

Eastern Cape ecotourism business achieves Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa status

THE Dunes Country House is a four-star country house based in the Eastern Cape's beautiful seaside village of St Francis Bay.

The eco-tourism business is committed to preserving coastal fynbos and wetlands and facilitates a variety of initiatives to ensure staff are treated fairly and local economic benefits are realised.

Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa (FTTSA) certification is an independent endorsement of fair and responsible tourism practice in South Africa. It is based on adherence to specific criteria including fair wages and working conditions, fair distribution of benefits, ethical business practice, and respect for human rights, culture and the environment. Certification is offered on a voluntary basis to providers of tourist accommodation, activities and attractions.

One of FTTSA's key principles is "Respect for Environment", which can be measured in relation to planning, operational management and

investment in conservation activities. The Dunes Country House demonstrates a concerted effort in all these areas, particularly through its involvement in the St Francis Bay Conservancy's ongoing alien eradication programme and other initiatives to protect delicate species and eco-systems. The Dunes' alien eradication programme also provides all the firewood necessary for keeping staff and guests warm during the winter months.

The Dunes Country House invests in the surrounding area by buying local goods and supporting local enterprises such as Henry's Vegetable Garden. The Dunes has provided Henry – a local entrepreneur – with a small parcel of land to create a vegetable garden, which is fertilised by The Dunes' newly installed vermicomposter (worm farm). Henry provides The Dunes' kitchen with home-grown produce for staff and guests to enjoy. In addition, The Dunes' kitchen aims to serve only "sustainable" seafood guided by the South African Sustain-

able Seafood Initiative (SASSI).

FTTSA certification also evaluates whether a business has developed appropriate workplace policies and is implementing measures to educate staff about HIV/Aids. The Dunes Country House offers an ongoing education programme about HIV/Aids in various languages (English, Afrikaans or isiXhosa). As a further commitment to its staff, The Dunes invests in a broad range of skills development including chef training, spa therapy, first aid, fire safety, recycling and training on conservation.

According to FTTSA's executive director, Jennifer Seif, FTTSA's certification of The Dunes Country House "demonstrates that the goal of operating in an equitable and responsible manner is attainable by small businesses when sufficient leadership, team work and commitment are in place. The Dunes will inspire other small businesses operating in sensitive ecosystems to implement the principles of responsible tourism – one step at a time."

