

Seeing us from the inside

Tourists can now get an authentic township experience through homestays, writes **Neo Maditla**. Pictures by **Melinda Stuurman**



GENTLE LIFE: Rastafarian Zebulon Afrikaner talks about the Tabernacle, a Rastafarian church in Judah Square, a Rastafarian township in Knysna.



A TYPICAL township tour on foot, by bus, donkey cart or even bicycle, can take anything from 20 minutes to a day – but to pick up the real flavour of township life tourists should stay over for a night or two.

To give an alternative to the instant “township cultural experience”, Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa is working with communities in more remote parts of South Africa to offer foreign and local visitors a less touristy township experience.

The non-profit organisation promotes sustainable tourism through the certification of businesses that are committed to giving their staff fair wages, good working conditions and have respect for human rights, culture and the environment.

I was part of a group of journalists that recently visited some of the projects that Fair Trade is helping to become sustainable tourism operators in Grahamstown and parts of Knysna.

We had a different tourism experience through homestays in Joza township in Grahamstown. The homestays run like B&Bs, but instead of having a separate room, you stay in the house with the family.

Our host was Sindiswa Ndeya, who is one of the 55 pensioners who formed the Kwam e-Makhana homestays group in the township.

Ndeya welcomed us to her home on a rainy afternoon with a gracious smile and welcoming hugs.

The smell of home-cooked food filled the living room as we walked in.

She showed us to our room and mine had a charming old radio, which Ndeya had owned for a very long time.

“But you can have it if you want, I will give it to you for R100,” she said with a smile.

Back in the living room we sat down to have dinner which consisted of rice, vegetables and stew.

Later she brought us tea in a tea set complete with cosies.

She sat with us and told us about her husband who was away at the time of our visit, and how they liked playing jazz music on the music recorder that sat in my room. “We liked dancing in those days and boy, would we move.”

Ndeya was a domestic worker and later a sales assistant before retiring. Her husband, who is also retired, worked in the laundry at Rhodes University.

She said she had always wanted to run her own B&B.

“When I was a sales assistant in Grahamstown, the day I worked for owned a B&B. I have always wanted to know what it would feel like to have my own.”

“This homestay is like a dream come true for me and I

hope to do this until I die.”

Despite her excitement at running her own homestay, she is faced with financial challenges like late payment from the local tourism office for the guests who stayed with her during the National Arts Festival a few months ago.

Because of the rain, we were not able to go out to see what Joza nightlife had to offer.

The township is very quiet and has endless views of the valley that is dotted with matchbox houses. It is very picturesque.

The next day we went to meet other homestay owners in Knysna and outside Plettenberg Bay.

These included the Griqua community in Kranshoek and the Rastafarian village just outside Knysna.

Although the Griquas and the Rastafarians live far from each and seem like two different cultures, they are similar in many ways.

Both communities are trying to get formal recognition from the government, are very traditional and are trying to preserve their culture.

The Griquas are descendants of the Khoi and the Kranshoek community consists of about 9 000 people. Sophie van Wyk moved from Cape Town in 1994 to raise her children in Kranshoek. “I wanted them to grow up among other Griqua people.”

She said that although many Griquas spoke Afrikaans and mixed with other races, they were teaching the young ones about their history and heritage at school.

“We are teaching the kids to speak Nama and our traditional reed dance, and twice a year we have celebrations we invite Griquas from all over the country to.”

The Griquas have their own parliament, national anthem and flag.

The Rastafarians also have their own flag, and Zebulon Afrikaner, who gave us a guided tour of the village, said they had formed the Rastafarian National Council of South Africa to get recognition from the government as a religion.

Afrikaner said that they had the largest community in the country, with 25 families living in the village outside Knysna. He said that the community was very diverse, with some of the families coming from Jamaica, Kenya and Australia to live there.

Afrikaner said they also had two big festivals every year, just like the Griquas.

As we made our way from one small town to the next we passed tour buses with tourists craning their necks to get a better view of the townships.

Although we were all in the same place our experience probably felt more like an authentic township experience than their bus trip.





DREAM COME TRUE: Sindiswa Ndeya in her B&B at Joza Location, Grahamstown.



THE RHYTHM: Afrikaner plays a bongo drum for guests outside the Tabernacle.

