

uShaka Marine World: Past, Present and Future

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Legends and ghosts of the past The eastern shipping trade routes off our KwaZulu-Natal coastline have tempted many men to brave the jagged rocks, dangerous currents and treacherous seas in search of fame and fortune. They were intrepid explorers, foolhardy sea dogs, early pioneers and entrepreneurs. Whether successful or lured to an early watery grave, they have become part of Durban's fascinating nautical history - a tantalising mix of truth, mystery, and legend … even ghost stories. You will find this rich tapestry of history reflected in uShaka MARINE WORLD's exceptional centrepiece – on the outside a wreck of a 1920s steamer snared on rocks in a lagoon; and inside, a fascinating underwater world of wrecks and shark-infested waters that bring these seafaring stories to life.

Phantom Ship Sailors tell of a phantom ship, first seen at the turn of the last century, sailing towards Durban's harbour. Stevedores noticed it at dusk, rounding the Bluff headland, with just one blue-green light swinging at the fore. They waited for the small steamship – but it never arrived! A few weeks later it was seen again; a little closer to shore, moving slowly, with the same eerie blue-green light. It had no name, failed to answer any signals and no flags flew … it wasn't long before it was known as the phantom ship. Early one evening two fishermen saw the phantom ship and came up close. They shouted, but there was no answer. It was a calm night and the ship stayed still, almost lifeless. The braver of the two men boarded the ship. Minutes later he shouted down to his mate. There was nobody to be seen, only a cat and some old maps – and a long curved pipe that was still warm. He then held up two green bottles and threw one down to the fishing boat, saying he was getting off the deserted steamer. Eager to hear more the fisherman waited for his friend to appear - but he never did. Frantically the sailor called for his mate. He rowed around the vessel, but there was no sign of life. No sound or movement at all - except for the ghostly swish of water as it lapped against the vessels. Scared, for his own life and that of his mate, the fisherman rowed back to shore for help. A rescue party went out – but there was no sign of the ship. Like a phantom, it had disappeared into the night; and the missing fisherman was never heard of again. The legend lives on. The phantom ship has not been sighted since, although some nights, usually in the calm before a storm, a blue-green light can be seen a short distance from the entrance to Durban's harbour … If you look carefully around the shipwreck at uShaka MARINE WORLD you will find an old curved pipe – the sort that bearded captains of yore might have puffed and pulled upon. But don't touch it – it is still warm. In another part of the ship you will find an old green glass bottle – the one thrown down from the side of the phantom ship. Inside is a note that reads: "Find the map and you will find the treasure." While this map might not be the original map that will take you to the Kruger millions, we do suggest that you follow the map around uShaka MARINE WORLD to find your very own treasure trove of fun and adventure! uShaka MARINE WORLD holds the undiscovered treasures of the sea – and fun adventures for everyone. Explore the present: Explore the new worlds of treasure at the exciting uShaka MARINE WORLD – one of the 10 largest aquariums in the world – set to open its doors for the first time on Friday, 30 April 2004. uShaka MARINE WORLD is a world-class 16-hectare marine theme park, tastefully developed into an African sub-tropical beach paradise - and it is about to become one of Durban's top tourist attractions, offering waves of fun and adventure for everyone. Treasure troves of adventure The southern end of Durban's "Golden Mile" has been transformed into a dreamscaped water adventure wonderland, offering worlds of entertainment in four exciting new zones: uShaka Sea World, uShaka Wet ‘n Wild, uShaka Beach and uShaka Village Walk … everything from lazy days spent on sun-drenched beaches to swimming with sea life in the snorkel reef and heart-stopping rides down adventure water slides. uShaka Sea World: uShaka Sea World incorporates a unique shipwreck-themed aquarium (the largest aquarium in Africa – with 17 500 cubic metres of water), a 1 200-seater dolphin stadium (also the largest dolphinarium in Africa), a seal pool and penguin rookery – and interactive activities in the dive tank, snorkel reef and touch pool. The life-size 1920s era cargo steamer run aground between rocks and lagoons in the heart of uShaka MARINE WORLD is perfect for the intrepid adventurer. It incorporates a number of restaurants (including the unique shark restaurant) and nearly half a kilometre of themed viewing around seven massive aquarium tanks and 25 smaller exhibits. You will need to wind your way below deck to explore the shipwrecks in the shark-infested waters of South Africa's east coast. Look out for unique sea creatures and other treasures in the 1600s Spanish Galleon; make your way carefully through the passenger steamer – the structural damage she suffered twisted some of her part upside down … she could fall apart any moment! Come nose to snout with the star of 'Jaws' with just a few millimetres of glass between you as you traverse the wreckage of a 1970s cargo ship. See the largest collection of sharks in the southern hemisphere and wind your way – carefully – through the shipwreck as you discover the wonders and dangers of the deep. Landlubbers can touch a starfish, or feel a sea cucumber in the touch pool at the rocky shore, or paddle with the sea creatures in the snorkel lagoon. Be sure to swim past the outside of the shark tank, imagining a little nibble on your toes. The brave and adventurous can take the plunge in the shark dive tank and be lowered in a protective cage to meet the world's most fearsome marine predators! Visit the Dolphin Stadium and be enchanted by world-famous Gambit and his mammalian friends. Nothing beats the power and grace of the dolphins as they enthral you with a combination of strength, gentleness and agility – and don't forget to watch them in action under water at the specially designed viewing windows. The seals at the seal stadium will entertain you with their clever tricks, and a visit to uShaka Sea World is not complete without popping in to the penguin rookery to say hello to the best-dressed residents of uShaka MARINE WORLD. A special behind the scenes tour is available, taking you to see the large pumps and reticulation systems used to feed the salt water aquarium tanks, as well as uShaka Sea World's research stations, sick bay and rehabilitation areas for injured marine life.

uShaka Wet ‘n Wild: uShaka Wet ‘n Wild is the ultimate freshwater entertainment centre - a fun freshwater

world of slides and pools catering for the adrenalin junkie - and those slightly less adventurous. The adventure set can climb up to the top of the heart-stopping and adrenalin pumping Stuka freefall slide for the best view on site and plummet downward for a gravity-defying wild ride. If that still leaves you looking for more, you can try the Kamikaze ride for thrills of gut-wrenching pleasure, or race in sets of fearless five down the five-lane racer. The less adventurous can relax on sand, lawn or deck and watch the children on the kiddies slides or cool off in one of the sparkling pools. For a tamer ride on the wild side try the open super tube rides or embark on a 450m adventure river ride around the unique marine theme park, and through the wreck of the cargo steamer, exploring rapids and passing the shark tank as you drink in the sub-tropical surrounds.

uShaka Beach: Durban is famous for its warm sub-tropical climate and lazy days spent on golden miles of sun-drenched beaches, and uShaka Beach in front of the uShaka MARINE WORLD is no exception, set aside for perfect pleasure and all-year-round action. uShaka Beach offers everything from the simple pleasures of sunbathing, building sand castles, and paddling in the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, to non-stop beach and surf action including windsurfing, kayaking, beach volleyball, beach rugby, surfing, jet skiing, kite surfing, paddle boat rides - as well as national and international beach sport events. It's sizzling with hot entertainment and action; simply put: it's the place to be!

uShaka Village Walk: Durban is renowned for its market shopping experiences and its variety of cuisine. Take a stroll along uShaka Village Walk, drink in the stunning vista and feel the excitement of the activities at uShaka MARINE WORLD. The smell of tantalisingly tasty food mingles with the cool sea breeze as you walk at leisure through the African-themed uShaka Village Walk - a retail heaven and culinary adventure rolled into one. Dine in style at the Shark restaurant, sharing your meal with a three-storey view of these cold-blooded creatures of the deep; or choose from one of dozens of outlets (from fast food, to family, to speciality cuisine) offering tempting bites with panoramic sea views. And for those in need of a little retail shopping therapy, uShaka Village Walk also offers a large selection of retail outlets focusing on outdoor recreation and clothing, sporting equipment, arts, crafts, curios and other fun items. Just the place to snap up that perfect gift or spoil yourself with a special memento to treasure. Preserving for the future While uShaka MARINE WORLD is billed as one of Durban's premier tourist attractions and a world-class adventure-seeker's paradise, it is more than all that. It is home to the South African Association of Marine Biological Research (SAAMBR) and the Oceanographic Research Institute (ORI) and as such uShaka MARINE WORLD plays an important role in marine research and conservation. SAAMBR was established in Durban in 1959 and since then it has undertaken a wide spectrum of activities focusing on the preservation and conservation of the region's rich marine heritage. ORI is the research and educational wing of SAAMBR and together they have, over the past 40-odd years, become internationally recognised as a leading marine biological research institute, conducting research assignments along almost the entire eastern seaboard of Africa. SAAMBR's new larger premises within uShaka Sea World, complete with sickbays and research stations, will serve to bolster its good work and provide an environment conducive to further world-class research and conservation initiatives. Catch the action - from 30 April Adventure Ahoy! Make uShaka MARINE WORLD your next port of call. This article appeared in What, Where, When and a shorter version in What's On