

Literary tourism: walk in footsteps of Alan PatonRICH TAPESTRY. KwaZulu-Natal's history has been immortalised in *A Literary Guide to KwaZulu-Natal*. Pictures: iStock

KZN authors in your pocket

A BOOK THAT LURES VISITORS TO THE PROVINCE IN A DIFFERENT WAY

Adriaan Roets

KwaZulu-Natal artworks are finally getting deserved recognition and are being likened to British modernism, while writers and poets are also getting accolades in *A Literary Guide to KwaZulu-Natal*.

This is an authoritative literary tourism guide that helps readers trace the steps of famous authors and poets from the province. While this can be considered a niche audience, the literary history in the book forms an important part of the South African identity, which makes the guide a must-have.

Co-authored by Niall McNulty and Lindy Stiebel, it's a concise guide to fascinating people and places.

But first, they recognise the third-largest metro area in the country as a place of incredible relevance that is constantly underappreciated.

"Durban has always played second fiddle to the traditional arts and culture capital of Cape Town and economic hub of Johannesburg," says McNulty. "However, there is a vibrant, somewhat underground art culture in the city.

"The late Andrew Verster produced amazing artworks, which are still undervalued in my opinion, and Cameron Platter is an excellent contemporary artist with a very 'Durban' aesthetic.

"So, it always feels like Durban is on the verge of recognition and it's been the case since the '90s."

Stiebel has had a stake in literacy information since 2002, when she started KZN Literacy Tourism, an



Lindy Stiebel

academic research project centred around gathering information on writers linked in one way or another to KwaZulu-Natal.

During the initial five-year phase of the project, the objectives were to create a database of writers and produce a literary tourist map of the province. It led Stiebel and McNulty, who was initially a research assistant, to finally create a whole guide to the province.

"KZN is largely marketed on its beaches and wildlife, which is wonderful, but there's far more to the province than the obvious physical attractions," says Stiebel.

"The history of the province can be told in at least a few languages when you think of the people who have made an impact here ... many of those people wrote about their lives and the place they lived in.

"Literature is another way to un-



Niall McNulty

derstand a place, whether the writers write fiction or about their own lives and histories.

"Stories, poems and memoirs enable others to imagine the events too. They bring a human element to bear on facts and figures and landscape."

From South African Indian authors, its status as Boer Republic to its Zulu heritage, KwaZulu-Natal provides a rich tapestry of people, which provides a certain thrill when it comes to reliving these people's words.

This week marked the birthday of Alan Paton, just one of many authors that called KwaZulu-Natal home, and it's that spirit that is captured in *A Literary Guide to KwaZulu-Natal*.

"I have a love for Grey Street in Durban [the traditional Indian cultural hub] and the authors associated with it, in particular Aziz Hassim, who recreated a literary version of the area

[which he called the Casbah] in his novel *The Lotus People*," says McNulty.

"Fernando Pessoa, the renowned Portuguese poet, attended school in Durban and a bust dedicated to him sits in the city centre. KZN playwright Neil Coppen is currently writing a book on Pessoa.

"The most well-known writer to come out of KwaZulu-Natal is Alan Paton, who immortalised the landscape of Ixopo in *Cry, The Beloved Country*."

But while many authors have been recognised, others have not. "African writers from the '70s and '80s, such as Lewis Nkosi, who wrote *Mating Birds*, and poet Mafika Gwala, who combined traditional and urban imagery with jazz rhythms, are underappreciated," adds McNulty.

Stiebel says: "I'd agree on Nkosi, who was one of SA's finest intellectuals, but was largely unknown here because he was in exile for 30 years.

"His literary criticism is very fine. Lauretta Ngcobo was also one of the exile figures from the apartheid era who is largely unknown in South Africa.

"Zulu language writers also are underappreciated."

Durban was recently announced as the literary capital of Africa, proving that KwaZulu-Natal has finally emerged as an arts epicentre.

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- *A Literary Guide to KwaZulu-Natal* by Niall McNulty and Lindy Stiebel covers different parts of the province.
- It's available at Exclusive Books, other good bookstores and online.