

TRAVEL

Durbs by the sea!

It's one of South Africa's most popular holiday playgrounds, attracting thousands in summer. Photographer and Durbanite Teagan Cunniffe captures a typical day on the beachfront – and the many marvellous ways South Africans use and delight in it



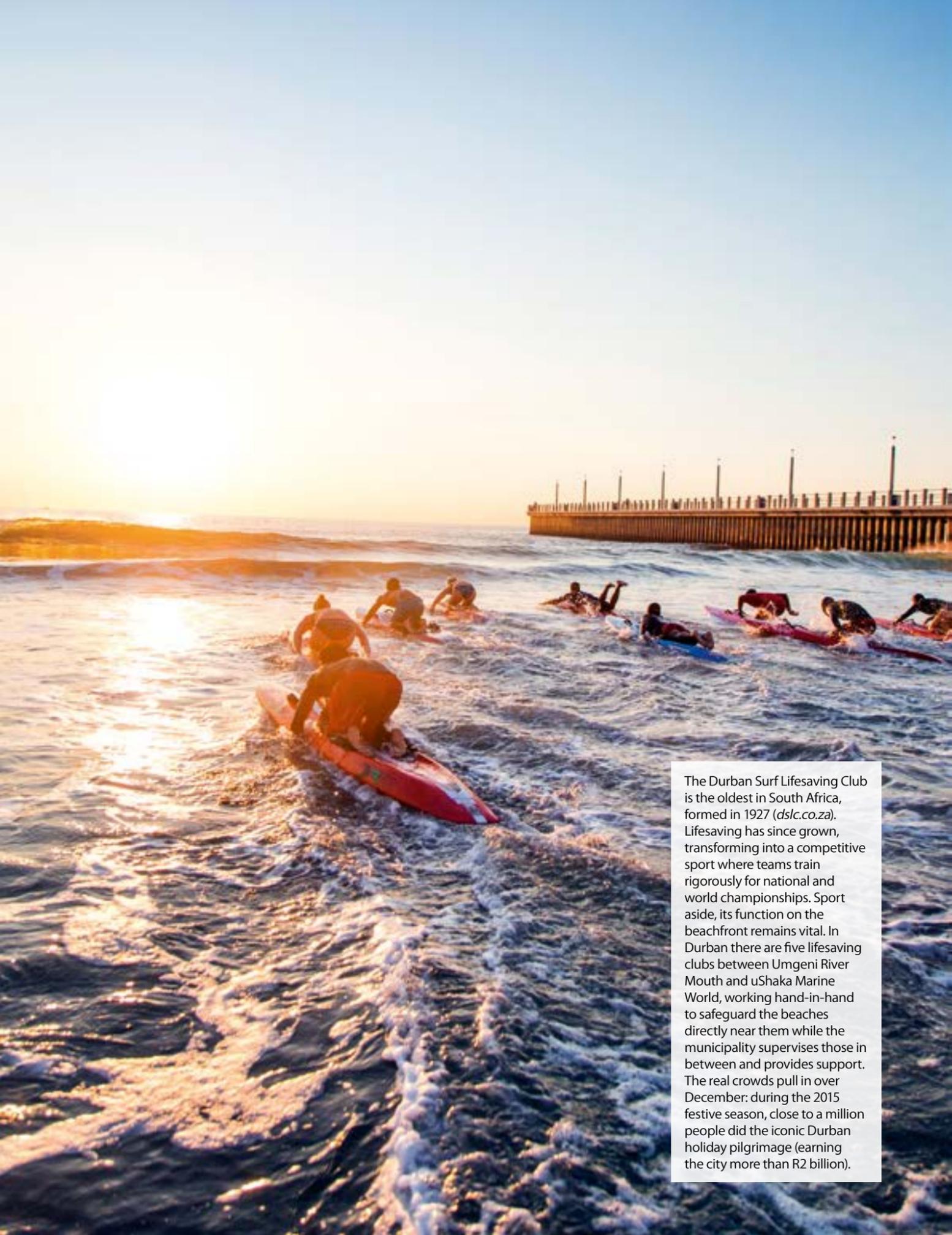
When was the first time you saw the ocean? For these school kids, this was the day. Travelling by bus all the way from Limpopo (876 kilometres), and supervised by their smiling teachers on shore, they splashed and screamed their way through the shallows, beaming throughout. Some schools make the journey annually, but you'll still find countless children in SA who have never seen the sea.

OPPOSITE These surfers who are part of Surfers Not Street Children (surfnoststreets.org) can be found at New Pier most afternoons. Some go on to compete in surf contests, but all learn the value of living in a supportive community with people who want to help them achieve their best. Out on the waves, these kids get respite from stressful environments and a chance to connect with nature and each other, reshaping their outlook on life and, ultimately, their future.

Zionism has between 15 and 18 million followers throughout Southern Africa. The AmaZioni (meaning 'the people who worship Zion') in Durban hold their cleansing ceremonies on the beachfront mainly on Sundays. Small groups stand in circles, singing. One by one, they are led into the healing waters to be baptised and cleansed of spirits. The process is emotionally charged and is often accompanied by the slaughter of a chicken, its blood then mixed with seawater. There has been pressure to move the baptisms from Bay of Plenty to North Beach, a popular beach with more onlookers and safer swimming. The Zionists I spoke to would rather have stayed on the quieter beaches, away from curious spectators.



Every morning the seine-net fishermen push off from the beach near Durban Undersea Club (DUC) and row out into the rising sun. Their presence is historical: in 1865, indentured labourers moved to Salisbury Island in the port to form the seine-netter community, pioneers of the Durban fishing industry. They were also heroes: in October 1917, when the Umgeni River flooded and washed debris, animals and people out to sea, a volunteer crew, the Padavatan Six, managed to rescue 175 people from drowning. In 1963 the community was relocated by the Group Areas Act to Chatsworth, 25 kilometres from their fishing grounds, effectively destroying their livelihood. Today, the seine netters operate on a much smaller scale, and amid debate about their environmental impact.



The Durban Surf Lifesaving Club is the oldest in South Africa, formed in 1927 (dslc.co.za). Lifesaving has since grown, transforming into a competitive sport where teams train rigorously for national and world championships. Sport aside, its function on the beachfront remains vital. In Durban there are five lifesaving clubs between Umgeni River Mouth and uShaka Marine World, working hand-in-hand to safeguard the beaches directly near them while the municipality supervises those in between and provides support. The real crowds pull in over December: during the 2015 festive season, close to a million people did the iconic Durban holiday pilgrimage (earning the city more than R2 billion).



ABOVE Durban's waters are open to all, and people take this seriously. You'll find surfers and bodyboarders, stand-up paddlers and swimmers in the sea throughout the day. Many use the seven piers as an easy entry to the water, walking to the end and leaping off into the waves below. This man was swimming across the waters of North Beach in the early morning calm.

DO IT YOURSELF
Durban is a two-hour flight from Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Johannesburg, or a five-hour drive from the latter.

WHEN TO GO
Weather is good throughout the year – winter in Durban, though there's a slight chill to the water, yields some of the most beautiful sunsets and sunrises. The December school holidays draw throngs of crowds to the beaches.

NEED TO KNOW
eThekweni municipality hands out identification armbands for children at the beach over the festive season. Be sure to pick one up for your kids in case you get separated.

STAY HERE
The Happy Hippo, near South Beach, is a friendly backpackers with a rooftop bar overlooking the streets below. From R460 for a double room. 031-368-7181, happyhippodurban.co.za
Ushaka Unit is a top-rated two-bedroom AirBnB option at Durban Point Waterfront. From R171 pp. airbnb.com/rooms/7768694
Southern Sun Elangeni & Maharani is an iconic Durban hotel, well-located with gorgeous views onto the beach, and a great bar and pool deck. From R935 pp sharing. 031-362-1300, tsogosun.com

DO THIS
Sip cocktails at Moyo's bar, at the end of uShaka Pier, while

watching surfers below you and the city's skyline. Drinks from R45. 031-332-0606, moyo.co.za
Learn how to SUP at Addington Beach, where it's more sheltered. Xpression on the Beach (next to Surf Riders Cafe) gives stand-up paddling lessons for all levels of expertise. From R150 pp, board rental is R100. 074-134-1232, xpressiononthebeach.com
See Durban's underwater world by snorkelling at Vetch's Pier and along the harbour wall at high tide. You'll see coral, reef fish and even moray eels and rays. Rent snorkel gear (R150 for a mask, fins and snorkel) at nearby Calypso Dive & Adventure. 031-332-0905, calypsoushaka.co.za

*Prices correct at the time of going to print