



Wilderness Safaris GLOBAL TOURISM BUSINESS AWARD FINALIST 2010

CASE STUDY

Founded in 1983, Wilderness Safaris originally established itself as a tour company offering “Original Experiences in Pure Wilderness”, with nature, and its conservation and protection, at the heart of its business practices and values.

Since then, Wilderness Safaris has built a successful business model serving approximately 40,000 guests a year, staying in more than 60 permanent camps and lodges in Namibia, Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Malawi and the Seychelles. The company has over 2,000 employees, of whom nearly 90% are rural-based Africans, many trained by Wilderness Safaris. The company is also publicly listed on the Botswana Stock Exchange.



Through the years, Wilderness Safaris has helped to rehabilitate, manage and protect more than 2.9 million hectares (7.2 million acres) of natural habitat, home to many rare and endangered species. At the core of the company’s mission is its commitment to its founding environmental principles.

Through collaboration and support with local communities, this provides a successful economic alternative to less sustainable forms of development in Africa, such as mining, trophy hunting and timber concessions. Most importantly, it has recognized that successful conservation and tangible social and economic benefits for local people are only possible when the business on which those depend remains viable and profitable.

Today, Wilderness Safaris’ mission has evolved into a bold commitment to build “sustainable conservation economies”. This has meant a greater focus on protection of wilderness areas, sustainable practices in its day-to-day operations, and more focus on sharing its experiences and philosophy with its guests and other tourism companies in Africa and around the world. As an example, its Children in the Wilderness community initiative is a life-skills programme that has hosted over 3,000 children from villages near wildlife reserves across Southern Africa, teaching them about conservation so that they become the future custodians of these areas.

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In Zimbabwe, where Wilderness Safaris recognised that attendance was poor at schools due to the fact that families had no money to educate their children and that food was also in short supply, they decided to focus on directly helping children in their communities and in their schools. This has led to a Wilderness Safaris' nutrition programme providing daily meals for 430 malnourished children. The company advocates a strong operating principle that properly planned and managed tourism can make a significant positive difference to the lives of rural African communities living in and around conservation areas.

One of the most important lessons it has learned is that, in order to grow both as a business and in terms of implementing and growing its sustainable tourism best practices, it must constantly evaluate its systems and progress.

It also maintains that investment in its conservation and community initiatives should not be considered an additional special effort, but should be an integral part of its business model and its business success.

To help drive its business decisions going forward it has engaged in monitoring and evaluating its community initiatives and their conservation outcomes. It now employs full-time staff to evaluate the long-term impact of its community support programmes.

By way of example, it is increasingly focused on looking at the most effective ways of partnering with local communities to provide them with revenue benefits from the existence of its camps – lease fees, revenue share and shared ownership equity in the business itself. It monitors employment opportunities, training resources and access, and the impact of community projects such as its Children in the Wilderness Program, the establishment of schools, clinics and water wells, and sourcing of local supplies and services from local communities. These assessments inform and drive its decision-making as a company.

It has also been proactive in supporting comprehensive health programmes for all Wilderness Safaris' staff, specifically in relation to the reality and impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in southern Africa. By providing confidential screening for all employees, and universal education for all staff and their families, as well as access to long-term medication and treatment for those in need, it is investing for the long term in its employees, and decreasing the stigma attached to this deadly disease.

In addition to its community outreach programmes, it has also increased monitoring of its impact on the wildlife and natural landscapes where its lodges are located. It regularly hosts scientists conducting research on wildlife species, conservation issues and biodiversity, and through the Wilderness Trust, its non-profit conservation foundation, it is able to use this research to seek solutions to issues of human / wildlife conflict, protection and preservation of biodiversity, and conservation of nature. Through these efforts, Wilderness Safaris is showing that a company can continue to grow as a profitable business model and achieve greater accomplishments in sustainable tourism.