

## Ethical Volunteering Gets The Nod From FTTSA

Two companies will be awarded top Fair Trade in Tourism honours at Indaba as the first recipients of the new FTTSA certification for responsible volunteer programmes. Calabash Tours and Volunteer Africa 32° South are well-respected companies in terms of their commitment to responsible tourism, and have excellent track records to prove it.

Calabash Tours, based in Port Elizabeth facilitates volunteer experiences in two focus areas; education and HIV home based care and support. The Calabash approach is structured around transfer of skills, and attracts teachers and health workers from overseas countries to share skills to build capacity within township communities. Calabash Tours has also used the volunteer programme as a way to develop travel philanthropy models, in conjunction with the Calabash Trust. This has resulted in the possibility of ongoing support from volunteers, once back home, as fund raising ambassadors for the projects. The result has been the development of school libraries, nutrition support in schools and pre schools, and countless educational resources for schools.

Volunteer Africa - 32° South's volunteer programme works with schools in the Cintsu area of the Eastern Cape. It facilitates computer literacy classes, playing a supporting role for teachers and complementing the existing curriculum, and it provides a vital resource for learners to gain hands-on computer skills that will prove invaluable as they progress through their education and eventually seek employment. The schools involved are all part of the "Ecoschools" project – initiated by WESSA and WWF – to give children access to environmental education via computer applications. The programme's next goal is to fund a mobile computer lab to be able to reach more learners in the area.

It is a known fact that volunteer tourism is an important growth sector, in line with the developing interest in responsible tourism experiences. In Southern Africa it can create positive opportunities that would otherwise not exist, and it is a catalyst for bringing economic development to communities that are not generally part of mainstream tourism.

Rapidly growing demand for volunteer tourism experiences has meant that many programmes are not planned and managed effectively, and that volunteers could in some cases be placed where no formal structure existed, with little in the way of supervision at the destination.

The need for more accountability and self-regulation in the sector was identified some time ago by South African 'Voluntourism' operators. One of the main concerns was how placements were structured. Volunteer profiling and screening is critical in order to match the candidates to a suitable programme, and in the past many volunteers have left South Africa with less than happy memories. Volunteers generally work with vulnerable members of society, and there is a certain level of sensitivity needed so make sure that the interaction is meaningful on both sides. When it is done professionally and with integrity, volunteer tourism is life changing, for the visitors and for the communities involved

As a result of this, a number of South African operators co-published a 'Code of Good Practice' for volunteer tourism in 2008, which was officially launched as part of 'World Responsible Tourism Day' at World Travel Market in London.

Drawing on the Code of Good Practice, FTTSA carried out research to investigate the potential for certification specifically geared to voluntourism. The response was overwhelmingly positive, and so began the process to create a dynamic set of guidelines, using international benchmarks and based on responsible tourism best practice, i.e. encompassing fair wages and working benefits to host communities, ethical business operations, respect for human rights, heritage and culture, as well as considerations of the environmental impact.

Jennifer Seif, FTTSA Executive Director commented that "many of the challenges facing this sector are not unique to South Africa, and thus FTTSA will be able to share information and lessons learned with peers in other developing countries so that they may establish similar checks and balances".

FTTSA has nearly 70 products certified in its main programme, and this new certification system for volunteer tourism will be an exciting addition to the portfolio, helping to guide those seeking this kind of holiday to make the right choices, and channeling important resources that can make a real difference.

The awards ceremony will take place at the FTTSA stand, DEC D020, on Monday, 11 May at 1pm. For enquiries please contact Katarina Mancama, [Katarina@fairtourismsa.org.za](mailto:Katarina@fairtourismsa.org.za) / Mobile +27 076 481 7965.