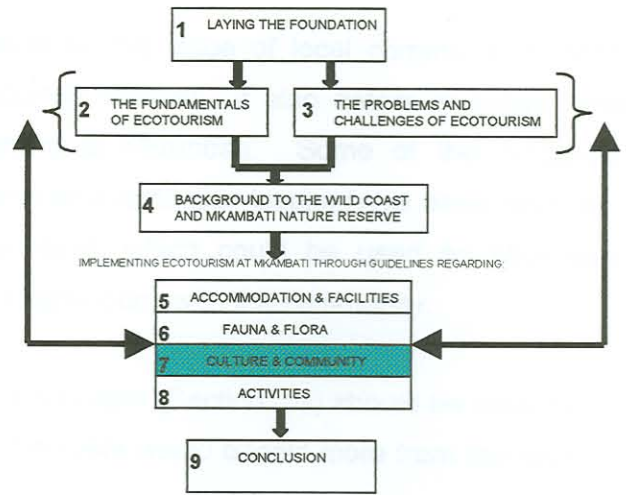


## Chapter 7

# Implementing ecotourism: culture and community



### 7.1 Introduction

Chapter 7 continues putting theory into practice at Mkambati by developing guidelines for the implementation of ecotourism in the area of culture and community. The fundamental of the local community forms the focus, but the ecotourism industry and the tourist also have roles to play in utilizing culture as a resource and fostering community involvement. Part of Mkambati's mission statement is to achieve participation, on an equal-partnership basis, from the local community in planning and managing the reserve. The statement also mentions the integration of local culture into the operation of Mkambati.

Mkambati falls under the Thaweni Tribal Authority of the Lusikisiki district. This Authority consists of six administrative areas, each of which is led by a headman, all of whom are responsible to Chief Mhlanga. Each administrative area is comprised of several villages which are further divided into various *izithebe* or mat associations (Kepe, 2000a).

The issue of who the local community is and, more importantly who has rights to what land, and can benefit from developments, is highly contested in this area. This constraint was introduced in Section 4.5. Currently, several communities have laid a claim to land rights in Mkambati Nature Reserve and TRACOR land. All have some basis for their claim if the three characteristics of a community provided in Section 2.3 are taken into consideration. The process of determining to whom the land belongs has been complicated by the Wild Coast SDI, which included all six administrative areas under Thaweni as a single 'local community'. Expectations were raised and 'locals' are now reluctant to exclude themselves from any possible restitution benefits (Kepe, 2000a). Furthermore, the reserve is seen by the local community as one of the few economic opportunities available to them, that can improve their quality of life (Prinsloo, 1999a). Livelihood is currently gained through arable and livestock farming, and the collection of a range of natural resources and external sources of income, including remittances and pensions (Kepe, 2000a).

For various historical, political, and economic reasons, the issue of local community benefit, participation, and empowerment is a source of current tension. It also deters investors, and poses a serious threat to ecotourism development at Mkambati. Some of the proposed guidelines will only be feasible once community and land restitution issues have been resolved. However, the guidelines provide some practical ideas, which could be used by Mkambati management as points of leverage in the on-going negotiations with the community.

In light of the above complications, the two-tier benefit system (Section 2.3) should be considered at Mkambati, whereby immediate local community members would benefit more from the reserve than those further afield.

Besides examining how communities can be involved, this chapter also has a strong cultural and historical element, setting guidelines for the utilization of the culture of the local people and the history of Mkambati as resources for tourism. The Wild Coast SDI also promotes a focus on cultural-historical tourism as a unique drawcard. This chapter deals mainly with the fundamentals of the local community, followed by the ecotourism industry and the tourists.

## 7.2 Current involvement in Mkambati Nature Reserve

Currently, the only direct economic benefit for local residents is to those employed by the reserve. There are 130 people on Mkambati's staff, but it was not possible to ascertain how many of them are from villages in the Thaweni Tribal Authority. Local people have seasonal access to the following natural resources of Mkambati, for which they pay a small fee:

- woodlot trees for construction and firewood;
- thatching grass; and
- angling fish (Prinsloo, 1999b).

## 7.3 Using culture as a resource for tourism at Mkambati

Attempts are being made to create a strong 'sense of place' for the region, one which is deeply rooted in the cultural-historical context of the Xhosa people. However, there is currently very limited information on, and use of the Xhosa people and their history and culture at Mkambati.

The reserve has an opportunity to carve a unique niche for itself within this macro picture – not by replicating what is being done in other areas, but by linking its cultural ventures to the natural environment.

Considering the ecotourism fundamental of the local community, Mkambati Nature Reserve needs to ensure that the local communities benefit equitably from the tourism development of this area. However, since the core business of Mkambati Nature Reserve is conservation management (Prinsloo, 1999b), it should not be required of Mkambati to invest a significant amount of their time and resources into the training and capacity building of local Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs), except for local guides for fauna, flora, and cultural/historical tours within the reserve.

However, Mkambati should play a role in identifying opportunities for local SMMEs to benefit financially from the development of the reserve, for example, arts and crafts, the management of an indigenous nursery inside the reserve, and the provision of accommodation within the community. SMMEs should also be used as far as is possible, in the production of information materials, for example, recycled unbleached paper. To aid this process, Mkambati management should work in close partnership with the Triple Trust Organisation introduced in Section 4.2, who have been appointed by the EU to develop SMMEs on the Wild Coast.

Environmental education and capacity building for local people should also be a key priority and must be integrated into all management objectives, goals, and strategies (Prinsloo, 1999b). Local universities or other training institutions with a broad base of expertise could be enlisted to conduct training courses to improve the management and public relations skills of local entrepreneurs as well as to educate them on ecotourism.

A further valuable way of involving local communities is through indigenous knowledge systems. Prinsloo (1999b) mentions the importance of recognising local customs, traditions, and indigenous knowledge regarding the conservation of biodiversity. This knowledge can also be interpreted to visitors.

It is important to keep in mind that most of the employment or income-generation opportunities offered by Mkambati Nature Reserve to the local community will be seasonal and dependent on visitor interest. In the study on current visitors to Mkambati, the main draw-card was the solitude and natural resources. Cultural and historical pursuits were not high on their agenda, while rest and relaxation were priorities (Kepe, 2000b). While most visitors were not averse to the idea of

visiting local communities and purchasing local goods, it is unlikely that their interest would be high enough to provide sustained and viable economic opportunities for the local community. Active marketing is therefore vital to draw more international tourists, who are interested in learning about natural and cultural resources. In addition, the local community needs to understand that, given the fluctuating context within which tourism takes place, ecotourism ventures need to supplement, not replace other livelihood sources. If this is not established, unrealistic expectations will be raised.

#### **7.4 Promoting an ecotourism ethos and culture amongst staff, visitors, and the local community**

Staff, visitors, and the local community need to be informed and educated about the benefits of ecotourism and the role each group can play in promoting ecotourism. If Mkambati is to provide an authentic ecotourism experience, it needs to ensure that the principles of ecotourism permeate the organisation. To do this, the following suggestions are made:

- Develop an education programme on ecotourism in the form of information sessions and workshops for management and staff.
- Use existing governance forums and education programmes to present ideas and information on ecotourism to the local community.
- As mentioned in Section 4.6.2, an ecotourism code of conduct must be developed. This should include guidelines on interacting with, and supporting the local community.

#### **7.5 Interpreting Mkambati's culture and history to visitors**

In this regard, the following recommendations are made:

- Conduct participatory action research to document and map the culture and history of Mkambati. The 'story' of Mkambati needs to be told as experienced by people who lived there in both the recent and distant past, bearing in mind that Mkambati has both an indigenous and colonial history.
- In the Mkambati guide booklet, cultural-historical sites should be pointed out. These could include the shipwreck, the island, the two churches, and buildings over 100 years old, and be linked to its history as a mission station, leper colony, and tuberculosis hospital. Existing historical sites will have to be restored, for example, the two churches, one of which is in a particularly derelict state. Local people could be employed or contracted to assist with the restoration efforts.

- Provide a trail guide and information on the historical and cultural significance of Mkambati as part of the guide booklet. This map can also be displayed on the back of menus at the Clubhouse, inside toilet doors, at Reception, and at the Environmental Education Centre. One large colourful map should be displayed prominently at Reception. Display information in small perspex holders/wooden frames at cultural and historical sites. Telling the story of The Lodge, for example, has already been mentioned in Section 5.3.1. A short cultural ramble at Main Gate is also advised, taking tourists past the two churches and the units where the lepers were housed. Interesting information can be displayed at these places.
- Interpret fauna and flora to the visitor from a cultural perspective. For example, place an information board on the mahogany tree explaining its cultural significance to the indigenous Xhosa people of the area. In this instance its significance is medicinal. In addition, if local people have contributed to natural resource management using indigenous methods, these practices should also be interpreted to tourists.
- Identify and train young people to conduct guided cultural-historical trails within Mkambati. These guides could also be trained to conduct fauna and flora trails. While trained by Mkambati, they should be self-employed with their income dependent on visitor interest. In addition, these guides should demonstrate their commitment by paying a nominal fee to undergo the training.
- Display traditional household items in the accommodation. For example, place traditional kitchen utensils in the kitchens, against the walls, or in corners. Another idea is to buy traditional straw brooms made by local women for use in the accommodation units. Use information boards to explain how these items are used in traditional homesteads. Make some of these items available for tourists to buy at Reception.
- Reception should source and provide information on cultural and historical sites and routes around the Mkambati area, extending throughout the Wild Coast region.
- Post up useful Xhosa translations at the Reception, Environmental Education Centre, Clubhouse, and accommodation units. These could include phrases such as *Molo* (hello), *Unjani?* (how are you?), *Enkosi* (thank you), *Ngubani igama lakho?* (what is your name?), *Simkile* (we are on our way), etc. (Ndukwana *et al*, 2000:20). Many tourists are keen to learn some phrases of the local language.
- Approach local people to perform cultural activities. The use of traditional dance, music, and storytelling at Gwe Gwe Cultural Village has already been proposed. Authenticity and quality are important, although items may need to be shortened. Special training programmes may be needed to ensure high quality performances.

## 7.6 Provision of opportunities for visitor interaction with the local community

The following are suggested:

- A tourism node at Ndindindi on the southern side of the Msikaba has been proposed where tourists can stay with the local community in huts. This idea should be pursued, since many tourists engaging in ecotourism seek this type of experience.
- Amadiba Adventures, on the eastern bank of the Mtentu River, promote local cultural events to tourists, and the process is working well. It is recommended that Mkambati establish a 'Local Cultural Events Calendar' in conjunction with the local community. The events open to tourists could then be clearly displayed at Reception. In this way the locals can also benefit by charging a reasonable admission fee and Mkambati enhances its image among the local community and tourists. However, tourists need to be informed about appropriate respectful behaviour at such events. The same applies to tourists staying with locals at Ndindindi.
- Offer visitors an opportunity to spend a morning with Mkambati grass-cutters where they can learn about traditional ways of thatching and weaving. Grass-cutters would be self-employed.

## 7.7 Provision of opportunities for small businesses in the local community to benefit from tourism developments

The following suggestions are made regarding the above:

- Encourage the local community to sell their home crafts, for example, sleeping mats or conventional rush mats, popular Xhosa bags made from goat skins, wire bracelets, and traditional pots used for decoration and serving beer. This could initially be done from Reception. A separate shop may be needed at a later stage. The pricing of these products should ensure a market-related profit for the producers. All locally-made products should have information on the origin of the product, informing tourists of materials used as well as any cultural or historical significance attached to the item.
- Retain the authenticity of local designs, materials, and skills in arts and crafts. When mobilizing the community around Mkambati to make these items, the existing knowledge base regarding crafts must be tested. Where traditional arts and crafts have deteriorated, a programme may be needed to research the original methods.
- Develop a nursery growing indigenous trees and traditional herbs. This nursery could be positioned behind the Learning Centre at the Main Gate allowing easy access for the locals. The nursery would be situated on Mkambati property but owned and managed by locals. It

would provide trees to locals as well as to the reserve, with the reserve purchasing the seedlings from the locals.

- Use local produce and services as far as possible in the provision of all of Mkambati's services, including accommodation, food and beverages (for example crayfish, poultry, fruit and vegetables), and laundry and maintenance services. The locals need encouragement and initial support in establishing such services.
- Develop a formal organisational statement regarding the procurement of local goods and services from SMME service providers.

## 7.8 Conclusion

In keeping with the continuums in Figure 2.3, emphasis must be placed on moving local people from passive involvement to active participation through equitable partnerships in both planning and implementation. Attention must be given to both short-term and long term benefits, and to building good relationships. The ecotourism industry, in particular, has an important role to play in doing this. It is important in planning new ventures, activities, and accommodation, that the community are aware of it and are given the opportunity to participate. The tourists' involvement, in this case, is their interest in learning about, and interacting with local communities. This often extends to a genuine concern about local people and their welfare through tourism development. It is therefore essential, when dealing with this 'new tourist', to include culture as a tourism product. Furthermore, the involvement in, and benefit to the locals should be communicated to tourists. All this is part of moving the tourist from a place of only enjoying an ecotourism destination to a place where enjoyment is coupled with a behavioural and lifestyle change.