



**Sustainable Tourism  
Partnership Programme**

**BROWN SIGNS SURVEY**

**FEEDBACK REPORT**

Version 1.0

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***ACT RESPONSIBLY, GROW SUSTAINABLY™***

# CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION .....	3
2.	SURVEY DETAIL .....	6
3.	STPP OBSERVATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS .....	6
4.	CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS .....	9
5.	COMPANY INFORMATION .....	10

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## WHO WE ARE

The STPP is a non-profit company established to assist smaller tourism businesses to implement Sustainable Business Practices. Our vision is for **South African businesses and communities to work together more meaningfully towards a prospering society**, using tourism as catalyst to achieve this. Our mission is to be recognised in South Africa as the most comprehensive and effective sustainable tourism implementation programme which works through **collaborative partnerships to empower businesses and communities to bring about sustainable change**.

Established in December 2012, the STPP has received significant recognition in the industry, not only for our knowledge on Sustainable Tourism, but also for the innovative ways in which we help create awareness as well as educate and train a multitude of tourism stakeholders, including tourism businesses, other businesses, associations and industry bodies, community members, government and the tourist. One of the STPPs objectives is to conduct on-going industry surveys and collect data. This assists the programme to track qualitative and quantitative benefits of implementation efforts identify challenges to small tourism businesses, provide evidence based support to positively impact change and to find solutions to assist tourism stakeholders to implement change (please refer to our website [www.stpp.co.za](http://www.stpp.co.za) for more detail on our objectives and what we do).

## THE VALUE OF A TOURIST

The first step in most of the STPPs awareness and education programmes is to illustrate to stakeholders the value that a tourist may bring to a town.

An extract from “The Responsible and Sustainable Tourism Handbook: Southern & Eastern Africa Volume 1” (available for download at [www.sustainabletourism.co.za](http://www.sustainabletourism.co.za)), edited by the STPP and published by Alive2Green, illustrates this value as follows:

“A tourist arrives in a town renowned for its natural beauty and cultural history.

	Activity	Stakeholder in the Tourism Value Chain
1	After a few hours of driving, the tourist family car needs petrol to travel further	Service Station
2	Someone is hungry and requires a snack	Local Cafe/Service Station
3	They have booked at a place to stay for a few nights in order to reach places of interest, and have opted for a bed and breakfast with a self catering component	Accommodation

4	Now the family needs to purchase a few basics which they did not want to pack before the journey, e.g. eggs, milk and some more snacks	Retailer
5	After checking in, they decide that they need to plan their next day of activities in the town, and realise they do not have updated information or a road map (this was not available at the establishment)	Local Tourism Office
6	After visiting the tourism information office, they walk on foot to explore some of the towns attractions. They pass a curio shop. The kids are hugely excited and decide to spend some of their pocket money on toys made of wood and recycled tins by local community members.	Community curio shop
7	In the evening, instead of making food at the accommodation establishment, the tourist and his family seeks out a local restaurant for a meal.	Restaurant
8	The next morning, after breakfast, they get ready for their day's outing and realise that they had left the sunscreen at home.	Pharmacy
9	Next they set off for their day's adventure and arrives at the local National Park. At the gate, local arts and crafts are on display, and mom decides she would like to beautiful wooden salad bowl.	Local crafters
10	They sign in and pay at the gates and go on their outing	National Park
11	The next day, after spending all their cash on fun and memorabilia they need to draw some money.	Bank
12	They decide to go on a Local Tour of the Area	Local Tour Guide
13	Dad needs airtime or has left his cell phone charge at home	Cellphone shop

As illustrated, during his first 24 hours in town, the tourist has had interactions with at least 13 different stakeholders directly, and many more indirectly. Following the tourist around and understanding where he has spent his money, allows stakeholders to identify opportunities to improve the experience of the tourist.

What is critical, however is that there are a number of **indirect services** that is absolutely taken as a given. These are basic requirements, which is the responsibility of not only the tourism businesses, but all stakeholders providing some product or service to the tourism business and other businesses. These include:

1. **Tourist needs to go to the toilet:** these require Water, Electricity and a Good Sewerage System Responsibility of the Local Municipality
2. **Tourist throws away wrapper from the sweets bought.** Waste separation and waste management is key, so that the waste does not land up on the streets or in landfill. If the area was littered with garbage (see picture below taken at a town in South Africa – guesthouse is behind the photographer). Keeping streets and public spaces clean and safe is not only the responsibility of the local municipality, but also

the responsibility of each and every community member, whom the tourist will never meet.

3. **Eats at the restaurant and NEVER meets the chef.** The chef needs to be trained and his equipment needs meet health and safety requirements.
4. **The tourist moved around** and took in many sights, such as the church, national monuments, street and sidewalks. If the sights were pleasing to the eye and information including names and history was available, the tourists will have had a positive experience. The maintenance and upkeep of these sights are the responsibility of the local municipality – stakeholder that the typical tourist very seldom, if ever, interacts with.

Depending on the nature of the tourists interaction with each and every stakeholder, his observations and his feelings, he will have formed an opinion about:

1. The specific business / stakeholder
2. The town
3. The region
4. The country

The presence of the tourist creates a number of opportunities for stakeholders within any community. These include:

1. Delivering across the board Excellent Service;
2. Enticing the tourist to spend more money;
3. Enticing the tourist to come back for more visits (return business);
4. For the tourist to become a marketer for the area through word-of-mouth (telling friends, colleagues and acquaintances about his experience);

The point of the above extract is that everybody in a town has a role to play to ensure that the tourist feels welcome and looked after. Each interaction with the tourist, including communicating through brown signs, is a way of communicating the attitude the town has towards tourists. If the signs are **positioned correctly, provide correct information and are in a good condition**, the tourist will immediately gain confidence that the town is worth visiting. Further positive experiences will reinforce this message and the town will be remembered, referred to friends, revisited and most importantly, the tourist will bring more economic value to the town ((spend money in the town).

## THE ISSUE

Over the past 24 months, the STPP team has run more than 40 workshops across South Africa and has interacted with thousands of tourism business. In 90 % of the interactions, the issue of challenges with the application for and installation of brown tourism signs have been reported. In some provinces, complaints have been received where the brown signs are set up without the right permissions and containing incorrect information. We therefore decided to run a survey to gauge the extent of the problem and to identify the core issues.

## 2. SURVEY DETAIL

Number of surveys completed	400
Number of businesses that applied for brown signs	244
Number that have received brown signs	154 (63%)
Max waiting period	> 36 months
Min waiting period	1 week
Average waiting period	9 months

### Success Stories / Not difficult at all

Eastern Cape	Jeffreys Bay, Aliwal North
Free State	Harrismith, Bethlehem
Gauteng	Midvaal, Tswane (process generally took 3 - 4 months)
KZN	Ladysmith
Limpopo	Louis Trichardt
Mpumalanga	Lydenburg
Northern Cape	Springbok
Western Cape	George
North West	None

### Types of stumbling blocks identified

- Incorrect process / procedures followed - signs removed- Signs removed, no communication on reasons
- Vandalism / Theft
- Road works / road transfers - signs removed and not reinstated
- Illegally installed signs
- Inconsistency in the application of by-laws, resulting in perceived unfair treatment of products
- Poor quality products from contracted sign makers

## 3. STPP OBSERVATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### General Comments

There is a general misinformation and misunderstanding amongst businesses. Some examples include:

- What is the correct application process and who is allowed to have signs (e.g. Non-grading was cited as a reason for not being allowed signs) ?
- The role of roads agencies and who should re-instate signs removed or hand-over between roads agencies (local vs regional)
- Correct installation procedures advised by one department, followed by the removal of signs by another department
- Processes are being ignored and in some instances illegal signs have been erected due to the frustrations of the applicants.
- The time that it takes from application to final approval as well as the different entities that need to be dealt with before signs can be erected are the key factors contributing to the issue.
- There are some establishments that would shy away from applying for signs as they believe that it is a security risk and would not want to promote tourist arriving without a prior booking. However, these seem to be in a minority.
- The findings from the survey were very similar from Province to Province, Local Municipality to Local Municipality.
- The process in most cases is complex, there is a lot of red tape as there is more than one department involved.
- Complications come into play in relation to where signs should be placed i.e on National Road (not allowed), a provincial road or a municipal road.
- Different departments are involved.
- By-laws in the different towns, municipalities and districts are inconsistent.

The STPP believes that solutions can be found in all towns and regions if a number key principles are adopted by local business owners and./ or local councillors that are passionate about making change. These include:

### **Taking responsibility / being a champion**

We have received reports of town where the process has worked extremely well. In these instances, the local council members 1) understood the value of a well-positioned and accurate tourism sign, 2) took initiative to involve all the relevant stakeholders in the application, approval, specification and installation processes and 3) made the process easy and accessible to tourism businesses. The person taking responsibility and being a champion can be any business owner or council member. The key is to be willing to take the lead and drive the process, despite the difficulties encountered.

If you are one of the people that have had good success, please share names, contact details, sources of information with your local counterparts via e-mail.

### STPP story on signage

We arrived at our guesthouse in a town where we were going to run a workshop the next day. We found the guesthouse quite easily, as the brown tourism signs were accurately placed. We were very hungry and ready for supper, and were directed to the only local independent restaurant. However, the signs to this restaurant were incorrectly placed and directed us into driving around in circles for more than 30 minutes. We then gave up and went to a local fast-food restaurant, which did not quite provide us with the local experience we were looking for. As with many human experiences, we remember the town for its greasy fast food and not for an authentic local experience!

### **The “brown sign issue” is just one of the symptoms of a greater lack of understanding of the criticality of tourism in economic sustainability**

It is up to the tourism businesses and local municipality to take hands and work together to reinforce the messages of the critical role that tourism could play in local economic development and local prosperity. As illustrated in the introductory section, providing tourists with information and making them feel welcome is critical for any town. Brown Signs are an excellent way to promote a tourism business in a region and a town. However, from the survey, as well as our own observations during many interventions, it is clear that as with many other aspects of tourism, tourism is left to tourism departments, tourism businesses and tourism associations to run. And more importantly, tourism budgets are the ones that get cut first.

There are a number of education and training interventions available from the STPP, partner organisations and other industry players that will assist stakeholders in the implementation process of brown tourism signs to understand their roles in tourism and the potential economic value it can bring. The National Department of Tourism has published a “The South African Tourism Planning Toolkit for Local Government” in 2010 and Gauteng Tourism Authority Published a “Responsible Tourism Planning Manual in 2002”. These documents are extremely informative and comprehensive, but working through it may require significant time and effort. The STPP recommends that a 2 to 3 day training intervention is set up with relevant stakeholders in your town or region..

### **Maki it easy**

The majority of Establishments and Tourism businesses are not sure where to apply and how to apply. Many people that completed the survey have suggested the following:-

- “Easy application process with simple rules to follow”
- “The Authority could publish requirements in some sort of guidebook including statutory requirements for the types of businesses that require signs”
- “On line application process managed by Local Municipality”
- “Combined tourism signs for all properties should be placed in strategic positions”
- “... make available a straightforward specification of the layouts, construction, erection and placements and then take offenders to task if the deviation is outside these limits”

In towns where the processes worked well, an information booklet was available, providing a step-by-step guideline on the application process and the “do’s” and “don’ts” of brown tourism signs.

Special campaigns were run and meetings were called where tourism businesses were given the opportunity to submit their applications, and the processes were followed through within a short turnaround time

## 4. CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

Following our observations, the STPP will endeavour to take the issue of “Brown Tourism Signage” to the National Department of Tourism and request a point of discussion on the Agenda at the National Provincial Forum. Once this has been discussed, the STPP will give all participants of the survey feedback on possible solutions;

In the meantime, tourism business should continue to apply for brown signs, and send information via our website should problems be encountered. We endeavour to try and assist by providing detail of people that have had success, so that knowledge may be exchanged;

In conclusion, we request that all participants in this survey continue to stay involved with the STPP. We look forward to receiving your ongoing feedback and your requests for assistance. The more that we can all get involved and bring issues to the attention of the various departments, the more we will all prosper in tourism and create a sustainable environment in which to operate. And most importantly, the surveys provide us with support in raising issues and challenges as information is no longer seen as being based on “isolated” cases or as “anecdotal” stories.

Please get involved.

- Participate in future STPP surveys – check [www.stpp.co.za](http://www.stpp.co.za) for detail where we will have a dedicated space to access surveys, polls and data collection once our new website is up and running;
  - Let us know which surveys you are interested in and we will evaluate your request and possibly run your survey;
  - Get involved by signing up for our monthly newsletter and joining our social media pages;
  - Get involved by attending the various workshops that we and our partners offer.
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## 5. COMPANY INFORMATION

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Or visit our website | [www.stpp.co.za](http://www.stpp.co.za)

Or Facebook Page | [www.facebook.com/sustainabletourismPP](http://www.facebook.com/sustainabletourismPP)

Or on Mxit | [mxitapp.com/mystpp](http://mxitapp.com/mystpp)

**Company Registration Number:** NPC 2012/126418/08

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## APPENDIX 1: National Minimum Standard for Responsible Tourism SANS1162:2011outline

1. Environmental Criteria: - Implementation of actions related to the reduction of the impact on the environment e.g.
  - Reduction in consumption of energy and water;
  - Improved waste management;
  - Improved sourcing policies to reduce carbon footprint;
  - Reduction of the use of harmful materials;
  - Biodiversity protection;
  - Conservation awareness and participation.
  
2. Cultural and Social Criteria:- Protection and support of local cultures, places of importance and traditions to ensure equity and sustainability in the area of operation
  - Protection of historical, archaeological, cultural and spiritual sites;
  - Provision of access to local communities;
  - Restriction on tourist activities on provision of basic services;
  - Use of local arts, crafts, cultural artefacts in operations, décor;
  - Support local development initiatives;
  - Provide opportunity for tourists to buy locally produced goods....where legal;
  - Communicate behavioural codes to visitors;
  - Provide information to staff on HIV/AIDs and general wellbeing.
  
3. Economic Criteria:- Restoring balance to bringing prosperity to the local environment and its people e.g.
  - Equitable recruitment processes
  - Local employment / emphasis on designated groups
  - Local purchasing of goods and services & set targets
  - Support of SME's
  - Living wages
  - Prohibit child labour, forced labour, sexual exploitation
  - Report transparently on guest contributions
  
4. Operational and Management Criteria:- Implementation of appropriate management systems, measurement tools, policies and procedures to positively impact on natural, economic, social and cultural diversity e.g.
  - Local and National Regulation alignment;
  - Policies & Procedures (where relevant and practical);
  - Staff awareness and training;
  - Measurement tools;
  - Consumer Protection Act – deliver what is promised;
  - Public availability of information;
  - New construction / renovation recognises environmental and cultural aspects;
  - Access for disabled people / Universal Access;
  - Customer feedback and corrective actions.

A copy of the SANS1162:2011 should be sourced from the SABS for further detail.