

V&A Waterfront festive exhibition heroes African creativity and community

A comprehensive exhibition of African basketry and an installation of beautiful travelling totems are among the cornerstones of the V&A Waterfront's festive décor over the December holiday season.



Source: Supplied

The hand-created decorations form part of the V&A Waterfront's overarching Joy from Africa to the World project, based on a vision that kicked off two years ago to reimagine a festive season that celebrates the creativity of the African continent while honouring its commitment to environmental sustainability. In addition to the 100 Beautiful Baskets and Travelling Totems on display, the project is also underpinned by a festive spirit and compassion for communities, explains the V&A. Commissioned pieces have created employment in the community that created them.

The installations are designed to challenge the traditional approach to the end-of-year celebration. The project heroes local design and sustainability and gives a rich, warm African welcome to visitors to the Cape Town attraction.

“Since 2019 we have set out to infuse the festive season with purpose and meaning. We didn't want to do away with the celebration, but rather, we wanted to do it in a way that showcases authentic African stories, shines a spotlight on the creativity of the people of this country and continent and celebrates our heritage. We wanted to inspire locals and the rest of the world by sharing the story of a joyful Africa – it is our story, told our way,” explains Tinyiko Mageza, executive manager: marketing at the V&A Waterfront.

100 Beautiful Baskets exhibition

The 100 Beautiful Baskets exhibition, which was curated by Platform Creative, is open for public viewing at the Victoria Wharf Shopping Centre.

The contemporary exhibition celebrates Africa's unique basket-weaving traditions and showcases woven vessels, furniture, jewellery and much more from different communities – stretching from KZN, Ghana to Zambia and Uganda.



Source: Supplied

With a strong focus on Southern Africa's diverse groups of basket-weavers, this free exhibition brings together some of the most revered names in basketry, giving this highly skilled handcraft the recognition it deserves.

Each piece has been carefully crafted by hand, by master weavers (mostly women) across the African continent, and behind every basket there is a story to tell and a person to meet.

One such story features master weaver, Angeline Masuku from Hlabisa in KwaZulu-Natal, who says it took her three full weeks – or 200 hours – to weave the Ukhamba Podium Basket on show at the exhibition. She was only eight years old when her aunt, a competent basket weaver, started to teach her the skills of basket weaving. Masuku is now well-known for her Zulu art weaving techniques, as well as the materials she uses, and prides herself on creating unique designs true to her style and upbringing.

Festive décor and travelling totems

The end of November also sees other festive décor elements being installed across the V&A Waterfront neighbourhood. The décor talks to the vision of being inspired by local creativity, while driving a message of sustainability,

through using materials that are reused and can be recycled.

This year, eight large and intricate totems have been created by local communities from around the country who are known for the creativity and celebration of South African craft and heritage.





Source: Supplied







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One of the totems, named Umoya Wasekasi, which is isiXhosa for ‘spirit of the township’, is the story of Monkeybiz in Khayelitsha. Noloyiso Maphakathi, who beaded the sun and moon that sits at the apex, says the sun symbolises happiness in her Xhosa culture. Having the moon and sun at the top of the totem represents the cycle of life, which is made up of day and night; light and darkness – much like the lived experiences of many people in marginalised townships. The beaded dolls represent women’s empowerment, one of the core missions of Monkeybiz.

This totem, along with the other seven, can be seen around the V&A Waterfront’s Victoria Mall for the duration of the festive season. Other key installations for visitors to look out include a summer palace for kids to wander through, colourful hanging baskets in the open-air atriums, golden swallows made from recycled metal, swooping through the mall, and a giant Christmas tree.

Tenants get involved

One V&A Waterfront tenant that is embracing the Joy from Africa to the World theme is The Table Bay hotel. This year, domestic and international tourists entering the 5-star hotel will be greeted by all the festivity of the season, but with African flair.



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Joanne Selby, general manager for The Table Bay Hotel says, “We were inspired by the V&A Waterfront’s vision of Joy from Africa to the World and decided to draw on this concept for the hotel festive programme. This year our celebration will celebrate the essence of South Africa to create truly lasting memories for our guests.”

“Sustainability is important to us so we decided to upcycle our decorations. We commissioned local artist Glorinah Khutso Mabaso to reimagine them in an African pattern that would be exclusive to our hotel, and that symbolises a festive season at the tip of Africa. In addition to covering our old baubles, we have partnered with Monkeybiz which works with 250 local crafters in Cape Town.

“The wire and beaded objects they have created include bowls, proteas, porcupines, and even a fun African take on reindeers. Each piece is hand crafted so no two decorations are the same and we are certain our guests will appreciate this novel festive experience.”

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