

OPPORTUNITIES abound



Dirk Meissner / IBN Consulting

South Africa had six years to prepare for the 2010 Soccer World Cup and was under intense scrutiny from the rest of the world throughout that time. This mega-event is to be held for the first time in a developing country on the African continent and many questions were raised about South Africa's ability to host such a tournament. But now it is time to look into the future and consider the long term benefits after having the games played on this soil.

Having been in the country for almost 20 years it was amazing to witness the preparations for the World Cup. A country, not always united, had to pull itself together and work towards a deadline. The attention of the world on the outcome ensured the press kept a record of what was working and what was not. Broader political issues of service delivery, the impact of crime and the ever present spectre of corruption were issues that could not continue to be ignored. Pressure was put on President Zuma to effectively deal with trouble makers although this has not prevented the well organised trade unions from seizing the opportunity to strike, for better wages and working conditions. The notion of "African Time", which means that it can take a lot longer than anticipated to reach a result, has been speeded up and the lengthy debates with no outcomes, and the visions of the future that never come to pass have all had their day because a deadline has been met and the results are commendable.

The magnificent stadiums are ready. Planning processes were accelerated, but kept to the law and still engaged the proper public participation processes as well as conducting the necessary environmental impact assessments. Former sceptics in the neighbourhoods surrounding the stadiums are now enjoying increased property values. International experts assisted South African engineers and builders and delivered exceptional results taking the infrastructure to world-class levels.

From our experience we know only too well how visitors to this country for the first time are able to recognise the opportunities and from being tourists they quickly turn into investors. Travelling to and within South Africa has become a pleasure and the new airports in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban are buzzing with activity. New roads have been built and highways and large intersections have been upgraded. All of this development has been done with the future in mind considering how the cities will grow and this implementation is the real legacy of the World Cup. Thanks to this mega-event, issues of town planning were tackled on a large scale and funds and resources were unlocked to redesign urban living. One only has to look at what cities like Munich, Barcelona and Sydney achieved in preparation for hosting the Olympic Games to know how they benefited subsequently.

The South African cities have been spruced up and many business travellers, global sponsors and ordinary fans will see for themselves the beauty that South Africa has to offer. Add to that the sound platform to do business and a functioning and attractive infrastructure and there are valid reasons to be optimistic about the further economic development of this country.

Only people who travel all over the world understand what global competition really means and there are plenty of investment opportunities on this planet. By comparison, it is fairly easy to set-up a business structure in South Africa bearing in mind that there is a certain amount of administrative red tape to manage at the beginning. Once you have got through that, in principle, the "system" works and is reliable. Property prices and associated rentals are low by international standards and starting a company is simple and does not require any huge capital outlay. You can maintain full control over your assets, the tax system is predictable and there is a market of approximately one billion Africans waiting to engage in business with you.

Enjoy your visit to this extraordinary country. Use your imagination to recognise the opportunities out there and identify what people will need in the future like energy from sustainable and renewable sources. People need to communicate and desire goods and services of the best quality. Walk around with open eyes and engage with the people you meet, remembering transfer of know-how and experience is as much welcome as capital investment. South Africa is proud of what it has achieved and welcomes you to seize the opportunities!

Yours

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