

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Rationale

Tourism is the world's largest industry in terms of the numbers of people participating, the amount of resources generated, and its employment capacity. International tourists arrivals have been increasing steadily from 362 million people in 1987 to 458 million in 1990 to 518 million in 1993 and 594 million in 1996 (Reid, 1999). For most countries such as South Africa, tourism is becoming an increasingly attractive source of income and a means of financing other developments. According to Bennett (2000: 7) tourism in South Africa is seen as a major job creation force and a source of wealth.

According to McIntosh et al (1990) tourism is a multi-faceted economic activity, which interacts with the environment in the framework of a two-way process. Tourism has both economic opportunities and social and environmental by-products. Environmental resources provide, on one hand, one of the basic "ingredients", a critical production factor, for the production of the tourist product, the natural and/or manmade setting for the tourist to enjoy, live in, and relax. On the other hand, it produces a variety of unwanted by-products, which are disposed of, either intentionally or unintentionally in to the environment.

There are many forms of tourism, amongst others are mass tourism, sports tourism, urban tourism, nature-based tourism, heritage/cultural tourism, farm tourism, community tourism, eco-tourism, rural tourism, and adventure tourism. This study focuses on rural tourism as a unique tourism product that has a potential for both environmental conservation and rural development in the Limpopo Province of South Africa (see appendix A). Most sources attest to the fact that rural

tourism is yet to be fully explored, although it already has the potential to significantly contribute towards sustainable rural development in most of the developing countries. In the context of this study, rural tourism is viewed as the combination of cultural heritage and nature based tourism. Most tourists, particularly the aged, prefer relatively undisturbed environments. According to Business Day (2001) more and more tourists are asking for an authentic African experience. The Limpopo Province is one of the few places that gives one a greater feeling of being in Africa (Northern Province Tourism Board, 2001).

The Limpopo Province offers a mosaic of exceptional scenic landscape, a fascinating cultural heritage, an abundance of wildlife species and many nature-based tourist opportunities. It is a land of legends and myths and of ancient civilizations. (<http://www.tourismboard.org.za>, 2000). Those in search of history will find many places of archaeological significance dating back millions of years. It is against this background that the potential of rural tourism could be predicted as a fundamental contributing factor towards rural development through resource conservation and the provision of economic and job opportunities for the rural population.

According to Linkorish (1994) the appreciation of rural areas and the wilderness, a concern for conservation and the environment, become much more important over the next decade. Lickorish (1994) further argues that there is much new interest in rural tourism, farm tourism and special interest tourism. Outdoor activities are growing in popularity and demand for rural holidays and farm holidays is increasing. It is also due to this new international trend of interest in products such as rural tourism that a thorough look should be considered for this product.

Rural tourism, as indicated by Page and Getz (1997), is truly global, and yet little is known about it in developing countries. It is ironic that most developed countries have taken rural tourism enterprises very seriously, while most rural areas (developing countries) are yet to exploit it.

According to Page and Getz (1997) in some regions and countries, notably Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand, rural tourism is well established and a big business. During the rural tourism seminar organised jointly by the World Tourism Organisation in 1997, the Government of Israel and the European Travel Commission, together with nine countries, delegates shared their experiences with regard to rural tourism. These countries were Australia, Italy, France, Switzerland, China, Netherlands, Spain, Turkey and Romania (World Tourism Organisation, 1997).

Many countries are now beginning to realise that rural tourism has the potential, not only of combating overdevelopment in cities or coasts, but is rather an essential means of achieving a balanced development and maintaining, protecting, and often enhancing natural and cultural heritage (World Tourism Organisation, 1997). Robinson (1990) argues that tourist ventures are some of the few development options available for many rural areas seeking to develop their local economy. These areas are often geographically remote but possess great scenic beauty and are very attractive propositions for tourists. It is in this context that the Limpopo Province as a rural area with beautiful natural and cultural heritage possesses a competitive advantage when it comes to rural tourism.

Rural tourism is a multi-faceted activity, which takes place in an environment outside heavily urbanised areas. It is an industry sector characterised by small-scale tourism businesses set in areas where agricultural activities and forestry dominate land use. Rural tourism can represent to the traveler, an essence of country life (Australia's Commonwealth Department of Tourism, 1994).

Most forms of development initiatives in rural areas run against conservation and sustainability principles. O'Riordan (1995) argues that the global environment debate is a mixture of worry for

the planet Earth as a whole, and a concern for billions of less fortunate humans whose children face a possible future of desperate choices - between dying and staying alive by destroying the fabric of existence that will keep their children alive in 10 - 20 years time. Hugo et al (1997) argues that the whole environmental crisis simply boils down to a question of supply and demand. An assumption is made that rural tourism could play a fundamental role towards rural development since tourism prospects are high in rural areas.

The Limpopo Province, where this study is conducted, is predominantly rural (see chapter 3, 3.4). Comparatively speaking it is also one of the poorest provinces in South Africa. It seems that through a well-planned development and targeted marketing of the diverse range of rural tourism products available in the Limpopo Province, country towns; local communities and individuals can benefit from this emerging segment of the tourism industry. However, for the above-mentioned benefits to be realised, a coherent, comprehensive, clear and co-ordinated rural tourism strategy should be developed. The rural tourism development strategy will lay down the principles that will guide and provide direction for tourism development in the province.

Inciting tourists to venture beyond South Africa's capital cities will not only benefit rural areas, but will demonstrate a greater diversity of tourism product that can only make South Africa more competitive and a global tourism player. The province offers great potential for rural tourism enterprise development. Rural tourism, if well planned, can assist in reducing poverty, which Hugo et al (1997) argues is a cause for environmental degradation. South African Integrated Rural Development Strategy (1999) rarely mentions, if at all, anything concerning tourism or rural tourism. It should be noted that rural development is more than just agriculture, and encompasses all forms of development aimed at poverty eradication, job creation, food security and ultimately a better life for all.

## 1.2 The importance of Rural Tourism

Tourism's potential contribution to development has become especially important because of Sub-Saharan Africa's declining performance. Many African countries initially tried to develop economically by expanding and increasing the range of primary exports from agriculture and mining. When this did not provide satisfactory economic growth, Africa turned to industrialisation as a road to a quick and sustainable economic growth. Contemporary Africa's endemic economic stagnation and poverty suggest that these strategies have not worked for the continent. It is in this context that attention has focused on tourism's contribution to development, especially in rural areas (Reid, 1999).

One contribution that tourism can make to sustainable development, particularly in rural areas, is to enable more villagers to make a living out of tourism related activities rather than by exploiting resources through woodcutting and marginal lands cultivation. Rural areas have long been seen and used as appropriate locations for recreation and tourism activities (Butler, et al, 1998). It is in this context that a carefully, planned rural tourism enterprise could provide rural economic transformation in tune with the aspirations of the people.

There is another important way in which rural tourism can contribute to rural development. It can provide a source of money for the community, so that local people can afford to let the natural and cultural resource bases recover. There is a "window of opportunities" in the Limpopo Province because of its richness in natural and cultural resources. Awareness of the need to conserve environmental resources is increasing rapidly as the ecosystems themselves deteriorate, but short term imperatives of food and survival is a hindering action. Rural tourism could prove to be a valuable form of development that is compatible with environmental resources, thus ensuring long term benefits for both the industry and rural people.

The Limpopo Province has severe economic problems, but also has opportunities to put rural tourism on the right track. According to the Sunday Times (1999) tourism is the road to job creation and prosperity. If given a priority status, it has the potential to start a boom in the SADC countries. Relatively undisturbed areas offer great chances for tourism and in particular, rural tourism. According to the Northern Province Tourism Board the Limpopo Province portrays the quintessence of untamed Africa ([www.tourismboard.org.za](http://www.tourismboard.org.za), 2000). As a result of its natural and cultural resource abundance, the province is well positioned for rural tourism prosperity.

Rural tourism should promote local participation, the conservation of resources and economic opportunities for the rural communities, provided it is well planned and implemented. However, experience has shown that tourism around the globe, and particularly in the developing world, suffers from uneven development, ensuring poor returns and disproportionate incomes due to poor planning and management (Sindinga, 1996). Tourism in South Africa has a poor history of involving local communities and previously neglected groups in tourist related activities. The essence of South Africa's conservation policies under the apartheid government was largely a programme to select interesting biological complexes and bestow on them a distinct status. Although conservation in South Africa was perceived to be successful, there was a large element of failure because rural communities have been bypassed and alienated from the conservation effort (World Bank, 1995).

People had been forcibly removed from their land to make way for conservation areas and as a result, there was much anger and a feeling that animals were thought to be more important than people. Rural communities had, in the past, regarded themselves as playing no part in tourism and considered themselves merely as objects for tourists to view. The history of community resistance to conservation in these areas has coloured perceptions of both tourism and conservation, which are both often perceived as threats (Handley, 1996).

As indicated above, the Limpopo Province is not only rich in natural resource, but in cultural heritage as well. But the two have been separated to an extent that rural people feel disenfranchised from tourism and conservation activities. In the context of this study the combination of both the natural and cultural resources could benefit rural communities. The challenge facing the province is to develop strategies to rectify the imbalances of the past and open up the tourism industry for participation of the hitherto disadvantaged citizens for the benefit of both tourism and conservation and the rural community. The tourism competitive advantage of the province lies in its rural nature. The Limpopo province is 89% rural (Statistics SA, Census, 1996). It is against this background that developing a rural tourism development strategy could place the province on the national and international tourism map.

### **1.3 Research design and procedure**

#### **1.3.1 Problem statement**

The challenge facing tourism is to create new alternative tourism products that will meet the need for a new form of tourism demand such as rural tourism. Few areas can compare with the Limpopo Province in terms of African culture and natural beauty. The concept of rural tourism in South Africa is still in its infancy. The rules of the game, with respect to rural tourism development have never been written. Equally, new tourism activities (e.g. the cultural/African village) which have been started have been poorly planned due to lack of a proper development framework. In essence, there is a lack of a coherent, comprehensive, integrated and co-ordinated strategy for rural tourism development for the Limpopo Province of South Africa. The main research problem therefore is to critically review the current national and international tourism strategies, in literature and in practice, against the theoretical principles underlying rural tourism, and to suggest guidelines for rural tourism development in the province.

### **1.3.2 Aim of the study**

The primary aim of the study is to formulate a strategy for rural tourism development for the Limpopo Province of South Africa that would succeed in arousing sensitivity towards the environment, and to provide opportunities for enjoyable, authentic rural experiences for tourists and benefits for local communities.

### **1.3.3 Objectives**

To realise the above primary aim, the following objective have been set:

- To promote a broader understanding of rural tourism product in South Africa, especially in rural areas.
- To analyse foreign tourism development strategies, and in particular, the Australian National Rural Tourism Strategy of 1994.
- To review the tourism policy and strategy in South Africa: White Paper on Tourism Promotion and Development 1996 and Tourism Development Strategy 1998-2000: Tourism in Gear as well as to assess the Limpopo Province rural tourism potential.
- To conduct empirical research with relevant stakeholders.
- To formulate rural tourism development guidelines/principles (strategy).
- To apply the set guidelines or strategy (research results) to the situation in the Limpopo Province.

### **1.3.4 Identified data source**

This study was conducted in the Limpopo Province. The study area or data source has been gathered by engaging stakeholder groups. Stakeholders that were consulted are government departments of tourism at Provincial and National levels, tourism industry bodies at Regional, Provincial and National levels, tour operators (including the cultural/African village operators,



private nature reserves and government-run nature and game reserves), academic institutions, tourists (both local and international) and traditional leaders.

For the purpose of this study, data source were categorised into the following respondent groups:

- Policy makers and administrators (government departments of tourism, tourism boards, tourism associations)
- Tour operators (cultural/African village tour operators, private and government run nature and game reserves)
- Academics (Universities)
- Tourists themselves (local and international)
- Traditional leaders

A total of forty respondents were interviewed individually and in groups in order to get their views and opinions with regard to their involvement in tourism activities. The respondents are regarded as highly knowledgeable in this matter and their inputs are considered a fair reflection of their stakeholder's viewpoint. The sample distribution per respondent groups is as follows: Policy makers and administrators: 7 (four managers, two from the National and two from the Provincial Government, three administrators from the Northern Tourism Board), Tour operators: 14 (four tour operators/guides from Luvhola Cultural village, three tour operators from Tshakuma Cultural tours, two managers from Guvhukuvhu Water Falls, three managers and two staff from Manyeleti Game Reserve), Academics: 4 (one Lecturer from Vista University, two from University of Venda, and one from Madzivhandila College of Agriculture), Tourists: 12 ( six from Australia, four from Germany, two locals, and two Traditional leaders.

### 1.3.5 Research methodology

The choice of methodological approach for this study was guided by concerns as to how best to address the research problem and specific objectives. Unstructured interviews were the primary methodology utilised, and yielded data about rural tourism products perceptions of tourism operators and managers. The suitability of this method for this research is outlined in chapter four. Participant observation techniques and literature review yielded important information in terms of tourism practices in and outside the country. In other words, a qualitative rather than quantitative approach was used for this study.

## 1.4 Terminologies

**Rural tourism** in this study refers to multi-faceted activities that take place in an environment outside highly urbanised areas. It is an industry sector characterised by small-scale and scattered tourism businesses, set in areas where agricultural pursuits and forestry dominates land use. The range of tourism products includes rural attractions, rural adventure and nature-based tours, country towns, rural resorts, farm stays and other styles of rural and village accommodation, cultural festivals and events, arts and heritage, and agricultural education. Rural tourism, in its purest form should be:

- Located in rural areas.
- Functionally rural (small scale enterprise, open space, contact with nature and the natural environment, and traditional societies.
- Rural in scale (settlement).
- Traditional in character.

Source: Butler et al, 1998

According to Reid et al (1995) rural tourism is distinguishable by its projection of (authentic or unauthentic) rural life into the attractions which constitute its core. It is generally constructed around the built or natural environment, and includes programmes such as cultural festivals and traditional activities that often re-enact or provide a flavour of the traditional local or rural culture and history. Rural tourism, in this case, brings together the natural and cultural tourism products. Rural tourism differs from nature-based tourism in the sense that it includes cultural or traditional heritage as part of tourism, as well as local people themselves.

Another argument often raised against rural tourism development is that ecotourism already advocates for sustainable utilisation of both natural and cultural resource for the benefit of the industry and community. While this is true, ecotourism is viewed, in the context of this study as an approach rather than a product itself. Ecotourism as an approach to tourism can be applied to a diverse spectrum of activities like trails, mountaineering, skiing, hotels, cruises and game viewing (Hattingh, 1994a: 5; Cater, 1995:21; Schaller, 2001). Ecotourism is seen as an approach that can be applied to many types of tourism. In other words ecotourism is not, in the context of this study regarded as a product.

Ecotourism principles can be practiced in different types of tourism products such as adventure tourism, rural tourism, urban tourism and beach tourism. We therefore we can have eco-adventure tourism or eco-urban tourism, etc. Rural tourism is not the opposite of eco-tourism. We can have rural tourism that is planned around the principles of eco-tourism for sustainability reasons. In other words, we can have eco-rural tourism. Although there are overlaps in different forms of tourism, such overlaps do not imply that rural tourism cannot stand on its own. It appears that rural tourism can be found only in rural areas. This highlights the dependency of rural tourism businesses on the rural resource base. This is what makes it distinctive.

**Rural areas** are traditionally associated with specific rural functions – agriculture, sparsely populated areas, geographically dispersed settlement patterns, and rurality have been conceptualised in terms of peripherality, remoteness and dependence on rural economic activities (Butler et al, 1998). At times the concept of an urban-rural continuum is used as a means to establish differing degrees of rurality and the essential characteristics of ruralness.

**Sustainable tourism** refers to tourism development and management which optimise the economic and social benefits in the present without jeopardising the potential for similar benefits in the future (South Africa, White Paper, 1996).

**Ecotourism** refers to environmentally and socially responsible travelling to natural areas that promote conservation, have low visitor impact and provide for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local people (South Africa, White Paper, 1996).

**Tourism** refers to travelling for whatever purpose that results in one or more nights being spent away from home, except for work purpose (South Africa, White Paper, 1996).

**Strategy** refers to a total plan and actions that position the organisation in its environment and also defines the mission and objectives to be achieved. A strategy could also be seen as a set of roles, objectives and activities of each part of the operation so that they contribute to and support the vision of an organisation.

**NB: Please note changes of names in the province**

The Limpopo Province was previously known as the Northern Province, Polokwane was known as Pietersburg, Makhado was formerly known as Louis Trichardt, Bela-bela was called Warmbaths, and Musina was known as Mesina.

### **1.5 Outline of the report**

This report will be divided into the following chapters:

- Chapter one: introduction and background
- Chapter two: literature review: an international perspective
- Chapter three: literature review: South African tourism policies and the Limpopo province tourism situational analysis
- Chapter four: research methodology and findings
- Chapter five: proposed guidelines for rural tourism development strategy (research results)
- Chapter six: application of the research results to provincial situation

### **1.6 Conclusion**

It appears as if rural tourism, if well planned, developed and promoted, can contribute tremendously towards job creation and rural development as well as conservation and tourism development. This study is about reviewing tourism strategies in and outside the country from a rural tourism perspective with the aim of formulating a coherent, comprehensive, integrated and co-ordinated strategy for rural tourism development in the Limpopo Province of South Africa, that could also be adopted in other provinces.