

Robben Island fights for its World Heritage status



By [Katja Hamilton](#)

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Robben Island's infrastructure is in a state of decay, and the once-popular tourist site is in a fight to maintain its World Heritage status.



Source: [Robben Island Museum](#).

This represents the overarching outcome conveyed by the Public Works and Infrastructure Minister Sihle Zikalala who, yesterday (22 June), visited the site to inspect progress on the upgrade of the island's infrastructure.

Buildings, cemeteries, gardens, recreational facilities, waste management services, and the blue stone quarry - known for the labour of political prisoners who were forced to work there during the apartheid era - are in dire need of repair.

In the light of its deteriorating infrastructure, Robben Island stands to have its authenticity and integrity undermined. It faces being placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger. In an extreme case, it could have the World Heritage Committee remove its World Heritage status altogether.

Updating the public on refurbishment projects being undertaken on Robben Island, Zikalala said R122m has been injected to improve infrastructure on the island and to create new investment opportunities for it.

"The infrastructure developments will go far in preserving this memorial site, boost tourism, and contribute to employment

creation," he said.

Potential costs and urgent action

However, it is estimated that the cost of renovations and infrastructure upgrades could mount to R250m, according to Robben Island Museum Council chairperson, Saths Cooper. He highlighted the need for urgent action to be taken to halt irregular expenditure of resources allocated for the revitalisation of Robben Island.

Cooper mentioned that thorough investigations are currently underway regarding the mismanagement of funds earmarked for the site, particularly in light of the purchase of the boat, Krotoa, that transports visitors to the island.



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The purchase of the R100m ferry in July 2019 erupted into a corruption storm as the Sport, Arts and Culture Department began to look into its financing and who might have benefited from the decision to buy it.

Industry sources [said](#) the decision to buy a foreign ferry was questionable due to the presence of world-renowned shipbuilding facilities in Cape Town.

Diverse projects underway

Nonetheless, the Department of Arts and Culture is working on several projects including the restoration of the blue stone quarry wall, and the upgrade of the harbour precinct, the desalination plant and the effluent plant. It is also constructing a new floating jetty, and expanding the diesel plant reticulation system.

A total of R2.1m has already been allocated and utilised for the improvement of a desalination plant. The desalination plant has not been functioning since February.

"We want to revitalise the world heritage site. We want to ensure that the area is preserved but modernised and its legacy can inspire society," Zikalala said.



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Sports, Arts and Culture Minister Zizi Kodwa last month [said](#) in the light of reports of corruption and improper handling of funds at the World Heritage site, that he is beginning to see improvements with regard to the governance and management of structures on the island.

"We are quite pleased with the work that is being done to maintain the heritage site. There are a number of ideas as we started meeting with the executive management; there are issues that we must deal with and we will help them to make sure the site continues to shine," he said.

In recognition of its historical and cultural value, Robben Island was designated as a Unesco World Heritage Site in 1999.

Katja is the Finance, Property and Healthcare Editor at Bizcommunity.

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