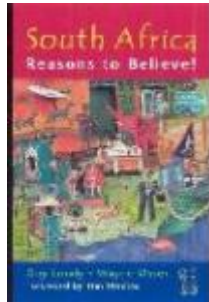


## South Africa:

### Reasons to Believe!

*By Guy Lundy and Wayne Visser (Aardvark Press, 2003)*



~ 6 WILD, BEAUTIFUL AND FREE ~

#### **The world in one country**

South Africa is a wild land of awesome beauty and spectacular contrasts. There is nothing monotonous or homogenous about this land or its people. South Africa powerfully engages all the senses – the sights, the sounds, the tastes, the smells are always different and always intense.

There are landscapes ranging from scorching deserts to snow-capped mountains, vegetation ranging from lush yellowwood forests to hardy fynbos scrub, and fauna of every description, from the mighty African elephant to its miniature cousin, the 'dassie' (rock hyrax). In the Cape, the seasons bring untamed winter rainstorms and hot, dry summers, while in the rest of the country experiences warm, soaking summer rains and cold, parched winters. And yes, the sun is shining somewhere in South Africa, no matter what day of the year it is. The west coast is lapped by the icy Antarctic waters, while the east coast has enticing warm tropical currents, each supporting its own unique marine environments. Culturally, an intoxicating mix of African, European and Asian infuses the country's languages, religions, music, cuisine, art and architecture.

South Africa truly represents the world in one country. In this chapter we take a look at some of what we have on offer in our own unique corner of the world, from the blessings that nature has bestowed upon us, to the richness of our heritage and the special global niches being carved by our tourism industry. We hope that this goes some way to explaining the growth in foreign tourist numbers, and to enabling us to see for ourselves how much there is to do and see right here at home.

#### **Blessings of nature**

Africa has an extraordinary abundance of natural riches on the land, in the sea and in the air, which unfortunately has not always been conserved as well as they should be. But it is heartening to know that in South Africa, the government has recognised our natural heritage as a unique asset to be preserved and developed for the enjoyment of current and future generations of the world's citizens. South Africans have also spotted the massive economic opportunities presented by eco-tourism, one of the fastest-growing segments of the tourism industry. We currently have over three million hectares reserved for conservation, and this is growing year by year.

### ***Sanctuary for wildlife***

South Africa has some 403 protected areas, ranging from the massive and world-renowned Kruger National Park, (established in 1898, it is the size of Wales and one of the oldest and best-managed nature reserves in Africa), to the tiny and little-known Mkambati Nature Reserve in the Eastern Cape. Our wildlife populations are particularly well-managed and plentiful, and the reserves are easy to get to and move around in because of South Africa's excellent transport and accommodation infrastructure. This makes the country among the best places in the world to view big game. Many big spenders are also attracted by the opportunity to hunt in carefully controlled game reserves.

In the next 20 years, South African National Parks will expand the country's protected areas from its current 6% to 8% of our land surface. During the same period, protected marine and coastal environmental areas will be expanded from 5% to 20%. Already, Addo Elephant National Park in the Eastern Cape, which used to be one of the smallest of our national parks, has grown 10 fold to over 90,000 hectares. Now known as Greater Addo, it has become a 'Big Seven' park, including leopard, lion, elephant, rhino and buffalo (the traditional 'Big Five'), plus dolphins and whales.

Despite the 'Big Five' mentality of most tourists, we should not forget to take pride in some of the smaller and no less fascinating creatures that are found in our reserves. Foreign bird watchers, for instance, already bring between R10 million and R25 million into our economy annually. This is not surprising, given that we have over 900 species of birds.

### ***Expanding our horizons***

A good deal of the phenomenal success of our wildlife conservation has been the result of visionary initiatives. Courageous people and institutions have pushed past the constraints of fear and negativity about South Africa's future and come up with unique new ways to develop nature conservation as a sustainable and lucrative industry for the future.

Adrian Gardiner, one of the nominees for the 2000 Audi Terra Nova Awards, is a classic example. He took 20 000 hectares of degraded farmland in the Eastern Cape and transformed it into one of the most biologically diverse game reserves in the country, now famously known as Shamwari. In addition to planting indigenous pioneering grasses and reseeding the contours with shrubs and trees, in eight years he reintroduced 10 000 head of game, many of which had disappeared from the Cape region over the past few centuries. At first everyone thought he was crazy, but as the success of Shamwari has shown, sometimes crazy is visionary in disguise.

Another of the areas that South Africa is pioneering is community participation in wildlife conservation. For example, two new tribe-owned lodges have opened on the rim of the Kruger National Park – Phumulani, owned by the Mdluli tribe, and Wisani Lodge, owned by the Mhinga tribe. This new brand of community-based tourism proves that conservation and development do not have to be in conflict and we do not have to choose between people and animals. The Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa embodies similar principles of sharing the benefits of tourism equitably with the local population.

One of the most visionary initiatives underway in South Africa is the creation of Transfrontier Conservation Areas, also known as Peace Parks because of their role in improving cross-border relations between neighbouring countries. Six such parks have been identified in Southern Africa, including the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, which was created in 2002. The latter joins together Mozambique's Coutada 16 Park, Zimbabwe's Gonarezhou Park and South Africa's Kruger National Park. This contiguous wilderness is 35 000 square kilometres in extent, larger than some countries in Europe.

Along similar lines, recognising that our tourism strength lies in cooperation as a region, two cross-border Special Development Initiatives (SDIs) have been launched. The Coast-to-Coast SDI started as a trucking route linking Mozambique on the east and Namibia on the west, via South Africa and Botswana. But the tourism opportunities soon became clear, with the N4 highway taking visitors from Maputo, through subtropical Swaziland and Mpumalanga, Gauteng's cradle of humankind (and basket of shopping), the game-rich Limpopo region, across the sands of the Kalahari desert in Botswana and finally to the German coffee culture of Swakopmund. That's 3 000 kilometres of incredible, exotic Africa!

### ***Oceans of plenty***

In August 2002 National Geographic ran a wonderfully ebullient story about 'South Africa's teeming seas', declaring that the 3 000 kilometres or so of South African coastline form "one of the richest, most biologically diverse and most oceanographically complex marine environments on Earth - the Serengeti of the sea." It is not surprising that tourists and locals alike are starting to discover a new kind of wildlife experience – 'water safaris' that take in the sights and sounds of whales, dolphins, sharks, penguins and colourful coral reefs.

As a result of continuously increasing numbers of whales visiting our shores since the international ban on whaling, the whale-watching industry has grown at a phenomenal rate, already being estimated to be worth around R500 million to the economy. Coastal communities such as Hermanus have turned this into a great tourist attraction, furnishing themselves with a whale crier, a whale-watch hotline and an annual whale festival.

In addition to whale-fever, Cape Town has for many years offered trips to the seal colonies along its coast, and it remains hard to resist an up-close-and-personal encounter with hundreds of penguins shuffling around like cute little gentlemen in tuxedos. False Bay is also fast becoming famous around the world for the unique behaviour of its Great White Sharks, which are known to breach or jump clear of the water in the same way as whales or dolphins do. The adrenaline junkies are queuing up to go cage diving with these deadly predators.

Further up the east coast, it seems the most normal thing in the world to come across vast schools of dolphins. In KwaZulu-Natal the annual sardine run, described by National Geographic as "one of the marine wonders of the world", has spawned its own Sardine Festival in Scottburgh. And Sodwana Bay is poised to take over as a diving destination from the more well-known diving Mecca of the Red Sea between Egypt and Israel.

It isn't only under the water where the action is happening. Let's not forget that other strange marine species – the surfer. South Africa's coast has some of the world's best surf, all within easy access of major cities and facilities. We are poised to benefit from the tremendous growth in surf tourism that is taking place around the world. The Quicksilver ISA World Surfing Games held in Durban in 2002 are a sign of things to come.

### **Kingdom of flowers**

One of South Africa's greatest treasures is still its floral bounty, specifically our Cape Fynbos, which is the smallest but most diverse of the world's six floral kingdoms. There are more species of fynbos in the Western Cape than floral species in the whole of the United Kingdom. In fact, South Africa has more threatened plant species (3 000) than Europe's total plant species. Fortunately, the total species count is growing year by year. In 2000 alone, South African botanists discovered 60 new plant species, most of them fynbos.

It is not only fynbos with which we are blessed. Go up the West Coast towards Springbok in the springtime and you will find that the brown semi-desert landscape has burst into brightly coloured carpets of endless yellow, orange and white Namaqualand daisies. And

did you know that not too far down the track, in Niewoudtville, we have the highest number of bulb species in the world? The streets of Los Angeles are lined with Agapanthus, and the flower-boxes of Europe burst with Geraniums, but we have yet to fully capitalise on these South African floral assets commercially. Conversely, the bulb-growing Dutch earned more money in 2000 from the sale of South African indigenous bulbs than we redeemed in gold sales in the same year. Even so, the Cape wildflower industry alone is already worth R150 million a year, mostly coming in foreign exchange.

Elsewhere in the country, the 150 000 hectares of the Waterberg has been declared one of the only Savannah Biosphere reserves in the world and added to UNESCO's register of 386 global reserves in 91 countries. In addition to employing more than 1 500 people, it is one of the finest examples of biodiversity anywhere.

And it's not just our nature reserves that are green. Food and Trees for Africa claims that Johannesburg is one of the most treed cities in the world, and some even go as far as to call it the world's biggest man-made forest. Certainly there are more bird species found in and around Johannesburg than ever before, as exotic immigrants such as the Loerie and others have migrated there, drawn there by the ever-greener environment.

### **Footprints of history**

Many think of our history as starting in the 1600s, but this is quite inaccurate. South Africa has an incredibly rich history dating back to pre-human times and tracing the development of ancient advanced African civilizations. Some of this history is still in the process of being discovered, and the rest of it is being carefully preserved and presented in a way that takes into account the importance of the roles that all our people have played in shaping our nation into what it is today.

### ***Cradle of humankind***

Hidden beneath the surface of northeast Gauteng is the most complete and varied evidence of the origins of modern humans, known as the Cradle of Humankind. Embedded in rock in the 47 000 hectares around the dolomite Sterkfontein Caves are the fossilised remains of hominids dating back over 3,3 million years. The site is home to world-famous Mrs Ples, the oldest complete hominid skeleton in the world, as well as the even older Littlefoot which is still being excavated and studied.

The Cradle of Humankind was declared a World Heritage Site in December 1999, one of three in South Africa, along with Robben Island and the St Lucia Wetland Park. It is being developed into a major scientific and tourist centre. Interest is not restricted to palaeontology but includes important archaeological sites of Stone Age and Iron Age periods. The full story of humanity is told on this single site. And not far away is the ancient Tswaing crater, the remains of an asteroid that struck the area more than two-million years ago.

The arid Karoo in the Western Cape is also well known as a palaeontologists' heaven, littered with pre-historic fossils. Most recently, footprints of an unbelievably large scorpion – about the length of a human – were discovered in what used to be the muddy sediments of the ancient seabed of the Karoo around 260 million years ago. This is the largest trackway of an invertebrate yet found in the world, according to British scientist Dr John Almond of Nature Viva.

Mapungubwe, where the Limpopo and Shashe Rivers meet in Northern Province, is another fascinating archaeological site, where a once sophisticated ancient civilization dating back to Africa's Golden Age was based. A thousand years ago, when Europe was in the very depths of its dark ages, these African people were trading gold and ivory with China, Egypt

and India, including delicate gold jewellery and finely crafted pottery. Many of these cultural treasures are on permanent exhibition at the University of Pretoria and the site is about to become the centrepiece of the planned Limpopo Shashe Transfrontier Conservation Area between South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana.

South Africa's rich tapestry of rock art pre-dates the most visited temples and ruins around the world and is by far the oldest record of human art forms, dating back around 10 000 years. This interpretation of the lives of our ancient ancestors is a gift that few other countries can offer to the world. The rock-art sites range from Bushmans Kloof Wilderness Reserve in the arid Cederberg, to Giant's Castle in the lush Drakensberg and Kaoxa Bush Camp in the riverine Limpopo Valley.

Bushmans Kloof, a South African Natural Heritage Site with more than 125 rock art sites, has been dubbed the world's largest open-air art gallery. The vast expanse of Drakensberg mountain range in KwaZulu-Natal has counted more than 20 000 individual San paintings. And on the Limpopo plains there are 2000-year-old records of female-initiation friezes, diverse animal images and the only known paintings of kaoxa, the locust.

### ***Colonial conquests***

Unfortunately the direct descendants of those ancient artists have all but been wiped out since the arrival of the various colonial powers in Africa. Nevertheless their arrival introduced another dimension to our colourful history. At the very least we have a wealth of Cape Dutch homesteads on our historic wine farms, and fascinating buildings such as the pentagonal Castle in Cape Town and the Union Buildings in Pretoria. The introduction of Christian, Islamic, Jewish and Hindu faiths also resulted in the development of lovely old stone cathedrals, beautifully crafted mosques, striking synagogues and magnificent temples.

And of course, if it wasn't for this period we wouldn't be the interesting and dynamic fusion of African, European and Asian influences that makes us the cultural potjie (pot-stew) that we are. One just has to visit the Grahamstown festival to witness that fusion at its most creative. Apart from our eleven official languages, some of the other languages that are also widely spoken around the country include Guderati, Hindi, Arabic, Hebrew, Greek, German, Portuguese and Italian. Our restaurants are increasingly serving a unique and wonderful mixture of African flavours and European methods of preparation, ending up in tantalizing and exotic treats. The décor in these restaurants, as well as the hotels and game lodges around the country, is following the same pattern, blending the best of European, Asian and African styles into an exciting, inviting and luxurious mix.

### ***Struggles for freedom***

In many ways, South Africa has been a land of struggle – struggles for survival and freedom by the khoi-san bushmen, the indigenous black tribes, and the Afrikaners, as well as struggle by the black population (including native Africans, Coloureds and Indians) against the apartheid system. For modern South Africans, there is the struggle against pervasive poverty and unacceptably high levels of crime.

These struggles for freedom have moulded this country and its people. We may not be proud of everything that has transpired in our history, but it does make us uniquely South African, and it holds widespread interest for the rest of the world. Luckily our new government did not go on a rampage to tear down icons of apartheid and rename virtually everything in honour of their own revolutionary leaders, as they were probably expected to do. Instead they have acknowledged these symbols as being an important part of our history and have transformed icons of pain and suffering into icons of liberation that hold

lessons for our future. As a result the growing phenomenon of 'struggle tourism', to coin a phrase, can and should be embraced and showcased.

This heritage includes the Voortrekker Monument near Pretoria, which celebrates, amongst other things, the victory of the Boers over the Zulus at the Battle of Blood River. Today those same Boer commandos are recognised for having been fighters for freedom against British imperialism during the two Anglo-Boer wars. Other sites include the Taal Monument in Paarl, the Huguenot Museum in Franschoek, the KwaMuhle Museum in Durban, the War Museum in Bloemfontein, the Hector Peterson Memorial in Soweto Township, the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, the Lilliesleaf Museum in Rivonia and the Robben Island Museum off the Cape coast.

Each of these monuments have incredible stories to tell, and none more than Robben Island. There can be few islands in the world that have seen and experienced as much suffering as this one, anchored off the coastline of the Cape of Storms under the tantalising gaze of Table Mountain. This tiny land has served over the centuries as a place of isolation for shipwrecked crews, outcast lepers, common criminals, and political prisoners.

Today, Robben Island has been transformed from a place synonymous with fear and loathing into a symbol of strength and transformation. It lives on as a sobering monument to our bedevilled past, watched over by Ahmed Kathrada, a surviving member of the exclusive Robben Island Old Boy's Club, and run by former prisoners who now work as tour guides. The painful memories that haunt the bleak island are recounted in books like Kathrada's Letters from Robben Island, not to mention Mandela's autobiographical Long Walk to Freedom. For the tourist – whether conscientious, concerned or just curious – there must be few other places on the planet that are more infused with living history, culture and emotion.

More recently, in the same tradition of remembering our past, the Apartheid Museum was opened to the public at Johannesburg's Gold Reef City in November, 2001. Quite apart from simply telling the story of one culture's domination over another, it manages to exude a sense of celebration at the transformation that this great country has undertaken. Already, museum curator, Christopher Till, has witnessed the full gamut of reactions from visitors: from the white policeman tut-tutting about 'those terrible times', to political prisoners breaking down in tears and schoolchildren awed into hushed whispers by their experience – 'Did our parents really live through that?'

### **Tides of tourism**

#### ***Novel new ideas***

Having recognised the massive opportunities that our country and its culture present for tourism, South Africans are continuously learning from other tourist destinations and coming up with new and unique ways to provide foreigners with even more reasons to come here. These range from the ever-popular and rapidly growing adventure tourism to adventures of a different kind on the cosmetic surgeon's operating table.

Over the years New Zealand has become synonymous with adventure travel. But with the sheer number of ways that South Africa can offer adrenalin-junkies to willingly risk their lives, and our relative proximity to Europe, this country is fast gaining a reputation as one of the premier destinations for adventure tourism. This is particularly true of the bold young backpackers who have often made their way overland through Africa.

The adrenalin-pumping choices on offer in this country are mind-boggling: rollerblading in the annual death-defying Downhill Challenge from Kloof Nek, solo-climbing up and

abseiling down Table Mountain's sheer cliffs, surfing in the annual Big Wave Africa contest at Dungeons off Cape Town, kloofing down river gorges, kayaking on the Tugela River, paragliding from Lion's Head, hot-air ballooning over the Highveld, cage-diving with great white sharks, 4x4 trails into the mountains of Lesotho, or going plunging from the world's highest commercial bungi-jump at the 216 metre Bloukranz Bridge.

On the more sedate and sophisticated side of life, the Cape winelands are already the 10th most visited tourist attraction in South Africa. This is not only a great testimony to the quality of our 'nectar of the gods', which is growing in fame daily throughout the world, but also to the first-class creativity of the estates themselves. Wine farms have transformed themselves into must-experience destinations over the past decade. The 'experience' now includes meandering through the stunningly beautiful valleys of the Western Cape wine routes and casually stopping off at any number of famous estates for wine tasting sessions, cellar tours, picnics, horse drawn carriage excursions through the vineyards, candlelit dinners and luxurious overnight accommodation. At Spier, you can even enjoy opera, theatre and musical performances at their open air amphitheatre.

Cape Town, which is already widely known as the 'mother city', is beginning to show another feature of its feminine side. It is actively marketing itself as a gay-friendly city, and a number of gay nightclubs and bed-and-breakfasts have sprung up to help big-spending Britons and others part with their 'pink pounds'.

Some say a change is as good as a holiday. Increasingly, wealthy tourists are opting for both, combining a visit to South Africa with cosmetic surgery, be it laser eye surgery, teeth-whitening, face lifts, nose-jobs, or breast enlargements. South Africa has first-rate medical centres (remember, the first heart transplant happened here), at a price that is literally unbeatable, and there are no waiting lists to speak of. Not only is it cheap, but it is discrete. Why not pass the time at an exclusive game park while the bruises heal? When you get home you can tell your friends that the African air is great for making one look younger. This medical tourism is a growing phenomenon, and we are perfectly positioned to become one of the world's leading destinations. Companies like Surgeons and Safaris can already hardly keep pace with the demand.

We are becoming a stop-over for other kinds of running repairs and rest and rejuvenation too. Whenever the Suez Canal has been closed or under threat, South African ports have benefited. Today the Suez Canal is open, but most luxury liners are opting to avoid it anyway because of the ongoing troubles in the Middle East. South Africa is seen as a safe port of call, and more and more ships are stopping here. In the first six months of 2002, 42 cruise liners docked in Cape Town, compared with a previous average of 13 per year. Their passengers are particularly big spenders, some of them spending as much as R30,000 per day while in port.

For those wanting a more low-cost experience, the Soweto Shebeen Route has been launched by 13 major shebeeners, the most famous of which is Wandile Ndala. Ever since his township restaurant, called Wandie's, was awarded Best Restaurant (Ambience) status by the British publication *Winners' Dinners*, the rich and famous have been drawn to this humble dwelling, just down the road from Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu's homes. Inside, the walls are papered with business cards of day-trippers and business people from around the world, together with photos of Wandie with Evander Holyfield, Walter Sisulu, Jesse Jackson, Quincy Jones and Richard Branson, to drop just a few names.

Township tours mushroomed after 1994, but a more recent positive development is the emergence of township B&Bs, like Vicky Ntozini's B&B in Khayelitsha, Cape Town's largest township. Vicky's B&B is sandwiched between ordinary township shacks on a side alley in what is called Site C. There are no signs or fancy neon lights to show the way, and the

house is nothing more than a well-extended shack of corrugated iron and wood. This is a taste of raw life in Khayelitsha where nothing has been glitzed or glossed to dazzle the guests. Most visitors get to know about the place by word of mouth, and the guest book is full of names of people from foreign countries.

Of course, at the totally opposite end of the scale, South Africa offers some of the best hotels in the world – we are winning international awards hands down. Just ask the Cape Grace or Singita Private Game Lodge, or visit Sabi Sabi's fabulous Earth Lodge.

38-year old Thabiso Tlelai is one of South Africa's new generation leaders in the leisure and tourism industry. His passionate faith in South Africa's hotel industry fuelled a remarkable turnaround of the Don Group of executive suites that he took over in 1998. Tlelai claims that the country's hotels are among the most affordable in the world and our tourism package and its ancillaries are up with the best in the world. "We have the weather, we have the facilities, we have the destinations."

### ***Take this, sports fans!***

South Africans are sports-mad. As a result we have developed world-class stadiums, golf courses and other sports facilities over the years, and we have become rather adept at staging massive sporting spectaculars.

We have already successfully hosted a vast number of international sports people and their fans during the Rugby World Cup in 1995 and the African Cup of Nations Soccer in 1996. The skills developed during the running of those two events will help enormously towards holding a successful Cricket World Cup in South Africa in 2003. These mega-events always bring not only good international exposure for South Africa, but also a great deal of foreign money spent by sports fans during the event and afterwards as they take extra time to visit the country or come back to do so later.

There are also other events which showcase our organisational abilities such as the Comrades Marathon between Durban and Pietermaritzburg and the 105 km annual Cape Argus Pick n' Pay Cycle Tour. The Cycle Tour began with 500 riders in 1978, and today it attracts 35 000 cyclists of all shapes, sizes and degrees of seriousness. The Tour earns the city approximately R125 million, with more than 65 000 people visiting the region over the period of the race. Charities also benefit, with over R2 million being ploughed back into the community and sports development.

In addition to the successful hosting of events, we have also developed skills and experience in the bidding process for even bigger international events like the Olympics and the Football World Cup, which we haven't been awarded – yet. By having failed before, we are in a position to learn from our mistakes and make a successful bid next time. The world has been assured that the 2010 Football World Cup will be held in Africa and there can be no question that we are the most prepared to host it.

But it isn't only the big events that bring large numbers of tourists to our shores. Golfing tours already attract significant numbers of international travellers who come here specifically to play at our world-class, spectacularly beautiful golf courses at prices that are for free compared to courses in Japan and Europe. The success of our own pro-golfers on the international circuit has also helps to promote South Africa's Sunshine Tour, composed of eight tournaments, including exotic courses in Zimbabwe, Sun City, the Wild Coast and the Cape.

South Africa is in a very strong position to continue to successfully develop our sporting tourism industry, bringing in thousands of people who come to watch or take part in the

sport and then spend time and money on all the other wonders that our country has to offer.

### ***Parties in pinstripes***

It isn't only the sports fans that are coming; it's the serious business types too. Between 1999 and 2000 South Africa moved up a notch to 20th on the world top convention rating, according to the International Congress and Convention Association. Five years ago, South Africa wasn't even on the radar screen as a conference destination.

High profile events like the UN Conference on Racism, the international HIV/AIDS Convention and the inaugural meeting of the African Union in Durban, as well as the UN's World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg have helped to put South Africa on the map. The World Summit alone, which drew tens of thousands of people to Johannesburg from the 189 UN member countries and others, is estimated to have contributed R1.6 billion to the national economy and created more than 14,000 jobs. In 2005, South Africa is to host another mega summit, this time the World Petroleum Congress (WPC).

SA Tourism CEO Cheryl Carolus believes South Africa is perfectly poised for further growth in this highly lucrative MICE industry – that's Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions, an international tourism market worth in excess of \$100 billion. The country has 1,700 conference venues, ranging from large city venues to remote venues in spectacular mountain, coastal or bushveld surroundings. At the upper end of the market, following on the successes of the Sandton Convention Centre and Durban's International Convention Centre, Cape Town is about to launch the country's third state-of-the-art mega-facility, able to handle in excess of 5 000 delegates at one time. The exhibition space will rival the best in the world, with 10 000 square metres of pillar-free space.

According to a report released by Grant Thornton Kessel Feinstein, the entire MICE industry in South Africa contributes 246 000 jobs and R6 billion in salaries annually. Importantly, a study carried out by SA Tourism showed that 90% of all delegates surveyed said they would return to South Africa, this time with their friends and family in tow. The benefits of continuing to develop this industry are obvious.

### ***Riding the wave***

The tide seems to be turning in our favour as far as tourism is concerned. The Rand is undervalued, South Africa is increasingly seen as a safe destination in comparison to the USA, the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent, and the country offers foreign visitors an unforgettable experience. Tourists, particularly in Europe, are realising this more and more, and as a result they are arriving in unprecedented numbers. In total contrast to other destinations like Egypt, which has seen a 40% drop in tourism since September 11th, South Africa alone in the world has had massive increases month on month. In January 2002, 18 469 more tourists visited this country than in January 2001, an increase equivalent to two extra Boeing 747s full of tourists every day. And the 2002/3 holiday season, which normally starts in October, had already started early, partially as a result of the Johannesburg World Summit.

This growth is expected to continue for some time to come, with new tourists coming from all over the world. For example, in November 2002 South Africa will sign an agreement with China, under which it will become only the fifth country in the world to be given 'approved destination' status for Chinese tourists. But SA Tourism is not resting on its laurels. Instead it is working hard to ensure that we can expect a lot more foreign accents (and cash) around here over the next few years, profiling and targeting potential visitors in all regions of the world. This includes North America, an area still largely untapped.

South Africans are increasingly seeing the tourism possibilities and both government and business are scuttling about to put the necessities into place to welcome this influx. Johannesburg International Airport has recently undergone a R1.9 billion facelift in anticipation of increasing the 11 million people that currently pass through it each year to 17 million by 2010. Airlines have recognised the need to increase the number of flights to South Africa. Lufthansa, for example, will be increasing its weekly flights from 7 to 13 between October and March, and they expect to increase the 350,000 passengers that they planned to carry in 2002 to 450,000 in 2003.

Responding to this rising demand, high-class hotels and homely B&Bs are springing up like mushrooms after the rain. The Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism plans to help individuals get established in the industry through initiatives such as their recently launched tourism handbook for small businesses.

Tourism is an industry with massive potential for the growth of South Africa, and we need to ensure that we don't miss the wave like we originally did after 1994. Instead we need to ride it in a positive and cheerful manner. Like the advertisement says, smile, and welcome foreigners to our beautiful country, letting them know that we believe in its future so that they and their friends will keep coming back.