

Kaapsehoop family goes above and beyond for US tourist

Chelsea Pieterse

KAAPSEHOOP - An American tourist's journey through the Lowveld was saved by a local family after his vehicle was broken into and most of his possessions stolen.

Just a week before Ryan Umane (37) was due to return home to Manhattan, New York, his hike through the rolling hills and grasslands of Kaapsehoop ended in finding the windows of his rental car smashed in.

"I had parked my car near the Bohemian Groove Café at about 09:30 and went for a walk up in the Blue Swallow Reserve to the stone calendar." When he got back to the café, the owner Andrea Fourie's daughter, Chevonne, had a nervous look on her face and asked him which car he drove. "I said I was driving the white car, and she told me the windows had been smashed. My heart sank," said Umane.

His passport, clothing, toiletries, glasses, his suitcases and almost R9 000 in US dollars and rands were stolen.

"It was almost everything I had come into the country with."

However, just when all was lost, he said Andrea and her family took it upon themselves to take Umane in and help him with food, accommodation and the process to get an emergency passport.

Andrea is one of 52 volunteers across the Lowveld of the Kruger Lowveld Chamber of Business and Tourism (KLCBT) and the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency's (MTPA) victim support programme.

This means when any tourist is in any sort of distress, a volunteer is activated to assist them until they are back on their feet and on their way home.

Umane said Andrea put him up in a beautiful room, gave him food, took him to the airport to replace his rental car, put him in touch with the American embassy to process an emergency passport, and even bought him clothes and toiletries. "Following all of this, I was really shown the good of humanity by all the kindness extended towards me, especially by Andrea and her family," he said.

"I was burgled of most of my possessions in such a beautiful place, but it did not ruin the trip for me at all."

He added that he did not harbour any hatred for the people who stole from him, but did not want a similar incident to happen to other tourists.

Umane said the Ngodwana Police Station, where he registered a case of theft out of a motor vehicle, was also very helpful.

The KLCBT has refunded Andrea for the assistance she gave Umane and the MTPA will refund the KLCBT when a budget is available.

KLCBT's Linda Grimbeek said that they, in conjunction with the MTPA, were busy organising tourism monitors to Kaapsehoop and that there would be a discussion about security in the area.

Grimbeek added that a toll-free line for tourists in distress would be discussed at their next conference.

She urged tourists and locals alike not to leave valuable items in their cars, not to display expensive items, not to walk alone and to be discreet when withdrawing money.

To find out more about the volunteer system, email Grimbeek on linda@klcbt.co.za.



Chevonne Fourie, Marabe Ditshego, Ryan Umane, and Charl and Andrea Fourie.