

Tourism industry growing the vital BEE element

Text and photo by Neil Digby-Clarke.

AZ 03/2006

The tourism industry in Namibia is steadily expanding, providing employment for many and, in generating large revenue streams for the Government, contributing considerably to the nation's all important GDP figures. It can already be classified within the top three most significant industries in the country. And with Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) having obviously become very much a keynote area in the structure of the nation ever since independence in 1990, following the historical marginalisation and exclusion of the majority of the Namibian people in the economic mainstream, the industry adopted a Transformation Charter during a national Tourism Forum in 2004. This charter aimed to embrace the goal of widening the base of who benefits from tourism in Namibia and committed to seven main policies: 1) Skills Development. 2) Apprenticeships, Internships & Sponsorships. 3) Strategic Representation & Employment Equity. 4) Ownership and Joint Venture Policies. 5) Preferential Procurement. 6) Enterprise Development. 7) Social Responsibility Programmes. The upliftment and empowerment of rural communities can be surely linked to tourism products. The successful Wilderness Safaris joint venture at the Damaraland Camp with the Torra Conservancy is proof of that.

This modus operandi of running with a staff complement drawn from the indigenous Namibian populace is indeed ever rolling forward, with benefits to all. Travelogue visited such an example of an independent establishment and reports here; The mercurial owner and hands-on operator of Rostock Ritz Desert Lodge, Wolfgang 'Kücki' Kuhhirt has, as of July 1st 2006, elevated one of his staff to the position of Assistant Manager. Bonny Haimbodi takes up the position, responsible now directly to the owner, in a further positive move by Rostock in

continuing to pursue their pro-active approach to Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). In fact proprietor Kücki's team at his lodge in the Namib Desert is now made up entirely of previously disadvantaged Namibian citizens. And, if truth be told, there has surely been a need in Namibia for BEE, ever since Independence.

Boniface Haimbodi, born in 1974 to Owambo parents of Catholic persuasion, attended the Kolin Foundation secondary school in Arandis and completed his education to Grade 12 standard. Before he left school, Bonny had already taken part-time work as a glass cleaner in the local Arandis Club, where he then spent a further three years as a casual barman. He became a full-time barman at the Strand Hotel in Swakopmund and remained there until moving to Rostock Ritz in 1999. Whilst first employed simply as a barman and waiter at the lodge, his obvious potential and desire to gain knowledge led his employer to offer Bonny thorough in-house training. In the intervening seven years, he has progressed through reception, rooms division, laundry and overall management including human resources up to his new managerial appointment. Kücki Kuhhirt explains: "From the beginning, Bonny showed an ability to identify himself with the product. His strengths lie in HR work and in communicating with customers." Indeed Bonny can speak English, Oshiwambo and Afrikaans fluently and already has learnt enough German to be able to speak to guests in that tongue. The new assistant manager is naturally thrilled with his promotion, saying: "I am fortunate to have had a great mentor in my boss, Mr Kuhhirt. I am so grateful for this opportunity and will do my utmost to repay his faith in me and succeed. Life would be nothing without challenges like these." So proprietor Kücki, renowned also for creating the legendary Kücki's Pub in Swakopmund, is to be applauded in making this appointment and endeavouring to bring fulfilment and advance-



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ment to one of his fifteen staff, more of whom are likely to benefit from his approach in advancing these indigenous personnel, historically denied empowerment in the workplace, all of whom are already helping to provide high levels of service to every lodge visitor.

This charming and distinctive establishment, nestling in the heart of the scintillating Namib and conveniently situated within easy reach of Windhoek and Swakopmund (both 240 km) and the world-famous dunes

at Sossusvlei (180 km), offers guests affordable quality, 22 unique rooms, copious activities including many and varied hiking trails, game and scenic drives, rock art visits, pleasure flights and undoubtedly the coolest pool in the west. To say nothing of those imperiously high standards of service, the eager, professional and contented staff, and of course the inestimable Bonny Haimbodi.

More Info:

www.rostock-ritz-desert-lodge.com ■