 632	Saldanha Bay 80	Ray Nkonyeni 180	Ray Nkonyeni 237
6	Ray Nkonyeni 1 490	George 79	Mossel Bay 143	Mossel Bay 172
7	Mossel Bay 1 023	Nelson Mandela Bay 78	George 117	George 162
8	Bitou 808	Mossel Bay 76	Overstrand 116	Overstrand 160

At the close of the pre-COVID period in 2019 the coastal areas of South Africa accounted for approximately one-third of the tourism economy with particular strengths for leisure tourism (sea, sun and sand) and the domestic tourism market. The devastation wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic within one year is shown on Table 1. This reveals losses to coastal destinations as a whole of 70.1 % of total tourism spend, 65.2 % of leisure trips and 66.5% of domestic tourist trips. Across all 15 indicators relating to purpose and origin of travel downturns of between 65 and 71 % are recorded for the coastal areas of South Africa as a whole. Across all 15 indicators presented on Table 1 the hollowing out of the coastal tourism economies is evidenced for the period 2019-2020. In proportional terms the largest losses were recorded for the critical indicator of total tourism spend as well as for business trips.

The full brunt of the pandemic was experienced most severely by the coastal metropolitan areas as is demonstrated on Table 2. It is evident from Table 2 that the collapse of tourism impacted most particularly the tourism economies of the two largest coastal metropolitan areas – Cape Town and eThekweni. In addition, Table 2 confirms that outside the large coastal cities major losses in tourism were also experienced, and especially for the Garden Route destinations of Western Cape province following government announcements of beach closures. In terms of critical indicators of total spend, total trips, domestic trips and leisure trips Cape Town and eThekweni head the list for pandemic-induced losses which were experienced by coastal destinations. In August 2020 it was announced that Cape Town's iconic Mount Nelson Hotel would remain closed until December 2020 and that it would retrench 154 of its 251 staff as international travel bans caused a collapse in foreign bookings (Bottomley, 2020). For the most lucrative segment of leisure travel the major losses occurred in Cape Town followed by eThekweni and then the smaller municipalities of Overstrand in Western Cape and Ray Nkonyeni in coastal KwaZulu-Natal. Further supplementary official data on visits to Cape Town's leading leisure tourism attractions reveals the differential impact for those attractions heavily reliant on the international market (Robben Island, V & A Waterfront) as opposed to the local market (Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens) (Table 3).

Table 3. Total visitors at leading Cape Town leisure attractions: comparison of December 2019 and December 2020  
(Source: Western Cape Government, 2021)

Attraction	December 2019	December 2020	% Change
Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens	103 892	79 907	-23.1
Robben Island	37 680	6 175	-83.6
V & A Waterfront Shopping Centre	3.39 million	1.71 million	-49.5
Table Mountain National Park	333 716	82 452	-75.3
Table Mountain National Park Boulders	86 552	22 489	-74.0
Table Mountain National Park: Cape of Good Hope	116 930	35 812	-69.4
Table Mountain Aerial Cableway	110 229	36 997	-66.4

Table 4. Coastal South Africa: Proportion of national total (Source: Authors based on IHS Global Insight)

Indicator	% 2019	% 2020
Total Tourism Spend	34.0	34.1
Total Trips	23.3	23.5
Total Bednights	28.6	29.3
Leisure Trips	30.5	29.7
Leisure Bednights	37.0	36.7
Business Trips	23.1	22.8
Business Bednights	29.9	30.3
VFR Trips	20.8	21.1
VFR Bednights	24.6	25.0
Other Trips	20.9	22.2
Other Bednights	25.9	26.9
Domestic Trips	23.9	24.3
Domestic Bednights	29.7	30.6
International Trips	20.8	20.9
International Bednights	27.3	27.6

Table 4 provides another perspective on coastal tourism as a whole by examining the performance of coastal tourism destinations in relation to their national share of tourism. A mixed picture emerges with only minimal change or even minor improvement in terms of key indicators of total spend, total bednights, total trips and share of domestic trips. It is observed that downturns were recorded for the share of both the markets of leisure trips and business travel. In Table 5 the local development impacts of the havoc caused by the pandemic are apparent in terms of massive reductions in the contribution of tourism to the

local gross domestic product of coastal destinations. Significant reductions are recorded in the role and contribution of tourism to the economies of the four metropolitan areas. Once again worst affected was the city of Cape Town where in 2019 tourism represented 6.3 % of local GDP and yet in 2020 dropped to only 1.7%. Beyond the cities the local economic impact of the pandemic on tourism was even more devastating in the less diversified coastal economies which were highly reliant on tourism. In particular, for coastal resort areas in the Western Cape such as Overstrand and the Cape West Coast (Saldanha Bay) as well as Garden Route municipalities, such as Knysna or Bitou (Plettenburg Bay) the pandemic caused a massive reduction in the contribution of tourism to the local economies of these popular resort areas (Table 4). These results point to the unevenness of the pandemic's impact upon the tourism economies and of the role of tourism in various coastal centres.

Table 5. Coastal South Africa – ten leading municipalities: tourism contribution to GDP (Current Prices) (Source: Authors based on IHS Global Insight)

Name/Province	2019	2020
City of Cape Town (WC)	6.3	1.7
eThekweni (KZN)	5.9	1.7
Nelson Mandela Bay (EC)	4.8	1.4
Buffalo City (EC)	5.1	1.4
Saldanha Bay (WC)	23.9	9.6
Overstrand (WC)	10.2	6.0
Mossel Bay (WC)	12.4	5.0
George (WC)	14.1	5.7
Bitou (WC)	22.6	9.4
Knysna (WC)	21.9	9.0
Ray Nkonyeni (Hibiscus Coast) (KZN)	10.9	4.5

Table 6. Coastal destinations: key change indicators 2019-2020 (Source: Authors compilation based on IHS Global Insight)

Regions	Leisure 2019%	Leisure 2020%	Domestic Trips 2019%	Domestic Trips 2020%	Total Spend 2019%	Total Spend 2020%
Four Coastal Metros	49.0	39.5	56.2	44.6	72.0	65.5
Rest of Western Cape	29.9	33.9	16.1	20.7	14.5	18.6
Northern Cape	1.3	1.6	0.8	1.2	0.4	0.5
Rest of Eastern Cape	5.9	6.1	10.2	8.7	5.1	6.0
Rest of KwaZulu-Natal	13.9	18.9	17.5	24.8	8.0	9.4

The uneven geographical effect of COVID-19 on South Africa's coastal tourism destinations is further confirmed by undertaking a comparative analysis of the performance of the four coastal metropolitan centres with the smaller centres in the different provinces. The results are presented in Table 6. The table shows the proportionate share of different regions in the total coastal tourism sector of South Africa. Note that the four Coastal Metros are City of Cape Town, eThekweni, Nelson Mandela Bay and Buffalo City; Rest of Western Cape the local municipalities of Matzikama, Cederberg, Bergrivier, Saldanha Bay, Swartland, Overstrand, Cape Agulhas, Hessequa, Mossel Bay, George, Bitou and Knysna; Northern Cape the local municipalities of Richtersveld, Nama Khoi and Kamiesberg; Rest of Eastern Cape the local municipalities of Ndlambe, Sundays River Valley, Kouga, Kou-Kamma, Mbhashe, Mbizana, Mnquma, Great Kei, Ngqushwa, Ingquza Hill, Port St Johns, Nyandeni and King Sabata Dalindyebo and Rest of KwaZulu-Natal the local municipalities of Umdoni, Umzumbe, Ray Nkonyeni (Hibiscus Coast), uMhlabuyalingana, Mtubatuba, Big Five Hlabisa, uMfolozi, City of uMhlathuze, uMlalazi, Mandeni and KwaDukuza.

Several points can be observed. First, it is striking that the four coastal metropolitan destinations have recorded a reduced role in the coastal tourism economy as a consequence of pandemic impacts. In pre-COVID times the four metropolitan areas captured 72% of total tourism spend in coastal destinations and accounted for nearly half of all leisure trips and 56 % domestic trips. The dominance of these metropolitan areas in coastal tourism is a reflection of the trend towards the urbanisation of coastal tourism that has been in evidence in South Africa since 2000 (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2020d). The immediate impacts of COVID-19 have halted and reversed that trend in 2020.

Second, what is disclosed on Table 6 is that, in relative terms, it is the smaller coastal centres which have increased their share of coastal tourism as indexed by total spend, proportion of leisure trips, and especially their share of domestic trips. Across all four provinces and all three critical indicators the smaller non-metropolitan centres have advanced their share of coastal tourism with the only exception being a downturn recorded for domestic trips to the smaller centres of Eastern Cape. Three, these findings point to the importance of location of these smaller centres to the markets of the large metropolitan areas in explaining their relative performance in COVID-19 times. The best performing non-metropolitan coastal local municipalities have been those which can be easily accessed from metropolitan markets. Examples are Ray Nkonyeni close to eThekweni, Overstrand close to Cape Town, and the local municipalities that are proximate to the Nelson Mandela metropolitan area. Overall, these observations for South Africa are parallel to those found in other geographical research on COVID-19 impacts for coastal areas, most notably in Spain where as a result of risk perceptions tourists avoided both large urban destinations and major coastal tourist hotspots. This points to what Donaire et al. (2021:12) describe as the significance of location factors and most especially of proximity to home for understanding the uneven geographical impacts of COVID-19 for coastal tourism destinations.

## CONCLUSION

Recently, COVID-19 has been styled as a 'game-changer' event for global development (Sims et al. 2022). Few sectors were more adversely impacted by COVID-19 across the international record than tourism and hospitality. The public health crisis that ensued from the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has inflicted unprecedented negative disruption on South Africa's tourism economy. Arguably, these negative impacts potentially may take many years for recovery as a result of risk perceptions and changes in consumer travel preferences.

This paper has documented the pandemic induced impacts of COVID-19 for coastal destinations in South Africa in 2020. The key findings confirm the hollowing out of the tourism economies of coastal destinations with the leading

coastal cities those worst impacted. COVID-19 has caused a reversal of trends recorded for the past two decades for the benefits of coastal tourism to be concentrated in large cities. Instead, it has resulted in the relative improvement of smaller coastal centres and in particular of those localities which are relatively well-located for access to the domestic markets offered by large cities. These South African findings are another indication of changes in consumer psyche and travel behaviour as an outcome of COVID-19. Further research and analysis is essential to determine whether this observed trend is a short-term phenomenon or the beginnings of a new normal for coastal tourism destinations.

### Acknowledgements

Thanks to Arabella Rogerson for data analysis and editorial inputs. Arno Booyzen prepared the map. Robbie and Skye Norfolk as well as Lulu White are thanked for their helpful inputs.

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