

Abercrombie & Kent

Tourism for Tomorrow Awards Community Finalist 2014

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Celebrating 50 years in business, Abercrombie and Kent (A&K) is world renowned for quality safari products and attention to detail. The local communities who live in the lands where A&K operate have never been, and never will be, however, a mere detail. They are not a thing to tag on to the end of a safari break as a token 'cultural experience'. They are integral to the whole A&K set up.

Although it started life in East Africa, A&K now operates on all seven continents, but with community partnership still at the core of everything they do. By establishing Destination Management Companies worldwide, A&K hires and trains more than 2200 local staff and builds local infrastructure which benefits hosts and guests alike. They offer on-going training for local communities, and not just token training. High level capacity building, with accounting, driver training, mechanics, history, geography, natural resources and conservation top of the agenda.

A&K knows that conservation and community go hand in hand. This commitment was formalized as long ago as 1982, when Abercrombie & Kent Philanthropy (AKP) was founded. AKP is a registered charity in England and a not-for-profit organization in the U.S. , its expenses being borne by the A&K Group so that 100% of every donation flows to designated projects. For example, A&K have always recognised the rights and respected the needs of the traditional pastoralist Maasai people of Kenya. People who are facing dramatic changes with a growing population of 300,000, diminishing natural resources and increasing conflicts between humans and wildlife. The survival of this key conservation area is essential not only for ecological stability but also for economic stability of Kenya and economic advancement of the Maasai people.

A&K have always employed locally in the Maasai Mara. Sanctuary Olonana , for example, is a community-based project built on land owned by the local Maasai who receive lease payments and a royalty per bed-night. More than half Olonana staff are Maasai, holding key positions as Head Naturalist, Heads of Security and Project Coordinator. In 2012, tangible economic benefits to the Maasai community through Olonana alone totalled more than US\$1,725,000.

Looking ahead another 50 years, A&K also supports local education. Such as sponsoring "Rhino Watch" field trips into the Reserve for Maasai children to experience their natural heritage as international visitors do and better understand the benefits of sustainable tourism. Wildly popular with students, teachers and parents, more than 1,500 have participated since A&K support launched the programme.

And these are just a few of the details. A&K programmes have become templates of best practice in community engagement and conservation. Which is why A&K guests, gathering around a bar after a day on safari, don't just ask, "What did you see today?". They also ask, "Who did you meet? ". Which says it all.