

Ladies trek for tourism

**NIYANTA SINGH
AND SHAN PILLAY**

WITH their mission to show the world "our Afro-optimism", 10 women, two of them from KwaZulu-Natal, are ready to embark on an epic journey from the southernmost tip of Africa, Cape Agulhas, to Europe's northernmost tip, the Nordkap in Norway, to promote tourism in Africa.

The all-women team will set out on International Women's Day, March 8, next year in Mitsubishi vehicles and will cover 34 000km overland over eight months.

Chosen from 18 finalists after an 11-day selection process in Bitou (Plettenberg Bay), the team members are Sibongile Mpakanyiswa, Monica Villalobos, Tanya Weyers, Julie Farrington, Monique Hansen, Alicia Proud, Petra Schueller, Tanya Tiefenthaler, Ingrid Bohme, Jahna Boshoff, Marion le Roux and Bridgette Johnson.

They will be joined by expedition organisers Enya Fehler and Andrea Doerfert.

Peru-born journalist Monica Villalobos, who recently settled in Pietermaritzburg, said she knew she was destined for the expedition as soon as she had read about it.

"It's like this expedition had been designed just for me and I was determined to be part of it. After a long, and not always easy, process, I can happily and proudly say that I am a team member. Africa, here I come," said Villalobos.

"I have always been a passionate traveller and I have explored my part of the world, South America, extensively.

"So, once established here, I started travelling a lot with my partner in South Africa,

but I couldn't wait for the chance to go further north. And then I learned about this trip," said Villalobos.

She said from this trip she wanted to show the world "our Afro-optimism".

"I think this continent doesn't need more charity. It needs confidence and pride in its own power, people, nature and beauty.

"The challenge, the length and the crew of this expedition will create the impact needed to get the people to listen to us. Our pictures will seduce them, our stories will motivate them, our passion will convince them," said Villalobos.

Another KwaZulu-Natal team member is lecturer Julie Farrington, 35, of Durban, who describes herself as an intrepid adventurer and traveller.

"On leaving school, we were asked to set a life goal. There was only one I could think of - to travel to as many countries as I can before I die. This goal has defined my life and to date I have travelled extensively in 48 countries," said Farrington.

Highlights of her travels include spending four-and-a-half months travelling through the US and Canada; backpacking around the world for more than 10 months; trekking through the Annapurna Circuit; spending two months in China, hiking Tiger Leaping Gorge; trekking through the Tibetan plateau; and snow-ledgeing through virgin forest in South America.

"I'm a very proud African who can rough it out with the best of them and cook up a feast over a campfire," said Farrington.

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