

ECO-PRENEURS

making a world of difference

WRITER JUDY CHAPMAN

Sustainable travel. Authentic connections. Community Spirit.

Is today's spa industry more philanthropic than pampering? Indeed many are putting into practice what some of us instinctively know – that it's through helping others that we help ourselves.

Every day, Kelly May, project leader for the North Andaman Tsunami Relief (NATR) spends her days helping those in Tsunami affected regions. The former publisher of *OK!* celebrity magazine in Thailand, says she didn't hesitate to swap her stilettos for a pair of flip flops to dedicate her energy full time to helping others.

Over the past five years, employees and associates of the JW Marriott Hotel Jakarta have been involved in a number of community activities under their umbrella 'Spirit to Serve'. Included in this is their 'Home at

the Heart of Hairun Nisa Orphanage', where employees spent up to 645 hours volunteering, reconstructing bedrooms, buying books for the library and decorating the interior and exterior.

Further up the mountains in the Himalayas, Carroll Dunham and Nina Henning from Wild Earth Nepal are working together not only to produce their Himalayan inspired petrochemical-free spa products, they are also involved in a host of projects that support not themselves, but the entire Himalayan community.

We are all in a position to make positive change and businesses, in particular, have the power, and are slowly developing the conscience, to make global transformations.



Last month, the richest man in the world, Bill Gates, announced he was giving up his day job to dedicate his time to charity projects. Most of us are aware of founder of The Body Shop, Anita Roddick, and her mission to create global changes through the business community. Celebrities too are receiving encouraging media coverage for their good will. New parents Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt, for example, recently donated \$300,000 to help impoverished African children to mark the birth of their daughter. Their statement to the press read: "We want to contribute to Namibia and the people who have been so gracious to us at this time." Indeed Angelina has been a great inspiration to others (me included) for her tireless efforts with Third World Charities. And Bono has put his fame behind Product Red, the credit card which helps eliminate AIDS in Africa.

Even small changes can make a world of difference. Here in Asia, former Miss Thailand, Areeya Chumsai, and Nisa Kongsri have just won the prestigious Spirit Award at the International Documentary Film Festival for their documentary titled *Innocence*. While starting a protest or demanding rights for rural children was not their original intention, Areeya reports that the documentary brought light and a voice to the voiceless in this remote area. "We also started a scholarship fund and were able to collect 1,400,000 baht for the school so hundreds of hill tribe children are able to continue their education."

"Of all the things I've done and accomplished in life, this work is something I am most proud of," says Areeya. She adds that as a result of the overwhelming media coverage, the Thai government reinstated the

money to the school and all schools across the country. (You can preview a trailer of *Innocence* at www.pigonine.com)

The eco-preneurial philosophy is fast becoming an integral part of any successful business plan. It defines companies with a conscience, who create sustainable environments and realise that healthy staff equals a healthy company.

"Our people reported an immense sense of reward and pride from contributing," says Greg Allan, General Manger of the JW Marriott in Jakarta. "This includes a sense of team spirit, camaraderie with other donor organisations and personal growth and satisfaction." These employees, and associates, even gave up their own holiday and cashed-in holiday pay to make direct contributions to various projects.

This eco-preneurial philosophy has also infiltrated the way we travel. A good example of this is the emerging trend of Volun-tourism where people add community responsibilities to their travel itinerary. Predictions are that this non-profit sector will play a major role in the 21st century with vacations of the future including activities like rebuilding temples in Nepal, teaching English to children at orphanages, and reforestation to name a few.

Kelly May from The North Andaman Tsunami Relief says that she has experienced first hand how people are no longer content with just visiting a country, they want to give something back.

"Right now we have 11 University of Birmingham students with us for six weeks who have been involved in everything from mangrove reforestation, waste management, beach conservation and helping guides

improve their tourism skills."

Eco-tourism is another emerging trend and is growing at a rate of five percent per year. It's defined by the International Eco-tourism Society (TIES) as 'responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the wellbeing of local people.' Through eco-travel we learn how to minimise our impact on the planet through volunteer programs that promote recycling, re-use water and help create economic opportunities for local communities.

"Most important are places where sustainable and tourism are inseparable," says founder of Lonely Planet, Tony Wheeler, who has just launched a new book titled *Code Green*, that tracks 100 of the world's best responsible travel experiences. "In many cases – from African wildlife to whales – it's tourism that is the ultimate guarantor of a species survival." He says that often tourism can provide a far more environmentally friendly income than anything else on offer. "Surprisingly, sustainable can also mean comfortable or stylish, it can even include a touch of luxury."

Indeed, all the good we do in life lives long after we have gone. The potential to give is infinite. And so it seems are the repercussions when we are able to step outside of ourselves and 'beyond the me'.

Once we get that everything and everyone is interconnected the world suddenly becomes incredibly beautiful.

ABOVE LEFT TO RIGHT: Kelly May works with locals for North Andaman Tsunami Relief; painting with the children at the Hainan Nisa Orphanage in Indonesia. NEXT PAGE: Film stills from the documentary *Innocence*; Carroll Dunham working with the Himalayan community in Nepal.



North Andaman Tsunami Relief
www.northandamantsunamirelief.com
 Wild Earth Nepal, www.wildearthnepal.com
 The Body Shop, www.thebodyshop.com
 International Eco-tourism Society
www.ecotourism.com
 Product Red, www.joinred.com
 Innocence, www.pigonine.com
 Lonely Planet, www.lonelyplanet.com



Judy Chapman is a leading holistic spa writer who has been exploring the spa scene of South East Asia for the past five years. Her first ever 'spa' experience was in an outdoor bath where she grew up, in a rainforest shack, interspersed with family holidays to yoga ashrams. "Working as a volunteer at Sanglah hospital after the Bali bomb, it was a transforming experience to see how everyone came together in a tragedy and worked for others," she remembers. "It really showed me the potential of humanity, and it showed me that even in tragedy there is so much beauty. Weird but true."



There are many resorts and spas involved in community projects – here are a handful to inspire you.

BANYAN TREE GREEN FUND

The Banyan Tree's corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Conservation projects are wide and varied. They have, for example, set up projects for coral regeneration and turtle conservation in the Maldives, and the Seychelles. Additionally, like most companies around the region, they created post-Tsunami projects like 'Adopt an Island' in the Maldives and 'Restoring Livelihoods' in Phuket. Their Green Imperative Fund, established in 2001, provides financial support for environmental initiatives and community based projects in places where they have a presence. As well, guests may make a contribution and the hotel will then match the guests' contributions, dollar for dollar, to develop the fund. www.banyantree.com

COMO FOUNDATION

The COMO Foundation has a variety of philanthropic interests with a declared responsibility to the greater global community, including recognising the indigenous and celebrating individuality. At the Uma Paro in Bhutan, for example, they support local group of women weavers to practice the living tradition of weaving traditional Bhutanese kiras (the traditional dress) while earning money to support their families.

"We sell the kiras in our boutique at Uma Paro and we buy the materials to produce the kiras, pay the women for the time to weave a kira and we pay a profit share to a local non-profit organisation in Paro," says spa manager, Isabel Sebastian. "By helping the women in the local community we help to keep families and the community strong." www.como.bz

SPAS HELPING SPAS

After Hurricane Katrina, Susie Ellis, President of SpaFinder, created a link on their website www.spas-helping-spas.com to help make a difference to some of the Hurricane Katrina victims. "You will see the email from Andrey and Kevin who lost their spa and then ended up finding great jobs with Preston Wynn Consulting. When I ran into them at a recent conference they said they have never been happier!" www.spafinder.com

SIX SENSES SPAS

The team at Six Senses is well known for their endless and creative efforts to design sustainable resorts and spas. Earlier this year, they launched the Reduced Carbon Emission Strategy at Soneva Fushi in the Maldives. They joined forces with The Carbon Neutral Company in an initiative to help neutralise the effects of carbon dioxide produced by air flight to the island. This, of course, is all part of their plan to be carbon neutral by 2020 and indeed sets a great example to other resorts and hotels on the possibilities out there to be environmentally pro-active. www.sixsenses.com

SANCTUARY RESORTS

Sanctuary Resorts, which include The Bale in Bali, has set up a number of initiatives including The Foundation of International Responsible and Sustainable Tourism (FIRST). The purpose, including both financial and volunteer support, is to give back to the local communities where their resorts are based. Guardian of The Sanctuary Resorts, Andrew Jones explains their intention was not to provide a hand out to people, rather a 'hand up'. He cites the old adage "Give a man a fish, you have fed him for today. Teach a man to fish, and you have fed him for a lifetime." www.sanctuaryresorts.com

JW MARRIOTT'S SPIRIT TO SERVE

At JW Marriott Jakarta there is still more. They are planning various different activities for children in the upcoming months. According to spokesperson, Lee Sutton, "We are going to carry out a program to make a difference in the children's lives which will include marine biology and oceanography classes by a well known Indonesian oceanographer, simple home meal cooking classes, hygiene and sanitary classes, as well as recycling for the home industry." www.marriott.com