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Sunset after a rain shower on the Namib plains

International accolades for Namibia’s ‘green’ standing are not surprising to those of us who are involved in the tourism sector. For decades the Ministry of Environment and Tourism and private enterprise in the tourism sector have not only been campaigning together for the sustainable development of tourism, but have done so with laws to support these actions. We as a young democracy boast about the fact that the wise people who wrote our constitution enshrined within it the protection of our natural environment. What is exciting now, and will serve as an inspiration to all of us, is that true ‘green’ credentials have a broader meaning than just conservation. The green approach is considered good business practice, at real value. The fact that Wolwedans was chosen as the first Long Run Destination in Namibia (see next page) and is currently one of only ten in Africa is a feather in our cap, as well as in theirs. I am convinced that many Namibian establishments will soon follow suit.

How great it is that those who have invested money and time because they personally believe in the principles of sustainable tourism, will now reap the benefits on the bottom line. And it could not have come at a more opportune time. When times are tough it is just natural to cut back on what used to be considered not absolutely necessary. This global trend towards a new greener footprint shows that what Namibian establishments invest in these efforts, is indeed necessary and will be financially beneficial in the long run. Soon those Eco Award flowers for your lodge will influence a client’s decision to stay with you.

This year we also celebrate the NTB’s first decade. Venture Publication’s contribution to this important milestone is a special edition later this year that will reflect on the Board’s successes and achievements over the past ten years. To demonstrate the important role the NTB’s private-sector partners have played in its success, we invited local tourism businesses to tell their stories. We are hard at work compiling information that will impress even the most cynical.

It is with the utmost self-restraint that I refrained from starting this editorial with a comment on the copious rains we’ve been having. I can’t help but say to the tourists who apparently cancelled their visit to Namibia because of the rains that it is their loss. It has been nature’s spectacular drama in all its magnitude.

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Balloon flight over NamibRand

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In it for the Long Run

Wolwedans first to pave the green way

Paving the way to a greener and more environmentally friendly Namibia, Wolwedans is the first and currently only Namibian establishment to be chosen as one of ten Long Run Destinations around the world.

In line with the worldwide trend to move tourism into the green lane, Jochen Zeitz, founder of the Zeitz Foundation, chairman and CEO of PUMA, and chief sustainability officer of PPR – the Luxury, Sport and Lifestyle holding company – launched the Long Run Initiative as the Zeitz Foundation’s guide to assist the world in working towards a better future.

The Long Run Initiative is based on three interlinked but distinct elements: Long Run Supporters; Long Run Alliance Members; and Long Run Destinations, such as Wolwedans. Long Run Destinations are institutions that directly manage or significantly influence the management of a natural area of conservation value which has defined geographical boundaries, and which have demonstrated their ability and commitment to achieve sustainability through the four Cs – community, culture, commerce and conservation.

Stephan Brückner, managing director of Wolwedans, stresses: “You can have the best-quality marble in the bathrooms, the softest silk linen in the bedrooms, the greatest interior design and the best chefs in

the kitchen, but what’s the use if you don’t also have the green button?”

The green button, of course, refers to the sustainable tourism aspect, which, globally, is fast becoming the most important factor when choosing a holiday destination.

The Zeitz Foundation’s Global Ecosphere Retreat® (GER) Certification system, which Wolwedans is currently undergoing, is setting a new standard in sustainability, and is a driving force in promoting and developing sustainable thinking around the globe. It ensures that best practices in sustainability are adhered to and innovative approaches experimented with and researched to develop sustainable solutions.

Put Namibia on the ‘green’ map globally

“It is of little use if each country has its own eco-accreditation system, but it’s not recognised on a global level,” says Stephan. Following a presentation on global standards for sustainable tourism in January, eco awards Namibia will align its criteria with standards approved by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), further putting Namibia on the green map.

The NamibRand Nature Reserve, where Wolwedans is located, is governed by a strict code of ethics and the number of guests it



Wolwedans Dune Camp, the first and currently only Namibian establishment to be chosen as one of ten Long Run Destinations around the world

can accommodate is restricted. Visitor park fees are channelled directly into the conservation of NamibRand Nature Reserve. The Wolwedans Foundation, whose key objectives are education, conservation and social development, was also a determining factor for being chosen as a Long Run Destination. The Foundation funds the Desert Academy, which teaches young Namibians all aspects of the hospitality industry and is aimed at raising skills levels and the overall quality of Namibian hospitality. The Foundation also supports the Namibian Institute of Culinary Education, a commercial restaurant, a bar and a chef-training school.

Wolwedans was named one of the world’s 50 best eco-lodges in the *National Geographic Traveller* magazine of 2010/2011. The Wolwedans Collection consists of the Dune Camp, Dunes Lodge, Private Camp and Boulders Camp. (MvR)

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