

Game lodges take aim at poverty

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Almost 4,800 people are being supported directly and indirectly by the 683 people employed by 16 luxury game lodges in six Southern African countries, according to a study by Sue Snyman, a researcher associated with the University of Cape Town's environmental policy research unit.



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Although this study reinforces others showing the importance of the sector in alleviating rural poverty, it has been a muted year for SA's travel and tourism companies. Growth in tourism numbers has lagged the rand's depreciation, which some tourism leaders have ascribed to onerous new visa regulations.

The JSE's travel and leisure index has gained 8% in the past year. Among the heavyweights, Tsogo Sun has added 12.78% to R26.39 for the year while Sun International has dropped 2.51% to R87.74.

According to Statistics SA's "Tourism Satellite Account for SA" released three weeks ago, about 711,746 people, or 4.5% , of SA's workforce is employed in tourism. The African Development Bank's annual *Tourism Monitor*, last published a year ago, showed about 20-million people were employed in tourism in Africa in 2014, which was about 7.1% of the continent's workforce.

Snyman found the multiplier effect of tourism in remote areas of Southern Africa was about 14 times. Every staff member

employed at the lodges she surveyed was directly supporting about seven people. Others benefited as staff spent their wages at community stores, hired people for childcare or herding, or sent their children to school.

The average salary at these lodges in SA, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi was about \$278 a month. Snyman said it was vital for tourism ventures to invest in appropriate capacity building. "People need to be trained in bookkeeping, management and accounting," she said. "They need to understand the industry; for instance that if someone spends \$400 a night, that isn't a clean \$400 profit; expenses need to be covered first."

Some of the other social benefits of ecotourism lodges in remote areas were the improvements in infrastructure and services, such as upgrading roads, cellphone reception and clinics. Local residents received education in specific skills such as lodge management or bookkeeping or could become partners or tourism operators.

From an environmental perspective, land set aside for conservation was not damaged by mining or agriculture and water quality could improve.

Source: Business Day

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