

# Partnership to Strengthen Tourism Management in South Africa

BRIJESH THAPA, SANDRA RUSSO & LORI PENNINGTON-GRAY

Tourism in South Africa is an important industry with demonstrated growth in visitor arrivals in the last decade. The tourism product mix has experienced diversification beyond the traditional core products based on wildlife and natural protected areas to incorporate marine and coastal areas, rural communities and townships, events, urban centers, and meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions. More recently, the country has increased its visibility on an international stage as the successful host of the 2010 FIFA Football World Cup. Leveraged on such sporting events as well as international meetings and conventions, the government expects to increase visitor arrivals to over 10 million in the future to generate income, employment, tax revenues, and entrepreneurial activity.

While growth has been evident, it is vital to maintain and enhance tourism with a sustained strategy for further growth and competitiveness given the potential to strengthen other economic sectors in rural and urban regions. In addition to hard infrastructure projects such as facilities, utilities, transportation networks, etc., it is paramount to simultaneously focus on human resources development in the tourism sector to achieve sustained growth. The overall advancement of qualified, trained and skilled labor force is crucial, given the rate of growth and future trends. Capacity building and institutional development through training is a key component for the vitality and sustainability of the tourism industry in South Africa. In order to address this major need, the University of Florida (UF) and Tshwane University of Tech-



nology (TUT) in Tshwane, South Africa have formulated a three-year partnership to strengthen its teaching, research, service and faculty development initiatives in tourism management.

First, teaching and curriculum needs were accommodated at the Bachelor degree level with respect to the following objectives: a) review and update existing curriculum; b) develop new curriculum in casino management, and aviation management (currently these degree programs are not offered on the African continent, and pending final approval by the government); and c) plan vocational and executive training certificate programs based on the new degree programs - to be developed at a later phase. Second, based on a strategic visioning meeting with faculty and industry stakeholders, a Center for Tourism and Sustainability was established with active industry engagement and partnership. The mission of the Center will be largely to serve tourism destinations and industries through research, training and outreach within the community, province and other regions in southern Africa. Currently, final TUT approval along with financial and human resources

is in process to operationalize the Center.

Third, faculty development has been emphasized with regards to enhancing capacity as well as collaborative initiatives in tourism research with the project team and select UF faculty. Recently, a nationwide study among residents and visitors during the 2010 FIFA World Cup were completed. Currently, a study to examine community conservation, development, and tourism at Vredefort Dome World Heritage Site is being conducted – the site is considered to be the oldest, largest, and most deeply eroded complex meteorite impact structure in the world. The facilitation of collaborative initiatives in research partnerships will be sustained during and post-completion of the project. Fourth, professional development opportunities will be offered to current TUT faculty through a short visit to UF. A TUT faculty visit is expected to occur in early spring 2012. Currently, the majority of the objectives have been accomplished. In addition, various spin-off projects and stakeholder engagement have been conducted.

*Brijesh Thapa is the Director of Eric Friedheim Tourism Institute [www.uftourism.org] and a associate professor in the Department of Tourism, Recreation & Sport Management. The partnership project is managed through Higher Education for Development with a three-year funding [\$250,000] from the U.S. Agency for International Development, Washington, D.C.*