

German runners train in Stellenbosch

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STELLENBOSCH is a popular destination for sportsmen and sportswomen from European countries.

Middle distance runner Carsten Schlangen is one of them. The German three-time champion of the 1 500 metre came to Stellenbosch for two weeks with his team, Hauptstadtlaifer, to train for the upcoming Olympics in Beijing.

"The training conditions are absolutely perfect here. I have never seen such a good combination of training facilities," the 27-year old Schlangen from Berlin said.

He was delighted with the size of Coetzenburg's sports grounds. "It takes almost 20 to 25 minutes to run around all of them. It is a very low-impact terrain for running since the grass is cushioning the impact."

The team also trained on the tartan track of the Coetzenburg stadium, and during some morning sessions they went to Jonkershoek to run a 10 kilometre track.

"To be honest, it seems quite crazy to fly about 10 000 kilometres just to find perfect training conditions," said Schlangen, who has interrupted his architecture studies to fully concentrate on his sport.



Middle distance runner Carsten Schlangen (middle) and his team-mates run 10 kilometres in Jonkershoek.

But after visiting the same training locations at the Mediterranean Sea for some years, he wanted to become acquainted with a new place. He therefore organized the training camp for his four team mates and their trainer, Prof Roland Wolff.

The Stellenbosch University Sport Performance Institute (SUSPI) handles approximately 1 000 sportspeople per year who come to Stellenbosch for training purposes.

"Many of them are South African," explains Gustav Venter, communications coordinator of SUSPI. "At the moment I would say there are about 15 to 20 athletes from abroad here in Stellenbosch."

According to him European athletes mostly come to Stellenbosch in the summer months because of the warm weather at that time of the year.

"Stellenbosch is attractive be-

cause it offers a superb environment for both training and relaxation," Venter said. "The fact that Stellenbosch is on the same time zone as the European countries (thereby reducing the effects of jet lag) also plays a role." Stellenbosch is not only popular for athletes but also for rugby, hockey and football teams as well as swimmers.

Schlangen and his four team-mates did not only like the town

for its good training conditions, but also because they had the chance to get to know a foreign country.

"This is one of the opportunities that we have as professional runners - to see a lot of different places all over the world," Schlangen said.

"Every second day, between training hours, we went on a trip to discover sights in and around Cape Town," Moritz Höft (27), one of Schlangen's team mates, explained.

"One of the greatest things was ascending Table Mountain. It took us about 55 minutes. We had a scenic view and it was a thrilling experience," Schlangen said. "We also went to see some local vineyards in and around Stellenbosch. Of course we could only take a limited number of sips."

After Portugal and Lanzarote, Spain, the Stellenbosch training camp was already the third one for Schlangen this year.

However, it was a special one for him and his team.

"Good climate, perfect training conditions and people who are friendly and open-hearted," Schlangen concluded.

His team-mate Höft agreed, "This training camp was the most exiting one ever. South Africa, and especially Stellenbosch, is a wonderful place."