

## **Township boys discover a new world**

By Alex Eliseev

They stayed in Sandton's luxurious Michaelangelo Hotel, were chauffeured in a BMW X5, and networked with business leaders from 26 countries.

They visited the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, debated the risks of investing in South Africa and popped in to meet the president.

Then they returned to their dusty townships to study for school exams.

This was the extraordinary adventure of Thabang Mofokeng and Ndumiso Caba, a pair of matric pupils from Jules High School in Jeppestown.

Caba had never set foot in Sandton and Mofokeng had passed through it only once. Both had never even heard of the Michaelangelo Hotel, located in the heart of the "richest square mile in Africa".

But their eagerness to learn economics got them five days that may change their lives.

Mofokeng, 18, is from Soweto and loves soccer. Caba, 17, lives in Tembisa and spends a lot of time writing.

In May a teacher at their school invited them to enter an essay-writing competition to spend time with a group of 96 business fellows touring India and South Africa.

Caba wrote about public transport and Mofokeng about boosting business in the townships. They had just one weekend to work on their essays, but produced works that secured them their places. They were joined by two schoolgirls from Lenasia and Katlehong.

Caba and Mofokeng's journey began on May 25, when they were taken to meet the international visitors.

The MIT Sloan Fellows programme - which boasts names like Kofi Annan (former secretary-general of the UN) - is a year-long programme for business people doing an MBA degree and striving for senior leadership positions.

Candidates are chosen from around the world, and this year among them is South Africa's Xoliswa Kakana, managing director of Joburg-based ICT-Works.

When the boys got to their hotel room - which cost more than R2 600 per person per night - they were so overwhelmed that all they could do was take photographs.

During the programme they went to the Cradle of Humankind, and listened to President Thabo Mbeki in Pretoria. Caba even shook Mbeki's hand.

"It gave us high hopes and made us feel like anything is possible," they said.

When they were not exchanging contact numbers with the fellows they took the opportunity to see Sandton. In the evenings they met the girls and discussed what they had experienced.

They visited Pretoria's Innovation Hub, Joburg's CIDA campus and the Apartheid Museum. They listened to

entrepreneurs share ideas and took to heart advice from business revolutionaries like Taddy Blecher, founder of CIDA.

"The only part of South Africa I get to experience is the negative side... the (township with) xenophobia, corruption and crime. But now I saw a different side. The positive side," said Mofokeng.

The boys agreed that the days were not a vacation. Mofokeng is planning to study marketing management and Caba is hoping to do a Bcom in business management.

"It was an experience that I will never forget," said Caba.

