



Family tragedy

Since the beaches were told to be pure paradise, and since the weather was fine that morning and the sea looked calm, Bavo Verheyden (21) and his brother Bart (29) went into the water. The two Belgian young men, who were spending their holiday at the Wild Coast, were not aware of the dangers of the ocean. They had never heard of unexpected rip currents and high waves. And nothing or nobody spoke against their plan. But Bavo and Bart got into serious problems.

Bart survived the ocean, Bavo didn't. April 18th 2011 turned into a tragedy for all of us.

Holiday drowning

Each year an estimated 400.000 foreign as well as domestic tourists die by drowning in the sea¹. The main cause is the tourists' unawareness or underestimation of the dangers of the sea. Many of them come from regions or countries where the sea is far away and – by consequence – no attention is paid to open water swimming tips and training. The absence of the sea in their daily lives makes those tourists completely unacquainted with the dangers of the sea.

Our mission

To give sense to Bavo's death we will take all possible measures to avoid coastal tourism drowning, primarily in South Africa but also globally.

Prevention makes the difference

Only the joint efforts of lifesaving organizations and all touristic stakeholders, at home as well as in the country of destination, to undertake preventive measurements will reduce coastal drowning: the provision of accurate and uniform information by means of safety warnings is a very important strategic tool. Our organization therefore fights misleading and/or untruthful slogans to attract unaware tourists. Leaflets, signs and flags, guidebooks in touristic centers and in accommodations, and information videos, have proved to be efficient tools to prompt beachgoers to a safer behavior at the seaside.

Our actions on October 26th and 27th 2012

Out of concern for the safety of future beachgoers as well as in loving memory of our beloved Bavo, we will plant five signage boards on Ntafufu beach, the beach where Bavo drowned. The boards are in accordance with the safety messages, colors and symbols which are used by the International Life Saving Federation. The Municipality of Port St Johns agrees upon our action.

On Friday, October 26th a meeting is planned with local touristic stakeholders and with the press. This conference will deal with safe coastal tourism and discuss tools and strategies to reduce the number of ocean drownings of domestic and foreign tourists.

The planting of the five safety signs is planned on Saturday, October 27th.

¹Source: International Life Saving Federation (ILS), the world authority for drowning prevention and lifesaving.