

On Track With The San

!Khwa ttu is just over an hour's drive from Cape Town, along the West Coast flower route offering an incredible insight into one of South Africa's richest, most spiritual and environmentally conscious cultures.

What was originally a wheat and sheep farm back in 1999 has been transformed from a group of tired and dilapidated farm buildings to an inspirational San culture and heritage centre. The vision of !Khwa ttu, was to take advantage of the land's spectacular natural surroundings whilst creating a unique and interactive experience for the visitor that would open their eyes to the world of the San people. It was not however, to be an interpreted, modern day take on the past, it was to be a tangible journey into history facilitated by the people themselves. As a result, the ambitious project involved consultation with San communities from across the entire region of Southern Africa for their input and knowledge. Consultations continued through all aspects of its inception to ensure authenticity, working 'hand-in-hand' with the support of professionals in the fields of tourism, anthropology, archaeology and education.

Though the area itself was not commonly associated with the presence of the San, the region's history reveals that this was once part of a vast territory inhabited for centuries by hunter-gatherers who were brutally persecuted by the Boer commandos in the late 18th Century. In honour of these lost communities and distant ancestors the project was named '!Khwa ttu', the term used for 'water-hole' in the language of the now extinct Xam San.

!Khwa ttu's location with its vast openness, rocky outcrops, indigenous *fynbos* vegetation and a number of game species offers wonderful possibilities to enjoy nature and uplift the spirit. It is a tourism experience like no other. !Khwa ttu is the only San-owned and culture and education centre in the Western Cape of South Africa, and it is majority owned by the San people themselves, in partnership with the Swiss UBUNTU Foundation in a very special 50/50 joint venture. The Swiss donors visited the area in the early days, and were fascinated to learn of the ongoing struggles of the modern day San in southern Africa as an indigenous minority group, renowned for their tracking and rock art painting skills that were now on the brink of being lost forever. It inspired the formation of a dynamic partnership that would empower the San to take ownership of preserving their culture and heritage. The concept was to provide an interface for

skills development in parallel with a tourism business that would be run by the San to generate income that would feed back into the funding pool as a financial return. The San, as beneficiaries and resident owners, are an intrinsic part of every policy or development decision in this arrangement. It is an ongoing process of inclusion, interaction and mediation. A successful formula that has helped make !Khwa ttu what it is today.

!Khwa ttu was officially opened to the general public in March 2006, and as a tourism attraction it offers a variety of activities that will leave an indelible mark on the soul. The 850ha nature reserve is home to hundreds of plant species and indigenous fynbos, as well as a wide array of local wildlife. On the tractor driven reserve tour you will hear traditional animal stories that form an important part of San history, as well as get an introduction to the complexities of their trademark 'click' language.

There are easy nature walks that share the wealth of knowledge on ancient hunting, gathering and tracking, explaining a symbiotic way of life that would today be deemed to have a minimal carbon footprint. The guides also describe some of the more mystical aspects of the social structure, such as the healing power of the trance dance and the traditional egalitarian society.

The raw and poignant photographic exhibition consists of eye-opening quotes, real life stories and explanatory texts around issues close to the hearts of the San of Southern Africa today. From historical challenges such as dispossession of lands and natural resources and the experience of war on a peaceful people, the centre is a great example of the importance of culturally appropriate education, how it can work through tourism and how a unified approach between a group of committed people is building a future that will help to get the San 'back on track' and acknowledged for their extraordinary legacy.