



FAIR PLAY

A HANDFUL OF SOUTH AFRICAN BUSINESSES ARE SPEARHEADING A SUSTAINABLE TOURISM REVOLUTION – AND RURAL COMMUNITIES ARE REAPING THE BENEFITS.
REPORT BY **MARCUS CRAFT**

Dirty water kills. So when guests at the Wild Coast's Bulungula Lodge donated water tanks to nearby Nqileni village, lives were saved.

Before this gift, diarrhoea – due to a lack of clean drinking water – was a devastating problem. 'It was terrible ... at least one baby a month was dying in a very small community because of a lack of sanitation,' says Jennifer Seif, executive director of Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa (FTTSA). Now households in Nqileni village have access to fresh water.

With its profit dividends, the Nqileni Trust – which owns 40 percent of Bulungula Lodge – has built a classroom at the local school, set up a community vegetable garden that sells produce to the lodge, and bought a community ceremony tent and a tractor, says the lodge's co-owner Dave Martin.

These are just a few examples of how community tourism is helping rural South Africans achieve a better quality of life. For a long time, locals did not reap the economic rewards of tourism. But that is changing. While the drive to establish, develop and sustain community tourism has been with us for many years, FTTSA now offers powerful incentives to do so. It also establishes principles that business people

can apply and parameters in which they can operate.

Community tourism exists in South Africa to varying degrees of success, under many guises – responsible, sustainable, cultural or Fair Trade tourism – but the underlying principles and goals are similar, if not often the same. The bottom line – making a profit – is still crucial, but it is the people in the surrounding areas, rather than distant investors, who really gain from a sustainable approach.

THE WATCHDOG

South Africa was the first country in the world to apply Fair Trade principles to tourism operators. Launched in 2002, the Fair Trade certification scheme guaranteed establishments and tours were committed to operating in a socially, economically and environmentally responsible manner. Now Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa, which became a fully fledged NGO in 2004, is the leading promoter of sustainable tourism development.

'FTTSA awards the use of a special label to qualifying businesses as a way of signifying their commitment to Fair Trade criteria, including fair wages and working conditions, fair purchasing, fair operations, equitable distribution of benefits and respect for human rights, culture

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and environment,' according to the organisation's website. The Fair Trade qualification criteria are stringent – there are just 65 clients members (at time of writing).

Tourism businesses looking to gain a FTTSA certification face close scrutiny. 'We look at things like how the business engages with the local economy through social investment, through procurement, skills development, giving jobs to local people, training them up through the business and so forth,' says Seif. It's a holistic assessment of the business and encompasses 14 operational areas, she explains. Certification is valid for 24 months, then the business is reassessed. Within the two-year period the business is asked to submit a paper audit, a report on 'certain key indicators'.

So why should travellers in South Africa choose a FTTSA-approved operator over others? 'Because it's a guarantee that the business is run in a way which is consistent with the principles of Fair Trade ... people working in the business are getting a decent wage and have their human rights respected, and the people in the business are benefiting in a meaningful way, meaning that the communities around the business are also benefiting, the environment is being protected, there are no children being exploited,' says Seif.

'It's a guarantee, so you know that if I go on a township tour that people in the township are actually benefiting somehow from the

R300 that I spend on my tour. It's not all getting swallowed up by the middle man... It's a mark of quality, a mark of sustainability.'

Clare Girarden, of Shiluvu Lakeside Lodge in Limpopo, says the lodge was one of the first three properties worldwide accredited with the FTTSA trademark. That was an important stepping stone for the off-the-beaten-track business. 'In essence, this certification validated what we had been trying to achieve for years – namely the promotion, and sustainability, of cultural tourism as a niche market.'

Being given the Fair Trade stamp is more than just an acknowledgement of goodwill. It makes good business sense. Paul Miedema of Calabash Tours in Port Elizabeth says accreditation gives his company 'a unique selling proposition in the market, but I think also ... the process of certification gives us a management tool in our business to continue to look at where we need to improve in terms of our own sustainability'.

His company, which started out offering two products (its Shebeen Tour and Real City Tour), was certified with FTTSA in 2004. 'Then in the last four or five years we've been working in the volunteer sector as well and we now have two of our volunteer programmes also certified with FTTSA.'

Jo Melton Butler, of Hog Hollow Country Lodge, near Plettenberg Bay, says, 'The FTTSA has an integrity far above the bewildering amount of organisations ▶

THEN AND NOW

22 October 2003

Four FTTSA-certified establishments, the first of their kind in the world, are announced
1 July 2011

65 FTTSA-certified companies in SA

Plans are afoot for a project between FTTSA and the National Development Agency to establish a 'Fair Trade in Tourism' incubator for small enterprises – a fixed-term programme at the end of which each enterprise becomes FTTSA certified, says executive director Jennifer Seif.

BEST PRACTICE

Six principles of Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa:

FAIR SHARE All participants involved in a tourism activity should get their fair share of the income, in direct proportion to their contribution to the activity.

DEMOCRACY All participants involved in a tourism activity should have the right and opportunity to participate in decisions that concern them.

RESPECT Both host and visitor should have respect for human rights, culture and environment. This includes safe working conditions and practices, reducing consumption of water and energy as well as reducing, reusing and recycling waste, and HIV/Aids awareness.

RELIABILITY The services delivered to tourists should be reliable and consistent. Basic safety and security for host and visitor should be ensured.

TRANSPARENCY Tourism businesses should establish mechanisms of accountability. For example, sharing of profits, benefits and losses must be transparent.

SUSTAINABILITY Tourism businesses should strive to be sustainable. This includes economic viability through responsible use of resources, reduction of 'leakage' through local purchasing and employment, and support to historically disadvantaged entrepreneurs.

Source: fairtourismsa.org.za

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offering their expertise and stamp of approval for sustainable/responsible tourism. Plus, they have worked very hard to make their brand so recognisable and respected. Their assessors are of exceptional quality, their assessments rigorous, their assistance helpful and their willingness to take on board criticism or different viewpoints refreshing.'

Melton Butler regards the FTTSA's stamp of approval as 'an effective marketing tool' for Hog Hollow. 'Many visitors who travel to South Africa want to know that their "spend money" is being well used; staff know and understand the principles of Fair Trade and that transparency and commitment to the six guiding principles [see Best Practice on previous page] makes them more interactive, communicative and supportive in initiatives and in their working environment.'

THE REAL DEAL

Today's tourists are sophisticated – they don't want a gawk-and-go holiday, they want an immersive experience. They want to see, hear, smell and taste day-to-day life at their destination ... at least for a little while.

Seif says there's a risk 'that a [safari] lodge can develop into enclave tourism where the guests fly in, in their private plane, and they never engage with the local community'.

Community tourism lends itself to a more hands-on style of holiday experience, which forms part of a larger trip consisting of different aspects, different attractions. 'You don't just stop by the Bo-Kaap and take

a picture ... you have a chance to understand how people live and understand their reality and eat some really cool food. A lot of people would prefer to have that in-depth, authentic kind of interaction with ordinary South Africans,' Seif says of Andulela Experience's Bo-Kaap 'cooking safari' (andulela.com).

SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

Betty Hlungwane started work at Shiluvu Lakeside Lodge (shiluvu.com) about 15 years ago. 'She actually used to be a petrol pump attendant at Elim, then came to the lodge, working in all the various departments from scullery to housekeeping,' says Girarden. 'She has risen through the ranks and is now lodge manager. She also runs our HIV programme and is our FTTSA representative for network evenings forums.'

Hlungwane's story is one example of how the wider Soutpansberg community has flourished as a result of the lodge's success. Most of its international packages involve a three-night stay, with a day and a half dedicated to touring local communities. Aside from the artists, these include local schools and community centres, says Girarden.

She says Shiluvu primarily sources its goods – and services – from local suppliers and artisans. 'Our thatching is done locally, our plumber is from Elim, our electrician is a local, all our staff are local, we buy fruit and veg from the Elim fruit market, our decor in the rooms is all done by locals. There is no middle man in our transaction.'

RESPONSIBLE OPERATORS

Some of FTTSA's line-up:

Upmarket establishments, including:

- The Peech Hotel, Joburg
- Antrim Villa and Bickley House, Cape Town
- Farm 215 Nature Retreat and Grootbos Reserve, both in the southern Cape
- Spier Hotel and Wine Estate, Stellenbosch
- Leshiba Wilderness, Limpopo
- Djuma, Motswari and Sabi Sabi private game reserves, Mpumalanga
- Tswalu Kalahari Reserve, Northern Cape
- Dunes Country House, St Francis Bay

Mid-range accommodation, including:

- Buccaneers Lodge and Coffee Shack on the Wild Coast
- Lebo's Soweto Backpackers, Joburg
- Umlani Bushcamp in Timbavati, Kruger Park
- Albergo, Plettenberg Bay
- Fairfield Mountain Cottages near Ceres

Eco/adventure activity operators, including:

- Mehloping Adventure Trail in the Eastern Cape Drakensberg
- Moratiwa Tours, Soweto, Joburg
- St Lucia Tours & Charters, KZN
- !Khwatlu San Culture & Education Centre on the West Coast
- AWOL's Masiphumelele Bicycle Tour near Kommetjie, Cape Town
- De Zalze Golf Course, Stellenbosch (the only FTTSA-certified course to date)
- Ocean Blue and Ocean Safaris, Plett
- Dreamcatcher Alternative Winelands Tour

For more details, visit fairtourismsa.org.za

Miedema, at Calabash Tours (calabashtours.co.za), has another success story – the rise of Nelson Sebenzela, an employee for nine years, from worker to shareholder. 'He and a fellow colleague were given the option of buying 15 percent shares in our company three years ago. Today Mongezi Lumka and Nelson Sebenzela each own 15 percent.' For Miedema, who started Calabash in 1997, running the business in a sustainable, responsible manner was a no-brainer. 'If we hadn't chosen a sustainable route I don't think we would still be in the market after all this time ... we have really deep relationships with the communities where we work.'

Bulungula Lodge (bulungula.com) provides an income to half the households in Nqileni village and has paid a profit dividend to the community every year since it was established. 'They are empowered ... because of tourism and (because) the business is run in a sustainable way, which means also being commercially successful,' says Seif.

At Hog Hollow Country Lodge (hog-hollow.com), business success has another welcome knock-on effect: workers become more confident in themselves and in their abilities, and that filters through to life at home. 'Staff here become role models where they live,' says Melton Butler. 'People in their community see how things improve for them and see how they live their lives, and see that that is achievable through hard work and adherence to basic principles.'

'But remember, too, the staff are also faced with opposition: people are jealous or angry because their neighbour is more successful. Poverty is huge, HIV/Aids, alcoholism, drug abuse, lack of good schooling, lack of capacity... It's a difficult road to travel, so while there are positive indications, there is still a long way to go.'

Yet the positives still outweigh the negatives.

'There is the sense of not only receiving but giving too,' Melton Butler says. 'One of the chefs in the kitchen prepares meals [in her spare time] in the village for HIV/Aids sufferers.' The head gardener has a village choir and they sing at the lodge – helping to fund uniforms and transportation costs to choral competitions. Six staff members now have drivers licences and cars. 'Small things – they make a difference.' ●