

## VILLAGE HOMESTAYS: A SUSTAINABLE TOURISM SOLUTION FOR COMMUNITIES IN AFRICA

As the world gets smaller and smaller, we continue to seek out more exotic destinations and unspoilt environments. We are also intrinsically seeking to connect with other cultures that live in these environments whilst having an altogether holistic and authentic experience of an alternative lifestyle. With village homestays, the traveller has an opportunity to stay with the family as one of the members and therefore treated as a guest rather than tourists. A very significant benefit from this is the visitors are able to forge relationships with their hosts which can continue even after they leave the village.

Village homestays holidays are organised and run on the premise that holidaymakers visit and stay in a village with accommodation being supplied by a village community in their own homes. Visitors can stay in these villages for as little as three days to a maximum of 3 weeks.

Now what comes to mind when you think of an African village?

For most people in the Western Countries and even those who live in rural and village communities, the African village community is filled with poverty, hungry children and living in unsanitary conditions. Any visit made to these villages is normally and can only be done by charitable organisations, donor agencies providing the villagers much needed supplies or even those on Gap-year placements. With an increase in Gap-year breaks and Voluntourism there is an upward spiral trend in people wanting to travel whilst contributing their time and services to the local people as a way of giving back or reaching deep to their sense of integrity. "Gap years" have becoming more popular among students and professional taking a break from their careers.

However there are those individuals who do not have six weeks let alone six months worth of time to help teach English in an African village with a safari holiday thrown in or volunteer in a Nepali orphanage whilst trekking around the Himalayas. Those of us with families, mortgages to pay and jobs we simply cannot abandon but still curious and interested in how other people live. How do we get to experience a similar type of adventure and consequently have that same fulfilment that "Gap Years" seem to go on about?

The concept of village homestays provides a 'win-win' solution to fill this need. Village homestays holidays provide an opportunity to make an impact directly to the local people. Activities in this type of holiday revolve around the villagers' lifestyle such as digging in the fields, collecting of water, grazing of livestock etc. If it is teaching or helping out in the community in general is your main interest, it is something that is usually arranged on a family to family basis. Most communities that participate in this type of holiday are also able to run a collective and wider community project from the revenues earned from this holiday.

It has been proved that tourism has the ability to make a positive change in a country. Mass-packaged tourism has been criticised for being unsustainable and having little involvement with local people to improve their lives, which has been argued leads to alienating the very people who benefit from tourism. Both these tenets of responsible tourism are covered by voluntourism and Gap-year breaks. Village homestays thus offer an ethical and cultural holiday for shorter periods of time whilst churning the same benefits.

### **NOTES TO THE EDITOR**

Since its inception 2 years ago, GSE Ecotours has been running a Village homestays project as means to integrate conservation and tourism in rural parts of Kenya. The purpose of these holidays is to reach beyond the basic tenets of cultural holidays. Although the cultural component is very essential, the project also combines people's sense of adventure with their desire to give back to the local community. These holidays are mutually beneficial for both the guests and their host communities. For more information please visit [www.gse-ecotours.com](http://www.gse-ecotours.com)