

Welcome to my town

TOWNSHIP TOURS reveal a different side to South Africa and provide an invaluable insight, writes Emma Northam

A ramshackle assortment of tightly packed, corrugated iron shacks clings to the gentle slopes surrounding the sparkling waters of False Bay. This is Khayelitsha. Around 20 miles from Cape Town, it is one of South Africa's three largest townships and home to somewhere in the region of a million people.

From Lookout Hill on the corner of Mew Way and Spine Road, where the new Ikhaya community centre takes pride of place, the view beyond the township of soaring, rugged mountains, verdant winelands and azure sea feels out of place.

But then, much about Khayelitsha seems incongruous. It is at once informal and formal, friendly and yet apart – even its homes range from dilapidated tin shacks to smart brick houses. It is perhaps not surprising that such a conflicting mix exists just 15 years after the end of apartheid; generations worth of rebuilding – both physical and spiritual – have still to be achieved throughout the country.

Many of those at the vanguard of the new South Africa are the younger members of the population. Our guide, Luvuyo, a nattily dressed Khayelitsha resident in his twenties, clasps my hand in a firm greeting involving

three quickly executed, interchanging grips, and insists, "Call me Vuyo." Vuyo (pronounced Voeeoo), who has been leading tours of his home for four years, introduces us to Mma Pauline, a matriarch of Khayelitsha who helps cook for some of the less fortunate of the township's children at Ikhaya.

Township tours are an increasingly popular attraction for tourists keen to have the "real South Africa" experience and it would be hard to meet people more real than the Khayelitshans.

Children scurry about barefoot in the streets. Take their photograph or give them a "high-five" and you're a friend for life. Older residents are more tentative, and Vuyo explains some of the social and economic problems facing them: alcoholism, Aids and high unemployment. Yet crime is low, says Vuyo, in this close-knit community.

We continue through the shopping district: food stands and clothing stores, hair salons and barbers. Many operate out of old shipping containers transformed with colourful murals.

Evidence is all around of the government's rehousing efforts. Breezblock huts are replacing shacks, while on the township's outskirts, more elegant houses are springing up. Crucially, all homes will eventually have clean water supplies and electricity – basic amenities that the township's residents can exploit to run B&Bs.

At Kamamma Homestay, Mma Esme imparts her love of African cooking, producing such delicacies as *chakalaka*, a moreish vegetable ratatouille with beans, curry powder and chilli, and *umxaxha* (pronounced "umkaka"), a deliciously sweet dish of



Pleased to meet you: young Khayelitshans, above; Vuyo and Mma Pauline, below left; township murals below; *chakalaka*, bottom

butternut squash and creamed corn. At dinnertime there is a tray of succulent roast chicken, steamed bread, spinach and potato (*muragho*). We sit on the floor to eat the feast with spoons, in keeping with tradition, washing it down with Mma Esme's excellent home-made ginger beer.

Later, we head for our township B&B, Ekhaya Homestay, on Cedile Street. The house, a sizeable yellow-painted bungalow, is run by the jovial Mma and Papa Zulu. I note, with a satisfied grin, that my three-grip handshake is improving.

Mma Zulu shows us to comfortable accommodation in a separate building, though the hearty breakfast is served next morning in her attractive dining room. The table heaves with

cereals, breads and preserves, while framed family photos jostle for space on the sideboard.

Stay here for more than a few days, and you'd quickly feel part of the extended Khayelitsha family. Indeed, Khayelitsha means "Our New Home" in Xhosa, the language of "clicks" that is spoken more widely than Afrikaans here, especially by younger people.

It is perhaps due to the younger population of Khayelitsha that the residents maintain such a forward-thinking approach. Vuyo knows that nothing will change overnight yet, like so many of his generation, remains hopeful. As he waves us off, he charges us to spread the word: "Go back and tell them not all townships are the same; some of us welcome visitors."



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