

TOURING THE TOWNSHIPS

Abuzz with energy, the townships are where it's happening in South Africa. It's never made more sense to step out of your comfort zone and into the vibrant and welcoming world of township tourism.

Before 1994, townships were generally regarded as off-limits to tourists. Most guidebooks described them as dangerous slums overrun by poverty and despair – to be avoided at all costs. But over the last 16 years these myths have slowly been debunked, thanks largely to a new breed of innovative entrepreneurs who've made their own back yards surprisingly enticing and accessible.

Brief township tours conducted from the comfort of semi-luxury, air-conditioned vehicles have been popular for some time now. However, it makes more sense to step out of the tour bus and into a more interactive experience, including overnight stays. Weekend trips are now the best way to have a township tourism experience, and around the country tourists are flocking to shebeens, craft markets, cultural shows, exhibits, museums and overnight accommodation to truly drink in everything that these fascinating places have to offer.

Dr Richard George, who heads up the University of Cape Town's Diploma in Tourism Management, believes it's important to get tourists interacting with locals on a one-to-one basis. Not only does it enrich visitors' experiences, but it also improves the security and quality of the tours, as locals see their impact first-hand.

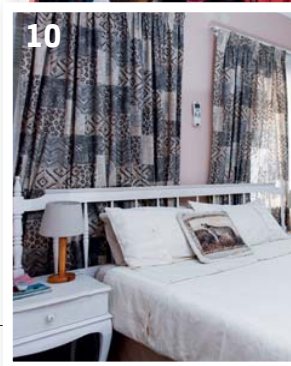
"It's important that people in the townships realise the value of tourism," says George. "The more they see what tourists can do for the community, the less likely they are to take advantage of them."

HOMELY HOSPITALITY

Vicky Ntozini, owner and founder of the popular **Vicky's B&B** (021 387 7104) in Khayelitsha, believes that over the last few years tourists have begun to see the value of staying overnight in townships. She offers a truly unique experience that's designed to leave a lasting impression on her guests.

"When township tours started being conducted by different tour companies, most of them were just driving people around," says Vicky. "Tourists were just coming to look at people, as if we were animals. And so I asked the tour companies to make my house one of their stops."

It was this move that eventually led to the establishment of her bed and breakfast.



Vicky is a shining example of an entrepreneur who has filled a gap in the local industry. A mother of three, she also plays an important role in the upliftment of the local community. At the B&B, neighbourhood children are able to interact with visitors in a relaxed but controlled manner, and guests are naturally encouraged to visit other local attractions such as the **Khayelitsha Craft Market** (021 387 7104), or the famous, fabulous **Mzoli's** (021 637 8449) – a happening local restaurant frequented by a great mix of residents and tourists.

DIFFERENT DINING STYLES

Soweto, on the outskirts of Johannesburg, is the best known of South Africa's townships, owing to its history of activism during apartheid. And so it follows that bustling attractions such as **Wandie's Place** (011 982 2796) and their newer guesthouse now feature prominently on most Jo'burg tourists' itineraries.

But outside of the well-known tourist spots, the bigger townships are seeing a new breed of smaller, up-and-coming businesses developing. These typically offer an altogether different experience, with a unique blend of locals coming to visit families and friends, and tourists looking for a township experience. Free from the carefully designed menus and organised activities, this new trend arguably offers a far more realistic insight into life in the townships.

TEXT: ANDREW THOMPSON; PHOTOGRAPHY: ANTONIO DEL HOYO, ROGAN WARD, ZEKI DU PLESSIS

To do list:

Have a beer or sample *umqombothi* at a shebeen.

Have your fortune told by a sangoma.

Have tea and *vetkoek* at a B&B.

Bargain with crafters for a beaded masterpiece.

Join the kids for soccer practice on a makeshift pitch.

Learn to do the pantsula or gumboot dance.

Have your hair braided, SA-style.

NO FRILLS, ALL THRILLS

Ndonga B&B Guest House (083 652 2157), located in the heart of Durban's Umlazi township, gets most of its traffic from Johannesburg residents coming down to visit family and friends residing nearby, along with a smattering of internationals.

Skoti Guest House (051 434 1726), in Bloemfontein's Manguang Township, offers authentic, no-frills township accommodation, with a mixed clientele. Both Skoti and Ndongo can form part of regular township tours, or guests can visit them as a standalone experience.

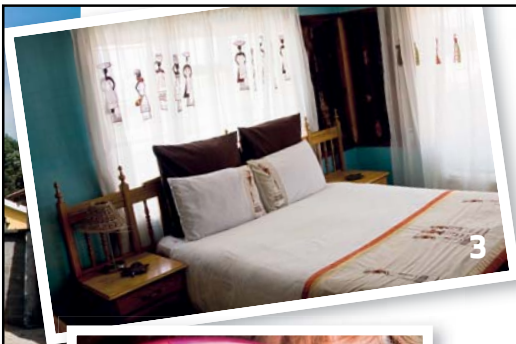
With Manguang opening up to innovative and enticing cultural tours, it's just a matter of time before it follows in the footsteps of the likes of Soweto and Khayelitsha.

Dr George believes that this is an increasingly important trend in the local tourism industry, and something that everyone, including foreigners and nearby locals, should experience. "At the moment it's only really schools, university and college students that go on township tours, and I think it's something that everybody should do. Township tours can really go a long way to reigniting that atmosphere of union and *ubuntu* that we all felt during the World Cup."

CATCH A RIDE

There are dozens of companies offering township tours, but try these operators in our Mango cities:

- Cape Town Coffee Bean Routes, www.coffeebeansroutes.com
- Johannesburg Themba Day Tours & Safaris, www.sowetotour.co.za
- Bloemfontein Visit the information centre at 60 Park Road, Willows, or call 051 405 8489
- Durban Hlola Umlazi, www.hlolaumlazi.co.za



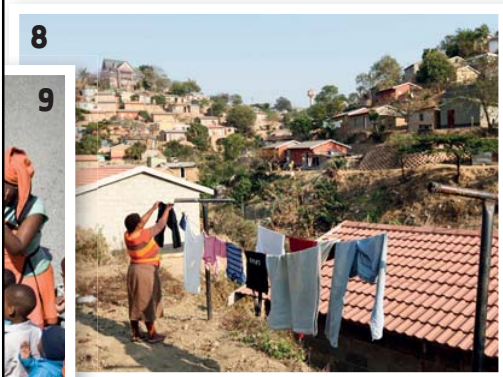
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1. Township love on display
2. Khayelitsha corner
3. A room at Vicky's B&B
4. Township life reflected
5. A decorated wall at Wandie's Place
6. Vicky poses proudly in front of her B&B
7. Tables laid out at Wandie's Place
8. A regular day in Durban's Umlazi township
9. Nursery school children gather outside Vicky's B&B
10. A place to spend the night at Ndonga B&B Guest House
11. Khayelitsha Craft Market weavers
12. Peggy Mkhwanazi of Ndonga B&B in Durban
13. Hard at work at the Khayelitsha Craft Market
14. Market seller in Soweto