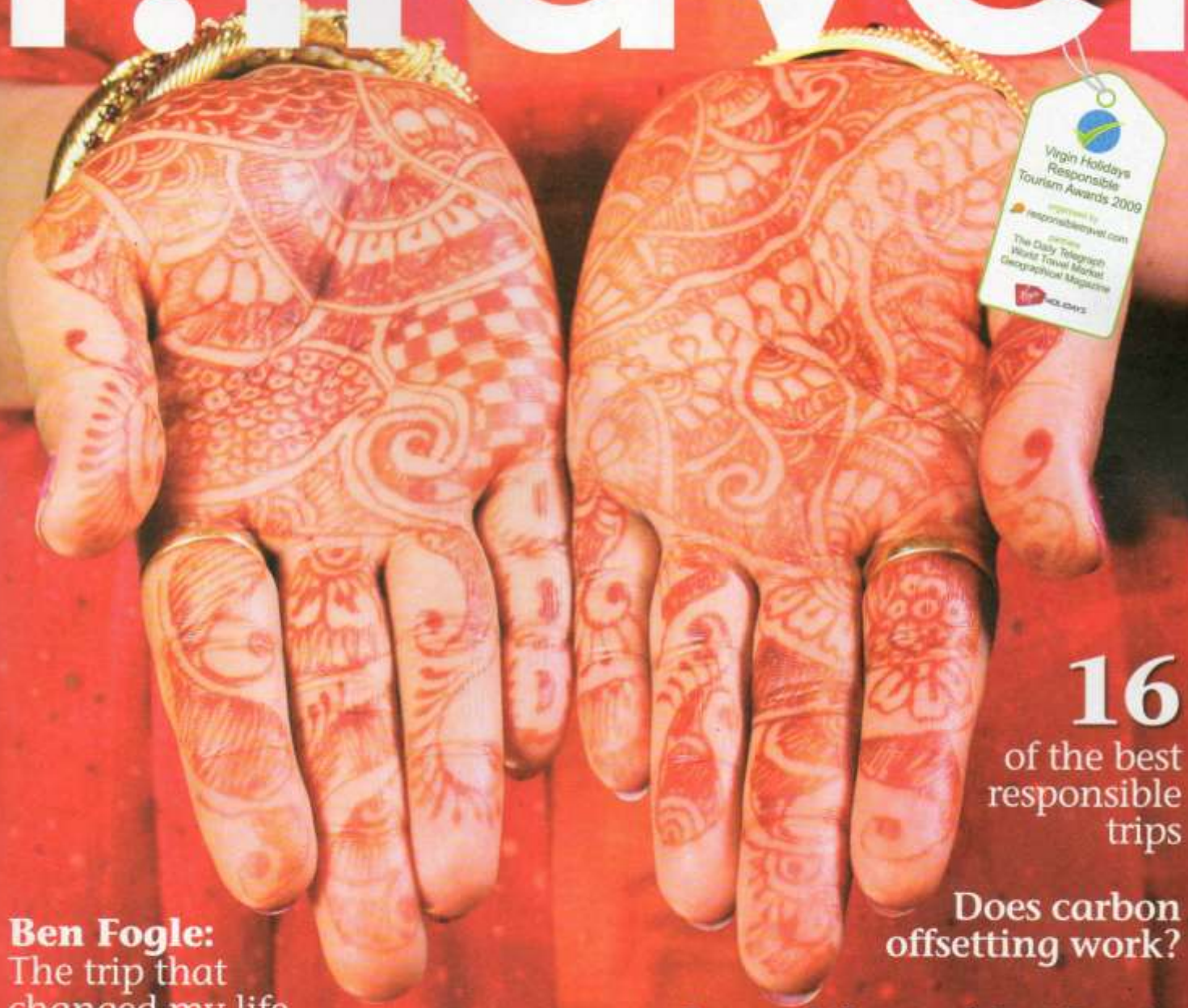


the magazine for the responsible tourist

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16

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**WINNER**

People and  
Places, UK



## The right people in the right places

As the organisations featured over the next four pages happily confirm, volunteers are the lifeblood of their work. Nevertheless, volunteering is a potential minefield for the unwary and the unprepared. Our winning company, UK-based People and Places, offers a responsible way forward

**E**very year newspapers and social networking sites are filled with tales of gap year volunteering plans that ended in disappointment or disaster – both for the volunteers and the community they had hoped to serve.

It's not always about unscrupulous companies relieving our eager children of large sums of money, most of which find their way into the wrong pockets. Another potentially traumatic problem is managing expectations and matching people's skills with the right project. It's an issue all too familiar to Sallie Grayson, co-founder and programme director of People and Places. Now a Responsible Tourism Award winner, two years after getting a 'highly commended' nod, People and Places prides itself on offering fully transparent

programmes. The first volunteer organisation to be independently audited by the Responsible Tourism Partnership, it works with local partners – from respected responsible tour operators to international NGOs – to match volunteers' specific skills to local needs.

Since launching in March 2006, People and Places has placed around 250 volunteers and expects to place a further 200 in 2009. It currently works with eight partners, supporting 16 projects in the Gambia, South Africa, Nepal, India, Peru, Indonesia, Swaziland and Madagascar.

Explains Sallie: 'Most short-term volunteer travellers do not have an in-depth knowledge of all the nuances of the community they seek to serve. They are well meaning, intelligent, well read and optimistic. This optimism almost invariably

leads them to want to achieve more than may be practical or possible.

'We do not place volunteers without the informed consent of the project – this means that the project is privy to the skills of the volunteer well before they arrive. In many instances the volunteers will have far greater skills in an area they feel they are not qualified in than those of the people on the ground and in many instances local people have higher skills than volunteers – but the very nature of the volunteer being "foreign" leads the community to believe they will know more.

'Add to this the nuance of cultural mores – for example, communities where they would not dream of disagreeing with an honoured guest, and volunteers who are fearful of cultural disrespect – and misunderstandings can and do arise. It is imperative to have skilled facilitators on the ground with whom volunteers and project leaders can meet regularly.'

People and Places addresses this challenge in three ways, says Sallie.

- Detailed briefings before departure.
- Putting volunteers in touch with each other before they leave. People and Places



encourages previous volunteers to brief future volunteers – warts and all.

- On the ground the company works with local partners who are in and of their communities and experienced in ensuring guest and host will work together.

A different, but welcome challenge has been the management of the generosity of returning volunteers. Over the two years to the end of 2008, volunteers have contributed at least £49,000 in mandatory donations to projects in the communities in which they work, but this total is doubled by further donations raised by the volunteers when they return.

'More than 20 per cent of our returning volunteers want to continue to support their projects when they return home,' says Sallie. 'Our challenge was how to manage this travel philanthropy – efficiently, effectively and openly. To be quite honest, as a tiny organisation, we were becoming overwhelmed by the reporting systems needed to ensure we were communicating properly with donors and monitoring efficacy – and the burden was equally

overwhelming for our local partners.'

People and Places solved that by becoming a founding partner of TravelPledge ([www.travelpledge.org](http://www.travelpledge.org)) a charity which channels donations to targeted causes, with donors able to see where money is going and how it is spent.

All in all, volunteering should be a satisfying process for everyone involved. 'Seeing the cumulative effect of volunteering in community development is especially rewarding,' adds Sallie. 'We are helping communities build the future they want for themselves. And, because we update previous volunteers on developments after their placement, they gain a growing understanding that their role was important and meaningful.'

[www.travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk](http://www.travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk)

## ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

ANYONE looking to volunteer should do their homework to avoid disappointment – or worse. Here is People and Places' checklist of what you should ask of any volunteer organisation, before signing up. More details – and the right answers – are at [www.travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk](http://www.travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk)

1. How can I be sure that what you're telling me is true and not just marketing hype?
2. How and where is my money spent?
3. How will my skills be used effectively?
4. I'm only going to be there for a few weeks – how can my input be of any real use?
5. Who decides what my role will be?
6. Who knows about me before I arrive and what do they know?
7. Whose idea was the project and who runs it?
8. Can I talk to previous volunteers?
9. Can I talk to local people before I go?
10. Will I be safe?
11. What's all this I hear about adequate insurance?
12. Is there any continuity?
13. What kind of support is there for me?

## WHAT THE JUDGES SAID

'People and Places has exercised leadership in a sector bedevilled by poor practice and established a replicable business model. Committed to reporting transparently on the money that volunteers pay, they ensure that the volunteers meet their full costs and are not a burden on the community; and carefully match the skills of volunteers to the needs of that community without replacing local labour. They have taken the ground-breaking step of having their work externally audited and publishing it online. These four principles set not only a practicable standard for operators to aspire to, but offer valuable guidelines for tourists seeking legitimate and socially beneficial volunteering experiences.'

## SPONSORED BY: Kenya Tourist Board

The Kenya Tourist Board has a commitment to Responsible Tourism and environmental and cultural preservation projects have grown

extensively over the past decade, spurred by a desire to maintain Africa's rich artistic and ecological treasures. From helping with community aid in remote villages and learning about animal conservation, to viewing and helping preserve ancient African rock art – there are now more options than ever for holidaymakers to explore and get involved.

With 'safari' coming from the Swahili for 'journey', Kenya prides itself on offering an unparalleled travel experience for everyone. From the depths of a coral reef to snow-capped mountains, from lush rainforests to vast trackless expanse of desert, from extinct volcanoes to geothermal springs and from rolling savannahs to freshwater lakes, Kenya's contrasts hold the promise of real adventure.

Its 59 National Parks and Reserves offer endless potential for the wildlife enthusiast, while those pushed for time can even have a taster with a one-day safari adventure in Nairobi national park – just 20mins from the capital.

The country has also drawn on its many historical influences to develop its own unique culture and boasts 42 ethnic groups, countless languages and dialects and one of the most richly diverse social tapestries on earth.

A great sporting nation, there's plenty to satisfy the amateur enthusiast and ultimate thrill seeker alike in Kenya, from golf to bike trekking, from marathon running to big game fishing and from paragliding to world-class diving.

Added to this are award-winning safari lodges and sophisticated tented camps, plus a fantastic range of both scheduled and charter flights from the UK. There has never been a better time to visit Kenya. Whichever safari option you choose, Kenya's charms inspire.

[www.magicalkenya.com](http://www.magicalkenya.com)

