

three tree hill

history • nature • culture



Community & Conservation Foundation

Three Tree Hill is a small luxury lodge situated in the foothills of the Drakensberg mountains, northern Kwa Zulu Natal, South Africa. All the staff employed here come from the local village, Hambrook, which is 8km down the road. Through our Community & Conservation Levy (together with generous guest donations) we are able to fund small (& large) community & conservation projects in the area. Since many of our guests visit the World Heritage Site (Okhahlamba Drakensberg Park), we also support the community in that area with the Legacy of Grace SA project. Spioenkop Game Reserve, managed by Ezimvelo Wildlife, neighbours the lodge property. Guests are privileged to join guided walks in this special 6000ha reserve where rhino, giraffe & zebra roam wild. The fund helps to support various conservation projects in & adjacent to this reserve.

We are proud to be a certified member of Fair Trade Tourism (FTT), promoting best-practice responsible tourism in Africa. The aim of FTT is to make tourism more sustainable by ensuring that the people who contribute their land, resources, labour and knowledge to tourism are the ones who reap the benefits. This is done by growing awareness about responsible tourism to travellers; assisting tourism businesses to operate more sustainably; and by facilitating a FTT certification programme across southern Africa. Tourism businesses that adhere to the FTT standard use the FTT label as a way of signifying their commitment to fair and responsible tourism. This includes fair wages and working conditions, fair purchasing and operations, equitable distribution of benefits and respect for human rights, culture and the environment. All staff receive sustainability induction training where they learn about good environmental practices, which apply not only to reducing their environmental impact in the workplace, but can also be applied in their homes and communities. Staff are encouraged to come up with ideas on improving the business as well as projects in the community.

We do believe that your contribution will make a difference in preserving the history, nature & culture of this region.

Our story begins...

In 2007 we settled in this beautiful area surrounded by the Drakensberg mountains and our relationship with the Zulu community down the road began. After consulting the staff from the lodge, we discovered that the crèche in the village had no facilities and the grounds were in need of maintenance. There were 18 children attending the facility.

Our first major guest donation was from Blackstar Fund Managers, Johannesburg South Africa. They donated a [jungle gym](#). The absenteeism plummeted – everyone wanted to come to school to play! There are now 84 children enrolled at the learning centre.

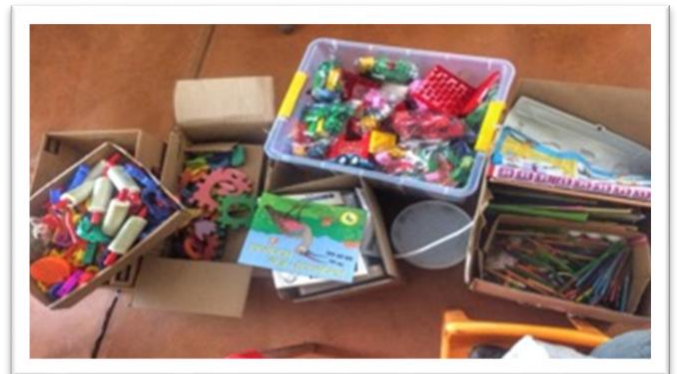
Then, we discovered that many children were coming to school hungry and falling asleep during the school day. We contacted a friend in Mpumalanga that had formulated a nutritional, [vitamin-enriched porridge](#) designed for people with immune deficiencies. This Nhlayisa porridge, is fed to the children each morning, together with a cooked meal consisting of maize-meal, meat & vegetables.



We then decided to donate a portion of each guest accommodation expense to a fund that could sustain these projects. Some guests that stay at the lodge decide to leave a larger portion, or donate their services or goods to help the community - such as [books](#), [puzzles](#), [toys](#), [computers](#) and [IT expertise](#).

The next thing we had to do at the crèche was secure the area from the wandering goats & cattle in the village. We wanted to start a [permaculture garden](#), but didn't want to share it with all the livestock in the village. We erected a strong & sturdy fence. We then sponsored the connection of a water source from the main municipal water line. With the incredibly back-breaking hard work of 2 ladies from the Mphophomeni Conservation Group in Howick, we began breaking the soil to start the garden. The ground was as hard as rock, but Ntombenhle & Tutu persisted until the final product revealed a heart-warming food garden, enjoyed by pollinating insects & the children alike. Slowly, but surely, food & flowers have been planted & then subsequently enjoyed by the children for lunch. We now also employ a care-taker that can help keep the grounds in shape & clean for the teachers to focus on the children's education.

We then decided to [upgrade the existing buildings](#) to create a more comfortable space for the children to learn in. We

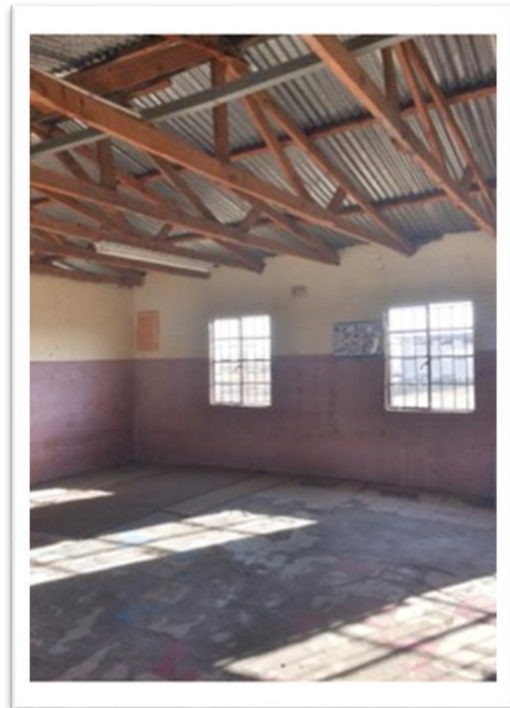


started by waterproofing the exterior roofs, installing insulation & ceilings with electric light fittings. We have installed gutters on the refurbished building that feed into [rain water tanks](#), that can then be used for cooking or for the permaculture garden. Children learn the process of capturing & saving this precious resource. We sanded, sealed & painted the walls, erected pin & chalk boards for the teachers to display their learning materials. With guidance from an experienced teacher training facilitator, we bought carpets for the children to sit on, desks & chairs for writing, bookcases & cupboards for separating all the learning areas.

We have also installed a [water-less toilet system](#) that separates urine & solid waste, some of which is recycled into the flower garden & produces exquisite blooms!

In 2018 we interviewed & hired 2 more teachers for the creche. We also arranged a [Teacher Training Programme](#) through Botshabelo to facilitate practical training workshops for the teachers. They come all the way from Johannesburg every 3 months & spend 4 days with the teachers in their classroom environment. This training has been invaluable to our facility.

[Nobomi High School](#) then approached us to ask for assistance with computer training. The school had no facilities for this, so we decided to convert one of the classrooms into a Computer Learning



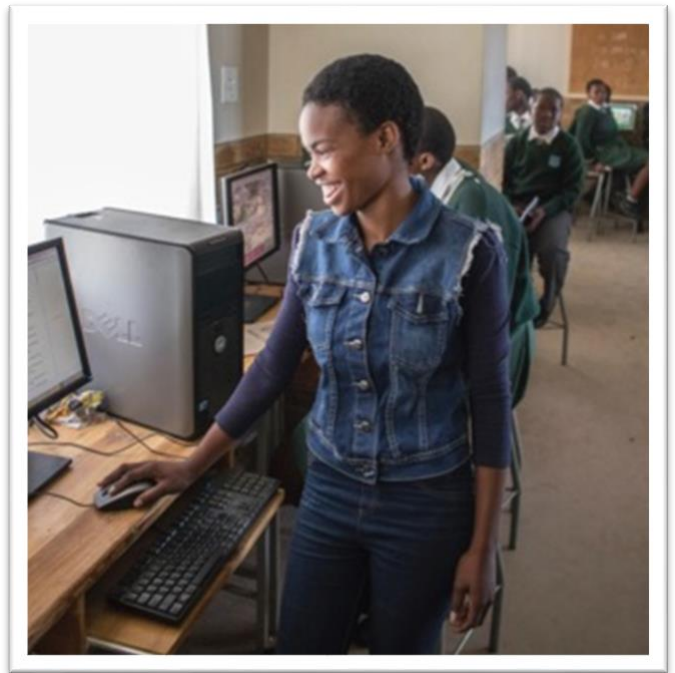
Before... and After...



Centre, by renovating the existing desks to house the computers. Microsoft donated the operating systems & the lodge arranged an internet connection. We were all geared up, but had no teacher! We decided to find a volunteer to help set up the computer training programme. A young German scholar, Alex, spent 3 months at the school, working closely with the principal, teachers & students. Most of the children had never touched a computer before, so the learning curve was huge. The time went so quickly and Alex had to return to Germany. The children now sat without a teacher. A long-term solution was needed. After extensive interviews in the community, a young student, Noxolo, was chosen to attend a computer training course at Boston college, so that she would be able to start teaching the high school pupils at their own level, in their own language and hopefully for a long period of time. Thank you to a very generous sponsor, Julia Aalbers, Noxolo has completed her studies successfully & she now teaches at the school full-time, funded by Three Tree Hill.

[Sakhile Centre of Learning...](#)

In 2015, one of the guests from Three Tree Hill visited the Amazizi community neighbouring Okhahlamba Drakensberg National Park and was deeply moved by the passion of the community guide (Elijah Mbonane) & the children in his village.



Noxolo teaching Computer Classes



She partnered with this guide to [create a Learning Centre](#) for kindergarten-age children, to teach them English & Environmental Tourism. The centre now has 60 children attending (aged 1 – 5 years), with 2 full-time teachers. Zinhle Shabalala has attended the practical teacher-training sessions through Botshabelo and is has completed a formal [Early Childhood Development Diploma](#) through Lyceum college to further her passion for helping the community children.

In 2018, another guest committed to donating a large sum of money to re-build the school, which is taking place at the moment. Incorporating sustainable building methods to expand the facilities to further educate the children & have better space for promoting the community tourism projects in the area.

[Getting guests involved...](#)

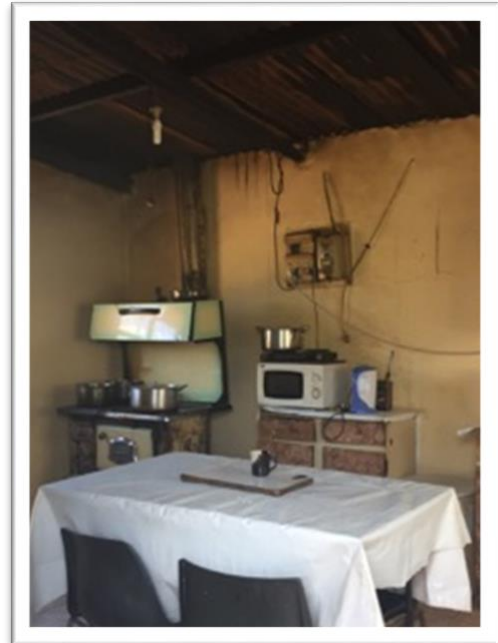
Encouraging guests to visit the community on a [Village Tour](#) gives them a better understanding of the assistance needed in uplifting the community. We do not wish to change the way the people live, but we would like the youth to benefit from better educational opportunities to preserve their culture for the future. We would like to offer assistance with entrepreneur projects that would bring income into the community to be spent locally rather than



in the big cities. Guests can either walk, drive or do the tour by bicycle. This is guided by one of the staff members from the lodge, who also resides in the village. The tour is authentic & un-prompted, lasting approximately 4 hours (by bike) 2 hours (by car) 8 hours (by foot) Guests may take cash to purchase beer or coldrinks from the traditional Spaza shop, but asked not to hand out money to the residents. Should you wish to bring practical gifts from home, these may include coloured pencils, crayons, powder paint, paper, USB sticks, school shoes, blankets or something similar. These may be handed out on the tour should you wish?

School Leavers...

Each year, we provide a practical workspace for learners from the Tourism Department, for students to gain practical work experience during their year-long Tourism course. These students are expected to cover a wide range of subjects, including health & safety, hygiene & culture, service excellence, duties & responsibilities of a tourism ambassador, financial planning, budgets & advertising in the tourism sector. After the full year, which includes continuous assessments, the students have the opportunity to apply for a permanent position at the lodge.



Entrepreneur projects...

We are always open to new ideas for staff or village residents who have a skill or talent & wish to make a business out of it. Our staff transport is funded by Three Tree Hill, affording the taxi owner with a fixed monthly income to run his vehicle for the staff & school children that live along his daily route. Ntobeko, front of house manager, started making doilies to sell in the lodge shop so she could raise funds to buy her mother a refrigerator. She has done this and continues to supplement her income with the sale of these beautiful doilies. Maduna, housekeeper, has started her own business making copper wire underplates for sale in the lodge shop. Other projects that have empowered women in the village - hand crafted beaded dolls & traditional stylish clothing.

Conservation... Since the lodge & the village lies adjacent to the Spioenkop Game Reserve, it is very important for the community & children to learn about this reserve and conservation in general. Since many of the residents have never seen the wildlife in the reserve, we will attempt to educate them about this treasure & slowly but surely arrange for the youth to travel to the park to see the wildlife.

Three Tree Hill works closely with the game rangers that protect the animals in



the reserve, alerting them of any suspicious [poaching](#) activities in the area. One of our guests even had special backpacks made for their patrols.

Energy & water conservation workshops are carried out in the village, assisting less fortunate families with small [solar system](#) set-ups.

Further conservation efforts on the property include the permanent removal of [alien vegetation](#) species that inhibit the growth of indigenous species. This is a labour-intensive process that requires careful management to avoid spreading. Regular paths taken by the animals are monitored and brush-packed to avoid any further erosion.

In order to reduce our overall environmental footprint, Three Tree Hill have comprehensive procedures and systems in place to reduce energy, water usage and to manage waste responsibly. Should you be interested in conducting a short tour highlighting these practices, please feel free to ask any staff member who will gladly show you.

We use [energy-saving](#) LED light bulbs throughout the lodge, insulate our walls and ceilings and purchase appliances and equipment with energy saving in mind. A solar cooker & Wonder Bag are used in the kitchen to further reduce consumption. All our water geysers are fitted with solar tubes to make use of heat provided by the sun. A very thorough [recycling](#) programme ensures that not only paper, cardboard, glass, plastic



and tins are recycled, but also used stationery, soap and candle wax are re-used in various forms. Tea bags are sun-dried, laced with paraffin & used as firelighters. Cereal & biscuit boxes, toilet rolls and magazines are taken to the community pre-school for use in their art classes. All garden and kitchen waste is composted or fed to earthworms, chickens & pigs. A monthly roster is in place to dose all septic tanks with bio salts.

Water from the jugs in the rooms & tables are fresh from our aquifer, which is 120m (430ft) deep. Please do not leave the taps running while you are brushing your teeth or shaving. Don't run the water to wait for it to heat. Please, only put towels & sheets under the basin if you want them washed or else we will only replace them when you leave. All our showers are fitted with low flow heads. We have rain water collection tanks around most of the buildings. This water is used for washing the guest's vehicles before departure & supplementing the borehole in the rainy season. All the plants in our garden are indigenous & therefore use minimal water. All grey laundry water flushes out into the vegetable garden, watering it throughout the year. All cleaning chemicals are biodegradable & diluted on site.

Fresh **produce** is mostly sourced from the local farmers co-operative in Bergville. Great care and research has gone into sourcing produce from small business owners located in the area. We have our own vegetable & herb garden which is used



daily in preparation for guest meals. Compost & vermi-compost is made on site & used to nourish the garden. Only organic pesticides (garlic & canola oil) are used in the garden. We have also tried to use foods in the kitchen with reduced preservatives, additives & colourants, purchasing only South African made products, where possible. Replacement linen & furnishings are bought locally in South Africa from South African designers & carpenters.

Goals for the future....

We would like to upgrade the toilet facilities at the creche. And build a shaded, sheltered eating area, where children can sit and enjoy their lunches without soiling the learning areas. We would also like to build a greenhouse to grow seedlings that can be distributed in the community. We would like to encourage the idea of self-sustainability, with conscious efforts to reduce excessive consumption of resources. We would like to cultivate an area behind the second class that can be used for motor-skill development & outside play/sport related education. This would also include an upgrade & extension to the existing jungle gym.

Our present monthly expenses throughout the year include salaries for 7 teachers, 1 caretaker & food for 84 children.



Should you wish to facilitate expertise in any of the above projects or be willing to donate a sum of money, please **contact**

Cheryl@threetreehill.co.za or

+27 84 9854284 or follow the DONATE link on our website

<http://threetreehill.co.za/#philosophy> to

make a donation in your own currency.

The link will take you to a new page exchange4free where you can follow the prompts.

Why not do a fund-raiser campaign for your next birthday party? Instead of friends bringing you gifts that may collect dust in your home, invite them to donate something on your behalf.

