

NMMU team ready for Machu Picchu

TNA REPORTER
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FOR months, Phumla Jack had mixed feelings about her daughter Nandipha's impending climb up South America's Machu Picchu following the death of motorsport star Gugu Zulu while climbing Mount Kilimanjaro last month.

But she was relieved after a meeting with Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) vice-chancellor Prof Derrick Swartz and fellow trailblazer and alumni Dr Bridgette Gasca last week.

Nandipha and the rest of the team leave for Machu Picchu on Friday.

"I have always been in two minds about this trip since it came about because my child has never climbed

a mountain before and has never been out of the country. But I was excited at this amazing opportunity for her, which is also for a worthy cause," Jack said.

"When the news of Gugu's death broke, I panicked. I started thinking maybe this was not a good idea. I was really nervous but my daughter is not one to panic, so she has been very calm about this.

"I am glad I got to have this interaction with Prof Swartz and Dr Gasca because now I feel some sort of relief. I know she will be in good hands and come back home in one piece."

Swartz, who is a seasoned climber, sets off for Peru next Friday with Nandipha, Dr Gasca and chancellor Santie Botha and will meet the rest of the

23-member team on arrival.

The team will tackle the 43km Inca Trail to Machu Picchu in a bid to raise R4m to help 160 academically deserving but financially needy students finish their academic journeys.

This is a bigger drive to find alternative funding sources in the wake of the #FeesMustFall movement that gripped the country late last year.

Pleased to have finally met Phumla, Prof Swartz promised to take great care of Nandipha on the 13-day trip.

"Now that I have met who I must account to, I assure you we will take great care of Nandi on this trip. We are all rookie climbers and as fit and healthy as she is, she will have no problems with the trail," he said.

Swartz also told Phumla of the dangers involved in climbing, including the effect of altitude changes and encountering foreign viruses, while stressing that all care is being taken to ensure Nandipha is well equipped.

Nandipha, who has been hard at work preparing for the climb by hiking trails including the 5km Lady Slipper trail, said she felt ready and more at ease as the trip drew closer.

"I am ready, I have been getting myself acquainted with climbing and will continue training at Lady Slipper and other trails.

"I have come this far and am excited about the trip," she said.

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NEW HEIGHTS: NMMU student Nandipha Jack atop Lady Slipper mountain with deputy director of Madibaz Sport Steven Thomas.