

Sustainable tourism, please!

If you prefer an authentic and undisturbed wilderness experience, an eco safari destination is most definitely the place to book.

Words: **Vanessa Rogers**

Here, the lodge itself will be constructed from **natural materials** – reeds, wood, canvas and thatch, and in building such a camp the following aspects will receive consideration: power (use of solar panels for heating and light, and wind-powered pumps for fresh water); facilities (offices, even the laundry, are located off-site); recycling (all waste will go to the local town's depot); biodegradability (all products used are environmentally friendly, from washing detergents to the soaps and shampoos provided); and local crafts and materials (local artists are supported, no permanent structures are erected and all materials are bought locally).

Helen Turnbull of Serendipity Africa, a company based in Cape Town that promotes responsible tourism, says: 'Supporting the development of ethical tourism experiences and running responsibly-managed tourism businesses

is key to South Africa's success. The consumer and the supply chain can play a vital role by making good choices when buying travel products. It's not just in our personal interests to protect our environmental integrity, but our economy and well-being depends on it.

'South Africa's Tourism White Paper of 1996 clearly states that tourism in South Africa must be supportive of the people and environment. This was a pivotal moment for global tourism, and this document formed the basis of many tourism policies frameworked in other countries.'

Popular **eco-tourism activities** are: the canopy tour, which involves a trip down a kloof or above a forest canopy, stopping to admire the expansive views, waterfalls and surrounding ecology; whale watching in and around Dyer Island, near Hermanus; and hiking the many mountain trails that South Africa has to offer, from the 17km Dolphin Trail, an overnight route through the Tsitsikamma National Park, to the Otter Trail, Fish River Canyon and more.

Fair Trade in Tourism (FTTSA) is an accrediting body for sustainable tourism development. They offer a certification programme and endorse tourism establishments that meet with stringent criteria, including:

- fair wages and working conditions, fair operations, purchasing and distribution of benefits;
- ethical business practices; and
- respect for human rights, culture and (most importantly) the environment.

Go to www.fairtourismsa.org.za. ✨

