

Classroom of the world

What is it that South Africa has and that foreign students want? **AMANDA MATHEE** finds out.

WHY TRAVEL THOUSANDS of miles to study in a country at the southern tip of Africa? One foreign student put it this way: “We would never learn in the classroom what we experience in one week in South Africa.”

South Africa is becoming a classroom of the world’s future managers if the increasing number of overseas students who attend programmes at the University of Stellenbosch Business School (USB) and its executive education company USB Executive Development Ltd (USB-ED) is anything to go by.

This is how MBA student Chris Kennelly from Durham Business School in the north-east of England described his study experience at the USB ...

Saturday, 6 June

We’ve arrived in Cape Town! Jako, our academic host, meets us at the airport.

Sunday, 7 June

During breakfast the news comes through that the sea is too choppy for the Robben Island ferry. On the plus side, the food is excellent and I try the local chicken livers with my bacon and eggs. Jako points out some of the places we will be visiting later.

Monday, 8 June

We had such a great day sightseeing yesterday that I’m slightly disappointed that we have academic work today. This soon disappears as the first lecturer, Christo Nel, talks to us about change management and leadership. It’s a small group and we gel quickly as

the lecture turns into a group discussion, and everyone seems happy and confident to contribute. The lecturers assume (correctly) that we have the academic learning from Durham, which means we spend more time applying knowledge and getting to grips with the challenges and issues specific to South Africa and Africa. The differences and the similarities with the West are equally stunning.

I’m surprised by the openness of all South Africans regarding the apartheid legacy. I found some of the issues discussed today uncomfortable, but I think that has more to do with my British sensitivities. By the end of it, the group seemed a lot closer and no questions were taboo. We continue our debate over dinner with a few beers and I become a little less British.

Tuesday, 9 June

More lectures follow in the morning, comparing and contrasting branding and market segmentation in South Africa and the West. I’m beginning to understand the changing face of SA. The afternoon sees our first company visit to Power Construction. Yesterday we learnt about the transport and infrastructure challenges that South Africa faces. Today we see a part of the practical solution in action. One of the key issues facing Power Construction, and most companies in SA, is skilled, educated labour. Coming from a health sector background, I find it interesting to hear about the education and health programmes being employed by Power to care for their employees.

Wednesday, 10 June

We kick the day off with the lecture we have perhaps been looking forward to most. Prof



Chris Kennelly

Wolfgang Thomas puts into historical perspective the current challenges and opportunities facing SA with moving personal accounts of expulsion from the country

for anti-apartheid views and his subsequent return. A trip to Backsberg Wine Estate was scheduled for the afternoon. Stunning location, innovative company and, equally important, some wine-tasting. Here also, skilled labour and social responsibility is high on the agenda.

Thursday, 11 June

The diversity in lectures and company visits continues without any drop in quality. Today commenced with a lecture on the multicultural issues in South Africa. The afternoon was for many of us the trip we were most looking forward to – the townships. While I wanted to see the townships first-hand I was struggling with an awkward voyeuristic feeling. This, after all, is where people struggle on a daily basis. It is not a tourist attraction. What we found was extreme poverty but with it a huge amount of entrepreneurial spirit, commerce and hope. We visited a small school providing education and childcare to over 70 children. The community spirit to drive this and other projects, with little or no government support, was truly inspiring.

Friday, 12 June

We're going to Robben Island. After a beautiful crossing on the ferry we arrive at the island and our tour guide for the prison is an ex-convict. This brings added poignancy to the tour. It is difficult to comprehend that it was only in 1994 that apartheid ended and this is perhaps a tribute to the magnitude of change achieved in such a small amount of time. I will fondly remember this week.

Other group exchange students from abroad give their reactions.

Satu Willgren, MBA student at Lancaster University Management School (LUMS) in Lancaster, UK, said: "I've realised that to try and understand South Africa's situation, I have to find a new way of looking at it. Our 'Western' way of viewing the issues is simply not adequate."

Jamie Doyle, another MBA student at LUMS, was struck by differences in South African and UK approaches to corporate social responsibility (CSR). "One of the firms we visited, Pick n Pay, quickly discovered that their survival depends on the survival of the community. They plough 8% of their profits back into the community each year whereas in the UK, CSR is largely about reputation. The organisations we visited were very open with us, and we had access to people at very senior levels."


MBA student **Per Blenker** from Aarhus in Denmark says: "On the one hand the USB operates in quite a different context from ours. It is therefore an analytical and cultural challenge for us to work in a totally different environment. On the other hand, the USB is similar to any other high-quality Western business school. So, in that sense, it is possible to come and fit in."

Strategy professor on the MBA at Reims Management School in France, **Svetlana Serdukov**, says: "We can learn a lot from the USB because they're in a different set-

USB-ED as a global teacher

USB-ED forms part of the World Executive Education Alliance (WEEA) programme, presented by leading business schools and universities on five continents. Participants can study, say, finance in Russia, marketing in the USA, logistics in India, management information systems in Switzerland and corporate strategy in Brazil.

Recently 25 business people from Europe studied Human Resources, which included an analysis of BEE in South Africa, as part of this programme. USB-ED CEO, Frik Landman, says the programme is an ideal forum "where business executives from developing economies can exchange ideas with their counterparts in developed economies".

ting; their market is growing fast and they have new challenges which we don't have. So we can learn how to be more adaptive to the changing reality." 

AREAS OF SA EXPERTISE

Hennie Oliver, head of International Affairs at the USB, says: "We offer international groups a balance between academic content and business practice. Students need to understand different world views and build networks around the world. Hence, I'm a strong believer in group exchange studies."

Johan Burger, who facilitates the programmes, says: "We customise our offering according to the needs of overseas schools. We offer leadership, values and culture as applied to South Africa."

For case-study learning, the USB and USB-ED enjoy the support of corporates in various industries. This is what some companies say:

Retail

Fawza Essa of Woolworths says that the world can learn from this retailer's ethos of quality and sustainability, and its "deep understanding of customer segmentation, which flows from our diversity".

IT

Richard Lord of Psitek says the IT company's experience of telecommunications in emerging markets "is something that people from other countries could learn from".

Health care

Tersia Bester of Medi-Clinic Private Hospitals says: "We have hospitals in Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates. This allows us to compare hospitals in different countries. Other areas of expertise include our heart units and environmental system."

Studying at the USB

The USB's internationally accredited programmes – all taught in English – are suited to foreign students: full-time and modular MBA, MBA exchange studies, Master's in Development Finance, MPhil in Management Coaching, MPhil in Futures Studies, PhD, and executive and customised programmes. See DVDs at www.usb.ac.za/Degrees/MBADegree/Default.aspx