

Kilombero North Safaris
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550 words
RREC10/EJ/78

Harry Charalambous, the general manager of Kilombero North Safaris (KNS), is talking through one of his company's conservation projects in Tanzania.

"There's a boarding school near us that educates 1800 children, but it didn't have access to any water," explains Harry. "Kids walked to other villages to wash. And even then it was often dirty. So we drilled a borehole specifically for them. Now pupils don't have to beg – they can concentrate on learning rather than wasting three-quarters of their day searching for a safe supply."

A lack of clean water is a huge issue in Tanzania. Half the population, or 23 million people, don't have nearby access, and that means women and children can sometimes spend seven hours a day travelling to fill up buckets. The result is 3,000 under fives dying each year of preventable diseases linked to dirty water and sanitation, as well as the obvious knock-on effects for farming, health and education.

What's surprising, of course, is that these uncomfortable topics aren't the sorts of things you'll often hear senior members of luxury tourism companies talk about, let alone those focussed on hunting and fishing. "Other agencies don't put in the effort," says Harry. "They concentrate on their own businesses and look the other way at problems. Our owner believes in protecting the resource and working with communities. For many years, this was funded out of his pocket and, still now, it is deducted from company profits."

And drilling boreholes is just the start. KNS's staff report and monitor illegal poaching, educate young people on the need to look after wildlife and invest in health care. In one instance, KNS even organised a soccer competition between 14 villages in the neighbouring Kilombero Mlimba, supplying footballs to schools. It was called "The Uhifadhi Cup", which translates as "The Conservation Cup".

The point is that conservation and business aren't mutually exclusive. "The bonus is that communities view us differently and go the extra mile to help," adds Harry. "They appreciate what we do." What that means for customers is that they get the kinds of experiences you won't find from its rivals, and the knowledge its activities will be helping, not hindering, locals and wildlife. Go fly fishing, for instance, and you'll have exclusive access, from sunrise to sunset, to 120km of the Ruhudji and Mnyera rivers on 16ft aluminium boats, and your expedition will be led by local guides who will be recording environmental information while pointing out where you're most likely to catch 20ft tiger fish. All fishing is "catch and release" with single barbless hooks, no beat is visited twice in a week, and areas where fish are spawning are strictly no-go areas.

Hunters similarly pick from seven huge “concessions”, each 3400km², but abide by strict quotas that ensure they won’t be harming the numbers of rare species. Meanwhile, guests in its main camp of Dhala stay in thatched, raised log cabins, decorated with locally made furniture.

It’s an approach Harry thinks is paying off.

“Professional hunters and our anti-poaching staff have reported a steady increase in almost all species of game,” he says. “Areas that a few years ago were sparsely populated with wildlife have now improved to the extent that, in one instant, zebras were spotted in Kilombero.

“That’s something we’ve not seen in almost a decade.”

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