

# !Khwa ttu

## A Celebration of San Culture

---

by Hitekani Mbatsana

---

South Africa prides itself in its diversity of culture and language. This is evident in the motto on its coat of arms, written in the language of the |Xam people “!ke e: |xarra ||ke” which literally translates to “diverse people unite.” Even so, there is still a lot that the average local needs to learn about the San groups and their culture.

Under the tag, “*San Spirit Shared*,” !Khwa ttu San Culture and Education Centre on the West Coast of Cape Town is a project dedicated to San culture and education. The project is on a farm just outside Yzerfontein, which is an hour’s drive from Cape Town. Swiss anthropologist, Irene Staehlin, bought the farm in 1999 to assist the San to find work for themselves. This was achieved by training them in aspects of the tourism industry so that they could showcase the fascinating San culture and heritage to the world. All its tourism activities generate revenue for their developmental programmes, and also provide invaluable practical opportunities for the San to cultivate their skills.

We arrived at !Khwa ttu on a crisp, autumn morning with a band of clouds intermittently rolling over the mountain. I have travelled to various parts of the country and can easily recognise most South African languages, but when the two guards spoke to each other in a musical banter, my ears perked up as I thought, “*Oh, you don’t hear that too often, do you?*”

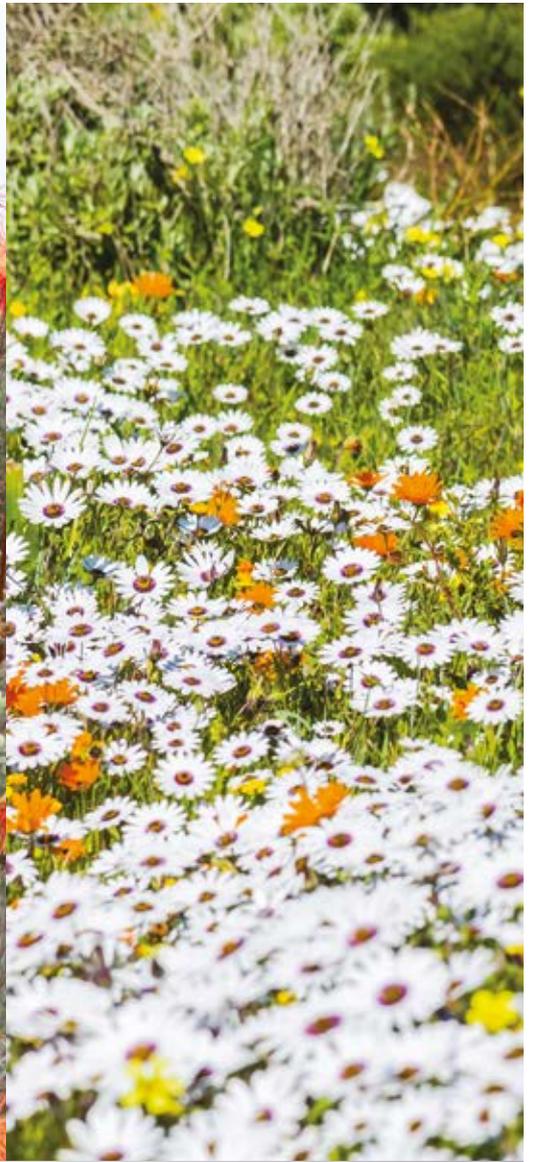
!Khwa ttu is a flourishing tourism destination that operates with sustainability in mind. It has multiple activities available to create a great day out, from guided tours to mountain bike trails for the whole family, luxurious accommodation, and a busy restaurant specialising in game reared on the farm. All the tour guides, and most

of the staff, are from various San groups. The guides are empowered to share their San heritage in a manner that rings true to them, providing a nearly forgotten glimpse into the heritage and contemporary life of the San.

The centre currently has two guided tours: a Hunting tour, and a plants and herbal tea tasting session that introduces you to unique plants and the production of San herbal teas that were brewed as medicinal remedies. Both tours offer an introduction to the San language and the unique clicks of the tongue.

Kerson Jackson or “*Mr Nice guy*” as he’s called, took us on our hunting tour. He’s a fun, bubbly character with a wealth of information. Originally from Namibia, he took us through the history of the San people, their culture, demeanour, migration, and experiences through the centuries. Kerson introduced his colleagues from different San backgrounds who have completed the skills development programmes in tourism provided by !Khwa ttu. Their excitement about their experiences and more importantly their future was palpable! It was heart-warming to see how such a place had fostered so much hope for an almost forgotten people.

The guided tour started with a tractor ride through the farm to a replicated homestead. The drive was a short but exciting one as we drove past ostriches, zebra and eland along the way. It provided great views of both the mountains and ocean in the distance. Shrieks of laughter rang through the air as the children, and dare I say the adults, joyfully bounced around until we reached our destination.



The tour was a charming experience. We learnt how animals were tracked using their footprints. The guides placed replica impressions in the sand for us to fathom which animal was being tracked. Apparently my survival skills still need some work as none of the correct answers were in fact "guinea fowl".

At a replica homestead, we also explored the tools used for hunting and discussed the way of life in the past. Kerson demonstrated the process of making fire with two fire sticks, an arduous and time-consuming chore that was always left to the young men. On windy days, the process is more challenging, so many homesteads kept the fire burning to avoid the need to relight it.

We also had a brief guide to pronunciation, which was a palate of musical clicks, but what fun! There are three main families of San languages in Southern Africa. The Ju (Northern San), Khoe (Central San), and !Uti-taa (Southern San) language family. The words Ju, Khoe, !Ui and Taa all mean 'a person' from the different families. We went through the pronunciation of various click symbols, which can also be accompanied by other sounds simultaneously including voicing, aspiration, nasalisation or a glottal stop – not something that was going to be mastered in a morning! Here's an entertaining guide to the pronunciation of one simple click-sound featured in the name, !Khwa ttu:

"!" is an alveo-palatal click, achieved as follows: press the tip of your tongue against the alveolar ridge (just behind your upper front teeth and the palate), pull your tongue downwards and back, which creates a sound something similar to a cork being pulled from a bottle.

The day excursion was a rich and fun-filled family outing. There is something profound about people telling their own stories, as there is nuance to their truth that cannot otherwise be gleaned. This was one of the most important features of this fascinating tour, which navigated us through the history, way of life, disenfranchisement and ultimate survival of South Africa's most ancient people, the San. It is the lesser told story that defines an important part of South Africa's heritage.

In September 2018, !Khwa ttu will open the only Heritage centre in the world that is solely dedicated to the San people. It is co-curated by San communities and will house untold stories, trace the ancestry of the San and demonstrate the vibrancy of the San culture.

# INTERESTING THINGS TO DO AT !Khwa ttu



Have breakfast or lunch at the restaurant and try their signature !Khwa ttu Eland Burger



Gain insight into the San culture on a San guided tour



Learn about the medicinal properties of traditionally brewed Herbal Teas on a tea tour



Ride along the mountain bike trail along well marked routes with varying degrees of difficulty



Explore the farm on walking or hiking trails and see unique plants, game, and birds



Shop for crafts, books and artwork by San artist and craftsmen



**Got to: Where to Stay**  
Enjoy some R&R at the guest house, bush lodge or tented camps on the farm