

I have a passion for Africa, and I firmly believe that my mission this time around on this planet is to do what I can to improve the lives of the African people I have learned to know over the years. Often, after taking clients to visit a traditional village, I hear comments like, “They looked so poor. I want to help improve their lives in some way.” To most Americans, the word ‘poor’, when applied to people, relates specifically to lack of money - money that could improve one’s lifestyle.

However, it isn’t that simple in a place where the welfare of people must also be in balance with the welfare of the environment and its other residents, the African wildlife and flora that make Africa such an unforgettable place. Any development, no matter how well-meaning, must take into account its long-term impact on individuals, their cultures and the environment as a whole. To do otherwise is to court certain disaster. Though there are many such examples, I prefer to focus attention on what *does* work.

Tourism is the largest source of foreign exchange for Kenya and is very high on the list for the other countries featured in this book. There are five major areas where tourism dollars contribute to conservation and sustainable development in east and southern Africa:

1. Protection of Cultural Integrity
2. Employment and Training
3. Economic Growth
4. Education and Health Care
5. Conservation & Preservation Projects

PROTECTING CULTURAL INTEGRITY

In the past, tourism practices were frequently insensitive to local customs, and often had a corrupting influence on indigenous cultures. Today, this is

changing. A growing global awareness of the need to preserve indigenous heritages has prompted the tourism sector to a greater level of awareness and responsibility. Serena Hotels has taken Maasai culture into consideration in the architecture and interior design of their lodges. Amboseli and Mara Serena Lodges were built along the lines of a Maasai boma, or village enclosure, harmonizing visually with the surrounding environment.

Another aspect of protection lies in the nature of personal encounters between tourists and local tribal groups. Keeping these exchanges educational, yet non-invasive, requires great care and awareness. Skeleton Coast Camp in Namibia seems to have a model that provides guests with an authentic cultural experience while contributing in positive ways to the local Himba community. Visitors are greeted warmly and the time spent with the Himba people provides for stimulating - and illuminating - conversation around the campfire. Wilderness Safaris, in conjunction with Conservation International, has taken a similar approach, developing a camp model at Gudigwa, in northern Botswana, which allows guests to experience the San bushman culture for brief periods in a non-invasive manner.

EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

In the United States, there is no question that the more education or training a person has, the better their options to change their socio-economic condition. This is also true in Africa. As tourism grows, more people are employed to serve the needs of the industry. These people need to be trained in this type of work, and the brightest and hardest workers advance and earn higher wages.

It is estimated that each employed person supports from five to ten others. After visiting a local village in Samburu, I asked the lodge manager how many people were employed at the lodge. I was told 120 - and those 120 employed

Kenyans were supporting 1,200 family members! I wonder what the ratio would be in the USA? Because structured programs and trainings like those for safari guides and other tourism-related work change more lives than that of each trainee or student, entire extended families and villages benefit over time.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

In the predominantly rural areas most impacted by safari tourism in east and southern Africa, the definition of economic growth has little in common with the economic growth envisioned by westerners dealing in stocks, bonds, and quarterly earnings. Instead, the emphasis is on sustaining renewable resources, by creating jobs and programs supporting the surrounding environment, wildlife, and people.

Most camps and lodges are located in remote areas of Africa, well away from highly populated areas, thus those camps and lodges who employ local labor and who purchase local goods from people in local communities create more wealth throughout the entire region. The new Jaci's Tree Lodge in South Africa was built with local labor using building materials that were purchased locally when available. The new lodge brings jobs and prosperity to an area where formerly there were few job opportunities.



Rangers trained at Lewa Conservancy protect wildlife from poachers, raise orphaned offspring, and help to develop community-based conservation programs for preservation of the local environment.

As well as jobs, community-based projects such as The Islands of Siankaba Lodges' Maize Mill Project in Zambia work wonders. Maize meal is a traditional subsistence food made by crushing dried corn kernels by hand with a mortar and pestle. The Lodge funded an electric mill, which now allows production of maize meal beyond what is needed for subsistence in local villages. The money earned from selling the meal is used to maintain the mill and to purchase medicine needed to keep the villagers' cattle free from disease.

Training for conservation and ecologically-oriented work also creates growth by changing old mindsets. Lewa Wildlife Conservancy's drive to involve local communities in the work of protecting and conserving the threatened wildlife of northern Kenya is a case in point. This was a tall order as, traditionally, many farmers considered these animals nuisances that destroyed crops. Ian Craig, Lewa's Director, made it his mission to change this way of thinking. At this writing, there are now five Community Conservation programs in place, with more on the way. The entire focus of this area has changed from seeing animals as competition for food, to valuing wildlife as a means for long-term security and economic prosperity. The Conservancy also supports education for local children as a part of its plans.

SCHOOLS, EDUCATION AND HEALTH CARE

As for education, governments in many African countries do not have the financial resources to provide schools for children to get even a basic education; nor do they have the means to establish and support clinics to provide even the most simple health care. Programs such as Lewa's and the profits generated from tourism in general allow many camps and lodges to support conservation education programs, schools, and medical clinics.

After Paul Newman visited Botswana in 2001, he partnered with Wilderness Safaris to start a local program similar to his "Hole in the Wall" Foundation in the USA and Ireland. Children between twelve and eighteen years old were selected from the poorest schools in northern Botswana to participate in a week-long program combining wildlife conservation, environmental awareness, the arts, and health education. The children were flown in to Vumbura Camp, along with their teachers for this experience, the first of many such bush learning experiences.



A trained and licensed game guide in South Africa.



Subsidized schoolchildren in Kenya visit with FoA guests.



Painted cloths from a Mfuwe, Zambia co-op are prized by tourists.

Many lodges and camps follow the same model as Mvuu Lodge in Malawi, Bushcamp Company and The River Club in Zambia, supplying books and uniforms, building classrooms - and in some cases entire schools, or providing school fees. In South Africa, White Elephant Lodge contributes funds to the hospitals and clinics in northern KwaZulu Natal that lack the finances to provide healthcare in rural areas. They also encourage guests to accompany the local doctor on a flight to these hospitals and clinics to see medical care first-hand.

ECO-FRIENDLY SYSTEMS

Care for staff, their families, and their villages is only part of the picture. The surrounding environment must also be managed with care and sensitivity. The challenge is always this: how to generate tourism, yet do no harm? Since eco-tourism is the 'buzz-word' these days, you will not find a camp or a lodge that does not aspire to be environmentally friendly.

Many camps have converted to eco-friendly ways of managing everything from trash to electrical needs. Many are heavily or completely solar-powered. Some even truck or fly out wastes that cannot be disposed of in environmentally proper ways. And, there are even places that take the idea of 'low impact' to practically 'no impact', such as Singita Lebombo Lodge.

On one of our Focus on Africa safaris in 2004, I visited their new lodge in Kruger National Park, South Africa. Each of the rooms in this remarkable lodge is raised off the ground by four steel pillars bolted to concrete slabs. These slabs are designed in such a way that the rooms can be lifted away so that even the pillars and concrete can be removed in short order. After filling in the postholes with dirt, one would never know that a \$1,000 per-person per-night luxury lodge once occupied this place. Amazing.

CONSERVATION PROJECTS

After experiencing 70 safaris to Africa, it is crystal clear to me that if tourists do not visit Africa to see the wildlife, there will not be the foreign exchange required to protect the environments that sustain the flora and fauna of east and southern Africa. And, if the environments are degraded and the wildlife gone, those who would otherwise journey to Africa on safari would forever be denied the truly life-changing experience that is Africa. By putting conservation projects in place, safari camps and lodges are the catalysts for a truly 'win-win' situation for all of us: the environment and wildlife, local peoples, the tourism industry, and you and I, the fortunate travelers. The following is just a 'short list' of currently active conservation programs in the areas where we travel on safari:

- Chitabe and Chitabe Trails, Botswana, support the Botswana Wild Dog Research Project in the Okavango Delta.

- Damaraland Camp, Namibia, is one of the most successful of these projects. What was once 200,000 acres of inhospitable, hostile territory where poaching was rampant has been proclaimed a Community Wildlife Conservancy. Today, the rare desert elephant, endangered black rhino and plains game are flourishing, - and the poaching has stopped.

- Rocktail Bay Lodge, South Africa, financially supports the KwaZulu Natal Park's 30-year-old turtle monitoring and satellite tracking program, and also funds the game scouts employed to protect the turtles during egg-laying season.

- Mombasa Serena Hotel, Kenya, initiated their own turtle conservation project in 1993, which provides a safe haven for egg-laying turtles, also working with local fishermen to protect the turtles year-round.

- Okonjima Lodge, Namibia, is home to The Africat Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to the long-term conservation of Namibia's large carnivores, especially cheetahs and leopards. Activities include blood sampling, data collection, radio tracking, cheetah rehabilitation, and environmental education.

- Amboseli Serena, Kenya, is famous for its elephants, who destroy great numbers of trees annually in their search for forage. Every Amboseli guest is encouraged to sponsor the planting of an indigenous tree during their stay. Over the past nine years, over 750,000 seedlings have taken root.

- Gibbs Farm, Tanzania, runs a tree nursery for use in local reforestation.

- Giraffe Manor, Kenya, takes its name from its work in the protection of the endangered Rothschild giraffe, along with that of the African Fund for Endangered Wildlife. AFEW also supports Wildlife Clubs of Kenya, an organization dedicated to educating Kenyan youth about the importance of conservation. Their most recent project is with Friends of Lake Victoria, which is addressing the many environmental problems in the lake basin.

- Tarangire Treetops Lodge, Tanzania partnered with three local villages to transform a 57,000-acre area bordering Tarangire National Park into The Tarangire Conservation Area. The bed-night fees, together with lease payments, provide funds for schools, bore holes, and clinics. In return, the local people have agreed not to farm or hunt in the area. Since the National Park is only 13% of the entire Tarangire eco-system, protecting areas outside the park is very important.

- Chelinda Lodge, Malawi, provides essential income that supports the maintenance of Nyika National Park where it is located. The Nyika-Vwaza Trust financially supports the Department of National Parks in their management of the reserve, as 10% of their income goes to Nyika Park.

- Bartholomeus Klip, South Africa, plays a key part in conserving vanishing habitat for endangered species such as the geometric tortoise, one of the most at-risk of the forty species of the world's tortoises that live in southern Africa. Their private reserve in the Western Cape is another example of how tourism can save a species from potential extinction. They are also an important part of an African buffalo project aimed at halting the devastation of hoof and mouth disease among wildlife, as well as the site for an ambitious project to genetically re-create the extinct quagga, a near-relation to the mountain zebra.



Professional guide Rodgers explains tracking to fascinated guests at Chichele, Zambia.

SAFARI TOURISM AND YOU

I hope that these points will highlight how your visit to Africa will be of direct benefit to sustainable development on that continent, conserving the environment, saving wildlife, and providing the means for indigenous peoples to live better, more productive and healthier lives. I invite you to join me for more than a journey; this is indeed an experience which will not only enrich your lives, but the lives of so many others.