

News release

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South Africa's Sandstone Estates (Pty) Ltd has appointed Geoff's Trains Ltd, a British specialist tour operator, as their international groups consultant.

South Africa has been described as "A World in One Country", an exceptional tourist destination that offers a fascinating history, vibrant present and outstanding natural beauty and wildlife reserves.

Less known is the vast agricultural and industrial infrastructure, and the story about how they came into being from the fruit and wine estates around Cape Town to the vast highveld agricultural estates that feed the nation.

One organisation that is strongly associated with both running a successful agri-business and preserving its past is Sandstone Estates. It is a large agricultural estate close to the Maluti Mountain Range in the Eastern Free State province offering scenic wide-open spaces, huge heritage collections, loads of old-fashioned rides and a 26km-long narrow-gauge railway.

The company provides a dynamic, and probably unique, insight into industrial, military, and agricultural heritage interwoven with one of the nation's great farming estates that is committed to the future with sustainable farming and community support.

The heritage collection

From a small start over 20 years ago, Sandstone's heritage collection has grown to what is today one of the world's largest collections of heritage assets with a railway, agricultural, transport and military background. Much of this impressive collection is maintained in working order.

With such a diverse and historic collection located in such scenic surroundings, it was inevitable that there would be a growing pressure from the public to visit. Events were organised that made this possible and these grew into the bi-annual Stars of Sandstone International Festival.

The Stars of Sandstone Festival

The success of the Stars festivals meant, increasing visitors, both local and international and Sandstone decided that it would look to providing the same experience but to more manageable tour groups in the future.

In 2019, Sandstone contracted Geoff's Trains Limited, a UK based specialist tour operator, to act as their international tourist booking agent. Geoff's Trains is owned by Geoff Cooke, who still has a hands-on approach to the business. He has been associated with African heritage tourism for many years, with experience as diverse as building and operating an upmarket steam tourist train to Victoria Falls and running railway charters and more general tours to many African countries including South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Kenya and Tanzania. Recognising his long-standing commitment to African heritage tourism. He has included multi day Sandstone visits in his tour portfolio since their early days.

The future

Sandstone has appointed Geoff Cooke and Geoff's Trains Limited to act as their consultant for international group tours. Geoff will work with Sandstone to encourage group visits from around the world to visit the collection in a way that will offer great value and interest for the visitor whilst minimising the disruption to the farming estate, so shifting the emphasis from a come all approach to a more targeted product that will be easier to promote and more sustainable. He will work with group tour operators, clubs or anyone interested in visiting Sandstone to develop a visit best suited to their interests.

This multi-faceted approach makes it easy to develop a multi-day tour that can stand alone or be incorporated into a wider African holiday. It is intended to give each visit a special character whilst minimising disruption to farming activity.

Sandstone and Geoff's Trains working together

The key elements of any visit to Sandstone are getting there, accommodation and attractions.

Getting there

The usual gateway to Sandstone for international visitors is Johannesburg's OR Tambo Airport. Geoff will assist with planning for transfers between airport and estate, nominally a five-hour trip. This can be anything from chauffer car hire to a luxury coach.

Accommodation at Sandstone

Your group will need accommodation either at Sandstone or nearby. Geoff's experience can direct you to the best solution.

Sandstone can offer self-catering accommodation in Victorian Cottages for up to 24 people, each cottage can sleep four in two twin bedded rooms with a kitchen and bathroom with shower. Their railway cottages offer accommodation for 8 people in twin bedded or single rooms with shower. For larger groups, there are railway coaches that previously operated passenger sleeper services throughout southern Africa. These historic carriages offer economical accommodation that is popular with railway enthusiasts. Meals can be arranged at the Waenhuis, a recreation area with indoor and outdoor seating and a well-equipped kitchen and bar. Also available is a conference room is equipped with white boards, an overhead projector and additional equipment.

Sandstone's Attractions

Sandstone Estates is open to visitors all year round with a programme which enables you to select from a menu of options. Geoff's Trains Ltd will help you to review these options, plan your visit and provide you with a quotation to suit your requirements.

The Narrow-Gauge Steam Railway

We have one of the largest private 2-ft Narrow Gauge Railways in the world with over 25 locomotives in use, all of which have seen previous use in southern Africa. Visits from one day to over a week can be tailored to the specific interests of your group where the emphasis may be on photography, riding the rails or footplate experience.

The collection includes locomotives from many different countries that can become the centrepiece of a themed experience, supplemented by appropriate heritage farm and road vehicles. Examples of this would be a day devoted to locomotives manufactured in Britain, the USA, Germany and others accompanied by appropriate vintage vehicles, tractors and farm machinery. Put together a number of such days for a unique photographic experience.

If you prefer riding the rails, no problem! With over 26 km of track and three distinctive routes to choose from, you can ride different trains on different days over different lines.

Your visit will be planned with Geoff's assistance, ensuring that your requests are achievable and that the price is right for you.

Tractors, trucks, cars and busses

Many of the exhibits are operational and can feature in your tour. The remaining exhibits can be viewed in spacious storage areas. If you would like a tractor ride into the fields, experience an ox waggon for a South African wild west experience, zip through the African bush in a vintage car or half cab bus or go big with a ride on a Sherman tank, they are all possible at Sandstone.

The military collection

We can offer military vehicle experiences using a substantial collection of military vehicles including a Ratel, Samil 100, Elands, Ferrets, Casspir, Buffel, and many others including WWII vehicles such as a Sherman tank, the White Half Track and Bedford Desert troop carrier..

Farming and natural history

The farming activity at Sandstone is there for you to see. Depending on the season and weather, you may witness ploughing, planting and the harvesting of crops as diverse as maize, soya beans and cosmos flowers. There are also cattle and other domestic livestock that graze alongside wild antelope and other African species that have made the estate their home, encouraged by Sandstone's green credentials.

You do not have to be a transport heritage enthusiast to enjoy Sandstone, visiting the estate and spending a night or two there can be the highlight of any South African holiday.

For more information, please contact:

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