



AS IT IS

South Africa Loses Cultural Landmarks as COVID Remains

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A set of **boxing gloves** worn by Nelson Mandela during the anti-**apartheid** struggle in South Africa lies in a darkened room. The quiet is broken only by the sound of insects hitting the glass case that holds the gloves.

They were once among the most popular objects at the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg. The museum is one of many cultural and art spaces around the country forced to close because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Christopher Till is museum director. He told Reuters news agency he had to let go of about 30 employees. “There’s no one here to turn the lights on and off,” he said.

He used his mobile phone as a light to show some of the pieces that represent the long struggle against white minority rule.

“We can’t **afford** to lose this place,” Till said.

Before the pandemic, the museum was recording up to 1,000 visitors a day, most of them foreign. Like other cultural organizations, the space shut down in March 2020 when South Africa issued its first stay-at-home orders. It sold no tickets for 10 months but reopened in January 2021. However, visitor numbers were low because of the ongoing virus spread and the museum did not have enough money to operate. It closed again in March.

With **tourists** not around because of restrictions, several other cultural landmarks in South Africa are suffering similarly. They include the Fugard Theatre in Cape Town, the Johannesburg Art Gallery, and Mandela’s house in the town of Soweto.

South Africa's \$14 billion loan-guarantee plan aims for banks to lend money to businesses affected by the coronavirus crisis. But the plan has not helped as much as was hoped. Many businesses are afraid to take on more debt.

In normal times, tourism makes up more than eight percent of the nation's economy and around 1.5 million jobs.

Bongani Ndlovu is a tour guide in Soweto. He said his small business was suffering because of museum closures.

Places like the Apartheid Museum and the Mandela house are "big **attractions** for international visitors," he said. "It's the first thing they ask to see when they get here."

We wanted these places to be cared for, Ndlovu said.

I'm Alice Bryant.

Reuters news agency reported this story. Alice Bryant adapted it for Learning English. Caty Weaver was the editor.

Words in This Story

boxing gloves - n. cushioned hand-coverings that fighters wear on their hands during boxing matches and practices

apartheid - n. a former system of segregating and economically and politically oppressing the nonwhite population of South Africa

afford - v. to be able to do something without having problems or being seriously harmed

tourist - n. a person who travels to a place for pleasure

attraction - n. something interesting or enjoyable that people want to visit, see, or do

