Shaka Zulu Statue - Durban, South Africa



Located on the coast of the Indian Ocean in KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa, Durban preserves the legacy of the Zulu Kingdom and the memory of one of South Africa's most striking historical figures. King Shaka kaSenzangakhona, who united the Zulu nation and founded one of the most powerful African kingdoms of the 19th century, was born around 1787 and reigned until 1828. Today, Durban is home to a colossal monument statue rising within the international airport that bears his name. This statue has become an indispensable stop for history enthusiasts and tourists visiting the region.

Construction and History of the Statue

The first statue at King Shaka International Airport was created by Durban artist Andries Botha as part of the 2010 FIFA World Cup preparations and unveiled in May 2010. However, the Zulu Royal Family disapproved of the statue; Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini and other members complained that it "resembled a shepherd boy" and that the spear placed at Shaka's feet evoked surrender. Following lengthy negotiations, the old statue was removed and a new one was commissioned. The new 12-meter statue was unveiled on November 7, 2024, at a ceremony attended by President Cyril Ramaphosa and Zulu King Misuzulu kaZwelithini. The new statue depicts Shaka as a warrior holding a spear and shield.

Features and Artistic Details of the Statue

The massive bronze statue, standing 12 meters tall, depicts Shaka in traditional Zulu war attire, holding a spear in one hand and a shield in the other. At the unveiling ceremony, President Ramaphosa described the statue as a symbol of unity, integrity, and leadership for all South

Africans. The statue is located in an open area in front of the airport's terminal building, easily visible to visitors. It is also the first monumental structure encountered by every domestic and international passenger the moment they set foot in Durban.

King Shaka International Airport and Surroundings

The statue is located at King Shaka International Airport, approximately 35 kilometers north of Durban city center. The airport's name was also inspired by Shaka. Shaka's legacy is kept alive at many points in Durban; the best known of these is uShaka Marine World, a marine-themed amusement park opened on the city's beachfront in 2004. Additionally, the monument and grave in the city of Stanger (KwaDukuza), located near where Shaka was assassinated, stands out as a historic site worth visiting.

The Legacy of Shaka Zulu

After ascending to the throne in 1816, Shaka kaSenzangakhona fundamentally restructured the Zulu military system. Developing the short spear (iklwa) and the bull horn battle formation, Shaka built a vast empire from a small tribe. The Mfecane (dispersal) period that began during his reign permanently altered the demographic and political map of southern Africa. Assassinated by his half-brothers on September 24, 1828, Shaka continues to be evaluated in contradictory ways in history both as a "nation founder" and a "tyrant." South Africa celebrates September 24 each year as Heritage Day, and Shaka Zulu remains one of the central figures of this day.

Visitor Information

The Shaka Zulu Statue is located at King Shaka International Airport, approximately 35 kilometers north of Durban. The airport is easily accessible by car from both Durban and the La Mercy area. The statue is situated in a publicly accessible area outside the terminal building. For those wishing to explore Shaka's legacy more deeply beyond an airport visit, uShaka Marine World in Durban and the monument tomb in KwaDukuza can be added to the itinerary.

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