

SOUTHERN STARS

This year marks the 10th anniversary of democracy in South Africa, and the country is full of excitement about the way it is changing. Tourism is essential to the new South Africa, so the government has worked hard to ensure that you can have the best of all possible times...

There was a time when your visit to South Africa was a manicured fortnight of Big Five sightings, awesome landscapes, world class cuisine and a bottle of hearty Cape pinotage for the flight home.

You returned with a suntan, a couple of duty-free curios and, hopefully, some in-focus photographs of a lion kill – hardly enough of an experience to rate you as guest speaker at a Royal Geographic Society dinner. If someone asked if you'd actually met an African who wasn't a bartender or waiter, you passed on that. And who could blame you?

Whisked away on a sanitised tour of a game lodge with fluffy towels, hot and cold running rangers, imported foods, satellite TV, the company of your peers, special events like helicopter breakfasts at waterfalls and five-star Cape Town accommodations with a sunset view of Table Mountain – you may as well have been living in a postcard.

This was 'enclave tourism' in its base form. You were steered away from the community at large. Minimal signs of poverty to stress the senses. Things were, generally, as you would expect to find them in Cancun – or perhaps Sydney. Benidorm with an African twist. Tourism on trainer wheels.

However, a much better South African experience awaits you now. There are scores of tours, lodges, routes and adventures where you can dig deep below the surface of the country, encounter the locals in their home environments, learn about the culture – and still have that bottle of Nederburg in passing...

But here's a newsflash: most of South Africa's 44 million people are dirt-poor. A quarter of them have no idea where dinner will come from tonight. AIDS stalks the poverty-stricken masses and further decimates their ranks. Crime statistics frighten even the stout of heart, even though the crimes are not against tourists. Yet this country is heartbreakingly beautiful, its people equally so.

As a travel photojournalist who spends his working life in southern Africa, I've seen more than my share of forgotten communities. And then I visit a place like Intabazwe Township outside the Free State town of Harrismith and I see the positive legacy of tourism.

There are thousands of trav-

ellers who have 'dropped off the bus' and dipped their toes into the waters of South African culture. In the process, they have been hugely enriched by what they've seen and the people they've met. And in return, they have become benefactors in many different ways.

The groups who visit this dusty township come to meet the Intabazwe Big Five: '14' Tshabalala, a gypsy musician who occasionally gigs with Ladysmith Black Mambazo; the big-hearted Mama Khumalo who raises scores of orphans; Evelyn Skosana, the Mystic Sangoma; Magdalena Mollo, mother of six who talks about daily life in a squatter camp; and the magical Joyce Muhle Mthembu, the tourism information officer who put her township on the world map, and who may just be running for parliament in the April national elections.

Joyce told me recently that a specially formed Dutch foundation was helping to educate the children of Intabazwe, a French couple were collecting clothes and medical supplies for the needy, and another foreign visitor had offered to buy the Mollo family a house in the township.

'Whenever someone gives us funding, we take photographs of the project in progress and send them across to the donors, with all the relevant invoices attached,' said Joyce. 'So they can see we're not wasting their money.'

As part of a growing international trend towards ethical consumption, demands of travellers have changed from one-dimensional Barmy Army experiences or dreams of Shirley Valentine beach romance to wanting more fulfilling experiences. And instead of coming home blistered and hungover, they want to be rejuvenated in body, mind and spirit.

That's why pro-poor tourism and responsible tourism have become buzz-phrases worldwide in recent years. In 1996 the South African government issued a white paper on the development and promotion of tourism in SA, in which responsible tourism was described as an 'absolute necessity if South Africa is to emerge as a successful international competitor'.

As a side event to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, the Responsible Tourism Partnership and Western Cape Tourism organised the Cape Town Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations. It was



Don't forget me: the maker's name and photo on every doll from the Malalea project, Lesotho



Night time in Cape Town



Lion cubs at Sea View game reserve, Eastern Cape

co-chaired by Mike Fabricius of Western Cape Tourism and the legendary Harold Goodwin, of the International Centre for Responsible Tourism.

The year before, SA Tourism had launched the Emerging Tourism Entrepreneur of the Year Awards (ETEYA), designed primarily to encourage and sustain the development of small business within the local tourism grid. During the WSSD, the Imvelo Awards for Responsible Tourism were announced in Johannesburg. The next year saw the birth of the Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa trademark, an IUCN (World Conservation Union) initiative that recognises

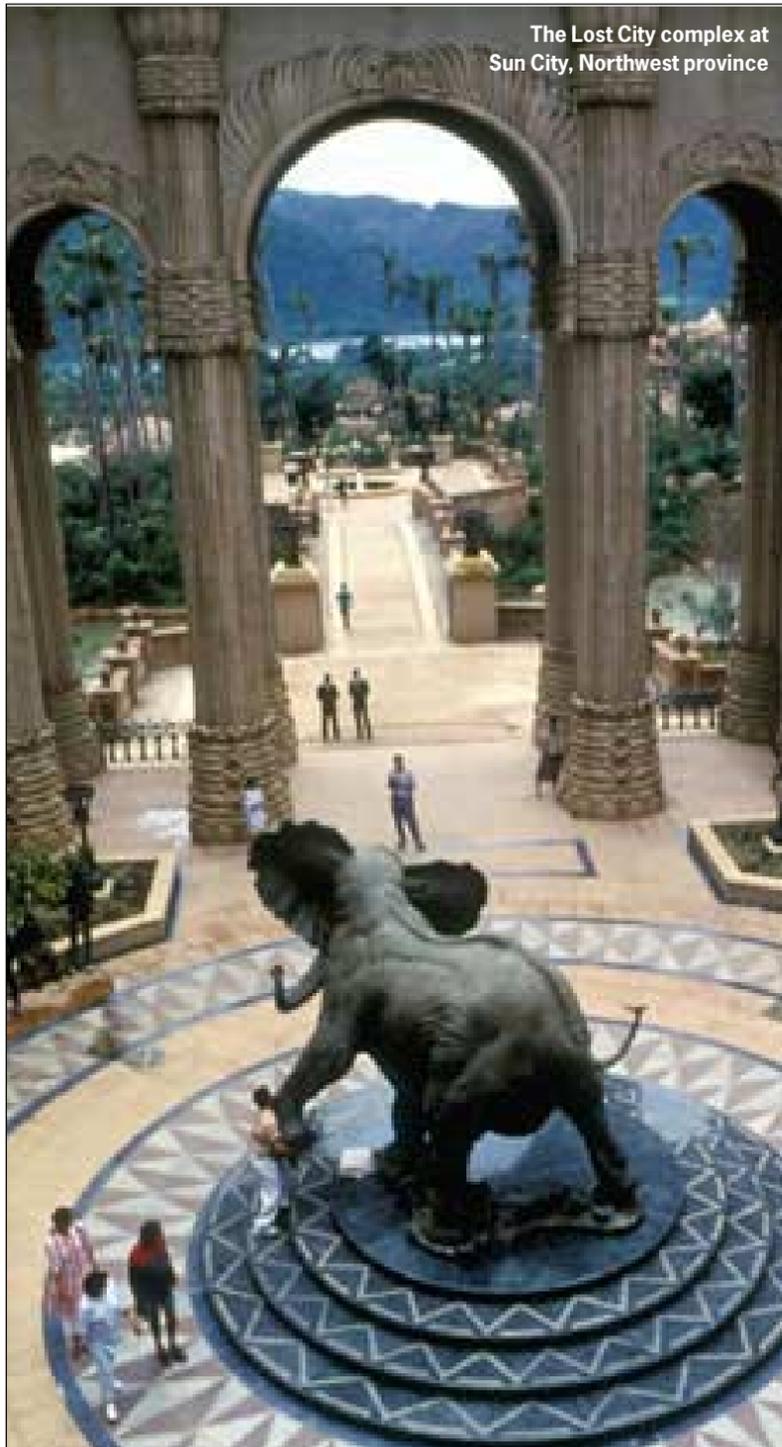
certain special tourism ventures for their efforts in responsible tourism.

In fact, the British Department for International Development (DFID) partners the FTSA initiative in South Africa – and was the first agency to promote the concept of pro-poor tourism in the late 1990s.

The message from all these conferences and award ceremonies, organisations and trademark bodies, is virtually the same. They support: a fair share for the host community; an unspoilt environment; a sustainable tourism venture; a special tourism experience.

Chris Marais

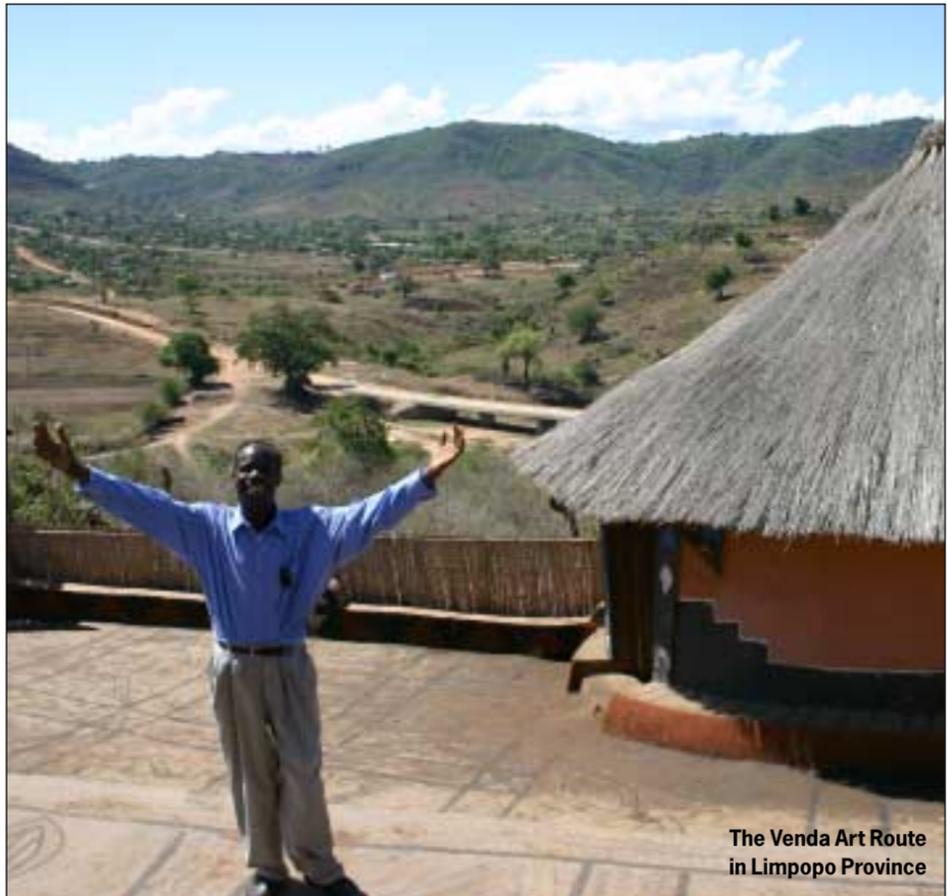
Travellers want more fulfilling experiences. And instead of coming home blistered and hungover, they want to be rejuvenated in body, mind and spirit



The Lost City complex at Sun City, Northwest province



The Glasstudio craft centre in Free State province



The Venda Art Route in Limpopo Province

ETHICAL ADVENTURES

Ethical – often community-based – tourism operations are important to the new South Africa. You can respect the people and the places you visit... and have the adventure of your life. Here are some South African businesses, destinations and routes that stand head and shoulders above the rest. Most have won awards issued by Imvelo or have the Fair Trade in Tourism SA (FTTSA) trademark

GAUTENG PROVINCE

By now you will have heard of big, bad Johannesburg and its insane crime rate. Brochures and websites will warn about the Joburg central business district and the gangs that come from the townships of Soweto and Alexandra.

So imagine your surprise when you venture into the inner city precincts of Joburg and see a clean, vibrant set of streets with Art Deco buildings, a community crimewatch programme and a cappuccino society that rises early for its first java fix of the day. The Market Theatre district, the Nelson Mandela Bridge, the Heritage Route of Soweto, the Apartheid Museum and a good shebeen tour of Alex where you'll drink with the brothers of the struggle – you cannot claim to have visited South Africa until you've tasted these heady fruits.

Much of the improvement of Joburg is a result of the pressure of negative media image and the determined efforts of government to harness poverty relief programmes and clear the area for sustainable tourism. The Golden City is getting its jive back.

Fact is, nowadays a tour through Johannesburg (with a registered guide) is a delight of discovery. And Township Tours are entirely crime-free. The irony

is that South Africa has taken its worst feature (Joburg, where most tourists didn't want to spend a single night) and transformed it into one of its finest. Cape Town will astound you with its beauty, but Joburg will rock you with its humanity.

Soweto: Sizwe Tours 00 27 11 975 5239; sizwe@lantic.net

Alexandra: Alex Tourism Association 00 27 11 882 0673; alextoours@fast.co.za

NORTHWEST PROVINCE

SA's largest casino and entertainment complex, Sun City, is a pleasure palace built in the hollow of an extinct volcano in the late 1970s.

The resort is totally self-sufficient in waste management and recycles a lot of its water. Sun City has spent millions of rand on community upliftment projects and hires local contractors for repair work. It supports local craft training projects and has built a hydroponic vegetable farm in a nearby village.

Sun City Hotel 00 27 14 557 1001; asteyn@sunint.co.za

LIMPOPO PROVINCE

Shiluvuvar Lakeside Lodge near the mission station of Elim in Limpopo is the local powerhouse for tourism. It provides good

lodgings and great food at reasonable prices. But its owners are also passionate about local tourism, and very few people stay over at Shiluvuvar without doing a tour of the Venda Art Route in the region in the company of a guide provided by the Ribolla Tourism Association. The route takes in visits to world-famous artists, potters and carvers, with a few 'social detours' along the way for some exposure to village life.

The staff at Shiluvuvar have benefitted from training and job enlargement over the years. The ownership of the lodge also reflects the changing nature of the SA tourism industry in that it boasts a number of black partners. Shiluvuvar Lodge: 00 27 15 556 3406; www.shiluvuvar.com

MPUMALANGA PROVINCE

Sabi Sabi, which borders on the Kruger National Park, was the first private game reserve in SA to introduce a natural wetland wastewater management system. In a dry region where many game lodges use water indiscriminately, this feature wins Sabi Sabi big points on the conservation side of responsible tourism.

Lion Sands, on the same conservancy, is the only lodge in the area to employ a full-time ecologist to help achieve a balance

between conservation, community and commercial interests.

Nearby is one of the most popular tourism experiences in the province: the Shangana Cultural Village. You can get it horribly wrong with a cultural village, and as a result they're not most people's cup of tea. But at Shangana, things are different. The atmosphere is more genuine, friendlier and far more interesting than at your bog-standard so-called cultural village.

Guests visit the Marula Market at Shangana, which sells locally made arts and crafts; they tour a living village and learn about Shangaan customs and traditional medicines; or they join a nightly feast where there is dancing, acting and merriment on offer. Shangana supports more than 20 local businesses and has created in excess of 200 jobs. A management-staff shareholding scheme is in place and the property has been offered through the Lands Claim Commission to the local community, to ensure their increased involvement.

Sabi Sabi Private Game Reserve 00 27 11 483 3939; pshorten@sabisabi.com
Lion Sands Private Game Reserve 00 27 13 751 2000; nickm@lionsands.com
Shangana Cultural Village 00 27 13 737 7000; shangana@fast.co.za

EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE

The Eastern Cape, traditional battleground between Xhosa tribes and the 1820 British Settlers, is one of SA's poorest provinces. And because it is so under-developed, the Eastern Cape is also one of our most beautiful, pristine areas.

Calabash Tours & Trust takes its guests close to the cultures of the Eastern Cape, including spectacular visits to the local townships. With one of its clients, Saga Holidays, Calabash built the Ekaya Arts & Crafts Centre in the squatter-village of Ramaphosa. Calabash shows local and hires local – most of its goods are purchased from businesses within a 50km radius.

Mbotyi River Lodge, in the Pondoland region of the Eastern Cape hires 90 per cent of its staff from the local community and gives them skills training. The campsite is jointly owned by the lodge and the local Community Trust, which has brought in R80,000 in its first year of operation.

The lodge has helped a number

of tourism-related enterprises start up along the Pondo Cultural Trail – it also handles bookings for a local horse trail company at no charge.

Stormsriver Adventures, one of the most exciting adventure outfits in SA, has a responsible environmental programme in action, feeds 135 local schoolchildren twice a week and has trained 24 local guides in eco-tourism adventure activities.

Calabash Tours: 00 27 41 585 6162; www.access.web.za/calabash
Mbotyi River Lodge: 00 27 39 253 8822; www.mbotyi.co.za
Storms River Adventures: 00 27 42 281 1836; www.stormsriver.com

WESTERN CAPE

Just when you thought the Garden Route could not get more sensational, along come a few dozen pods of Southern Right Whales, calving and cavorting all along the coastline for the season. It's the finest free show on Earth.

Another type of holiday you can try is Research Tourism (elephant-darting expeditions, blood-sample missions and the like) and that's just what it feels like at dawn, out on the sea with Ocean Blue Adventures. Whether it's spyhopping whales or surfing dolphins in their thousands, you pick up on their aqua-adrenaline and suddenly you're having the time of your life. Ocean Blue makes a point of taking youngsters from disadvantaged communities out and educating them on matters marine.

Hazel's Home Stays, operating out of Oudtshoorn, has done groundbreaking work in bringing travellers into the townships and encouraging entrepreneurs in tourism. With tourism duties shared between a number of families in the area, business benefits are spread evenly.

Spier Estate, outside Stellenbosch, is an eco-friendly tourism establishment that embraces winelands, an outdoor theatre, a country club, hotel, golf course, wildlife rehab project and an equestrian centre. It is involved in numerous community and land reform projects, organic farming schemes and recycles its own water.

Ocean Blue Adventures: 00 27 44 533 5083; linda@oceanadventures.co.za
Hazel's Homestays: 00 27 44 272 4380
Spier Estate: 00 27 21 809 1100; info@spier.co.za

FREE STATE PROVINCE

What began a few years ago as a modest little French wire craft project in the southern Free State town of Jagersfontein has developed into a vibrant, highly creative exporting operation that employs and has trained up more than 20 members of the local community.

Run by Naas and Gil Vermaak, Glaasstudio has put Jagersfontein on the map again. Day-trippers and passers-by pop in, spend time in the large workshop and invariably purchase some of the unique products.

Glaasstudio Crafts: 00 27 51 724 0259; gillian@shisas.com

KWAZULU NATAL PROVINCE

Rocktail Bay Lodge, run by Wilderness Safaris, is part-owned by the local Mqobela and Mpukane communities and the conservation authority, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife. Fresh produce, curios and cultural tourism activities all come from the local community, which welcomes guests. Wilderness Safaris assists with turtle, shark and whale research programmes in the region.

In the northern part of KZN, Phinda Private Game Reserve is a beacon of environmental recovery. Formerly a degraded piece of farmland, it has been rehabilitated and restocked with wildlife. Phinda employs a staff 250, 80 per cent of them local, and keeps close ties with the community.

Rocktail Bay Lodge 00 27 11 883 0747; patrickb@sdn.wilderness.co.za
Phinda Private Game Reserve 00 27 11 809 4400; phinda@ccafrika.com

NORTHERN CAPE

The Northern Cape Province is, traditionally, one of SA's poorest regions and yet it is also one of the most starkly beautiful areas of the country.

Every spring, tourists flock to the Namaqualand, where huge fields of daisies appear – as if from nowhere – in the scrub desert. The visitors feast on lamb, cold-water crayfish and the sweet wines of the region, spending their days among the flowers.

Although still in its relative infancy, the South-North Tourism Route (SNTR) of the Northern Cape promises to be a major tourism asset to South Africa. It is a community-based route that

The Sotho Sounds band, from Maleala Village, Lesotho, who played at Womad in 2003



White rhino and her calf in Hluhluwe-Umfolozi game reserve, Kwazulu Natal

stretches from Cape Town to Ganigobes in southern Namibia, based on 'equitable, sustainable and responsible tourism in conjunction with local people'.

The SNTR will offer: a 13-day Youth Leaders for the Environment course that includes studies of Table Mountain, Bushman rock art, west coast fishing traditions, unusual geological sites, informal settlements and diamond diving; a 15-day Koisan Trail, following the history of Iron Age settlers; a 10-day Succulent Safari to see parts of the province's unique floral kingdom; a 15-day Photographic Safari; an eight-day Wilderness Challenge down the Orange River and through the rugged Richtersveld; a Mountain Desert Walk, a Wildflower Walk and a bicycle trip up and down the route.

www.south-north.co.za
Chris Marais

The tourist heart of the Venda Art Route

