

## PACKING WITH A PURPOSE

*With this innovative website, becoming a responsible tourist has never been easier* WORDS JANE BROUGHTON

Increasingly, people are planning holidays with greater awareness and travelling with a conscience by choosing to stay at properties that support community-based projects in meaningful ways. 'Just in case' packing, especially when heading to a remote or unfamiliar destination, is not an unusual affliction among even the most seasoned travellers. Yet how often do you reach a beautiful part of the world and wish that, instead of cramming that extra pair of completely impractical shoes into your suitcase, you had packed something that would have been of real use to a local school or grassroots clinic? Enter Pack for a Purpose ([packforapurpose.org](http://packforapurpose.org)), a volunteer-driven, nonprofit initiative impacting the lives of less-privileged people across the globe.

When avid globetrotter and ex-school teacher Rebecca Rothney and her husband, Scott, first travelled to Africa they realised that the baggage allowance on the transatlantic leg of their journey far exceeded the weight of the soft-sided bags they would be restricted to on safari charter flights. Explains Rebecca: 'On a subsequent trip to Botswana, we were keen to donate supplies to a school close to our lodge and asked Wilderness, our safari operator, to find out exactly what we should pack'. Armed with this inside info, the couple donated 64kg of school supplies, including solar-powered calculators and sports equipment, simply by using up their baggage allowance. 'Several trips to Africa later,' continues Rebecca, 'we'd transported over 450kg of donated clothing, school and medical supplies with the aid of like-minded friends. One day I asked a travel agent why other travellers didn't use their baggage allowance in this way. "Because nobody thinks about it," he replied. I started Pack for a Purpose in 2009 to inspire others to reserve a little space in their luggage for needs as diverse as stethoscopes, bandages, skipping ropes and solar-powered calculators.'

The site lists a growing number of properties in 36 countries that are already partnered with local community projects to improve the lives of people living and working there. It's an easy-to-navigate, accessible platform for travellers who want to contribute in a meaningful way with minimal effort – hence the site's irresistible tagline: Small Space, Little Effort, Big Impact. The site provides up-to-date wish lists specific to each project, highlighting not only what to pack but how to pack it. It's a simple, effective concept, which is why more and more properties located in bucket-list destinations from Belize to Botswana are signing up to be part of it. In South Africa alone, there are 20 properties currently listed, ranging from luxury lodges – among them Londolozi, Lion Sands, Samara and Rocktail Bay – to budget-friendly backpacker lodges in Jeffreys Bay and Soweto. Each of them has inspiring stories to tell of guests arriving with all sorts of items that most of us take for granted in our lives.

At the beginning of the school year Kwa Maritane Bush Lodge in Pilanesberg National Park was able to provide a number of children with new pencils, pens and exercise books, thanks to the generosity of guests who donated from 2kg to 10kg of stationery each. Samara Private Game Reserve joined Pack for a Purpose in 2011, outlining the needs of three community-based projects. It took one generous donation by an American guest – think stuffed toys, toothbrushes and toothpaste, and children's books – to bring joy to a ward full of young patients at the Marjory Parkes TB Hospital in Graaff-Reinet.

Rebecca emphasises the ripple effect of the donations, explaining that the funds that would have been used to source the same items – given the often remote locations, this is usually a logistical nightmare – can be reallocated to other needs. Through word-of-mouth marketing, social media, generous sponsorships and various partners in the travel industry, Pack for a Purpose is growing exponentially. 'My goal for this year is to sign up to at least 100 more properties worldwide,' smiles Rebecca.

