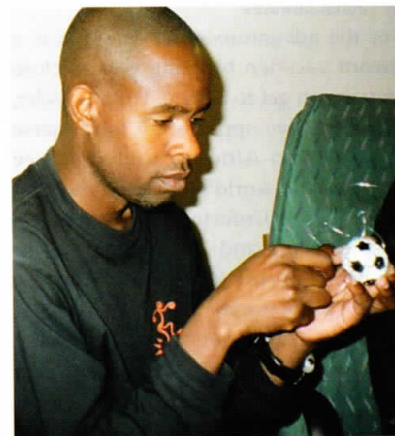


Fair-Trade Shopping in Cape Town

PURCHASES THAT DO RIGHT



Imizamo Yethu, one of many shantytowns near Cape Town where thousands of non-whites live in unsanitary conditions; Streetwires artisan Artwell Munenura creating a soccer ball out of beads and wire.

article & photos by Andrea Hodgins

A visit to Cape Town is soul-stirring stuff. Although cloaked in spectacular beauty, the “Mother City,” as locals call it, still bears the scars of a regime that denied the majority of South Africans human rights and access to basic services. Since Nelson Mandela’s triumph in this country’s first democratic elections in 1994, those oppressed by the former apartheid government have witnessed some improvements. But many still face crippling socio-economic challenges including unemployment, inadequate housing, diseases, and illiteracy.

THE STRUGGLE

According to the United Nations, South Africa’s unemployment rate is 29 percent, while over one-third of its approximately 45 million people are forced to survive on a meager \$2 a day. Many have no choice but to live in overcrowded shantytowns or “townships,” where gastroenteritis, measles, respiratory infections, and tuberculosis run rampant. In 2004, World Vision noted that just 30 percent of the population had access to safe drinking water. But what is ravaging the nation is HIV/AIDS. UNICEF reports that South Africa has the world’s highest total number of people suffering from this deadly disease. And a staggering

one million children have been orphaned by AIDS, forcing many of them to leave school and provide income for their families. Malnutrition, distance to school, and lack of resources also keeps thousands of school-age children from getting an education. Yet, it is not just the young who are poorly educated. World Vision estimates that more than 10 million black adults are illiterate. What is even more heartbreaking is that UNICEF claims there’s been a rise in child abuse and children living in shelters or on the streets.

HOPE THROUGH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS

Despite these grim realities, visitors to Cape Town can help in a small but important way to alleviate poverty by purchasing handmade crafts created through numerous social uplift programs. Generally, employees in these programs are provided with art materials such as beads or wire. The artisans then create handicrafts, which the employer buys at a fair price to sell in his or her store. Some craftspeople receive hourly pay and benefits. Thanks to these employment initiatives, employees are often able to work at home in the townships, so they can be with their families and save on transportation costs. Several

programs offer life, business, and literacy skills training. Your purchases not only contribute to financial and emotional empowerment, but they also help maintain unique artistic traditions. That’s a lot of bang for your buck.

BO-KAAP DISTRICT

A picturesque metropolis of approximately four million people, Cape Town offers a cornucopia of vibrant hand-crafted jewelry, gifts, and home décor. In the colorful Bo-Kaap district, don’t miss the innovative Streetwires shop. With wire, beads, metal, and tin as their medium, you’ll be amazed by the ingenuity of the some 120 previously unemployed artisans. On weekdays, you’re able to watch them at work. Pick up a gecko, napkin rings, or transistor radio purse adorned with rich jewel tone beads. “I’m confident that this business will provide sustainable employment long after I’m gone,” beams affable co-founder Winston Rangwani.

Around the corner, in a funky monkey-face-studded building, is MonkeyBiz, which showcases outstanding beadwork. Nelson Mandela magnets are a big hit, as are the intricately crafted animals and dolls, created by 450 employees. Proceeds from sales help to fund a well-

ness clinic, which offers skills training, counseling, yoga therapy, and homeopathic treatment for low-income HIV positive women.



Joseph Diliza, founder of Thando Papers, pioneered the use of invasive weeds to make paper products.

THE VICTORIA & ALBERT WATERFRONT

The bustling Victoria & Albert (V & W) Waterfront offers an excellent selection of "township art." For one-stop shopping, head to the Red Shed Craft Workshop. At Original T-Bag Designs be sure to watch the inspirational video about this one-of-a-kind business that uses tea bags for canvases. The studio and main store are located in the upscale suburb of Hout Bay, a few blocks from the dilapidated homes in Imizamo Yethu township, where the artisans live.

"I was troubled by the poverty at the end of the road and...I felt that something had to be done to make a difference," says founder Jill Heyes, a former schoolteacher from England whose warmth and concern for her employees shines through. Heyes confesses, "I'm not a businesswoman." Despite this, coasters, cards, magnets, bags, and candleholders are flying off the shelves, helping 20 people to earn a living.

At the 15-year old craft co-operative, Masizakhe, you'll find the works of more than a dozen talented artisans. Whether it's safety pin bracelets, filigree fruit bowls, or belts made from recycled pop cans, you won't walk out of here empty-handed. Of particular note is the selection of paper goods by Joseph Diliza's

company, Thando Papers. A soft-spoken man, Diliza has won acclaim for taking invasive reeds that are clogging riverbeds and harvesting them to create paper products. He also trains disabled people in the art of papermaking.

The exquisite Get Wired sells delicate bead and wirework. Photos of the craftswomen from the Crossroads township dot the walls amid their chic creations of rings, necklaces, lamps, pillowcases, and evening purses. Sometimes, you will see the women working on their creations while you shop.

Bursting with eye-catching pieces, Delagoa African Arts and Crafts, in the Waterfront's Clock Tower, is a must-see. Included in the vast array of handicrafts is a selection of quirky papier-mâché bowls from the AIDS-focused organization, Wola Nani. Purchases of the Topsy Foundation's adorable beaded miniature dolls also help in the fight against AIDS.

GARDENS

When you're in the Gardens neighborhood, check out yet another excellent source for socially conscious goods: Heartworks. In addition to MonkeyBiz and Wola Nani crafts, this gem sells offbeat Mielie handbags, home wares, and accessories, all made from recycled materials.

Mielie founder, Adri Schutz, says, "When I started, I wanted to make a difference to 300 people." Now, she's happy that she's been able to help even one person to "slowly pick up the pieces."

On a visit to the Mielie store and studio at the Montebello Design Centre in

Newlands, 30 women are employed. It is the day of the week when they come in from outlying areas to drop off their finished products and pick up more materials. A few of the artisans stay and work together in the well-ventilated, light-filled attic laughing while they proudly show off their rainbow-colored creations.

DOING RIGHT

As leader of this "Rainbow Nation," Nelson Mandela once said, "We must use time wisely and forever realize that the time is always ripe to do right." Cape Town offers visitors many opportunities to do right and help make a positive contribution to the livelihoods of the many gifted craftpeople in this remarkable nation. ■

Andrea Hodgins is a freelance writer who has criss-crossed the globe for more than 20 years. She is an avid supporter of fair-trade handicrafts and poverty alleviation. Contact her at anhodgins@yahoo.com.



MARKETPLACE
HANDWORK OF INDIA

Global fashion that
makes a difference!

www.marketplaceindia.com
or call
(800) 726-8905
for a catalog

We are a non-profit,
Fair Trade organization.

Empowering Women Through Art and Enterprise

Experience. Explore. *Embrace.*

Customized Tours & Cultural Experiences around the globe that strengthen your mind, spirit and integrity



Work • Volunteer • Teach • Intern • Study • Travel

Discover the *Similarities*
Share the *Differences...*

www.culturalembrace.com
(US/Canada Toll Free) 866.282.8511