

Township tours



Source: www.suedafrika.net/imizamoyethu/index_d.html

A key challenge for Southern Sun is to engage with poor stakeholders to develop new products that will provide added-value to the company and deliver benefits to the community. The success of township tours in the South African context is one example of the product development opportunities that exist.

Township tours offer potential because:

- they respond to market demand in particular from overseas visitors;
- they bring visitors to the 'hosts';
- they are focused on 'experiencing the authentic' and relatively little infrastructure investment is needed;
- they help create access to areas often perceived as dangerous; and
- they offer the potential to involve a wide spectrum of the community.

However, township tours also suffer from inherent problems linked to marginalised communities excluded from the mainstream tourism sector. These problems are:

- the township tourism industry is often not linked to the overall tourism supply chain;
- often few opportunities for interaction with the target market exist;
- the product range is often very narrow and uninventive;
- SMMEs often have weak bargaining powers;
- the township tourism industry is highly dependent on foreign tourists;
- promoters and foreign tourists often do not understand township tourist product and services;
- little information is often available and thus tourists that have not planned to visit a township are not encouraged to do so;
- endorsement by a credible third party is often lacking;
- contact between township enterprise and other more traditional enterprises is often limited;
- township initiatives are often at risk of being absorbed into conventional tourism enterprises;

- township SMMEs tend to differentiate their products on price rather than uniqueness or demand;
- package tours often pre-define or constrain the possibility of township tours;
- difficulties in completing transactions given problems of language, currency and cultural attitudes;
- lack of investment in logistical infrastructure in order to make products and services available;
- There are often no formal channels for feeding back information about product satisfaction;
- Existing themed routes and themed maps developed and distributed by the local tourist boards often do not include township tours;
- Promotional material provided by tourists boards are paid for by its members and the businesses advertised in it, seldom are SMMEs asked whether they would like to be included, often due to lack of information, but also because they are not deemed to fit in with the traditional product; (Biggs, Goussard, Mtsweni and Bytheway (2001)¹)

Other obstacles for township tours are:

Price: Because most tourists visit the townships in small groups with a tour operator, the overall price of goods and services purchased in the townships is higher. For example, a lunch at a township restaurant is usually only available to patrons who are willing and able to pay the price of a tour as well.

Profits: There is a high degree of dependence on tour operators from outside the townships to bring visitors to the area. Many of these tour operators expect 'kick-backs' for bringing tourists to a venue, which diminishes the owner's receipts and overall revenues.

Quantity: Because there are few tourist attractions in the townships, the same tourists visit most of the attractions, usually on the same day. Therefore producers of goods, with their own retail outlets, do not benefit much by placing their goods at other venues in the townships.

Product mix: There is no tourism "cluster" or full range of tourism products available. Typically, accommodation, entertainment, restaurants and transport services are all required to make a viable opportunity for average tourists. These facilities and services are often not provided on a commercial basis, i.e. Bed & Breakfast owners waking up their non-commercial neighbours to entertain their guests for no financial reward. The lack of variety often leads to boredom and non-participation by the tour operators, for example sitting in the microbus while the tourists have lunch.

Access: Travel in the townships is perceived and promoted by some as dangerous. Road signs are absent and there are few maps of the areas. The chances of a tourist encountering a micro enterprise in passing are much slimmer than for those in 'safer', more advantaged areas.

Cash economy: The township economy is a cash economy: banks, ATMs, foreign exchange bureaux or credit card facilities are generally not available. (Biggs, Goussard, Mtsweni and Bytheway (2001))

To overcome these difficulties it is essential that SMMEs within townships to form cooperatives to strengthen their individual and collective bargaining positions in the value chain. Information dissemination and marketing mechanisms need to be developed to provide tourists with a fuller range information about tourist products in the townships, and physical mechanisms need to be developed to provide a wider range of actual products and services. Township enterprises need to create stronger links with the formal tourism sector, including local, national and international travel agencies and tour operators, retail outlets, hotel chains and popular tourist

¹ Biggs, D., Goussard, Y., Mtsweni C., Bytheway, A. (2001) Peri-urban township tourism and e-commerce, Department of Information Systems, University of the Western Cape

attractions. Southern Sun could play a great role in this by providing marketing facilities, even potentially contributing to the development of tours themselves. They can play a very important role in mediating between the formal and informal sector and potentially marketing a product that can add value to their existing product.

Biggs, Goussard, Mtsweni and Bytheway (2001)² surveyed tourists' attitudes to township tours and found that the main interest for visiting a township lies in wanting to experience the 'way of life', experience and learn. Township tours clearly are based on the portrayal of 'authentic' offering great potential for including add-ons such as the sale of 'authentic' products, arts and crafts exhibitions, events, storytelling and the like. A main reason why people would not visit a township is due to safety consideration and lack of information. Here a 'trustworthy' third party such as an established hotel could mediate by providing information and potentially endorsing tours and tour operators.

Tourists and their attitudes to township visits:

Would you like to visit?	%	What reason – main concepts (%)
No	37	Been before (7) No time (7) Concerned for safety (6) Not interested (6) Only interested in nice sights (4) Scared (3) Dangerous for foreigners (1) Not a good situation (1) Told not to visit (1) Don't know anything (1) Too far (1) Won't make a difference (1) Enough in my own country (1)
Yes	46	See how people live (15) Interested (14) Learn (6) Understand apartheid (3) Experience reality (1) Appreciate the situation (1) Interested in lifestyle (1) Enjoy myself (1) Family lives there (1) See the genuine face of Africa (1)

² Biggs, D., Goussard, Y., Mtsweni C., Bytheway, A. (2001) Peri-urban township tourism and e-commerce, Department of Information Systems, University of the Western Cape