

Tourism troubles for Robben Island?

WORLD-FAMOUS tourist attraction, Robben Island, has come under scrutiny recently with many tour operators complaining of the attraction's poor facilities and service.

A South African visitor said: "Even though the guides are well informed and entertaining, visitors are made to ride in buses that are far below standard with torn seats and grimy windows."

Tourists were allegedly asked to fit three people on a seat only big enough for two, which made the journey around the island uncomfortable. "We only got to see the attractions from far away through dirty bus windows and weren't given any time to visit the curio shop."

Frustrations for operators

Tour operators have also been experiencing complaints from their clients about the island. Says Mike Smuts, Africa Deluxe Tours: "I find working with Robben Island most frustrating. It is a main tourist attraction, but the way it is operated is bad for SA tourism." Smuts complained about the ferry operations, saying that it was difficult to get answers to questions and that the service was not up to scratch.

However, Pieter Nel of Sure Swartland Travel disagrees with Smuts. Speaking from personal experience, he says Robben Island

is an enjoyable experience. He adds that it "was a great experience and, being South African, I learned a lot about the island that even I did not know! Our guide was very informative and we could see that he had a great overview of the island. Our guide in the prison buildings was fantastic and dealt with every situation with tact and made everyone aware of the situations involved in the old regime!"

Spokesperson for Robben Island, Shalo Mbatha, says the management of the island is not aware of any service complaints and has always dealt with complaints from visitors about staff members.

Calvyn Giffellan, CEO of Cape Town Routes Unlimited, the marketing body for Cape Town and the Western Cape, says: "Cape Town Routes Unlimited has not received any complaints recently about Robben Island or its services."

Mbatha claims that problems with buses on the island have been sorted out. "We have acquired nine new buses in the last two weeks but because of rough seas, we have not been able to transport them to the island."

'Highly regrettable'

In an online poll about the island, the overwhelming majority of respondents (85%) said they had had a bad experience dealing with the island while only 15 per cent



Robben Island has come under fire for poor service levels.

didn't have any problems. Mbatha said: "The poll results are highly regrettable to our image. We are working to make the experience on the island pleasurable."

Mariette Du Toit-Helmbold, CEO of Cape Town Tourism (CTT), refutes Mbatha's claims of being unaware of service complaints and says there is regular communication between CTT and the Robben Island management team.

She says: "We receive a fair amount of queries on Robben Island and each one is assessed

and investigated directly with the island's management team. We have raised concerns with regard to service levels and operational matters and are encouraged by the island's commitment to dealing with these issues."

Mbatha appealed to visitors to report bad levels of service and to direct complaints to Robben Island. "We pride ourselves in what we offer the public and are always willing to improve weak areas that may surface."

Kate Els

SAT Japan puts the spotlight on 2010

SOUTH African Tourism Japan held 'South African Trade Workshops 2008' in Seoul, Korea, and Osaka and Tokyo in Japan on June 10-13.

A total of 27 exhibitors attended the events, including operators, tourism organisations and airlines. The workshops provided updated information regarding South Africa's preparedness for 2010. They gave information on infrastructure development projects currently being rolled out, including the development, expansion and renovation of the 10 stadiums, airports, public transport systems and fanparks.

The objective of the workshops was to increase the number of Japanese visitors to Southern Africa.

"South African Tourism is setting a goal of 10 million visitors



Zolelwa Mukozho, SA Tourism Regional Director Asia and Australasia.

by 2010 and we have already reached 9,1 million arrivals in 2007, an increase of 8,3 per cent compared with the year before, which gives us confidence that we can reach the arrival goal by 2010," says SA Tourism's Regional Director Asia and Australasia, Zolelwa Mukozho.

Kate Els

Ongeluksnek Nature Reserve opens

THE Ongeluksnek Nature Reserve, situated along the Southern Drakensberg in the Eastern Cape, officially opened last month. The reserve forms part of the Maluti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Park (MDTP) and straddles South Africa and Lesotho's borders.

A ceremony held on June 18 saw the Deputy Minister of the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Rejoice Mabudafhasi, formally open the reserve.

Kate Els

Gorongosa partners with US foundation

THE Gorongosa National Park in Mozambique has partnered with US-based Greg Carr Foundation, a non-profit organisation, in a bid to better manage and market the park as a tourist destination.

The Mozambican Ministry of Tourism signed an agreement for the co-management of Gorongosa that has several objectives, says Mozambican President, Armando Emilio Guebeza. These include increasing visitor numbers and investment in the area as well as

identifying tourism routes that can be developed for visitors during the 2010 Soccer World Cup in neighbouring South Africa.

Greg Carr, President of the Greg Carr Foundation, said: "The resources of Gorongosa provide human beings with many benefits. Tourism, for example, creates jobs for local communities. Park tourism revenue is used to build schools and health centres in communities around the park."

Kate Els