

EU-funded programme unlocking potential of local tourism routes

Minister of Tourism, Derek Hanekom recently joined the Head of the EU Delegation to South Africa, Ambassador Marcus Cornaro in a visit to a European Union-funded sustainable enterprise development programme at the Dwars River Escape Route, located in the Cape Winelands District Municipality, to find out more about the community tourism project being implemented here.



Hanekom enjoys some local music with business owner and community member Sienna Charles on the Dwars River Escape Route. Image: Open Africa

The Dwars River Escape Route, between Stellenbosch and Franschhoek, is one of eight tourism routes supported through a European Union Grant with co-funding by Barclays Africa and the Finnish Embassy's Local Corporation Fund. The objective of the project is to assist local tourism routes to become more sustainable and help communities unlock the tourism opportunities in their vicinity.

The enterprise development component of the project is also implemented by Open Africa with support from Fetola, a local enterprise development specialist. The project is developing skills and creating jobs in the rural tourism sector through capacity building, youth development and market access for emerging tourism entrepreneurs.

The group conducted a site visit of Pniel, Lanquedoc, and Kylemore to learn more about the route's 2020 vision that includes an exciting street art project. The street art project will be funded through an innovative challenge fund facility that encourages routes to come up with business ideas that can contribute to their financial sustainability while enhancing the appeal of the destination. Local guides will also be trained to take visitors on a heritage tour of these towns, using street art to visualise the rich culture and heritage of the towns and its people.

The site visit ended with a traditional meal and wine pairing at Sienna Charles's Beker en Bord Tea Garden in Kylemore, where local wines from the valley were paired with local delicacies such as green bean stew.



Hanekom with Sienna Charles on the Dwars River Escape Route. Image: Open Africa

Enabling communities to benefit from tourism

Hanekom said: “Routes like this are fantastic for local communities because it provides them with a wide range of avenues to become involved in tourism and to gain the economic benefits of it. We thank the EU for the funding that made this development possible and the valuable contribution it is making to tourism both in the region as well as throughout South Africa.”

The local people of the valley are a central part of any experience on the route and their rich history is portrayed in a number of historic buildings and churches. The valley is at the centre of the Winelands and the project is re-positioning the Dwars River as a must-stop destination for locals and international visitors alike. Apart from being extraordinarily scenic, the mountains in the region also offer great opportunities for hiking and mountain biking.

Cornaro said: "I am very pleased to interact with Minister Hanekom around the challenge to link sustainable tourism with sustainable local job creation. The Open Africa project has clearly identified a range of promising avenues, bringing together a good blend of business initiatives. Coupled with the beautiful landscape and the hospitality of the local community, all elements for success are there. The EU is proud to partner with Open Africa and the entrepreneurs of the Dwars River Route in this initiative."