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A tour guide of a different kind



It doesn't talk back or miss a turn-off, or only mention a sudden ditch when you've already hit your head against the roof of your car, or apologise when you're already stuck in the mud. It doesn't have a high-pitched voice when

nervous or a boring drone that puts you to sleep after lunch. This tour guide comes in a neat little box and you can switch it on or off as you please.

Tourism Radio is an electronic invention perfectly suited for use in a vast country such as Namibia, with thousands of self-drive tourists in rented vehicles travelling to remote destinations.

JC Nel travelled the width and breadth of Namibia, tracking every route, visiting towns, villages and tourist destinations along the way. He collected every relevant tourism fact on Namibia, on her people and her places. A professional scriptwriter then compiled the text that forms the basis of this electronic travel guide. "The best thing about this product" says JC, "is that it can be continuously adapted, improved and updated."

The safety aspect of Tourism Radio is valued and sought after by car-rental companies in particular. Self-drive tourists often have no previous experience of the country and gravel surfaces, and are not used to driving on the left-hand side of the road. Tourism Radio warns the driver to be cautious at the exact time that he should be cautious – when, for instance, there is a sharp bend to the right just after a rise; a turn-off that is not well indicated; a stretch where cattle and people cross the road; or any kind of information that will enable the driver to pre-empt a potentially dangerous situation.

Tourism Radio is not a radio and not a GPS. It is an

electronic device that is programmed to broadcast pre-recorded information when it picks up the signal that a specific GPS point has been reached. For instance, a few kilometres before you drive into Rehoboth, your device will automatically activate the electronic tour guide to start the narration on the town, its history, places of interest and other facts that are likely to appeal to visitors.

Travel News was invited to go for a test drive in Windhoek's city centre. This clever device knows when you enter the city from the south or the north! Don't ask how, but it knows that the Christuskirche is in front of you, regardless of your approach. On the way from the airport it is programmed to give the visitor general and practical information on Namibia.

"We've not nearly exploited all its potential and we're constantly updating and revising the information," says JC, who secured the rights to expand the reach of Tourism Radio to Botswana, Zambia and Angola. It is a mammoth task, but a pleasurable one for him and business partner Frans Burden, who are seasoned safari-style, off-the-beaten-track travellers. Future plans are to provide the narration in languages that will suit most self-drive visitors – German, Italian and French – but the priority is to perfect the English version and make it as user-friendly as possible, based on feedback from self-drive tourists who rent the device either from the car-rental company or tour operator, or directly from Tourism Radio Namibia.

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