



## Leisure pursuits in South Africa as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic

Marié E. M. Young

To cite this article: Marié E. M. Young (2020) Leisure pursuits in South Africa as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic, World Leisure Journal, 62:4, 331-335, DOI: [10.1080/16078055.2020.1825252](https://doi.org/10.1080/16078055.2020.1825252)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/16078055.2020.1825252>



Published online: 29 Sep 2020.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 491



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



## Leisure pursuits in South Africa as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic

Marié E. M. Young 

Department Sport, Recreation and Exercise Science, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa

### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to present the leisure pursuits in South Africa as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the world was hit by the pandemic as early as January 2020, South Africa recorded its first case on 5 March 2020. A five-stage lockdown was introduced to flatten the curve and prepare the health system during the first level. Lockdown regulations were severe, with restricted movement only for essential services. The extreme lockdown measures had a visible impact on the leisure and tourism industry. Small businesses were devastated by the financial hardship and job losses have contributed to the already high level of unemployment and social-economic inequalities among citizens. Observations for this study were based on what people shared on social and popular media, including discussions with friends and family. The pandemic forced many people to revisit how they live, work and play. People change and adapt their leisure pursuits to fit the situation they find themselves in. Technology was embraced to connect with others and to pursue leisure activities. The future of leisure and recreation practices post-COVID-19 is not clear and will change indefinitely. The social and economic impact on the industry has been vast and will be far reaching.

### KEYWORDS

COVID-19; leisure pursuits; South-Africa

While the world was hit by the Covid-19 pandemic as early as January 2020, South Africa recorded its first case on 5 March 2020 (National Institute for Communicable Diseases, 2020). President Cyril Ramaphosa announced a national state of disaster on 15 March 2020 and lockdown from 26 March. A five-stage lockdown was introduced to flatten the curve and prepare the health system during the first level (Level 5: 26 March 2020 until 30 April 2020) (Magongo et al., 2020). Lockdown regulations were stringent, with movement restricted only for essential services (South African Government, 2020a). Beaches, open spaces, and parks were closed until the beginning of July, and the sale of cigarettes and alcohol were banned. These restrictions were eased within levels. With the onset of level 4 (1–31 May 2020), walking, jogging, or cycling was allowed between 6–9 am only, and is restricted to the area within a 5 km radius of your residence; walking on the beaches or surfing remained prohibited. Level 3 was

**CONTACT** Marie E. M. Young  myoung@uwc.ac.za  Department Sport, Recreation and Exercise Science, University of the Western Cape, Robert Sobukwe Road, Bellville, Cape Town 7535, South Africa

introduced on 1 June 2020 (and are still in effect), allowing exercise outside the house between 6 am and 6 pm; the economy also opened up, with certain businesses being allowed to reopen, e.g. restaurants, DIY and clothing stores (South African Government, 2020b). However, people are nonetheless encouraged to continue working from home if it is possible. The tourism and corporate leisure industry has remain closed, and movement between provinces and holidays continue to be prohibited, with no international travel allowed (Watts, 2020).

The stringent lockdown measures have had a visible impact on the leisure and tourism industry of South Africa. Small businesses were devastated by financial hardship, and called for imidiate reopening of the industry (Johnson, 2020; Travel Reporter, 2020). This industry accounted for at least 1.5 million jobs, and covered almost 3% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) (South African Government, 2019). Many people have already or were at risk of losing their jobs. Many restaurants have had to closed their doors, hotels, guest houses, wineries, and fitness centres remain closed, and as a result, many workers in the fitness and food industry (including farming) have also lost their jobs. These job losses have contributed to the already high level of unemployment and social-economic inequalities among citizens.

More than 1.2 milion of South African households stay in informal settlements, where it was not possible to maintain social distancing (Cirolia et al., 2017; Noko, 2020). Many were unable to stay within their residential parameters, have not had internet access nor space around their house. It was common to see big families staying in a confined space of not more than 3m<sup>2</sup>, with either no income, or having something that is less than the minimum monthly income of R3500 (South African Government, 2020c). Often, only one or two of these people earned a monthly wage, and the rest of the family rely on them for support. It was visible in these settlements that people continued with their daily life as normal, ignoring lockdown rules. Further, leisure pursuits were not prioritised in these areas, and gangsters, substance abuse, and crime levels were very high, among other social injustices (i.e. violence against woman and children, teenage pregnancies, etc.) (Meth, 2016). Nonetheless, this paper aimed to present the leisure pursuits in South Africa as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic. These observations were based on what people have shared on social media, discussions with friends and family, and via mass media.

The pandemic, with strict lockdown regulations, forced many people to revisit how they have lived, worked, and played. Unless involved in what was considered an “essential service”, people were required to work from home (South African Government, 2020a). They also had to undertake more domestic responsibilities (domestic help was prohibited), and oversee children and students who had to convert to online schooling. Amid these additional responsibilities, people still used these times for leisure activities for the family, such as physical activity, drama, music, hobbies, arts and crafts, playing board games, etc. Some shared their activities on multimedia platforms. It was interesting to see the preference of specific activities that occurred with the onset of lockdown.

The first response to the lockdown was to keep in touch with one another – musicians started entertaining people from their balconies, and a focus on health promotion was observed. People shared fitness tips over social media platforms, made use of fitness apps, or participated in online fitness classes. Facebook, Google Hangouts, and Zoom became very popular social media platforms used. In lower socio-economic communities, people had no or very limited access to the internet. Mobile data have been

expensive in this country, and the majority of citizens only buy mobile data to use Facebook and WhatsApp. In these instances, WhatsApp was often used to send off daily exercise routines for friends and family to follow. In some neighbourhoods, people stood across the street and exercised together. As lockdown requirements eased, allowing more movement, people took to the streets, beaches (even though still prohibited), promenades, and parks for walking, running, and cycling (Everatt, 2020). However, these activities could not accommodate big groups, and all larger events are prohibited.

Technology played a huge role in not just keeping people connected, but also becoming central and more pronounced than they were before lockdown (Fourie, 2020). People took up baking, cooking, and sharing recipes widely. Creativity was also clearly visible: online theatre productions were streamed, and radio stations attempted to support struggling artists, setting up online shows at a minimal cost. Churches shared services on YouTube and sent out messages to their congregations through WhatsApp.

Having traditional “braai” (the South African barbeque) whenever possible was an integral part of the social culture of South Africans. During lockdown, some families and friends hosted virtual braai’s, and of course, shared a good glass of South African wine – if they had some in stock. These practices were widely shared among friends as a way of keeping contact with one another.

While there were numerous positive observations, one industry the hardest hit by the lockdown has been the leisure industry. Many sport, fitness, cultural clubs, and NGOs lost membership rapidly, and have subsequently closed down due to financial constraints (Johnson, 2020). Citizens have been able to participate in some creative online sessions, when made available, but the mental impact on citizens, especially children and youth being socially isolated from their friends, has been palpable. It was observed that children felt distressed and uncertain (Durham, 2020; Jansen, 2020; Wessels, 2020). While they might have had access to one another via their devices, they dearly missed engaging with their friends face-to-face. In some instances, children made no contact with their friends, choosing to isolate themselves, reducing to only playing online games and using social media, and parents highlighted their concern for their children’s mental health. The gradual opening up of schools and access to limited sporting opportunities (i.e. non-contact sports such as tennis, karate, etc.) has placed some relief on the situation.

The restricted access to beaches and participation in sport in general, led to the surfing community protesting, claiming that their activities were highly unlikely to contribute to the spread of the pandemic (Fisayo-Bambi, 2020; Nkanjeni, 2020). As a result, numerous irrational arrests were made of people on beaches as well as those who were not physically moving on the promenades (one man was arrested while stretching), and in areas where municipalities did allow people to walk to certain shops on the beachfront (Alexander, 2020; Basson, 2020). These arrests and restrictions did not make sense (Everatt, 2020). Besides, people in informal settlements were not adhering to the restriction rules, roaming the streets without masks, and not maintaining social distancing: it appeared that they were not being policed in any way.

To conclude, observations indicated that people changed and adapted their leisure pursuits to fit the situation they find themselves in. Technology was embraced to connect with others and to pursue leisure activities. Nonetheless, the future of leisure and recreation practices post-COVID-19 is not clear and will change indefinitely. The

social and economic impact on the industry has been vast and will be far-reaching. Policies and practices for leisure, tourism, culture, sports, events, and social businesses, especially where contact and/or masses of people are involved, need to be developed.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## ORCID

Marié E. M. Young  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9195-1519>

## References

- Alexander, E. (2020). *Cape Town surfers protest against lockdown restrictions*. <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2020-05-05-in-pictures-cape-town-surfers-protest-against-lockdown-restrictions/>
- Basson, A. (2020). *Keep quiet and work with us' – Cape Town law enforcement apprehends joggers on promenade*. <https://www.news24.com/news24/video/southafrica/news/watch-keep-quiet-and-work-with-us-cape-town-law-enforcement-apprehends-joggers-on-promenade-20200416>
- Cirolia, L. R., Görgens, T., van Donk, M., Smit, W., & Drimie, S. (2017). *Upgrading informal settlements in South Africa: An introduction*. In L. R. Cirolia, T. Görgens, M. van Donk, W. Smit, & S. Drimie (Eds.), *Upgrading informal settlements in South Africa: Pursuing a partnership-based approach* (pp. 3–26). UCT Press.
- Durham, S. (2020). *The impact of lockdown on children and the reality of going back to school*. <https://www.sacap.edu.za/blog/applied-psychology/impact-of-lockdown-on-children/>
- Everatt, D. (2020). *Lockdown is riling black and white South Africans: Could this be a reset moment?* The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/lockdown-is-riling-black-and-white-south-africans-could-this-be-a-reset-moment-138044>
- Fisayo-Bambi, J. (2020). *South Africa: Surfers protest against lockdown*. <https://www.africanews.com/2020/05/08/south-africa-surfers-protest-against-lockdown-morning-call/>
- Fourie, L. (2020). Tech News: Technology usage patterns during Covid-19. IOL. <https://www.iol.co.za/business-report/tech-news-technology-usage-patterns-during-covid-19-48305674>
- Jansen, J. (2020). Ready to learn? The emotional impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown on South African children. <https://www.iol.co.za/news/opinion/ready-to-learn-the-emotional-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-and-lockdown-on-south-african-children-50691597>
- Johnson, H. S. (2020, June 12). *South Africa: COVID-19 economic impact on tourism accommodation industry*. eTN Global Travel Rew. <https://www.eturbonews.com/573946/south-africa-covid-19-economic-impact-on-tourism-accommodation-industry/>
- Magongo, B., Lam, J., del Busto, I., Chibwana, C., Rametse, L., Li, S., & Coppel, E. (2020). *South Africa's social development sector response to COVID-19*. IDInsight/National Development Agency.
- Meth, P. (2016). Informal housing, gender, crime and violence: The role of design in urban South Africa. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 57(2), 402–421. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azv125>
- National Institute for Communicable Diseases. (2020, March 5). *First case of COVID-19 coronavirus reported in SA* [Press release]. <https://www.nicd.ac.za/first-case-of-covid-19-coronavirus-reported-in-sa/>
- Nkanjeni, U. (2020). *Mzansi weighs in on surfers' peaceful protest in Cape Town*. <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2020-05-06-mzansi-weighs-in-on-surfers-peaceful-protest-in-cape-town/>

- Noko, K. (2020, March 22). *In Africa, social distancing is a privilege few can afford*. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/africa-social-distancing-privilege-afford-200318151958670.html>
- South African Government. (2019). Tourism. Retrieved July 7, 2020, from <https://www.gov.za/about-sa/tourism#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20World%20Travel,R145%2C3%20billion%20for%202019>
- South African Government. (2020a). Disaster management Act, 2002: Amendment of regulations issued in terms of Section 27(2). *Government Gazette*, 657. Republic of South Africa, Pretoria.
- South African Government. (2020b). *Disaster Management Act: Regulations: Alert level 3 during Coronavirus COVID-19 lockdown*. <https://www.gov.za/coronavirus/alert-level-3> on 13/08/2020
- South African Government. (2020c). *Employment and Labour on new National Minimum Wage rate*. <https://www.gov.za/speeches/new-nmw-base-rate-come-effect-march-%E2%80%93-department-employment-and-labour-24-feb-2020-0000#:~:text=The%20new%20rate%20for%20the,applicable%20on%201%20March%202020>
- Travel Reporter. (2020). *Once a leading destination, Franschhoek is now 'fighting desperately to survive' Covid-19*. <https://www.iol.co.za/travel/south-africa/western-cape/once-a-leading-destination-franschhoek-is-now-fighting-desperately-to-survive-covid-19-5ff150bc-327d-42f4-be76-3f6dff54d312>
- Watts, D. (2020). Lockdown level 3 regulations: Recreational activities explained. <https://lowvelder.co.za/625079/lockdown-level-3-regulations-recreational-activities-explained/>
- Wessels, S. (2020). *Covid-19 will have lasting implications for children's mental and physical well-being*. <https://www.iol.co.za/news/opinion/covid-19-will-have-lasting-implications-for-childrens-mental-and-physical-wellbeing-50806068>