

# Prospects for Niche Tourism Development in South Africa

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# Introduction - niche tourism and niche markets

Niche tourism has its origins in niche marketing.

A niche market is defined as:

A group, in which individuals in the group are identifiable by the same specialized needs or interests, and have a strong desire for the products on offer (Novelli, 2005).

Similarly, niche tourism markets are made up of identifiable groups of individuals with similar interests, needs and wants – specific products can then be tailored to meet the needs of particular market segments.

The size of niche tourism markets can vary considerably – for instance ‘cultural tourism’ is a niche (macro-niche), but can be sub-divided into art tourism, film tourism, township tourism, etc. (micro-niches).

# Management implications of niche tourism

The concept of niche tourism has emerged in recent years to counter what is commonly referred to as mass tourism.

Problems associated with mass tourism:

- Economic – high leakage, low trickle down rates, spatial inequalities
- Environmental – damage to vegetation, pollution, over-crowding
- Socio-cultural – commodification of culture, loss of authenticity, damage to traditional cultures

For managers and planners, niche tourism appears to offer greater opportunities, tourism that is more sustainable, less damaging and more capable of delivering high-spending tourists.

For tourists, niche tourism offers a more meaningful set of experiences in the knowledge that their needs and wants are being met.

# Tourism

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## Mass tourism

Conventional tourism - large number of tourists, usually in staged settings

## Niche tourism

Special interests, cultural and/or activity based tourism, involving smaller numbers of tourists, usually in authentic settings

### Cultural tourism

Heritage tourism, Ethnic tourism, Religious tourism, Educational tourism

### Environmental tourism

Nature tourism, Wildlife tourism, Adventure tourism, Geo-tourism

### Health tourism

Medical tourism, Spa tourism (medical/wellness), Thermal spring tourism (medical/wellness)

### Other types of niche tourism

Photographic tourism, Volunteer tourism, Sport tourism, Youth tourism

## **Benefits of niche tourism for local economic development (DTI/Salga, 2010):**

- **Niche tourism helps to diversify the tourism economy by creating new markets.**
- **Niche tourism generally has greater growth potential than mainstream tourism.**
- **Niche tourism usually leads to higher yields per visitor in terms of foreign exchange earnings and consumer spending, even though niche markets are often smaller in size than mainstream tourism markets.**
- **Niche tourism often stimulates the creation of quality jobs that require specialized skills, as opposed to low or semi-skilled jobs generally associated with mainstream tourism.**
- **Activities undertaken as part of niche tourism are often community-based, located outside of traditional tourist areas, and thus encourage geographic distribution of tourism benefits.**
- **More local spending takes place, since niche tourism offerings attract independent travelers, as opposed to pre-paid package tourists.**

**In the Western Cape Tourism Development Plan (Western Cape Provincial Government, 2011), some 26 niche markets with development potential are identified:**

**Adventure tourism, agri-tourism, backpacking tourism, youth tourism, beach tourism, bird watching tourism, MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, events) business tourism, cruise liner tourism, cultural tourism, desert tourism, educational tourism, flower tourism, gambling tourism, gay tourism, palaeontological tourism, religious tourism, scenic route tourism, sport tourism, star gazing tourism, traditional medical tourism, western medical tourism, volunteer tourism, whale watching tourism, wine tourism and yachting.**

**Which niche tourism products should be developed?  
Unique, location-specific products**

# Thermal Spring Health Tourism in South Africa: Developing the Niche

A scenic view of a thermal spring in South Africa. The foreground is dominated by dark, smooth, rounded rocks partially submerged in a shallow stream of water. Steam or mist rises from the water, particularly in the center and right, creating a hazy, ethereal atmosphere. In the background, there are lush green hills and a bright sky, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

September 2013 – World Tourism month theme:  
Tourism and water – protecting our common future (UNWTO)

# South Africa's thermal springs

South Africa - about 80 thermal springs – water temperatures 39°C - 64°C.

About 30 developed into resorts - most were originally established as semi-medical 'spa' resorts because of apparent healing properties of the hot mineral water – stories of amazing cures abound.

In recent decades importance of health as a motivator to visit southern African thermal springs has declined – become family leisure resorts.

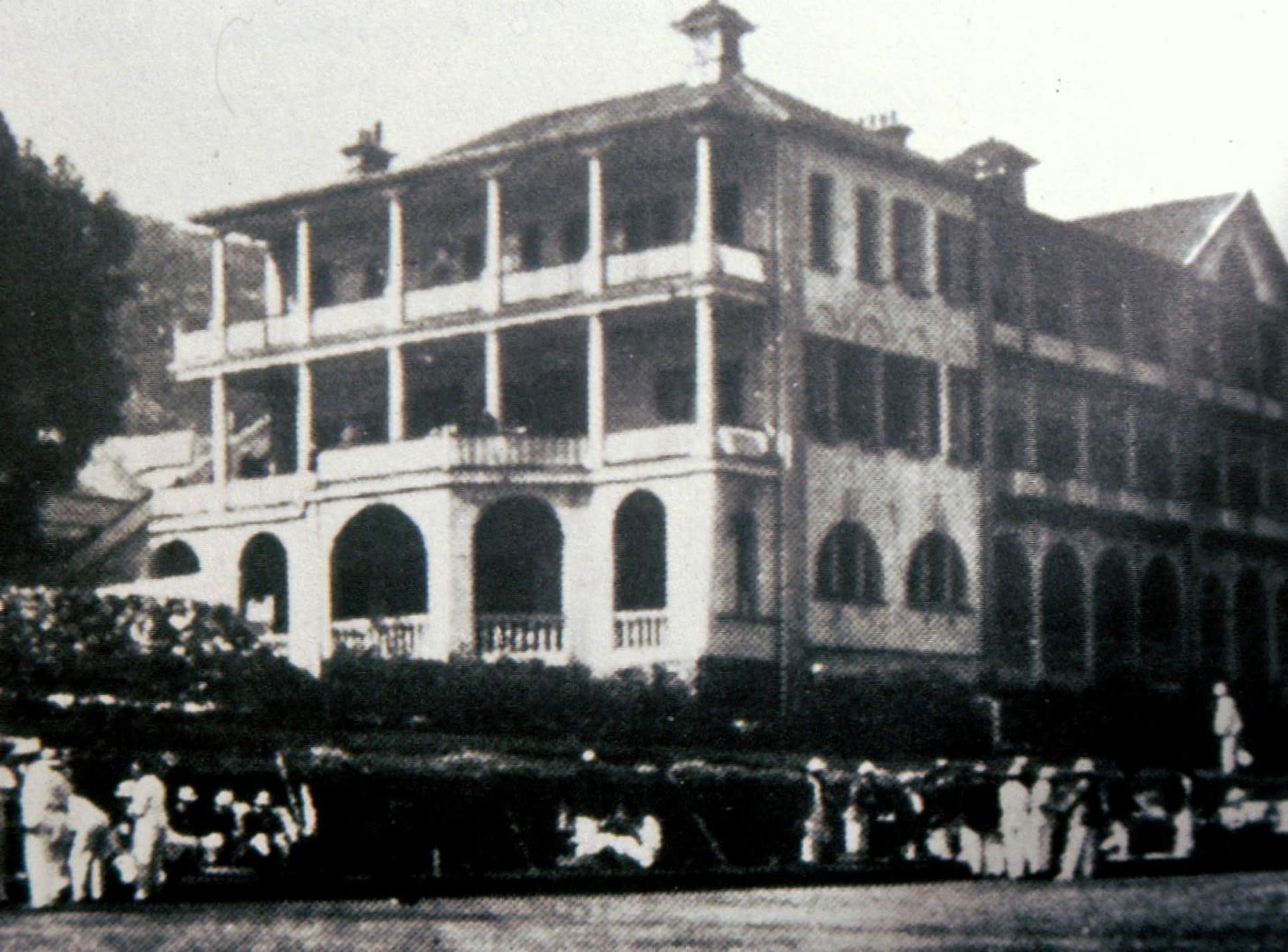
Tradition of 'taking the waters' as part of health and wellness tourism is reviving in many parts of the world, as part of 'alternative' medicine.

South African thermal springs are not a significant part of the growing international, as well as domestic, health tourism markets.

Danger that old healing traditions, based on hot mineral water, will be entirely lost, unless developed and incorporated into modern health (medical and wellness) niche tourism products.



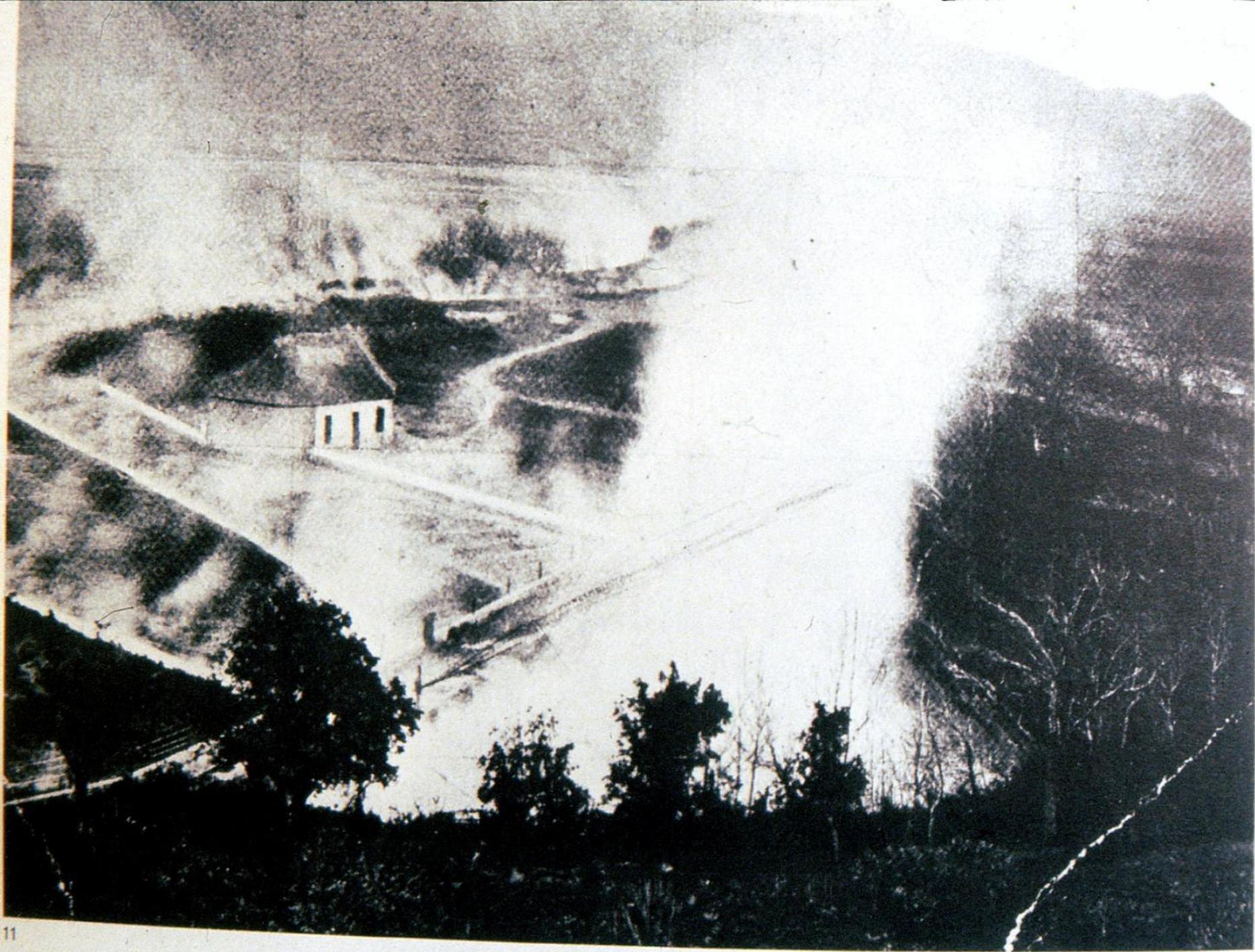
# Thermal Spring Resorts in South Africa























WELKOM WELCOME



RIEMVASMAAK

*Die pad vorentoe... The road ahead...*

PETER GERTSE  
1986

RIEMVASMAAK  
WARMWATER BRON.  
DIE NATUUR  
OP SY BESTE.

TOEGANGS =  
FOOI

VOERTUIG : R20

VOLW. : R10/dag

KIND. 6-18 JAAR

: R5 per dag

KIND. ONDER 6

JAAR : VRY

HUT : R70 per nag

DANKIE

RIEMVASMAAK  
HOT SPRING

NATURE AT  
ITS BEST.

ENTRANCE  
FEE

VEHICLE : R20

ADULTS : R10/day

CHILDREN 6-18

YEARS : R5 per day

CHILD. UNDER

SIX : FREE

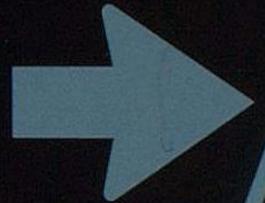
HUT : R70 per night

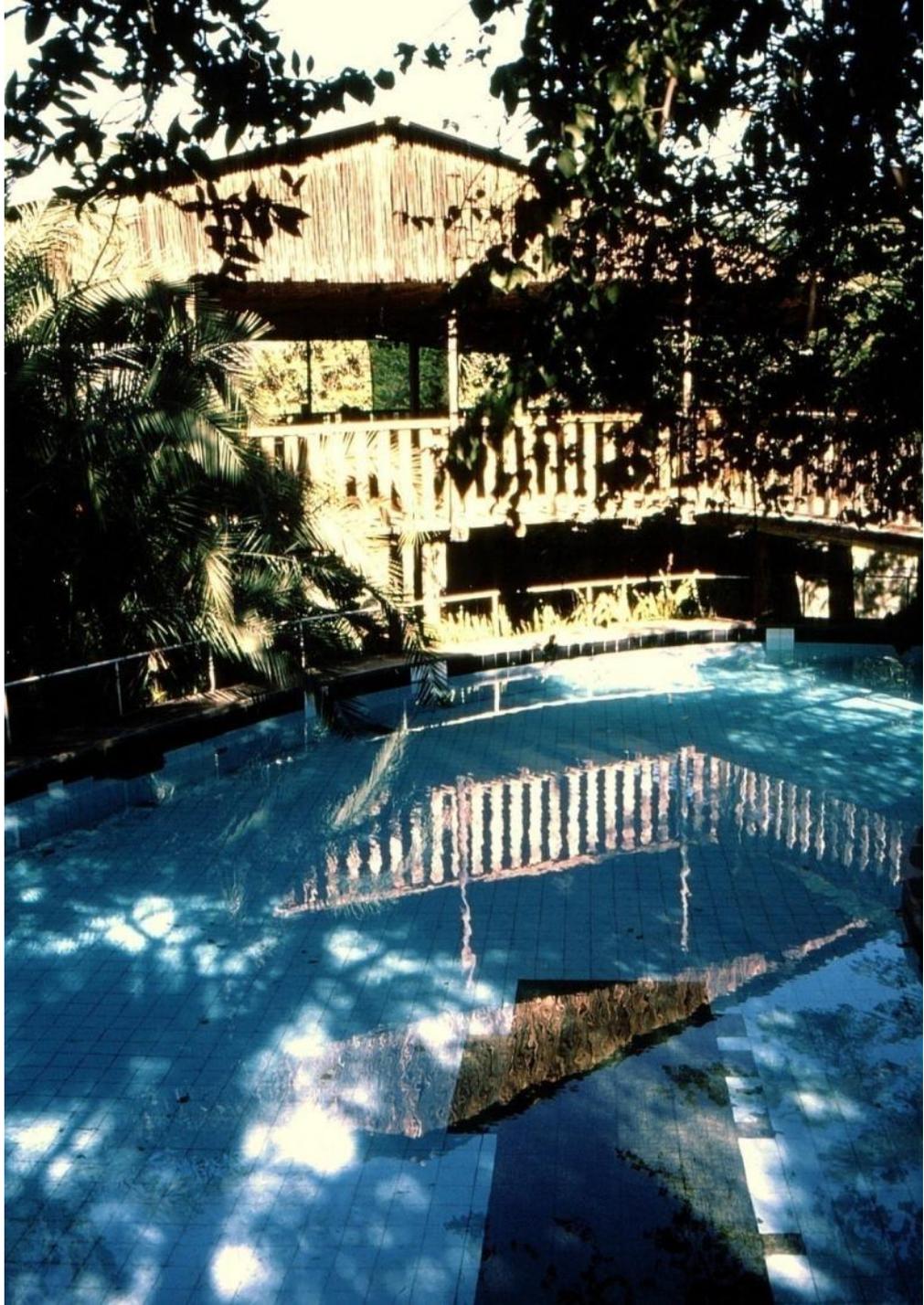
THANK YOU





Thangami Safari Spa











## **What do we need to do to develop the thermal spring health tourism niche?**

**Research healing properties of the different waters, find ways to incorporate the healing waters into modern health (medical and wellness) niche tourism products.**

**Continue to offer products that attract domestic markets - family leisure markets, domestic health & wellness markets, retired market.**

**In order to attract international health tourists – offer medical and wellness facilities in combination with local tourist attractions and niche tourism products – combine with wildlife tourism, ecotourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism - spa routes, spas as bases for visiting nearby attractions, midweek packages that include accommodation at thermal spring resorts.**

**Encourage increased interaction between visitors to thermal spring resorts and local communities – use location-based herbal remedies in healing treatments, involve local people in production and sale of health products, promote local foods, particularly organically grown health foods, promote production and sale of arts & crafts – create opportunities for local communities to become involved in and benefit from tourism.**

# Concluding remarks

## Niche tourism – is it the right way forward?

- **More sustainable – economically, environmentally, socio-culturally.**
- **Favours development of unique location-specific products.**
- **Lends itself to small-scale operations, local community involvement and spreading of economic and other benefits of tourism.**



Thank you