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TOURVEST GUIDE ACADEMY: ENABLING LOCAL COMMUNITIES

South Africa is rich in natural resources, ecologically diverse and bursting with untapped human potential. And tourism is one of the major local industries that taps into the country's wealth of possibility to make a valuable contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

In 2018, the travel and tourism sector contributed around R426 billion to the economy and created 1.5 million jobs. According to an annual review by the World Travel & Tourism Council, that makes South Africa the continent's largest tourism economy.

Despite those impressive figures, however, Gary Elmes, Tourvest Accommodation and Activities CEO, observed that there was a marked shortage of trained and properly accredited guides in South Africa and career development opportunities in the industry have historically remained scarce.

Ultimately, Gary's research yielded that it wasn't a lack of interest in the industry, but a lack of financial support in local communities that was the problem. And with that hard-hitting realisation, the Field Guide Academy was born.

Gary commented, "Wherever I go among the Tourvest and aha Hotels & Lodges properties throughout the country, there's one common denominator – the human potential that surrounds us, everywhere we go. But opportunities are scarce and so many young people in these areas don't have the financial means to study. The tourism industry is always in need of great new talent and we can now address both needs while providing a springboard for these communities to flourish in the long-term."

Following months of planning, the Tourvest Field Guide Academy opened in September 2019, welcoming its first 16 candidates – nine female and seven male recruits, each of whom had undergone a rigorous selection process. These deserving young people all came from communities surrounding various Tourvest Lodges throughout southern Africa.

Candidates who successfully complete the training programme get NQF Level 2 Accreditation, which opens up a number of employment opportunities they would not have had access to previously. They also receive guaranteed employment for a minimum of two years after they have completed their six-month practical training programme.

The training course is conducted at a dedicated field guide camp in the Makalali Private Game Reserve, where the candidates are provided with board, lodging, uniforms and fully sponsored tuition, all covered by the Tourvest Group. EcoTraining handles the initial selection process in conjunction with the Study Trust and their qualified instructors provide full time training and study support.

A very exciting addition has also been made to the traditional FGASA course, which is likely to provide Tourvest Guide Academy alumni with an added advantage. The programme now



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includes a six-month foreign language course, which will make the young guides indispensable to foreign visitors. Candidates are currently learning German. Italian and Mandarin may be added to the curriculum in the not-too-distant future.

Tourvest would like to extend thanks to the suppliers who have lent continued support to the Tourvest Guide Academy. Without the participation of these valuable partners, this programme and all its positive effects may never have been possible:

- Tourvest Travel Retail
- Trappers
- EcoTraining

Tourvest is committed to enriching the communities in which it operates. The Tourvest Guide Academy has seen a R 3 million investment so far. It further aims to sign up 16 new students every six months, for at least the next three-years. The initiative will produce qualified guides, proficient in foreign languages, who are able to make a valuable ongoing contribution to South Africa's booming tourism economy.

For more information on Tourvest and aha Hotels & Lodges, or to make a booking, please visit www.aha.co.za

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aha Hotels and Lodges manages a collection of hotels and lodges throughout Southern Africa, including Gauteng, Western Cape, Northern Cape, Free State, North West Province, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, Limpopo and in Southern Africa; Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Zambia and Ethiopia.
