



# Safe Coastal Tourism N.P.O.

Dr. Caroline Danneels

Rome, 12/7/2012

*Straighten your shoulders,  
think and do what you feel you should do!*  
**Bavo**

## What happened on 18/4/2011?

- ❑ Bavo (21) visits his brother Bart (29) in SA
- ❑ A roadtrip
- ❑ A guesthouse in Port St Johns, referred to by a friend of Bart



## What happened on 18/4/2011?

- ❑ Bavo (21) visits his brother Bart (29) in SA
- ❑ A roadtrip
- ❑ A guesthouse in Port St Johns, referred to by a friend of Bart
- ❑ No swimming pool, only a reservoir
- ❑ It is obvious that guests go to the beach for a swim



Last photo Bavo took

3

## What happened on 18/4/2011?

- ❑ Bavo (21) visits his brother Bart (29) in SA
- ❑ A roadtrip
- ❑ A guesthouse in Port St Johns, referred to by a friend of Bart
- ❑ No swimming pool, only a reservoir
- ❑ It is obvious that guests go to the beach for a swim
- ❑ No warnings in the resort, no signage on the beach
- ❑ A seemingly calm sea
- ❑ An unexpected rip current
- ❑ Springtide 4 hours later

04-10	FQtr	04-11	04-12	04-13
L0054	0.8	L0155	0.9	L0354
H0704	0.6	H0803	1.5	H1036
L1319	0.8	L1436	0.5	L1646
H1941	1.1	H2119	1.5	H2329
04-17	Full	04-18	04-19	04-20
H0302	2.2	H0340	2.2	H0417
L0913	0.3	L0951	0.2	L1008
H1521	0.1	H1559	2.2	H1637
L2127	0.2	L2205	0.2	L2243
04-24	LQtr	04-25	04-26	04-27
L0126	0.9	L0240	1.0	L0450
H0734	0.5	H0852	1.4	H1104
L1351	0.9	L1519	1.0	L1721
H2020	1.5	H2209	1.4	H2358

## What are rip currents?



Rip currents typically occupy deep channels between sandbars. Wave breaking is therefore reduced and the water appears **calm**.

A lack of knowledge regarding rip currents and identification appear to be risk factors for coastal drowning.

Consequently, people unfamiliar with rip currents often choose to enter the water where there is a rip current, unaware of the danger, citing that “calm water means it is safe to swim”.

*Ballantyne R, Carr N, Hughes K. Between the flags: an assessment of domestic and international university students knowledge of beach safety in Australia, Tourism Man 2005; 26(4): 617-22*

5

## Fact: holiday drowning

- ❑ bad luck? wrong place? wrong moment?
  - so no one to blame?
  - so drowning not preventable?
- ❑ research
  - Abstracts International Life Saving Federation's World Conference on Drowning Prevention 2011

Presented by



**WORLD CONFERENCE ON DROWNING PREVENTION 2011**

VIETNAM

10-13 MAY

Supported by



*Building a global platform to reduce drowning*

- Statistics? No! → I surfed on the internet, looking myself for news articles on drowning accidents → impressive list
- Reports of Surf Life Saving Australia on tourist ocean drowning

6

## Fact: holiday drowning

- ❑ *Being a tourist, and therefore being unfamiliar with local water risks and features, is recognized as an increased risk of drowning. (WHO)*
- ❑ *About 400.000 people drown in the sea because they don't know or underestimate the dangers of the sea. Most of them are inland tourists. We assume that 2 %, namely 8.000 people, are foreign tourists, which means that – worldwide – one foreign tourist per hour is dying by drowning in the sea. (ILS, Secretary General, Dr. H. Vervaecke)*

7

## Health, safety and security info?

### Implementation of Article 6 of the Global Code?

Travel brochures, travel guides, travel vouchers, websites 'selling' beautiful destinations  
→ no safety advice, either very poor advice and limited to protection against crime, either false or misleading pretending there are no risks at all!  
(≈ 'false advertising')

8

# Health, safety and security info?

EX. 1. <http://www.portstjohns.org.za/beaches.htm> (2011)

## Africa: Port St Johns Transkei

Second Beach is about 12 kilometers south of the town along a tar road. It is an idyllic bathing beach - very safe for swimming as it has a very gentle slope. There is a full life-guard contingent as well and there has never been a shark attack there. The pictures below speak for themselves. Third Beach is only accessible with a permit and is composed mainly of rocks and rock pools.

Beaches

incorrect

### Surfer killed in shark attack

2011-01-15 23:24

East London - A surfer was killed by a shark in the sea at Second Beach, Port St Johns in the Eastern Cape on Saturday, Surfing South Africa said.


Shamase was the fifth shark victim at the notorious beach in the last three years. Four of the attacks have been fatal, the report said.

<http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Surfer-killed-in-horrific-shark-attack-20110115>

# Health, safety and security info?

EX. 2. Resort Port St Johns

misleading



front of the dining hall and see the constellations as clear as you would in a planetarium!

- **Swimming and Surfing:** Our lagoon is clean, our beaches are wide, unspoiled and great for swimming (and surfing). In season we have lifesavers from Port St Johns on our main beach. Out of season it is all yours - Pure Paradise! The distance to the beach is about 2,5km. Drive or walk down to the river. Take the canoes / rowboat to the beach or cross the river and walk the remaining section. The walk is highly recommended for the surrounding natural beauty. It takes 15 to 45 minutes depending on your mode of transport.

Promoting swimming at patrolled beaches gives rise to the misconception a beach is safe,...

...when in fact it is the patrolling by lifeguards that makes the difference. Surf Life Saving Australia reported that between 2005 and 2007, more than a half of beach drowning deaths occurred on lifeguarded beaches outside of lifeguard patrol hours.

## Health, safety and security info?

EX. 3.

### Luxury Self Catering Holiday Accommodation

#### *Treligga - nr. Port Isaac - North Cornwall* Caradoc of Tregardock sleeps 8 people

Welcome to North Cornwall's Caradoc of Tregardock, a place to relax and be inspired. Here there are crashing breakers, wild flowers, sea birds and yachts in the bay. Walk down to the tidal beach and make footprints in its 2 miles of golden sand, explore the rock pools or surf the waves if you dare.



**irresponsible**



Yet the area is known by the local people as dangerous !

At high tide the sea comes right up to the cliffs – which can catch some beachgoers unawares.

9/4/2012: Son forced to make agonizing decision to let go of drowning dad to save himself from giant waves.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2127222/Son-forced-make-agonising-decision-let-drowning-dad-save-giant-aves.html#ixzz233IVecUN><sup>1</sup>

## Health, safety and security info?

### Implementation of Article 1 of the Global Code?

- Embassies/sites of foreign affairs fail to give (correct) advice related to swimming in the oceans.
- According to SA's tourist info hotline ([www.southafricanet.info](http://www.southafricanet.info)), "Health and Safety in SA":
  - no advice on protection against the risks of the sea
  - "safety and security" = protection against crime

## Health, safety and security info?

### Implementation of Article 1 of the Global Code?

Whilst member states of UNWTO ensure they endorse the Ethical Code:

- **Flanders:**  
the decree on travel agencies in Flanders will be given up, starting 1 / 1 / 2014!
- **South Africa:**  
“safety and security” restricted to measures against crime

13

## Health, safety and security info?

Yet, the last interpretation of s & s is not consistent with:

*Planning for tourism safety and security requires consideration of risks originating in four source areas:*

- *human and institutional environment outside the tourism sector*
- *the tourism sector and related commercial sectors*
- *personal risks of the individual traveller*
- ***physical or environmental risks due to the traveller's ignorance or passive approach to potential risks***

(Tourist safety & security, Practical Measures for Destinations, WTO, 1996)

14

## Health, safety and security info?

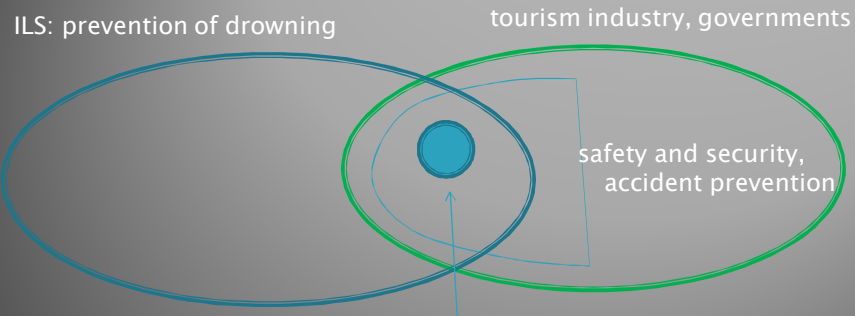
*Following September 11 the whole focus for tourism globally became one of crisis management and business recovery after a crisis rather than incident prevention.*

*Water safety has been left to ILS or local government councils who supply lifeguards for their own beaches.*

Jef Wilks, University of Queensland Australia  
 Stephen J. Page, University of Stirling, Scotland, U.K.  
 Managing tourist health and safety in the new millennium

15

## Our appeal



Efforts from both sectors should be combined to fight against ocean drowning of tourists

UNWTO must be the binding element between life saving organizations and tourism and governments to join these efforts!

16



## Our appeal

- ❑ Legal duty of care
- ❑ Legal duty of information
- ❑ For all touristic stakeholders:  
travel organizers, accommodations, travel guides,  
transport companies in the touristic sector,...
- ❑ To protect tourists from physical and  
environmental risks, including risks of the sea (rip  
currents, (spring)tides, high waves, ...), of which  
they are not aware because of being tourists

Why is legal duty of information  
so urgently needed?

## To reduce ocean drowning of tourists!

- ❑ The coastline is always going to evolve!  
(<http://www.ngo.grida.no/soesa/nsoer/issues/coast/index.htm>)  
→ treacherous unexpected quick changing sea conditions are not surprising: rip currents, high waves, tide working, ... → **tourists are unaware.**
- ❑ No information from hotel-, resort- managers, from local community, from municipality  
→ **the tourist is expected to have the good sense to determine himself whether it is safe to swim or not.**
- ❑ The number of tourists visiting beaches worldwide is growing.

## To reduce ocean drowning of tourists!

- ❑ Travel agents, tourism service providers fear the effects of creating a negative impression of health and safety and security risks associated with a destination or their business: they fear tourists will stay away  
→ **risks are concealed by the touristic sector.**
- ❑ NSRI versus ILS / rescue versus prevention / different lifeguard criteria, ...
- ❑ Reflection, testing on the effectiveness of measures is needed! Look at the Australian example!
- ❑ "*Bathing at own risk*" – signage is ineffective, if a tourist is unaware of the risks!

## To reduce ocean drowning of tourists!

- Against fatigue, fatalism, 'there is nothing we can do': "*The Wild Coast is a paradise most of the time, with miles of beaches and gentle waves which children lay in with very little fear, ...*" says a NSRI-man.
- It is not effective that the protection of health, safety and security of the tourist depend on the **goodwill** of tourism providers.

## Only goodwill is not effective!

- NPO Safe Coastal Tourism depends on the goodwill of touristic stakeholders and governments! Many doors stay closed, many mails stay unanswered!  
Why? There is no legal basis to refer to.
- Each act, each strategy should be tested on his effectiveness! If not, money, lifes and enthousiasm will be lost.
- Tourist protection shouldn't rely on the goodwill of lifeguarding groups.  
Tourist protection is a human right:  
*"We, the experts, believe that the ability of citizens of all countries to travel in safety is a fundamental human right."* (WTO, 1996)

UNWTO must give leadership on this matter, and put more pressure to international instruments, national governments to implement duty of care and duty of information in their legal system.

23

## Thanks!

- To Secretary General Mr. Taleb Rifai and the United Nations World Tourism Organization for the invitation to give me the opportunity to share my experiences with you.
- To International Life Saving Federation, for their research and publications, and for their constructive advice.
- To you, members of the World Committee on Tourism Ethics for your attention and your work for a responsible and sustainable tourism.

24

## NPO Safe Coastal tourism

Is a non-profit association in Flanders, Belgium (nr. 0844.745.581) established by the family and friends of a promising young man from Flanders - Belgium, Bavo Verheyden (21), who became a drowning victim on April 18th, 2011 at a beach near Port St Johns at the Eastern Coast of South Africa.

The vision of the organisation is a world free of coastal tourism drowning.

The mission of the organisation is to undertake all possible measures to avoid coastal tourism drowning, primarily in South Africa but also globally.

Contact: [info@safecoastaltourism.org](mailto:info@safecoastaltourism.org)

Website: <http://www.safecoastaltourism.org>