

How can local government support sustainable, community-based tourism in deep rural areas?

Lessons from Bulungula Lodge



What does “deep rural” mean?

- Communities situated more than 30km away from the nearest town with a post office,
- at least 10km of gravel road,
- at least two hours travel time to town by public transport.

What is Community-based tourism?

- “Community based tourism is tourism in which local residents (often rural, poor and economically marginalised) invite tourists to visit their communities with the provision of overnight accommodation. The residents earn income as land managers, entrepreneurs, service and produce providers, and employees.” - Responsible Travel

Characteristics of successful community-based tourism

- Authentic cultural experience (not fake cultural village).
- A space where visitors can become temporary members of a community.
- Community members make up all or most of staff including management.
- Financially, socially and environmentally sustainable.

Bulungula Lodge case study

Located in one of the most remote villages in the Eastern Cape: Nqileni village, Xhora Mouth Admin Area, Mbhashe Local Municipality, Amathole District Municipality.



Our community



The situation in 2004:

- No access road (not even a gravel road).
- No potable / piped water.
- No cell phone signal.
- Only five people had ever passed matric.
- No school building – outdoor school.
- 53% of mothers have lost one child to diarrhoea, one in nine mothers have lost at least three children.
- No electricity. ***
- Very poor provincial linking roads (4x4 only). ***
- No toilets (not even pit latrines). ***
- No clinic. ***
- No refuse removal. ***

*** Still the case in 2017.

History of Bulungula Lodge

- Joint-venture partnership between private investor and the Nqileni community.
- Investor provided capital (R800,000) and tourism/business skills, the community provided the land (lease).
- Community and government consultation began in Oct 2002. Lodge opened for business in Aug 2004.
- All employees selected by the community to ensure fair distribution on jobs between clans/families.
- No grants or loans from anyone.

Bulungula Lodge physical set-up

- Run 100% on solar energy using energy efficient technologies,
- Rain water-harvesting and water recycling,
- All buildings and furniture built with local materials using local artisans (12 rondawels + bar/restaurant)
- All plastic refuse transported to Mthatha (expensive!!).
- Guests parked in next village, walked 5 km to lodge.

Bulungula Lodge social setup

- The focus was on creating an inclusive environment as envisaged in our constitution.
- Community welcome inside the lodge at any time: no fences or other barriers.
- No locks on doors for ten years!
- Low prices ensures that the widest range of classes can afford to visit (R50 per person in 2004, R180 per person in 2017)
- Facilitated the creation of ten locally-owned tourism businesses providing tours and other services.

Bulungula Lodge Achievements

- In 2014 investor donated balance of shares to the community.
- Bulungula Lodge is now 100% owned, managed and staffed by community members.
- Financially self-sustaining since 2004. No external funds received.
- 23 staff members all born and raised in Nqileni village.
- Additional 16 jobs created in associated small tourism businesses.

Bulungula Lodge Accolades

- 2nd Best Eco-lodge in the World. Guardian newspaper 2014
- Ethical Travel Award: Worldwide runner-up: UK Guardian newspaper 2009 Travel Awards
- "One of the World's Top 25 Ultimate Ethical Travel Experiences" Rough Guide 2007
- Fair Trade accredited since 2006
- Numerous Lilizela tourism awards
- "Spectacular...something very special... should be on your must-do list." Lonely Planet's Pick of the Wild Coast. 2012.
- Regarded by experts as one of the best

So what can **YOU** as
local government do
to support the growth
of deep rural,
community-based
tourism businesses?

How local government can support community-based tourism

- We recognise the challenge and achievements of local government in deep rural areas.
- Other communities often have greater needs.
How to balance needs of tourists and impoverished communities?
- ROAD ACCESS is the most important challenge. 95% of tourists do NOT drive 4x4's. Bulungula will die this year if the road is not repaired.
- Each missing service (electricity, refuse removal, water, etc) increases the chance of the business failing.

How local government can support community-based tourism (cont...)

- LG can assist with application of environmental laws that are difficult for communities to implement without causing conflict.
- LG must act as advocates/intermediaries with other spheres of government.
- Use above services as a carrot to convince non-community orientated tourism business to improve

Facilitating new tourism investments in deep rural areas

- identify beautiful locations and resolve all land issues in advance.
- ensure road access (properly maintained gravel road is fine)
- every missing service (water, electricity, sewerage) makes the chances of success lower – but success is still possible.
- invite external investors to partner with local communities. Almost impossible for communities and/or government to start successful businesses alone.

Facilitating new tourism investments in deep rural areas (continued)...

- Do proper due diligence investigations on investors to avoid later conflict.
- main investment criteria: local job creation (profits are much less than salaries)
- Sufficient management skills transfer will take AT LEAST 10 years. (Forget about 2 year hit-and-run projects.)



