

## CHAPTER SIX: THE APPLICATION OF THE PROPOSED RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES (RESEARCH RESULTS) TO THE LIMPOPO PROVINCE SITUATION

### 6.1 Introduction

Collectively, the literature reviewed both locally and internationally, and the respondents provide a clear overview of the important issues and opportunities facing Rural Tourism Development. In terms of natural and cultural tourism resources, the province is reasonably rich. This has been confirmed by the literature review and research findings. The province offers a mosaic of exceptional scenic landscape, a fascinating cultural heritage, an abundance of wildlife species and many nature-based tourism opportunities. It is described as a land of legends and myths and of ancient civilisations with warm and friendly people (chapter 3, 3.4). On the other hand, in terms of problems and challenges, rural tourism seems to be the most extreme.

Many rural communities and individuals in the Limpopo Province are getting into tourism for reasons of community and economic development, as well as for employment or personal profit, but the development of this sector can be especially difficult. Many rural communities lack the experience and training necessary to develop tourism businesses. Rural communities also face a number of unique challenges, including a desire to balance development and resource preservation, and the difficulty of fostering tourism development without losing control to outside investors or agencies.

Despite the fact that the province is rich in natural and cultural resources, its share in international and domestic tourist arrivals leaves much to be desired. The province lags behind provinces such as the Western Cape, Kwazulu-Natal, Gauteng, Mpumalanga and the Northwest (Chapter 3, 3.4).

It is evident that while other provinces took advantage of their competitive advantages, the Limpopo Province did not. It can therefore, be argued that the province's competitive advantage (rural tourism) can make it unique and different from the rest.

Developing the rural tourism product, which integrates both nature-based and cultural tourism activities is what this province needs. The province is ideally positioned to offer 'second to none' rural tourism experience, given its rural nature, natural resources, indigenous cultures, archaeological sites and people. Therefore, if the Limpopo Province tourism industry authority can accord adequate mileage to the cultural heritage and integrate it with nature-based tourism to form a complete rural tourism product, then the province could become sightseeing Mecca. According to Derwent (2002) the tourism Industry Authority barely accords adequate mileage to the cultural heritage, but focuses on the nature-based tourism that is otherwise common throughout the world, and do not necessarily set the province apart. It seems that only a few provinces or countries are quite as extraordinary as the Limpopo Province, or are populated by such diverse, ancient traditions and fascinating individuals as one finds in Limpopo Province.

In terms of the guidelines for Rural Tourism Development as highlighted in chapter four, two areas of greater importance came out. They can be catergorised as:

- (1) Rural tourism participants or role players
- (2) Key Issues or challenges

## **6.2 Rural tourism participants**

The Limpopo Province, as it is the case elsewhere, has a number of tourism participants. They range from (but not exhaustive) accommodation operators, restaurant operators, tourism

operators, host community, transport operator tour guides, tourism industry bodies and associations, academic institutions, governments at different levels, the media and other interest groups. All role-players have a fundamental role to play as far as Rural Tourism Development is concerned. However, lack of coordination and integration of what role-players are doing seems to be a problem in the province. Clear guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of each participant should therefore, be provided.

It is on this basis that a clear, coherent, integrated and co-ordinated strategy for Rural Tourism Development is important. Of equal importance are clear roles and responsibilities as well as the benefits of the host communities.

### **6.3 Key issues and challenges**

Key issues and challenges as identified in the previous chapters include the provision for education and training, branding of product or enterprise, accreditation and industry standards, leadership, infrastructure development and policy directives. It is crucial that these issues are addressed in order to ensure that rural tourism development can be realised. All these issues and challenges can best be addressed in a participatory approach, where role player are part of planning and design, implementation, management and monitoring of the development process.

It appears that the principles of rural tourism as outlined in chapter four can be applied to the situation in the Limpopo Province, provided the above-mentioned issues and challenges are addressed. Most importantly, the province is ideally situated to offer unparalleled rural tourism products.

#### 6.4 Summary of major findings and interpretation

In the preceding chapters, in particular, the literature review chapters (two and three) confirmed that many countries around the world have already formulated their Rural Tourism Development policy guidelines and have indeed taken an advantage of this emerging tourism product. Countries such as Australia, Canada, Germany, New Zealand, Austria, China and the United States of America have all taken rural tourism quite seriously, to an extent that policy and strategic frameworks are in place to guide and monitor the development of this unique product.

If developed countries regard rural tourism as one of their pillars for rural and regional development, what then, for a developing country such as South Africa? Most provinces and the Limpopo Province in particular are relatively rural. It therefore makes sense that most rural places in South Africa (in particular the Limpopo Province), can learn from rural tourism pioneers of this world, such as Australia.

On the other hand, both the White Paper on the Development and Promotion of Tourism in South Africa (1996) and the Tourism Development Strategy 1998-2000 (1997) do acknowledge the importance of tourism. At the same time, both documents fall short of recognising rural tourism as a unique brand and follow international trends and encourage the development and promotion of rural tourism as an industry. It appears as if none of the above-mentioned countries could beat South Africa with regard to rural tourism as a tourism product, given the rural nature of our country. The Limpopo Province is very rural and should capitalise on this rare image.

The South African Tourism policy framework does not mention rural tourism in the country as a potential economic activity. This is in spite of the fact that of lately, there has been a shift towards

rural tourism as a preferred tourism product. In Australia, as it is the case in many countries, rural tourism policies and strategies were developed a long time ago, as early as 1994.

However, South Africa (the Limpopo Province in particular) lacks a coherent, comprehensive, clear and co-ordinated Rural Tourism Strategy; this constitutes a gap in terms of rural tourism development in the country. Another finding of the study was that there is a lack of interest, debate and research work with regard to Rural Tourism Development in South Africa. On the contrary, many international conferences on rural tourism have taken place in the last decade. Israel hosted one such conference in 1997 in conjunction with the World Tourism Organisation.

In the light of the above findings, which confirm that indeed the Limpopo Province has a potential for Rural Tourism Development, and the fact that rural tourism is now a recognised tourism industry by many countries including Australia, there is a need for a coherent, comprehensive, clear and co-ordinated Rural Tourism Strategy for the Limpopo Province of South Africa. Such a strategy could assist in the processes of Rural Tourism Development, not only in the Limpopo Province, but also throughout South Africa.

### **6.5 Recommended further rural tourism research topics**

Given the scarcity of rural tourism literature, it goes without saying that there is a dire need for research work to be done if this emerging tourism industry is to thrive at local and international levels. According to Page and Getz (1997) rural tourism has continued to suffer from a neglect amongst tourism researchers, often being subsumed under, or confused with recreation and leisure activities, since many studies assume that rural tourism equates with simple concepts such as 'the countryside': therefore, the assumption is that users of 'the countryside' are predominantly

recreationalists and that tourists are not the main user group. While these assumptions are invalidated by research, such beliefs still affect the image of what constitutes rural tourism.

The neglect of tourism as a rural business activity has also been compounded by the absence of any theoretical research published in mainstream tourism journals. As a result, much of the research on rural tourism has, with a number of exceptions, failed to contribute to a growing awareness of its role, value and significance in the wider development of tourism studies and its importance as a mainstay of many rural economies. Butler and Clark's that:

The literature on rural tourism is sparse and... conceptual models and theories are lacking... Many of the references in tourism are case studies with little theoretical foundation... or they focus on specific problems... Some take a broader perspective focusing on issues and process... There is, therefore, a lack of theory and models placing rural tourism in a conceptual framework, are in this context relevant.

(Butler and Clark, 1992:167)

As a result, rural tourism has remained peripheral to the focus of tourism research. It also remains poorly defined. This shows the need for research in this field. The following are recommended rural tourism research topics for South Africa.

1. The business of rural tourism in South Africa: Its economic, social and environmental impact.
2. The management of rural tourism businesses: Planning, development, management and marketing.
3. Rural Tourism Development: An opportunity for emerging entrepreneurs.
4. Rural tourism for diversification of rural economies and core for rural development.
5. Policy framework: a platform for Rural Tourism Development.

6. Rural tourism: the role of traditional leaders versus the role of local government authorities.

## 6.6 Conclusion

In the preceding chapters literature on tourism and rural tourism studies has been reviewed. The South African Tourism Policy (White Paper on the Development and Promotion of Tourism in South Africa: June 1996) and Strategy (Tourism in GEAR: 1997), were analysed from the rural tourism perspective and compared with international tourism strategy (in particular, the Australian National Rural Tourism Strategy: 1994). It was found that the South African tourism policy and strategy are silent with regard to Rural Tourism Development. On the contrary, most developed countries, including Australia and Canada, have taken rural tourism as a developmental tool quite seriously.

Rural tourism is clearly an important tourism product throughout most of the world, and is likely to become very important as more countries and destinations compete for niche markets. Business opportunities continue to expand for rural residents, and for those who prefer to set up businesses in rural areas. Without the sharing of experiences, many mistakes will be repeated and successful strategies missed. It is because of this point that tourism strategies were analysed and compared in order to learn from others' experiences. On the other hand, without synthesis, the tourism field cannot be advanced. It has been found that more research work needs to be done with regard to rural tourism as an industry.

Chapter five concerns the proposed Rural Tourism Development Strategy with specific reference to the Limpopo Province of South Africa. The proposed Rural Tourism Development Strategy intends to fill the gap that exists in the South African tourism policy and strategic documents.

This strategy is modelled around the Commonwealth of the Australian National Rural Tourism Strategy. The strategy highlights the potential of, and opportunities rural tourism can bring to rural areas in terms of business development (diversification of rural economies), destination development, infrastructure development, training and the preservation of natural and cultural resources

Impediments and challenges of rural tourism development, together with ways and means of overcoming such obstacles are also highlighted. Such impediments includes, amongst others, community inexperience and the low level of education, lack of professionalism and business expertise among operators, lack of data and research, lack of policy and support strategies, industry fragmentation, distance, lack of infrastructure and lack of financial support. However, the advantages of rural tourism may outweigh the impediments if it is well planned and managed. Hence, this is the core finding of this study. Given the lack of Rural Tourism Development Strategy and rural tourism potential in the province, it may be argued that the proposed strategy is both necessary and urgent.

Finally, the major factors that give rural tourism its special appeal include:

- remoteness/isolation
- peace and quietness
- authentic culture (ethnic, traditional, native)
- heritage sites and buildings
- rural lifestyles, including food and beverages
- undisturbed nature
- hospitable citizens;
- exclusivity (not mass tourism);



- located in rural areas
- rural functionality
- rural in scale and
- their traditional character.

Tourism destinations and businesses in their planning, development and marketing strategies can use these factors. These are the resources that form the basis of rural tourism and must therefore be nurtured, preserved and enhanced. The Limpopo Province does possess most of these tourism resources. It is on this basis that rural the Rural Tourism Development Strategy is proposed in order to achieve a better life for rural communities.