

“aha LESEDI BEADING LADIES, reflecting cultural pride through beautiful beadwork”

The beautiful South African beaded jewellery that’s often sold to tourists as gifts is steeped in tradition and has deep cultural significance. Many of the South African indigenous ethnic groups such as ***amaZulu, amaXhosa, baSotho, baTswana, baVenda and amaNdebele*** have their own distinctive beads and bead work, each signifying different cultural importance.

In recent years, bead art in South Africa has developed into a major ecotourism offering where women with beading skills create artefacts and jewellery based on traditional techniques and imagery. The bead works also serves as an important source of income for the women in the various ethnic groups and the skills have been handed down from generation to generation. These skills are being lost unfortunately as the newer generations wish to define and express their culture in different ways. In today’s contemporary society for some cultures the beadwork tradition continues as living art and continues to be created for use in traditional ceremonies to celebrate matrimony and the rites of passage from infancy to adulthood.

The beadwork done at ***aha Lesedi*** is pioneered by mama ***Girly Leah Ntuli*** and mama ***Bongiwe Elizabeth Masombuka***. The beautiful creations they produce signify ***amaNdebele*** and ***amaZulu*** culture. Their career at ***aha Lesedi*** began in 1999 and shortly thereafter they expressed a keen interest in sharing their knowledge of beading and its significance with the multitude of local and international tourists that make their way to ***aha Lesedi*** each year.

aha recognised that this cultural talent needs to be supported and developed therefore the company presented the ladies with business support services in order to help them formalise their trade and assisted with infrastructure support by providing them with a workshop and store at the ***aha Lesedi market***. They also received their first official business loan which went towards purchasing their raw materials; in addition ***aha*** also covers expenses such as their rent, electricity and security. The agreement includes an undertaking that their products will be supplied to various ***aha Hotels and Lodges*** as signature ***aha*** guest gifts, which turned out to be a resounding success.

Girly and Bongiwe have produced hundreds of custom made designs through the years, ranging from elaborate beadwork costumes and body accessories (as worn by the ***aha Lesedi*** traditional dancers) dolls and jewellery to various ornaments such as beaded ties and branded passport covers. In actual fact, the ladies creativity is boundless and their designs are as unique as one can get. ***aha Lesedi*** guests and patrons are sure to walk away with a select product with every purchase.

The ladies are currently busy with one of their biggest projects to date; the design of a signature 100cm x 100cm size ‘aha’ entrance sign that will be placed at the head office reception area.

They speak zealously of the work they create; beaming with pride at the realisation that the crafts produced from their hands is revered by different people across various cultural backgrounds across the world. *aha* too shares in their pride and continues to support their initiative to ensure that their skills and knowledge is passed on to a younger generation that will forge their career paths at *aha Lesedi*. Together we will safeguard this beautiful, colourful tradition and preserve it for future generations.

