

R4.5 Million Project Boosts SA Tourism Beyond 2010 World Cup

Raw Africa, Induna Adventures and Roc ‘n Rope are the local partners of the whl.travel global travel network to benefit from this initiative.

As South Africa prepares to host the world’s biggest sporting event, an innovative project by the African regional office of **whl.travel**, a global online travel-booking network of local tour operators, will ensure that small accommodation providers in Mpumalanga, Southern Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal are marketed beyond the hype of the 2010 World Cup to international travellers as well as to South Africans wanting to explore their own country.

The project is being partly funded by the Shared Growth Challenge Fund, a Business Trust project which aims to stimulate pro-poor innovation and growth from the private sector. This R4.5 million, 18-month project aims at getting at least 150 accommodation providers online and sustainably positioned with enhanced exposure and bookable websites.

Zachary Rozga from WHL Consulting, a partner in the project, explains that the project aims to “get bums in the beds of small and medium tourism accommodation venues by setting up unique websites for accommodation providers, as well as offering affordable package holidays that combine accommodation and fun activities for visitors.”

The basis of the **Shared Growth Challenge Fund** project is a creative concept called the **Tourism Development Bank**, “which uses room nights as currency,” says Rozga. In return for paying a registration fee of R300 and donating 18 room nights, local accommodation providers are assessed for market readiness, and, if deemed market ready, receive:

- a selection of professionally taken photos of their property, including photos for use in ‘immersive tours’ where travellers can take a virtual online tour of a venue;
- a professionally drafted travel write-up highlighting the venue’s appeal to experiential and mindful travellers;
- a unique e-commerce website linked to the whl.travel global network;
- access to a local whl.travel tourism market training seminar.

The 18 room nights, which Rozga calls “the bed bank,” will be used by whl.travel in affordable package holidays that combine accommodation with local tours and activities like river rafting, abseiling, horse-riding and hiking so boosting local tourism.

The **Shared Growth Challenge Fund** project is being piloted through a partnership between the Africa regional office of whl.travel, WHL Consulting, which will manage the project, and three local whl.travel operators based in the Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal regions.

Danny Pinkas from www.MpumalangaHighlands.Travel, one of the local whl.travel partners, describes the project as “a win-win situation for everyone involved, from tour operators and accommodation establishments to travellers as well as local communities, who will benefit from spinoffs.”

Darron Raw from Raw Africa, www.kzn.travel, another whl.travel partner agrees: "Up until now a large number of SME accommodation and activity providers have not been able to participate effectively on the Internet, and this project will integrate them in a professional online e-marketing and booking service."

Says Jaco Lubbe of Induna Adventures, who oversees both the www.panorama-tours.travel and www.krugersafaris.travel whl.travel portals, "The outcome of this initiative will help local accommodation establishments to provide a more professional and technologically 'with it' service to the world. It will also create a platform and give the accommodation establishments the necessary tools to be more visible to specific target markets. I am convinced that this project will help make our piece of the earth more sustainable for generations to come."

Both whl.travel and WHL Consulting are part of the WHL Group, the largest local-travel company in the world.

whl.travel is a global online travel-booking network of local tour operators. It is the springboard for independent consumers headed off the beaten path and yearning to book accommodation, tours and other activities from local businesses, no matter how small, and especially those making socially responsible and sustainable decisions about their destinations, often in the developing world.

The Shared Growth Challenge Fund, The pilot program of Business Trust (www.btrust.org <<http://www.btrust.org>>), was conceived to harness and leverage the private sector's capacity for innovation, investment, risk-taking and growth. Facilitating the inclusion of poor people historically excluded from participating in and benefiting from the formal economy. Over the 10 year period a number interventions have been pursued. The most recent being the piloting of market-based approaches to poverty reduction in areas of extreme poverty. The Shared Growth Challenge Fund involves the use of one-off grants to private companies to support 'pro-poor' innovation and to stimulate private sector investment and risk-taking. Providing profitable ways of improving market access for the poor as producers or consumers

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