



# MAKING A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE ...

## In Kenya

### Developing & Marketing Sustainable Maasai Village Tourism Experiences in Kenya

In 2006 the Travel Foundation began funding a new project in Kenya developed by Responsible Tourism Consultancy, Tribal Voice Communications.



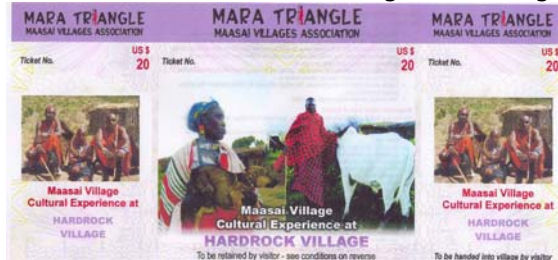
The project aimed initially to work with villagers from existing cultural manyattas located in the Western side of the Maasai Mara (the Mara Triangle) to develop sustainable, responsible, marketable, village tourism experiences by:

- Significantly increasing the economic benefits from tourism to the local community.
- Developing a quality village tourism experience that encouraged genuine cultural exchange.

- Providing UK tour operators and destination suppliers with sustainable cultural tourism excursions to responsibly market to their clients.
- Disseminating good practice and lessons learnt from the project to enable other community tourism ventures in Kenya and beyond to improve the sustainability of their businesses.



The pilot initiative was completed in late 2007 and was successful in overturning over 30 years of exploitation of the Maasai tribe by Kenya's driver guides, in this ground breaking new initiative. After working with villagers from 4 cultural manyattas in the Mara Triangle, along with safari lodges, tour operators and ground handlers in Kenya, a new, transparent, ticketing and payment system for cultural visits to manyattas has been put in place whereby the villages retain 100% of visitor tour fees for cultural tours around their villages from lodge-



generated business, compared to only 4% previously with the remaining 96% being pocketed by Kenya's driver guides.



The Kenya Association of Tour Operators (KATO) has put the full weight of its support behind this initiative.

Fred Kaigua, KATO Chief Executive, commented... *"All too often, tourism is wrongly perceived not to be of any benefit to local communities. This is largely due to the way the revenues are utilised once accrued. We applaud this initiative by Tribal Voice Communications as it will go a long way towards making a direct impact not only on the lives of those it touches, but also on the visitor experience and product quality"*.

Impacts include:

1. Significantly increased benefits from tourism accruing to the local community (800% increase in tourism revenues p.a. during Year 1) and more equitable sharing of benefits (community now receives 100% of tour fees from lodge-generated business, and 75% of tour operator-generated business through KATO ticket sales – compared to just 4% for

both previously). The 4 villages in the pilot earned circa. \$60,000 from tourism in the first year of this initiative through the implementation of a transparent, cashless, visitor fee payment system and linking the villages into the formal supply chain i.e. doing business directly with tour operators and safari lodges. The villages uniting and forming the **Mara Triangle Maasai Villages Association** gave them the collective voice necessary to negotiate formal supply agreements with tour operators, ending the long-established 'informal' practice of driver guides taking 96% of visitor tour fees.

2. Increased visitor satisfaction with excursions (100% of clients surveyed via the visitor survey said that the excursions met or exceeded their expectations), and increased cultural exchange (as evidenced by visitor survey results and format of newly developed, participatory cultural tours in the villages).



3. All lodges now brief their clients on the do's and don'ts when visiting the villages to minimise their impacts, along with these being published on the back of visitor entry tickets.

4. Other communities (Maasai villages on the Narok side of the Mara) and community tourism development organisations (SEMADEP,

Ecotourism Kenya, SNV Kenya, ACC) have already taken on board the lessons learnt from this pilot project and are adopting them in their own work with communities in Kenya.



5. The current cultural tourism product has been enhanced and new product developed that gives these villages a marketing edge and increased visitor satisfaction at the same time.

6. Villagers are empowered and have the skills, tools and knowledge to operate their tourism businesses on a sustainable basis into the future.

7. The excursions are now marketed by the lodges and tour operators in Nairobi and Mombasa, with formal supply agreements now in place. For the first time in over 30 years the Maasai are part of the formal supply chain in tourism.

8. Villagers now, for the first time in over 30 years of running tourism businesses, feel that they are part of the tourism industry in Kenya.

9. The villages are already seeing the fruits of the increased benefits from tourism – Enkereri village has expanded its community school to 2 classrooms and has now employed 2 teachers.

They have also started adult education classes, built long drop toilets, constructed a rainwater harvesting system, commissioned a survey to assess the potential for the construction of a borehole in the village, and sent 2 of their bright young stars to college for further education. All other villages have built long-drop pit latrines and Enkutoto village has opened a nursery school. Importantly the community is empowered and confident and is initiating a host of other new businesses from cow dung briquette production through to a curio bead business.



A report has been produced which highlights the lessons learnt in turning around these failing community tourism ventures. Aimed at disseminating best practice in this area for use by other community projects/destinations, the report is available on both the Travel Foundation and Tribal Voice Communications websites.

Much media coverage has been achieved on the initiative both in the UK and Kenya (both online and offline), including high profile coverage in a BBC2 primetime documentary entitled 'Should We Really Give Up Flying', the Sunday Observer newspaper and the Times

online. A short film has also been made on the initiative so that the Maasai themselves can tell their own story – this film can be viewed at [www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk/help.asp](http://www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk/help.asp)



Critically, expansion of this initiative to other Maasai villages in the country is already well underway in an attempt to end the exploitation of the Maasai by the tourism industry's driver guides throughout the whole of Kenya. To this end the Travel Foundation has further funded this initiative for an additional year, commencing in May 2008, to allow TVC to expand this groundbreaking initiative into the mass safari tourism area of the Masai Mara where 27 Maasai cultural manyattas operate (the Narok side of the Mara). Between these 27 villages circa \$5 million p.a. in visitor tour fees 'leaks' from the villages, unbeknown to tourists who visit these villages, into the pockets of Kenya's driver guides. TVC and 2 Maasai facilitators from Enkereri village (one of the initial pilot villages) and local community development organisation SEMADEP have carried out the capacity building work in this community, united the 27 villages to form the **Masai Mara Cultural Villages Tourism Association** and in March 2009 launched a transparent, cashless, visitor payment system thereby securing these villages inclusion into

the formal tourism supply chain for the first time in over 30 years of operating their tourism enterprises. KATO and lodges in the area are acting as the Association's ticketing agents, and the Association retains 75% of visitor tour fees under this new arrangement. The initiative is currently being expanded to the 9 Maasai villages in Northern Mara, thereby reaching all cultural manyattas in the Masai Mara, and later, if funding permits, it will also be expanded into Amboseli and Samburu - the 2 remaining areas in Kenya where Kenya's driver guides are exploiting the cultural manyattas.



It is still early days for the new ticketing system on the Narok side of the Mara (June 2009). Whilst it is meeting with some success in that the majority of the lodges in the area are actively supporting the initiative by selling the official village tickets to their own clients (those that arrive by air), the initiative is in need of much greater support from tour operators. Tour operator-generated business to this side of the Masai Mara (visitors that arrive on safari by road) accounts for over 80% of tourist visits to the area, and hence tour operator support is absolutely critical to the success of this initiative. Currently the driver

guides are trying by all means possible to disturb the new system by various 'dirty tricks' and hence it is crucial that tour operators in both Kenya and the UK pro-actively support the implementation of this initiative by pre-selling Maasai village excursions to their clients.

If UK tour operators and their ground handlers in Kenya would like to support this initiative to return equitable benefits from village visits by their clients back to the Maasai, they should purchase visitor entry tickets for the villages in the initiative direct from KATO's offices in Nairobi or Mombasa for onward sale to their clients. In this way, they will have the assurance that the villages will benefit from this income.

**For more information on the initiative, or to get involved, contact: Dr Cheryl Mvula of Tribal Voice Communications on [cheryl@tribal-voice.co.uk](mailto:cheryl@tribal-voice.co.uk) or visit TVC's website at [www.tribal-voice.co.uk](http://www.tribal-voice.co.uk)**

**To find out more about the work of the Travel Foundation, please visit our website at [www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk](http://www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk)**

