

# It's not just about the animals — monitoring the impacts of SANParks week, Kruger National Park

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*SANParks week visitors from a village near Tzaneen, looking forward to another enjoyable day in Kruger. Currently, about 50 000 people visit the park from local villages and towns during SANParks week.*

**S**ANParks Week started in 2007 as one of several mechanisms to re-connect people to the cultural and natural heritage within parks. Historical conservation-based injustices distanced people from parks in South Africa and efforts such as SANParks Week build bridges across park borders, especially for people neighbouring parks.

**ALTHOUGH SOME PEOPLE TRAVEL FROM FAR, PARTICIPATION IN SANPARKS WEEK IN KRUGER NATIONAL PARK IS MOSTLY LOCAL, WITH MANY REPEAT VISITORS. PEOPLE COME TO SEE ANIMALS AND MEET NEW PEOPLE, AND DESPITE CONCERNS TO THE CONTRARY, THE INCREASE IN VISITOR NUMBERS DURING SANPARKS WEEK DOES NOT NEGATIVELY IMPACT OVERNIGHT GUESTS**

*"We come every year during SANParks week, and we come other times as well. We are all pensioners. Last week we went in Phalaborwa. Today we are going in Orpen."*



The impact of SANParks week goes beyond the increasing numbers of participants (currently 50 000 people participate each year nationally) and interviewing visitors revealed that the majority of visitors are from villages and towns adjacent to the park (78%) and had visited Kruger previously (82%). Although visitors wanted to see (and subsequently enjoyed seeing) animals during their visit, many were hoping to also meet new people and see new places, with the swimming pools a highlight of many visits.



*SANParks Week visitors from Phalaborwa area, showing their free of charge entry permit.*

*"I have come to see and meet people, today maybe I will find a friend from Sweden or Canada..."*

**S**ANParks Week does not extend to overnight guests. However, research shows that people who were overnighing at the time were not negatively impacted on their tourism experience due to the increased visitors. Visitors also suggested extending SANParks week to include a weekend, to allow for people who work and with school-going children to also participate. Learning new things and building social connections make people happy, and this research suggests that SANParks week is making that happen.