



# Making an impact

In the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, **Carrie Hampton** has a look at how to give back when you travel to this southern African country, and how to ensure that your funds are going into the right hands

I want my holiday spend to matter," stated Celsea Jenkins from California on safari at Great Plains Conservation's Selinda Camp in the Okavango Delta. Her resolve was fuelled by unethical wildlife encounters she and husband Wyatt had experienced in Asia. From then on, they decided their annual adventure would be selected more consciously. Fulfilling their objectives is surprisingly easy in Botswana, a country that has cultivated relationships with safari operators that use tourism as a means for greater good, such as conservation, local employment and social upliftment.

## Spreading the word

African lodges are increasingly ensuring their operations support wildlife conservation and communities; and Great Plains is just one of a number of progressive companies steered by seasoned safari personalities and conservationists.

When film-makers Dereck and Beverly Joubert co-founded the organisation, their mission was to find a perfect formula for conservation, community engagement and commerce that would have a lasting impact on iconic African animals and wilderness areas. Their

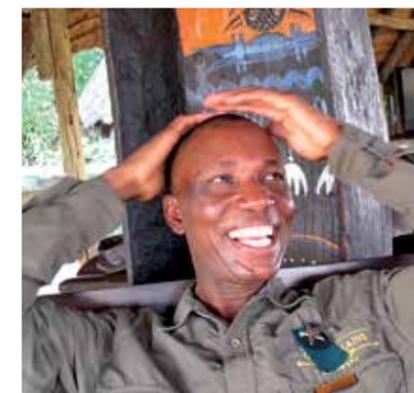
documentaries have enabled them to change the world as few people can, making their dreams a reality.

Tugging at the collective conscience, their books, television appearances and eight Emmy Award-winning films tell of nature's impending doom from loss of habitat and poaching. They seize the attention of conscientious travellers worldwide and reach millions, helping to spread the crucial message that African wildlife is in crisis.

## Compulsory environmental education

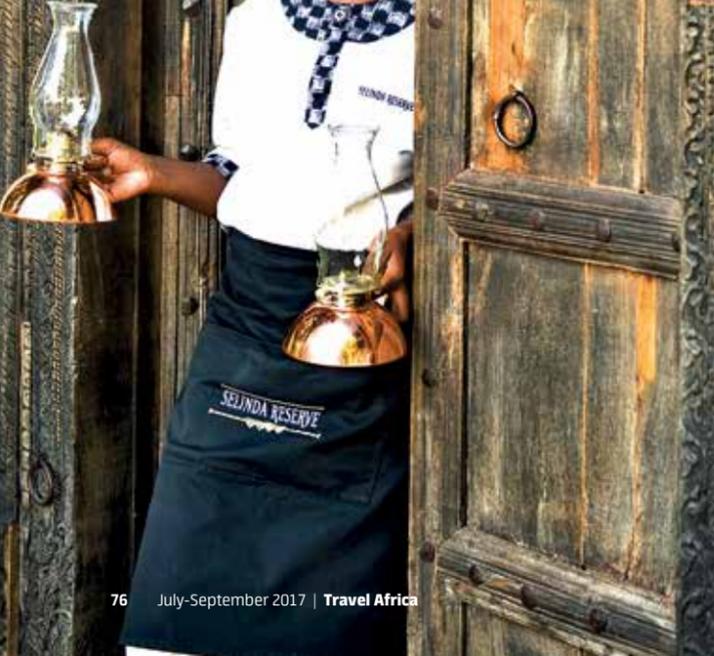
People create crises – and bringing humans back into the equation to solve the problem is exactly what Botswana's government is doing. Every school must have compulsory environmental education, including field trips and other conservation projects run by private safari companies.

Good examples of this are Wilderness Safaris' Children in the Wilderness programmes; Great Plains' annual Young Explorers Conservation Camp for pupils of Gudigwa Primary School; and andBeyond's Africa Foundation, which integrates high-end tourism, conservation and communities to their mutual benefit. →



CARRIE HAMPTON

**OPPOSITE:** Coming full circle. Engaged, employed, uplifted and committed local communities are at the heart of Great Plains Conservation's philosophy and lodges. **ABOVE:** Mots Morundu, a wildlife guide at the company's Selinda Camp in Botswana's Okavango Delta



**CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE**  
**LEFT:** Kids from the Children in the Wilderness project enjoy a mokoro experience; Xigera Camp's Gideon Kgalemang and Obonye (OB) Baitseng both benefit directly from the company's commitment to sustainable tourism; a girl from the Shashe Primary School's Eco-Club in Maun; women from the Shashe Adult Eco-Club weave baskets that are bought for use in the Wilderness camps; a local member of staff at Great Plains Conservation's Selinda Camp

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These three examples are grounded in the philosophy that the local community must share responsibility for driving change. For Wilderness, this means placing substantial levies from operating two lodges in the Delta into a Community Trust administered by five villages. It's up to them to use the funds wisely.

**Employment, stability and security**

As many as 60 per cent of villagers who reside in or alongside wilderness areas where lodges operate are employed, directly or indirectly, by tourism. The industry adds 11.6 per cent to the country's GDP and creates around 75,500 jobs out of a population of just over 2 million (in 2016). Tourism is, therefore, hugely important, and the country's long-held policy of low-volume high-price has maintained perceptions of exclusivity.

Botswana is also perceived as safe, secure and stable – prized qualities in an unpredictable world. Another great accolade is its rating as the least corrupt country in Sub-Saharan Africa, according to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2016. All good marketing points for a safari destination that sells itself. By travelling here, you can trust that your tourist dollars are going into the right hands.

**Ecotourism certifications**

Botswana probably has greater buy-in for green tourism operations than any of its neighbours, and the Botswana Ecotourism Certification System, a voluntary, industry-wide standards programme to encourage and support responsible tourism and eco-friendly products, monitors this. This accreditation is aligned with Fair Trade Tourism, which certifies accommodation and activities under its strict sustainable tourism criteria.

Other related organisations in African and Indian Ocean countries include: Global Sustainable Tourism Council, Ecotourism Kenya, Eco Awards Namibia, Seychelles Sustainable Tourism Label, Responsible Tourism Tanzania, The Responsible Safari Company and Pack for a Purpose (read more on page 79).

In the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, Sharon Gilbert-Rivett, formerly of Fair Trade Tourism, wishes that more tour operators would take this unique opportunity to compile itineraries containing at least 50 per cent sustainably certified properties and

**WHO ELSE IS GIVING BACK?**

Great Plains Conservation, and Beyond and Wilderness Safaris are just three of the private companies supporting sustainable tourism in Botswana. Here are a few more who are doing their bit:

**Stuart Bartman**

Karibu Safari Botswana

"The last true wilderness on Earth is under pressure. As access to these areas improves, locals increasingly seek a share of the reward; but sadly this doesn't always happen, so many resort to poaching, either for sustenance or more often than not for commercial gain. However, we have partnered with People for Wildlife on a remote camera-trap project, which helps with identifying both animals and people moving in and around our areas of operation. This information is then shared with either the research groups or the relevant authorities. The positive results have been fantastic!"

**Mike Brogden**

Botswana Cultural Holidays

"Guests can get involved by supporting locals in Serowe. Stay at the Serowe Hotel (locally owned and staffed); visit the Khama Museum (run by local man Scobie); take the tour led by the young Motswana woman, which includes the Khama graves and the market; and buy wooden carvings by San craftsmen – all to the benefit of the Batswana themselves."

**Vikki Threlfall**

Tuli Safari Lodge

"We produce enough vegetables in our garden (**below**) to sustain the lodge and supplement staff rations. Fuel and time are saved from the reduction in long road journeys for shopping trips. The bricks were even made on site rather than brought in and the land has been planted cooperatively to deter insects so that no pesticides are required. Guests and staff love it!"





JULIET LEMON / WILDERNESS SAFARIS

activities. “With sustainability benchmarking in South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Kenya, Tanzania, Madagascar and Mozambique, well-informed tour operators can create wholly sustainable packages,” she states. Fabien Cousteau – a speaker at the World Travel & Tourism Council 2016 Global Summit – made it more poignant by saying, “I look forward to the day when there is no sustainable tourism. Just tourism.”

Cousteau’s line is very much the approach of many safari operators in Botswana that have taken the attitude that tourism should either be sustainable or it shouldn’t exist at all. Guests travelling with Great Plains, for example, soon realise that they’re not here just for their own gratification. Just by being there, they are an imperative part of a chain that links them to meaningful habitat and wildlife conservation, eco-friendly accommodation and empowerment of local communities through education, employment and infrastructure investment.

### Praising the government

Every member of staff has a story to tell about their own personal upliftment and the skills they’ve learnt, which usually includes spontaneous praise for President Lieutenant General Seretse Khama Ian Khama, and his government. Where else in the world, I pondered,

would that happen? My guide at Selinda Camp, Mots Morundu, admires President Khama for his support of conservation and zero-tolerance towards poaching. It’s a shoot-to-kill policy here, which has gained Botswana the enviable reputation of being the safest place for rhino to survive and live wild and free.

In a visionary collaboration between big players such as Wilderness Safaris and andBeyond, the translocation of 100 rhino from South Africa to safer Botswana is well under way. Moreover, some rhino have been moved from Singita’s Pamushana Lodge in Zimbabwe, not because they are in peril (there hasn’t been any rhino poaching there since 2007) but because they are breeding so successfully that there isn’t space for them. Mots says he is “99 per cent sure” that none of the displaced animals will be poached because of all the measures in place to stop that happening, such as the efforts of Rhino Conservation Botswana, which works hard to protect the country’s wild rhino.

Mots told me how a school Wildlife Club trip to Chobe National Park and Moremi Game Reserve had ignited his ambition to work in a safari lodge. His children have visited him at Selinda and now foster their own aspirations, his eldest boy wishing to become a wildlife vet and his daughter, a pilot. She is modelling her future



DANIEL MYBERG / WILDERNESS SAFARIS

on the female staff she has seen at MACK AIR, which flies guests to Botswana’s many lodges. Both can set their sights high and will hopefully achieve their ambitions.

### A novel use for dung

When Celsea’s tour operator in San Francisco didn’t have the knowledge to choose sustainable lodges, she did her own research. Great Plains policies closely mirrored her own ecological living goals.

At Selinda, every piece of plastic, can or recyclable object is squashed and returned to the nearest supply town, Maun, some 300km away by road. Food waste is used to generate biogas that runs the kitchen stoves. At Zarafa Camp – Selinda’s serene little sister on the Zibadianja Lagoon – manager Willem Bakhuis Roozeboom thinks a good dollop of buffalo dung gives the methane gas production “extra *vooma*”!

### A safari with a difference

Back home in California after her Botswana adventure, Celsea reflects: “Our holiday created such a big impact on us because we could actually see how much the people and wildlife were supported by tourist dollars. We were very humbled and inspired by our experiences, and having thought it would be a once-in-a-lifetime trip, we now wonder how we can stay away from Africa! I’m sure we will be back.” 🐾

## SAFARI PLANNER

■ **Getting there** British Airways, South African Airways and Virgin Atlantic fly to Johannesburg. From there, Airlink will take you to Maun (for the Okavango Delta) or Kasane (for Chobe). Alternatively, if you wish to visit the Victoria Falls, you may prefer to fly to Livingstone, Zambia, or Victoria Falls International in Zimbabwe. The writer travelled from Johannesburg with Air Botswana and within the Okavango Delta courtesy of MACK AIR.

■ **When to go** During the dry season (May to October) animals usually congregate at waterholes, but this rule doesn’t apply to the Okavango Delta, which, from May to August, is filled with floodwaters from Angola, making water activities such as mokoro and boat trips the main attraction. October and November are blisteringly hot but then the cooling rain arrives from December to March, which is known as the ‘green season’.

■ **Health** Botswana is a malarial zone, so visit your local travel clinic to buy antimalarials and to receive any other necessary vaccinations.

■ **Films** Dereck and Beverly Joubert’s books and wildlife documentaries, such as *Soul of the Elephant*, *The Last Lions* and *Eye of the Leopard*, can be found on [wildlifefilms.co](http://wildlifefilms.co).

■ **Books** Bradt’s *Botswana Safari Guide: Okavango Delta, Chobe, Northern Kalahari* (4th edition) by Chris McIntyre.

### TRAVEL RESPONSIBLY

How to choose the right tour operator. Here are six questions you should ask to ensure you choose the right company:

- How do the places where we will be staying practise sustainable tourism?
- What green initiatives are in place?
- How does the community benefit from our stay?
- What animal encounters can we expect and are they ethical?
- Can we engage authentically with local people and cultures?
- Do our accommodation and activities have any environmental or sustainable certifications?

### PACK FOR A PURPOSE

This is a simple concept. All you need to do is save some space in your luggage and take something to donate to the local community. Here are a few tips:

- Visit the Pack for a Purpose website: [packforapurpose.org](http://packforapurpose.org).
- Find your destination from their list of more than 60 countries.
- If you’ve chosen your holiday well, your accommodation should be listed.
- See what items they have requested, and go and buy whatever you can afford.
- Once there, hand over your donations and feel great about adding more meaning to your trip and helping others in a practical, genuinely beneficial way.

ABOVE, FROM LEFT: Children proudly show off their vegetable garden at the Shashe Primary School’s Eco-Club in Maun, launched by Wilderness Safaris; a boy holds a chameleon on one of the Children in the Wilderness programmes, during which local kids are taught about wildlife and conservation