

Creating a niche for the youth in responsible tourism

Bringing the youth firmly within the sub-economic sector of responsible tourism has long been a clear goal of FEDHASA (Federated Hospitality Association of Southern Africa) as well as other leading tourism organisations, both government and private. According to Caleb Mabaso, FEDHASA's head of Strategic Projects, the future success of the hospitality and tourism industry in South Africa depends on a strong talent pipeline of young people within the industry who will continue the legacy of responsible tourism that is being so carefully established in this country.



He says: "At this stage responsible tourism is being embraced by the hospitality and tourism industry in South Africa; we have even gone so far as to adopt national standards in responsible tourism - only the second country in the world to do this. This augurs well for the future of this potentially vibrant and sustainable sub-economy - but it does mean that extreme focus needs to be placed on bringing the youth into the industry, inspiring them, training them, and encouraging them as they find their place in this sector."

This call was emphasised by Minister of Tourism, Marthinus van Schalkwyk, in his address at the launch of Tourism Month on 28 August 2013 in North West Province, when he encouraged young people to join the tourism industry, where opportunities for exciting and rewarding career development abound as the industry shows unprecedented growth.

Future industry leaders

Says Mabaso, "We need to attract young people, both as entrepreneurs and as business people, who will be capable industry leaders in the future." He adds that much work needs to be done as the industry has suffered from misinformation in the past, where young people perceive the industry as primarily offering opportunities for 'hard labour, overworking and low pay'. This needs to change.

One of the initiatives pioneering this drive is being implemented this year and is being hailed by the industry as a 'game changer' that will set the benchmark for future initiatives designed to encourage the youth to join the tourism industry - it is a Food Safety Programme, developed in a partnership venture between FEDHASA and its members and the National Department of Tourism.

Following a new career path

The vision of the Food Safety Programme, which specifically targets graduates from FET Colleges and is being launched this month, is to create a new career path within the hospitality industry. It entails placing students within hotels in positions of Food Service Assistants for a 12-month period to assess and monitor food safety issues within the hotels' food preparation, storage and service processes.

Students will be trained throughout the programme and certificates will be issued to students who achieve the outcomes specified in this programme. Costs will be carried by FEDHASA and the Department of Tourism for the year for the training through a third party, as well as the stipend paid to the trainees for the year, following which the position will hopefully be considered a valuable addition to the participating hotels' staff contingents and will be made permanent.

Adds Mabaso, "At this stage hotels tend to outsource the auditing related to food safety to external service providers on a quarterly basis, but given the new legislation related to food safety and food labelling, we believe this measure is no longer enough and that a permanent position within large establishments is required. We have had a hugely positive response from our FEDHASA member hotel groups as well as enthusiastic buy-in from all relevant role players within the industry and we anticipate a successful year for our first intake of food safety students."

Delivering sustainable jobs

Eddie Khosa, chairman of FEDHASA, says, "We believe this Food Safety Programme will deliver sustainable jobs to the youth; jobs that are brand new in the industry and do not replace any existing positions, which is an extremely important step forward for the sub-economic sector of responsible tourism. It will also contribute to placing the country on the preferred choice of destination lists for many international travellers as food safety concerns are often deciding factors when making travel plans."

He adds that initiatives such as this one will go a long way towards encouraging the youth to consider the tourism industry as a career - and more specifically responsible tourism as the way of the future - and introduce them to new roles and positions that have not existed in the past but which will become prominent in the near future.

National tourism youth structure

In another strong youth-focused move in the industry, the Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBCSA), has commissioned FEDHASA to establish a progressive and dynamic national tourism youth structure that will represent all industry's sub sectors. Its aim is to broaden the lines of communication with the youth of the country, connecting with school leavers, students, young entrepreneurs and potential entrepreneurs, as well as young people within the industry with less than two years' experience.

The objectives of the tourism youth structure include training the youth through the provision of bursaries and scholarships; providing opportunities for the youth to access information on pursuing careers or entrepreneurial activities in the industry; providing accelerated skills development and management programmes; providing financial and mentorship programme opportunities; providing information on the legislative framework that governs the industry; and offering membership benefits to stimulate domestic tourism.

"As we educate the youth on responsible tourism and the opportunities it holds for individuals, as well as for the country at large, we are likely to see an upsurge in interest, involvement and passion for this industry that forms such a vital part of South Africa's ongoing economic development," says Mabaso.