



A calling of culture & ubuntu

Ubizo Events & Tours specialises in authentic community interactions and immersions for international tourists. Offering tours, experiences and tailor-made events in the townships of Langa, Gugulethu and Khayelitsha outside Cape Town, Ubizo is taking township life to the world, packaged in fun and unique way.

The business has been operating in Langa since 2008 and has extensive experience working with other tour operators, conference organisers and universities. It crafts tours for all ages that showcase the rich cultural heritage and community unity of the townships. Ubizo also specialises in home stays, food and entertainment experiences, community projects and music and networking events.

A small company, it comprises the owner and two part-time employees. Ubizo contributes to job creation by recruiting from the community and has also trained 10 tour guides. It also actively promotes partnerships and development opportunities between the tourism industry and local communities.



Meet Siyabulela “Sabu” Siyaka,
owner of Ubizo Events & Tours:



Advice for entrepreneurs & potential incubatees

Know your business

“If you’re thinking of applying for the SATSA Sigma tourism business incubator programme, you need to be prepared. By this I mean identifying the essential needs of your business. Then you’ll be able to fully leverage this opportunity. It’s a great network and space to be in; to be shown the opportunities that exist for your business and get introduced to the right people.”

Network, network, network!

“Understand the value of networking and use it. I went to Africa’s Travel Indaba several times in the early days of my business and Meetings Africa in Joburg. I had to use money I didn’t have to get there and attend; I had to stay with friends. But it was worth it. I met development agencies and incentive travellers and had the opportunity to travel to Berlin, London, Beijing and New York. I learnt to leverage the power of networking and connected with development agencies that helped my business.”

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Origins in community

Siyabulela “Sabu” Siyaka grew up in the township of Langa, not far from Cape Town. Inspired by the entrepreneurial spirit of his grandparents and parents, he became involved in his parents’ business while still at school, selling livestock. After completing matric in 2000, he went on to study internal auditing at Cape Peninsula University of Technology, when it was still Cape Tech, but remained involved in his parents’ business. Sabu did not return to the university to do his final year, opting to rather start a business with friends, organising events for matriculants in and around Cape Town.

The business, Ubizo Tours & Events was formally launched in 2008, and the same year, he was invited to the University of Cape Town (UCT) for an informal meeting with some student representative council (SRC) members and given a tour there. “I asked the guys conducting the tour: ‘How about a tour where I’m from?’ And they said, ‘Okay, that sounds interesting’.”

Sabu took one of the SRC members and showed him around his neighbourhood of Langa. Sitting down afterwards for lunch, Sabu chatted to him about his business. “I told him I was aware of international students attending UCT and asked if he knew where the office for these students was. He told me where to find it and who was involved. So off I went to this office, no business plan, no brochure and I said: ‘Hi,

I'm Sabu. I'd like to invite your students to show them where we live. It's cultural, it's educational, it's fun and it's organised by other young people'. They didn't hesitate. They said: 'Here's a group of 20 students. Show them around'. And that's how Ubizo got off the ground."

Fast-forward 16 years and the UCT student Sabu took on a tour is now the mayor of Cape Town! Geordin Hill-Lewis.

Learning the tourism ropes

With an intake of UCT students to take on tours only happening every six months, Sabu took the opportunity to build relationships with other universities. He sent them feedback he'd received about his tours, and they started coming on board. He also took this time to do a deep dive into the tourism industry – its inner workings and value chain to better identify his key markets and how to target them. "I met some amazing people from Cape Town Routes Unlimited and Cape Town Tourism and learnt about the industry through networking, making connections, and attending courses and workshops. I also got accredited as a guide and as a tour operator. I also started to travel and connected with some development agencies that helped my business. Networking was key then and it still is today." Sabu says it took about 10 years until his business grew from a twice-a-year intake of students to a more regular flow of tour bookings.

Challenges & wins of entrepreneurship

When I asked about his biggest challenges, Sabu says: "This is such a lonely journey. You

need to make things happen, but you have to figure it all out by yourself. At least you're doing what you love. Also, when you're starting from nothing, that is a struggle on its own. Just to get on a train to travel to the CBD for a meeting when you don't have money, is a huge challenge. Then later, when you've set up your business, and you get to that boardroom, and you're asked where your business plan or proposal is, but you have no idea what those documents look like – these are some of the difficulties one comes across. Not to mention market access and competing against established big businesses. How then do you carve a niche for yourself?" he asks.

There was never the option of giving up, though. "Because there was no Plan B. There was no Plan C. There was only one plan. To make this business happen. When you believe in it, and you've seen the gap – that's your mojo right there. Every single day, when you wake up, you have a purpose. You know what you want. You go for it because you know it's just a matter of time."

Asked about his proudest moments, Sabu says there have been several. "Such as when your guests tell you how much they appreciate the experiences you've given them, and when you've been able to make a significant impact by creating opportunities for others." He also mentions a post-budget dinner Ubizo Events & Tours hosted for minister of tourism, and the letter of gratitude the minister sent afterwards. "My mother was involved in that event as well – she was doing the catering. That was one of the best events we've worked on together, and it was the first time I heard her say: 'I am so proud of you'. That's another one of those moments. Sadly, she passed away three months ago but I will forever cherish that moment."

A business boost

Ubizo Events & Tours was accepted into the SATSA Sigma tourism business incubator programme last year, giving the company a significant boost in the right direction. Europcar came on board as the sponsor for the 12 months' incubation. A tailored marketing strategy was created for Ubizo Events & Tours, which included enhancing its company profile, focusing on online marketing and leveraging social media, financial management training and developing an online booking system for the business. The programme also facilitated linkages with the SATSA network, particularly destination marketing companies. Finally, Europcar graduated Ubizo as a supplier and gave it a much needed supplier development grant to recapitalise the business.

"I've gained so much in a short period of time, and it was exactly what my business needed," says Sabu. "Importantly, the programme was not only about developing Ubizo Events & Tours on paper but also about connecting me with the relevant people so I could start doing business with them. Craig Drysdale was my mentor on the sales and marketing side, but there was also a whole team supporting me. And the business plan – well, it was awesome!"

Working with purpose

The word Ubizo means "a calling", and Sabu explains that sharing the richness of his culture and heritage with the world is his calling. "I'm very proud of who I am and where I come from. I also strongly believe that everyone comes into this world for a purpose, and part of my purpose is giving back."

Sabu is deeply invested in his community and wears several hats. He's one of the founders of the South African Township and Villages Tourism Association and an executive member of Langa Tourism Forum. He's also the Vice Chair of his street committee, an executive member of Langa Ward 53, and a steering community member of the community's housing development project. He also employs from the community and offers tour guide training through his company. "I see a lot of talent in the townships but not everyone has access to resources and opportunities. I was one of the lucky ones. So, it's about finding a way to create opportunities for people to have a better life," he says.

With Ubizo Events & Tours now empowered by the incubation programme, Sabu has set his sights on a new path in the next five years. "I'd like to venture into another industry while staying in the space of developing township economies. I'd also like to continue working closely with tourism." Sabu says he's already identified avenues where he can take his expertise and experience. "I want to see how I can leverage all that in a new industry to make a meaningful impact once again."