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Calabash Tours is a leading Responsible travel Company based in Port Elizabeth. Established in 1997, its primary purpose has been to create meaningful interactions between visitors and local township communities. Calabash Tours 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.

The need for more accountability and self-regulation in the tourism 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.

"Being familiar with the process of certification, we were very positive about the way FTTSA went about setting up the criteria and standards for the Volunteer Sector. It was consultative, collaborative, and transparent. In addition, FTTSA again has shown great advocacy and vision, within the tourism industry by developing standards for this fast growing sector. The actual on site assessment was very good, and the resultant report we received very valuable in identifying areas for improvement, as well recognizing aspects that are well done" **Paul Miedema, Owner, Calabash Tours**



