



# Giving Back

Charitable travel makes a positive impact on destinations and communities. BY KATIE MCELVEEN

Returning from her first African safari several years ago, Janet Lewis remembers that while she was thrilled by the animal encounters, she wished the cultural component of the trip had focused more on philanthropy. “The connection with the local community was limited,” she recalled. “It also felt scripted and not at all authentic.”

Then Lewis heard about Dazzle Africa, a Las Vegas-based nonprofit that, through its safaris, supports organizations that provide conservation, education and community development in the South Luangwa River Valley of Zambia. The difference? In addition to observing wildlife, travelers go behind the scenes with professionals like the Zambian Carnivore Programme’s expert lion trackers who work to keep prides safe from poachers. They also observe the canine training team from Conservation South Luangwa, whose sniffer dogs are taught to detect the specific contraband regularly smuggled in and out of Zambia.

“It’s a win-win,” said Stacy James, cofounder and executive director, Dazzle Africa. “Guests have an extraordinary, meaningful experience, and the community gets funding for needs such as a bush plane to track herds, clean water and college scholarships that will give young people the education they need to fill high-level jobs brought about by an expansion in wildlife tourism.”

Lewis was so impressed with the experience, she’s about to embark on her third safari with Dazzle. “Dazzle’s partner-

ships allow us to spend real time with the people on the ground working to preserve South Luangwa,” she said. “It’s incredibly inspiring.”

Lewis isn’t alone in wanting her travel to do more than light up her Instagram feed with smile-filled photos from exotic locales. According to a recent American Express survey, 59 percent of respondents agree they are interested in “philantourism,” the act of choosing a vacation or experience in order to support a destination through tourism.

back to the regions they’re visiting.

Through the Good Travel with Marriott Bonvoy initiative, for instance, guests at W Bali Seminyak can assist hotel staff in creating meals from surplus food so it can be safely packaged and delivered to needy families in the community. Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort & Spa invites guests to help build coral frames which, once underwater, provide an environment where coral can regenerate. A post-work snorkeling tour of the site with marine biologists allows participants

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Angie Rice, cofounder, Boutique Travel Advisors in Arizona, isn’t surprised by the numbers. “Travelers have gained a hunger to contribute and interact with the community in a more positively impactful manner,” she said. “The tourist’s script has flipped from, ‘What can I get out of this travel experience?’ to ‘How can I give back through this experience?’”

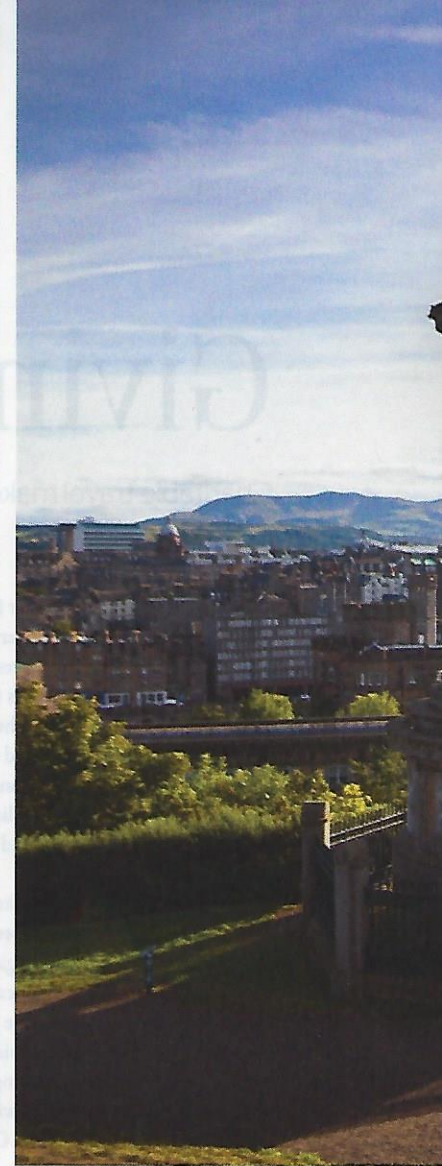
Inspired by their guests’ philanthropic leanings, hotels, tour operators and cruise lines launched a wide array of experiences that give guests the opportunity to give

to understand the impact of their work.

The Ritz-Carlton’s Impact Experiences are tailored to the needs of their local communities and include designing and creating greeting cards for children living near The Ritz-Carlton Half Moon Bay resort in Jamaica and, at the company’s Okinawa, Japan, property, planting coral. “We find that our guests are continually looking for new opportunities to experience a destination, using travel as a vessel for transformation, education and growth,” said Donna McNamara, vice

**Lending a Hand:**  
The Ritz-Carlton’s Impact Experiences guests planting trees

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**Make a Difference:**  
 (Left to right) Ritz-Carlton volunteers cleaning the beach, highlights of Scotland tour in partnership with Invisible Cities, and spaces for local artists provided by Hyatt Loves Local

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president and global brand leader, The Ritz-Carlton. “Impact Experiences are one of the initiatives I am most proud of, particularly as we look to the year ahead when our guests will be focused more than ever before on giving back.”

In May 2021, as part of its continued effort to revitalize communities and local businesses recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, Hyatt Hotels reintroduced Hyatt Loves Local with more than 160 collaborations that include volunteer opportunities at animal shelters through Andaz Delhi (India), Grand Hyatt Goa (India) and Parisi Udvar Hotel Budapest (Hungary).

Hyatt also provides ways for guests to help their communities in other ways: Grand Hyatt Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), Hyatt Centric Center City Philadelphia and Hyatt Regency Baltimore, among others, provide retail space where local artists, makers and artisans can show and sell their products, allowing small business owners a way to benefit from increased travel to their cities.

The Travel Corporation, which comprises more than 30 well-known travel brands such as Insight Vacations, Uniworld Cruises and Red Carnation Hotels, launched a series of conscientious experiences under an initiative called Make Travel Matter. Beyond cool volunteer opportunities like taking U by Uniworld passengers fishing for plastic in Amsterdam’s canals,

MTM experiences support local businesses by sharing their stories and bringing them customers. One example is Insight Vacations’ visit to Brlog, Croatia’s first women-owned co-op brewery, to try a selection of the natural craft beers and hear the inspiring story of how founders Maja Šepetavec and Ana Teskera built their enterprise. Becoming an MTM experience isn’t easy. “Our teams are very hands-on finding MTM experiences,” said Guy Young, president, Insight Vacations. “They ensure that local organizations meet robust criteria that includes advancing at least one of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals.”

Smaller resorts and tour companies also work to connect clients with their communities. One is Tierra del Volcan, whose trips deep into Ecuador’s northern Andes include a number of service projects. “Through adventure activities, travelers become more sensitive to the environment that surrounds them,” said founder Jorge Perez. “The conservation group service project in the Cotopaxi area will support sustainable initiatives and conservation efforts. This program reinforces private, community, and local government efforts to preserve one of the most visited areas in Ecuador: The Cotopaxi National Park and its buffer zone.”

While experts applaud travelers looking to help local communities, studies show that, in some cases, uninformed volunteers can do more harm than good. “Those seeking volunteer experiences while on the road need to



ensure that what they will be doing doesn't take away a paid job from a local person," said Matt Berna, managing director of North America, Intrepid Travel.

Though Intrepid doesn't facilitate volunteer opportunities for travelers, the company does work with a number of enterprises that directly — and often creatively — support community development. One is the walking tours offered on the company's Highlights of Scotland Tour, run in partnership with Invisible Cities, a social enterprise that supports and trains people who have experienced homelessness to become tour guides in their own city.

For small nonprofits like Invisible Cities, a partnership with a large travel corporation can have lasting impact. Ten years ago Sandals Resorts International began to promote Pack for a Purpose, which encourages travelers to pack five pounds of needed items such as antibiotic ointment, soccer balls, reading glasses and school supplies in their suitcases. The resort then delivers supplies to needy schools, clinics and orphanages. Rebecca Rothney, the group's founder and director, said the collaboration enabled Pack for a Purpose to expand its service to a level she never would have thought possible. "Sandals' support is part of the reason why the global travel community has donated more than 434,249 pounds of the supplies," she noted. "Giving back is a way of showing gratitude to your destination and the people who live there. Our goal is to make it as easy as possible for travelers to say, 'Thank you.'"