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Pandemics and Heritage: understanding the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Archaeotourism in South Africa

Nithya Eswaran



2522121

Supervisor: Dr. Thembiwe Russell

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of MSc, Archaeology,

University of the Witwatersrand in 2023

SCHOOL OF GEOGRAPHY, ARCHAEOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

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Plagiarism Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree MSc. by research in Archaeology at the University of the Witwatersrand. It has not been previously submitted for any other degree at any other university.

Nithya Eswaran Date: 30 April 2024

Abstract

The project explores the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on archaeotourism at three public visitation sites in South Africa. According to the 2021 UNESCO report on the impact of Covid-19 on heritage tourism, visitors to Africa decreased by 71% in 2020. The drop significantly impacted the revenue of the continent (UNESCO 2021). This research focuses on assessing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic locally by examining two UNESCO World Heritage sites: the Sterkfontein Caves in the Cradle of Humankind, Gauteng Province, and Main Caves in Giant's Castle Game Reserve, KwaZulu-Natal Province. The third study site is the Origins Centre Museum at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. These sites are open to tourists for guided tours. Quantitative data from Kruger National Park is collated to analyse the pandemic's influence on public, nature-based sites for comparison to culture sites.

Ethics clearance: Protocol No: H22/08/5

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Table of Contents

Plagiarism Declaration……2

Abstract……3

Acknowledgements……4

Table of Contents……5

List of Figures……10

List of Tables……12

Chapter 1: Introduction……13

1.1 Comparison of Nature-Based and Culture-Based Tourism Strategies during the Pandemic:……15

1.2 Research Question……16

1.3 Aims……16

1.4 Rationale……17

1.5 Study Area……17

1.5.1 Sterkfontein Caves……18

1.5.2 Main Caves (Maloti-Drakensberg World Heritage Site)……21

1.5.3 The Origins Centre, University of the Witwatersrand 24

Chapter 2: Literature Review 27

2.1 Archaeotourism 27

2.2 Archaeotourism in South Africa 29

2.3 Coronavirus and the Tourism Industry 31

2.3.1 Impact of COVID-19 on airports, cruises, and the hospitality industry 37

2.3.2 Impact of Covid-19 on heritage sites and archaeotourism 41

2.4 Disaster Risk Preparedness for Heritage Sites 42

Chapter 3: Methods 48

3.1 Interview Methodology 48

3.2 Sample Selection 49

3.3 Study site selection 49

3.4 Interview participant selection 50

3.5 Ethical Considerations 51

3.6 Site Visitation 52

3.7 Quantitative Data & Published Resources 52

Chapter 4: Results 53

4.1 Archaeotourism at the Study Sites and the impact of the pandemic on archaeotourism 53

4.1.1 Visitor numbers 53

4.1.2 Visitor numbers and impact of covid on Kruger National Park 59

4.1.3 Analysing the impact of pandemic from interview data 63

4.2 Different Strategies and Coping Mechanisms adopted during the Lockdown Period 65

4.3 The Impact of the Pandemic on the Culture and Nature Sector in South Africa 66

4.4 Existing Framework and Approaches for Risk and Disaster Preparedness 66

4.5 Recommendations to Improve Disaster Preparedness Strategies for Archaeotourism in South Africa 68

4.6 Other Issues Arising from the Interviews 69

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion 72

5.1 Discussion 72

5.1.1 Increased domestic tourism to archaeotourism sites 72

5.1.2 Decreased international tourism to archaeotourism sites 73

5.1.3 Virtual tourism as a coping mechanism for nature-based tourism 73

5.1.4 Coping strategies taken at the study sites during the pandemic. 73

5.1.5 Disaster and risk preparedness at the study sites 73

5.1.6 Recommendations to improve disaster preparedness strategies for the Archaeotourism sector in South Africa. 74

5.1.7 Other findings 74

5.1.8 Limitations of the study 75

5.2 Conclusion 75

References 77

Appendices 85

Appendix 1 85

Appendix 2 91

2.1 Ethics Clearance Certificate 91

2.2 Sample Interview Questionnaire 92

Appendix 3 93

3.1 Origins Centre Museum Interview (University of Witwatersrand) 93

3.1.2 Follow up interview with the Curator, Origins Centre 108

3.1.3 Interview II 112

3.2 Giants Castle Game Reserve (uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park) 123

3.2.1 Interview I 123

3.2.2 Interview II 133

3.3 Sterkfontein Caves, Cradle of Humankind 144

3.3.1 Interview I 144

3.3.2 Follow Up Interview Sterkfontein Site Manager 154

3.3.3 Interview II 156

Appendix 4 164

4.1. Visitor Counts from the Study Sites. 164

List of Figures

Fig. 1. Location of the study sites 18

Fig. 2. *Partial view of the Sterkfontein Caves (Fossil Hominid Sites of South Africa) (© Albino Jopela 2023)* 19

Fig. 3. The tourist entrance to Sterkfontein Caves (Photo: Eswaran 2023) 20

Fig. 4. The tourist route to exit the Sterkfontein Caves (Photo: Eswaran 2023) 20

Fig. 5. Partial view of the Main Caves (Maloti-Drakensberg World Heritage Site) (© Albino Jopela 2023) 21

Fig. 6. The view up to Main Caves as one of the tourist approaches the site (Photo: Eswaran 2023) .22

Fig. 7. The tourist entrance at the start of the guided tour to Main Caves (Photo: Eswaran 2023) 22

Fig. 8. The site museum at Main Caves (Photo: Russell 2023) 24

Fig. 9. School groups experiencing a replica of rock art from Makgabeng, South Africa (Photo: Origins Centre 2023) 24

Fig. 10. A public lecture at the Origins Centre (Photo: Origins Centre 2023) 25

Fig. 11. Tourists from SADC Countries, 2020 compared to 2019 (Maluleke 2021, Fig 4.5: 14) 33

Fig. 12. International tourists from overseas, 2020 compared to 2019 (Maluleke 2021, Fig 4.4: 13) 34

Fig. 13. Tourists from selected African countries, 2020 compared to 2019 (Maluleke 2021, Fig 4.6: 15) 34

Fig. 14. Foreign tourists' arrival, 2006 to 2020 (Maluleke 2021, Fig 3.4: 7) 35

Fig. 15. AFTCOR's Six Work Stream (Nhamo et al. 2020, Fig. 3.3: 66) 36

Fig. 16. Daily departures from East and South Africa (Nhamo et al. 2020, Fig. 5.3:116) 38

Fig. 17. Economic impact of Covid-19 on the USA (Nhamo et al. 2020: Fig. 8.6: 197) 40

Fig. 18. The researcher during a guided tour of the rock art at Main Cave's North (Photo: Russell 2023) 50

Fig. 19. The researcher during a tour of Sterkfontein Caves (Photo: Mahlangu 2023) 51

Fig. 20. A page from the Origins Centre visitor's book (2017) (Photo: Eswaran 2023) 54

Fig. 21. Total number of international and domestic visitors at Origins Centre Museum (2017-2022)

(detailed data in Appendix 4) 55
Fig. 22. A page from the Main Cave's visitor's book (2022) (Photo: Eswaran 2023) 56
Fig. 23. Total number of international and domestic visitors at Giant's Castle Game Reserve (2017-2022) (detailed data in Appendix 4) 57
Fig. 24. Lions viewed during a self-drive game drive as a tourist to KNP (Photo: Eswaran 2022) 59
Fig. 25. Zebra viewed during a self-drive as a tourist to KNP (Photo: Eswaran 2023) 59
Fig. 26. Total guest visitations at Kruger National Park (2018-2023) (after SANParks 2019; SANParks 2020; SANParks 2021; SANParks 2022; SANParks 2023) 60

List of Tables

Table 1. Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) Criteria (after UNESCO 2021c).....22

Table 2. Archaeotourism sites in South Africa. All these sites charge an entry fee.....29

Table 1.1 Covid-19 timeline from 2019 to 2022 in South Africa (Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs 2020; SAHO 2020; Nkgadima et al. 2021; CDC 2022).....90

Table 1.2. ***2*** Timeline of the lockdown levels in South Africa (Carlitz & Makhura 2020; South African Government 2021).....92

Table 4. 1 Visitors Count from Giant's Castle Visitors book (June - September 2015).....164

Table 4. 2 Visitors Count from Giant's Castle Visitors book (August - November 2018).....164

Table 4. 3 Visitors Count from Giant's Castle Visitors book (November – December 2020).....165

Table 4. 4 Visitors Count from Giant's Castle Visitors book (2021).....165

Table 4. 5 Visitors Count from Giant's Castle Visitors book (2022).....166

Table 4. 6 Visitors Count from Origins Centre Visitors book (September – December 2017).....166

Table 4. 7 Visitors Count from Origins Centre Visitors book (2018).....167

Table 4. 8 Visitors Count from Origins Centre Visitors book (2019).....168

Table 4. 9 Visitors Count from Origins Centre Visitors book (January – March 2020).....169

Table 4. 10 Visitors Count from Origins Centre Visitors book (May – August 2022).....169

Chapter 1: Introduction

Archaeotourism, a burgeoning subset of tourism, holds the potential to fund archaeological research, conservation efforts, and stimulate economic growth by creating employment opportunities (Verkerk 2017; Odum & Oguamanam 2020). This form of tourism draws in visitors to explore various archaeological resources like historic sites, abandoned settlements, caves, and more (Verkerk 2017; Odum & Oguamanam 2020). It aims to foster appreciation and knowledge of diverse cultures and histories, offering educational and experiential value to tourists (Verkerk 2017; Odum & Oguamanam 2020). It creates an opportunity for local artisans to sell their handicrafts and showcase their talent. It lets descendant communities reconnect with their pasts and educate others on aspects of South Africa's history which are often unappreciated (Verkerk 2017; Odum & Oguamanam 2020). The bottom line of archaeotourism is conservation, education, and development (Srivastava 2015). This exploration and interest by visitors leads to development at various archaeological sites (Licata *et al.* 2021).

This study considers the impact of the pandemic on archaeotourism in South Africa. The tourism sector, more broadly, in South Africa was significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, prompting the national government to devise recovery plans. Central to these efforts is the emphasis on boosting domestic tourism. The pandemic's profound effects are expected to reshape established trends, prompting a need for in-depth research to create effective recovery policies (Rogerson & Rogerson 2021). In this study, pre-pandemic is years before 2020, while the duration encompassing 2020 to 2021 is termed as during the pandemic, and everything after 2022 is regarded as post-pandemic.

The International Tourism Research Network has proposed several strategies for recovery, including promoting local and regional destinations, encouraging travel among friends and family, and advocating for 'localism'—encouraging residents to explore nearby attractions (Rogerson & Rogerson 2021). In the aftermath of Covid-19, natural spaces, especially national parks, and nature reserves, were anticipated to play a pivotal role (Rogerson & Rogerson 2021). Rogerson & Rogerson (2021) note a shift in tourist preferences, favouring natural environments overcrowded and polluted urban areas. This change reflects a growing awareness of the psychological and rejuvenating benefits of connecting with nature (*ibid.*).

The agenda for tourism scholars, including those in Africa, is being transformed by Covid-19. The pandemic has raised awareness about the significance of tourism experiences and spending for individuals and communities. Furthermore, it continues to greatly affect the tourism industry and is expected to strongly influence the way future environments and services are structured (Rogerson &

Rogerson 2021). Significant evidence from various parts of the world, like North America, Europe, and Australia indicates changes in consumer preferences and the nature of local tourism (Rogerson & Rogerson 2021). Rogerson & Rogerson (2021) suggest the possibility of additional unforeseen changes ahead in the tourism industry. Wen *et al.* (2020) highlight that Covid-19 will likely deeply affect how domestic tourists spend, though acknowledging variations due to individuals' cultural differences (Wen *et al.* 2020).

According to Yeoman (2021), Covid-19 will shape a future distinct from the past (Yeoman 2021). Despite potential vaccines, the enduring effects of the pandemic on people's perception of tourism mean returning to the pre-Covid-19 norms should not be assumed (Rogerson & Rogerson 2021). Rogerson & Rogerson (2021) emphasise that the impact of Covid-19 varies across different tourism markets due to the diverse nature of tourism demand. Regarding leisure travel, the ongoing presence of Covid-19 will likely influence where, why, and how people travel, impacting activities and experiences in tourism destinations due to measures like social distancing, restrictions, or avoidance of large gatherings (Rogerson & Rogerson 2021). The business tourism sector is anticipated to undergo lasting changes and is least likely to return to its previous state (Rogerson & Rogerson 2021). Companies are reassessing the necessity of travel, leading to significant long-term negative effects (Rogerson & Rogerson 2021). In the global South, it is crucial to recognize that the future demand for domestic tourism will be closely tied to national economic performance (Rogerson & Rogerson 2021). In situations of low or no economic growth, compounded by the impact of Covid-19, the potential for increased demand for any tourism products is diminished (Rogerson & Rogerson 2021).

Tourism worldwide has been greatly impacted by the rise and fall of coronavirus infections since early 2020. Covid-19 protocols, lockdowns, and changes in rules for travel across domestic and international borders affected many lives. These changes in lockdown levels depended on epidemiologists' reports, the capacity of hospitals, patients' recovery, and mortality rate (Bakar & Rosbi 2020). With the lack of certainty and spread of infections, tourism and tourist destinations were hit hard (SABC News 2021). To manage the virus, the South African government changed the lockdown levels (1 to 5) depending on the fluctuation of Covid-19 cases (see table 1; appendix 1). Levels 1, 2, and 3 were implemented when the spread of infection is moderate and health centres were well equipped to cope with infections. Levels 4 and 5 were implemented when the spread of infection is high and health care centres could not provide for patients (Carlitz & Makhura 2020; Pillai *et al.* 2020; Dukhi *et al.* 2021). Each of these levels had different rules to curb the spread of the virus. International and domestic travel were only possible at level 1 and sparingly at level 2. Levels 3, 4 and 5 did not allow any type of leisure travel. The

economic shock and the inability to cope with the situation was a great loss for the tourism industry (Rogerson & Rogerson 2020). Since the beginning of Covid-19 i.e., March 2020 onwards, tourism has witnessed diminishing returns because of the pandemic across the world (UNESCO 2021a).

Globally, the contribution of UNESCO World Heritage sites to GDP growth, employment enhancement, and poverty mitigation of the country through tourism cannot be over-emphasized (UNESCO 2021a); therefore any changes in the visitation numbers to such sites has grave consequences for those relying on the income they generate. In the 2020 UNESCO survey conducted across the globe, which aimed to understand the various aspects and threats posed to tourism and heritage by the pandemic (UNESCO 2021a), the participants noted that during the pandemic, the following threatened heritage properties globally (UNESCO 2021a):

1. World Heritage properties experienced a lack of conservation along with a rise in illegal activities;
2. There was an increase in domestic tourism;
3. There were unlicensed construction and demolitions were recorded in a few places;
4. Local tour guides were negatively impacted as they lost all sources of income from tourism immediately. The lack of income for local communities directly affected the management of the sites;
5. Financial insecurity at the sites affected conservation monitoring. Monitoring of properties was either reduced or non-existent due to the loss of revenue from tourism and the absolute lockdown;
6. An increase in deforestation and illegal small-scale mining was a major threat to world heritage properties in 2020;
7. As vegetation grew, the state of archaeological sites worsened. Vandalism was a point of concern and unfortunately could not be controlled by the authorities;
8. Globally people's health and livelihood suffered.

1.1 Comparison of Nature-Based and Culture-Based Tourism Strategies during the Pandemic:

During the lockdown, Game reserves in South Africa captured the public's attention by offering live virtual safaris twice a day, each lasting three hours (Thompson 2020; Cocks & Tassiem 2020; Lekgau *et al.* 2021; Tourism update 2020). This offered live interaction with game rangers through social media chat platforms. It also became popular with schools during lockdown. This was offered both on TV and via live streaming. Examples of this offering is the channel, WildEarth, which although started in 2006, only became well known during the pandemic and this led to it launching a dedicated TV channel

in South Africa in August 2020 (Washington Post 2020).

As reported for the private game reserve group, andBeyond, on April 6, 2020:

> "Already, the company has seen a 50% increase in engagement, a 100% increase in its daily new followers, and a 130% increase in organic reach to its Instagram page, says Nicole Robinson, andBeyond's chief marketing officer. Success came so fast and furiously that within four days, the company was supplementing its efforts with twice-daily, three-hour-long "WILDwatch" broadcasts in collaboration with WildEarth on Facebook and YouTube, where the longtime purveyor of safari videos is also garnering record-setting numbers. These livestream game drives aren't just a promising pathway toward economic recovery following the Covid-19 pandemic, says Robinson."
>
> (Mybroadband 2020)

The study was interested in trying to ascertain what the long-term impact of this marketing strategy was on nature sites once the pandemic was over and whether they had fared better during and after the pandemic as a consequence of their virtual tourism offering. The game reserves that participated were private concessions within the Kruger (e.g., Sabi Sands, Ngala), which is why the study will look at visitor numbers from Kruger as a comparative dataset.

1.2 Research Question

What impact has the Covid-19 pandemic had on South African archaeotourism?

1.3 Aims

This study aims to undertake a comparative analysis of the effects of Covid-19 on three public heritage sites based on qualitative and quantitative data to suggest measures for the archaeotourism sector in South Africa. The specific objectives are:

1) To present the archaeotourism context of South Africa pre-Covid-19 and during Covid-19 with focus on three public heritage sites.
2) To delineate the framework for risk and disaster preparedness, along with outlining the perceived threats to cultural heritage sites prior to the pandemic in South Africa, and subsequently formulate recommendations aimed at enhancing disaster preparedness strategies for the archaeotourism sector in the region.
3) To examine the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on archaeotourism in South Africa,

particularly focusing on visitor numbers and profiles, while concurrently comparing its effects on the culture and nature sector in the region through selected case studies.

4) To analyse the different coping strategies taken in the archaeotourism sector during the different Covid-19 lockdown periods in Southern Africa in relation to the selected sites.

1.4 Rationale

South Africa was hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic. The country recorded half a million Covid-19 infections on August 1, 2020, (Rogerson & Rogerson 2020). It was the worst affected among the USA, Brazil, Russia, and India (Rogerson & Rogerson 2020). The lockdown was harsh leading to "non-tourism". Small scale tourist destinations and the hospitality businesses in South Africa battled bankruptcy. Tourism was forced to cease (Rogerson & Rogerson 2020).

Although the literature suggests that the Covid-19 pandemic has had profound and multifaceted impacts on heritage sites across the world, the effects of such impacts on archaeotourism in South Africa are still poorly understood. It is important to be prepared and to develop preventive measures for the future. This is reflected in the 2020 UNESCO survey conducted across the globe, which aimed to understand the various aspects and threats posed to tourism and heritage by the pandemic (UNESCO 2021a). In addition, the Covid-19 crisis has revealed a lack of risk and disaster preparedness for such pandemics within the heritage field to ensure a clear, effective course of action that minimizes damage and facilitates swift recovery.

1.5 Study Area

Two of the study sites, Sterkfontein Caves and Main Caves, are part of large World Heritage properties – the Fossil Hominid sites of South Africa and Maloti-Drakensberg respectively (Naidu 2008; UNESCO 2021a; UNESCO 2021b) (Fig. 1)**.** The third study site is Origins Centre located at University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. To understand the impact on nature-based sites, quantitative data from Kruger National Park is used for analysis.

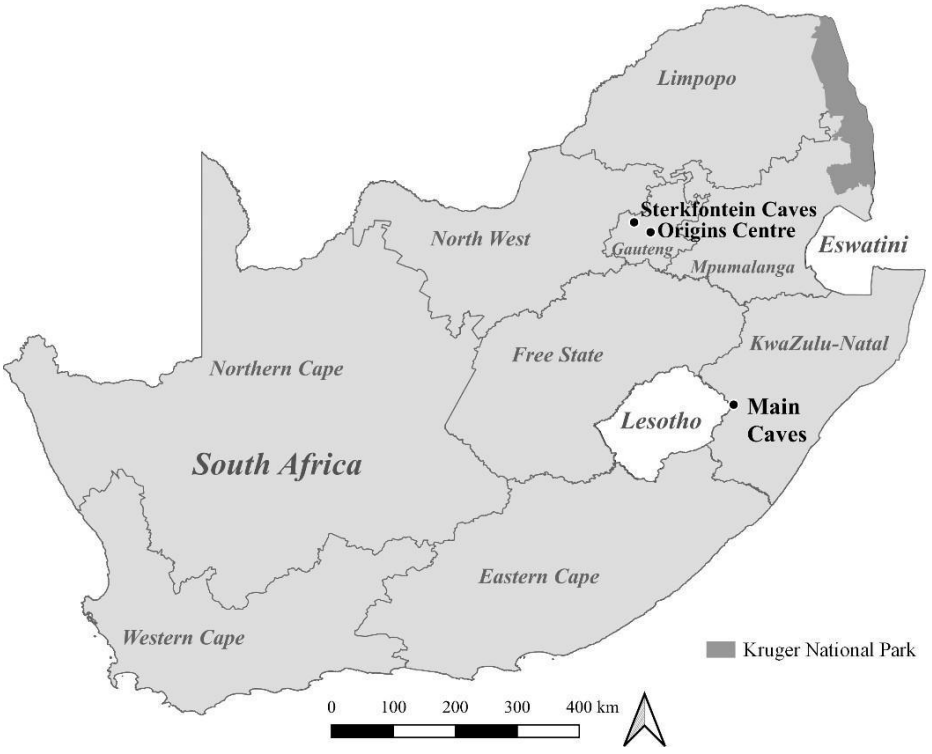


Fig. 1. *Location of the study sites*

1.5.1 Sterkfontein Caves

The Sterkfontein Caves, part of the Fossil Hominid Sites of South Africa, boast the world's richest fossils and situated 70 kilometres southwest of Pretoria, South Africa (Stratford 2015; Bruxelles *et al.* 2019; Thackeray 2020; Pickering *et al.* 2021; Ferreira 2023) (Figs 2-4). Initially discovered by lime miners seeking calcite in the form of speleothems, required for gold processing, it was Robert Broom discovery of '*Australopithecus*' on August 17, 1936, that brought the caves to the attention of archaeologists and palaeontologists (Stratford 2015; Clarke 2019; Thackeray 2020).



Fig. 2. *Partial view of the Sterkfontein Caves (Fossil Hominid Sites of South Africa) (© Albino Jopela 2023).*

The development at Cradle of Humankind (COH) was a result of the public-private partnership between the Gauteng Provincial Government, the University of the Witwatersrand and Maropeng a'Afrika Leisure (Pty). This created temporary and permanent job opportunities for 1,800 people. With the construction of the roads, 600 employees were given temporary job opportunities. The UNESCO listing of Fossil Hominid Sites of South Africa generated expected results in tourism (Ndoro 2015).

This paleo-anthropological site gained recognition for its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and was designated as a World Heritage property in 1999 under criteria (iii) and (vi) (criteria explained in Table 1) (UNESCO 2021d; Thackeray 2020; Ferreira 2023). Its significance lies in both natural and cultural OUV criteria. Excavations in the Sterkfontein Caves unearthed fossils dating back approximately four million years, with an astounding forty percent of the world's human ancestral remains discovered in this area (Du Preez 2019; Thackeray 2020; Ferreira 2023). Notable finds include Mrs Ples (1947), 'Little Foot' (1997), *Australopithecus sediba* (2013), and *Homo Naledi* (2013) (Du Preez 2019; Thackeray 2020; Ferreira 2023). Presently, the caves are owned by the University of Witwatersrand but belong to the State (Thackeray 2020).

The caves are located approximately a 45-minute to 1 hour drive from Johannesburg. The entrance fee stood at ZAR 100 for an hour guided tour. Sterkfontein Caves has been open to the public since 1950 (Esterhuysen 2007). However, as of March 2024, the caves have remained closed for nearly a

year, depriving enthusiasts of their opportunity to explore this captivating geological wonder.



Fig. 3. *The tourist entrance to Sterkfontein Caves (Photo: Eswaran 2023).*

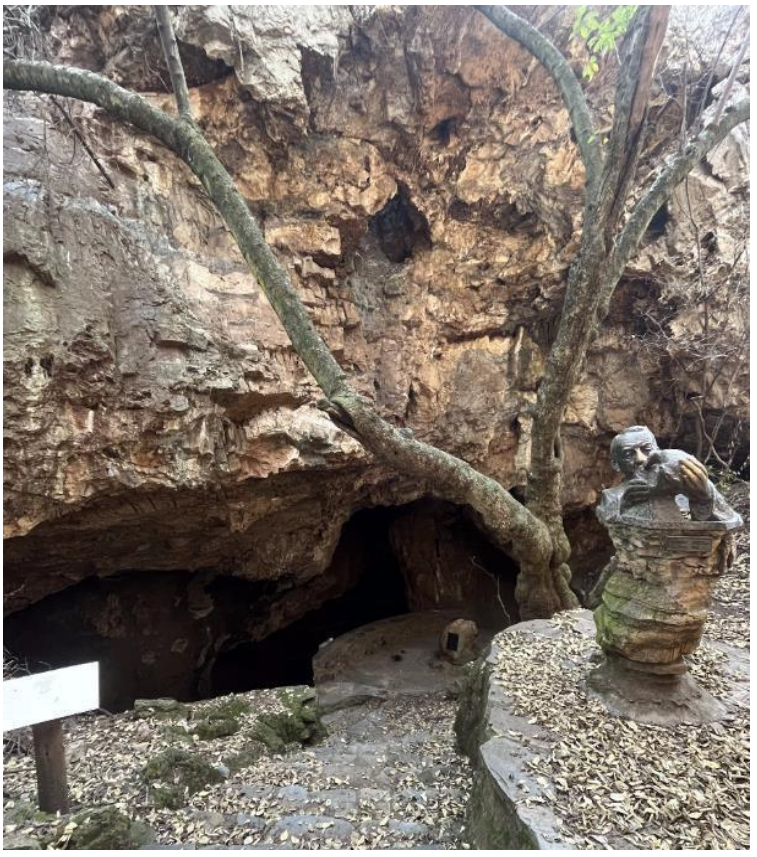


Fig. 4. *The tourist route to exit the Sterkfontein Caves (Photo: Eswaran 2023).*

1.5.2 Main Caves (Maloti-Drakensberg World Heritage Site)

The Drakensberg is known for its extraordinary mountains, flora and fauna. Most tourists enjoy the scenery and various outdoor activities that naturally exist. Unfortunately, Main Caves is known only to a few tourists and researchers (Duval & Smith 2012).

The site of Main Caves, located in Giant's Castle Game Reserve is a part of the uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park (UDP) in Kwazulu-Natal (Mazel & Watchman 2003) (Figs 5-8). The game reserve forms a part of the Maloti-Drakensberg world heritage property that was listed in 2000 based on Outstanding Universal Value (UNESCO 2021c). The natural and cultural criteria are (i), (iii), (v), (vii) and (x) (criteria explained in table 1) (UNESCO 2021b).







Fig. 5. *Partial view of the Main Caves (Maloti-Drakensberg World Heritage Site) (© Albino Jopela 2023).*

Main caves is made up of big sandstone caves which contain many hunter-gatherer rock paintings (Willcox 1957; Russell 2000). Main Caves is one of the largest and most well-preserved sites in Drakensberg with paintings as old as 2,000 years (Deacon & Mazel 2010). The Drakensberg Mountain

range begins in the Kingdom of Lesotho and extends to the Republic of South Africa (Duval & Smith 2012). The range is known for its landscapes and is the keeper of many threatened and endangered flora and fauna. The World Heritage Property has 690 cultural sites maintained in their natural setting (Duval & Smith 2012; Duval *et al.* 2018; UNESCO 2021a). The caves have been open to the public since 1969 (Mazel 2008). The nightly rate per person is ZAR 1,500. The tour duration is approximately 1 hour, which includes a 30-minute walk. Accessing the caves within Giants Castle Game Reserve requires a ZAR 40 per person entrance fee, in addition to the ZAR 50 per person guided tour cost.



Fig. 6. *The view up to Main Caves as one of the tourist approaches the site (Photo: Eswaran 2023)*



Fig. 7. *The tourist entrance at the start of the guided tour to Main Caves (Photo: Eswaran 2023)*

Table 1. Criteria for assessing Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) Criteria (UNESCO 2021c).

Number	Criteria	Description
(i)	Cultural Criteria	"to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius";
(ii)		"to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design";
(iii)		"to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared";
(iv)		"to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history";
(v)		"to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change";
(vi)		"to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria)";
(vii)	Natural Criteria	"to contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance";
(viii)		"to be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features";
(ix)		"to be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals";
(x)		"to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation".

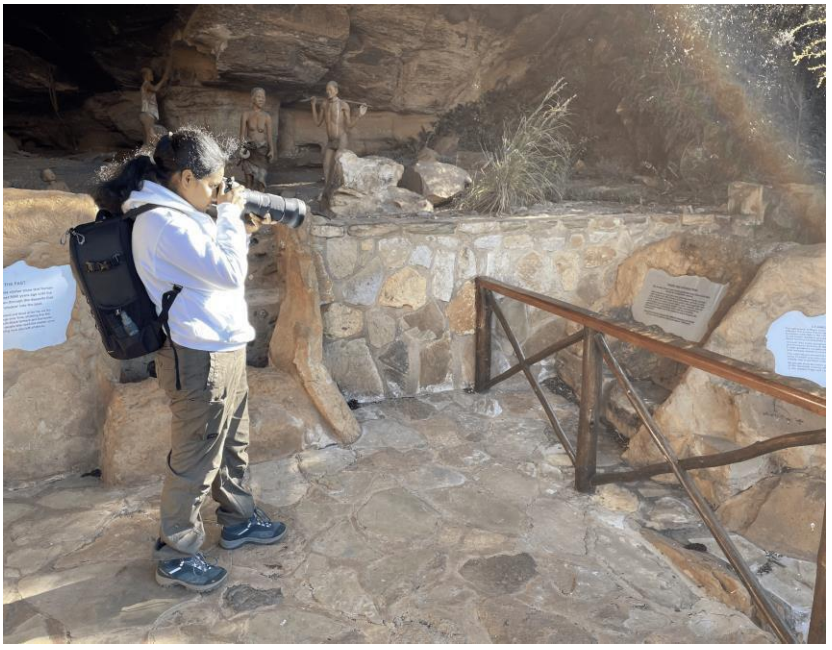


Fig. 8. *The site museum at Main Caves (Photo: Russell 2023).*

1.5.3 The Origins Centre, University of the Witwatersrand.

The Origins Centre, situated within the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, spotlights African traditions and rock art, notably from Game Pass Shelter in Drakensberg and Wildebeest Kuil near Kimberley. It started off as an idea focusing on the San community along with the question- "Who the African people are?" (Appendix 3.1: 112app). The institution showcases the rich culture of African peoples through an array of 2D and 3D exhibits (Fig. 9-10) (Grant 2021).



Fig. 9. *School groups experiencing a replica of rock art from Makgabeng, South Africa (Photo: Origins Centre 2023)*

The Origins Centre provides an engaging and contemporary experience that seamlessly aligns with its mission and vision. This analysis underscores the museum's success in delivering exhibits that both captivate and educate the public about indigenous African traditions and rock art. Its primary goal of honouring and fostering connections to ancestry and heritage, particularly for cultures represented within its walls, is achieved admirably. Upon entry, visitors encounter "Out of Africa," an art installation by Walter Outmann—a striking metal rendition of the African map (Grant 2021). Adjacent displays feature an array of stone tools, ostrich eggs, and fossils, offering a glimpse into ancient histories. A dedicated section pays homage to the San community, spotlighting their rich cultures, trance rituals, and a photographic wall capturing the essence of San life (Grant 2021). Complementing this is an illuminating narrative on human evolution, race, and DNA (Grant 2021). Exiting the museum, visitors are greeted by Hazel Buchan's "Beyond Origins," an installation adorned with vibrant maps and a comprehensive list of rock art sites (Grant 2021). The museum's souvenir shop invites exploration, boasting an assortment of local African crafts, books, and specialised Origins merchandise.



Fig. 10. *A public lecture at the Origins Centre (Photo: Origins Centre 2023)*

The museum offers a rich experience, featuring audio commentary in multiple languages, including “English, isiZulu, Sesotho, Afrikaans, French, and German” (Grant 2021: 8). Despite the absence of touch screens, the wealth of material they once housed is still accessible through other means, ensuring the continued dissemination of knowledge about African cultural heritage. Throughout the year, the

museum hosts a diverse range of events, enriching the experience for visitors. In essence, the Origins Centre effectively intertwines history, culture, and education to create an immersive journey through time and heritage, inviting all to engage with the fascinating narratives of Africa's origins (Grant 2021). Open to the public since 2006, the Origins Centre continues to serve as an educational and immersive space for visitors (Grant 2021).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In order to understand the impact of Covid-19 on South African archaeotourism, the review of literature will focus on archaeotourism and archaeotourism in South Africa, the disaster preparedness of the heritage sector prior to the pandemic and the impact of Covid-19 on tourism generally and more specifically on heritage tourism and nature-based tourism.

2.1 Archaeotourism

> "The definition of archaeological heritage tourism is based on the description of heritage tourism which considers travelling to experience places, artefacts and activities which authentically represent stories and people of the past but also provide understanding of contemporary ways of life and societies" (Thierstein 2019: 58)

According to Walker & Carr (2016), archaeotourism is preserving, managing, promoting and interpreting heritage sites. Brochures, tours, exhibitions, and trails are some aspects of promoting archaeology through tourism (Walker & Carr 2016). The motivation factor for many archaeotourists is the passion to understand the past and to learn about age old cultures and traditions, which is the aim of linking archaeology and tourism (Cahyadi 2016; Comer & Willems 2019; Odum & Oguamanam 2020). Cahyadi (2016) describes the location of the archaeological sites as "exotic", which enhances the experience for tourists. According to Cahyadi's (2016) study based primarily in Indonesia, archaeological and historical tourism has expanded significantly, merging with ecological tourism, geo-tourism, and heritage tourism. This integration widens the scope of travel experiences by combining cultural exploration with elements of nature, geography, and heritage, offering diverse and comprehensive attractions for tourists (Cahyadi 2016).

The increased number of tourists at heritage sites paved the way for conservation and management. Smith (2006) defines heritage as a socio-cultural process involving management and conservation of a space through various guidelines, by various people with different study backgrounds (Smith 2006). It promotes engagement among people and the possibility of remembrance and fame are high. Through theatre, cinema and literature, the idea of heritage has an influence on late modernity especially in Europe and the United States. Professional architects and archaeologists were swayed with new ideas in their respective fields from the existing material culture. In the process, history through materials became an important area of study which positively impacted the preservation of heritage sites.

Additionally, the public was intrigued. With the emergence of archaeology and the developments in architecture, the public began to judge and appreciate heritage. Smith (2006) points out that heritage could also mean culture, tradition and legacy that existed to keep the space alive instead of the material (Smith 2006). Increased growth of heritage tourism in a developing world has alleviated poverty and increased community development. Due to the reduced industrialization, some of the world-class historical sites still exist in Africa, Middle East and Eastern Europe. Presently, the use of tangible and intangible past has led to broadening the understanding of heritage and culture.

The tourism sector has been a significant contributor to the economy; technology advancement, ease of visa, low travel cost and upcoming middle class led to rise of tourism. These factors have created employment opportunities, especially in the rural areas. Tourism promotes cultural development worldwide. It is a strategic pillar of the economy's GDP (Abbas *et al.* 2021). An UK based study by Licata *et al.* (2021) highlights that archaeological sites may struggle to handle pre-pandemic visitor numbers (Licata *et al*. 2021). This necessitates exploring new ways to showcase our country's lesser-known heritage due to concerns over overcrowding at cultural attractions. Factors once seen as positive, like queues at museums and monuments, are now viewed negatively due to the risk of contagion, affecting the economic value of these resources (Licata *et al*. 2021).

In Indonesia, archaeological and historical tourism stands out as a highly profitable global industry, drawing in substantial tourist traffic each year, as pointed out by Cahyadi (2016). Its appeal lies in visitors' enthusiasm for delving into the past and exploring the cultures of ancient civilizations. The fascination with ancient remnants and historical legacies serves as the primary driver for individuals seeking these immersive experiences. The rise in tourists has led to growing job and business opportunities (Cahyadi 2016).

A growing marketing strategy in heritage tourism is bringing culture to life, termed as ‘living culture’ (Timothy & Nyaupane 2009). Examples of this include live folklore, working dairy or agricultural farms, sale of local specialities such as spices, handicrafts and live music (Timothy & Nyaupane 2009). The running of the bulls in Spain and the carnival festival in Brazil and cultural villages in South Africa are tourist heritage attractions that are representative of living culture (Meskell 2012). Material finds connect various cultures across the globe (Giraudo & Porter 2010). For example, places like Greece and Egypt create an adrenaline rush because of the presence of authenticity (Srivastava 2015).

In 2018, tourism in Africa grew by 7% i.e., 64 million tourists visited the continent. The continent received an income of 38 billion USD. The rise of income was 2% (Nhamo *et al.* 2020). During the 2018-2019 period, the government allocated a total of R2.3 billion to support the tourism industry. Out

of this amount, R1.2 billion was specifically designated for promotional and marketing activities. The remaining budget was distributed among various initiatives, including the “Expanded Public Works Programme, the Tourism Incentive Programme, Visitor Support Services, Destination Development, and the Research, Policy, and International programme” (Bhuda & Kgwadi 2023). In 2019, South Africa's tourism industry was thriving, boasting impressive economic statistics. This sector made significant contributions to the nation's economy, primarily through employment and leisure spending. In that year, it contributed 3.7% to the national Gross Domestic Income (GDI), amounting to R209 billion more than what was contributed by agriculture and utilities (Bhuda & Kgwadi 2023). Moreover, the industry provided jobs for 773,533 people, representing about 4.7% of the national labour force (Bhuda & Kgwadi 2023).

The question that arises from these definitions, is whether public visitations to archaeological sites for which there is no entry free should also be considered as archaeotourism? For the purposes of this thesis, only public visitation to archaeological sites that generate income are considered to be part of archaeotourism. The free visitation of sites falls within the broader definition of public archaeology and engagement rather than archaeotourism. Because none of the definitions of archaeotourism explicitly made this distinction it is necessary to define it here: that archaeotourism is the use of archaeology to attract visitors to a place and to generate a direct economic benefit. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, Edrogan (2021) estimates that 20% of tourists worldwide included places of historical importance in their travel plans (Erdogan 2021).

2.2 Archaeotourism in South Africa

The increasing development and interaction of tourists with archaeological sites has introduced the concept of archaeotourism into the field of archaeology (Wurz & Van der Merwe 2005). Archaeotourism revolves around both tangible and intangible cultural elements, holding significant societal value (Wurz & Van der Merwe 2005). Based on the table below, archaeological sites in South Africa have been open to the public since the 18th century (Table 2).

The promotion of historical tourism has become a high priority in South Africa (Bhuda & Kgwadi 2023). South Africa protects all tourism sectors under its constitution, and cultural and heritage tourism is encouraged as a means to create jobs and economic opportunities (Bhuda & Kgwadi 2023). The tourism minister oversees various entities responsible for promoting tourism through research, policy development, international relations, and sector support. The 2017 National Tourism Sector Strategy guides their efforts, focusing on areas like visa regulations, air connectivity, and licensing to boost the industry (Bhuda & Kgwadi 2023).

Table 2. *Archaeotourism sites in South Africa. All these sites charge an entry fee*

Site Name	Location	Opening date	Reference
Various Cederberg sites	Western Cape	circa 1990	Parkington 2003
Clanwilliam Living Landscape Project	Western Cape	circa 1995	Parkington 2003
Sterkfontein Cave	Gauteng	1950	Esterhuysen 2007
Game Pass Shelter	Kwazulu-Natal	2002	Ndlovu 2014
Main Caves, Giants Castle	Kwazulu-Natal	1969	Mazel 2008
Malapa Fossil Site	Gauteng	Post-2008	Cradle Boutique Hotel 2023 https://cradlehotel.co.za/activities/
Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape	Limpopo	2003	SANParks 2023a https://www.sanparks.org/parks/mapungubwe/
Melville Koppies	Gauteng	1959	Shaw 2023, https://www.mk.org.za/
Pinnacle Point	Western Cape	Post-2000	Point of Human Origins & Springnest 2023 https://www.humanorigin.co.za/activities/cave-visits/
Thulamela	Mpumalanga	1997	Nemaheni 2003
Wildebeest Kuil Rock Art Centre	Northern Cape	2001	Morris 2014
Wonderwerk Cave	Northern Cape	1993	Morris 2014, KSO Creations 2021
Cango Caves	Western Cape	1891	Cango Caves 2023, https://www.cango-caves.co.za/

In March 2023, the South African Tourism released a report for the fiscal year 2023/24, addressing the significant challenges faced by the tourism sector due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The report outlines a

comprehensive Tourism Sector Recovery Plan (TSRP) designed to address the repercussions of the pandemic and ensure the sector's resilience and competitiveness in a post-pandemic world. Recognizing the profound impact of the pandemic on tourism businesses and the economy at large, the TSRP emphasizes the importance of targeted and coordinated efforts to facilitate recovery, transformation, and long-term sustainability. The plan is structured around three interconnected pillars, each supported by strategic interventions aimed at bolstering the sector's recovery efforts. Moreover, the TSRP identifies key enablers that will play a crucial role in supporting the implementation of recovery initiatives. These enablers are intended to provide essential support mechanisms to facilitate the successful execution of the plan and enhance the resilience of the tourism sector in South Africa (Lille 2023).

Lwoga & Mwakunda (2020) suggest that the slow growth of archaeotourism in sub-Saharan Africa is due to the lack of understanding of the requirements of tourists visiting southern Africa. There has been very little published research carried out on Archaeotourism in developing nations. This contrasts to research on nature-based sites where there is a larger body of published research (Lwoga & Mwakunda 2020). Nature-based tourism is an important aspect in the sub-Saharan Africa region (Lwoga & Mwankunda 2020; Odum & Oguamanam 2020). Unfortunately, archaeological sites existing in nature-based locations are not of primary importance (Meskell 2012; Duval & Smith 2014; Lwoga & Mwankunda 2020). For example, game sightings and hikes are prioritised over rock art sites, leading to ignorance of heritage sites (Duval & Smith 2014; Lwoga & Mwankunda 2020). Past marketing approaches are inadequate for crafting present-day archaeotourism strategies due to shifts in demographics, necessitating the adoption of fresh methods and tools to effectively engage and attract modern audiences (Lwoga & Mwankunda 2020).

2.3 Coronavirus and the Tourism Industry

"Every tourist's dream is to find themselves in a place without tourists".

Marco D'Eramo, Italian social theorist (BBC 2023: 22m27s).

Epidemics and pandemics are part of human life, according to the “Global Preparedness Monitoring Board (GPMB)” (Nhamo *et al.* 2020). Disease outbreaks have been rising over the past few decades. According to the GPMB, fast spreading diseases such as yellow fever, Ebola, Zika plague, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) affect poor countries the most. Continents like Africa with the least resources struggle to cope. In November 2019, the initial instance of what would become known as Covid-19 emerged in Wuhan, China, marking the start of a global health crisis. Initially misdiagnosed as pneumonia, this novel coronavirus swiftly spread from person to person through close

contact or respiratory droplets. By March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization officially classified Covid-19 as a pandemic, triggering worldwide efforts to contain its transmission. Alongside this declaration, WHO disseminated guidelines outlining preventative measures to mitigate the virus's spread. However, Covid-19 did not leave a single country unaffected. 2020 was the year when matters of hygiene became a global priority. Breathing had become hazardous as the spread of infection was at the speed of light and life-threatening. The world was mentally and physically traumatised (Bakar & Rosbi 2020; Nhamo *et al.* 2020).

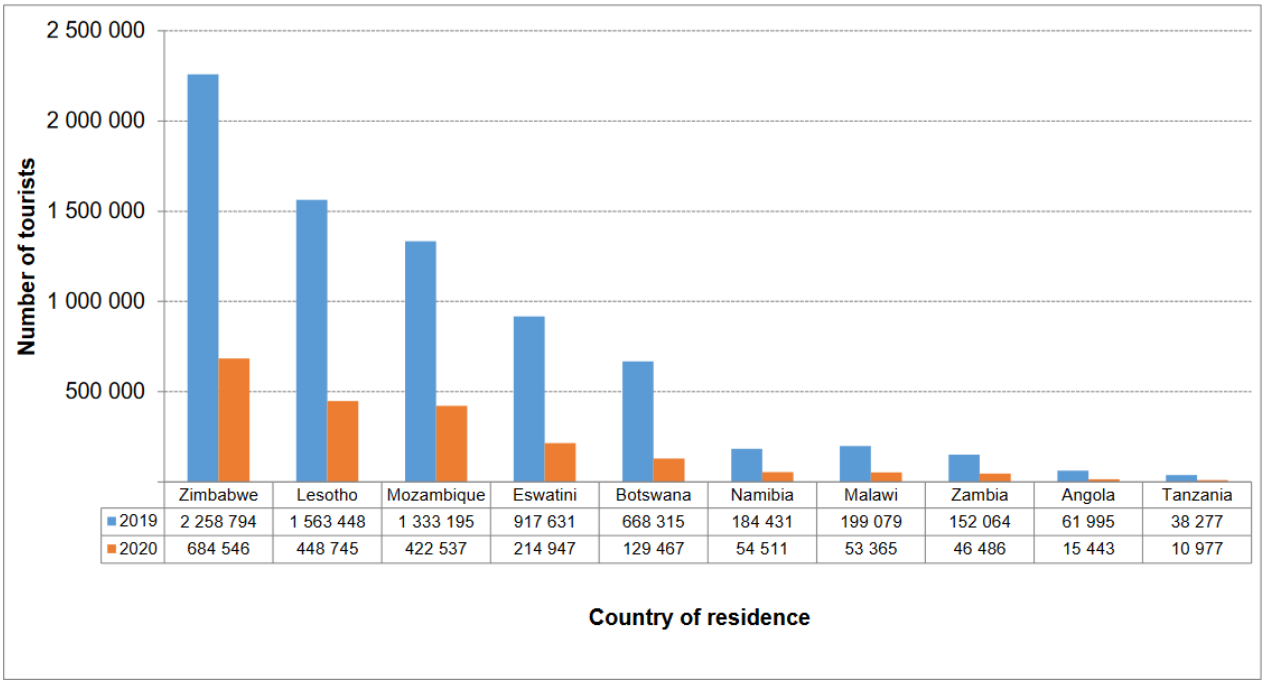
The BBC forum brought together experts discussing the impact of Covid-19 on global mass tourism. The conversation highlighted concerns about over-tourism and the resurgence of travel, termed "revenge tourism" (BBC 2023). The discussion underscored the need for a more balanced and sustainable approach to tourism that respects local communities, promotes authentic experiences, and addresses the challenges posed by over-tourism in a post-Covid-19 world (BBC 2023). The panellists along with moderator explored the historical roots of mass tourism, tracing it back to the industrial revolution's concept of work-life balance. The rise of package tourism, epitomised by cruises, aimed to offer relaxation without the hassle of planning (BBC 2023). In Africa, a focus on "regenerative" or "authentic" tourism emerged, showcasing diverse experiences beyond just leisure, hoping to highlight the continent's rich offerings (BBC 2023). However, over-tourism raised significant issues, including security concerns, privacy violations of locals, and disruptive behaviour by tourists (BBC 2023).

Instances like Kinder Dijk in the Netherlands and peak seasons in Copenhagen demonstrated how tourists' attitudes and behaviours could negatively impact local communities and heritage sites (BBC 2023). The forum also touched on the desire for tourists to find destinations without crowds, highlighting the conflict between the allure of tourism and the problems it brings, intensified by digitalization and the prevalence of social media-driven trends like selfie culture (BBC 2023). Moreover, mass tourism's effects were seen as detrimental to local communities in cities like Venice, where residents were displaced, local shops were replaced by souvenir stores, and non-residents invested in properties, contributing to economic leakage and issues of governance, such as with platforms like Airbnb (BBC 2023).

Before the pandemic hit in 2020, Statistics South Africa reported that road passenger transport was the leading contributor to direct employment in the tourism sector, with 241,155 employees out of the total workforce (Bhuda & Kgwadi 2023). The industry was divided as follows: 31% in road transport, 20% in retail of tourism products, 19% in food and beverage, 15% in hospitality and accommodation, 4% in travel agencies, and 11% in indirect sectors supporting tourism (Bhuda & Kgwadi 2023). The tourism industry heavily relied on both internal (non-resident and domestic) visitors, who spent around

R451.5 billion in 2019, providing crucial financial support to the sector (Bhuda & Kgwadi 2023). Domestic visitors accounted for most of this expenditure, contributing 73%, while non-resident visitors made up the remaining 27% (Bhuda & Kgwadi 2023).

A statistical report published by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) on Tourism aimed at understanding the changes in tourism in 2020 as compared to 2019 (Maluleke 2021). It highlights that South Africa had the highest number of tourist arrivals in January 2020 (39.0%) (Maluleke 2021). However, from April 2020 to September 2020, tourists entering the country were less than 2.0%. The tourists' motives included holiday, business visits, education, and medical treatments. Many tourists travelled from the SADC regions (74.8%), while overseas and 'other' African regions were 23.6% and 1.5 % respectively in 2020 (Figs. 12-14) (Maluleke 2021). Arrival of foreign tourists also dropped severely because of the imposition of hard lockdown from 26 March 2020 (Fig. 11).



	Zimbabwe	Lesotho	Mozambique	Eswatini	Botswana	Namibia	Malawi	Zambia	Angola	Tanzania
2019	2 258 794	1 563 448	1 333 195	917 631	668 315	184 431	199 079	152 064	61 995	38 277
2020	684 546	448 745	422 537	214 947	129 467	54 511	53 365	46 486	15 443	10 977

Fig. 11. *Tourists from SADC Countries, 2020 compared to 2019*[1] *(Maluleke 2021, Fig 4.5: 14)*

[1] People from Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Lesotho are categorized as tourists by South African services, although they may not fit the traditional definition of tourists.

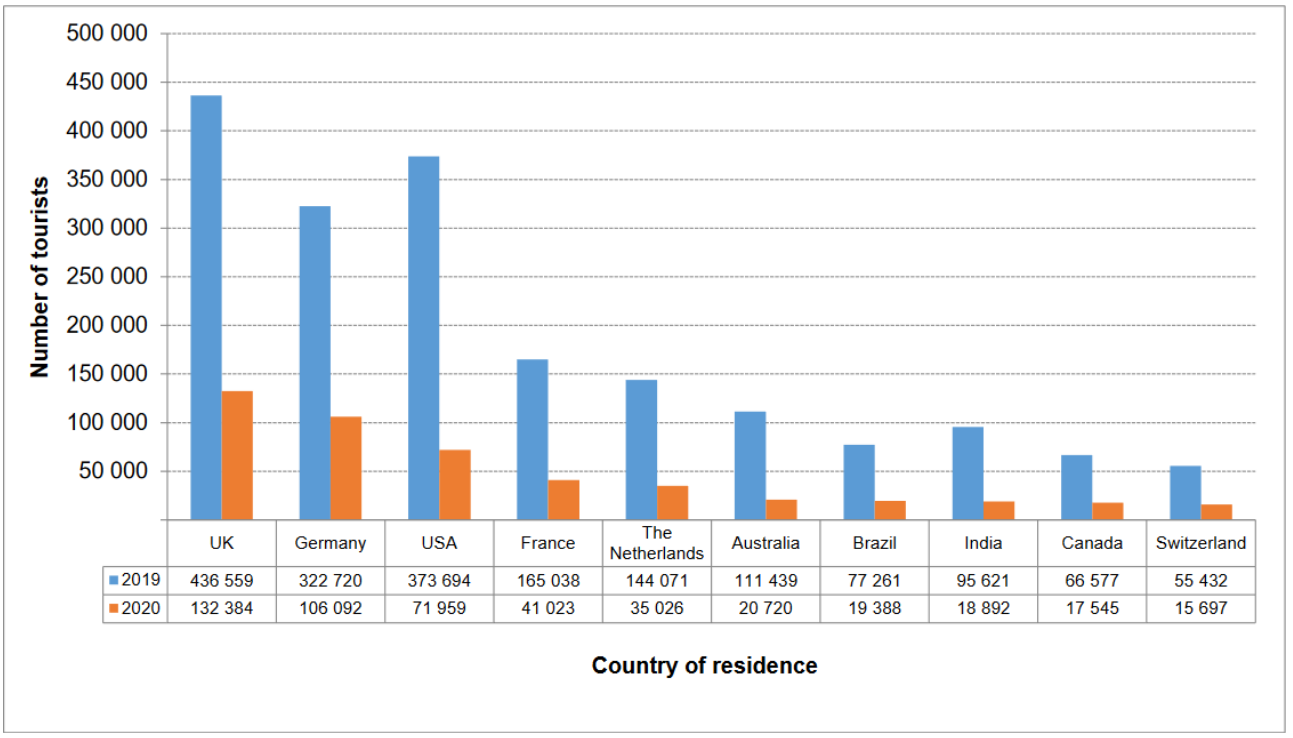


Fig. 12. *International tourists from overseas, 2020 compared to 2019 (Maluleke 2021, Fig 4.4: 13)*

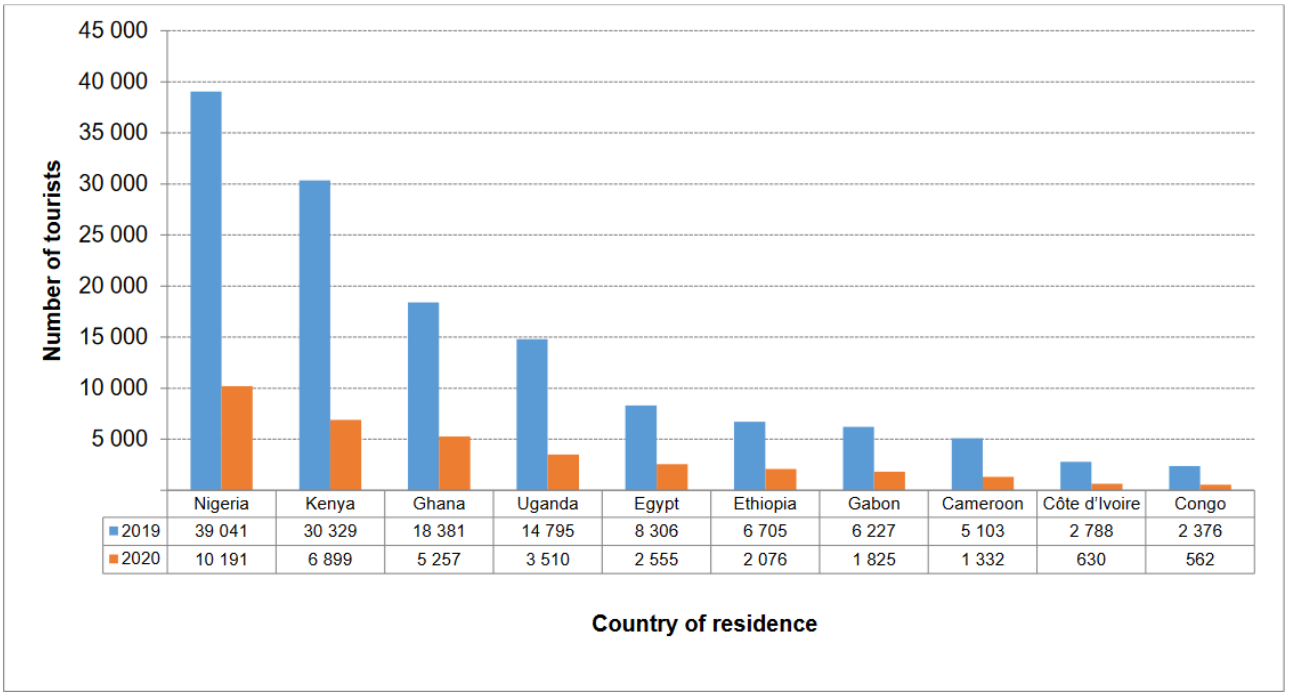
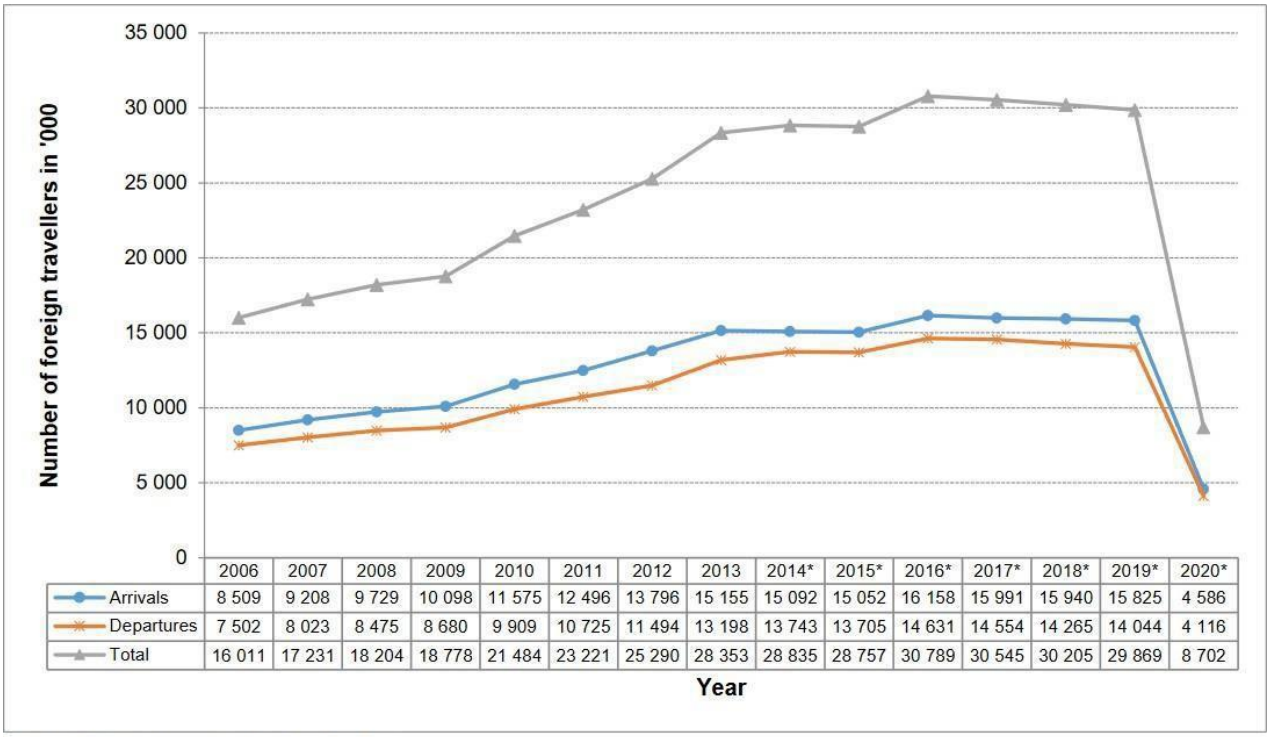


Fig. 13. *Tourists from selected African countries, 2020 compared to 2019 (Maluleke 2021, Fig 4.6: 15).*



	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014*	2015*	2016*	2017*	2018*	2019*	2020*
Arrivals	8 509	9 208	9 729	10 098	11 575	12 496	13 796	15 155	15 092	15 052	16 158	15 991	15 940	15 825	4 586
Departures	7 502	8 023	8 475	8 680	9 909	10 725	11 494	13 198	13 743	13 705	14 631	14 554	14 265	14 044	4 116
Total	16 011	17 231	18 204	18 778	21 484	23 221	25 290	28 353	28 835	28 757	30 789	30 545	30 205	29 869	8 702

*2014-2020 data excludes travellers in transit.

Fig. 14. *Foreign tourists' arrival, 2006 to 2020 (Maluleke 2021, Fig 3.4: 7)*

The declaration of Covid-19 as a pandemic triggered geographic, political, and economic restraints. The toll on individuals, livelihoods, and the nation itself surpassed that of World War II (Nhamo *et al.* 2020). The African continent remains in the limelight due to lack of proper resources. Weak health systems and socio-economic factors add a high- risk element during disease outbreaks (Nhamo *et al.* 2020). Additionally, trade relations between China and other African continents (South Africa, Egypt, and Algeria) were also a matter of concern. The "African Union Centres for Disease Control and Prevention" (AUCDC) and World Health Organization (WHO) in partnership with member states initiated the "African Taskforce for Coronavirus Preparedness and Response" (AFTCOR) (Nhamo *et al.* 2020). The components of the task force are listed below in Fig. 15. South Africa was one of the countries in the African continent to effectively control the spread of virus, as highlighted by Nhamo *et al.* (2020). The declaration of a national disaster, limiting people's contact, travel ban, closing airports and ports were some of the methods adopted to curb the spread of virus (Nhamo *et al.* 2020).

Many tourists were stranded in different parts of the world waiting to get home. Cruise ships, shopping malls, and hotels had become shelters. For example, in George Town City, Malaysia, shop houses had become homes to many stranded tourists. The UNESCO World Heritage Site had tourists from parts of Europe and Asia. The shop houses were not equipped to accommodate the stay of tourists leading

to shortage of basic amenities such as water and bathrooms (Zwain 2021). In such a setting, adhering to Covid-19 measures was impossible. Sports and games such as the Tokyo Olympics 2020, Grand Prix etc were cancelled or postponed indefinitely to reduce the spread of infections.

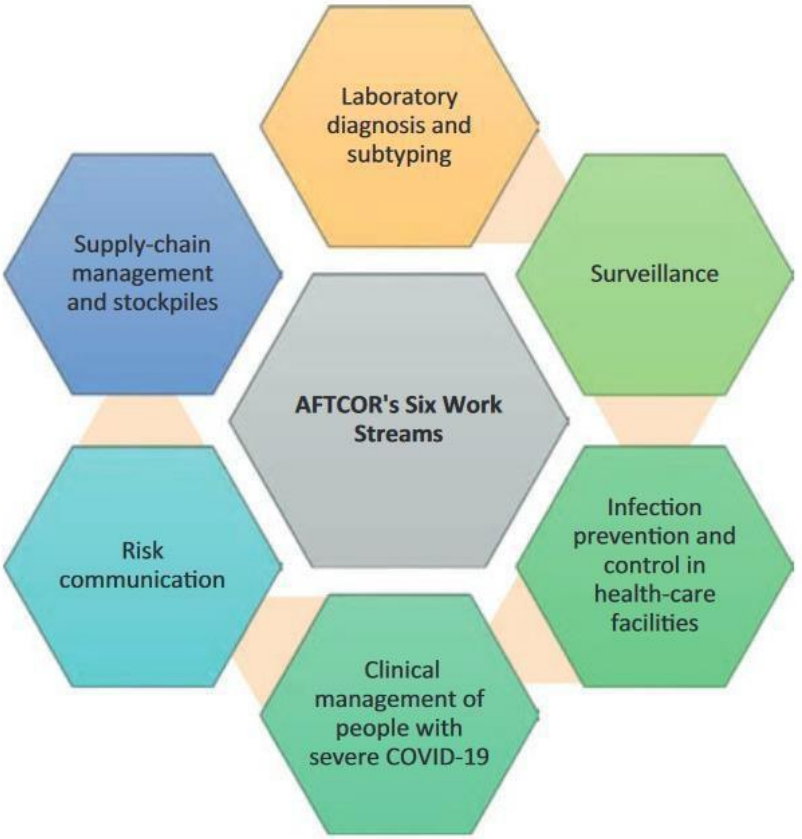


Fig. 15. *AFTCOR's Six Work Stream (Nhamo et al. 2020, Fig. 3.3: 66)*

This impacted the income of the tourism and hospitality sector (Nhamo *et al.* 2020). 219 countries were completely closed for all types of travel during the beginning of Covid-19 (Roman *et al.* 2022). Every section of the tourism industry has been shocked with the sudden closure. The virus negatively impacted livelihoods. Many facilities like public transports were of no use during the lockdowns (Nhamo *et al.* 2020).

The DACH (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland) countries contributed USD 5.1 trillion to the global GDP. Europe was the highest contributor (50% share to the global tourism industry) (Abbas *et al.* 2021). In recent years, countries like Spain and Germany were visited for history and culture while there was a visitor drop in France and the UK. The pandemic caused the world to become less connected with each other i.e., de-globalisation. "A crisis like no other", the director of the IMF

(International Monetary Fund) described Covid-19 (Jones & Comfort 2020:1). Italy was predicted to lose 31 million tourists over 4 quarters (Licata *et al.* 2021). In South Africa, many small-scale businesses have closed due to the uncertainties of the pandemic and the lack of financial support (Giddy & Rogerson 2021). The misuse of archaeological sites increased during the pandemic i.e., vandalism, graffiti and human habitation.

The tourism industry is vulnerable and the global vulnerability focuses on rethinking travel (Abbas *et al.* 2021; Licata *et al.* 2021). Returning to 'normal days' will not be easy. Giddy and Rogerson's (2021) study focuses on developing a tourism recovery plan in nature-based tourist destinations in South Africa (Giddy & Rogerson 2021). The plan aimed at meeting needs for international travellers. As the pandemic progresses, heritage sites are framed negatively because of the long lines in museums, crowds in monuments and archaeological parks. It is significant to try experimental strategies with positive effects on the tourism sector. Restoration is difficult as funding and investment are scarce. The improvement of an archaeological site can possibly lead to a new tourist destination.

2.3.1 Impact of COVID-19 on airports, cruises, and the hospitality industry

People's movements influence tourism typologies. The fear and anxiety to travel led to a ripple effect on the finance, employment along with maintenance of the assets and liabilities (Nhamo *et al.* 2020). Based on evidence from the previous outbreaks and experiences from Covid-19, businesses related to the tourism sector are affected the highest. The aviation industry leads in the books of losses. The losses were in billions and trillions of dollars (Nhamo *et al.* 2020). The reasons for these losses include mass cancellations from passengers and unannounced cancellation of flights due to insufficient passengers. The change in lockdown levels did not motivate people to travel. The Covid-19 screening at airports was questionable. As highlighted by Nhamo *et al.* (2020), Quilty *et al.* (2020) observed that the screenings at airports were not successful (Nhamo *et al.* 2020). Most of the time, the virus was not detected. Over a period, the airports hardly conducted the screening. The risk was high as airports and airlines barely adhered to Covid-19 regulations (Nhamo *et al.* 2020).

Airlines offered free postpone or prepone tickets for up to two years. However, a refund was not an option as there was no means of income. The public travelled only in case of emergency. During these unprecedented times, only cargo flights were operational. However, these flights also faced losses (Nhamo *et al.* 2020). As a result, the employees received a reduced salary, most casual or contract employees were laid off and reduced work hours were implemented. For example, Emirates reduced the salary of its employees while Air Ethiopia gave its employees three months paid leave (Nhamo *et*

al. 2020). Airlines understaffed due to the lack of revenue and adopted several alternatives to sustain. Nhamo *et al.* (2020) highlighted the International Air Transport Association (IATA) data of potentially job losses continent wise and mentioned the revenue loss globally (Nhamo *et al.* 2020). According to IATA, Africa and North America where the least affected as 2 million people lost their job as compared to Asia Pacific, with a layoff of 11.2 million (Nhamo *et al.* 2020). Not only were the airline employees laid off but the auxiliary staff working in the airport were also dismissed due minimal or lack of operation of airports. Most airport shops, restaurants, duty free and lounges closed. The aviation industry needed 252 billion US dollars to restart (Nhamo *et al.* 2020).

The pandemic had drastically affected the departures and reduced the air traffic in seven regions including Southern Africa. There was an abrupt end to tourism in the African regions especially after the virus was announced as a pandemic (Fig. 16). East and Southern Africa had a sharp decline with lower departures than any other country. Flights took off for stranded tourists or for medical emergencies. By April 2020, some of the regular aeroplanes were converted to cargo flights to transport medicines and other essentials. The pandemic affected the airlines and airports, majorly in Africa (Nhamo *et al.* 2020).

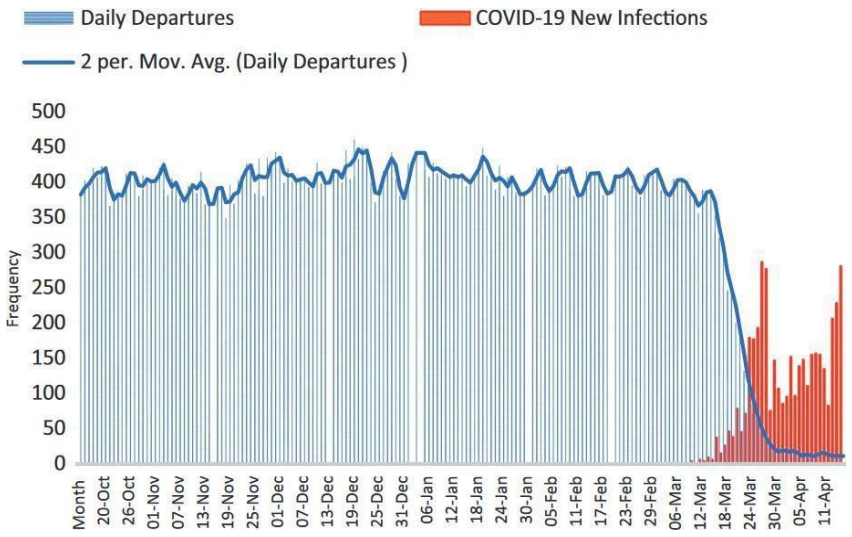


Fig. 16. *Daily departures from East and South Africa (Nhamo et al. 2020, Fig. 5.3:116).*

The cruise industry is one of the rapidly growing sectors of the tourism industry. As of 2019, 30 million passengers travelled across the sea creating 1.11 million jobs opportunities (Nhamo *et al.* 2020). This growth and demand meant expansion of the number of home ports in Cape Town, Durban and the rest of the African region. For example, in South Africa if a ship carries 2000 passengers, the income for

the tourism industry at the destination equates to ZAR 2 million per day (Nhamo *et al.* 2020). Considering, a tourist spends up to ZAR 1000 a day. However, cruises are known for communicable diseases due to closed living spaces and shared dining areas. Nhamo *et al.* (2020), calls cruise tourism "a pandemic itself" (Nhamo *et al.* 2020). Norovirus is an existing virus leading to seasickness, motion sickness and various other discomforts. It is a challenge to control the virus (Nhamo *et al.* 2020). Due to the existence of virus and disease outbreaks, it is assumed that cruise ships are better prepared than the rest of the modes of conveyance in the tourism industry. It is significant to report the outbreak of any disease according to the international biosafety and health regulations. Unfortunately, ships have been caught unprepared. For example, Caribbean Cruises experienced challenges during the outbreak of SARS, Chikungunya (2013), H1N1 (2009) (Nhamo *et al.* 2020).

Due to lack of preparedness, the ship staff were affected the most, becoming a burden for the government and impacting the goodwill of the cruise in the Caribbean. The learning has not been much from the past experiences. With the outbreak of Covid-19, ships faced similar challenges due to lack of planning and coordination (Nhamo *et al.* 2020). The sudden implications of Covid-19 made it difficult for the cruise ship industry to cope. To sell tickets and avoid bulk cancellations, cruises told tourists, "Covid-19 doesn't exist in tropical places," as pointed out by Nhamo *et al.* (2020) (Nhamo *et al.* 2020). Well known cruises like Royal Caribbean dropped a stock value of -80.08% which is the highest as compared to Norwegian Cruise (-80%) and Carnival corporation (-63.40%) (Fig. 15) (Nhamo *et al.* 2020). All possible means of income were blocked. South Africa, Australia and other European countries were the hub of cruises. The strict ban on travel and people's fear led to a no revenue situation. Adding to the nightmare, 6000 passengers were stranded on a Caribbean cruise ship with no dock with brave to host the tourists (Nhamo *et al.* 2020). Many ships were stranded in the middle of the sea with passengers and staff falling sick. A major struggle apart from the loss of jobs was, cruise line workers were not allowed to leave the ships due to stringent repatriation conditions. However, the industry was obliged for the well-being of the employees (Nhamo *et al.* 2020).

2020 was supposed to be a high-performance year (as compared to 2019) for the hospitality industry. However, Covid-19 shattered all possible income dreams. Hotel groups, online booking websites faced major losses. The US remains the most affected (Fig. 17). The average occupancy rate dropped by 25%. California, New York, and Texas were in a bad shape (Nhamo *et al.* 2020). Globally, employees were furloughed. There were cancellations from all possible directions. Owners of properties, especially Airbnb, were forced to pay fixed charges with no income. In Africa, small towns like

Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe have been bankrupt since 2020. Cape Town has also not seen much light at the end of the tunnel (Nhamo *et al.* 2020).



Fig. 17. *Economic impact of Covid-19 on the USA (Nhamo et al. 2020: Fig. 8.6: 197).*

The tourism and hospitality sector do not receive catastrophes positively. Any threats (natural or man-made) affect the tourism industry first. The effects on various sectors of the tourism industry are no different but extreme. All sectors of tourism witnessed a steady growth until 2019 (Nhamo *et al.* 2020). The industry was getting better as people began exploring new places. 2020 was a shocker. Tourism is agile to various demographic and socio-political factors, Covid-19 added to the existing public dilemma. The last two decades (2000-2020) have been years of disease outbreaks (Nhamo *et al.* 2020). Humans have fought and evolved through various viruses. As highlighted by Nhamo *et al.* (2020), adherence to frameworks and preparing for pandemics will reduce risks and will help build back stronger (Nhamo *et al.* 2020).

Rogerson's (2021) study focused on the Overstrand Local Municipality in South Africa's Western Cape, exploring how tourism businesses in this highly tourism-dependent area adapted to the challenges brought by Covid-19 during 2020-2021 (Rogerson 2021). The municipality, particularly centred on Hermanus, stands as one of the nation's most tourism-dependent areas. The research aimed to fill a gap in understanding Africa's response to the pandemic, as previous multi-country studies did not cover the continent. South Africa, considered one of the most impacted countries by Covid-19 in Africa, served as the study's context due to its heavy reliance on tourism. The Covid-19 pandemic

significantly devastated tourism in Overstrand and nearby areas, particularly impacting businesses reliant on international tourists like the 5-star eco-lodge, adventure diving, and cruise boat services (Rogerson 2021). Many establishments experienced drastic reductions in demand, forcing a shift toward survival-focused strategies due to the collapse of international tourism. Despite hopes for increased domestic tourism, the wider economic effects of Covid-19 on South Africa led to reduced discretionary spending, hindering recovery for businesses catering to both local and international visitors. The fear of travel among domestic tourists and stringent government lockdown measures, including alcohol bans and beach closures, further compounded the challenges faced by the tourism industry (Rogerson 2021).

The pandemic drastically altered the tourism landscape, prompting tourism businesses in Overstrand, South Africa, to adapt through self-reliant measures (Rogerson 2021). Facing declining business prospects, these enterprises diversified products, lowered prices, trimmed staff, adjusted marketing, and fostered stronger cooperation among themselves (Rogerson 2021). However, government actions like alcohol bans and beach closures worsened the financial strain on these local businesses, leading to a disconnect and distrust toward national authorities. Rebuilding trust between the government and established private sector tourism businesses emerges as a crucial factor for successful recovery planning in South Africa's tourism sector (Rogerson 2021).

2.3.2 Impact of Covid-19 on heritage sites and archaeotourism

UNESCO conducted a global survey to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on intangible cultural heritage. The results showed that the pandemic had a significant impact on living heritage around the world, but communities adapted their practices to specific contexts and used living heritage as a means of resilience. The survey received 236 responses from 78 countries, with the majority coming from living heritage bearers (33%) and national authorities (19%). Most responses were related to initiatives led by bearers and practitioners of living heritage, and the largest proportion of responses came from Latin America and the Caribbean (34%) and Western Europe and North America (33%). The pandemic had a significant impact on social practices, rituals, and festive events, as well as traditional craftsmanship and performing arts. Almost all responses (93%) referred to the pandemic's impact on living heritage, including both the ways in which it had been weakened or threatened and how it had been transformed, revived, or recreated. The survey results highlight the vulnerability and fragility of living heritage in emergencies and its capacity to evolve and adapt to changes in the environment. The report suggests three areas of action for post-pandemic recovery: strengthening support mechanisms for living heritage bearers, leveraging digital technologies for

safeguarding and recognition and integrating living heritage safeguarding into emergency preparedness plans. The pandemic highlighted the importance and relevance of intangible cultural heritage in addressing complex challenges (UNESCO 2021).

Digital platforms have become a connecting space for people interested in culture and heritage. The concept of sharing photographs on social media (specifically Instagram) helps understand people's interests and informs community sentiment. Geo-tagged photos helped the site gain popularity. The study conducted by Ginzarly and Jordon (2021) focused on the UNESCO hashtags #ShareOurHeritage and #ShareCulture (Ginzarly & Jordon 2021). The hashtags were launched on 12 August 2020 to promote culture and heritage (Ginzarly & Jordon 2021). Evidently, many hashtags were launched at local and international level. This kept the concept of consumption of culture and heritage content alive. Many museums and cities started virtual tours. It has been highlighted in the study that engaging with photos helps cope with crisis and social media isolation (Ginzarly & Jordon 2021). It helps build a community sentiment towards a cultural site and go beyond judgements (Ginzarly & Jordon 2021). The photographs shared with captions helps the audience read and comprehend the significance of the site. People's emotions help in bringing together creators from different parts of the world to create a collaborative experience leading to a cultural exchange (Ginzarly & Jordon 2021). As a result, tourism becomes an important aspect among people who love travelling. Cultural heritage is not a fixed entity, but rather a social construct that evolves over time and space in response to various socio-economic factors. Digitization of cultural heritage can enhance its ability to endure and adapt to changes over time, including the emergence of new heritage values (Ginzarly & Jordon 2021).

2.4 Disaster Risk Preparedness for Heritage Sites

According to the International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC), disaster preparedness involves actions taken to prepare for and mitigate the impacts of disasters. This includes anticipating and, if possible, preventing disasters, minimising their effects on vulnerable populations, and efficiently responding to and resolving their consequences (Titko & Ristvej 2020).

As per Titko & Ristvej 2020 publication, several authors have highlighted how personal experiences influence individuals' perceptions of risk and disasters (Titko & Ristvej 2020). Past experiences with disasters shape people's expectations about future events and their behaviour. Research shows that these experiences can prompt proactive or reactive behaviour, leading individuals to take measures to mitigate the impact of disasters or prepare for survival (Titko & Ristvej 2020). Disaster experiences

also influence how prepared individuals feel. People recognize the shortcomings in their previous preparations, understand what they were unprepared for, identify areas for improvement, and better assess their abilities to cope with future events. Each cycle of this process should ideally enhance preparedness levels, both subjectively and objectively, although this progression does not always occur (Titko & Ristvej 2020).

Therefore, it is extremely important to have a disaster risk management plan as heritage sites are non-renewable resources that protect culture and keep the idea of passing on alive (Smith 2006; Timothy & Nyaupane 2009). Disaster Risk Management (DRM) can be developed not just for current circumstances but also for future situations. Properly designing response measures can expedite recovery and lead to better reconstruction efforts. Shifting from event-based approaches to process based methods or utilising a combination of both can provide a structured framework for managing risks (Titko & Ristvej 2020). Public support is essential for building a sustainable and successful Disaster Risk Management (DRM) system. It is crucial to focus on important tasks common to nearly every disaster, disregarding a specific type of event (Titko & Ristvej 2020). Robben Island is on the West Coast of South Africa. It was declared as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999 based on natural and cultural criteria (Robben Island Museum 2016). After the declaration, the need for an Integrated Disaster Risk Management Plan (IDRMP) arose based on UN and the island's Integrated Conservation Management Plan (ICMP) requirements. Oil pollution, sea accidents, terrorism are some of the main disaster risks for the island. The framework of the IDRMP focussed on preventing and mitigating hazards, emergency preparedness and response, and planning for disaster recovery (Robben Island Museum 2016). Preventing and mitigating hazards involves taking actions before a possible event to minimise the likelihood and potential impact of a disaster. Emergency preparedness planning and responses involve taking actions during a disaster to ensure a coordinated response and effective management of the situation. Planning for disaster recovery involves taking actions to recover from the disaster and improve future disaster management efforts.

Overall, effective disaster management requires a comprehensive and integrated approach that encompasses all three aspects of disaster management. For example, at the Mayibuye Archives, University of Western Coast (UWC) the fire was maybe caused by student violence or electric faults. The lack of safety and planning by the UWC led to a major loss of documents in the archives (Robben Island Museum 2016). For better implementation of the plan, each of the sites at Robben Island were assessed based on the location of the site and level of risk. According to Robben Island 2016, basic pointers such as working without pen and paper in case of risk, nominating a staff member to attend all meetings related to disaster risk preparedness, conducting regular emergency and fire drills, and

ensuring all authorities are on the same page will reduce chaos in case of emergency (Robben Island Museum 2016).

Natural disasters are a big threat to modern societies. The Disaster Risk Readiness (DRR) states that the state of readiness directly affects the magnitude of the damage caused by a pandemic. The United Nations adopted the “Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030)” during the UN World Conference held in Japan on 18 March 2015 (United Nations World Conference 2015). The framework was a second of the “Hyogo Framework for Action” (2005-2015). The principal elements of the framework are effective working towards prevention of disasters and transparency for creation of disaster risk at all levels. The UN further emphasises that pandemics and epidemics require attention and therefore, it is significant to understand policies and practices from all spectrums. Various natural threats that the Sterkfontein, Main Caves and the Origins Museum face include earthquakes, fires, flooding, pest attacks, and technical failure such as pipe bursts. Meanwhile human threats include vandalism, war, and theft. The preparation for disasters can reduce the damage or help prevent disaster altogether. The “National Archives and Records Services of South Africa Act (NARSSA, 1996)” and “Schedule 5 of the South African Constitution (1996)” state that provinces are responsible for archiving (Ngulube *et al.* 2011: 240). The national archives support and assist provinces along with setting guidelines for preservation. Records and Archives are sensitive to disasters and archivists should act as a shield. Disaster Training raises awareness and increases the reflex of humans in case of a disaster (Ngulube *et al.* 2011). Calamities and epidemics have been a part and parcel of life. Although Covid-19 is a rather recent calamity, other calamities have existed long before. The tourism sector has managed to overcome sudden calamities of the past such as the 2015 Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Pandemic (Zwain 2021). The uncertainty with Covid-19 makes it difficult for sustained tourism. Respiratory Syndrome Pandemic. The uncertainty with Covid-19 makes it difficult for sustained tourism (Zwain 2021). (Further readings on coping mechanisms of the Middle East during the pandemic by searching "Middle East and tourism during the pandemic" on Google Scholar.)

As the oral traditions/narration of the past continue in Southern Africa, it is difficult to fill the gap in archives (Chirikure & Pwiti 2008). The management of disasters can decrease ‘cultural amnesia’ (Ngulube *et al.* 2011). Disaster plans must be a part of preservation and management plans. The concept of collection may become invisible if there is no protection plan, according to Ngulube *et al.* (2011). In case of a disaster, cultural heritage is highly affected, and the damage is irreplaceable. The priority given to disaster preparations in South Africa is below average when compared to the rest of the world. Marginal importance is given to the long-term damage caused by the disaster with respect to staff, employers, and depositors (Ngulube *et al.* 2011). Cultural institutions are the hub of archiving

and preserving heritage from the past, an important aspect of disaster preparation. The “South African Disaster Management Act No. 57 of 2002” accentuates reduction of disaster risks, elimination of reducing the consequence of the disaster, emergency preparedness, quick and responsive team to manage disaster and post disaster retrieval (Ngulube *et al.* 2011: 240).

Rogerson & Rogerson (2021) have put forth eight recommendations for South Africa, focusing on consumer travel behaviours, hygiene considerations, and the global demand for a tourism recovery plan. These are:

1. The first recommendation underscores the inevitable rise in the significance of automobilities within South Africa. Recognizing the potential growth of drive tourism, the authors advocate for the implementation of policy interventions to capitalise on the current window of opportunity for supporting domestic tourism of this nature. The main initiatives recommended involve reassessing tourism routes, improving signage, raising awareness among local governments, and enhancing road infrastructure. Emphasis is also placed on implementing measures to enhance road safety and prevent accidents.

2. There is a chance to balance tourism across different regions in South Africa by promoting domestic drive tourism, especially in less crowded rural areas amid the pandemic. It's crucial for local governments in these remote places with nature-based attractions to recognize and capitalise on this opportunity by highlighting features like open natural spaces, peacefulness, and seclusion to attract domestic tourists. Creating suggested routes for activities such as driving, walking, or biking can enhance visitor experiences. Moreover, adopting a 'safety tourist destination' certification system, inspired by practices in other countries, could be considered by local authorities.

3. As tourism expands in unaltered environments like South Africa's national parks, there is a need to monitor its impact on these protected areas, especially with the increasing flow of domestic tourists. Understanding these effects is crucial for ensuring the long-term sustainability of these spaces as places for physical and mental well-being. However, it's important to note that the primary beneficiaries of these wellness benefits tend to be society's more affluent classes. To address this disparity, future policies must strive to extend these advantages to lower-income and disadvantaged communities. This challenge is compounded by research revealing persistent issues of affordability and willingness to pay among economically challenged domestic consumers for various tourism offerings in Africa.

4. The rising interest in visiting national parks and natural settings for mental health benefits presents an opportunity for expanding commercial nature tourism focused on nature therapies. It's crucial to conduct research on the experiential aspects and commercial strategies tailored to various market segments interested in these forms of nature-based tourism. Australian research offers a solid groundwork for delving deeper into this direction.

5. City tourism stands to benefit from potential changes in visitor travel patterns, shifting focus from popular attractions to lesser-known areas within cities. This shift could create new opportunities for value generation, diversifying tourism offerings and enhancing the resilience of cities. Exploring options like creative tourism and unique tours off the typical path is recommended. These initiatives can bolster cities' visitor economies while spreading tourism impacts across different areas within South Africa's major cities.

6. Efforts should prioritise the implementation of technology to manage tourism demand effectively at popular attractions, wherever located. This involves conglomerating real-time data to implement measures that reduce overcrowding and enhance social distancing for better visitor experiences.

7. Given the reduced likelihood of a return to pre-Covid levels for cruise tourism, it's suggested that government departments overseeing the oceans economy reconsider plans for constructing new cruise ship terminals in South Africa. Furthermore, there's a recommendation to revisit the Coastal and Marine Tourism Strategy within the Department of Tourism, which plays a role in the blue economy planning frameworks.

8. To revive international tourism in South Africa, Rogerson & Rogerson (2021) suggest promoting contactless tourism, also termed as untact tourism. This involves the national government increasing awareness among tourism businesses and local governments about safety practices, cleanliness, and the development of a contactless economy (Rogerson & Rogerson 2021). Additionally, there's a need to build a tourism ecosystem focused on contactless services. Moreover, there's a recommendation to start identifying safe and nature-friendly untact tourism attractions in South Africa, particularly for future marketing efforts targeting Asian visitors (Rogerson & Rogerson 2021).

The Covid-19 pandemic had a profound impact on the global tourism industry, with each sector responding differently to government regulations. Air travel, particularly in Africa, notably South Africa, suffered significantly. Similarly, cruise tourism, once vibrant in South Africa, declined sharply.

Some countries, like Zimbabwe, faced economic challenges, even bankruptcy. However, the digital realm provided a lifeline, as tourist sites leveraged the internet and social media to maintain engagement. As borders reopened, there was a mix of apprehension and eagerness to travel again. The crisis underscored the importance of disaster preparedness, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive, integrated approach. Many archaeological sites lack a preparedness plan, highlighting the necessity for such strategies in facing future pandemics.

Chapter 3: Methods

The research methodology adopted is a comprehensive strategy (Jamshed 2014). The study draws on three types of data and experiences:

1. Interviews.
2. Site visitation to each of the three study sites, both as tourist and researcher (Figs. 18-19).
3. Statistics gathered, where available, from visitor records.

By employing these three types of data and experiences, the study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by three public heritage sites along with a comparison with a nature-based site- Kruger National Park in South Africa. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis, the research aims to elucidate the pre-Covid-19, during-Covid-19, and post-Covid-19 contexts of archaeotourism in South Africa, while also identifying potential risks and formulating recommendations for disaster preparedness strategies. Additionally, the study intends to assess the specific effects of the pandemic on visitor numbers, profiles, and coping strategies within the archaeotourism sector, comparing these findings with the broader culture and nature sector in the region through selected case studies. Through this multifaceted approach, the research aims to contribute valuable insights and recommendations for enhancing the resilience and sustainability of the archaeotourism sector in South Africa amidst the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.1 Interview Methodology

Interviews are an important tool of research. It is one of the oldest methods and can be defined as an exchange of information between the interviewer and interviewee (Whiting 2008; Hamill 2019). Interviews were used to understand the impact that the pandemic had on each site and the perceptions thereof, from those working at the different study sites. The interviews were semi-structured. A set of questions were prepared in advance; however, the interview was open-ended (Bernard 2006) (see Appendix 2 (2.1) for a sample of interview questions). This allowed for more flexibility in the interview, ensuring that all the relevant areas are covered by the pre-set interview questions, but that there is the potential to follow other directions of enquiry based on the responses given during the interview (Jamshed 2014).

The interviews were conducted in-person. All interviews were conducted in English. The answers were recorded using a Philips VoiceTracer audio recorder (DVT6010), photographs and notes were taken with the permission of the interviewee. The audio recording was made to help in data analysis and in

obtaining quantitative results (Whiting 2008; Hamill 2019). The content received was analysed through hermeneutic and descriptive analysis. The former focuses on the interpretation of data in a socio-historic manner using secondary data and the latter is an interpretation of the data using both primary and secondary data (Bhattacherjee 2012).

All the interviews were transcribed into typed Word documents on completion of fieldwork (Appendix 3).

3.2 Sample Selection

This section covers the motivations for sample selection – of both the study sites and the participants for the interview. In both cases their selection was non-random.

3.3 Study site selection

The three study sites were selected for the following reasons:

a) Accessibility: Two of the sites, Sterkfontein and the Origins Museum, were chosen due to their proximity to the University of Witwatersrand and the ease of travelling to them. The accessibility not only streamlined the research process but also facilitated collaboration and knowledge exchange, contributing to a vibrant academic community centred around the exploration of the pandemic, archaeology and tourism.
b) Comparability: Two of the sites were chosen (Sterkfontein and Main Caves) due to their comparability as they are both within world heritage properties and both attract archaeotourists.
c) The Origins Centre Museum was added to the study to expand the sample size and to also consider the impact that covid had on a very different type of archaeotourism attraction (a man made, urban venue versus the natural, authentic archaeological sites).
d) To compare the impact of the pandemic on the cultural heritage experience versus the natural heritage experience, Kruger National Park (Mpumalanga) was selected for comparative purposes, particularly as it publishes annual reports which are publicly available.



Fig. 18. *The researcher during a guided tour of the rock art at Main Cave's North (Photo: Russell 2023).*

3.4 Interview participant selection

The study used purposive sampling – where participants were selected based on the notion that their interviews would be information rich due to their employment positions with respect to the sites (Palinkas *et al.* 2015; Schutt 2018). Employers at the selected sites that were believed to be in positions that would mean that they could supply the most relevant information to the project were contacted for an interview. The decision was made to interview a person from senior management at each of the sites as well as a person who had direct interaction with the public in a guiding capacity; therefore, at each of the sites and heritage institutions, the interviewees were site management and site guides.

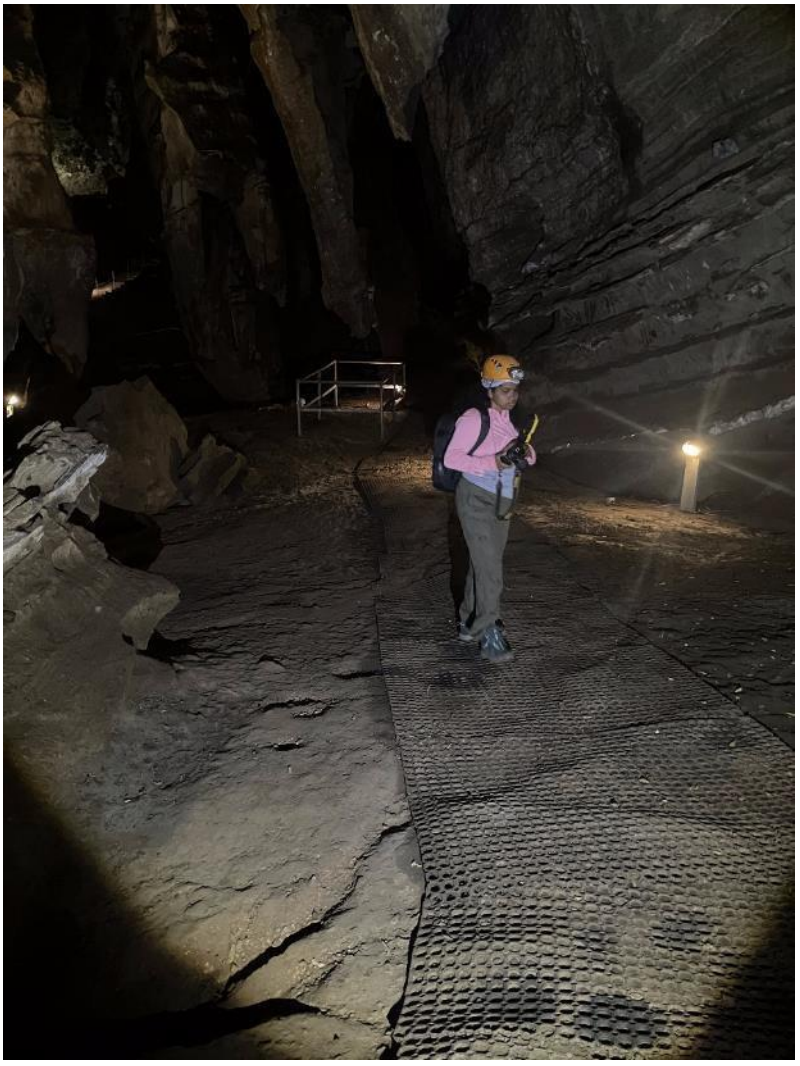


Fig. 19. *The researcher during a tour of Sterkfontein Caves (Photo: Mahlangu 2023).*

To meet the objectives of the research and to understand the impact of tourism, in-person interviews were conducted at Sterkfontein Caves and Giants Castle Game Reserve. Two employees were interviewed at each of the sites. For comparison purposes, two employees of Origins Centre Museum, University of Witwatersrand were also interviewed.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethics clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC, Non-Medical), University of Witwatersrand was obtained for the project ahead of fieldwork (Protocol No: H22/08/5) (Appendix 2). As per the Wits Ethics guidelines, the purpose of the interview and consent for conducting the interview was explained and requested before the interview. A participant's consent form was signed by the interviewees. The confidentiality of the interviews and participants were protected according to the participant’s request. Permission to record the interviews was obtained prior to the interviews.

3.6 Site Visitation

To understand the visitor experience at each site and the impact that covid might have had on the site tour, all the sites (including Kruger National Park) were visited with the guide as part of the tour experience.

3.7 Quantitative Data & Published Resources

Quantitative research entails gathering and analysing numerical data, whereas qualitative research delves into narrative or experiential data. Mixed research methods integrate both qualitative and quantitative elements to offer a comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Halcomb & Hickman 2015).

At each of the study sites, the visitors' numbers pre-, post- and during the pandemic were requested. The rationale was that quantitative data, such as statistics of visitation in each site, could be compared to the qualitative data (interviews) result. Where site visits and visitor numbers are not available the study will use published annual reports and scientific papers.

A literature review will be done to understand archaeotourism in South Africa and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on archaeotourism and heritage sites. Reading and interpreting various sources of secondary data on the relevant topics determines the gap in existing research (Ramdhani *et al.* 2014).

Chapter 4: Results

Covid-19 had both positive and negative impacts on archaeological sites and its people. In this chapter, through interviews and the data collected from the chosen sites, the effect of Covid-19 on this sector is analysed. The analysis is presented as per the four objectives presented in Chapter 1. Objectives 1 and 3 are combined so as not to be repetitive. In each case the objective is presented and then each of the study sites is considered based on the data collected at that site. Finally, the chapter ends with an evaluation of issues that were raised by the interview participants which do not strictly fit within the four objectives, but which are interesting for consideration (i.e., the impact of the pandemic on the employees' stress and mental health).

4.1 Archaeotourism at the Study Sites and the impact of the pandemic on archaeotourism

The evaluation presented is based on both visitor statistics and interview data. However, it was not possible to get visitor statistics at all the sites and in this case the analysis relies on the content of the interviews.

4.1.1 Visitor numbers

Origins Museum:

Visitor numbers for the origins centre were not made available for this study. Nor was any data on ticket sales made available to the study. So, this information relied on visitor book entries (2018 to 2022) (Fig. 20), which are not a complete nor accurate reflection of visitor numbers and information given by Origin's employees during the interview. The visitor book wasn't consistently filled, especially during Covid-19. It wasn't used to adhere to government protocols, so the count of visitors is at a *minimum*.

Pre-pandemic, in 2019 the Origins Museum was removed from the Red Tour Bus Route, which is a tourist hop on/hop off bus service that ferries tourists on sightseeing tours of Johannesburg, because the bus stop was considered risky for tourists due to crime in the area. This had a significant impact on the numbers of international visitors to the museum. Subsequent to this, later in 2019 the museum experienced a decline in both international and domestic tourists due to Covid-19 (Appendix 3.1: 94 & 110).

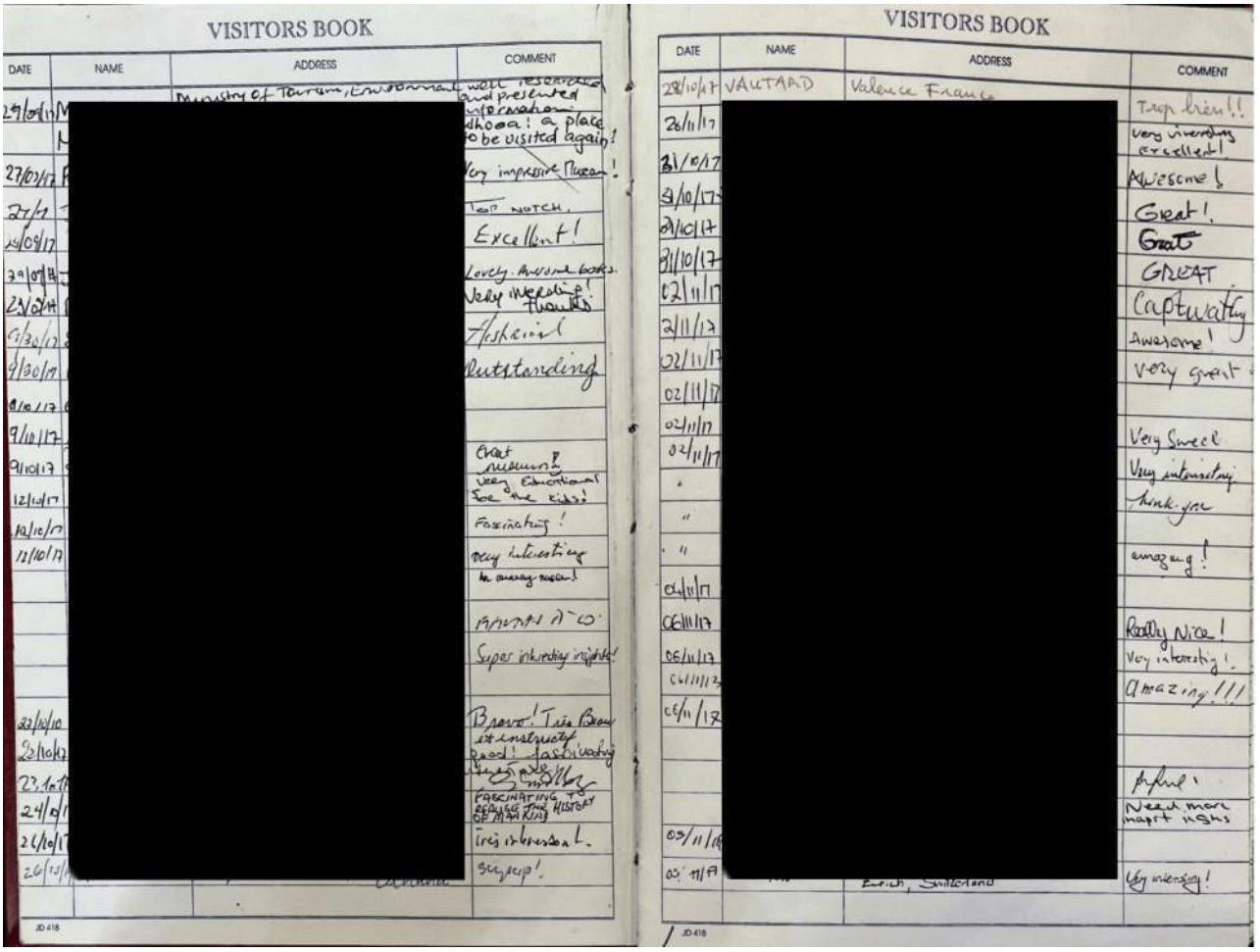


Fig. 20. *A page from the Origins Centre visitor's book (2017) (Photo: Eswaran 2023)*

Prior to the pandemic, group tours to the museum typically consisted of 20 to 25 tourists (Appendix 3.1: 92), but during the pandemic, the number reduced to 10 to 15 people, when lockdown eased (Appendix 3.1: 92). The main visitors to the museum are school groups from different provinces in South Africa. These provinces included Western Cape, Limpopo, North-West, Free State, Mpumalanga, and Kwazulu-Natal (Appendix 3.1: 117). As per the tour guide, over the past year, the museum welcomed over 2000 visitors, encompassing attendees of various events and functions, with a monthly average of approximately 500 individuals (Appendix 3.1: 120). Interviewees from the Origins Centre confirmed that the museum had returned to pre Covid-19 visitor numbers with group tours (Appendix 3.1: 120). The curator emphasised that the team had been working on marketing initiatives in schools and various public spaces in a hybrid manner (Appendix 3.1: 94). So, post-Covid, the shift in offering tours expanded. The museum provides both in-person and online tours tailored to diverse audiences, such as various age groups. The online platform accessibility has opened up opportunities for engaging with broader audiences worldwide. Moreover, the focus on different areas of the museum or specific content allows for a more customizable and immersive experience. The

augmented reality app makes the place interactive and exciting for school children. Additionally, utilising social media for interaction and engagement has become a valuable tool to connect with the audience.

Data collated from the Origins Centre visitors' book is summarised in Fig. 21 (detailed data available in Appendix 4: table 4.6 - 4.10). The visitor book had to be removed during the pandemic to comply with the South African government Covid-19 protocols, so the record during this period is incomplete.

In November and December of 2017, the museum saw its highest number of international and domestic visitors, with 33 and 27 visitors respectively. Overall, 2018 recorded the highest number of visitors (Fig. 21). Between January to March 2020, there are 54 entries by international tourists and 14 entries by domestic tourists.

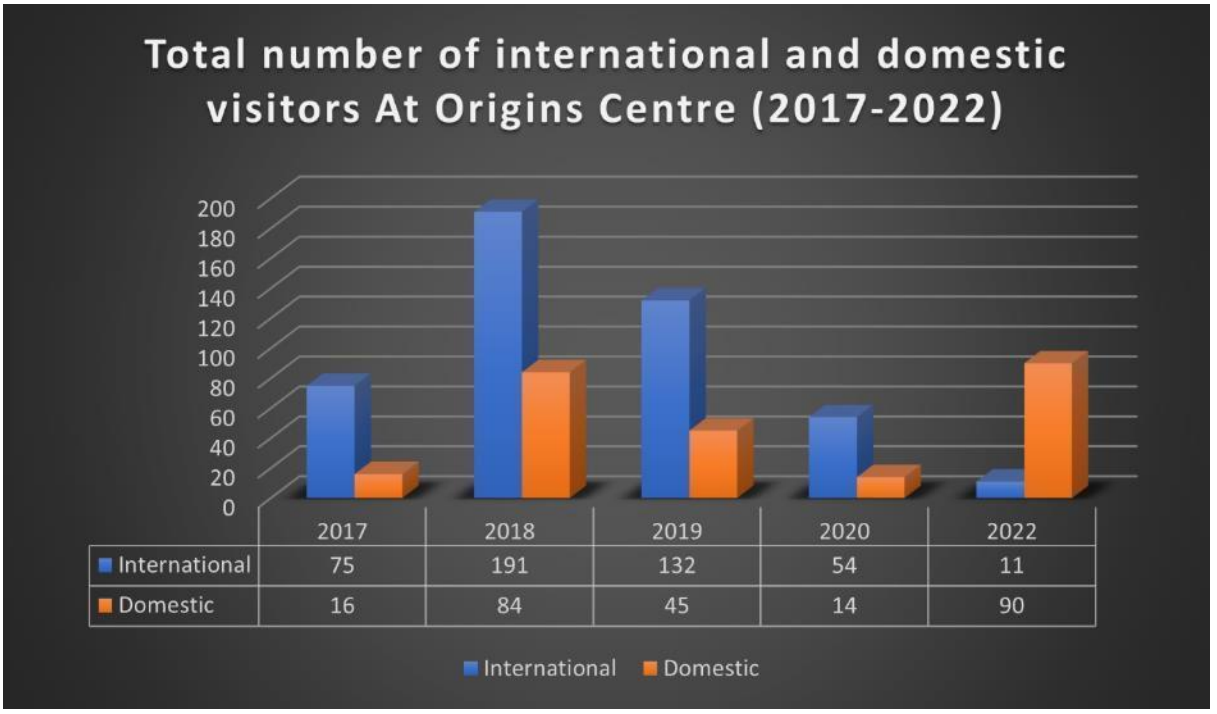
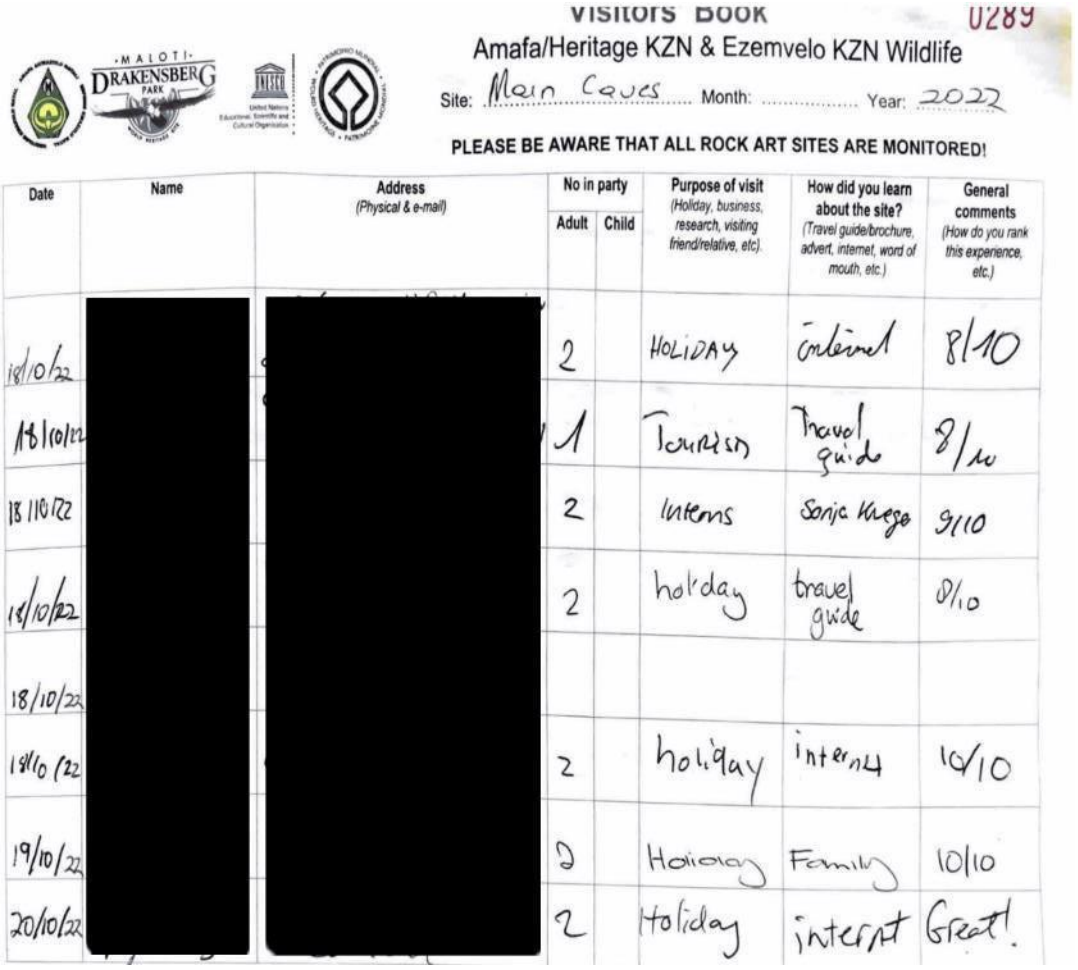


Fig. 21. *Total number of international and domestic visitors at Origins Centre Museum (2017-2022) (detailed data in Appendix 4).*

Main Caves:

The study was granted access to all the visitor books available. There were 2015, 2018, 2020, 2021, and 2022. All visitors to Main Caves are asked to fill in the visitor book by the site guide, so this is an accurate reflection of the *minimum* number of visitors to the site in any period (Fig. 22). No data on ticket sales was made available to the study.

Before Covid-19, tour groups had 20 to 25 tourists, during Covid-19, it dropped to as low as 5 tourists, and in 2023 there are approximately 10 to 15 people in a group (Appendix 3.2: 125 & 136). Prior to the pandemic, the international tourists were mainly from France, Italy, Germany, America, and Spain (Appendix 3.2: 129). Regarding domestic tourism, visitors from provinces such as Gauteng, Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal, and Mpumalanga visited the site. School groups from these provinces were also frequent visitors, pre-pandemic (Appendix 3.2: 133).



VISITORS BOOK 0289

Amafa/Heritage KZN & Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife

Site: Main Caves Month: ..... Year: 2022

PLEASE BE AWARE THAT ALL ROCK ART SITES ARE MONITORED!

Date	Name	Address (Physical & e-mail)	No in party: Adult	No in party: Child	Purpose of visit (Holiday, business, research, visiting friend/relative, etc)	How did you learn about the site? (Travel guide/brochure, advert, internet, word of mouth, etc.)	General comments (How do you rank this experience, etc.)
18/10/22	[redacted]	[redacted]	2		HOLIDAY	online	8/10
18/10/22			1		Tourism	Travel guide	8/10
18/10/22			2		Interns	Sonja Kruger	9/10
18/10/22			2		holiday	travel guide	9/10
18/10/22							
18/10/22			2		holiday	internet	10/10
19/10/22			2		Holiday	Family	10/10
20/10/22			2		Holiday	internet	Great!

Fig. 22. *A page from the Main Cave's visitor's book (2022) (Photo: Eswaran 2023)*

In 2015, over a four-month period, Main Caves had a total of 1982 visitors (Fig. 23). Of this count, 1061 were international tourists and 921 were domestic visitors. In 2018, the total number of visitors to Main Caves was 2164, with international visitors at their peak (Fig. 23). In 2020, after the lockdown, visitors to the caves were down, with just 320 domestic visitors. The data for the 12 months in 2021 showed the continuing impact of the pandemic on visitor counts, there were just 178 international tourists (Appendix 4: tables 4.1 - 4.5). This confirms the site manager's statement that international visitors had reduced in number by more than 50%

(Appendix 3.2: 135). In 2022, visitor numbers appear to have returned to pre-pandemic levels as there were a total of 2636 visits to Main Caves, out of which 1566 were domestic and 1070 were international. The interesting trend appears to be that domestic tourism counts are at a high in the post pandemic period. This is corroborated by the interview with the site manager, when asked about whether visits to the site were increasing, they said, "I wasn't sure whether we would pick up during summertime. I wasn't sure, but I just realised instead of getting more overseas guests, we were getting more local guests" (Appendix 3.2: 140).

Giants Castle Game Reserve is heavily reliant on organised tours to bring international tourists to Main caves. Prior to the pandemic travel companies such as Absolute Tours, Chickoloo Tours, and Touristic all included Main Caves on their tourist route (Appendix 3.2: 136). Unfortunately, the pandemic had a negative impact on these tour companies; some even shut down. Consequently, international visitors to Main Caves and the associated accommodation at Giants Castle camp have plummeted, this has had a huge economic impact on the site (Appendix 3.2: 129 & 134). Learning from Covid-19, the site manager said, “Preserve the painting more because they're starting fading now. Some of the painting you can't see them. Yes, we telling people we can go and visit the painting there's painting but because people were not travelling, so we were not getting visitors to go in and visit the caves” (Appendix 3.2: 142).

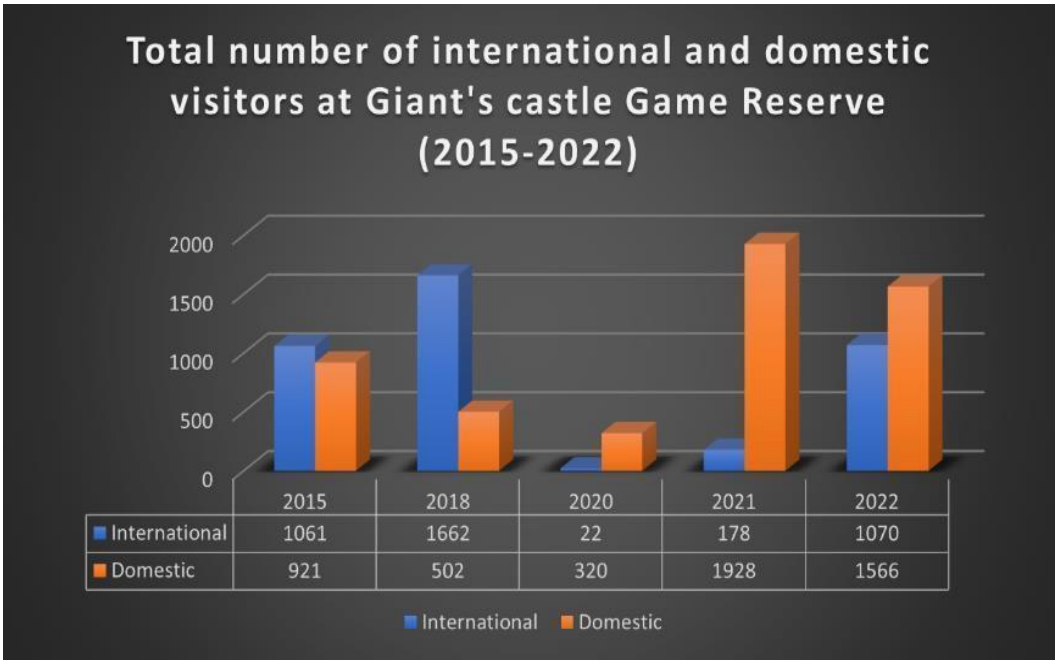


Fig. 23. *Total number of international and domestic visitors at Giant’s Castle Game Reserve (2017-2022) (detailed data in Appendix 4).*

Sterkfontein Caves:

Sterkfontein Caves did not have a visitors' book. During the Covid-19 pandemic, a register was

used for monitoring, but it is no longer in use. Before Covid-19, the cave tours operated with groups of 25-30 people every half an hour. During the pandemic, the numbers reduced significantly to 15, and sometimes as low as 10-15 (Appendix 3.3: 145, 146, 154, 157). When restrictions eased, the capacity increased to 23-25 people per tour, with a maximum of 20-25 allowed (Appendix 3.3: 145, 146, 154, 157). However, due to the closure of the caves for the past couple of months, operations were limited to the open area near the entrance of Maropeng. The impact of lockdown levels was substantial. During strict lockdowns, the number of tours conducted per day reduced to five, compared to the higher volume before. Overall, there were fluctuations in visitor numbers, with some countries seeing an increase while others experienced a decrease, but the majority of visitors were international tourists. Pre Covid-19, Sterkfontein Caves accommodated 30 to 35 visitors per tour, with 35 school kids or 30 adults in each group (Appendix 3.3: 146).

During the pandemic, cave tours had to reduce the number to a maximum of 15, with intervals stretching from 15 minutes to hourly for cleaning and sanitization purposes. Prior to Covid, they could host 1500 to 3000 kids daily, but post-Covid, visitor numbers remained lower due to lingering fears of public spaces (Appendix 3.3: 146). Previously, Sterkfontein Caves attracted visitors from diverse places worldwide, including small islands like Solomon Island, with regular visits from large groups of Japanese and Chinese tourists (Appendix 3.3: 155). In terms of visitor demographics, there was a significant shift. Previously, there were around 65-70% domestic visitors and 80-90% international visitors (Appendix 3.3: 160).

However, after the pandemic, there was a more balanced mix of domestic and international visitors, with a higher number of both categories. Even at present, the site is struggling to regain its previous visitor numbers. Queues at the caves, once common, diminished. Now, they accommodate approximately 150 to 200 domestic and international tourists on weekdays, a significant drop from pre-Covid levels. The pandemic led to heightened concerns among visitors, especially schools, regarding safety protocols. People became more conscious, asking numerous questions about Covid safety measures before booking. The regulation of the cave's temperature at 18 degrees Celsius added to the cautious approach, as any disease could potentially affect everyone visiting in a day. With the reopening of airports, there was an increase in international tourists visiting Sterkfontein Caves, but overall visitor numbers remained below pre-pandemic levels (Appendix 3.3).

4.1.2 Visitor numbers and impact of covid on Kruger National Park

Kruger National Park (KNP), located in Mpumalanga province, was established as South Africa's inaugural national park in 1926, with the construction of accommodations starting in 1928 (Saayman & Saayman 2006; Van der Merwe 2023). The park covers a total area of 2562 square kilometres, including 883 kilometres of tar roads and 1679 kilometres of gravel roads (Van der Merwe 2023). Over the years, Kruger National Park has become the most visited national park in Africa, with the wild animals being the main tourist attractions (Figs. 24-25) (Van der Merwe 2023).



Fig. 24. *Lions viewed during a self-drive game drive as a tourist to KNP (Photo: Eswaran 2022)*



Fig. 25. *Zebra viewed during a self-drive as a tourist to KNP (Photo: Eswaran 2023)*

Accommodation facilities have grown from 14 camps to 27, and there are also 24 privately owned lodges within the park equipped with safari vehicles (Van der Merwe 2023).

To fulfil the research objectives, visitors' count of Kruger National Park from SANParks annual report between 2018 and 2023 were compared (Fig. 26). The park's revenue comes from diverse sources like accommodations, restaurants, conservation fees, and activities within the tourism sector. SANParks experienced a decrease in visitors from 2018, with a 2.1% decline in overnight visitors (SANParks 2019). Despite this decline, there was a notable rise in total revenue, which increased by 9.4% to R1.766 billion (SANParks 2019). The data presented in Figure 1 indicates visitor counts before, during, and after the pandemic at Kruger National Park. Although Kruger National Park hasn't fully regained its pre-pandemic activity, it's handling the situation comparably well when contrasted with other natural sites (SANParks 2019).

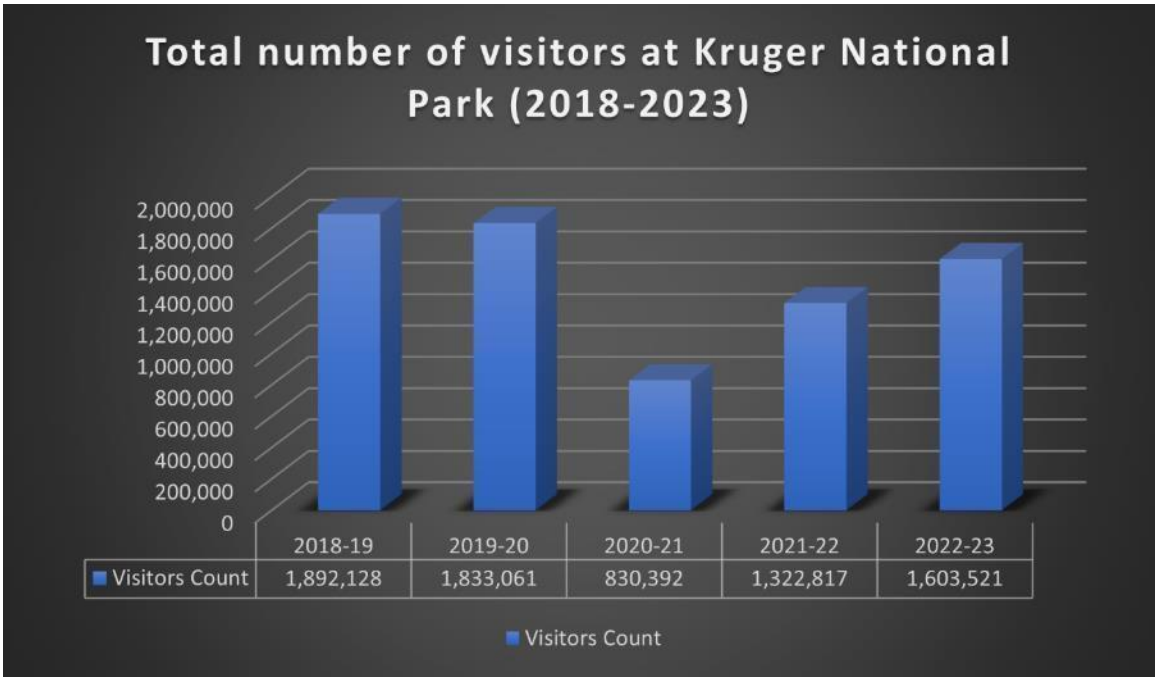


Fig. 26. *Total guest visitations at Kruger National Park (2018-2023) (after SANParks 2019; SANParks 2020; SANParks 2021; SANParks 2022; SANParks 2023).*

Tourism plays a crucial role in South African National Parks (SANParks) by providing both recreational and educational opportunities for local and international visitors. This tourism revenue constitutes 80% of SANParks' annual budget, reducing its dependence on state funding and enabling it to fulfil its conservation mission (SANParks 2020). According to the report, "SANParks' Tourism Division is one of three core pillars of the organisation, alongside Socio-Economic Transformation and Conservation (SANParks 2020: 111)". SANParks' Tourism Division comprises various units: the Marketing Unit promotes parks, raises awareness, and generates sales; the Visitor Services Unit enhances visitor experiences and conducts tourism research; the Yield and Revenue Unit monitors tourism-generated revenue and enforces standards; and the Wild Card Programme encourages public

support through a loyalty program, generating additional revenue (SANParks 2020: 83). Additionally, the Business Development Unit manages private-public partnerships as part of SANParks' commercialization strategy. The South African tourism industry has faced a decline since 2018 because of weak domestic and international demand (SANParks 2019; SANParks 2020). In 2018, the Tourism Business Council of South Africa reported it as the worst year for business performance since the inception of the Tourism Business Index (TBI) in 2010 (SANParks 2019; SANParks 2020). The TBI, an initiative of the TBCSA, indicates the performance of businesses in South Africa's tourism sector.

Despite a cautious expectation of 5% growth in visitor numbers in 2019 due to overall lacklustre demand, there were months of significant growth, notably in June and September 2019 (SANParks 2020). However, the sector's hopes were dashed when the Covid-19 pandemic hit in early 2020. International market cancellations started in January 2020 and surged in February and March, followed by domestic cancellations after the first case was recorded in March. In November between 16-20 November 2023 the park recorded a total of 14, 407-day visitors during the SANParks week celebrations. This decline continued, and the financial year ended on a negative note due to the impact of the pandemic (SANParks 2020).

In the 2020-21 SANParks report, Ms. Hapiloe Sello, Managing Executive of Tourism Development and Marketing, reiterated that tourism is a vital pillar for SANParks, focusing on nature-based and sustainable experiences, as well as promoting culture and heritage (SANParks 2021). The report highlighted the significant impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced the park to close in April and May 2020, reopening on June 8, 2020, following government protocols (SANParks 2021). The first signs of normalcy appeared in September 2020 when the intra-provincial travel ban was lifted; however, domestic tourist interest did not fully compensate for the earlier losses. During this period, the total number of guests visiting SANParks decreased by 68.4%, from 6,326,488 to 1,996,667 people. Specifically, in Kruger National Park, the number decreased by 54.7%, from 1,833,061 to 830,392 visitors, and for other parks, the decline was 74.0%, from 4,493,374 to 1,166,275 visitors (SANParks 2021).

To recover from the pandemic's impact and attract visitors, SANParks implemented various marketing strategies. These included the “Welcome back to the Wild” online advertising campaign and a Black Friday Sale (SANParks 2021). An 'Expanded Senior Citizen Discounts' campaign was introduced, offering revised discounts of 40% for a limited time at selected parks and camps, leading to increased bookings (SANParks 2021). SANParks collaborated with South African Tourism (SAT) to create videos showcasing health and safety protocols, reassuring travellers about their safety within the parks (SANParks 2021). These videos were used in global campaigns by both SANParks and SAT.

SANParks put into practice planned online initiatives to enhance their social media reach. These efforts led to significant growth and engagement across various platforms (SANParks 2021). Specifically, their YouTube subscriptions increased by 69.3%, reaching 10,000 subscribers, allowing for monetization due to substantial watch time (SANParks 2021). Instagram experienced a 35.7% growth, reaching 125,000 followers, and LinkedIn networks expanded by 32% to 35,000 connections (SANParks 2021). Other social media platforms also showed positive growth during this period (SANParks 2021).

The tourism industry faces a challenging path to recovery due to the ongoing effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and global travel restrictions. Experts suggest a "reset" or "recalibration" of the tourism sector post-Covid-19, requiring businesses to make their offerings more resilient and adapt to changing consumer interests, including a greater emphasis on sustainable products and experiences (SANParks 2021). Research plays a crucial role in informing management decisions in this context. SANParks revised its Tourism Research Agenda to focus on new research priorities for the short- to medium-term (SANParks 2021). Two studies were launched to investigate the pandemic's effects on tourism, travel patterns, potential recovery scenarios, and implications for ecotourism (SANParks 2021). A tourist perception study conducted in April 2020 indicated that visitors were eager to return to National Parks as they considered these experiences essential for their mental and physical well-being (SANParks 2021). Visitors felt that they could safely practise social distancing in national parks due to their spacious and open nature, minimising the risk of disease transmission. Consequently, many did not believe that visiting national parks increased their risk of contracting the disease compared to their normal everyday activities (SANParks 2021).

The SANParks Tourism, Marketing, and Communications Department plays a crucial role in connecting with tourists and the general public (SANParks 2022). They utilise a mix of traditional and digital channels to communicate, inform, gather feedback, and engage with people. During the pandemic, the use of virtual platforms became vital, allowing SANParks to reach a global audience regardless of their physical location. Audiovisual communication via computers and smartphones became essential, especially when travel was restricted, enabling SANParks to share information and images effectively (SANParks 2022). To enhance accessibility, existing programs like the Wild Card Loyalty and Stokvels and Travel Clubs were updated and integrated into the SANParks portal, making travel inclusive and affordable for everyone (SANParks 2022).

In May 2022, the Tourism Property Management System (TPMS) launch workshop was held at Golden Gate, attended by tourism staff from Parks Division, Kruger National Park, Corporate IT, and

SANParks partners Gijima, Ankerdata, and Plankton (SANParks 2023). TPMS comprises four subsystems: activity and inventory management, property management, stock control, and point of sale. The project team conducted site visits to gather IT, connectivity, gate, power, and infrastructure requirements from various parks (SANParks 2023). In December 2022, online ticketing was piloted at Table Mountain National Park, enabling visitors to purchase tickets for Cape of Good Hope, Boulders Beach, and West Coast National Park on mobile devices. A corporate portal and online activity/permit management will follow. During National Parks Week in September, two cultural heritage interpretation sites were opened in Kruger National Park: Rabelais Hut and Mount Tshikumbu (SANParks 2023).

These sites showcase the history of the Orpen family, park water policy, tourism evolution, biodiversity, black rangers, Chief Tongogara, Bakgalaka people, and other historical chiefs (SANParks 2023). Maintenance and restoration of cultural heritage sites in Kruger National Park were initiated in partnership with SANParks Honorary Rangers. Tourism research was conducted to enhance performance, focusing on "visitor behaviour changes, China as a source market, natural park characteristics' value estimation, visitor expectations and perceptions of heritage sites, tourism attraction value of rhinos in Kruger National Park" (SANParks 2023: 96). Engagements involved multiple universities globally. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the park is optimistic about the future and aims to build back better (SANParks 2023). The goal is to recover and reach pre-Covid visitor numbers by the next financial year, which is 2024-25. The park is focused on revitalising its tourism efforts and attracting visitors to experience its natural beauty and cultural heritage (SANParks 2023).

4.1.3 Analysing the impact of pandemic from interview data

Origins Museum:

For the museum, the pandemic brought about changes, some of which were advantageous and also challenges. The curator, when questioned about the impact of Covid-19, reflected, "So, I think there's been positive things as well, interestingly" (Appendix 3.1: 91). For example, the launch of Google Arts and Culture in 2021 attracted online audiences globally (Appendix 3.1: 94), and also, during the 2021 lockdown period, the museum utilised the time when there were no visitors to the museum, to renovate. As restrictions eased, the museum remained closed to the public, but a limited number of staff members returned for supervision. In December, renovation funds were secured, coinciding with the gradual return of additional staff members to work. As external service providers commenced renovation, the staff enforced strict measures, ensuring limited occupancy, mandatory mask-wearing, and continuous

sanitization for everyone present. Despite facing a year of no income from ticket sales, financial support from organisations like GENUS Palaeosciences and PAST (funding bodies that promote and fund research primarily in the field of Palaeosciences), and National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS), and Wits itself, enabled the museum to endure the challenging period (Appendix 3.1: 108). No permanent staff were retrenched during the period, and all remained on their full salaries. However, amidst these positive developments, there were setbacks such as the theft of indigenous plants with medicinal properties from outside the museum (Appendix 3.1: 114).

Main Caves:

Main Caves closed on March 25, 2020, reopening in October 2020, exclusively for domestic tourists (Appendix 3.2: 124). The tour guide expressed the difficulty of the times, especially the absence of tours and the need to stay at home. Despite these challenges, she expressed gratitude for not losing her job or income during the pandemic (Appendix 3.2: 124). The site suffered from infrastructural degradation, including broken decks, and uncontrolled fires (Appendix 3.2: 124). The tour guide highlighted a significant impact—the delay in research, crucial for both academia and the exchange of information among guides (Appendix 3.2: 124).

Sterkfontein Caves:

At Sterkfontein Caves, retrenchment occurred due to Covid-19. While the impact on the cave itself was limited, the people associated with the site lost a year's revenue, and some employees were laid off. After the initial three months of the pandemic, salaries were no longer paid. Funding from the Department of Economic Development (DED) and Gauteng Tourism was crucial in sustaining the site and some of its workforce (Appendix 3.3: 148). Additionally, concerns such as cable thefts, break-ins, robbery of materials, and fear of occupation by Zama Zama kept the cave's employees on edge, reflecting the broader challenges faced by these archaeological sites during the pandemic (Appendix 3.3: 147). According to the tour guide, the situation was challenging, primarily due to being stuck at home without going to work. Fortunately, there was a financial stipend from the company, but as a tour guide, the lack of guest tips (handouts) significantly reduced their income (Appendix 3.3: 156). The tour guide believed that the cave was negatively affected because researchers and archaeologists were unable to conduct their studies and excavations due to regulations (Appendix 3.3: 145 & 156). This halt impacted both archaeological work and tourism-related activities at the site.

4.2 Different Strategies and Coping Mechanisms adopted during the Lockdown Period

To navigate the challenges of the pandemic and sustain visitor interest, Origins Centre and Sterkfontein Caves opted to move certain tour components online. Meanwhile, Main Caves and Kruger National Park chose to await a relaxation of pandemic restrictions and the return of visitors.

Origins Centre:

Origins centre used virtual tours as one of the advertising tools. The virtual tours and other online facilities offered such as even live streams; public lectures were offered free of cost. However, post the pandemic the online presence has become a drawback as most people expect events to be streamed online for free. The curator explained:

> "Um…and so we've realised we kind of need both options, we need the income and the whole point is that people come to the space; and we need that money. And we need those visitors. The people that are overseas or in different parts of the country that can't come also want to be a part of it in some way, which we don't feel we can charge for. So, we've made an effort this year to have a hybrid option for funding that we've got. When we've got funding, we can offer that, but otherwise it's a bit tricky" (Appendix 3.1: 95).

In 2021, the launch of Origins Centre on Google Arts and Culture gave the museum global recognition, adding the heritage institutions as one of must-see places in Johannesburg for many tourists. The curator said:

> "We do also now have an international footprint because we have, we went virtual and we have virtual online exhibits with Google Arts and Culture, which we had started discussing before Covid that and it just came along at a really nice time so that we could launch them. I think it was in 2021 that we launched the online exhibits, so that helps kind of advertise the museum and people overseas can go, oh, wait, okay, this is a cool museum. And then we go visit it"
>
> (Appendix 3.1: 94).

Sterkfontein Caves:

At Sterkfontein, the two important changes that were adopted during the pandemic were adding covid-19 based signages inside the caves and shifting the sale of tickets online. Markings and guidelines were strategically placed along with sanitizers, guiding tourists effortlessly through the cave's wonders. The

tour guide highlighted that the building was marked with the guidelines making it easy for tourists to follow them. Pre-pandemic tickets were available both online and at counters in Maropeng Centre. However, when questioned about ticket sales amidst the pandemic, the site manager responded by saying, “Everything was online, so what you just needed to bring was a phone which we could scan or piece of document that you have already printed out that contains a barcode of your tickets and that's it” (Appendix 3.3: 154). Tickets were only available online through Web Tickets or Pick ‘n’ Pay to lessen physical contact. The resilience exhibited in the face of unprecedented challenges ensured that these cultural landmarks persevered, offering safe experiences to intrepid visitors during a time of global uncertainty (Appendix 3.3).

4.3 The Impact of the Pandemic on the Culture and Nature Sector in South Africa

While the archaeological sites themselves weren't significantly affected by the pandemic, the livelihoods of those working in and around them took a hit. According to interviews, Sterkfontein Caves experienced the most severe impact. Unlike other sites like Origins Centre and Main Caves, which received funding and support from external sources, Sterkfontein faced the challenges largely on its own, leaving its employees to navigate the difficulties alone (Appendix 3.3: 148). The commonality among the chosen sites is their provision of guided group tours. However, pandemic restrictions made such tours less appealing. Unlike the chosen sites, enjoying a holiday or a day visit at Kruger National Park was simpler. Visitors did not have to engage with unfamiliar individuals or gather in groups. Observing wildlife could be comfortably done from the confines of one's own vehicle, providing reassurance to many tourists during the pandemic.

Origins Centre:

The tour guide at Origins Centre said, “if you want to still be doing what you did before Covid, it means you haven't gone through covid properly or you didn't learn anything. So, our lives have changed after covid, our thinking have changed, our behaviour has changed, our diet has changed” (Appendix 3.1: 122). During the beginning of the pandemic, the demand for online presence surged as a necessity for Origins. Majority of attendees preferred accessing events virtually or taking online tours to steer clear of potential infections. However, the financial resources allocated for establishing and maintaining this online presence for Origins remain quite limited (Appendix 3.1).

4.4 Existing Framework and Approaches for Risk and Disaster Preparedness

There was no existing pandemic preparedness framework, however, the government protocols were modified and adopted based on each of the study site’s particular situation.

Origins Museum:

The curator at Origins Centre said, “So, I mean, we were guided by the governmental protocols, and we were looking at what other museums were doing, but we had to decide in our space; because the museum is quite like there's a lot of spaces that are, like, really big ceilings and there is a lot of space, but there isn't any air flow” (Appendix 3.1: 92). The museum faced challenges aligning space requirements with group protocols, especially in collaboration with the university protocols. Public access to the museum became complicated, necessitating stringent measures. Visitors had to explain their purpose, complete Covid-19 forms, or register via the Log Box app (a screening app used by Wits University to control university campus access). They were required to sanitise and wear masks throughout their visit. Group tours posed challenges regarding distance between guides and tourists. The university provided sign boards and masks, and sanitizers to the museum. The employees were given reusable masks. Group tours necessitated maintaining a safe distance between guides and tourists, a logistical puzzle resolved on-the-go, without the aid of a predefined pandemic preparedness guide (Appendix 3.1).

Main Caves:

At Main Caves the coping mechanisms paralleled those of Origins Centre. Tours were conducted hourly instead of every half an hour, allowing for strict sanitization between groups. This entails applying disinfectant to railings, walkways, and seating areas to mitigate the spread of the virus. The tour guide, with unwavering determination, enforced a strict "no mask, no tour" policy, denying entry to non- compliant visitors (Appendix 3.2: 123 & 124). The tour guide recalled how she had to sanitise every 8 minutes as tourists touched different parts of the site. The site manager was given PPE kits, sanitizers, and thermometers from the head office at Pietermaritzburg ensuring the safety of the employees while interacting with tourists (Appendix 3.2).

Sterkfontein Caves:

The approach mirrored that of Sterkfontein Caves. “The thing about this issue with Covid is that we had always thought that it would not happen to us,” said the site manager (Appendix 3.3: 145). The cave's unique conditions required hourly tours, facilitating ventilation, and minimising the risk of virus transmission. In these diverse settings, the adaptability of the staff, adherence to protocols, and innovative solutions emerged as common threads, safeguarding both the employees and the invaluable historical sites. Reduced tours and increased intervals helped curb the spread of the virus, keeping tourism alive (Appendix 3.3).

In terms a risk preparedness plan, the Sterkfontein site manager said, “That was only after we had opened; that was later in the year. Then we started trying to make processes and procedures which will

help us to deal with the situation…" (Appendix 3.3: 145). After the interview, the tour guide presented a manual which established the different ways to cope with the pandemic in different scenarios. For example: virus management standard for restaurants and food service establishments. This section explained the best practices during Covid-19 to reduce the spread of the virus. The manual also explains the procedure for management and disposal of biohazardous waste. Apart from virus management standard, a risk management guide with the guidelines of Section 8 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, 1993 was also used.

4.5 Recommendations to Improve Disaster Preparedness Strategies for Archaeotourism in South Africa

Throughout the pandemic, the sites experienced some positive outcomes despite the challenging times. Yet, the uncertainty following the post-Covid-19 era is undeniable. All plans conclude with an element of uncertainty, leaving us unaware of what lies ahead. Below are recommendations for each site to prepare for potential future pandemics.

Origins Centre:

> "Covid kind of helped us realise different ways of doing it and now that we have, you know that on online platforms that are accessible to most people, it's opened that up and definitely just social media interaction, things like that as well. But yeah, we kind of, me personally, I'm kind of going, okay, well, let Covid finished and let's you know… If we get thrown another hurdle or another pandemic in another year, we'll deal with that," said the curator of the museum who appears prepared for another pandemic.
>
> (Appendix 3.1: 96)

The museum, under the umbrella of Wits University, benefits from an added layer of security. The university provides a measure of financial stability that safeguards its employees. Leveraging the university's existing framework, as noted by the curator, enabled adherence to government protocols and facilitated adaptations during the pandemic. Nonetheless, drawing on the lessons learned from Covid-19, it is crucial to develop a comprehensive pandemic preparedness manual (Appendix 3.1).

Main Caves:

The interviewees confirmed the absence of a dedicated pandemic preparedness guide. However, drawing from the lessons of Covid-19, it is crucial that they create a structured framework for

future contingencies. Establishing a guide akin to the site's excellent fire protocol would alleviate mental strain during crises. Furthermore, implementing enhanced online presence and improved marketing strategies, and virtual tours, as proposed by the interviewees, would assist the site in managing the ongoing impacts of the pandemic (Appendix 3.2).

Sterkfontein Caves:

“I couldn't go to the caves, that’s my place of peace, that’s my perfect aura,” said the site manager (Appendix 3.3: 152). While the site itself remained relatively unaffected, its personnel experienced significant impact. The delayed development of a guide and gradual implementation of changes resulted in mental strain. The site manager noted that while sanitizers in the cave setting might not have a substantial impact, their presence was mandated by protocol. However, if a guide tailored specifically to the cave had been prepared earlier, it could have reassured both tourists and employees. The tourists were eager to adopt any measure that kept Covid-19 at bay (Appendix 3.3).

4.6 Other Issues Arising from the Interviews

Origins Centre:

The tour guide emphasised the profound psychological impact Covid-19 had on people. The mere sound of a sneeze or cough triggered a frantic self-assessment for signs of illness, inducing a sense of unwellness. The fear of job loss and financial instability, crucial for supporting families, haunted the tour guide like a recurring nightmare. Additionally, the tour guide expressed concerns about the adverse effects of the vaccine on their health. An intriguing observation shared by the tour guide highlighted the technological evolution: "I remember a time where there were no phones, we didn't literally have even a landline in my home, and now I'm living in a time where there are cell phones. So, it's quite interesting to see that!” (Appendix 3.1: 118).

Main Caves:

“So, it was terrible because the time there's no one coming there, even the researchers, they didn't come to see what's happening there. Lots of things was damaged, for example our deck, now it's been vandalised. So, it's not easy to fix it in. It took a while now so I don't know when they can fix it again” (Appendix 3.2: 124), said the tour guide at Main Caves as we spoke about the impact of the pandemic. The interviewees of Main Caves expressed concerns about the impact of Covid-19 on their workplace and its operations. Before the pandemic, regular maintenance of facilities, research activities, and visitor engagement were common.

However, after Covid-19, there was a decline in these activities. Financial preparedness became crucial due to the rising costs of goods and services. The lack of regular research visits led to a decrease in knowledge sharing and learning opportunities. The tour guide suggested a rotation system for staff and more diverse tasks to keep things refreshing - “So, it's better maybe if we can rotate. So maybe it's a week of that one, the following should be someone, so it always must be more refresher… For example, in Giant’s Castle we have more than 55 places with paintings. But because you stuck there for the whole day, so you can't go and check the other sites, but if you can do some other things, maybe for the week you can go and check, the other site is still okay, yes” (Appendix 3.2: 130 & 131). The need for improvements in facilities, schedules, and safety measures, such as slippery paths, was emphasised to enhance visitor experiences and safety.

The site manager highlighted the importance of proper maintenance for the location. She noted the absence of a specific marketing plan for the caves, relying mainly on word of mouth. The interviewee stressed the need for a dedicated marketing team to promote the caves as a distinct and special destination, separate from the overall resort experience. According to the site manager, preparation is the key. During the interview, emphasis was placed on pandemic preparedness- “It's just that you have to be prepared every time because you never know what's going to happen next. It might not be Covid19 but there be some other disease that can come up and then you don't have control of it. So, you have to always prepare.” (Appendix 3.2: 143)

Sterkfontein Caves:

“You ought to love what you do. You ought to appreciate it. It doesn't matter how small or how big. You just ought to be appreciative of what life brings you,” the tour guide said as we spoke about learnings from Covid-19 (Appendix 3.3: 153). The interviews conducted at Sterkfontein Caves evoked a range of emotions akin to a roller coaster ride. Every interviewee faced mental and physical challenges. The site manager, pregnant and with minimal income, encountered significant struggles, while the tour guide expressed deep discontent over the inability to learn and work, tearing up during the interview- “It was very bad, for starters. Being at home every day, not going to work… luckily for us, we had like a stipend, that’s in terms of finance that we received from the company. But, because remember as a tour guide, you also rely on things like handouts from guests. So, it minimised everything” (Appendix 3.3: 156). Presently, the employees harbour lingering fears of the pandemic, deeply value their employment and strive to avoid reverting to similarly challenging circumstances. Both the interviewees at Sterkfontein Caves emphasised the need for substantial improvements in marketing strategies, including rebranding efforts and adapting to the post Covid-19 global landscape. The site manager answered the question of re-establishment programs and said, “Education, you know,

very important, educate in terms of small businesses. If something happens to your everyday bread, how are you going to be able to learn to make the bread yourself?" (Appendix 3.3: 152).

Additionally suggested access to resources for redevelopment, and securing funding were identified as crucial requirements along with education. While the tour guide suggested diversifying on-site activities, incorporating outdoor options alongside guided tours, despite challenges related to the cave's terrain. In terms of marketing, the interviewees highlighted the importance of direct marketing methods, especially for areas with limited network signals, to expand their reach effectively. From the interview, "Marketing wise out of the property, I think expanding our market - direct marketing because obviously on social platforms, it's easier for some because of technology wise. But for others, remember you have network signals and other areas, so direct marketing would be relevant for those people" (Appendix 3.3: 162).

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

In the discussion section, the aims of the project and its associated objectives will be revisited. The section will end with listing the limitations of the study and the potential improvements that could be made in future research.

5.1.1 Increased domestic tourism to archaeotourism sites

The study started from a curiosity about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on archaeotourism in South Africa. Aside from the obvious implication of the hard lock down that resulted in huge income loss in all tourism sectors, the study was interested in what the long terms impact might be, and specifically: whether there were changes in the tourism industry, in particular the archaeotourism industry, that might endure and perhaps last forever?

It might be too early to speak of long-term impact, but two trends were evident from the study sites presented here: that a consequence of the pandemic was the more domestic tourists are visiting these sites, this is evident in the data presented for both Giants Castle and the Origins Centre. This stems from the travel restrictions implemented by the respective countries and the World Health Organization during the pandemic. For example, at Giants Castle, prior to the pandemic there were mainly international tourists and low domestic tourist numbers, this reversed during and post pandemic to high domestic tourist numbers and lower international tourist numbers. In 2015, Giants Castle saw a total of 1061 and in 2018, 1662 international and domestic tourists, over a period of three and a half months (Fig. 23). After the pandemic, in 2021, international tourists numbered 178 and domestic numbered 1928. In 2022, 1070 international tourists and 1566 domestic tourists for the entire year (Fig. 23). Similarly, at Sterkfontein Caves, in 2015 the total ticket sales were 2,338 per day (Lelliott 2015). However, at present, the caves are struggling to get back to such booming numbers.

One of the consequences of this shift in visitor profile is a decrease in revenue for the tourism industry as international tourists spend more than domestic tourists. This was evident at Giants Castle, where ticket sales to Main Caves were increased but actual revenue to the camp and associated facilities such as accommodation and restaurant were down (Appendix 3.2).

5.1.2 Decreased international tourism to archaeotourism sites

From interviews it became clear the international tourists tended to visit archaeotourism sites as part of larger tours. At both Giants Castle and Origins Centre, international tourist numbers fell when the tour companies ceased to operate. Many tour companies went out of business during the pandemic and one of the long-term impacts on the industry is that their numbers may not recover.

5.1.3 Virtual tourism as a coping mechanism for nature-based tourism

Whilst living in South Africa during the pandemic, the public became exposed to and aware of virtual tourism offered by private game concessions in the Kruger Park – lead by the live streaming channel Wild Earth. The daily live game drives became very popular with the public and were an obvious coping strategy for this sector during the pandemic. Through using visitor statistics published in the Kruger National Park annual reports, the study sought to understand whether virtual tourism had minimised the impact of the pandemic on Kruger and its recovery thereafter. The study thought it might be interesting to compare this part of the nature-based tourism industry against the archaeotourism industry and to explore whether any virtual tourism offering had been offered by any of the sites in the study. The park closed in April 2020, reopening on June 8, 2023, following government protocols Between the years, 2019 and 2020, Kruger suffered less than other game reserves (total number of visitors) fell by 55% as compared to 2019, versus other game parks which saw a fall in visitor numbers of 68-74% in the same period (SANParks 2021). The Origins Centre curated virtual tours through Google Arts and Culture, however Main Caves and Sterkfontein Caves lacked an online presence throughout the pandemic (Appendix 3.1).

5.1.4 Coping strategies taken at the study sites during the pandemic.

The Origins Centre, supported by Wits University, and the Main Caves, guided by the Pietermaritzburg head office, were part of larger systems, lessen stress on concerns about safety protocols, salaries, and job loss. Initially, the sites adhered to the disaster preparedness guidelines provided by the university and head office, following the protocol until determining their specific needs for the space due to the backup from the larger systems. In contrast, Sterkfontein Caves, as per interviews, faced financial difficulties, including job losses, and worried about potential closure during the challenging period.

5.1.5 Disaster and risk preparedness at the study sites

It was clear from the interviews conducted, that there was no disaster preparedness strategy in place at any of the three study sites that alleviated the impact of the pandemic. All the three study sites followed government guidelines in their operations once the pandemic started.

5.1.6 Recommendations to improve disaster preparedness strategies for the Archaeotourism sector in South Africa.

Create a virtual offering. All the study sites should actively seek funding to enable live streaming. Given the prominence of the internet in our contemporary society, it has become an integral part of our daily lives. While visiting archaeotourism sites offers an immersive experience, it's not always feasible for visitors to attend all events physically. Hence, prioritising the development of an online option and implementing a nominal fee can attract a broader audience, aiding in the promotion and marketing of the museum. Main Caves can enhance their online presence with a user-friendly website and strategic marketing to boost their popularity.

Education emerges as a prominent recommendation across all three sites according to the interviewees. At the Origins Centre, there's an annual recruitment drive specifically targeting university students. These students undergo training to become adept tour guides, delving into the San culture, the African community, and gaining a broader global perspective through engaging exhibitions and seminars. The tour guide at Main Caves proposed the idea of enlisting additional guides for tours as this will help in monitoring other rock art sites nearby, offering both employment opportunities and education on rock art and tourism. Additionally, the Sterkfontein site manager emphasized the importance of consistently educating tour guides to enhance the quality of tours (Appendix 3.1) (Ngcobo 2015).

5.1.7 Other findings

In 2020, UNESCO's global survey on the impact of the pandemic on heritage properties listed eight key findings (chapter 1), it was interesting to reflect on the UNESCO findings and to compare them to the results of this study (UNESCO 2021a). Of the eight points highlighted, the three study sites share four of the global findings, these are:

1. A lack of conservation along with a rise in illegal activities: This was seen at Origins Centre and Sterkfontein Caves. Although there were significant instances of vandalism, minor thefts occurred in the sites during the pandemic. Main Caves remained free of new graffiti. Interviewees expressed empathy towards the thieves, acknowledging their actions to make

ends meet and endure the challenges of the pandemic.

2. There was an increase in domestic tourism from pandemic-related travel restrictions enforced. This was seen at all three study sites. The interviewees confirmed a spike in domestic tourism during and after the pandemic while they continue to wait for the return of international tourists.
3. Local tour guides were negatively impacted as they lost all sources of income from tourism immediately. This was seen at some of the sites in the study such as Sterkfontein Caves. After the first three month of Covid-19 being announced as pandemic, employees at Sterkfontein struggled to meet ends because of the lack of income. The tour guide confirmed that the lack of tips from tourists majorly impacted his income even though a small stipend was allotted during the difficult times.
4. Globally people's health and livelihood suffered. What was clear from the interviews conducted in the study was the toll that covid had on the mental health and emotional well-being of staff employed at the three study sites. For example, the tour guide at Sterkfontein had teary eyes while talking about the year 2020. The interviewees couldn't stop stressing and sighing about how difficult and uncertain life had become because of a virus.

5.1.8 Limitations of the study

The study would have been improved by having access to accurate visitor statistics for the study sites. Curiously, employees interviewed said they did not have any record of these. Thus, the study relied on data from visitor books. However, these are not an accurate reflection of visitor numbers. Quantitative data on ticket sales would have improved the study. No data on visitor numbers was available at all for one of the study sites: Sterkfontein, nor do they have a visitor's book.

The study would have benefitted from interviewing stakeholders at the private concessions in Kruger national park, but these permissions were not granted in time for this study. The literature available for this study was Asia focused. Due to this, the results were heavily reliant on all the primary data collected from the sites.

5.2 Conclusion

During the pandemic all sectors of South Africa's tourism industry were hugely and negatively affected. This study found that a clear outcome of the pandemic was the growth of the local tourism industry as shown by the increased number of domestic tourists to the study sites to numbers that were

not seen prior to the pandemic (a trend that was found globally (UNESCO 2021a). Surprisingly, this means that total visits to the sites in this study, where data were available, have actually reached or exceeded pre-pandemic levels. However, this does not, at the moment, equate to revenue, as international tourist visits to all sites are down compared to pre-pandemic levels and this is the sector that generates the most income for activities and services associated with archaeological sites. The numbers of international visitors to the study site have not recovered in the post pandemic period. This may be a long-term trend. Tour companies that used to shuttle tourists to the study sites as part of organised tours to multiple sites have gone out of business and those that have survived are not including these sites on their rounds. This will have a big, long-term impact on the study sites. Selected game reserves in South Africa managed to increase their global and local visibility through offering twice daily virtual game drives. Game reserves that offered virtual tourism have suffered less because of the pandemic. This study found that this is an underexploited sector within culture-based tourism in South Africa and one that should be exploited even in the post-pandemic period to elevate its profile internationally and locally.

To test these trends the study should be expanded to increase its dataset and more accurate and complete data on visitor numbers and income generation would need to be captured.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Table 1.1 *Covid-19 timeline from 2019 to 2022 in South Africa (Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs 2020; SAHO 2020; Nkgadima et al. 2021; CDC 2022)*

Date	***Description***
12 December, 2019	A group of people experienced shortness of breath and fever in Wuhan, China.
10 January, 2020	The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) publishes about coronavirus on their website.
11 March, 2020	Covid-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation.
12 March, 2020	South Africa's health minister Zweli Mkhize confirms 19 positive covid-19 cases.
14 March, 2020	The president of South Africa- Cyril Ramaphosa declares a National State of Disaster to curb the spread of the virus. Travel bans were imposed, gatherings for 100+ people were prohibited.
15 March, 2020	The National State of Disaster was implemented.
23 March, 2020	President announces 21-day hard lockdown (Level 5) from March 27. Both domestic and international borders were closed for travel.

21 April, 2020	Funds were released to the economic relief funds to help the impaired due to the lockdown.
01 May 2020	Level 4 lockdown was enforced. Outdoor activities were allowed from 06h00 to 09h00, delivery services can operate between 05h00 to 19h00 and the night curfew was between 20h00 and 05h00.
01 June 2020	South Africa shifted from lockdown level 4 to 3. The sale of alcohol was permitted on specific weekdays with a time restriction. 10 weeks Later, domestic travel for business purposes was permitted.
23 June 2020	Vaccine trial begins.
12 July 2020	Due to the constant rise of infections, the president announces immediate ban on the sale of alcohol along with prohibiting family visits. The curfew timings were 21h00 to 04h00.
15 August 2020	The level of lockdown was changed from level 3 to level 2.
20 September 2020	National lockdown level moved to Level 1 from level 2.
11 November 2020	Rules for international travel were eased. Unemployment support during Covid-19

	continues
09 December 2020	The second wave of the virus was announced by the Ministry of Health.
14 December 2020	The imposed measures were revised by the president. Some beaches were closed due to rise in cases in the Eastern and Western Cape. Gatherings and funeral attendees' numbers were lowered.
18 December 2020	The discovery of a new variant by the scientists was announced by the minister of health.
28 December 2020	Lockdown level adjusted and changed to level 3.
17 February 2021	Vaccines rolled out and vaccine passports were introduced.
08 May 2021	The new variant: Delta and Alfa variant cases were reported.
01 October 2021	The lockdown level was changed to Level 1 from level 3.
26 November 2021	Omicron variant was detected by South African doctors to WHO.
24 March 2022	According to the recent government gazette, removal of the disaster act remains disputed. Following basic covid protocol such as wearing facial masks and social distancing in

	public places must be observed. South Africa is open to all international tourists.
05 April 2022	The National State of Disaster was lifted. However, the public is advised to follow basic Covid19 protocols.
30 April 2022	Sub-strains of Omicron were found and named B.A.4 and B.A.5
05 May 2022	Alert level 1 continued

Table 1. 2 *Timeline of the lockdown levels in South Africa (Carlitz & Makhura 2020; South African Government 2021)*

Date	Level of lockdown
26 March 2020 - 30 April 2020	Level 5
1 May 2020 - 31 May 2020	Level 4
1 June 2020 - 17 August 2020	Level 3
18 August 2020 - 20 September 2020	Level 2
21 September 2020 - 28 December 2020	Level 1
29 December 2020 - 28 February 2021	Level 3
1 March 2021 - 30 May 2021	Level 1
31 May 2021 - 15 June 2021	Level 2
16 June 2021	Level 4
16 June 2021 - 27 June 2021	Level 3
28 June 2021 - 25 July 2021	Level 4
26 July 2021 - 12 September 2021	Level 3
13 September 2021 - 30 September 2021	Level 2
1 October 2021- 4 May 2022	Level 1

5 May 2022	Level 1

Appendix 2

2.1 Ethics Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Eswaran

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H22/08/5**
PROJECT TITLE	Pandemics and Heritage: understanding the impact of the Covid-19 on Archaeotourism in South Africa
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Miss N Eswaran
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Geography, Archaeology and Environmental Studies/
DATE CONSIDERED	19 August 2022
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved Risk Level: Low
EXPIRY DATE	10 November 2025

DATE 23 November 2022 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(Professor J Watermeyer)

cc: Supervisor : Dr T Russell

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10004, 10th Floor, Senate House, University. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a regular progress report. For Minimal and Low studies, this is due annually on 31 December. For Medium and High Risk studies, this is due twice annually on 30 June and 31 December.**

_____ 24 / 12 / 2022
Signature **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

2.2 Sample Interview Questionnaire

I will be led by the participants and the interviews will flow from their responses.

1. What is the impact Covid-19 on the archaeological site and its people?

2. Did the site have tourists stuck at the lodge/stay with the sudden closing of borders? If yes, how were needs catered to, especially tourists who choose non-self-catering rooms?

3. Did the site have a pandemic preparedness guide? If yes, was it implemented when Covid-19 was declared a pandemic?

4. With the ongoing pandemic, what coping mechanisms have been adopted?

5. The government is welcoming and promoting tourism, what is its take on cultural heritage opening?

6. Was the site monitored during all levels of lockdown?

7. How was the site maintained with the change in gathering numbers?

8. Has there been any changes in the rules and regulations at the sites apart from basic Covid-19 protocols?

9. What is the maximum number of people accommodated in a group?

10. What are the changes in the visitors count (domestic and international) pre and post Covid-19?

11. Has the site seen an increase in domestic tourism with the rise and fall of Covid-19 infections?

12. Any illegal activities at the site (e.g., vandalism)?

13. Has an external funding body offered help to help cope with the pandemic?

14. With the world opening and travel easing, has there been a rise in international tourists?

15. What plans the sites have to re-establish their programs now that the pandemic is winding down. Is there an opportunity to revise and improve, or will the status-quo pre-pandemic simply be resumed?

Appendix 3

3.1 Origins Centre Museum Interview (University of Witwatersrand)

Note:

1. All interviews have been grammatically edited, i.e., repetitions have been removed for the reader's convenience. For example: And then the yeah with the when we were able to do the renovation, so that actually started in about December (changed to) And then, we were able to do the renovation, so that actually started in about December.
2. All names have been blacked out to comply with POPIA Act.

3.1.1 Interview I

(C): Curator

(N): Nithya

N: Can you please tell me how Covid-19 has impacted the museum and its people?

C: So, I think there's been positive things as well, interestingly. Obviously, 2020 we were closed until April 2021, but we had to then focus more on online activities. So, that has been a positive thing I suppose. But we had a year of absolutely no income, you know. And so, we moved things. We had things happening but no income. But luckily, we were protected by Wits, so we kind of got through and we got funding to revamp the museum. So, during Covid we used the time really well to update the museum. But Covid itself, the impact of it has been positive because we have looked at other ways of moving the museum into a virtual round.

N: Ah, that's interesting. So, we did have different levels of lockdown, right? Was the museum monitored at all levels of lockdown? How did you manage the restoration of the museum? How did that go? Because we had restrictions on the number of people and so many restrictions.

C: So, during the hard lockdown, you know, for at least six weeks, April- May, nobody was here, and Wits was completely closed. Then slowly as staff could come back, we kind of came in, just to check on everything. The museum itself can stay closed and it's fine. It is now that we just need to check that it's still the same temperature and all those kinds of things. And then, we were able to do the renovation, so that actually started in about December. We got the money and then obviously, the process to actually get the service providers in and whatever; by that stage most of us were back at work on some level. The museum wasn't open, but we were actually working from the building still

and coming in. Then once the service providers came in, we just had to make sure there weren't as many people at a time, everyone had to wear masks all the time and sanitise. Then as we were preparing to open, getting all the signs in place to make sure that everyone knows that they have to sanitise, they have to wear a mask or whatever. And then we had to restrict group size, so any event openings we had, we'd do the events outside and we'd have a limited amount of people depending on the space. So, as we had been opening in 2021, we had the opening of a geology exhibition, and we had three different opening nights. Instead of having everyone all together, we had everything separated and we reduced our tour group size. So, we now like, have max 20-25 in a group and before Covid. But during Covid, I think we reduced it to 10, maybe 15, and everyone had to wear masks as well, even the guide.

N: Okay. So, did you have anything specific to the museum or did you just follow Covid protocols given by the government or did the museum implement something different?

C: So, I mean, we were guided by the governmental protocols, and we were looking at what other museums were doing, but we had to decide in our space; because the museum is quite like there's a lot of spaces that are, like, really big ceilings and there is a lot of space, but there isn't any air flow. You know, anything like that or like open windows, we had to decide for ourselves what group size works. Then the guide can't hear you if they're wearing a mask, you know. Does the guide step back, you know things like that. Same with public lectures, it took a while for us to decide- when do we move back in person? How many people do we allow in this space? And if the group wasn't worried, if they all knew each other and they were like, oh, we don't care if it's twenty of us or thirty of us all in the space, you know, what do we do with that kind of thing? So, we would have to deal with things on an individual basis.

N: Okay, so did the museum have a pandemic preparedness guide developed earlier, or did you learn through the process of Covid and actually figure it out?

C: So obviously I mean, the university is a public space as well, but on a kind of different level from the museum. So, we used the university guidelines about what was expected, which meant it was very difficult for people to get on campus. It's an issue for us with security to get on campus and then during Covid it was even worse because then you'd need your Covid form, you would need all that. And so, people would just, yes.

N: We have that app - LogBox

C: And then there are, well, why are you the public coming on campus? And they're like, well, you're coming to the museum. So even organised groups, it was really difficult, so we had to work with the security guards to allow other people on campus. Even though we did outdoor stuff and whatever, you know it was that that was a bit tricky. So, we had to kind of work with the university but also say well we are in a different situation here and we are allowing public onto campus, not nonstudents.
So, nonstudents and non-staff.

N: Okay, so with the low income or no income and then eventually getting income, how was the site maintained in these different phases during Covid? Because, they're all artefacts that are million years old. So, they require high maintenance?

C: So, I mean it's a good question. During the hard lockdown, I think it was just shut down. It was assumed that the air-con stayed on, and you know we haven't had any issues with the air-con and Wits services would get any notification if there were issues, you know. And luckily there wasn't hectic load shedding that would have maybe implemented that but affected. But then yeah, so there's Wits services that would have done their usual checks on all the buildings. And then between myself and the head of Origins and our operations manager, we would come through every now and then and check our collections. Also within the origins building is the Rock Art Research Institute sections and so their collections manager would have checked that as well, and she curates the archaeological objects in the museum. So, we have humidity testers and temperature testers within the different cabinets that can be remotely checked now and so she also monitored those.

N: Okay.

C: Through the time. And we didn't have any issues, luckily. I mean, we had some issues with rain. So that was one thing. I mean, luckily it was over winter[1] mostly when it was a hard lockdown. But luckily not on any objects or any sensitive areas. That's lucky!

N: That's good. Did you have a fair number of international visitors coming in before Covid? And of course, that I'm assuming drastically reduced during Covid and now that we are sort of and out of

[1] Winters in Johannesburg, South Africa are cold and dry.

Covid almost, do you see a similar number in international tourism? Do you see a spike in domestic tourism? How's the visitor count going in for the museum right now?

C: Yeah, we were. We were at an interesting time before Covid because we had just been taken off the red bus route. So, our tourist international tourist numbers had dropped already.

N: Okay.

C: And so, we were focusing more on tour operators to bring their groups or, you know, like and realising actually we need to focus a lot on local tourists and school groups. And then, yeah, obviously with Covid, there were huge reductions. Still, it was surprisingly still people every now and then. I was actually quite surprised. Even though you think you can't travel at all then now. So, 2022 was when we started picking up quite nicely and international tourists. Again, we're still not on the red bus route. That was, you know, completely unrelated to Covid or anything like that. It's just an unfortunate decision for us on their part, but now we basically have the pre covid numbers, but I think it's school groups and it's more local tourists. We're getting international tourists, we definitely are, but we've perhaps, our focus of our efforts have been on school groups more and local groups that much more, so those numbers have increased as well, I mean. We do also now have an international footprint because we have, we went virtual and we have virtual online exhibits with Google Arts and Culture, which we had started discussing before Covid that and it just came along at a really nice time so that we could launch them. I think it was in 2021 that we launched the online exhibits, so that helps kind of advertise the museum and people overseas can go, oh, wait, okay, this is a cool museum. And then we go visit it. But then what's also impacted us from last year was that Maropeng and Sterkfontein have had issues and they have been closed a little bit more. And so, we've had some school groups that used to go to Maropeng that would actually come here and I don't know if maybe that it's easier and people are realising actually, this is what Origin Centre has to offer and it's easier to come to origins if they're closer by then, going all the way out there. And buses are expensive and whatever, whatever and. So, we've had good school numbers and good visitor numbers last year.

N: That's good. The other thing that I did pick up while we were speaking was virtual tours. So, I just wanted to know how, because you did explain how that began, but you know, so how was that for as a marketing tool for Origins and did that do better than in-person tours or how's that going?

C: No, definitely, yeah, it's. We see it as a kind of advertising tool to get people to see what Origins is and go - “Okay, I wanna go there.” I mean, it's a really nice thing that you can get your stats from Google [statistics from Google Arts and Culture]. You can see what countries are looking at your exhibits, which is really nice. But we don't charge for it. And during Covid, we didn't charge for any of our online things because there was just so much online stuff available that's free and just the mission of organising it as well. We just thought it's not worth it. So that people now expect an online option or a hybrid option for free, so that's been a little bit difficult. You kind of say, okay, we've got a public lecture, come and look at this now. And then, like last year, our centenary objects exhibition; to come and look at it and every single time we give people saying is it going to be recorded? Is it online? And so, there's that expectation to have it recorded, which means that people kind of think that they don't have to come to the event itself. Um…and so we've realised we kind of need both options, we need the income and the whole point is that people come to the space; and we need that money. And we need those visitors. The people that are overseas or in different parts of the country that can't come also want to be a part of it in some way, which we don't feel we can charge for. So, we've made an effort this year to have a hybrid option for funding that we've got. When we've got funding, we can offer that, but otherwise it's a bit tricky.

N: Have you ever thought of maybe developing a website for origins where you can put up your talks and exhibition objects on there and then charge people a minimal amount so that they can put in and that will also benefit the museum on its own? Because I do know a lot of learning platforms and museums who do that, where they're like, just pay five dollars, whatever.

C: And then you can get it.

N: Five rands and then you can see you have access to this module. It's very good consumer technique where you're like, okay, it's just five dollars and it's not a lot.

C: Yeah, I mean, it's not a lot. It's been something we've spoken about a lot. You know - what do we do? You know, if you get the access, it's nothing. It's something we haven't implemented yet. We do it, we would be something so our website is run through Wits marketing and so we would be restricted in what we can have on there, but it would be doable. We do also the same with YouTube. We have been talking lots of talk about our YouTube channel and putting our various talks on there, but it would have to go through Wits. So, they want us to go through them as well and then we haven't because of this issue of - “oh wait, but we want, you know, you want the video out there and

you want the lectures to be out there". But you want to firstly encourage people to come to origins. So, it's still…

N: Coming in-person is nice.

C: that juggle, yes and see. And then sometimes we've had speakers that don't want their lectures published, they don't. It's a public lecture, yes, but they will say, well, we don't want it online. You know, we it's, about just being now in-person. We don't want it to be something that's recorded. For them till the end of Time you know. Especially if it's new research or something.

N: That's true. Apart from virtual tours, what has the museum taken up to as a post recovery plan and because? Pandemics and epidemics have just been a part of our life. Now, I think for a decade now, so, but they haven't been on such a large scale. It's just that Covid had a massive, massive earth - breaking impact on people. So, what is the museum or you as a curator looking out to maybe reduce the risk of such pandemics in the coming days?

C: I suppose to have a variety of offerings; that you either cater for different audiences, that you cater for school groups. We've looked at going out to school groups. It's difficult though with our work contracts, with insurance and whatever. If we're travelling off campus for work and we're not actually supposed to and things like that, so we have looked at that option. What we can offer to different groups, so to tour groups if you can offer you know in person tours and online tours focusing on different areas of the museum or different content in the museum, different age groups, you know, so, so. Covid kind of helped us realise different ways of doing it and now that we have, you know that on online platforms that are accessible to most people, it's opened that up and and definitely just social media interaction, things like that as well. But yeah, we kind of, me personally, I'm kind of going, okay, well, let Covid finished and let's you know… If we get thrown another hurdle or another pandemic in another year, we'll deal with that. But I think we've got a lot of nice tools now realising, you know, like people working from home. You know, so many companies I think have realised that you still can have an amazing output and people are working from home in their pyjamas, at different hours of the day they want to, and as long as you produce. That's great. So. Yeah, I mean, we definitely go into another pandemic more prepared and realising how to what we can offer for different groups. It's made us think more broadly and what kind of offerings we can have for clients.

N: The other thing I wanted to ask is that the museum has a shop attached to it where you sell a lot of fancy South African, African goods books T-shirts. So how did the shop do during Covid? But did you have an online option where people can buy Origins merchandise?

C: Yeah, that's also something I've been speaking about for a while. Like, is it something we wanna do online? It just opened and we already have a very small staff contingent. And then you would need to ship things. It was just this whole other thing and then you know what -Pay PayPal or whatever you know paying system. Do you go through and then what does Wits allow, you know? So, it was. It was just, yeah. So, the online shop, I don't, I don't think that will happen and it's not feasible for origins. But we did, through social media, sell, say okay, our shop is open. If there's anything we want, we'd make specific plans for people, you know.

N: Okay.

C: So, we put up prices of our objects at that time when at. Least when we could get. To the shop, you know, a few months after the hard luck.

N: Did that impact in a good way? Did you sell stuff?

C: No, no. Very few. We even had a book launch, when was that? That must have been in 2021. We had a book launch, a virtual book launch, and we sold. I mean, we ended up selling about 20, but it was so much work and sometimes the book launches, we don't sell a huge amount, but. It was so much work for us to package everything, get the, you know, quotes for different postal services. You know it was. It was a mission and it's something that we can't offer on a regular basis with our staff component. We just don't have the capacity.

N: Have you thought about a collaborative project? Maybe collaborating with let's say, for example, a Courier service? Now that would help you and maybe in the long run give you some monetary benefit as well. If you do anything online, then a lot of collaborative projects now with any organisation that can do good to the museum, then how? How do you, what do you think about that? How will that work?

C: Yeah, I mean it, it's an option we wouldn't. So, it's difficult with our books. Our books are supplied through a bookseller and so we would end up just saying rather just go straight to the bookseller. It's

not for the small percentage that we get, it's not worth the effort. So even if we were working through a Courier service. I don't know if it would be worth it anyway, you know, we'd rather again have.

N: Okay.

C: The shock. You know, appeal to people left. Oh, Okay. I wanna go there because the stuff is cool. And this part you're getting a bit of origin centre which is why we have a lot more branded Origin Centre branded material because I know. Yeah. Like I know myself when I go to a museum overseas, I want to take a little bit of it home. Whether it's a pencil or you know, whatever. And so, we've tried to.

N: That's exciting!

C: Yeah, it's a nice little thing, you know, even if you're paying in dollars and you can't afford much. The so we've got some really nice origins and bits of branded material and tried to get things that people that have come to the museum will go, okay. This is a little memory of the Origin Centre. So, for me at this point I mean I think we would probably need another staff member to run with. We are pretty stretched with the small staff that we have.

N: Okay. Could you tell me how many tour guides you have and what's the staff count at the museum?

C: Sure, so we only have student guides. We have one head guide, who's on a year-by-year contract [redacted] and then we have so we just have student guides. So obviously every year. If students leave you, then you have to train a whole lot of new students, and we prefer to take, you know, you know, we would prefer not to take first years just because it helps if they have a little. More age and knowledge and whatever, and of them and it's.

N: And also, they'd be very overwhelmed in their first year to also be tour guides.

C: Exactly. It's her guide. Yeah. And. And even though it is very, it's just whenever a tour group comes, you know, so it's not like they know when they're gonna work or we demand that they come when they got a lecture. You know, obviously it doesn't work like that, but at the moment I think we have five guides. I mean we are near the beginning of the year. And be training another group of

about 5. So yeah, we like to have about 10 or 15 student guides, so that if we do get big groups, you know, 250 kids that come. Or just need more manpower. We can ask the guides and then, so we have the Head of Origins, [redacted] and then myself as the curator. Then [redacted], as the operations manager, [redacted] as our events manager, [redacted], he came on last year as our finance and bookkeeper.
And then [redacted], as the head guide and [redacted] as our shop assistant and head of front of House and then we had recently [redacted] leaving. So, we have our core eight people. Sounds like a decent amount but everyone is really stretched, so like [redacted], if we had an assistant events person then we could have more events which would bring in more money and you have all these private events and that pay really nicely to hire the space. But physically, there's only so many events that she can run in a week without going mad, you know, and the same, you know, we do need two shop assistants because we open six days a week and everyone is only working on a five-day week contract. So, you kind of have to shift time and have time off and things like that. But yeah, so we run on 8 mostly and then our two cleaners.

N: Okay.

C: [redacted]

N: So, while we're talking about funding, I was thinking, did you get any funds from the government? Did you approach the government or because they did, they were the government was promoting a lot of cultural heritage tourism when Covid was relaxed and when we were in lockdown Level 2 and one? Which was when we were actually allowed to travel and meet people. So did you have any benefit from the government monetarily?

C: No, no. So, through Wits only. We had kind of asked other GENUS Palaeosciences and the National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences and with that funding alone again, that's another thing. Like you can get all this funding, but if you don't have the manpower. To actually implement all of the projects that you get funding for and so we'd put in, we'd kind of overextended ourselves a little bit with some of the funding. And so, I mean, last year was crazy, I think we'd, yeah. So, in 2021, we're like, OK, we've got all these plans. We wanna do stuff, get funding, do more, do more, do more. And got really nice funding and so. But it meant that 2022 was a really difficult year, burnt out by the end of it. So, it's, you know, great to get lots of funding, but there's a lot of work that comes with it and a lot of projects and commitments that come with it too.

N: So now the university um... is open, so do you have any students from different departments coming in for the tour or not?

C: Yeah. And you on the whole, since I've started at Origins, we didn't get a big student component or a lot of student visitors, which is, yeah, I think, people there didn't have signage around the building. So that was an impact. But people see Origins Centre and they go oh, it's another centre. It's a department or whatever. And so, we get a lot of when students do come in. So, we would do like, O-week specials or on International Museum Day we're free and for the centenary and we try and have days where it's cheap for students or free for students. And the students that come even still now, they'll go. Oh, I've been at this for three years or four years or whatever, and I never knew this was here. How did I not know about this and so one way apart from the fee and the reduced fees we've tried to, we're getting a lot of students from fine arts. So, we've had a lot more interaction with fine arts and visual arts and their postgrad students will come to do exhibitions that are part of their masters. Master's or PhD or honours requirements and then that's great, because then they're opening nights, are free for guests, and then a lot of students have been coming to those nights from UJ and from Wits. And so that's been a really nice way of getting new visitors into the museum and our public lectures, if it's certain researchers that get people that aren't necessarily that into museums and they come into the museum space and go, oh, wait, Origins isn't just a dusty old museum.

N: It's just not a centre.

C: Yes, and all the development. So that's been a nice way. So, kind of word of mouth has worked more.

N: Okay.

C: We also have some interns that come from time to time. From but also the School of Arts, and that has helped kind of spread the word. They'll let their friends know and have you know, kind of given advice on social media, things or whatever, you know. So, because we don't have our own marketing person or department or anyone that runs our social media, Bongi and I, that try and figure it out.

(C & N laugh)

N: Okay, I was going to ask you, with regards to social media. Do you guys' um… because UNESCO did launch two hashtags as a part of developing and promoting cultural and heritage tourism. So well, it was successful.

C: Okay.

N: Which I don't think crossed the margin that they were expecting. Yeah, so um… did you do anything specific like that? Like, apart from virtual tours? Talks. Did you have a display for the centenary year? So did you have a specific hashtag for that or?

C: We used the Wits hashtag, which was, you know WITS100 or and that's.

N: Okay. Or anything specific to Origins?

C: To Origins we so we had, I mean we had specific ones for different series that we had run but but no nothing specific to we had done we'd we'd hashtag origin centre and hashtag WITS100.

N: Okay.

C: Yeah. And then that's that then we would be included in the Wits cause then Wits could monitor it as well. And so, as our kind of mother marketing institute or like body, even though they they don't have the capacity to help us with creating posters or creating you know like they they could at least if we did hashtag them or tag them and they would share our posts and they could monitor the amount of reach that had got. But yeah, we haven't. Yeah, I mean maybe with specific things. They're often very short term and so we haven't kind of felt it would be necessary maybe to get a hashtag for us, yeah.

N: Okay. Do you think that through this process of almost being digitalized, that there's a slight bridge and the knowledge gap among people, and have they been, you know, like he said that people still think it's just the centre. But do you also see people who say that who come very excited and say no, I thought I found this there, there, there. And you know, I found it very interesting. That's why I decided to walk in.

C: Yeah. So, we have people that will comment on our website not being up to date, so people are going on to our website. We are having a meeting actually with Wits marketing after this interview because we only can do so much on the website on our side and it has to come from the Wits marketing side. So, we've had issues with that. So, people are going on to that and all people will say yes, I've seen the Instagram posts and there's, you know, it looks amazing, or you know. And that for your friends of mine that will say, oh, must come. You know, it looks great. So, we are getting genuinely more likes and more reach just organically through our posts. And I mean, there is so much more we could do if we had the capacity, but I think it's definitely grown a lot. But we also have our augmented reality, which is free to download,

and we've added on different sections of that. So, we've got rock art and human skulls and dinosaurs, South African dinosaurs. And so that's kind of a nice reach, but it hasn't. It hasn't. I mean, it's. The idea is that you can experience it in the museum, but you also can-do stuff from home.

N: Okay

C: So, which is nice, and it's free and whatever. And then we have had people from around the world wanting to look at it. So, it is getting noticed, but a lot less than we thought. And it might be that it's a little. I mean, it's pretty intuitive to, you know, how to use it.

N: What does the app do? Can you just briefly?

C: So yeah, so you download the app, you choose the section. So, if you go into rock engravings, which was the first one that we developed it for, and in the Rock Engraving archive in the museum, there's redrawing of each of the engravings. So, you have a beautiful engraving of a giraffe, and then you have the drawing next to it. You click on the rock engravings on the app. And then scan the giraffe and then a giraffe appears on your phone and moves around, and you can kind of stand in it and take it.

N: Little 3D model.

C: Yeah, it's a yeah. So, it's a little, it's not made to look real. It's kind of made to look. Like this cool giraffe. There's sounds and nature and whatever, and you can get it. You can take a screenshot of your friend or whatever with like cat in the giraffe or something that looks like the engraving of the giraffe, and then there's the.

N: Okay, that's cool.

C: Hominin skulls as well.

N: Do the skulls come to life?

C: So, you can look at the skull comes and we don't have we had. We had thought of that like do we do reproductions of what they would have looked like when we thought we wanted to keep it on the skulls. Because there's a lot of interpretive issues around that and so yeah, so we focused on Southern African hominis and hominids. And you can kind of move the skull around and Piers on your table and you can move it around. And there's some information of, you know, like, okay, it's Australopithecus africanus. Some of the famous ones are, you know, Mrs Pleas, or Little foot? I mean Taung Child. And these are the ages. And you know where they were found. So. So it's a nice tool for teachers. We found that teachers teaching human evolution, usually grade 11 and 12 have wanted more, they've been asking us for more tools that they can use to bring the the stuff to life.
What can they do with their classes? They are not given a huge amount from the curriculum itself, so

this is a nice tool that. Kids can use and it's fun and you can just mess around. Or you can actually learn from it by moving the skulls around and reading up on it. So yeah, so it's a nice, it's a, it's been a nice fun thing to to kind of launch and and people whenever we show them in the museum, we do have signage up in the museum, but whenever we show people, it was like oh, this is amazing you know and then but it hasn't.

N: Anything that comes to life is cool.

C: Yes, it's just this fun thing. You know and you can play with your phone, and so that was another thing that we had kind of moved to, you know. Well, now we've had films that you have to touch a button and now it's a sensor button. And we had audio guides which were very problematic anyway, and they're very expensive to fix. So, we had thought cool people can use their own phones as long as we have Wi-Fi in the museum. They can use their own phones and you know, have your own germs stay on your own. Phone and then yeah. And then you can do it. You can keep it at home as well, and so the idea going forward would be to put the audio guides on the phone. So, if you scan a QR code or something in the museum, you can get onto the whatever you know, choose whichever language our audio guides before had six different languages, and then you can listen to it or read text in the language of your choice on your own phone.

N: Okay. Does it help in translation?

C: So that's what our audio guides at the moment were recorded. It was only audio and the and since the audio guys were developed, which was in 2006, there's been changes in the museum, especially in the last year or two years. And so, we would have to update that and it's a big expense. So that's the thing to get the translation, if we are gonna get people to actually record it.

N: Okay.

C: And so that's what's kind of held us back a little bit, that there's a big job and big expenses involved in doing it and doing it properly.

N: Right

C: So yeah, but it's nice. Yeah, nice way that people can have it on their phones.

N: In the museum, without being in the museum.

C: Yes, yeah, yeah. And that's the thing. You can take it home, you know, which is really nice, cause

a lot of people I know, I go to a museum, and I read, see the pictures, look at the objects and maybe read a heading. I hardly read any text when I'm in a museum and this is something I really like.

N: Yeah, it's all visual.

C: Yeah. And so that it would be something that I go, oh, yeah, I remember going there. What was that again? And if you can find it on your phone by going into the app or something, it's quite a nice way of continuing the experience and the memories of this space.

N: Okay, so through Covid, did you have more downloaders for the app?

C: For the app at that stage, I'm trying to think when did we launch; we launched the engravings, end of 2019, the app, the app would have only been launched in 2020 or end of 2020 or beginning of 2021.

N: Okay.

C: So, it was only post Covid.

N: So, I'll ask you one last question before we wrap up. So as the curator, what was your biggest take during Covid and how did you think that this will go and how did it go?

C: Yeah, it was interesting. I remember when we went into the hard lockdown, we all kind of thought this will be over in a few weeks, you know. And then remember on our you know staff WhatsApp group and we're like, oh, wow, we can't come in for another few weeks. You. Know like.
Oh, wow, what are we gonna do? You know, it was. I am. It was, yeah, the uncertainty was really weird, but it was really nice to know we had Wits's support and that's definitely grown in the last few years to realise that we've got the support of the Science faculty and Wits and we immediately least I feel that the museum is valued and that they've seen that we have this really nice public space and a public door, you know for, to the university and so, so that has been really cool. But then also realising now there's other ways that you can reach an audience that's not in Johannesburg because, you know, you kind of, even though we knew a lot of our clients were international visitors. There's so many South Africans that I feel should know that origin centres is here and so it's been kind of nice to explore that and realise there's so much you can do. From home still and to reach people in their homes, it's not only about coming to the museum, even though obviously that's, you the know the focus and that's how you experience the museum. The best is to come to it first, yeah.

N: That's true and what are your entry fees like for the museum, do you have this kind for pensioners, students, Wits students?

C: Yeah, we do. And so, like I said, we do try to have. When we do our funding, then we reduce the fees and we try to have specials as often as we can, but our fees for this year they just went up. I think they stayed the same from 2019 up until 2022 and then now they it's 90 Rand for adults, 70 Rand for pensioners and Wits staff and 45, I think it is for students and kids and that's the whole museum experience. So, the museum and any temporary exhibitions, less if you're just coming to a temporary exhibition. So that would be for people. Only have half an hour, or they've been to the museum 20 times, and they just want to see the one exhibition. Then it's. I think it's 60 and 40, so it's less but and then for talks, you know as well, we kind of depend on you know if there's going to be catering or but then then our exhibition openings are all free. So that's where we usually get really nice crowds coming into this place and yeah.

N: Do you offer spaces for conferences being held?

C: Yeah, so that's, that's Bongie's job. Conferences, workshops, private events, dinners award evenings for Wits as well. So, we've kind of, Wits has used us a lot and the Business School, which has been really nice that they kind of know us as a venue. Now that has you know all the, everything you need for different venues, and we've had stages brought in and stuff and that's a big income generator for us. It does mean sometimes that the flow of the museum is affected, you know, so that can be a little bit of an issue that you go okay, like last week, we had a week-long conference - astronomy conference. And so, it meant that they were in two spaces, three spaces actually in the museum. So, we actually closed the museum, but. And so, if clients did arrive especially international tourists and then like it's just our last day, please can we come in? We did let them in, but we kind of had to weigh it up. On that, you know, they're paying us quite a lot for the conference. So, if we turn away a few clients, it's not too. Bad, but it's. Yeah, it's not ideal.

N: Yeah, that, yeah, that would affect a bit on the tourism side?

C: Yes, it does. Yeah, but usually it's only one space and then we kind of say, OK, cool, they're having lunch now. So, you can go into the space or you know, so it usually doesn't affect the flow of the museum too much, and it's very rarely a full week conference. Yeah, we try. If we do, if we do have those, we try to put it in a space that's slightly separate like the gallery space or something, yeah.

N: I was about to ask if you maybe publicly announced that online would that help?

C: We do. Yeah. Yeah, we do. So, I think. So, we take our tickets off web tickets so you can't buy any tickets online and we put it on Google so that we are temporarily closed on whichever day is. And then yeah, we always trying to think… what happened last week, but I'm pretty sure we put it up whenever we are even if we are closed for a day, we'll put it up on social media just to say that we are closed.

N: Okay.

C: Cool. Awesome. If there's anything else you think of, send an e-mail or whatever.

N: I will. I'll come down again.

3.1.2 Follow up interview with the Curator, Origins Centre

N: Nithya

C: Curator

N: So, we're back to do some follow up questions and I'll just start with the first one. So, was there any particular activity that came out as a consequence of Covid alone?

C: Huh! That's an interesting option. I mean having an online option for things, suddenly, you know, people were like, you know, we did have people asking before to say - oh will the lecture be recorded or something like that. Now we get a lot more people asking, and it's almost expected. Which is quite difficult because we use the lectures as something that we want people to come to, and last year I mean our lectures were accompanying seeing a rare object. So, the point was to actually come to the museum to see this thing that's never on display or fossil or something. But yeah, there's definitely that people are wanting things online and then you can't really charge for them, you know, so it's quite difficult with that.

N: Apart from the online, do you have any other particular activity that you know started as a consequence of Covid and then now you are just carrying on with it?

C: Google Arts, that's also online. So, I mean everything was like kind of focused online. But I suppose, I mean, our education books, you know, just that need that teachers had this need. But I mean, before Covid not specifically Covid related, but to have other content. It has helped and also yeah, with other museums closing and we were open then, we've had more school groups come here and you know, instead. And then they go, oh, okay Origins is actually really cool. We can but, but no, I mean I need to think about it. But I don't think there's any. You know, we picked up our normal kind of programming again, but maybe with just that much more of a virtual focus, you know and an online presence.

N: Okay. So, you're still continuing the online presence?

C: Yeah, but we're trying to. So, our last talk was live streamed, and we don't have good facilities for it yet, but we have funding for it. So that the idea is that it will be, yeah, there will be an online option.

N: Talking about funding. So, you kept mentioning about the support that you got from Wits, but I

want to know if you got any financial support from Wits?

C: Yes. So, I mean Wits basically you know, does pay all our salaries, you know. We are part of Wits, and we are employed by Wits. And I mean Origins will never be a money-making thing. But we do have a lot of pressure to get external funding and to bring in other funding and so a lot of our programming we would struggle to run if we didn't have other funding. So, from GENUS. So, a lot of you know, palaeoanthropology and paleo science-based funders- PAST, GENUS and then the National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS). They've been able to fund a lot of our public programming projects and then that in turn brings in money.

N: Okay, apart from the funding, what other support did you get from Wits?

C: We've actually received a lot. I mean especially because the museum didn't make money for a year almost. You know the staff, while we're talking about - Oh, no, are we gonna, you know, like what's gonna happen; but they did keep our jobs safe. They gave funding for the building. So, I mean that to actually revamp Origins, which was really, really good. So actually, the space that, they've been great with that. And then, we work through the services so any issues with lighting or leaks or we've had some ongoing things for years, especially with leaking in the building. It's Wits services that helps with that.

N: Okay, that's good. So, you're more secure around Wits?

C: Yeah.

N: Okay. And I'm just going to take a step back and ask, during Covid. So, you didn't mention the different organisations, right? They did support you through and through financially.

C: Yes, but those were more specific projects. And they understood if there were delays. So that was quite nice as well that obviously we couldn't do things in 2020. So, then we could spend the money in 2021 or whatever. So yeah, but they have.

N: Through those fundings can you name some of the activities that you did or projects that you did?

C: Cool. Yeah. So, we developed our augmented reality app and different sections of it with different funding that we got. And as we've installed up until very recently, recently last year [2022] launched our last section well, the latest section on hominins. All of our, most of our public programming actually, so a lot of the public lectures and a lot of the kids' activity days where we need a lot of hands and guides to help out and we need to buy lots of material and advertise and things like that, the funders have helped. But then, even now we've recently developed an education booklet and that was made possible. We could get an illustrator on board and print everything with external funding that we've received. A lot of our public programming options, so lectures and things they don't.

Lectures, not as much because they don't always cost as much, but if we're putting a whole exhibition together, which we were the whole of last year, we needed funding to make that happen.

N: Okay, that's good. I'm talking about the red bus. If you can tell me, why were you taken off the red bus route and how did it impact?

C: It was a discussion. When we heard that it was an option, it was going to happen, it was sad and it definitely has impacted our numbers, quite significantly, I think. What the issue was, and apparently it had been ongoing. It was about in 2019, actually that we went off the red bus route and it had been discussion. But you know, before I joined, that there had been incidences of the red bus customers being targeted by muggers in Braamfontein. So then there had been discussions with Wits security and because there's, you know they have Wits security outside the premises as well. And Wits security like denied it. They said no, we've got security guards, it's not going to happen. You know that can't be a reason. That's the other reason that they said and maybe it was one incident or two incidents over a few years, I don't know that I've never heard any more than. Okay, it's just a hotspot. Because they had to wait on Jorrisen road and then they get off there. So, they have wait. Then, another issue for us was that the pedestrian entrance changed. So, we've even changed our brochures to say and show where the pedestrian entrance was and direct people back to Origins from there because they don't allow pedestrians through the entrance. You have to have a card, so the one right by Origins. And then the third thing for Red Bus was that they wanted their route was slightly too long. And so, it took that much and added on a few more minutes onto their route. And apparently, they were trying to kind of make, you know, like an hour route for the bus or something. And I think they changed their route slightly and that just seemed like a good option because of these other reasons as well. So partially security, partially just the red bus wanting to change their route anyway with time and then partially access onto campus, which is still an issue with people walking onto campus. Sometimes the security guards know Origins and they're fine. And other times they get given the run around, you know, give me a blood sample before I let you.

N: Since 2019, you haven't been back on the red bus route?

C: No. So, and we have a discussion. So, I mean now how it goes straight across from Nelson Mandela Bridge and then right up Jorissen. So, technically, it stops for WITS Art Museum. People only have to walk down 100 metres or so, so it's not too bad, but you still have. I don't actually know. I must actually ask them. Again, to see how many red bus people they get. They might not know because it's free entrance, whereas with us the red bus customers got a reduced entrance, so we would know exactly how many red bus people were coming, where they might not. You know, cause it's free. I don't think they know where the customers are.

N: Okay.

C: But yeah, so it's, I mean hopefully it's something that could change again in the future. But I don't know, it would depend on where the red bus is willing to extend their tour again.

N: Make it more than an hour?

C: Yeah (Laughs)

N: Okay, last question. Are the google statistics during and post pandemic available online?

C: I get the monthly stats or quarterly stats maybe, but I don't think I was managing like the Google business profile. I'm just actually going to check because, I get the monthly stats now and I'm like the, you know, at least one of the emails and I don't know who got the stats during Covid. I could check, but I'm sure I'd be able to get them. So, I know with Google Arts and culture, we can get all our stats on - which countries, who's looking at the app from where, which was great, and I would imagine Google could do that too. Yeah, that would be interesting too.

N: Okay. And so, can I see it as well?

C: Probably not.

N: Oh, Okay.

C: It might have to be whoever's managing the profile, like the business on Google. N:

Okay.

C: I'll go have a look. I mean, I can look now. Because I get all the stats and I'm sure, you know, I just haven't explored a huge amount as to what the stats are. So, I mean they give us stats on you know, how much it's gone per month. You know how many people have linked through it, look through it, phone through it or things like that or clicked on the website from there. And I mean generally it's gone up. Like most of our followers have increased quite a lot on all our platforms. And then with Google from month to month it goes up and down, but on the whole, I think I mean the trend is generally up, which is cool.

N: Okay, that's good. Does that help you financially?

C: No, I don't think we'll get any role. I've never received anything. I mean the effect would be that, presumably means more people are coming actually coming to the museum.

N: Okay.

C: So, we might, you know, you can see if they've clicked onto the website or they've. I don't think if you can see if they've clicked onto the buy tickets - I'm not sure. Because that would presumably mean, you know, that would be a big link that you can actually people are presumably buying tickets or at least planning on coming in.

N: Okay.

C: Yeah, but so it would be more people and just having a better presence and making sure we update our hours. Like if we are closed, we usually open most public holidays, but that's something like that, we've been more active. I'm not even sure if it was being run much or, you know, monitored much before it was just kind of left up. As you know, these are basic details, whereas now you know I respond to reviews and things like that, that we get. So yeah, questions we get.

N: So that does help you grow then?

C: It does. No, it does. And, you know we have questions like - oh, how much a ticket, that people haven't been able to find it online or are you open tomorrow, you know, things like that. I just get it on my phone, and I can quickly respond. So, it's quite nice, it's quite efficient. It's quite a nice way for us to get queries because if it goes to the Origins e-mail then I don't get them and it's only when somebody's here at Origins that's responded to. So, if somebody asks a question, say I need to bring a group tour. It's a Sunday and I need to bring a group tomorrow. We're only going to be able to tell them on Monday morning, you know.

N: Okay. So that's about it for my side.

C: It's cool. Good. It's a pleasure.

3.1.3 Interview II

(TG): Tour Guide (N): Nithya

N: How long have you been doing this role for?

TG: I've been doing the role for roughly 16 years.

N: Wow, okay. So, you've definitely seen a lot of the museum?

TG: 16 years. I have seen the changes I was here when it started out in 20, in 2006 and I left briefly for two years and then came back.

N: Okay, so how was the museum in the beginning, what was a space like, how was it? How did you

start off? How did the museum start off?

TG: Well, the museum started off as a new idea, which nobody has ever seen, an idea like this before. Actually, in a lot of the presentations of the museum, a lot of the stuff was quite new, especially in the information about the San people. The first people of southern Africa and the black people of southern Africa. The history has a different approach to what the old history books had told about- Who the African people are? And especially in southern Africa and what the scientists say they are. So, the new information gives the actual facts about who the people of southern Africa are and who are the first people in southern Africa far beyond before colonial imperial and the apartheid eras.

N: Okay.

TG: So that's part of what the information gives. There's a lot of very interesting technology as well that's in the museum. You mean touch screens and stuff like that, yes.

N: Okay, so how many sections does the museum have? And if you were to give somebody a tour, then how does the tour work and how do you give a tourist the tour.

TG: All right. After any person that comes to the museum, whether they have booked or they haven't booked and they are taken by a guide, the guide is given an hour and a half. You can take the person through the museum. But if the person walks on their own, they have all the time they have at their disposal to come stay into the museum and of course, we hope they are not going to stay until we close. But anyway they, a lot of them get interested because we have researchers that come to the museum. We have students from other universities and including students here and Wits university that are using the museum as part of their research as well, and there are enthusiasts. And the enthusiast depends on which area of study they are in or interests they are in. You have geological enthusiasts, you have historical enthusiasts, you have institutional enthusiasts, people who want to see the design of the museum, which would be architectural enthusiasts, you have linguists that also wants to see and hear the ancient language of the San and how it's being spoken, how it's being pronounced. You have people who actually are interested in seeing the pictures and how pictures from as far back as the 1800s were taken and how they look like. And of course, you have people who really want to see how the arrangement of our museum is, because they say there's so many, there's so much information and it's quite tricky in a lot of other museums in different parts of the world where they found they found themselves having a challenge in giving out or writing out information, and they wanted to see how it's done here at the origin centre, yes.

N: Okay. So, Covid just happened out of the blue, right?

TG: Yes.

N: Nobody was expecting Covid. So, what was the impact on the museum and its people?

TG: You know, um… Covid was quite a very very bad. You know, a lot of us got sick. Yes, and we were not very sure, you know what they say. There's a pandemic and there's a sickness. You're automatically want to find out if you are not sick.

N: Right.

TG: That's the first thing you do, and psychologically it works on us. A few of us started coughing (laughs) and then of course, that was the time when there was not no jabs at the time, and it was fascinating to see that even during that time there were a few people who had something up their sleeve. One, one of the incidents was that we found that people were taking plants outside our gardens.

N: Okay (laughs)

TG: Because those plants were found to be indigenous plants with medicinal properties.

N: Okay.

TG: That is one thing that was quite interesting. And um..., you know, everybody was scared, very scared, not just scared. People are, have invested in their lives, they invested in their families, people are married and you know the points. There was a point where we were worried about when, you know, nothing has been said about people being cut off, so we were worried that there might come a time where they will be told. So we're trying to prep ourselves for that time when we will be told.
Look, you will be cut off and you will not be able to work here anymore. But you know, we have heard stories also on the media and the news in different media sources, people being laid off, companies closing down and of course our museum also depends on visitors. And luckily it was still under. You know, one of the best curatorships. And of course, they, you know, protected a lot of us at work. So, we kept our jobs, and we were still being paid every month. You know, since the pandemic, I mean it was a shock, and we were still also very much ready to hear. That other voice that would say, alright, you have this amount of months to go or you could have your, your, your pay being cut since you're not working. So, we were very, very much ready for that but we still are not, you know, don't believe what happened. You know, families and members that passed away and, you know, you just don't know how to react to that. And of course, we have to stay home, and we had to start using laptops to relate and talk about our weekly experiences. When I said I got sick, I got very sick actually. For a week I was flat, flat, flat. And I thought it was just. the flu, you know. I hope it was just the flu (both

laugh), or it was a different type of flu with a different strand. The difference then, because we just don't know what covid was all about. Even the bit of information that we had, you know, I was flat for a week, you know flat out, flat out, flat out. Yes, and I was lucky that my system got back up. That as I'm saying before we got the shots, we got the jabs before we got the jabs and then, you know, later on, of course, about a year later, people were then encouraged to take the jab and what and what? And I went for the jab. And after the jab. One is still at least few other things. Of course, system hasn't adapted to it.

N: Yeah

TG: Yeah, and there's quite a new is, I think one, you know, after the job I got the high blood.

N: Okay, so there's something in the air.

TG: Of those things. Yeah. Yeah, something. Yeah, I would say that.

N: Okay, right. So, throughout this process, everybody, well, everybody, everybody was facing their own battle, fighting their own battle. Did the museum have a pandemic preparedness guides that you had to follow during hard lockdown during Covid?

TG: From the basics as I remember, masks the basic distancing very much the rule and the norm, sanitising your hands in every room. Also, sanitising anything that you touch from keys to handles to keyboards. And of course, you know, the museum is also, um… has sanitizers in every room. In almost every room or every second room, there's a sanitizer, so you will see as you walk around there. There are some other they're still on stand even today and just near the corridor to the ladies and gents, there's also another sanitizer. So, we were looking into that a lot. And masks were a big thing. We had boxes of masks. Especially what? What do they call? Those that you can throw away. So, once you have used it for today, tomorrow you're getting another mask you wouldn't repeat the mask and then later on the institution then started making masks and getting masks from Wits itself. And then we started using those that are washable.

N: Right.

TG: And of course, that saved a lot of money as well. Sanitising was quite a big thing we had to sanitise every you know. Every moment you move from one area to the next year to sanitise and the desks which we stayed had to be cleaned and sanitised as well. And of course, there's also mentioned that if you are not feeling well, you should say I'm not feeling well. And at least. See a doctor. Or stay at home for whatever number of time to see if you're right.

N: Right, did the museum have anything specific as a rule or regulation apart from the government and norms that we were following?

TG: You know well the there was they worked with the, what do they call it? OH- OHS&E um… the health, the health facilities of Wits.

N: Okay.

TG: Yeah. And there were no posters, but signs all over the museum in the entrances. So, they were following the Wits guidelines on how to. You know, to acclimatise to the new environment, yes.

N: Okay, so the museum was bound by Wits?

TG: The Wits policies and Wits here. So, we are abiding by that.

N: Okay and so then we have different levels of lockdown, and every level of lockdown was different from one another, right? So how was the museum monitored during these levels of lockdowns? Because we have, we have artefacts that are millions of years very important to keep them safe and sound.

TG: That area was more to do with the curator, and it had to do also with the head of origins. So, one they are the people that check on that roughly once or twice a month, if I'm not mistaken. Once or twice a month they're actually looking to all of that. They make sure that the temperatures are in place and what and if there are any of these artefacts that would be affected by this, they would obviously inform us and and they would inform their proper institutions that they work with in terms of the facilities, but of course most of what we had here or what we have here is encased in glass. So, the there wasn't a lot of disturbances infection or affection of those things by by that, of course. Not to mention that some of the standards is that whenever they check that gloves, you know, are the key aspect of either touching or holding any, any aspect of artefacts, yeah.

N: So, you said you've been working with origins for nearly sixteen years, right? So, over the years you've of course seen different numbers of visitors and the ups and downs of origins. So, what is the maximum number of people that you've had for a tour, pre and post Covid.

TG: Well, our numbers as a guide as an individual. As an individual, a guide can only take 25.

N: Okay.

TG: Yeah, that was when the standards rule of the museum that the guide can take. But ever post um… post Covid. You can take less. We take less than 20. It's from 15 to 20. Now, we have 15 to 20.

N: Okay.

TG: We can take at least that amount unless the number has increased or is far more than what we had expected. We can then go back to 25 per person per guide, yeah.

N: Okay. And you see an increase in domestic visitors as opposed to um… international visitors over the years now?

TG: Yes, there's a lot. One of our main customers or customer groups is school kids.

N: Okay.

TG: The schools visit us a lot since the museum is also curriculum based, so we do have a lot of schools coming from different areas of Gauteng and outside Gauteng.

N: Okay.

TG: Yeah, even provincial. Actually, we had, we have people from…

N: Okay.

TG: Cape Town. We have school kids from Cape Town. We have school kids from Natal. We have school kids from Limpopo Northwest and Mpumalanga. Yeah, Mpumalanga. Free State, yes, even the Free State. Okay, I'm trying to figure out. Which, yeah, all of the provinces.

N: Okay, all of the province is close by? TG:

Yeah. Roughly, even far.

N: Okay, um... so, during Covid, an important aspect was doing tours or showing places digitally, which was really helpful for the tourism industry. So, did you give any virtual tours? Did you do anything online that helped in coping up with the pandemic?

TG: It was actually the curator that was doing that a lot. Yes, I wasn't doing virtual tours.

N: Okay, so and well, with that there must have been a time where you guys really struggled to, you know, meet have expenses and all of that. So, I mean, as a tour guide like what, what do you think that could be a post recovery Covid plan for the museum that would help it in coping up with the pandemic that's been happening for roughly two and a half years?

TG: I'm not clue on the actual dynamics on how our institution is dealing with it, because mostly it's above my level, it's a little bit above my level, especially in terms of finances. And I don't have any insight on that.

N: Okay, so what is your biggest takeaway from Covid that you've learned through being in a museum or tour guide?

TG: You know, (silence) Covid has made one realise a lot of things that you know. Well, you could die (laughs) by a flu, which at first a flu used to be such a very easy thing to deal with but now it is found that one could actually die of a flu, which is a very, very sad and because a lot of people started having the flu. Yes, a lot of people started having the flu and you know one would never know, you know, whether you have it or you don't. I remember I had to do a the online survey with a doctor, the doctor asking me all of my symptoms. And that's when one realises how technology is valuable in this time. I remember a time where there were no phones, we didn't literally have even a landline in my home, and now I'm living in a time where there are cell phones. So, it's quite interesting to see that! And of course, there's a lot of things that one could say about most of the things are more emotional and personal. Rather than, you know, you start getting worried about yourself if you're prepared, did you leave any proper things to the proper people?

N: Right.

TG: Do you have enough money to bury yourself? Imagine thinking about things like that because you've seen people that you felt were healthy, dying. Within our families and sometimes within the campus and, of course, to an extent that when, when you were given an option to stay home, you thought maybe it was you started getting scared to say, Are they saying I should they? They're cutting me off. Are they cutting me off? So those are some of the very, very scary things that that happened. But that post covid, you know, one realises that, you know, we actually post one is relieved that the pandemic has passed, even though I hear it hasn't actually completely passed. Yeah, it has changed strains. You know, there was new strains that were coming in and going coming in and going. And for the first time, doctor is one of your best friends. If you can afford

going to a doctor, go, for any little thing that. You know any little thing that you suspect? Even so that you are cleared because it's it was more of a mental thing. A friend of mine was saying even that we should not even fear Covid. Because it's fear that's going to make us sick. I couldn't understand what you were saying, but he simply meant that once you are fearful, you start doing things that are abnormal and you might injure yourself in the process. So simply accept that there is this and find out what best way to protect yourself against it. So that culture is continuing even post Covid you know. We're starting to drink (laughs), what do they call those, those shakes? You know your gingers, your lemons.

N: Immunity boosters?

TG: Exactly, exactly. Yeah. And of course, after the jabs. Yeah. You know, two-two of the jabs, I didn't take. What was it? It was Johnson and Johnson and the other one?

N: Pfizer

TG: Pfizer. I was. I think I had taken Pfizer, because which one was it that you had to do twice, was it Pfizer?

N: Yeah.

TG: I think Johnson and Johnson, you had to do once. If not, you had to do the jab. But… Yeah, roughly post covid all one has to do is cope and, you know, stick. My diet has changed. My diet has changed and I'm afraid to tell you what I used to eat now I had to stop that. You know and only now do I understand certain songs very well. You know that this guy was telling us to stop those things. Yeah, but anyway, I don't want to make to make jokes over that, but. You realise that your guide is now key to your immune and therefore there is a little lesson that covid has taught us that our lives are more important than any other thing and therefore post covid, preparedness is the key to everything. Your finances, your health and your afterlife even.

(N & TG laugh)

N: So, well. With that. After that, well after Covid, what is the maximum number of visitors you've had at the museum for a tour?

TG: You had quite a lot. In the past, well in the past, in the past year, I think we had surpassed over 2000 people, personally over 2000. And of course, the museum, since it had events and functions so we could get almost in a month, we could get about, in a month about 500 people in a month for events that happened that happened here around the museum. So, we had quite a good number of people as a

guide. Yeah, there was quite a lot as well. I would, I would take it up to 2000, but personally like taking those twenty fives for a year, that's last year.

N: Okay. And then did you, did you expect so many like, especially with the amount of hype and negativity of Covid?

TG: Yeah, we did. We did expect a lot because a lot of people wanted to go out after being closed in. So we did expect a huge number of and when planes started, also transporting people became also one of our big boasts.

N: Okay. That's that, do you think if there's another pandemic, the museum's ready to take it?

TG: You know what, nobody is ready for anything. I would say.

N: With the learnings of covid, do you have a foundation for you know what to do as a tour guide for the museum?

TG: The thing is, we don't know what's coming, that's the thing. We just don't know what's coming. One other pandemic could be economy. You know the economy could slam places like museums, could be closed down and we could be told, you know, museums are not important because museums are leisure, are placed under leisure, the category of leisure. So, when an economy of a country goes, I don't think people have the lowest part of the economy, are worried about museums, you know, so. We don't know what type of other pandemic might be coming, but this one was a health pandemic. There's another one that is known as the as I mentioned, the economic pandemic. There could be other pandemics that we are not even aware of. We just were going through an electricity pandemic. If I may call it that, in the country.

N: That is a pandemic.

TG: Exactly. Well, exactly. We're still in this water. But we were warned roughly about five years ago, if not a decade now. That water might be the new war of the world. So, you know.

N: By 2030 they are saying…

TG: Climate is changing, meaning food might be scarce, might start eating dogs. I'm sorry, you know, and we don't want to go there, but I'm saying we don't know what new pandemic might be coming. We are as ready as we can be right now for a pandemic because in some cases in some cases closing down the museum is the best thing for it. Yeah, but losing the job is the worst thing.

N: Yeah.

TG: That one. Yeah. So, there's. Never enough. Yes, because right now there's also an issue of age. Certain economies depend on age. If you are older, they would prefer you to stay, to stay home, and if you are younger, they would want you to come in so.

N: But that's to do with the economy's GDP, right? Yeah. The young contribute to the GDP, the old are a liability to the economy.

TG: That's why they say that. I mean, experience is. Experienced liability now. That's what you ask yourself.

N: Yeah, that's true. So, another thing that I want to ask is during Covid, but not during Covid once during Covid, but once the lockdown was in level one and two, did you do any outdoor tours when you had, like a huge number? Did you go to lawns outside and then do an event like that or something like that?

TG: During, we did not. During Covid everything was seriously clamped down and of course.

N: And when the norms were slightly relaxed and…

TG: Yeah. Well, yes, we could go out, which was one of the very, very important aspects we could go out. Yeah, well, the museum doesn't have a lot of programmes outside, but it has a lot of programmes inside indoors. So, most of what we did was indoors rather than outdoors, but we did do one or two schools which required our request that made a request for us to come over.

N: Okay

TG: Us to come over.

N: Okay.

TG: Yes, we did.

N: Okay. So that's about it from my side. Do you want to add anything to the interview?

TG: Well so far no, I can't. I don't know what to say about. Nothing is…

N: It was a nightmare. Wasn’t it?

TG: Yeah, no, the pandemic was you know what? There is a nightmare. And there's something after. The night I mean. Beyond the nightmare. You know. It was a whole new thing. We actually wire our thinking. We had to rewire our habits. We had to rewire our economies. A friend of mine even said, If you want to still be doing what you did before Covid, it means you haven't gone through covid properly or you didn't learn anything. So, our lives have changed after covid, our thinking have changed, our behaviour has changed, our diet has changed. My diet has changed and…

N: We're scared of groups now. When I think of a museum. I'd imagine a whole crowd of people doing the tours. But now as I see a whole crowd of people doing the tour in the museum? I would. Step back. I would, I would say. Okay, I'll go after this group goes or I'll go after that bunch of people walk out, because then there's a lot less people in the museum, but it was not like that before, and we just, we wouldn't care about crowds before now. There's so much change. So, did that affect? Your tours in the museum did.

TG: Yeah, it did. It did a lot.

TG: Because we started out at 10 and 5. 10 and then we wave it 15 a bit. 10. 10 is quite different. Yeah, you know, we are used to group standing together. And now they have to stand. And now you have to shout. And now you're wearing a mask.

N: Did the 10 include the tour guide as well? Or was that excluding the tour guides? Was it 10 + 1 or 9 + 1?

TG: That's 10 + 1. Yeah, 10 + 1. You know, it was quite interesting because a lot of people that requested the guide would be external groups, groups from overseas. Yes, they would request the guide.

N: So, do you see a comeback of international tourists?

TG: Yeah, a lot, a lot. Because we still have the red bus is now back on rotation, so a lot of them climb off at the corner and comes to the origins centre, yeah.

N: Okay. That's good. That's a good thing. Thanks!

TG: It's a pleasure.

3.2 Giants Castle Game Reserve (uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park)

3.2.1 Interview I

N: Nithya

TG: Tour Guide

N: How long have you been working at the nature reserve?

TG: So, it's 11 years for now.

N: Oh wow, that's long. So, what was the impact of Covid-19 on you as a tour guide?

TG: So, it was very bad because during the Covid I was staying at home. So, the caves closed on the 25th of March, so until June passed there, the visitors start to visit on October. So, all those months, I am not working. So, it was terrible but and it's coming for only the people coming from KZN. They're just coming for the weekends only. During the week, there is no one.

N: Okay, that was pretty bad. So, in terms of income, where you paid? Because you said that the reserve was closed from 25th April to?

TG: So, it was open until June, but me as a tour guide, I start to work on October.

N: Okay.

TG: But fortunately, I used to get paid for all those months.

N: Oh, that's good and there was no deduction. You were paid in full?
TG: Yeah.
N: Oh, that's wonderful! So, you didn't have visitors for the period of complete lockdown. So, what was the impact of Covid-19 on the caves, on Main Caves as an archaeological site?

TG: So, it was terrible because the time there's no one coming there, even the researchers, they didn't come to see what's happening there. Lots of things was damaged, for example our deck, now it's been vandalised. So, it's not easy to fix it in. It took a while now so I don't know when they can fix it again.

N: Oh, that's sad. Were there any other illegal activities, because you just mentioned vandalism? So, did you see any other illegal activities?

TG: There's a lot of graffities. Because some other people, they're coming with their own, doing some graffities on the rocks, and now it's our fire season. So, the time there's no one there, the rangers they are working harder because there's two patrol and there's lots of uncontrolled fire.

N: Okay, Okay. The fire also affects the caves, is it?

TG: Yeah, but not during the Covid. Before the Covid was affected, because there was uncontrolled fire, and it was happening during the night.

N: Oh, Okay. So due to the sudden lockdown, that was that came unannounced did you have any

tourists stuck in any of the chalets who couldn't drive back, because the borders closed?

TG: Not exactly, because the President announced earlier. So, they make the arrangements and after that there's a lot of cancellations. The people they used to come and stay with us.

N: Oh, Okay. So, no tourists were stuck at any of the chalets?
TG: Yes.
N: So, did the site have a risk preparedness guide? Did you have some protocols before Covid was announced?

TG: Yeah, that's nice. So, it was okay.

N: Okay, so what were the protocols like?

TG: So, we know we are working nicely with the people and so we had seven days. Seven tours a day. But it was nice because you know each and every hour there's people coming. But after Covid it's one or the other days. It's quite for example like yesterday, I was sitting in the reception for the whole day. There's no one visiting the caves. Yeah, so it means it's not coming back now.

N: So that's bad.

TG: So, we're working harder or working very good, when it's weekend. The month end weekend or the long weekend, we know we are working. During the week, or maybe during the week, we work maybe three or four days, maybe two tours a day. It's very quiet. So, it means Covid is, it's confusing us.

N: Oh, is it? Okay. So, when Covid happened, when it was announced as a pandemic, did the cave have any special rules and regulations to follow?

TG: Yes, they said, I must, on an hour, I used to take 25 or 20 people. By the time it's Covid, they said on an hour, I used to take only five people.

N: Okay.

TG: On an hour, so not each and every hour. If for example, they take the people on 10:00 o'clock, they say 11:00 o'clock, so there's no one allowed to come right. So, they come only 14 hours, means the time it's Covid I only work 4 hours a day. So, 9, 11, 1 and 3.

N: Ah, Okay. So, we're talking about group sizes now, right? TG:

Hmm… Hmm…

N: So, when the pandemic was relaxed and the lockdown levels changed, what was the maximum number of tourists in a group?

TG: Okay, so now the number on the group I used to take 10-15, not as many as before, but if there's a school kids, so I try to take 30.

N: Has there been a change in the numbers in groups now? Because we're coming to normal. TG:
Now we're going to the normal, 30 people on an hour.
N: So, you do 30 people an hour?
TG: Yes
N: That's wonderful! That is really nice! But like, we were talking about how you could do only one tour an hour. Is that right, during Covid?

TG: Yes

N: So apart from that, were there any other rules, that you followed within the group?

TG: Yeah, because we mustn't allow to come closer. And each and every couple of minutes, for example, so I usually sanitise them after eight after 8 minutes. So, I used to sanitise them. So, I used to come also with a sanitizer

N: After 8 minutes?

TG: Each and every 8 minutes. Because sometimes they are touching the deck. So, they don't know exactly what's happening after touching, I used to sanitise them.

N: Okay, that's hectic.

TG: Yes, that's why I said, the Covid, we pray it mustn't come again.
N: Okay, that's quite bad. And then your masks were compulsory?
TG: Yes, we used to wear masks. So, all of us, we used to wear mask. And the one if they didn't wear masks, so, I did not allow them to come in. Even if they said, why they are not allowed? When they didn't come without mask. They say, because it's outdoors. I said no, it's a rule. We must wear the mask.

N: Yes, Okay.

TG: And no touching or no handshaking, all those stuffs.

N: Oh, Okay. It was hectic. So, was the site monitored at all levels of lockdown? Because there were tourists and then no tourists and tourists.

TG: Yeah, so the rangers, they make sure they patrol, everything is going well.

N: Okay, so tell me how did the patrolling happen? What's the procedure for patrolling?

TG: So now the rangers were around and they used to check. So maybe there's someone coming, maybe with arms, so they used to check. Although they were hiding, they also use binoculars to check. So, they are working in shifts. There is a day shift and a night shift. Now, fortunately now we also have the securities.

N: Okay, but it was the same during Covid or they had more shifts? TG:

Now there's more shifts now, yeah.
N: There's more shifts now?
TG: During the Covid… Before the Covid, there's only rangers, but now it's also the securities. Rangers and the securities, they are working together.

N: Okay, so in terms of income, because again during Covid, you mentioned that there were no visitors

for quite a period.

TG: Yes.

N: So, in terms of income, how was this site maintained? With barely any income and the change in level of lockdowns.

TG: So that's what I'm saying, it's not good. Because now, after the Covid, so they didn't maintain the deck. Usually each and every year, they come and maintain the deck, put the furniture on it, just clean but now, no. Even the researchers, before the Covid, they come each and every three months, just to come and do some research. Now, it's quiet. Maybe they come two times a year. But its better if they are coming each and every time, so that we can ask some questions and learn about the other new things. Because they do the research on other sites and not just the one, I am working on.

N: I hope they start coming soon.

TG: Yes.

N: So, while we talk about impact and finances, I want to know what are some of the things that you as a tour guide practice even after Covid is almost come to an end? What are some of the things that you keep in mind?

TG: Yes, we are supposed to. So, after Covid, so I used to learn, so the people if they suffered by the sinus or down with asthmatic. So, I know, so don't come closer then. There because some other place is fluffy but before I did not notice that, now I notice it. And also, other people are not allowed to come closer to it.

N: Okay, so that's the fear we have now, that's true.
TG: Yeah, because it’s suffocating a lot.
N: That’s true. And any other habits that you keep in mind when you're doing a group tour?

TG: So, the thing that I noticed so, I used to be, even if I'm not close to them, I'm trying to speak louder because the time it's Covid I'm strict and cannot stand closer to the people. So, all the time I used to start to speak louder, but before that I speaks not too loud. But now I'm like a radio.

(TG and N laugh)

N: Yeah. Was that because of the mask?

TG: Yeah, because of the mask. Because if you have the mask, they can't hear you properly.

N: So, what tourists have you seen, you know, is there a change in domestic and international tourists before Covid and now?

TG: Before Covid the international, there's a lot of them visiting there. But now it's many, although it's coming, but not many as before. So now the thing that I noticed, the South Africans, so they are coming now as compared to the before the Covid.

N: Oh, Okay.

TG: Even the local people, now they will come before that, they're not coming.

N: Okay, so which one have you seen more? Because now the flights and all have opened up, so do you see more of locals, do you see more of domestic?

TG: It's a balance.

N: Is it balanced? Do you think that's good?

TG: It's not that good. As I've said earlier on, so other days, there's no one coming. So but before that this time, you know it's a busy season now. So, you suppose you have lots of French people, Italians, Spanish, but now it's only few people on the camp.

N: That's true.

TG: So, it affects us a lot.

N: Okay, so what crowd did you have more international visitors?

TG: We have lots of buses, maybe 3 buses, different groups. So, it's staying two nights when they leave. The other groups also coming, so the camps are just always full, not like now. Like yesterday, yesterday it's only four chalets. The people were supposed to arrive, only four. It's unusual.

N: Okay, that's a big change. So, what countries of international tourists do you see more?

TG: It's Germany and US.
N: Oh, that's interesting!

TG: Yeah, not the Europeans.

N: Ah Okay, so another thing I want to ask in line of local and international tourists is that, has the sights seen an increase in domestic and international tourists with the cases of Covid-19 increasing and decreasing?

TG: So now it's decreasing. Yeah, now it's decreasing, but we pray it's coming because the other ones we said before, Covid. So, they're coming again, maybe with other peoples or with their friends.

N: Okay…

TG: So maybe it's going to be coming like before, but not fast, slowly. Maybe three to four years from now, it's gonna be good.

N: So, you are saying that the recovery will take three to four years?

TG: Yeah, because not good now. Because lots of people are losing their jobs. So, it's not easy to travel if you're not earning something.

N: That's true.

TG: Maybe when the currency is good, the people, they are coming.

N: Okay. That's interesting. I just want to in terms of income, has any government organisation offered you money to maintain the place?

TG: Yeah. Okay.

N: Do you mind naming?

TG: So, although they didn't tell me exactly, but they tell me so there's a funding to maintain. That's why, also the securities. Securities, they also come, patrol there because they know other people, they are coming to vandalise. You still you notice there's a lot of graffities. Yes, there's one, there's securities to check and care. So, the securities they must get paid. So that's why they took the money

there and it's been used by people.

N: And any non-governmental organisation that is giving you funding to maintain the place.
TG: Yes.
N: So, that does help you maintain the place?
TG: Yes.
N: So, as a tour guide, what plans do you think the site has to reestablish their programmes as the pandemic is coming to an end? We'd like to believe.

TG: I'm not sure.

N: Okay. Is there anything that you would want the management to take up?

TG: So, it's better maybe if we can rotate. So maybe it's a week of that one, the following should be someone, so it always must be more refresher. And sometimes when you doing some other things so you can study the other things. So not just like one band always know, okay, if they didn't ask me that question, they supposed to ask me that question. So, it's better if you can do also some other things. Because if they are there, so we can't take even the walk to check about the other paintings, the one that we have. For example, in Giant's Castle we have more than 55 places with paintings.
But because you stuck there for the whole day, so you can't go and check the other sites, but if you can do some other things, maybe for the week you can go and check, the other site is still okay, yes.

N: That's good. So, you're saying that you'd like more tour guides to be employed, so there's rotation?

TG: Yes.

N: That's an interesting take. I didn't that would come. While we're talking about improvements, what areas do you think the site must, you know, improve?

TG: So, there's a lot of things they must improve. For example, like the schedules on museums. So, it's better if they can maybe change with the new ones. The ones that look good at and all those stuff.

N: Okay.

TG: Because now, we said please do that. They say okay, let us go and check the budgets for all those stuffs.

N: So that's good. You're focusing more on the infrastructure of the place? I mean like decks,

replacement of benches.

TG: Yes, and the grass also all those stuffs. Because I think you notice the time, you're coming there, the path, if it's raining, it's too slippery. It's better they try to solve the thing because other people they'll fall and the older ones, they can't maintain to come back.

N: That's true. That's a very good point! So, another question that I want to ask, might sound funny, but what do you think are the positive impacts of Covid 19 on the site and you?

TG: So, it's bad, it's good. I was staying with my family. Although not all of my family because the others, they are not close to me. Because it was, for example so, it was, they said they were closed at 26th of June, sorry, March they are working and there is a time they said, after 10:00 o'clock there's no one allowed to be on the road. So, they're staying far away, but it was nice because I go and fetch my kids in the school, staying with her, so I enjoyed. But sometimes, you miss job because you know so these other people you can share fun with them, make jokes out of stuff, even like you. So sometimes sharing their jokes and now we have lots of friends. I met them in the caves. So that's why, I miss them.

N: Did you make friends with tour groups?
TG: With the visitors, yes.
N: That's so interesting! That sounds fun.

TG: Yeah, because sometimes if you know, if you know if I'm working on job, if I'm visiting Maritzburg, other people go – "Oh Thandeka it's you!" and blah... blah… blah... and we have a nice chat.

N: Oh, that's interesting. So, you know life stories of different people and how it impacted them with Covid.

TG: Yes.

N: So, we did speak about the positive now, but do you have any negatives that you want to highlight of the overall scenario of Covid?

TG: Yeah, there is the negative things. Because the time it's Covid, for example, people are also coming there without mask. They have stopped because it's outdoor post. So, they are allowed to come without mask. It seems as you neglected them, so that things wasn't good for me, but there's nothing I can do. So, I was supposed to do so. And others I ask them. So, if you wear the jersey, it's better use your jersey as a scarf, so that you can protect the others. But, I know, the other people, they

didn't feel well about it. There's nothing, because I know it's a long walk to walk there and if you are without a mask, ah-ah- turn back. So, it's not good.

N: So, you did have to turn down a couple of visitors? Do you have a number or a rough idea?
TG: Yeah, but it's not many. It's not many.
N: That's interesting. What's your biggest learning from COVID-19?

TG: I know, you must start to save. Because if you go to town, the thing it was very expensive the food, even the petrol so as from Covid. So, before Covid, when you buy the little petrol, if it's 16- ah, it's expensive. Now the petrol litre, it's over 23 rands. So, you see the Covid is teach us how to save.

N: And as a tour guide, what's your biggest learning?

TG: So, as a tour guide, they also teach me how to save and how to protect myself. Because before that, we used to go anywhere we want to - do some long hikes. But now, we know, so must make sure when you make the plan; so, make sure the plan is good for you. No say, now I'm going to Chile, then I'm going to that place. So now you know. So even our courses or workshops, now it's been maintained so but before they used to go each and every four months, you know it's supposed to go somewhere else to do some workshops, but now it's nothing.

N: Okay. So, do you think the cave will return to normal? When do you think the cave will return to normalcy and like how it was before? You said 30 people in a group?

TG: So, as I'm saying maybe two to three years, but now the kids that were coming, but the school groups then didn't come each and every day. Maybe they come one school group on a week or after two weeks. So, but usually before the Covid, I know a week, maybe I suppose you have three different school on a week, so it was working.

N: Oh, that's good. And do you have school groups from the area, or do you have groups from different places?

TG: Different places, even from the area. For example, last week on Wednesday a school groups coming from Clairemont. So, there were 87 kids, as I'm saying now, this, the kids that were coming, but not many as before.

N: Oh, okay, wow! So, can you name some of the provinces or the school groups are coming from?
TG: So, Gauteng, KZN, Limpopo.
N: Okay.

TG: Yeah, usually, it’s those three coming.

N: Oh, that's nice. Do you think I should have asked you any question or did I miss a question that you think should be in my research?

TG: No, I think it's okay.

N: Is it okay?

TG: Yeah.

N: Okay, that's about it. Thank you so much for your time!
TG: Okay. Thank you.
N: And I'll ask you if I need more.
TG: Alright, alright. Okay, thank you.
N: Thank you, okay.

3.2.2 Interview II

N: Nithya
M: Manager

N: How long have you been working in Giant's Castle for?
M: That's about 19 years.
N: Okay and what's your position at the reserve, right now?

M: My position is a front desk supervisor, but at this stage I'm standing in for the resort manager because she's not around.

N: Okay, that's good. So, what do you think was the impact of Covid-19 on you?

M: On me as a person, it's impacted a lot because as… For instance, I'm not earning that much, and the prices has gone up all over to take kids to school, uniform, food, especially food; it's too much now. So sometimes there’s things that you have to cut out from your normal expenses.

N: And you as a manager at the reserve, right now.

M: Yeah, there's lots of thinkers. We used to get lots of tourists. Right now, the occupancy is very low, even if it's weekend even its holidays, it doesn't pick up like; you get 100% fully booked.

N: Okay and what do you think is the impact on main caves as an archaeological site?

M: Yes, because most of the visitors that goes and visit the caves are overseas visitors. Although, the South African they do visit, but people that comes from other countries they interested to see how the paintings look like, what they were doing there, what the meaning of the paintings. But because the occupants is very low, even the day visitors. Because we find that all day we're sitting here, we don't get any day visitors coming in.

N: Okay. Do you have any percentage on how much it has dropped? M:

Yoh! It's huge. We don't even, a 50% that's less than that.

N: Okay, huh! that's quite a lot! So, while we are talking about tourists right now, I'm just curious to know, when the pandemic was announced and we had a complete lockdown, were there any tourists stuck in the chalets?

M: I think there were just few of them, but we waited until they checked out, and then we closed down the resort.

N: Okay, so were they staying in non-self-catering chalet?
M: Our chalets are self-catering chalets.
N: All of them?

M: All of them, yes.

N: Oh, okay.

M: It's just that a person have an option to eat at the restaurant, if they like to eat there. N:
So, the restaurant was opened when the visitors were stuck here?

M: Yes, they were still open because we joint venture with them. So, if we close down, they have to close down. If we still open, they still open, yes.

N: Okay. So that was hard. I just want to know if the site had a pandemic preparedness or a risk preparedness guide, that you had to implement?

M: That's the difficult one. Yes, the Risk Office gave us some PPE's and they were also sanitizers that were provided and this thing that we were checking the I can't remember what you call it.

N: The temperature? Thermometer?

M: Yes, yes. So, we have to train the staff to understand what is happening now. We have to make sure that the people that have got the correct PPE's; that they had to wear if they were still servicing the rooms or cleaning the rooms. So, there were lots of things that were going on, yeah.

N: Okay, so talking about cleaning and all of that, when did Giant's Castle close and when did you reopen?

M: I think it was closed about three months. There was 20 --- 2020 --- 19? That was the last month I can't remember exactly, but I can't check it for you because the stuff where we're at home by that time, it's only management that way around here.

N: Okay. That's good. So apart from the government protocols, did Giant's castle have a separate risk preparedness guide like you have a fire drill and a fire protocol, if there's a fire like that, did you have a separate disaster preparedness guide?

M: Not really, not really. Well, because we have our head office in Pietermaritzburg. So, there's people there that look everything and then they tell us. For now, you must do this for now. You must do this, yes.

N: Okay, so when the pandemic was relaxed.

M: Mm-hmm.

N: What was the maximum number of people in a group that you started the group tour with?

M: Yoh, I think it was only 10. Because there is a company that used to give us lots of visitors, which is called Absolute Tours, and we were also so surprised that it was closed down by the time. And yeah, there was our tour operator, it was active for giving us the visitors, but they don't do tours anymore.

N: Okay.

M: And we have also noticed that during the winter, before we were not getting any groups. But as I'm speaking, we're expecting one group from Touristic. Which is, we think it's unusual. I think the, the

travelling plans for people have changed the plans. Depends on who's got money. I'm not sure what, why because we normally getting groups in summertime.

N: And what was the maximum number of people you were accommodating in a group before Covid?

M: It will be like 20-25.

N: And that's quite a drop then?

M: Mhm- Mhm

N: Okay, so what are the companies that you usually get tours from? M:

You mean the people that were gonna come and stay over?

N: No, you said that there's some of the tour companies that would actually give you the tours, give you people, give you tourists for the tours. So, I was just wondering if you could name some of them.

M: That would be Chickoloo tours, as I said, Absolute Tours and Touristic.

N: Okay.

M: Also, Thompsons.

N: Thompsons?

M: Yes, but they don't do it anymore. I don't know. It's because of the Covid or it's a business issues on their side, I am not sure but definitely, the companies that I know, it's because of the Covid. Because they had to sell even their tour buses – Absolute Tours. We had a good communication with them. They were sending tourists here and then we will also take them to the local community, to visit the local community, but because of the Covid, everything stopped.

N: Okay, so while we are talking about income, I just want to know how was the site maintained with the change in lockdown levels, how was main caves maintained?

M: You mean the caves? The Main Caves?

N: Yes.

M: When we were closed during the Covid, we still maintaining the caves, the main caves you just asking that?

N: Yes.

M: Not really

N: Okay.

M: Because there are no people going up there.

N: So, there's nobody to look at the caves and look at what's happening there?

M: No, no. Unless, because we also have conservation guys. They do sometimes, once a month they go on patrol and see what is happening there at the cave, is everything in order.

N: Okay

M: But other than that, from our side we are not doing any daily check-ups for the caves.

N: Okay, so at all levels of lockdown is the site not monitored or was there a certain time when you could actually go and see the site?

M: No, not on our side. As I said, only conservation because they do a report every month, then they will go, but if they find something that is not right then, they will just come and report to us.

N: Okay. So, who are the conservation people? Do they have a name? What organisation? M: That's the officer in charge. Yes, that's Defnime Tetra

N: Okay, sorry?

M: Defnime Tetra, that's the conservation manager, that side.

N: Okay, so I just want to know because now we've been talking about tourists and how the site was not monitored. So now that Covid is like slowly winding down, what do you think is the long-term impact of Covid? As in, are there certain habits or certain rules, that you still follow even though Covid

is mellowed down now?

M: Not really. Unless, if you feel that you have flu, you would have to wear a mask. Because, we realised during the Covid time it helped a lot. Especially here, it's cold, so in the morning you just wear a mask, if you feel like you have a flu. But other than we don't do anything for COVID now.

N: Okay, so all the sanitizers and all of that is gone?

M: That is gone, gone, gone

(M & N Laugh).

N: Bring your own?

M: But you still have in store in case. And if you feel like you've come across with someone that is sneezing a lot, that is coughing, you do go to the side, just put a sanitizer, you sanitize. You take it, wipe your desk.

N: Somethings things don't change.

M: Yes…

N: Okay, so I was just wondering while we are talking about the visitors count. Have you seen a change in the visitors count for domestic and international?

M: Yes, international has dropped and then most people were getting now it's domestic. So, I don't know because I thought everything is gone up and everything is expensive, but yeah, they do manage to spend their two nights, but not more than two nights.

N: Okay, please. And how is it pre-covid?

M: It was like the other way around. It was more international than the local ones.

N: Okay. And the other question that I've also been wanting to ask is again, now that covid's coming to an end hopefully, have you, have you seen more domestic tourists or international tourists?

M: Domestic

N: Oh, is it?

M: International not that much. As I said before, before they used to come in groups, but yeah, not that much.

N: Okay and by domestic, do you mean just from the same province or is it from all over South Africa?

M: Most is Joburg and KZN, then here and there from Mpumalanga. Eish, I haven't seen other than that.

N: Okay, well, with the change in long down levels and Covid infections increasing and decreasing during that time, did you see more of local tourists coming in?

M: When?

N: When the Covid-19 infections were increasing and decreasing, and the President kept changing the lockdown levels. So, when the lockdown was slightly relaxed, did you see more domestic tourists coming to visit the caves?

M: Eish, that's a difficult one. Yeah, local they do. As I am saying, more locals we're getting now. Domestic than the international ones. I'm not sure whether we're gonna pick up during this summertime. I'm not sure, but I just realised instead of getting more overseas guests, we're getting more local guests.

N: Okay. So, when do you think the overseas guests will be back in the same way as they were coming earlier?

M: Yes, I hope so. I'm not sure, but I hope so.

N: Okay, so with people coming and going, well of course, it's a world heritage site, what are the illegal activities that's happening in the caves that you'd like to bring to notice?

M: Illegal activities?

N: Like for example vandalism or any infrastructure damage or anything like that you'd like to bring to light.

M: No, we haven't had anything like that. Apart from maybe if it's a group of school that will go there and do graffiti on the rocks but outside the caves, I haven't heard anything inside the caves.

N: Okay.

M: I'm not sure. Did you see anything inside the caves?

N: Saw a lot of graffiti outside.

M: Because inside, they can't go inside alone. They have to have a guide. So, every time the guides waits there, opened the gates on the hour and take them inside. So, there is no possibility that they can do something, unless they jump the fence after the gate is closed or after hours then. But I think the first thing we would know when the guide gets there, she'll just report to us that I'm getting here and find this, this, this, this.

N: Right! So, while we were talking about incomes and you mentioned that during complete lockdown, there were no visitors. So, I just want to know if there's been any government organisation that's helped you giving you funding or finances?

M: By the time us, Ezemvelo workers, we're so lucky because we are government entity. So, although the Covid was there, it didn't affect us as that much because we still getting our full salary unlike the restaurant guys because they get paid by hours that the work. So, no work, no pay. But us, we were so lucky that even if the time was difficult, but we're still getting our salaries.

N: That's good. And what about for site maintenance? Did you have any government organisation help you for site maintenance with regards to money?

M: No, not really. Unless maybe if they were funding us through our head offices as I said, because we are a big organisation. For all the reason, what, what is happening there by head office, I'm not sure, but I haven't heard anything or anybody that comes with something and say, you guys take this; this is from so and so.

N: Okay. And what about any non- governmental organisations have they offered to help you monetary wise?

M: Not really.

N: Okay. So, the other thing that I was also thinking is once the flights started and the aeroplanes and airports were slightly opening up, did you see an increase in international tourists at the caves?

M: Is that the caves?

N: Yes

M: Not in numbers that we used to have previously before the Covid. Yes, they still go there, but not in numbers as I said like they used to go before. Because as I said, normally it's the groups that used to come and then all, like say, 20 people go, all go and visit the caves. As I said, it's been dropped. Like you've got 10 people or 5 people instead of 10 person.

N: Okay and the other thing that I was thinking is while we're talking about income. Does archaeological site and the managers who manage the archaeological site, like you have any plans to re-establish the site in terms of infrastructure or for better tourism?

M: I haven't heard anything about that because I think this should be involved us, and AMAFA because it's a World Heritage Site or marketing department, they have to do more with marketing the site. But I haven't heard of any plans of doing this.

N: Okay, what do you think that they should focus on if they're planning to re-establish the site? What do you think is most important?

M: That's the difficult one. I think firstly they have to maintain it correctly. And then they have to have a good marketing team that can market the place. Other than the word of mouth. I don't think, I haven't seen the specific from marketing site that say this we're gonna do to market the caves. I haven't heard anything like that. Even if they do marketing, they like the whole place. Like a resort as a whole, but not saying if you don't want to stay in the in the resort, but there's something that you can go, which is special that you can go and visit. I think they have to market the place.

N: Okay, I'm going to ask you very…

M: Ah no…

(M & N Laugh)

N: Simple question. Very simple one. What do you think are the positive impacts of Covid19 on the archaeological site?

M: I think so because there's been lots of overseas visitors that have visiting the place. And they would just tell their friends and family that must go and visit the place. And then I think the other thing is to, I am not sure how to put this. But if we can get something that can protects the paintings more because if you visit the place now, sometimes the guy will tell you there's the painting there and you

can't see it (laughs) at all. I think if they can get something that can… preserve, what you call?

N: Yes, preserve.

M: Preserve the painting more because, they're starting fading now. Some of the painting you can't see them. Yes, we telling people we can go and visit the painting there's painting but. Yeah, sometimes…

N: Well, what do you think were the negatives of Covid-19 when it struck? What were the negative impacts on the archaeological site?

M: Because people were not travelling, so we were not getting visitors to go in and visit the caves. So, as I'm saying it's our most attractive site we have, that is something that we have to make more revenue from it. But, as the Covid-19 strike, people were not travelling and then the economy dropped. So, people are struggling to get back to their feet because lot of money we used by that time because there was no other people, they were not getting any income. They like to use their savings that they have put, saved for a long time.

N: Okay, and what is your learning as the manager from Covid19? What is your biggest takeaway from the pandemic?

M: Yoh, that's the difficult one, that one. It's just that you have to be prepared every time because you never know what's going to happen next. It might not be Covid19 but there be some other disease that can come up and then you don't have control of it. So, you have to always prepare.

N: Talking about preparedness, do you think that the site and other nature reserve is well equipped for another pandemic?

M: Ah, I don't think so.

N: Okay, So, what do you think that will help them be prepared, if you start now?

M: If another pandemic starts now?

N: How can you be prepared?

M: Yoh, that's the difficult one. I think you have to have an understanding of what is happening and also financially be prepared because we've seen that everything is going up. And then even if the thing that you were bread for 10 Rand, it would turn round and it went up to 50 Rand by that time. OK, so I think we have to be financially prepared, okay.

N: Okay, that’s a good takeaway! So, all my questions are done. Do you have anything to ask me?

M: No, not really.

N: Do you think there should be something or some question that I need to add to my research that I missed?

M: Eish, you had lots of questions that you asked. I can't even remember where we started. But I don't think there's anything that you have to add. Yeah, I think everything is covered.

N: Okay, thank you so much. You were wonderful!

3.3 Sterkfontein Caves, Cradle of Humankind

3.3.1 Interview I

N: Nithya

SM: Site Manager

N: What do you do at Maropeng and Sterkfontein Caves?

SM: I am running public programmes, I am supervisors to all the guides and also, I am a head guide, so I do take public tours, school tours and most importantly, research tours and professional tours.

N: That's interesting. That's a lot of touring there!

SM: It's a lot!

N: So, what is the impact of Covid-19 on you as a tour guide at Sterkfontein Caves?

SM: It has been quite bad for Sterkfontein Caves to be specific. When we were hit by COVID-19 almost immediately our sites had to be closed. We're talking, loss of revenue for almost a year. We are talking few jobs that were lost in the process and we were going to be retrenched. So, it was a dire situation. The funding that came through with the help of the Union is what had helped the process for us not to get retrenched.

N: Oh, that's hard!

SM: It was hard on us.

N: Yeah, it was quite bad. Do you by any chance remember the dates? When was the cave closed?

SM: The dates… The caves were closed, it was the 23rd. I'll just have to confirm. It must have been the 27th. If I'm not mistaken, it was the 27th of March.

N: Okay.

SM: That was the day right after the president had declared South Africa to be on level 5.

N: Right. And talking about impacts, what was the impact of Covid-19 on the caves?

SM: Directly on the cave, I would not say that there was so much that was done for the caves. The

caves had to be closed so the excavations that were done at the time had to be closed. Everything just came to a standstill.

N: Okay, that's quite sad. Do you provide accommodation for the people who come to visit the caves?

SM: Yeah, with some of the people that are coming to visit Sterkfontein caves because these are pre planned tours. So, some of our visitors are coming from overseas, they will get accommodated at Maropeng Boutique Hotel, which is another site that we have.

N: Okay and so, when the President announced the lockdown, did you have tourists that were stranded in the boutique hotel?

SM: No, luckily the MD at the time, [redacted]. Was quite scared of the pandemic himself, so he's been reading through and sending out information. So, closer to the dates of the closure, he would not allow the place to get overcrowded with bookings. So, I guess that has helped us a lot because then we did not have people getting stuck within the hotel or premises.

N: Okay, that's good! That was safe. And talking about Covid, on the same lines did the site have a disaster preparedness guide or a pandemic preparedness guide?

SM: Yeah. The thing about this issue with Covid is that we had always thought that it would not happen to us. We've seen Covid in December, we've seen what it did to China. In South Africa, we are making songs about it, and we were dancing to Corona, but we thought that it was something that was so far off, so we did not have a perfect plan. We had just had to react to what was happening at the time.

N: Okay. But so, I was thinking more on the lines of, if you have a fire, then there's a fire drill and a fire protocol that you follow. So similarly, did you have a risk preparedness guide?

SM: That was only after we had opened; that was later in the year. Then we started trying to make processes and procedures in which will help us to deal with the situation. Few instances, we would normally have people queuing here buying tickets, but when we had to deal with the pandemic, we only had to take online bookings. Yeah, we had to change from accommodating big numbers of people to taking 15 people into Sterkfontein Caves per hour. So those were drastic changes that we had to face, so we can comply with the Covid rules. Also make sure that the staffing and the people that were coming through for the caves were safe and also be able to manage with what we had at the time.

SM: Okay. So, we are talking about group numbers now. So, tell me pre-covid, what was the maximum number of people you'd take in a group?

SM: Pre-covid we would take about 30 to 35. It would be 35 school kids and 30 if it was adults.

N: Okay.

SM: And then during Covid, we had to reduce the number. The biggest number that we could take into the cave at the time would be 15 and prior to Covid, our tours would be moving between 15 minutes. We would have 15 minutes intervals and during Covid those would stretch out to every hour. So that, within that space we can have the cave breathing, surfaces to be clean and sanitised for the next group's moving.

N: And I'm just going to take your question back and just ask, so nobody was prepared for the pandemic and like you said, we did assume that it would not happen to us…

SM: Not going to happen to us.

N: So then, when it was announced and the president announced it, what coping mechanisms did the caves and you as an employee adopt?

SM: We… there was not much of coping. It was, the doors are closed, you are going home. You're sitting there, just make sure that you're safe and you live through this.

N: Right, and today, are you back to the same number in the group tour as pre-covid?

SM: We are not. To give you a rough estimate, prior to Covid we would accommodate at least 1500 to 3000 kids. But since we've opened during Covid, or even after Covid, we can't even reach to those numbers because a lot of people still have the stigma and the fear that if they go to public places they could be affected.

N: And is this 1500 to 2000 kids per month?

SM: That is per day.

N: Oh, per day! Oh wow! Okay.

SM: That was between Mondays to; Mondays and Fridays. That's when we would expect students.

N: Okay. So well, we're talking about the caves being sanitised and all of that. So apart from the government regulations and the Covid protocols that the government gave us, was there any special protocols that the caves took up to curb the virus?

SM: Not so much. But what we did, the maintenance manager and his team; they were responsible for

making sure that all protocols were observed. So, we had to make sure that we had sanitizers, even though with the conditions of the cave, we understood that it would not make much of a difference. Should the virus go into the cave, the temperature will sustain the virus for quite some time. We would encourage people going into the cave to carry sanitizers and sanitise often. When we would have people sanitising the railing in the caves as well. One of the most important thing which a lot of people did not like was the mask. And that was that the regulation, without it, you would not go into the premise, you would not go into the bathroom, you would not go anywhere or inside the cave itself.

N: Okay. So, you were just stricter with the government protocols.

SM: We just, we adopted the regulations of the government. But we just had to make sure that they were perfectly implemented.

N: Okay and I'm just taking you back to the time of the hard lockdown. So, were the caves monitored during all levels of lockdown?

SM: Yes, if you remember when we were going into lockdown, we also had another crisis in South Africa - the Zama Zamas.

N: Yes.

SM: Yes, so the caves had to be monitored and regulated because we were afraid that we would have those guys coming through to inhabit the cave without our knowledge, and we would get even greater problems when we came back. So, we would have for instance, maintenance team coming through. Those are the guys that, they didn't take that Covid leave. They had to come through to regulate all places. Also, you know the infrastructure would often fall apart if it gets close for too long. So, they had make sure that the electricity's, the lights were on, they would have to also make sure that what is this… The generators were running regularly, so they don't just fall apart and make sure that some of the exhibits were also working all the time, so they don't fall apart.

N: Okay and how many maintenance employees did you have come in to look at the caves?

SM: We had about 2-3 guys per day that would come through, just to regulate if everything is alright.
N: Okay, that was tough. And let's go to income now, so in terms of income, firstly, where you paid?
SM: Well, I was paid for I think the first month, second month. The third month I was paid for the, you know, the annual leave days that I had accumulated. So, if you had 12 leave days, they would pay you for those 12 days. That's when we understood that the company was now starting to run out of funds. And then there were times when we were not paid on time, but we then had to understand

because then, the finance team and the MD was trying to source out funds but DED - the Department of Economic Development came through. It has been funding Maropeng and Sterkfontein Caves for some time, in terms of infrastructure. And also, Gauteng Tourism was funding guides. It was not much; it was about 1500 that they would allocate for guides to help them through Covid.

N: Okay, Oh, that's good. And how was the site managed with this income trouble, with the change in lockdown levels and Covid?

SM: It wasn't doing very well at the time because, in between somewhere we had to face retrenchment as well. So, it wasn't always sunshine's', I can say.

N: Okay, so now that we are almost winding down with Covid. Hopefully we don't have another one. What do you think is the long-term impact of Covid-19 on you as a tour guide?

SM: I think we, as South Africa needs to be at the same standards with the world when it comes to educations of pandemics and how to prevent them. We need to have implementations, 5-10 years implementations on how are we going to manage in a long run. Should we be hit by another pandemic in the long run, how are we going to face out of it without it affecting so much. So, the most important thing out of all of that is education. We put as much education out there in terms of all these diseases. And also, we try and teach our people not to have so much of fear, because, you know, we can talk about the Covid lockdown. But what we have experienced out of Covid is the psychological lockdown and we are still stuck there.

N: You are right! I truly agree with that. The fear of, you know, planning a vacation right now, is…

SM: Exactly. I still look at Chinese with their masks today when they come here and they are on level 4, level 5 and I'm wondering - are they not bringing the pandemic again? So as soon as we get out of those terms, then the world would be a better place.

N: Okay, and what do you think is the long-term impact on the caves?

SM: The cave itself did not have so much of an impact because, you know, it's a natural resource. I would have been worried had we tried to push numbers when we were going through Covid. If we were about money and we were trying to make as much money out of the place, that would mean that we need to put as many people there. But for the fact that we were a bit cautious, and we had obeyed by the regulation, I think that had helped a great deal.

N: Right. And did you notice, you mentioned Zama, Zama so, but on the same lines, did you notice any illegal activities in the caves?

SM: We, that was… So, after it was the impact of Covid. That was after Covid we had suffered a couple of cable theft at the caves. So that was now the impact of poverty right after Covid because people felt that they were not working. And a lot of people have lost their jobs and a lot of people now were going into illegal activities and those are one of the things that we experienced. We had one… we had a couple of cable theft. We had one or two incidents of the small restaurant at Sterkfontein being broken into and I'll be also still some of Dom's [Prof. Dominic Stratford] material at the shed.

N: Okay.

SM: So that's what we had experienced right after Covid.

N: That's sad. That's really bad. So, on the same lines, do you still follow any of the COVID protocol?

SM: We have relaxed the protocols a little bit. We don't have masks, of which I wish that we could still have. Because we've had bad, very bad fevers and very bad flus, especially this year. Although we still have sanitizers from the entrance to the exit, we still encourage people to wash their hands. Now that in the restaurant we have issues with Cholera, so we still encourage people to wash their hands regularly and try to keep clean as possible.

N: Okay and now I'm just slowly going to shift to the visitors count with the tours and the caves. So has there been a change in visitors, both domestic and international? And we're talking about this in comparison to pre and now.

SM: Yes. For instance, you have visited the site while we are on school holidays. If it was prior to Covid, you would have seen the place swimming with people, but even after Covid we are still struggling to get back the numbers that we used to have. Prior to Covid, we would have queues at Sterkfontein Caves. 15 minutes intervals of tours that needs to go into the caves, but it's not the same anymore. We still get a number of guests we can accommodate between Mondays to Friday. Now we are sitting at plus minus 150 to 200 domestic and international tourists coming through. And not as great as the numbers that we had previously.

N: Okay, that's not good. I hope it picks up really soon.

SM: Hopefully after… Another problem that we have is the issue with cholera. So, you know, what is a very important thing to have. So, when we've got issues with such things – water, then internationally people are thinking; it's not the best place to be. Because you could be sick because of water and you know, we've always prided ourselves when it came to South African tap water. Prior to Covid we

would say drink the water, nothing will happen. But that cannot be the same today.

N: That's sad. So, I'm just going to stick to the same question and elaborate further. Have you seen more of international or domestic tourists at present?

SM: We are starting to see the shift in international and we also are seeing increased numbers in domestics as well.

N: And once the lockdown was relaxed and one domestic people could actually travel around, did you have locals come in to do the tours and see the site?

SM: Unfortunately, when you know when we are looking at after, we also have to factor - economical impact as well. So, people were quite cautious of how to spend their money. So, it had then affected domestic tourism around the Cradle of Humankind.

N: Okay and can you tell me how has the change in lockdown levels impacted visitors count?

SM: Umm… prior we had good numbers. We would move the numbers as greatly, didn't matter whether we were talking about schools or internationals or domestics, we would have as many people coming through, and people had an interest to see the site. And then after Covid, every time we had to take a school booking, you have a thousand questions that comes with a booking. The teacher wants to know, how are you going to make sure that my kids are not impacted by Covid, what if the previous group that went in had been infected and things like that, how are you regulating this and how you're regulating that. So, there is now, people are more conscious, so there's more questions to ask before people can actually decide to come through to places like Sterkfontein Caves. Because you know, it's a very small place, it's regulated temperature of 18 degrees, which means, should we have a disease there, probably every person that will go through in that day will probably come out with it.

N: Okay. That's quite risky. So once the airports started and aeroplanes started flying, has there been a rise in international tourism?

SM: It has. As we've seen, an increased number of international tourists coming through.

N: Okay, that's good. And so, you did mention about DED and Gauteng Tourism funding.

SM: Yes.

N: Anybody else who also helped you with the funding?

SM: No, not anyone else that I know in particular, but those were the biggest funders at the moment.

N: Okay. And how did the funding help you and the site?
SM: For DED, the DED funding was great because that is what has sustained the income of all the workers at Maropeng. Part of the money that was used at the time was supposed to have been for exhibition revamp. But, you know, exhibition revamping versus life, they had to choose life. So, it was a great deal. So, when we went into Covid, I was pregnant. So, you can just imagine the impact of losing a job on a pandemic, sitting at home. I was going crazy, basically.

N: Oh, I can imagine, and once again, can you just tell me the full form of DED?

SM: Department of Economic Development.

N: Okay, and now I'd like to move on and come to a little bit of the current, what plans does the site have to re-establish their programmes as the pandemic is winding down.

SM: For example, for the guides, we are doing re-familiarisation tours. So, we want to… you know there's been a shift in the mindset, and we want to make it as fun as tourism should be. So, we are visiting other tourist attractions around Gauteng at the moment to see how they have been affected, to see how they're trying to bring themselves up, to see if we can learn from them and maybe make something better. The greatest element that we are bringing for the tourist guide division is to educate them, as much as they can. So should we get into something similar to this in the future, without having to depend on the company, they will be able to take themselves out of the situation.

N: Right!

SM: Education, you know, very important, educate in terms of small businesses. If something happens to your everyday bread, how are you going to be able to learn to make the bread yourself?

N: Alright, that's very important! And also, while we talk about reestablishment, what areas do you think the site needs to improve?

SM: We need to improve on our marketing. We need to rebrand and see how the world has been shaped after Covid. We need education for all the organisations. We need resources that will help us if we need to redevelop ourselves. Those are few of the major things that we need. We still need as much funding as we can get. But those are the most important things that I would say we need at the moment.

N: Okay, that's quite interesting. and I'm going to ask you, maybe a funny question now. Did you have

any positive learnings from Covid?

SM: No, nope.

(SM & N Laugh)

SM: Few things that it has taught me, I think it's you had to like… if you had to see people for who they are. There was no pretence, during the Covid era. But it has taught us to either love each other or hate each other. During that Covid period, if a person never liked you, the person would then, would not pretend anymore because you're always on their faces, every time. You have to – appreciate, this one thing which I learned was appreciate life. Be grateful, as we always complain how small my salary is, I can't do this. Covid has taught me to be very appreciative because when I got my salary three days late and I went to the shop, and I could not buy bread because it was stocked out, my heart would break. But it would break to an extent, to understand that at least I still have a 10 Rand that I can move to the other shop. Someone somewhere out there has lost their job; they don't have the 10 Rand. So, if you came out of Covid and you're not appreciative of what you've got, I don't know what you need.

N: That's true. And what was the negative impacts of Covid-19 on you as an employee at Sterkfontein caves?

SM: I couldn't go to the caves, that's my place of peace, that's my perfect aura. I could not go to the cave. I couldn't see my colleagues. I couldn't - the people that would often encourage me. People like [redacted], I could not see anymore. I did not. You know what keeps you alive and keeps moving, what keeps you driven every day, we didn't get that, and I think personally that is the reason why after Covid, we had so much of people committing suicide because we've been keeping each other alive for so much; and now we have to learn to live by ourselves. And that was very difficult.

N: Yes, that's true. We're human beings, we're dependent beings.

SM: Yes.

N: And lastly, I'd like to ask, what is your biggest takeaway from Covid-19 as a tour guide and as an important member of Sterkfontein Caves?

SM: You ought to love what you do. You ought to appreciate it. It doesn't matter how small or how big. You just ought to be appreciative of what life brings you.

N: That's true. Any questions for me? I'll answer them.

SM: No, no.

N: Okay, and any suggestions or anything?

SM: No, not any suggestions, but I love reading. And recently I have developed an interest in reading people's thesis.

N: Okay.

SM: I've read [redacted]. I've been through [redacted].

N: Ah…

SM: And I think my next is going to be [redacted]. So, I'm quite interested because what we are trying to do currently is to do a combination of science and heritage. The impact of what heritage could have on science versus what science would have on heritage and see if we cannot look at a bigger picture of combining the two subjects together.

N: Right. That's interesting. So, my thesis might help then. So, thank you so much!

SM: Thank you so much. I hope you got what you needed, if you need anything more, please don't stress, just drop me a WhatsApp or send me an e-mail.

N: Sure, thank you!

3.3.2 Follow Up Interview Sterkfontein Site Manager

N: Nithya

SM: Site Manager

N: I was wondering if you have a written visitors report on site for the archaeological site?

SM: No, we do not have any record on site because all the bookings that were done during Covid were done on web tickets. So, the people that were coming through would only bring a ticket that they have already bought and that would only need to be scanned from our side.

N: Okay, so everything's online in that case.

SM: Everything was online, so what you just needed to bring was a phone which we could scan or piece of document that you have already printed out that contains a barcode of your tickets and that's it.

N: Okay and talking about visitors, in domestic and international, what were the visitors demographics like pre Covid, during Covid and now?

SM: Before Covid, let's talk about that first. We had good numbers before Covid, we would look at least 1500 kids that would be walking through. We would be talking about at least 300 domestic – international tourists coming through and, those would be during weekdays- Monday to Friday. During Covid, the numbers started going down as far down as having between 5 - 15 people because they were quite afraid of how places like Sterkfontein would be able to accommodate them, especially that the Cave is, you know, it's a closed space and also the temperature down there, had we had Covid inside the cave, it would be contained a little bit longer. So those were things that people were quite worried about. So that's why we had such low numbers at the time. After Covid, we still struggle. We still have a lot of people that are still very afraid to travel. People are not as comfortable as they used to be because now it's not only Covid that we are worried about, we're also worried about recent cholera that we have seen in water systems and places like Pretoria. So especially people internationally are worried, what could be happening around places like Sterkfontein? So, people are not as comfortable and I'm guessing it will take much more longer for people to go back to how things used to be.

N: Right. Pre-covid, what countries have you mainly seen visitors come from?

SM: We've seen people coming from everywhere prior covid and literally everywhere. The smallest of the smallest island. We've seen people coming from places like Solomon Island, people coming from Chert, any place in the world that you can think of where people would have access to get here, they would get here. We had the biggest numbers, Japanese and Chinese. We actually had regulars, 2 buses every day at Sterkfontein Caves for Japanese.

N: That's so crazy!

SM: And about 2-3 buses at Maropeng every single day.

N: And how many seater bus was that?

SM: That would be between 30 to 40 packs in a bus. They don't like getting clustered, so the bus would not be fully packed.

N: Okay, but that's still quite a good number.

SM: Those were good numbers that we would have.

N: Well, I hope we pick up soon and anything for me?

SM: Not much. Let's just pray that something like Covid never returns back, because it's crazy.

N: Yes, we will. Thanks!

SM: Thank you!

3.3.3 Interview II

N: Nithya

STG: Sterkfontein Tour Guide

N: How long have you been working at Sterkfontein Caves for?

STG: I've been here for the company for about 8 years now.

N: Okay, and what's your position?

STG: I'm a cultural site guide.

N: Okay, so what do you do as a cultural side guide?

STG: Mostly take tours, human evolution based. And then, it's part and parcel of archaeology and palaeontology and a bit of geology. So, it's all about storytelling of fossil records, how we discover them, and methods used to date them or get more information.

N: Okay, that's interesting! So, my project is Covid based as mentioned, what do you think is the impact of Covid-19 on you as an employee at Sterkfontein Caves?

STG: It was very bad, for starters. Being at home every day, not going to work… luckily for us, we had like a stipend, that's in terms of finance that we received from the company. But, because remember as a tour guide, you also rely on things like handouts from guests. So, it minimised everything.

N: Okay, what do you think is the impact of Covid-19 on Sterkfontein caves as an archaeological site?

STG: I think it put the cave in a bad position because remember now, researchers and archaeologists, we're not able to go the to the cave and do their research or dig for fossils or artefacts. So, everything was on a hold to all the regulations were put down.

N: Okay, so basically, everything stopped?

STG: Everything stopped, archaeological side and tourism side, leisure wise.

N: Right, that's true. Does the archaeological site offer accommodation?

STG: The caves no, due to the geological structure of the environment but as you go to Maropeng, that's where we offer accommodation because we have a hotel there and then we also have Atlanta accommodation whereby we can accommodate students who want to spend a night here or two.

N: Okay. So, when the lockdown was announced, did you have tourists stuck at the mentioned accommodation?

STG: Luckily for us, no.

N: Okay, that's good and so, I want to ask, the pandemic came a little unannounced, right? So, did the site have a pandemic preparedness guide or a risk guide that you could follow?

STG: Yes, yes. In terms of the cave, the amount of guests that we take through the caves were like lessened. So normally per tour we would have a group of, let's say 20-30 people. During hard lockdown, let's say when the regulation went down, we had to limit the amount of people from the initial amount and then tours as well were affected. Because we normally have tours every half an hour, but at that time [referred to Covid-19 time] during that process time, tours were hourly, meaning less tours in a day compared to before.

N: Okay and to give me a number, how many number of tourists did you accommodate in a group pre-covid?

STG: Before Covid, we would take 25-30 people in a group every half an hour and then during Covid it was 15, 10-15 maximum

N: Okay, and any other protocols that you followed apart from lessening the numbers in the group?

STG: Yes, we had to mark the building.

N: Okay.

STG: There's like Sterkfontein building in terms of social distancing. We had a registering book whereby you we would take your temperatures and all those things. Sanitizers, almost everywhere. And then in terms of the cave, because remember a cave, it's a closed area. We only have air circulation circulations through the entrance, the exit and through openings above the roof of the cave, so from 30 minutes tours to go to an hour to give the cave some time to breathe.

N: Okay. Do you still have the register book that you were writing the temperatures and marking

people?

STG: Yes, we still have them.

N: Okay. Do you still use it?

STG: Currently no, but yeah before we used to make use of it.

N: Okay. Any other protocols that you followed?

STG: Ticket sales had to change, so normally you would come to site and then make your purchase, or you would make a booking via the company directly. So, we had to use a third party which is Web Tickets or Pick 'n' Pay.

N: Pick 'n' Pay?

STG: Yes, and then you would only purchase your tickets through web tickets and then you wouldn't buy them on site.

N: Okay, that's interesting and then the government protocols were also followed, right?

STG: Yes

N: Okay and so, when the pandemic was relaxed and we slowly started, you know, including more number of people. What was the maximum number of people in a group tour?

STG: 23-25, between 20-25.

N: Okay and as of today, have those numbers changed?

STG: Yes, but speaking for the cave, because currently the caves had been closed for about a couple of months. So, we are not operating that side. We are operating only this side [entrance of Maropeng] which is in an open area because tours are conducted from outside going in. From inside, that's where we can give the guests to spread around. And then on a tour, we can accommodate about 30- 35 people because there's an outdoor tour going inside compared to the cave being underground.

N: Right, okay. And we were talking about the cave breathing and giving it time, right? So, I want to know, was the cave monitored at all levels of lockdown?

STG: Yes, they were. Monitored in terms of security or in terms of the cave itself inside?

N: Both.

STG: Yes, security wise we have a company that was working, I'm still working there. Just that we changed the company and then for the cave we had something like sensors inside, monitoring the temperature, the humidity of the cave, and so on. So, November - December last year, unfortunately, we had an incident whereby some of those things were destroyed, but currently I'm pretty sure they're still working on if they haven't done it. They're working on putting all those equipment's back so that

we can see how sound is the cave.

N: Okay, that's interesting. So, the stealing happened last year or was that during Covid?

STG: During Covid- November, I mean during Covid and last year, November - December.

N: Okay and I'm going to slowly move to income now. So, in terms of income, first let me ask this where you paid?

STG: During lockdown - yes.

N: And was it the same as your salary that you were normally paid?

STG: No.

N: Okay, there was a deduction?

STG: It was deduction, remember, because you are at home, you cannot get the entire salary that you normally used to get. For starters, you no longer make use of transport of which we have a transport allowance. So, they would take that one out and then…

N: Okay.

STG: As a tour guide or working in the tourism industry, remember you, you mostly work up on your weekends because weekends are the times that you get more hours, and then let's say more handouts from the guests.

N: Okay. That's nice. Something's better than nothing. And how was the site in terms of income? I mean, because like you said now it was monitored, so was everybody paid and how was the site managed?

STG: Everyone was paid because I'm pretty sure we got funding from the state- Gauteng Tourism Authority. So that's how income was involved in terms of spreading it amongst the workers. We did have people coming in regularly, so I'm pretty sure those people or those individuals are paid in full due to coming on site every day.

N: Okay, that's good. And now I want to know what do you think is the long-term impact of Covid-19 on you?

STG: Long term impact… It's finance, mostly.

N: That's true.

STG: Again, personally, remember being at home every day not doing, let's say doing one thing every day because being at home you always do one thing every day. For me it's kind of like

depressing, that's like in a cage.

N: Okay, and what do you think is the long-term impact on the archaeological site?

STG: It's going to delay research for starters. Somehow information that's put out to the public will have to be stored for a certain period of time due to the pandemic. The site alone won't be managed regularly because remember, when you go when it's like now, things are kind of like normal. It's easier for scientists, researchers to go to the cave and then see what's happening there. But in a pandemic and pandemic scale, everything is like when it down low, so nothing will be happening. Research - archaeology, palaeontology, and geology as well, will have to be stopped.

N: Okay, that's true and I just want to know, do you still follow any of the Covid protocols?

STG: Yes, we do have clients who prefer coming here with masks, employees as well. Hand sanitizers are still there. Facilities that require cleaning, like when on a downscale or upper scale are being done.

N: Right, okay. And I want to know, has there been a change in the visitors count, both domestic and international in comparison to pre-covid and now?

STG: Yes.

N: Okay.

STG: Yes, all the numbers have doubled. Because before we heard about, let's say domestic about 65-70% of individuals with armed lines coming through and then we would have about 80-90% of internationals. So, everything now is like on the balance, we have a higher number of domestic and then a higher number of internationals.

N: Okay. And so, you're saying you're almost in track with pre-covid and now. You're in sync?

STG: Yes.

N: Okay, that's interesting and with the lockdown relaxing, have you seen more of international visitors?

STG: Yes, we have.

N: Okay.

STG: Let's say the volume of clients that came through from that country have increased compared to before. And then here and there some went down, but majority of them are internationals.

N: Okay, that's interesting. Has the change in lockdown levels with the infections rising and dropping impacted the visitors count?

STG: Highly. So, the amount of people that we normally caught or came through weren't very down like. Out and about a day, we conduct five tours compared to before.

N: Okay, that's bad and have you seen any illegal activities in and around the cave?

STG: No because, majority of the things happened when staff is no longer there. If it's the security guard at night.

N: Okay. And what sort of activities are you talking about?

STG: I'm referring to the one that I pointed out earlier on the equipment of the cave being damaged and then some of them stolen. But during the day, nothing much.

N: Okay. And you were talking about funding from Gauteng Tourism Authority, right? I want to know if there was any other funding offer through any government or non-government organisation?

STG: On that one, I am not quite sure because, those are district things that the management used to talk about themselves. They never disclosed to the employees.

N: Okay. Right. And I want to know what plans does the site have to re-establish their programmes as the pandemic is winding down?

STG: In terms of human evolution because it's also included in the syllabus of school kids from primary school to FET; so, we have a programme whereby in three months we attend those schools and then we make like a presentation in order for them to pull them through to come back to us. And then we are communicating with most of the schools that we had before, who haven't been coming to the site; trying to pull them in to say this is what we are now offering and then some things have changed, but it would be much easier and better for you to come through and see what we are talking about. We also go to malls and then try to do marketing.

N: Okay

STG: To upper the volume of clients.

N: That's interesting. So, have more to people come and actually talk to you? Are they interested?

STG: Majority of them, yes.

N: Okay, that's interesting. Now I'm just going to ask with the marketing that we're talking, what areas do you think the site needs to improve?

STG: Within the premises or marketing wise?

N: You can say both.

STG: Premises, I think it would be much easier or better if they include activities like outdoor activities besides guided tours that we offer here on site. For the cave, it's going to be a bit tricky because of the land itself but something can be done there as well. Marketing wise out of the property, I think expanding our market - direct marketing because obviously on social platforms, it's easier for some because of technology wise. But for others, remember you have network signals and other areas, so direct marketing would be relevant for those people.

N: Okay. Any positive learnings from Covid-19?

STG: Personally, life wise, you know - what you have when you have it. Because when things change, having to change, it's not something easy. But it comes also with challenges. Mentally wise, I read books more than I used to read books on a normal situation. And finance - save as much as you can.

N: Any negatives of Covid-19 as an employee at Sterkfontein caves from the Covid-19 perspective?

STG: Yes, most of the programmes that we had had to stop. Like for an example we had a programme whereby we go to Rising Star Cave system which is about a kilometer away from Sterkfontein and then assist doing diggings, so that had to change – completely stop. All the camping plans that we had, had to stop as well. Me, personally as I was volunteering at Sterkfontein, everything was closed. So those are the negative parts for me.

N: Right. And what is your biggest takeaway from Covid-19 as an employee at Sterkfontein?

STG: Biggest?

N: Biggest learning.

STG: I actually learned a lot in terms of fossil preparations, I learned a lot about geology on its own because I was a bit limited in terms of that side. That's the biggest absolute changes that happened during Covid.

N: Okay and do you have any questions for me?

STG: No thanks. No, no. I don't think so.

N: Do you think I missed the question that I should add to my research?

STG: No, I don't think so.

N: Okay, Anything else?

STG: Do you know by any chance when the cave is opening?

N: (laughs) No, I don't.

STG: Alright, thank you

N: Thank you!

Appendix 4

4.1. Visitor Counts from the Study Sites.

Table 4. 1 *Visitors Count from Giant's Castle Visitors book (June - September 2015)*

Month and Year	International (adults and children)	Domestic (adults and children)	Total Visitors (monthly)
June, 2015[2]	58	172	230
July, 2015	299	477	776
August, 2015	694	272	966
September, 2015[3]	10	0	10
Total Visitors	**1061**	**921**	**1982**

Table 4. 2 *Visitors Count from Giant's Castle Visitors book (August - November 2018)*

Month and Year	International (adults and children)	Domestic (adults and children)	Total Visitors (monthly)
August, 2018[4]	572	148	720
September, 2018	309	110	419
October, 2018	432	155	587
November, 2018[5]	349	89	438
Total Visitors	**1662**	**502**	**2164**

[2] The data for June 2015 begins from 16/06/2015
[3] The data available for September 2015 are dates 01/09/2015 and 02/09/2015
[4] The data for August 2018 begins on 02/08/2018
[5] The data for November 2018 ends on 25/11/2018

Table 4. 3 *Visitors Count from Giant's Castle Visitors book (November – December 2020)*

Month and Year	International (adults and children)	Domestic (adults and children)	Total Visitors (monthly)
November, 2020[6]	03	109	112
December, 2020	19	211	230
Total Visitors	**22**	**320**	**342**

Table 4. 4 *Visitors Count from Giant's Castle Visitors book (2021)*

Month and Year	International (adults and children)	Domestic (adults and children)	Total Visitors (monthly)
January, 2021	09	123	132
February, 2021	0	66	66
March, 2021	05	156	161
April, 2021	12	242	254
May, 2021	10	123	133
June, 2021	02	201	203
July, 2021	02	138	140
August, 2021	29	210	239
September, 2021	18	139	157
October, 2021	17	130	147
November, 2021	33	94	127
December, 2021	41	306	347
Total Visitors	**178**	**1928**	**2106**

[6] The data for November 2020 starts on 14/11/2020 and ends on 29/11/2020.

Table 4. 5 *Visitors Count from Giant's Castle Visitors book (2022)*

Month and Year	International (adults and children)	Domestic (adults and children)	Total Visitors (monthly)
January, 2022[7]	23	68	91
February, 2022	43	94	137
March, 2022	26	182	208
April, 2022	63	128	191
May, 2022	65	430	495
June, 2022	84	72	156
July, 2022	159	187	346
August, 2022	219	150	369
September, 2022	78	135	213
October, 2022	216	90	306
November, 2022	90	27	117
December, 2022[8]	04	03	07
Total Visitors	**1070**	**1566**	**2636**

Table 4. 6 *Visitors Count from Origins Centre Visitors book (September – December 2017)*

Month and Year	International (adults and children)	Domestic (adults and children)	Total Visitors (monthly)
September, 2017[9]	05	04	09

[7] The data for January starts from 06/01/2022
[8] The data for December begins on 03/12/2022 and ends on 12/12/2022
[9] The data for September 2017 begins from 27/09/2017

October, 2017[10]	18	04	22
November, 2017	29	04	33
December, 2017[11]	23	04	27
Total Visitors	**75**	**16**	**91**

Table 4. 7 *Visitors Count from Origins Centre Visitors book (2018)*

Month and Year	International (adults and children)	Domestic (adults and children)	Total Visitors (monthly)
January, 2018	30	28	58
February, 2018	34	08	42
March, 2018	18	01	19
April, 2018	07	08	15
May, 2018	11	02	13
June, 2018	08	01	09
July, 2018	21	04	25
August, 2018	28	10	38
September, 2018	09	13	22
October, 2018	12	05	17
November, 2018	11	04	15
December, 2018[12]	02	00	02

[10] The data for October 2017 begins from 09/10/2017
[11] The data for December 2017 begins on 02/12/2017 and ends on 19/12/2017
[12] The data available for December 2018 is from 03/12/18 to 04/12/18

Total Visitors	**191**	**84**	**275**

Table 4. 8 *Visitors Count from Origins Centre Visitors book (2019)*

Month and Year	International (adults and children)	Domestic (adults and children)	Total Visitors (monthly)
January, 2019	12	01	13
February, 2019	15	05	20
March, 2019	12	01	13
April, 2019[13]	02	03	05
May, 2019	07	03	10
June, 2019	09	00	09
July, 2019	20	07	27
August, 2019	16	09	25
September, 2019	12	06	18
October, 2019	09	01	10
November, 2019	15	03	18
December, 2019[14]	03	06	09
Total Visitors	**132**	**45**	**177**

[13] The data available for April 2019 begins on 13/04/2019 and ends on 30/04/2019
[14] The data available for December 2019 is from 04/12/18 to 19/12/18

Table 4. 9 *Visitors Count from Origins Centre Visitors book (January – March 2020)*

Month and Year	International (adults and children)	Domestic (adults and children)	Total Visitors (monthly)
January, 2020[15]	32	05	37
February, 2020	14	05	19
March, 2020	08	04	12
Total Visitors	**54**	**14**	**68**

Table 4. 10 *Visitors Count from Origins Centre Visitors book (May – August 2022)*

Month and Year	International (adults and children)	Domestic (adults and children)	Total Visitors (monthly)
May, 2022[16]	00	88	88
June, 2022[17]	03	01	04
July, 2022[18]	00	01	01
August, 2022[19]	08	00	08
Total Visitors	**11**	**90**	**101**

[15] The data for January 2020 starts from 06/01/2020.
[16] The visitors count available for May 2022 is only for Museum Day (18/05/2022). The visitor's type is not mentioned.
[17] The data available for June 2022 is 07/06/22 and 22/06/2022.
[18] The data available for July 2022 is 07/07/2022
[19] The data available for August 2022 is from 01/08/22 to 24/08/2022