

De Rust in the 21st Century: A Scenario for Success Heritage, Environment, Tourism and Technology

In considering the future of De Rust into the 21st Century it is important to build on existing strengths while at the same time considering the role that ever increasing technology will play in future years.

The Present: De Rust is special in its historic mix of old and new. The Village with its classic Victorian era houses, many of which have been restored to their former glory is unique and the “**Heritage**” aspects are seen in every street. This ambiance is “**special**” and needs to be preserved for future generations.

At the same time De Rust is situated in a particularly picturesque part of the Western Cape being in the wide valley between the Swartberg and Kamanassie mountain ranges with spectacular views on all sides. In addition, De Rust is situated at the entrance to Meiringspoort which links the Klein Karoo and Great Karoo through a stunning gorge of 22 kilometers on the N9 National Road.

The Village is also strategically situated within an hour of the Cango Caves, the Swartberg Pass, Prince Albert in the Great Karoo and the village of Klaarstroom among other attractive tourist destinations. Added to this there are a wide range of outdoor adventure activities which range from hiking, mountain biking, trail running and horse trails among others.

There is also a vibrant agricultural community in the area which has a wide variety of rich alluvial soils. Crops/activities include seed onions, vegetables, ostriches, sheep, fruit and grape/wine production.

This is also part of the original region of the ancient San people and there are many sites where their rock paintings can be viewed. It is also an area of great biological diversity in both plant and bird life. In addition, for most of the year De Rust has a moderate to hot climate during the daytime hours allowing for a wide variety of outdoor activities. This linked to the historic nature of the village provides many varied opportunities for De Rust in the future.

The Future: In looking forward into the future there is little doubt that tourism is developing into a massive global industry as the growing middle class are able to travel internationally.

This surge in tourism provides great opportunities for all levels of skills, from the basic to very advanced. Technology is playing an important role here particularly with the rise of **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** in general use at the global level. This is moving to all industries, including agriculture where farmers are increasingly using technology in water management and other areas.

Tourism also creates an opportunity for local communities to participate more fully in the wider economy, while at the same time acquiring new skills. At the same time the whole question of environmental sustainability is linked to the tourism aspect and the De Rust area is generally pristine and unspoilt creating a natural market for “**environmental tourism**” which is rapidly gaining traction globally. In addition, the rapidly growing local market for offerings of this type allows for all types of new tourism initiatives in the area.

Opportunities and Challenges

As in other parts of South Africa employment opportunities, particularly for educated young people is a key component of future success. In this regard there is a largely untapped reservoir of young people in adjoining Blomnek who are in need of formal employment and training in an industry such as tourism.

Due to its location in the Western Cape, the village of De Rust is ideally suited to the wider establishment of environmental tourism opportunities. It can also offer the young people of the area the chance to build a future for themselves without having to relocate to the cities for suitable employment opportunities.

As the role of technology changes over the next ten years there is going to be an increasing demand for well educated flexible individuals to participate in the “**New Economy**”. This will allow the younger generation to move into more challenging roles in the economy where greater adaptability will be required in filling a number of varied roles.

The challenge for villages like De Rust is to see the opportunity in this rapidly changing environment and to tackle the challenges head-on for success.

Some Conclusions

*In looking at the medium to long term future of the Village of De Rust providing that there is an fully integrated approach to the three key issues of **Heritage, the Environment, Tourism and Job Creation** as outlined above the future is assured for all its present and “still-to-be” residents.*

A fully integrated and balanced approach requires all the various interest groups in De Rust to work together in a collaborative manner in order to maximize the full potential of the Village. Providing this can be done there is little doubt that the future of De Rust as a sought after destination for both visitors and long term residents is assured.

In addition to the above, much like Prince Albert on the other side of the Swartberg range, property prices in the Village will continue to rise at a faster rate than the majority of other similar small towns. This is a natural benefit of the role of “integrated development” at the local level.

“The Future of De Rust” belongs to those individuals who have a long term vision and commitment to integrated development in the Village. The opportunity is there and as a community we need to take up the challenge and move forward together.

Alan Tonkin

De Rust Heritage Conservation Association

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