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Debunking Myths of South Africa

By Audrey Arthur

Dr. Felicia Mabuza-Suttle is president of South African Tourism USA. In her native South Africa, she is a household name. For more than a decade, her show “Felicia” was an oft-watched program on South African television, garnering her numerous awards and acclaim.

As the newly appointed president of South African Tourism USA, which houses offices in New York and Los Angeles, she returns to the United States to promote tourism and business opportunities in South Africa. “I was solicited [for the position] based on the passion I exuded on my talk show in South Africa about my country and my continued interest in wanting to get Americans to experience South Africa,” she says.

While a passionate advocate for her country, Suttle is also an astute businessperson, serving as a founding member of Pamodzi Investment Holdings and as a partner in the Back O’Moon restaurant at Gold Reef City Casino in Johannesburg. Her other business dealings include a line of sunglasses and prescription eyewear and a clothing line for women. She continues her broadcasting career with the premiere of her new television show “Conversations with Felicia” on the Africa Channel, which at press time, was scheduled to air in late September. Suttle says the premise of the show is to build awareness about the positives of Africa and its citizens like Winnie Mandela, former wife of Nelson Mandela, and the father of African Jazz, Hugh Masekela and interview well-known American personalities who have experienced South African hospitality firsthand.

Tourism is big business in South Africa, accounting for seven percent or \$15 billion of the country’s Gross Domestic Product. Because tourism is extremely important to South Africa’s economy, Suttle aims to dispel misconceptions about her homeland and increase the number of American tourists visiting the country. Aside from all other renditions, she describes her native country as developed and comparable with many major American cities. “The media has been very unkind in its coverage of South Africa. It has failed to portray a country of contrasts where urban and traditional lifestyles intermingle. [It has failed to portray] the real wonder of wild life, the awesome sensory impact of its scenic beauty; a land of humanity and freedom, where democracy exists in the true sense of the word — the miracle of white and black living in harmony after years of apartheid; and, finally a land where fusion and beat (music) dominate — and tell the story of all our people.”

When it comes to doing business, South Africa holds just as much potential, adds Suttle. “South Africa today is one of the most sophisticated and promising emerging markets globally. The unique combination of a highly developed first-world economic infrastructure and a huge emergent market economy has given rise to a strong entrepreneurial and dynamic investment environment.” She notes that South Africa, about twice the size of Texas, is rich with minerals and is world ranked in its production of gold, platinum, diamonds, chrome, aluminum and coal.

And Suttle’s response to those who have not had the South African experience is, “It’s possible. You can go there ... it is an experience Americans will treasure for life because we give you the opportunity for the most memorable experience.”

AT

Dr. Felicia Mabuza-Suttle

South African Tourism USA
President

Awards: Named one of the Leading Women Entrepreneurs of the World by the STAR Group; Named one of the 100 Great South Africans by South African Broadcasting Corporation; Named one of the Top 10 Popular Personalities in South Africa by The Sunday Times newspaper.

Education: B.A., Marquette University; M.A., Marquette University; Ph.D., University of Berkley

Photography by Alex Jones