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AUGUST 8, 2005

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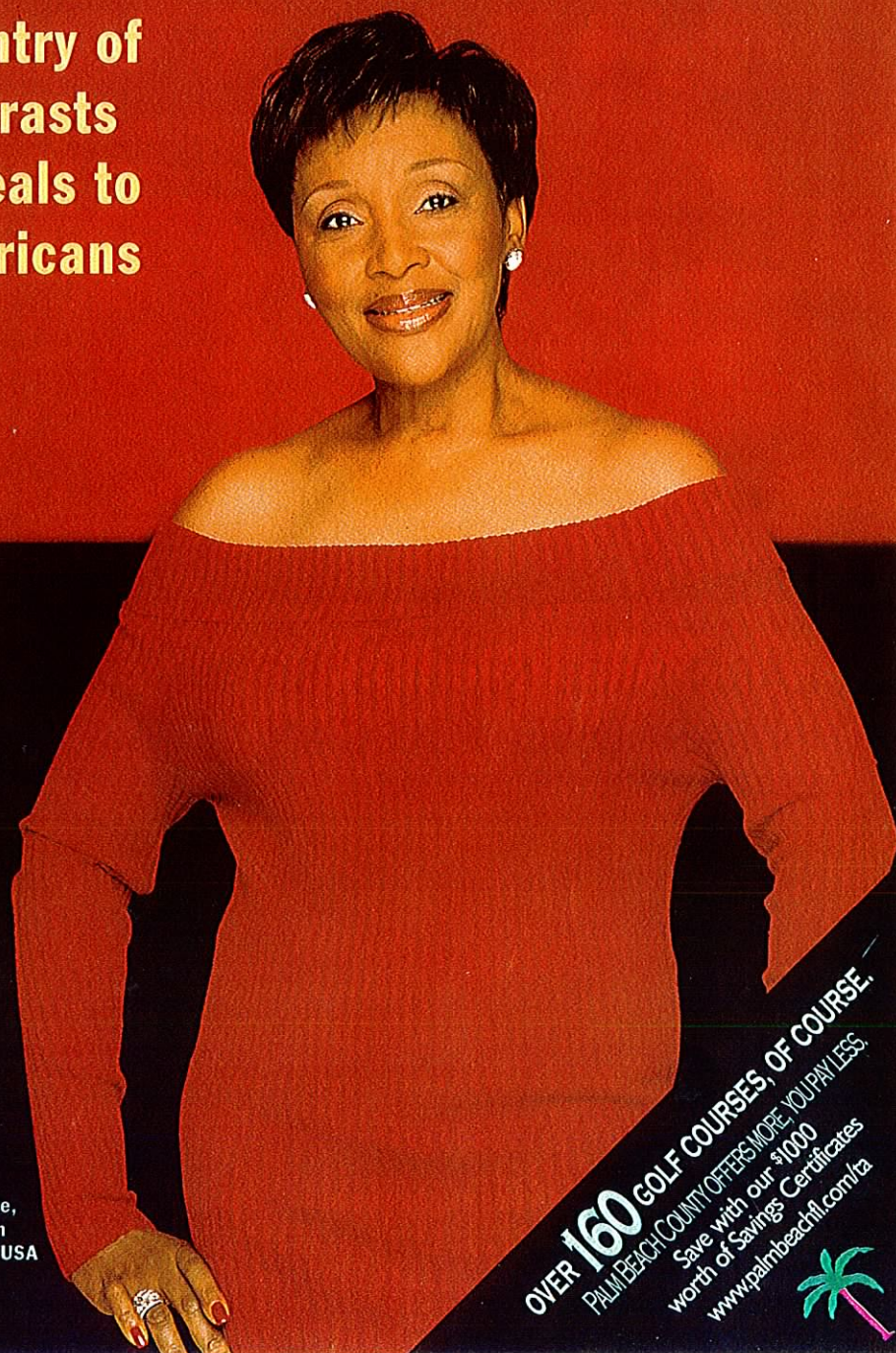
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A QUESTEX PUBLICATION

# SELLING SOUTH AFRICA

**Country of contrasts appeals to Americans**



Dr. Felicia Suttle,  
president, South  
Africa Tourism, USA

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'Wanderlust' and empty nesters make ideal target markets for South Africa.

## Coming Into Its Own

South Africa's history, wilderness and high-end infrastructure have created a tourism powerhouse

BY JAMES RUGGIA

**T**he naysayers of the early 1990s warned that the African National Congress would isolate South Africa and run the nation into the ground. However, under ANC leadership, South Africa is the continent's preeminent

democracy, apartheid is dead and the country is anything but a divided, isolated state. In 1994, the last year of apartheid, only 70,000 travelers visited South Africa; by 2004, that number was 6.7 million, a tenfold increase.

For U.S. tourists and agents, the country is a compelling mixture of wilderness, fine dining and world-class wine regions. The com-

bination of the wild and the urbane fits perfectly into many Americans' travel plans.

Among its most powerful attractions is the struggle to end apartheid. The tales of Nelson Mandela are an inspiring part of any trip, from the Robben Island prison where Mandela was held for 27 years to the town of Soweto and the Apartheid Museum.



This year, South African Tourism chose Dr. Felicia Mabuza-Suttle to head the North American office. Suttle was educated in America, married an American and understands what needs to be done in the U.S. Says Suttle: "We need to change perceptions of South Africa. The media fixation is on Africa as a place rife with suffering and plague. It's simply not the case. Americans should come to see what we are."

To combat the negative perceptions of Africa, Suttle is using a four-pillar approach:

- The sensory impact of the landscape;
- The sense of wonder in Africa's wildlife;
- Humanity and freedom, showcased in its inspiring political and cultural history; and
- The fusion and beat of its music and art.

Says Themba Khumalo, SAT's chief marketing officer: "We decided to sell South Africa to *travelers* as opposed to *tourists*. We believe these people would be enthusiastic



**SAT's Dr. Felicia Mabuza-Suttle**

about what we offer: an authentic experience that lets people expand their world by immersing themselves in the ultimate country of exploration." Adds Claude Pretorius, SAT portfolio manager, Americas: "We've identified market niches in the U.S., such as wanderlust travelers. They want more than wildlife and culture—they also want fun."

"We also need to pursue the African-American market, which was a \$723 billion market last year," says Suttle. Next February, Black History Month in the U.S., SAT hopes to attract 2,000 jazz lovers to a Jazz African Heritage festival at luxury resort Sun City.

Says Ian Swain, president of Swain Tours: "The long-haul traveler is an experiential traveler. They are explorers. South Africa is the next natural destination they will want to go to. It's also a great family destination, and 30 percent of my long-haul travelers are family travelers."

The potential reward for agents is enormous. Some 43 percent of U.S. visitors are repeat visitors, and about 5 percent of them have gone at least 10 times. A client who enjoys South Africa will look beyond to other countries. Its gateway city, Johannesburg, and South African Airways are keystones for

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exploration beyond South Africa into Botswana, Zambia, Tanzania, Namibia, Kenya and Mozambique.

Some 323 American agents recognized this potential when they became South African specialists, or *Fundi* agents. The free online course, which takes its name from the Zulu word for *expert*, uses a Web-based curriculum of modules that include information on selling South Africa. Graduates are listed on the SAT site.

"Agents are important partners in what we are trying to accomplish in the States," says Suttle. "One of our core markets—older, well-traveled empty nesters—are accustomed to working with travel agents. They're not comfortable relying on the Internet."

The first challenges for exotic long-haul destinations such as South Africa are security and comfort issues. SAT uses Cape Town—where a comfort zone of fine dining, vineyards

and the charming Victoria and Albert Waterfront helps travelers adjust to being on a new continent—as an icon in its promotions.

"In South Africa, the market drives the product," says Cheryl Schumacher, the North American representative of Three Cities Hotels, which manages 32 properties in southern Africa. "Even though everybody wants to visit a game park, South Africa is not just about safaris—it's about food, wine, great scenery,

whale watching, the Garden Route and vineyards outside of Cape Town. Americans like challenges. Repeat visitors feel secure enough to rent a car and explore." SAT partnered with Hertz and South African Airways in a self-drive program that starts at \$1,299 per person double with economy airfare from New York-JFK or Atlanta and seven days' car rental. Visit [www.seeuinsa.com](http://www.seeuinsa.com).

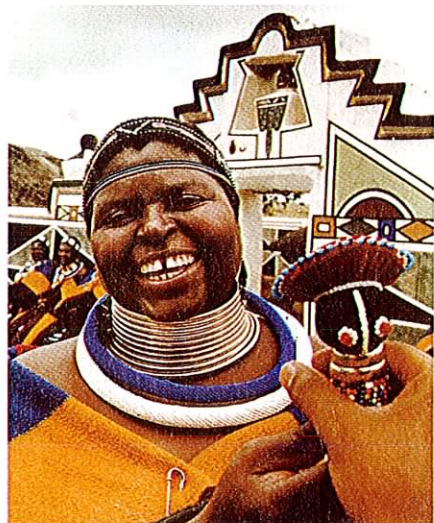
A healthy portion of SAT's new budget is being spent to reach high-end customers in

the U.S. For many, South Africa is the next big destination. The campaign positions South Africa as a comprehensive travel experience balancing safari fun with the urban dynamos of Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban.

Says John Bateman, SAT trade relations manager, West Coast: "We have two markets: the upscale wanderluster—a 26- to 40-year-old urban professional—and the 'Next Stop South Africa' market, which

has more money and time. For the first market, we encourage our wholesalers to create price- and time-sensitive programs."

SAT ads begin with an established market perception and build on it: "We Came for the Beasts. We Stayed for the Beauty," and, "We Came for the Safari. We Stayed for the Surf." This stresses that South Africa offers more than safaris. Botswana, Kenya and Tanzania also have wildlife and at lower prices, but



**The Ndabele tribe of Kwazulu Natal typifies the cultural diversity of S. Africa.**

## Essential Links

**South African Tourism**  
800-593-1318  
[www.southafrica.net](http://www.southafrica.net)

**Fundi Agents Site**  
[www.safundi.net](http://www.safundi.net)

**African Heritage Site**  
[www.southafrica.net/heritage](http://www.southafrica.net/heritage)

South Africa also has the vineyards of Cape Town, beaches and luxury lodges for "lifestyle travelers" who want more than adventure.

The approach to the U.S. market is coordinated with Fundi agents and wholesalers working with SAT. Last year, nine wholesalers developed value-driven packages starting at \$1,999 for eight nights. They featured three-star hotels, visits to two provinces, a one-day safari and two-day tours with roundtrip air to Johannesburg or Cape Town from New York or Atlanta. Similar packages are on the way for this fall.

U.S. visitors to South Africa spend \$6,000 per trip on average, and 60 percent of them use tour operators and stay 14 nights. Says Ann Bellamy, president of African Travel, "These clients are well-traveled, well-heeled, and comfortable paying \$50 for a bottle of good South African wine. We are betting that they are willing to invest \$10,000 in a safari."

## Food, Wine & Travel

African Travel puts wine at the center of several itineraries, using wine-tasting evenings with the help of local agents as a tool to attract Americans to South Africa. The agents invite clients to an evening of South African wine and food as African Travel presents what the destination offers.

## Abolishing Economic Apartheid

The economic footprint of apartheid still has a major hold in South Africa: the minority European segment still owns most businesses. Four years ago tourism developed a transformation charter to ensure that training and opportunities are presented to black South Africans. By 2014, it hopes black employees will hold half of the management positions and

actually own 40 percent of tourism business.

"This is the first time that the black majority in this country have been allowed to participate in the economy," says Rob Williams, a marketing manager with Akani Hotels, a black empowerment enterprise. "I represent a group in this country that aspires through our entrepreneurial drive to make South Africa work,

and tourism is one of the biggest factors."

Cape Town-based Dreamcatcher Tourism Business Network represents 200 travel-oriented small businesses. The organization has marketing offices in the U.K., Canada and the Netherlands. Dreamcatcher's itineraries help create tourism infrastructure and provide training for entrepreneurs.



South Africa also sells very well as a gateway to other African countries. A trip that includes South African upscale safari camps can easily feature North Island properties in the Seychelles or Cape Town as well as the wilds of Kenya and Tanzania, not to mention Victoria Falls, Botswana, Namibia and Zambia. South African Airways provides the links that make this kind of travel easy to arrange.

Southern African cooperation has stimulated the creation of "trans-frontier parks" comprising 262 million acres across the borders of 15 southern African states. The Great

Limpopo Trans-frontier Park will link Kruger National Park of South Africa with Mozambique's Limpopo and Zimbabwe's Gonarezhou national parks.

The Regional Tourism Organization of Southern Africa—comprising 14 countries from Angola to Zimbabwe—believes its nations can increase their combined tourism income from \$20 billion to \$50 billion per year by 2010. Says Shareen Thude, manager whoof marketing, Namibia Tourism Board: "In the U.S., as South Africa goes, so we go. We get about 7,000 Americans, mostly doing

extension packages off South Africa."

In the past 11 years, the bridges built by tourism have helped bring South Africa into the international mainstream. In 2010, the country will draw the eyes of the world when it hosts soccer's World Cup. And while soccer may not be top-of-mind with most Americans, South Africa's winning bid speaks volumes about how far the country has come.

"Apartheid" is a Dutch word meaning "apartness." As the world returns to South Africa, it helps the country complete its historic and inspiring unification. ■

## Growing the Market

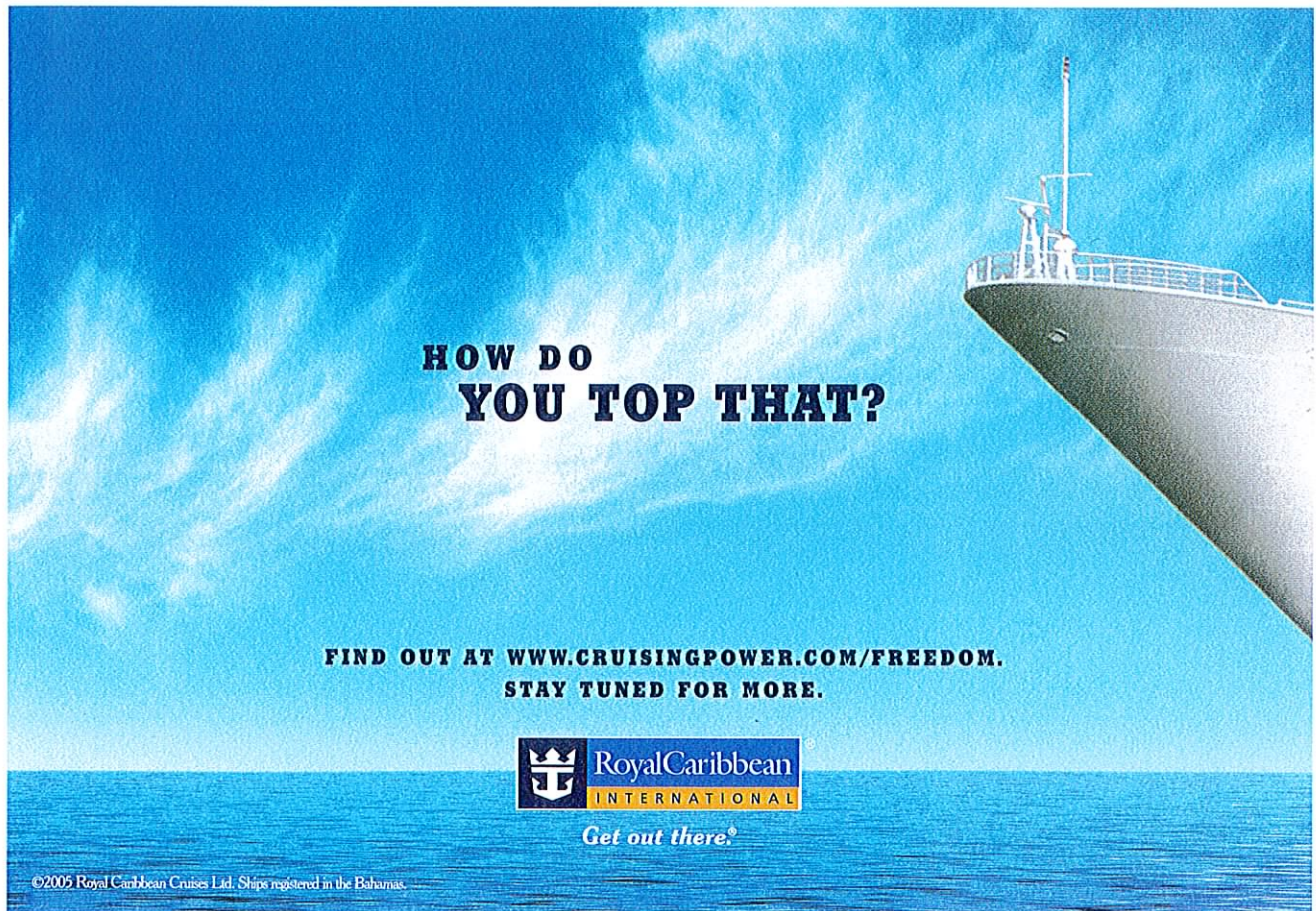
In recent years, travel to South Africa benefited from troubles that plagued travel to other parts of the world, ranging from disease to terrorism. In 2001, the South African government went on a serious branding mission to revive the image of the country. The South African economy, which was flat through the mid 1990s, went from an annual

economic output of \$117 billion to \$152 billion today.

Although tourism generates \$8 billion a year in revenues for South Africa, its most significant role is to integrate the country into the global fold. The U.S. market for travelers to South Africa grew 12 percent, to 208,000, in 2004. Through March 2005, the U.S. market


was up 13.8 percent over that period last year.

In addition, tour operators that have made their names serving other destinations—e.g., Pacific Delight (China), Isram (Israel and the Middle East), SITA World Travel (India), Swain and Goway Travel (Australia/New Zealand)—are now operating in southern Africa, as are a host of African wholesalers.



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