

Travel

# The kindness trip

EDITED *by* BERNARD O'SHEA

A holiday becomes even more enjoyable and meaningful when you put smiles on the faces of people you meet along the way, or make their day. With the “volun-tourism” travel trend firmly on the rise, here are some vacation options that include a strong feel-good factor.



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Credit: Henryk Sadura

## How to help ... other women

### Learn from locals

Joining a women-only tour is an excellent way to explore the world while empowering women in other countries, particularly in places where they're traditionally restricted from entering the workforce. Intrepid Travel's Women's Expeditions are a prime example of Girl Power-fuelled adventures ([intrepidtravel.com](http://intrepidtravel.com)).

On my eight-day tour of Morocco, led by a female guide, we venture from Marrakech (left) into remote regions of the North African nation, visiting women-run co-ops along the way. Our encounter with the Tawesna Association in Aït Benhaddou, in the High Atlas Mountains, is a highlight. This co-op supports more than 30 women, upskilling them and improving livelihoods. We feast on colourful tagines at their outdoor teahouse and restaurant before touring the astonishing World Heritage-listed town on foot.

Back in Marrakech, we're treated to dinner and an intimate performance by a female band, The Houariyates, in a local's home in the old medina. Their enthusiasm is contagious. We dance to their lively music and stirring vocals praising womanhood. We leave Morocco feeling good and doing good by shopping consciously at weaving workshops and traditional medicine stores selling nature-based beauty products, all run and operated by ... you guessed it! – *Julia D'Orazio*.

### Rebuilding trust in India

“A glass of water and a cup of chai is all that's needed,” humanitarian Govind Singh Rathore says of the women who seek refuge with the non-profit charitable organisation he founded, Sambhali Trust ([sambhali.org](http://sambhali.org)). “We help them survive vulnerable situations, offering counselling and new pathways.”

Govind, a survivor of domestic violence, made it his mission to support marginalised and vulnerable women. Sambhali (“rising of the deprived”) opened its doors in January 2007. Some 17 years later, through its 10 centres and three boarding homes – and with the help of volunteers and local interns – the trust has helped over 57,000 women and children.

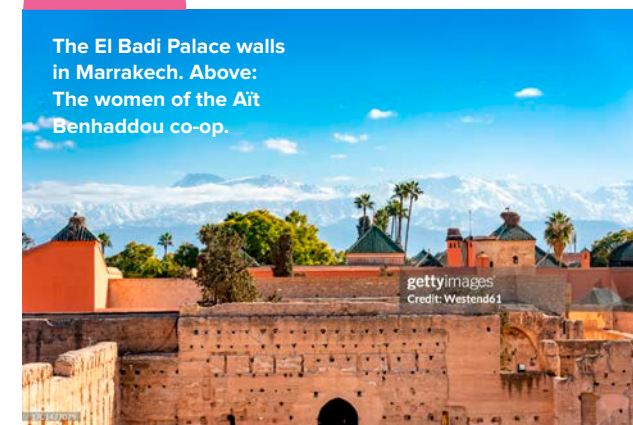
I visited three centres in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, to see firsthand the

incredible work taking place. Run by women and international volunteers, classes cover sewing/embroidery, maths/bookkeeping, reading and writing, self-defence, the English language, and women's rights. In such a supportive environment women are keen and eager, many never having had the opportunity to learn.

Volunteers can stay at Durag Niwas Guesthouse ([durag-niwas.com](http://durag-niwas.com)), owned and run by Govind's family. Also located here is a centre and boutique, which sells handicrafts and clothes made by the women ([sambhali.org/sambhali-sutra](http://sambhali.org/sambhali-sutra)). – *Lynn Gail*.



Morocco



The El Badi Palace walls in Marrakech. Above: The women of the Aït Benhaddou co-op.



India

Below: Houses in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, India. Left: Women at the Sambhali Trust, which supports and educates marginalised women.



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Credit: Cristian Baltg

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Bwindi Impenetrable Forest in Uganda. Right: Tricia Salau (right) with a co-op sewer. Below: Making bespoke garments.

Uganda

## Shopping with purpose

Fabric flows through Emily Basheija's fingers in a rainbow of colour at Ride 4 a Woman, a social co-operative neighbouring Bwindi Impenetrable Forest in Uganda. She is fashioning my bespoke skirt on the pedal sewing machine she learned to use thanks to a chance meeting between Melburnian Tricia Salau and the co-operative's founder, Evelyn Habasa, in 2011.

"I met Tricia on the streets of Buhoma [near Bwindi] when she was buying fabrics," Evelyn says. "I wanted to know what she was going to use them for. She told me 'quilting', and I was like, 'I don't know quilting'. She took my email and sent me pictures of the quilt. I thought 'Oh, this is nice. If we had this here, maybe this would help the women'."

Evelyn had founded the co-operative in 2009 in an effort to improve the economic prospects of vulnerable women – widows, single mothers, those suffering from HIV or domestic abuse. Armed with a tourism degree and alert to tourism's capacity for change, she'd trained eight female bicycle mechanics and launched a bicycle hire service; but there was little uptake from trek-fatigued visitors. The chance meeting



with Tricia changed all that.

"She organised with three of her friends to come back to Uganda and teach women how to quilt," Evelyn says. "We called a few lodges, showed them what we had made." Sales success followed. Evelyn says that when the women now look at their earlier work "they're like, 'Are we the ones who did this? This is not our work!' because they've gotten to be better seamstresses."

Today, Ride 4 a Woman (ride4awoman.org) encompasses the sewing project, a shop and guesthouse, and micro-finance, education and safe water programs. Tricia returns to Buhoma annually to further the skills of women like Emily, who stands up now from her pedal machine and presents me with my priceless new skirt. – Catherine Marshall.

Try also

## Take a hike



Australia

## Tackling taboos

Huma Charity Challenge's 10-day hike along part of the Flinders Ranges' epic Heysen Trail is a breeze compared to the trials faced by the expedition's beneficiaries: Women and children experiencing domestic violence, homelessness, or both. Integral to the challenge is participants' pledge to raise funds for Jenny's Place, a Newcastle-based support service. humachallenge.com



Zürich

## Women's movement

A 'Women Power' walking tour with Detours Zürich (detours-zurich.ch) shows you the city while highlighting women who've shaped political, cultural and social aspects of Swiss society. Your guide will invite you into discussions on gender bias, the pay gap and even sex work, and your tour fee supports local women in need.

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Three-year-old Kamili enjoys a midday feed.

Nairobi

## How to help wildlife and the environment

### Help rehabilitate an elephant

The pint-sized elephants pack a monumental punch at Sheldrick Wildlife Trust's (SWT) orphan nursery in Nairobi, Kenya (sheldrickwildlifetrust.org). With trunks flying and ears flapping, they thunder towards the arena where we've gathered for the midday feeding and mud-bath routine. Three-year-old Kamili lunges for a bottle of milk held aloft by her keeper; wizened by drought, she was rescued just over a year ago from Tsavo Conservation Area. "When she came in, she only had skin and bone left on her," says project manager Edwin Lusichi.

Along with other orphans whose mothers were felled by human-wildlife conflict, poaching or drought, Kamili will eventually be transferred to a regional reintegration unit and reintroduced to the wild. Like many of the elephants rehabilitated at SWT's units over the years, she might return to them one day to show off her own babies.

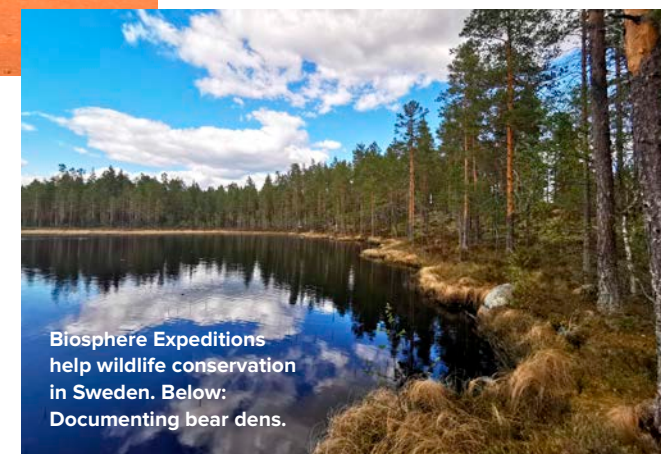
Adopt an elephant or visit the nursery and reintegration units during a Bench Africa safari (benchafrika.com). – Catherine Marshall.

## Scientist for a (holi)day

*In Australia ...* Be a citizen scientist across Australia on a tour with Echidna Walkabout. Your observations help wildlife conservation researchers learn more about how to help our unique animals. See echidnawalkabout.com.au



*And abroad ...* Put your wanderlust to work by documenting bear dens in Sweden, collecting snow leopard scat in Kyrgyzstan or tagging loggerhead turtles in the Azores on a volunteer holiday with wildlife conservation non-profit Biosphere Expeditions. See biosphere-expeditions.org



Biosphere Expeditions help wildlife conservation in Sweden. Below: Documenting bear dens.





Global

## Rescue native animals

On the day I visit the Kanyana Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre ([kanyanawildlife.org.au](http://kanyanawildlife.org.au)) in Perth, volunteer Nora Livingstone tells me I've just missed a fire drill. Evacuating hundreds of injured or orphaned native Australian animals, I soon learn, is complicated, but the Kanyana volunteer staff are expert in caring for the many marsupials, birds and reptiles at the centre (bottom). You can help just by joining a tour, and fees go straight into running costs.

Nora is at Kanyana as part of an Animal Experience International program, a Canadian organisation that matches volunteers with wildlife programs worldwide ([animalexperienceinternational.com](http://animalexperienceinternational.com)). Willing travellers can help with rescue dogs in Spain, Kenya and Nepal, work in sea turtle conservation centres in Costa Rica (below) or assist marine biologists with shark conservation in South Africa. – *Amanda Kendle.*



The walking trails allow travellers to experience the essence of rural Japan.

Japan



## How to help ... communities

### Support rural Japan

Tokyo may be the poster child for bustling modernity, but rural Japan is suffering from the effects of an ageing, declining population. It's a pity, as our hike through the hills of Tohoku following the Basho trail with Walk Japan proves that these tiny villages are brimming with amiable locals offering meals and souvenirs that rival or better what can be found in the cities.

Making use of the myriad hiking trails across Japan not only offers you captivating views and the benefits of nature, but also helps revitalise these rural towns. Walk Japan ([walkjapan.com](http://walkjapan.com)) has upped the ante by establishing a focused community project in rural Kyushu, and a portion of our trip fee supports this endeavour. – *Amanda Kendle.*

### Fund local youth

With a focus on regenerative tourism – not just doing no harm, but proactively leaving a community better than when you arrived – The Centre for GOOD Travel ([good-travel.org](http://good-travel.org)) helps travellers experience the best of a place as well as make heart-warming connections with local communities. On their Peru trip, for example, travellers meet young women being supported by Peruvian Hearts, a non-profit organisation aiming to end poverty and gender inequality. A portion of your trip fee funds their school supplies, tuition and transport.

Peru

