



# 2023 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

**Title:** Community and Nature bring renewed life to Phiring

**Destination, Country:** Phiring Village, Kruger to Canyons Biosphere, Limpopo Province, South Africa

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**In the category:**  Destination Management     Environment & Climate     Thriving Communities  
 Nature & Scenery     Culture & Tradition     Business & Marketing

**The Story in a picture:**

“Gun Rock” on the Sethunyeng Trail.

Hike along a stream of crystal clear water, one of Phiring’s primary water sources, under tall and rare indigenous trees; listen for the call of the beautiful Narina Trogon, a shy bird skulking in a canopy, skirting water lily covered ponds, past fields of ferns and small waterfalls, clamber over rocks until you reach what is known as Gun Rock.



**Summary:**

Phiring Village, a small rural hamlet, off the beaten track but close to a popular tourism attraction with some spectacular attractions of scenic and cultural importance of its own nearby, is virtually unknown to most.

The solution was to encourage the community to form a local tourism association with the support of Kruger to Canyon’s Biosphere and other conservation minded role players to identify and promote the village’s potential as an attractive and sustainable tourism destination which could benefit the community as a whole.





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**GOOD PRACTICE STORY**

The result is that some of the attractions have been upgraded for easier access; local guides trained; a community home stay project initiated; and a destination marketing strategy developed with the intention of attracting visitors to the village.



## Good Practice Story:

### Destination description

*Brief background of the destination.*

The Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region in South Africa is approximately 2.5 million hectares in extent and already includes popular and world-renowned tourism attractions such as the Kruger National Park and the Blyde River Canyon.

However it also encompasses heavily populated areas with high unemployment where few community members benefit from tourism activity in the region.

The east of the Region, bordering Mozambique, is the Kruger National Park and adjacent Protected Areas with lush savannah biomes. This area is home to 147 mammal species, over 500 bird species and a multitude of reptile, fish, and invertebrate species.

To the west of the Greater Kruger Park Protected Area we find transition zones where most of the community live and work. Towns and villages there are densely populated, with many created because of Apartheid era social engineering which included forced removals and relocation of entire communities; as well as rich agricultural areas with vast swathes of fruit orchards. Agriculture, together with tourism are the region's primary economic drivers.

The western boundary of the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region is formed by the Northern Drakensberg Escarpment in which the Blyde River Canyon, also known as the Motlatase Canyon is situated. The Canyon is another popular tourism attraction in the region offering spectacular views of the Lowveld savanna some 800 to 1000m lower than the top of the Escarpment. The habitat at the western boundary of the Region is vastly different from that to the east, comprising of vast open grasslands, fynbos and large Afromontane forest areas on the escarpment slopes. These mountains and the escarpment are the source most of the region's water, the lifeblood for the wildlife in their natural habitat which in turn attracts tourists; the extensive agribusiness generating much needed income and jobs to the region's 1.6 million residents.

Phiring Village, the primary focus of our story, is situated at the top of the escarpment close to the western boundary of the Biosphere Region and the Blyde River Canyon.

### Issues faced

*Problems/issues solved with the Good Practice Story.*

Traditional communities living in villages like Phiring adjacent to popular tourism attractions in the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region often struggle to benefit from the large tracts of land set aside

for formal conservation and to be included in the nature-based tourism product offerings that domestic and international tourists come to enjoy.

In addition, village communities face the following issues:

- The promotion of cultural heritage and indigenous practices are also dwindling and are slowly being forgotten by the new generation.
- Climate change and its forecasted models also warn of extreme events such as floods, landslides, droughts, and fires to be expected across the landscape.
- Phiring Village, with a single gravel road passing through it, despite it being very close to the Blyde River Canyon, (a popular tourism attraction, regularly featured in South African tourism marketing publications and advertisements), is unknown to most tourists.

The area around the village offers some spectacular attractions of scenic and cultural importance they have not been promoted and marketed due to poor services, perceived safety concerns and little support / mentoring of local community members by government agencies tasked with promotion of regional tourism development and marketing.

### Methods, steps, and tools applied

*Solutions implemented to address the sustainability problems or issues.*

The K2C Biosphere, with its vision of “Partnering to achieve a sustainable future for all life” embarked on a journey to demonstrate that this can and must be changed. By using a ‘bottom up’ approach we started work on various actions to help the village of Phiring and its residents better tap into tourism activity in their area.

A first step was to establish the Ba-Dinkwanyane Tourism Association, which acts as the driver behind the development and continued growth of tourism within the area. The following processes were followed:

- Like in many areas in rural South Africa, tribal traditions are still very strong and the decision of the local tribal leader and the tribal council is extremely important before new projects with the community are to be initiated. Consultation with the tribal and community leaders had to be initiated and their support and approval sought before any project within the village precinct could proceed.
- The Dinkwanyane Water Smart Project, funded by the Government of Flanders, was initiated to establish a learning site that showcases the potential benefits of a climate adaptive green economy. This project is a partnership between the community (Bapedi Dinkwanyane) and

various NGOs including Kruger2Canyons Biosphere. As a result of this project Ba-Dinkwanyane Tourism was created with the vision that the community realising that by solving water supply issues in Phiring, livestock, crops and tourism could flourish.

The Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Team (most of whom were Phiring residents) coordinating the Dinkwanyeng Water Smart Project encouraged the community leadership to support the formation of a local tourism association, thus the Ba-Dinkwanyane Tourism Association was born, with board members elected from the local community.

- Two culturally important natural attractions in the area, Sekweneng, a living tufa waterfall, and Sethunyeng, a pristine riverine forest trail with the gigantic trees and unique rock formations were identified and have been developed with improved signage and access;
- Local site guides were recruited from the community and trained;
- Cultural interactive activities in the form of traditional Ba-pedi dance, song, craft and village cuisine are being identified and developed by the Tourism Association.
- Recently a community homestay program was initiated within Phiring Village, where the homestay hosts or “moms” as they are known locally, have recently completed their training. The official homestay launch is scheduled for September (tourism month in South Africa). The Phiring Homestays have been promoted to several inbound international tour operators and marketing of the program to the tourism industry has commenced.

All tourism activities are developed, managed and evaluated against responsible and sustainable guidelines for community tourism.

### Key success factors

*Critical elements that led to successfully solving the issues.*

Two projects were initiated in the Phiring area by Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region together with various partners and funders, these were:

- Dinkwanyane Water Smart Project with the objective being to show how sustainable land-use practices can enhance eco-system services while contributing to sustainable livelihoods and creating a resilient community.

- From the Region for the Region project is designed to support SMME's in the Kruger2Canyons Biosphere Region to practice sustainable business practices and in return assist communities with access to market.
- Our support structures include: business management training, financial management and mentoring. Ultimately creating an all-inclusive green circular economy in the Kruger 2 Canyon Biosphere Region.

The community quickly realised the benefits these projects offered the community and welcomed the appointment of a experienced tourism practitioner to identify individuals wishing to develop skills in tourism; mentor community members in the development of tourism attractions and activities; and identify homestay hosts from the community.

The Kruger to Canyons team assisted the Ba-Dinkwanyane Tourism Association set up a website and social media platforms; the Limpopo provincial tourism agency (LTA) responsible for marketing tourism in the province; tourism stakeholders and representatives of tourism focussed media were invited to visit Phiring on familiarisation trips, experiencing the tourism offerings first hand as well as exposing the community to tourists.

The development; access improvement to the main attractions; the erection of signage of attractions and trails; and the appointment of a service provider to train, manage and market the homestays can all be considered successes.

### Lessons learned

*Challenges faced while implementing the Good Practice and their solutions.*

Notwithstanding Phiring's close proximity to a popular tourism attraction, the most of the community had little or no experience interacting with tourists, particularly international tourists.

The establishment of the local tourism association representing the village combined with mentoring and upskilling community members as well as introducing them to tourism role players has given many in the community more confidence when engaging with visitors.

Recent visits to the village have shown a greater pride of place in Phiring, the litter along the road verges is no longer noticeable, community members in general are friendly and welcoming.

The biosphere is full of villages like Phiring, some more remote, but if anything could be learned from the Phiring pilot project is that with community driven initiatives supported by well resourced and committed partners, more communities can benefit.

### Achievements and Results

*Direct and indirect results of the Good Practice.*

The Phiring tourism project is still in its early stages, while marketing initiatives and showcasing the destination are ongoing, there is unlikely to be significant increase in tourism numbers for at least six

months to a year, however awareness of what Ba-Dinkwanyane Tourism has to offer is gradually increasing.

The Dinkwanyane Water Smart project has raised awareness in the community for conservation, sustainable land management and now, gradually, the benefits of tourism.

### Tips for other destinations

*Your suggestions or recommendations for other destinations facing the same issues or implementing similar solutions*

- In the South African context, the establishment of a formally recognised and representative tourism association is crucial. Such an association will be recognised by local and provincial tourism agencies which may give them access to government funding for marketing and development initiatives.
- Develop a detailed destination marketing strategy taking the needs and interests of community, domestic and international tourists into consideration. Obviously sustainability needs to be a cornerstone of such a strategy.
- Focus on starting with small wins, they grab attention and offer credibility.

### Recognitions and Additional references

*Recognitions and awards the Good Practice received and supporting evidence.*

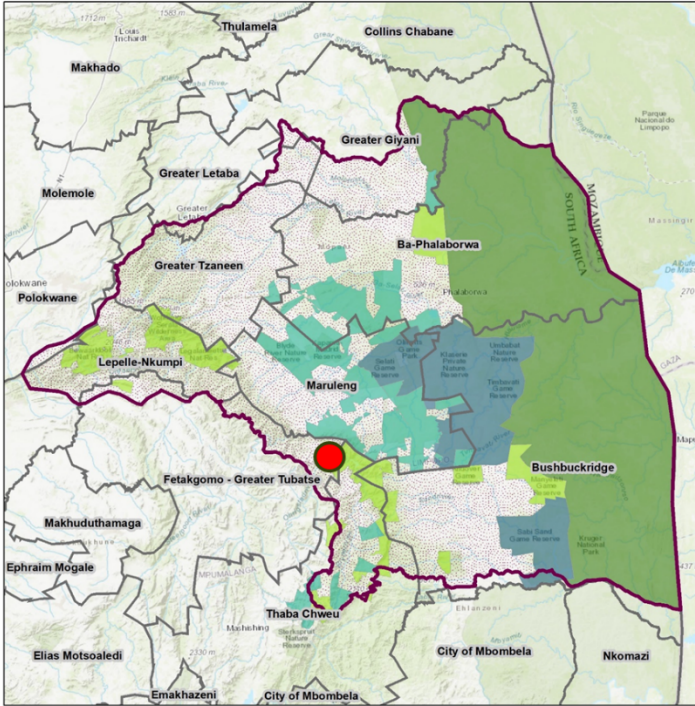
We wish to acknowledge the generous support of Acorn Tourism Development Consultants, who made it possible for Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region to become part of this year's fee waiver program.

Links:

- Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region: <https://kruger2canyons.org/>
- Dinkwanyane Tourism: <https://dinkwanyanetourism.co.za>  
<https://www.facebook.com/dinkwanyane.tourism>

Map:

# Phiring's Location

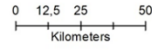
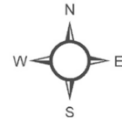
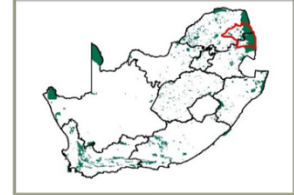


### Legend

- K2C Biosphere Boundary
- Municipal Boundary

### K2C Zonation (2017)

- Zone**
- Buffer Zone 1
  - Buffer Zone 2
  - Core Zone 1
  - Core Zone 2
  - Transition Zone



KRUGER TO CANYONS  
 BIOSPHERE REGION