

Tourists miss local culture

Western Union-sponsored route to encourage traveller visits

Claire Allison

TOURISM is one of the biggest job creators in the world and was recognised by the G20 as a driver of economic growth at the G20 summit in Mexico in June, marking the first time travel and tourism has been included in the G20 Leaders' Declaration.

What has become clear is that local enterprises desperately need a traveller market to connect to in order for this to work and for jobs to not only be created, but sustained.

Driving through the picturesque landscape of Limpopo, many travellers passing through are on their way to the Kruger National Park or one of the surrounding private game lodges, which never lose their appeal.

In an ideal world these travellers, both local and international, would spend time in the local towns staying overnight on their way in or out of the park to get a taste of the real Africa.

Money transfer company Western Union has sponsored a travel route in the Limpopo province along the western border of the Kruger National Park where the perfect opportunity exists for travellers to get the best of both worlds – a taste of real Africa and the ultimate safari experience.

In time the "adoption" of this travel route and marketing efforts generated by it aims to drive travellers into areas off the beaten track to learn more about the culture, history and heritage of the surrounding areas, while enjoying the smaller tourist attractions, and can help sustain livelihoods.

Bertha Shluisi Baloyi of the Greater Giyani Jewellery Project in Giyani, a town 80km north of Phalaborwa, used to employ 39 beaders and now employs

only 11 people. Most of her staff left for greener pastures as they were not generating enough income.

"We make beautiful things but we need to connect to a market," she said. "Our staff are trained for up to five years in various traditional Shangaan beading techniques but without a market we cannot survive."

Rich Mabunda, the project manager of Thomo Heritage Park 8km outside Giyani, has the same to say. Thomo is an Iron Age site and living museum where guests can sleep in traditional Tsonga huts, dine on traditional fare and enjoy the culture and history in Rich's guided tours of the park. We get visitors from as far as China, Holland and the US," he said.

"But sometimes we can go up to three months without visitors. Thomo's electricity supply is off-grid so every time guests book in, Rich has to buy petrol for his generator, a very costly piece of equipment to run with the price of petrol these days. Rich makes little to no profit at the end of the his guests' stay."

This is the sad reality for most rural tourism enterprises.

If the market existed, more jobs could be created and standards would improve and rural areas would thrive on the influx of travellers. Such would give local communities a sense of pride.

In a country so rich with cultural heritage and history, diverse people and places and a plethora of attractions to keep just about any visitor happy, why is it that travellers are bypassing the rest of South Africa to get to "the good stuff" when so much of it is right on our doorstep?

For more information on the Western Union sponsored route Rixile Culture to Kruger Route, visit www.openafrica.org



HARD WORK: Markets are needed for crafts from the Giyani Jewellery Project and such.



TOURIST: Visitors tour Thomo Heritage Park.



MAKE IT BIG: Shangaan women at Thomo Heritage Park need more visitors to keep trade alive.

Breakfast in
Brixton
Walkies
talkies

Norah Huyzers

I, LIKE most people, would prefer a life that runs smoothly; a life path that cuts serenely through the alphabet from A to Z. An explosive entry, then a nice, gentle journey to a quiet, peaceful end.

But Mrs Ruby, the small, fat, white dog, demonstrates what a life path is all about. We go from A, then waddle over to Q, for some reason. Then back to F, a long sniff and a quick hurry to W.

This involves criss-crossing the street of life. Halfway up one side, we must cross the road and go back down to check on something unsniffed.

Many a time, we must walk in the middle of the road, following a smell of vital importance, with cars hooting, swerving and swearing at us to step aside. Then back onto the pavement, with a smooth, safe path for a while.

As in every life, there are confrontations on the walk.

Two German shepherds in Kingston Frost Park, when we least expect it. And we are deathly afraid as they circle us like wolves.

We must be strong and face our fears.

We get mugged and robbed. We must learn to let go of material possessions and learn to walk again without constantly swivelling our heads, looking for danger.

Often we meet wonderful creatures on our walk.

Like the sweet, honest face of the Sowetan Special, a dog of great heart and serenity.

He doesn't care if we screwed up at work or if the wheelie bin has been stolen and the rubbish is overflowing at the house. He