



IDP PROPOSAL TO THE CITY OF CAPE TOWN

The Cape Experience

Cultural Tourism for the Wider Cape Flats

Service Delivery Party, Cape Town

October 2026

Prepared by Farouk Cassim

RYLANDS · MITCHELLS PLAIN · KHAYELITSHA



Summary

Cape Town sells itself to the world as a city of diversity, yet almost none of that diversity is on offer to the visitor. Tourism spend is concentrated on the Atlantic Seaboard, the City Bowl, the Waterfront and the Winelands. The Cape Flats, where most Capetonians live and where the city's cultures were forged, appears on the tourism map only as a short township stop.

The Service Delivery Party proposes that the City include in its Integrated Development Plan a programme of **community-owned cultural tourism centres** across the wider Cape Flats, beginning with three flagship sites:

1. **Rylands: India in the Cape**, a heritage centre and festival restaurant built around the Indian roots of the Cape.
2. **Mitchells Plain: The Cape Experience**, an immersive show and food courtyard telling the story of the Khoi, Dutch, Malay and enslaved peoples of the Cape and the meeting of Christian and Muslim traditions.
3. **Khayelitsha: The Xhosa Experience**, a feast hall, craft market and performance arena built on the existing Lookout Hill Tourism Centre.

Music, dance and drama run through every centre. Each centre is **25% owned by the City and 75% owned by the local community**, and each community decides for itself how its culture is presented.

This is not a request for a tourism subsidy. It is a proposal for the City to meet its constitutional obligation to promote social and economic development in the communities it has served least.

PART ONE

The Constitutional Basis

The Service Delivery Party treats Sections 152 and 153 of the Constitution as binding, justiciable obligations with measurable delivery standards. This proposal rests on them directly.

Section 152(1)(c) requires local government to promote social and economic development. A tourism economy that bypasses the majority of the city's residents does not meet this standard. Cultural tourism located in Rylands, Mitchells Plain and Khayelitsha brings visitor spend, jobs and enterprise into the areas where unemployment is highest.



Section 152(1)(e) requires local government to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in local government matters. This proposal goes further than consultation. Communities own the majority share of each centre and decide its cultural content.

Section 153(a) requires a municipality to structure and manage its administration, budgeting and planning processes to give priority to the basic needs of the community and to promote its social and economic development. The IDP is that planning process. Including this programme in the IDP, with a budget line and measurable targets, is the practical expression of Section 153(a).

Section 153(b) requires municipalities to participate in national and provincial development programmes. Cultural tourism aligns with national tourism growth and township economy strategies and creates a natural point of partnership with the national Department of Tourism and the Western Cape Government.

PART TWO

The Problem

01

A city that hides its diversity

Visitors leave Cape Town having seen its mountain but not its people.

Cape Town's cultural story, the meeting of African, Asian and European peoples over four centuries, is its most distinctive asset. It is also its least developed tourism product. The communities that carry this story, many of them shaped by forced removals under the Group Areas Act, live on the Cape Flats. Very little visitor spend reaches them.

02

Existing assets left to decline

The City already owns a Cape Flats tourism centre. It has not made it work.

The Lookout Hill Tourism Centre in Khayelitsha was built as a meeting place between residents and tourists, with a restaurant, craft hives, an exhibition centre, two amphitheatres and a boardwalk to the highest point on the Cape Flats. In February 2026 Parliament's Portfolio Committee on Tourism, after an oversight visit, described it as a "white elephant". The City responded that it intends to reposition the facility as a hybrid hub of activity. This proposal gives that intention a concrete form, a budget and a community ownership model.



03

Township tourism that extracts rather than builds

Too often the visitor is driven through, photographs are taken and the money leaves.

Much of what is sold as township tourism is owned and operated from outside the communities concerned. Residents become scenery. The SDP model reverses this. Residents become owners, hosts, performers, cooks and craft producers.

PART THREE

Lessons from Elsewhere

The SDP has drawn on cultural tourism models that work around the world. None should be copied wholesale. Each offers a principle Cape Town can adapt.

01

Kuala Lumpur: the Malaysia Tourism Centre

One venue that introduces a whole nation's diversity.

The Malaysia Tourism Centre (MaTiC) in Kuala Lumpur combines tourist information, exhibitions, crafts, heritage cuisine and scheduled cultural performances under one roof. Ahead of Visit Malaysia 2026 it was repositioned as a one-stop hub for arts, culture and heritage, with national culture and heritage agencies presenting food, music and dance. Its long-running signature performance blended Malay, Chinese, Indian and Bornean dance traditions into a single show.

Lesson for Cape Town: each Cape Flats centre should be a front door to a culture, combining information, food, craft and performance in one visit.

02

Malta: The Malta Experience

Seven thousand years of history in forty-five minutes.

The Malta Experience in Valletta is an audio-visual show in a purpose-built panoramic auditorium that tells the story of the islands from the Stone Age to the present. It runs every hour, offers commentary in 17 languages and has been seen by more than four million visitors since the 1980s. Visitors are encouraged to see it on arrival so that the rest of their stay makes sense.

Lesson for Cape Town: a Cape Experience show in Mitchells Plain can tell the story of how the Cape's peoples met, and become the first stop for visitors who want to understand the city.



03

Marrakech: Chez Ali

Many restaurants, one arena, a nightly spectacle.

Chez Ali, in the palm groves outside Marrakech, is a walled complex of traditional tents arranged around an open-air arena, seating thousands. Guests dine on regional Moroccan dishes while musicians and folkloric troupes move between the tables. The evening ends with the fantasia, in which robed horsemen charge the arena and fire their muskets in unison, followed by acrobats, dancers and fireworks. **Lesson for Cape Town:** several kitchens operating side by side, each run by a different local cook or family, can share one performance space and one marketing budget. The model suits Mitchells Plain, where Cape Malay, Khoi and boere traditions of food can sit together around a shared stage.

04

Nairobi: Carnivore, the Maasai Market and Bomas of Kenya

Food as theatre, crafts as enterprise, dance as heritage.

Carnivore, open since 1980, roasts meat on traditional Maasai swords over a vast charcoal pit at its entrance. Carvers move from table to table serving diners until they lower a small flag to surrender. The restaurant has twice been named among the world's 50 best and also hosts concerts by local artists. Visitors commonly combine it with cultural dance at Bomas of Kenya and shopping at the Maasai Market craft stalls. **Lesson for Cape Town:** the shisa nyama and braai culture of Khayelitsha can become a destination dining experience in its own right, paired with Xhosa performance and a permanent craft market.

05

Hawaii: the Polynesian Cultural Center

Performers who study, and a culture presented by its own people.

The Polynesian Cultural Center on Oahu presents several Pacific island villages, a canoe pageant and an evening show. About 70% of its roughly 1,300 employees are students at the neighbouring university, many from the islands they represent, working part time to fund their studies. Profits fund scholarships. **Lesson for Cape Town:** the "waiter as actor" idea works best when staff are trained performers and when the work funds skills and education. Partnerships with Cape Flats colleges and drama schools can make every centre a training ground.



PART FOUR

Three Flagship Centres

Each centre below is an illustration. The community in each area will decide its final content through the process set out in Part Six.

01

Rylands: India in the Cape

The Indian connection to the Cape, told where it took root.

Rylands and Gatesville are where the Indian community of Cape Town built its homes, mosques, temples, schools and businesses, often after forced removal from other parts of the city. The centre would include:

- **A heritage and visitor centre** on the Kuala Lumpur model, tracing the arrival of Indian people at the Cape, from enslaved and indentured labourers to traders and professionals, and the community's role in the struggle for democracy.
- **A festival restaurant** serving the many regional cuisines of the Indian diaspora. At set times the dining hall transforms into a staged wedding, a Diwali celebration or an Eid gathering. Waiters and kitchen staff double as actors, singers and dancers, drawing guests into the ceremony: the mehndi, the procession, the music and the feast.
- **A spice, textile and craft bazaar** supplied by local traders.
- **A performance programme** of classical and folk dance, devotional music and contemporary Bollywood-style productions, staged with local dance schools.

02

Mitchells Plain: The Cape Experience

Where the peoples of the Cape met, and where Christian and Muslim live side by side.

Mitchells Plain carries the story of the Cape's creolised identity: the Khoi and San who were here first, the Dutch settlers, the enslaved people brought from the East Indies, Madagascar and East Africa, the Cape Malay tradition and the coexistence of church and mosque in the same streets and families. The centre would include:

- **The Cape Experience show**, a panoramic audio-visual production on the Malta model, telling the story of the Cape from the Khoi to the present in about 45 minutes, with commentary in multiple languages. It would run several times a day and be marketed as the first stop for every visitor to Cape Town.



- **A Chez Ali style food courtyard**, with several kitchens side by side around a central stage: Cape Malay curries, bredies and koesisters, Khoi and veldkos traditions, boerekos and Cape fish dishes.
- **Nightly performance** featuring the Kaapse Klopse, Malay choirs, goema music and Cape theatre, with a regular evening finale in the courtyard arena.
- **A faith heritage walk** that tells the story of Christian and Muslim coexistence on the Cape Flats, developed with local churches and mosques.

03

Khayelitsha: The Xhosa Experience

Revive Lookout Hill as a living centre of Xhosa culture.

Khayelitsha already has the bones of a cultural tourism centre at Lookout Hill. The SDP proposes that it become the base of the Xhosa Experience, with:

- **A feast hall on the Carnivore model**, built around shisa nyama and traditional Xhosa food, cooked over open fire and served at the table with theatre and ceremony. A full vegetarian option would be offered.
- **A permanent craft market** on the Nairobi Maasai Market model, giving beadwork, textile, carving and design producers fixed stalls, card payment facilities and export support.
- **A performance arena** using the existing amphitheatres for Xhosa choral music, umxhentso dance, marimba, storytelling and contemporary theatre that tells the story of the township, from its establishment to the present.
- **Guided walks** to local enterprises, shebeens and homestays, operated by Khayelitsha-owned guiding businesses.

04

Extending the programme

Three centres to start, with more to follow.

Once the first three centres are operating, the model can be extended to other communities on the Cape Flats and beyond, including Gugulethu, Langa, Athlone, Bonteheuwel, Philippi and Delft, each telling its own story. A **Cape Flats Cultural Route** would link the centres by a dedicated MyCiTi tourist shuttle, with a single multi-centre pass sold through Cape Town Tourism, hotels and the airport.



PART FIVE

Music, Dance and Drama

01

Performance at the heart of every centre

Not an add-on. The reason visitors come and return.

Every centre must have a scheduled performance programme every day it is open, with a signature evening show at least four nights a week. Performance is what turns a restaurant into an experience and a visit into a story the visitor retells at home.

02

Every employee a performer

Hospitality and the arts as one career path.

Following the Polynesian Cultural Center model, staff would be recruited and trained as both hospitality workers and performers. The City would partner with TVET colleges, community arts organisations and drama schools to provide accredited training in hospitality, stagecraft, music and dance. Young people from each area would be prioritised for recruitment.

03

An annual Cape Flats festival

Three centres, one celebration.

Each year the centres would jointly stage a Cape Flats Cultural Festival, rotating its main venue between Rylands, Mitchells Plain and Khayelitsha. The festival would showcase each community's culture to the others as well as to visitors, building pride and understanding across the city.

PART SIX

Ownership and Community Control

01

The 25/75 model

The City as minority partner. The community as owner.

Each centre would be established as a company in which:

- **The City holds 25%**, contributed mainly in kind through land, existing buildings such as Lookout Hill, bulk services and infrastructure.



- **The local community holds 75%**, through a community trust or cooperative open to residents of the area, with local businesses, performers, cooks and craft producers as members.

Dividends to the community trust would fund local bursaries, arts training and further enterprise. The City's share of profits would be ring-fenced for maintenance of the centres and expansion of the programme.

The structure must comply with the Municipal Systems Act and the Municipal Finance Management Act provisions on municipal interests in companies and on the use of municipal assets. The SDP asks the City to obtain a legal opinion on the best compliant vehicle as a first step.

02

The community decides

No culture presented without its owners' consent.

Each community will determine its own approach to cultural tourism. Before any design is finalised, the City would fund and facilitate a participatory process in each area, through ward committees, subcouncils, faith bodies, cultural organisations, artists and local business. The illustrations in Part Four are starting points for that conversation, not decisions taken on the community's behalf.

03

Safeguards

Authenticity, dignity and local benefit.

- A minimum of 80% of employees to be residents of the surrounding subcouncil area.
- A minimum of 60% of procurement to be from local suppliers.
- A cultural advisory council of elders, faith leaders and practitioners in each centre to protect the dignity and accuracy of what is presented.
- Annual public reporting of visitor numbers, jobs, local spend and dividends.

PART SEVEN

What the SDP Asks the City to Include in the IDP

1. **Adopt the Cape Flats Cultural Tourism Programme** as a named IDP project under economic development and tourism, with explicit reference to Sections 152(1)(c), 152(1)(e) and 153(a).
2. **Commission feasibility studies** for the three flagship centres in Rylands, Mitchells Plain and Khayelitsha within the first year.



3. **Reposition Lookout Hill** as the Xhosa Experience, as the first centre to open, using the existing building and the City's stated intention to revive the facility.
4. **Identify and reserve City land** in Rylands and Mitchells Plain for the other two centres.
5. **Fund the community participation process** in each area before any design is approved.
6. **Obtain a legal opinion** on the 25/75 ownership vehicle.
7. **Partner with the national Department of Tourism, the Western Cape Government and Cape Town Tourism** for co-funding and international marketing.
8. **Establish training partnerships** with TVET colleges and arts organisations for hospitality and performance skills.
9. **Plan the Cape Flats Cultural Route** shuttle with MyCiTi.

Proposed timeline

Phase	Period	Milestones
One	Year 1	Legal opinion, community participation in all three areas, feasibility studies, Lookout Hill repositioning plan
Two	Year 2	Xhosa Experience opens at Lookout Hill; land secured in Rylands and Mitchells Plain; trusts established
Three	Years 3 to 4	India in the Cape and The Cape Experience open; Cultural Route shuttle launched; first Cape Flats Cultural Festival
Four	Year 5	Review and extension to further communities

PART EIGHT

Measurable Delivery Standards

In line with the SDP's position that Sections 152 and 153 carry measurable standards, the programme should be judged against published targets. The SDP proposes the following for the City's consideration:



Measure	Target by Year 5
Centres in operation	3 flagship centres, with at least 2 more in planning
Direct jobs created	1,500 across the three centres
Local employment share	At least 80% of staff from surrounding subcouncils
Local procurement share	At least 60% of spend
Annual visitors	500,000 across the three centres
Craft and food enterprises supported	300
Young people trained in hospitality and performance	1,000
Public reporting	Annual report tabled at Council and published

These figures are proposed targets to be refined in the feasibility studies.

CONCLUSION

A City That Shows Its Whole Self

Visitors come to Cape Town for its mountain and its beaches. They should leave having met its people. The Cape Flats holds the stories of Africa, Asia and Europe meeting at the southern tip of the continent: the Indian families of Rylands, the Khoi, Malay and Dutch heritage of Mitchells Plain and the Xhosa culture of Khayelitsha. Kuala Lumpur, Valletta, Marrakech, Nairobi and Oahu have shown that culture, presented with pride by its own people, is an economic engine.

The Service Delivery Party asks the City of Cape Town to meet its obligations under Sections 152 and 153 by placing the Cape Flats at the centre of the city's tourism economy, owned by the people who live there.

Sources

- City of Cape Town, Lookout Hill Tourism Centre facility page
- Cape Argus, "Khayelitsha's Lookout Hill: A neglected 'white elephant'", 2 February 2026
- Twentytwo13, "MaTiC repositions itself as one-stop arts and cultural hub for Visit Malaysia 2026"
- Guide Me Malta, "7,000 years of history in 45 minutes" (The Malta Experience)
- Civitatis and Rediscover the World, Chez Ali Fantasia dinner and show listings
- Tamarind Group, Carnivore Nairobi; Wikipedia, Carnivore (restaurant)
- Wikipedia and BYU-Hawaii, Polynesian Cultural Center