

**Tourism for Tomorrow Awards
Community Finalist 2014**



Basecamp Explorer Kenya

Svein Wilhelmsen founded Basecamp Explorer in 1998, following a life-changing meeting with Maasai elder, Chief Ole Taek. Having heard the Maasai's concerns about threats to his people, Norwegian Wilhelmsen founded a company with a mission to not only care for this indigenous people, but one that would leave a positive footprint in the places they operated and on the people whose homelands they brought visitors to.

Since then, Basecamp Explorer has set up several camps in the Maasai Mara, with not only luxurious camping facilities and stunning backdrops, but also impressive inbuilt structures of sustainability. Basecamp Maasai Mara, for example, an Gold Eco Rated Camp, operates on an eco-friendly model while Eagle View in the Mara Naboisho Conservancy is a Silver Eco Rated Camp and operates on a Conservancy model. It is the latter model that has strong community impacts as it involves the participation of 500 Maasai families who have given their land in trust and, in return, they receive a monthly income according to the size of land.

This community owned conservancy, now fifteen years old, is called Naboisho – after the *maa* expression of 'coming together'. Chosen by the Maasai community, the name symbolizes how the Maasai community came together in a time of need. With the need to hold on tight to their land having been an overriding issue in the Maasai Mara, Basecamp sought to find a sustainable alternative that would allow the Maasai to retain their land. In addition, the existence of this community owned nature conservancy means that the ecosystems and vital grazing grounds are also sustained. So it is a win win.

Community empowerment is about more than the land for Basecamp Explorer. It is also about capacity building of the people who live there. Leasing the land is one thing, but Basecamp Explorer is not about excluding people in the process. Basecamp Maasai Mara operates, for example, as a learning centre, attracting more than 300 college students every year to learn how an eco-camp operates, ensuring ecological sustainability and community empowerment while always ensuring guest satisfaction.

Empowering women is also part of this process, with 118 local Maasai women now receiving a direct income from tourism, inspired by the creation of The Basecamp Maasai Brand. Started in 2003 the project benefits 118 Maasai women who produce artisan goods made from sustainable resources. As well as making a direct cash benefit from sales, the women make decisions on their savings, their group constitution and elect their own leaders. The success of this capacity building model is now being implemented in other similar projects. Another aspect of this success is Basecamp's introduction of a community managed micro-finance (CMMF) program in 2010. Because in terms of community support and sustainability, this camp certainly does have all bases well and truly covered.