



iSimangaliso

Wetland Park

WHERE MIRACLES NEVER END



General Overview: iSimangaliso Map



HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL MEANING OF PARK SECTIONS & FEATURES: PARK JEWELS

INTRODUCTION

This document aims to uncover the untold stories of the historical and cultural significance and value of features and place names, as told by those who lived in areas that were subsequently designated as protected for their biodiversity value within the iSimangaliso Wetland Park.

The process has included, where possible, interviews with individuals who have lived in these areas and is based on their recollections of stories as they occurred or were passed down by their parents or relatives. The areas covered here include Maphelane, Lake St Lucia, Eastern Shores, Mission Rocks, Catalina Bay, Cape Vidal, False Bay, uMkhuze, Sodwana Bay, Lake Sibaya, Coastal Forest, Kosi Bay, Western Shores and Charters Creek.

MAPHELANE

The name Maphelane originated from the Sokhulu people upon their arrival under the leadership of Inkosi Dingiswayo Mthiyane. The Sokhulu people migrated from the Mnambithi (Ladysmith) area after Inkosi Dingiswayo had a dream in which he was guided to lead his people to the end of the world. Maphelane is derived from the IsiZulu word “phela,” meaning “the end of something.”

When the Sokhulu people reached the high dune along the shores of the Indian Ocean, Inkosi Dingiswayo believed that it was the place he had envisioned in his dream. They sought to settle there; however, the Nyawo people already inhabited the area. To gain control of the land, the Sokhulu people had to confront the Nyawo people in battle. In their first attempt, the Sokhulus were defeated, but they returned to fight again and ultimately emerged victorious. Following their defeat, the Nyawos fled the area.

TOURISM VALUE

Maphelane is a popular base for fishermen and nature enthusiasts. There are two self-guided trails: one follows the edge of the estuary, while the other ascends the dunes to provide spectacular views of the ocean and river mouth. The Maphelane dune, standing at 183m, is iSimangaliso's highest and the world's second-highest vegetated dune.



ST. LUCIA TOWN

In the 1500s, Portuguese explorers “discovered” the mouth of the estuary, and in 1576, the estuary and the lake were named Saint Lucia. The town of St. Lucia was established in 1885, with the bridge constructed in the mid-1950s. Prior to that, a pont, also known as a “river ferry”, was used.

Local residents referred to the area where St. Lucia town is today as Enkokweni. There were three shops in the area, called KwaMeke, Skhumane, and Nomaqhuzu. This information comes from Ms Thethwayo, who was born in an area known as Nomdlembe on the Eastern Shores.

LAKE ST. LUCIA

Lake St. Lucia is part of the St. Lucia Estuarine System, the largest estuarine system in Africa and the oldest protected estuary in the world. Covering an area of 26,000 hectares, the lake's depth ranges from 1 to 2.5 metres. The Bhangazi people referred to Lake St. Lucia as “ichweba laseNhlengeni”. Like other estuaries, the level and salinity of the lower reaches of St. Lucia fluctuate according to the inflow of freshwater from several rivers and the influence of marine tides. In certain years, the water's salinity has reached three times the level of seawater in the northern parts of the lake, resulting in mass die-offs of aquatic plants and animals.



The watershed of St. Lucia covers several hundred square kilometres. In addition to water from the Indian Ocean that enters the mouth of the estuary, water from the uMkhuze, Nyalazi, uMphathe, and Hluhluwe rivers flows into the lake. To the south lie the Umfolozi Swamps. Over the last 25,000 years, natural forces, including wind, have shaped the world's highest forested dunes in this area.

TOURISM VALUE

Lake St. Lucia is Africa's largest estuarine system, stretching 80 km in length and 23 km in width at its broadest point. This dynamic habitat is home to over 800 hippos and 1200 crocodiles, and it supports large flocks of pelicans, flamingos, ducks, and waders, as well as a variety of fish and other aquatic species.

EASTERN SHORES

The inhabitants of the Eastern Shores were descendants of the Mbuyazi clan and were governed by the Mpukunyoni Tribal Authority from the 1870s. In 1909, with the demarcation of the Zululand Reserves, the tribal authority's control over the area was terminated. Between 1950 and 1974, the inhabitants were forcibly removed in accordance with the Forest and Veld Conservation Act, No. 13 of 1941.

TOURISM VALUE

The Eastern Shores is the ideal destination for both beach and safari enthusiasts. Various game viewing roads provide intimate access to diverse habitats, including dunes, grasslands, lakes, pans, and coastal dune forests. Lookout points offer panoramic vistas over a landscape shaped by human habitation during the Iron Age and by the Bhangazi people. Popular beach destinations can be found at Cape Vidal and Mission Rocks.



MISSION ROCKS

The area derives its name from the rocky shores of the beach and from the Norwegian missionaries who arrived at the Eastern Shores, settled, and built a church atop a sand dune. The church became well-known for the homemade bread that was baked and offered to churchgoers. The missionaries aimed to convert the Bhangazi community to Christianity and remained in the area until 1950, when the forced removals began.

TOURISM VALUE

Mission Rocks is an excellent location for daytime picnics. During low tide, the rock pools teem with fascinating marine life, and the dunes offer a breathtaking view of the lake, coastline, and ocean. While swimming is not advisable, the beach is perfect for a fun and safe day outdoors. Additionally, it's a fantastic spot for fisherman to cast their lines and savour the day.



CATALINA BAY

The bay was named after the Catalina “flying boats.” These aircraft were stationed on Lake St. Lucia, belonged to the Royal Air Force of England, and served in the Second World War. They were capable of landing and taking off on water, gliding across the surface like a boat, and were also fitted with wheels for landing on solid ground.

The lake served as an effective hiding place from German submarines. The first anti-submarine operations using Catalinas commenced in St. Lucia in 1942. In 1943, a Catalina crashed shortly after take-off, resulting in the deaths of eight individuals, with only one crew member surviving.

This area is part of a former isigodi of Okhwakhweni; however, no definition has been provided for it.

TOURISM VALUE

Catalina Bay is home to a diverse array of wildlife, including elephants, antelopes, and various other wildlife species. Visitors can enjoy game drives along the Eastern Shores, admiring the pristine beauty of the area. The lookout point also provides stunning views of Lake St. Lucia, allowing visitors to start and end their day amidst breathtaking sunsets and sunrises.



uMKHUZE

The name uMkhuze originates from the river's tendency to dry out for extended periods, only to suddenly fill up, often without any local rainfall. During drought periods, people would plough in the riverbeds and narrows, while some would dig into the sandy patches for water. Occasionally, when least expected, waves of water would surge from the Lubombo mountains, rapidly filling the river. During these times, people would call out warning messages to farmers and others, saying "mkhuze," meaning "warn others," to indicate that the river was filling up, thus cautioning them against drowning.

TOURISM VALUE

In this 38,500-hectare paradise, you can spot more than 420 different species of birds, making it a true haven for bird enthusiasts! Additionally, the presence of leopards, black and white rhinos, elephants, giraffes, wild dogs, cheetahs, hyenas, and various antelopes further enhances the area's biodiversity. A guided walk through the Sycamore Fig Forest and a visit to the Nsumo Pan are among the popular activities available for visitors at uMkhuze.



FALSE BAY

False Bay has a 1,000-year history, during which the Tsongo people occupied the area. Evidence of their presence dates back to the early 1890s, when the region was known as Tembeland or Thongaland. In 1895, St Lucia Game Park, including False Bay, was established as an early conservation initiative. The area was later expanded and protected with the creation of False Bay Park in 1944. In 1999, iSimangaliso Wetland Park became South Africa's first World Heritage Site, encompassing False Bay. Remarkably, 60 million years ago, this region was underwater, with fossil remains of animals and corals still found today.

TOURISM VALUE

This area showcases sand forest, thornveld, and open savannah. Popular activities include boating and fishing. Enjoy the view of Lake St Lucia at its widest point. Marine fossils, both animal and plant, can be observed in the local interpretive centre.



SODWANA BAY

Sodwana Bay is situated near the Mgobozeleni mouth. In this area, during high tide, fish and other edible marine resources would spill into Lake Mgobozeleni. When the tide receded, these creatures would lie exposed on the sand between Mgobozeleni and the ocean. The local residents from Mbazwana village would go out to collect fish using spears. When white people arrived, they observed this activity and began to harvest as well. The local people would chase them away, insisting that they must not harvest there, as the fish belonged to them alone (labofishi abethu sodwana). That is how the region came to be known as Sodwana. Previously, the entire area was known as Mbazwana, comprising various izigodi.

TOURISM VALUE

Sodwana Bay is regarded as one of the top ten dive destinations in the world. The coral reefs house over 1200 species of fish, along with a diverse array of underwater landscapes and marine flora and fauna. The Coelacanth was discovered in the deep Jesser Canyon, offshore from Sodwana Bay, in 2000.



LAKE SIBAYA

Lake Sibaya is the largest freshwater lake in South Africa. The Eastern Shores are fringed with a coastal dune forest that separates the lake's freshwater from the long, deserted beaches of the Indian Ocean, where dolphins, whales, and whale sharks are often spotted. The lake derives its Zulu name from its initial round shape, reminiscent of a cattle kraal, "isibaya". This was established by the Ndwandwe upon their arrival from Nongoma when they followed Zwile to settle in the Mbila area.

TOURISM VALUE

Sibaya is South Africa's largest freshwater lake. Nestled against forested coastal dunes, its crystal clear waters are home to KwaZulu-Natal's second-largest population of hippos and crocodiles.



COASTAL FOREST

Accessible solely by off-road vehicles, this part of the Park features the unspoilt beaches of Mabibi, Island Rock, Rocktail Bay, and Black Rock. Snorkelling and scuba diving are favourite activities. Large Strelitzias and stunning dune vistas characterise this area of the Park.



KOSI BAY

Kosi Bay is the northernmost part of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park World Heritage Site, bordering Mozambique. This region is not only spectacularly beautiful but is also rich in cultural history and traditions, with the descendants of the Thonga people still residing in the Park.

In this area, you will find the unique Thonga fish kraals and traps, crafted from natural materials such as mangrove branches, which represent the sustainable use of a natural resource that has existed for over 700 years. The palisade fish kraals consist of a guiding fence that curves in towards a fish trap, allowing fish easy entry while preventing escape. The traps are designed to enable smaller fish to escape, ensuring no significant impact on the thriving fish population. These structures are individually owned by families and are passed down from one generation to the next, providing a fascinating and visually stunning example of age-old traditions found nowhere else in South Africa. A personal tour may be arranged with the owner of a fish trap to demonstrate their use.

A spectacular viewpoint is Threlfall, on the way to the Kosi Bay estuary mouth, which offers sweeping views across the lake towards the densely vegetated dunes at the mouth. The name Kosi Bay is somewhat misleading, as instead of being a true bay, it is, in fact, a system of four interlinking lakes fed by the Siyadla River and the Nswamanzi River, which open to the sea at a wide, shallow estuary mouth. The lakes are connected by winding channels along which boats gently cruise.

Visitors may join one of several licensed operators on a cruise to fully experience the benefits of the lake system, which is notable as one of iSimangaliso's four RAMSAR sites (wetlands of international importance). Resident wildlife includes hippos, crocodiles, and smaller game such as antelopes, rare thornbush squirrels, and monkeys. Travelling from the estuary mouth inland and south, these lakes are named Makhawulani, Mpungwini, Nhlanga, and Amanzimnyama. The largest and deepest of these, at over 30m, Nhlanga is a popular destination for boat fishing among both visitors and local residents. Amanzimnyama is a sanctuary accessible to the public only through an exclusive concession currently held by the Kosi Forest Lodge, which offers guided kayak trips from the Siyadla River into the lake itself.

TOURISM VALUE

Kosi Bay consists of four lakes interconnected by a network of waterways. It is recognised as one of the best locations in the world for fly fishing, while also providing exceptional snorkelling opportunities.

Fishing traditions, sustained through generations, have persisted for 700 years. Furthermore, Kosi Bay hosts the only natural stand of *Raphia* palms, as well as all of South Africa's mangrove species.



WESTERN SHORES AND CHARTERS CREEK

The Department of Forestry utilised this section of the Park for commercial plantations until the early 2000s, when the Park decided to rehabilitate the area and reintroduce game that had been known to exist naturally in the past. The area is naturally a floodplain, with narrow strips of Lake St. Lucia having formed grasslands, which provide an important habitat for grazing game.

Makakatana Bay Lodge

Makakatana Bay Lodge is named after a Zulu Chief known as “Chief Makhakhathana”, who lived in the area many years ago. The logo of the crab of Makakatana Bay Lodge was chosen because the land on which the Lodge currently stands featured an old concrete block house built by John Kemp Morrison (Jock), who used it to store fish and crabs in the early 1900s. The ‘crab’ house was later abandoned due to the intense summer heat and the ban on commercial crab catching, and when the Lodge was built, it was initially used as a wine cellar. The old building has since been retired due to the invasive roots of a fig tree, but it remains a wonderful feature. James (Jimmy) and Ursula Morrison, parents to the current owners of the Lodge, resided at Makakatana for 50 years before relocating to Ballito on the KwaZulu-Natal north coast. The Morrisons owned a shop known as KwaMafutha, which served the communities of Bhangazi and Mfekayi until the 1950s.

TOURISM VALUE

Observe elephants, buffalo, rhinos and leopards, as well as giraffes, tsessebe and other species of antelope or relax and take in the panoramic views of Lake St. Lucia and the Eastern Shore dunes.



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Mr. Elmon Mkhonto, Kosi Bay
Mr. J. Mabika – Lake Sibaya
iSimangaliso visitor map
Other

CONCLUSION

This document will remain a work in progress and shall encourage research and scripting of all vital history that should be recognised and valued as part of the Park's heritage.



iSIMANGALISO WETLAND PARK

GEF-7 FUNDED PROJECTS

The Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment has launched the GEF-7 project titled **“Catalyzing Financing and Capacity for the Biodiversity Economy around Protected Areas.”**

This project is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and is implemented with the support of the World Bank. iSimangaliso Wetland Park, South African National Parks (SANParks), and the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) serve as implementing agents of the GEF-7 project.



The objective of this project is to increase investment in protected areas and promote the South African biodiversity economy. This goal aligns with the objectives of iSimangaliso Wetland Park, which seeks to empower historically disadvantaged communities residing in and adjacent to the Park. The Park has approved a variety of benefits as part of its community-beneficial scheme.



This GEF-7 investment further facilitates the implementation of the community scheme.

Enhancing the livelihoods of communities neighbouring iSimangaliso remains a primary objective for the iSimangaliso Wetland Park. The GEF-7 project, in collaboration with iSimangaliso, has implemented initiatives that are already benefiting community members. GEF-7 funding is being utilised to support three boat concessionaires by providing new boats, boat replacement engines, and safety and snorkeling equipment to improve their business/operations. The boat concessionaires have also received training and obtained their boating permits through the iSimangaliso SMME Programme. Furthermore, the GEF-7 project will assist in constructing a boat harbour where passengers will embark.

The GEF-7 project is supporting the development of the Biodiversity Stewardship Programme and is presently in the process of declaring three community areas namely Makhasa CCA, Nibela CCA, and Mabasa CCA, as protected areas. These CCAs will also receive assistance with game donations, infrastructure development, and other forms of support.

Makhasa CCA received governance and leadership training from iSimangaliso, with further training scheduled. Furthermore, through GEF-7 funding, iSimangaliso donated 12 giraffes to Makhasa CCA. This funding will also be utilised to conduct biodiversity assessments that will determine the biodiversity value, which in turn, will determine the stewardship category that Makhasa CCA, Nibela CCA, and Mabasa CCA qualify for.

The iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority established the Enterprise Programme in 2008 to enhance economic empowerment opportunities for neighbouring communities. The iSimangaliso Enterprise Programme aims to tackle the socio-economic inequalities present in and around communities adjacent to protected areas. The promotion and development of small, medium, and micro enterprises are crucial interventions carried out by the iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority. This is in line with South Africa's white paper on small businesses that highlights the need to assist SMMEs with access to information, business advice, finance, and procurement from small enterprises.

iSimangaliso prioritises businesses more closely linked to conservation, tourism, and infrastructure. Through its support for small enterprises across various sectors, iSimangaliso is helping to reduce the high unemployment rate faced by the District of uMkhanyakude.

To date, the programme has supported over 400 local entrepreneurs through training and mentorship and has awarded small grants to some beneficiaries. The types of businesses that have received support range from tour operators and hospitality to lodging, boat tours, food preparation, cultural tours, homestays, campsites, the ocean economy, water purification, and nurseries.



Through the GEF-7 funding, iSimangaliso was able to boost the biodiversity economy within the District by providing support that creates opportunities for communities to engage in the green economy. The GEF-7 involvement facilitated the provision of financial and technical assistance to selected Small and Medium Enterprises (SMMEs) in the project nodes, with a particular focus on women-led SMMEs. Beneficiaries of the GEF-7 project receive a comprehensive package of SMME support services, which includes training and mentoring for both existing and new entrepreneurs to develop business plans, as well as mentorship and grants to assist SMMEs in integrating new businesses into existing value chains. The support provided to SMMEs is tailored to their needs, depending on the operational level of their businesses.

Beneficiaries of GEF-7 include homestays, boating concessions, and fishing cooperatives that have received funding from GEF-7 (UNDP Small Grant).

TYPE OF SUPPORT OFFERED TO SMMEs:

Technical Support and Training:

These include classroom-based training and the development of business skills, such as:

- Financial management training
- Business management training
- Customer service
- Production/Innovation
- Quality control
- Pricing of goods and services
- Marketing

Mentorship Support:

Individual mentoring sessions concentrate on each business and its progress. Visits to individual businesses are also used to verify information that entrepreneurs have conveyed about their businesses.

Financial Support:

After completing the class-based training, a funding application is submitted. Once completed, all necessary enterprises receive support grants in the form of equipment.

Market Development & Linkages:

Business opportunities in the iSimangaliso supply chain are offered to SMMEs. Referrals and opportunities for networking and presenting their product.

GEF-7 BENEFICIARIES FROM HOMESTAYS (6)

1. Blue Horizon
2. uKuthula Adventures
3. Sizakala
4. iZinyoni
5. Little Paradise
6. Hlalanathi

THE SUPPORT PROVIDED INCLUDES:

- Business related training.
- Company registration and business compliance.
- Rehabilitation of homestay.
- Marketing and business incubation.

GEF-7 BENEFICIARIES FOR BOATING CONCESSIONS (3)

1. Kosi Thonga Safaris
2. Hlabezimhlophe Trading
3. uKuthula Adventures

THE SUPPORT PROVIDED INCLUDES:

- Business related training.
- Compliance documents to operate at Kosi Bay Lake.
- Boats, boat replacement engines, safety equipment and snorkelling equipment.
- Marketing and business incubation; this includes exposing potential tourists to their activities through the iSimangaliso website.

UNDP SMALL GRANT BENEFICIARIES (3)

1. Nibela Fishing Co-op has 106 members.
2. Dukuduku Khayelisha Co-op has 98 members.
3. Siyazama St Lucia Market has 74 members.

THE SUPPORT PROVIDED INCLUDES:

- Fishing boats, fishing gear, and a functioning packhouse (container and cold room).
- Renovation and rehabilitation of the art and craft market structure.
- Business development training.
- Leadership and governance training.
- Assistance with compliance documents.
- Business plan and preparing reports.

To ensure that communities are well informed, educated, and equipped with relevant biodiversity activities, iSimangaliso Wetland Park, through the GEF-7, conducts learning exchanges with various communities living in and adjacent to the Park. These learning exchanges are hosted to enable communities to share information that will assist them in developing their businesses and increasing their revenue.

Thus far, iSimangaliso Wetland Park has hosted a three-day community learning exchange at Hluhluwe from 10 to 13 September 2024. This learning exchange aimed to familiarise communities residing in and adjacent to the iSimangaliso node with biodiversity stewardship under the theme “Building Biodiversity Economy Nodes for Community Stewardship and Livelihoods.” Another four-day community learning exchange was conducted at Kruger National Park and the Bela Bela Communal Property Association (CPA) from 10 to 13 February 2025. The primary objective of this trip was to familiarise traditional leaders with the opportunities that can be derived from the protected areas under their care, as well as to provide them with information related to commercialisation. iSimangaliso is working tirelessly to ensure that communities have the relevant information and support they need to thrive.





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