

Homestays: bringing the economic benefits of tourism to community families



“
Once you've experienced moments of shared humanity with people on the other side of the world, the inequalities become much harder to ignore. ”

JARED JUNKIN, MADAGASCAR
VOLUNTEER (OCTOBER 2016)

Homestays

Blue Ventures is a social enterprise that has achieved international acclaim for its simple yet highly effective conservation and ecotourism models. During our six-week expeditions, paying volunteers travel to our sites in Madagascar, Belize and Timor-Leste where they receive scientific and SCUBA training from a resident team of local and international conservation experts. Living and working alongside traditional fishing communities, our ecotourists play a direct role in supporting local conservation activities. These expeditions generate secure and sustainable seed funding to allow our conservation teams to develop community-led initiatives in collaboration with our growing network of partners.

Establishing conservation tourism activities in such remote settings is logistically challenging, and requires considerable sensitivity towards communities, cultures, and prevailing economic conditions.

Blue Ventures' ethos is to employ, source and buy locally whenever possible, and our consistent, long-term presence fosters a sound understanding of local contexts, helping to build strong relations, trust and credibility with our partners.

In keeping with this approach, all our volunteers now spend a portion of their expedition in homestays, whereby host families welcome pairs of ecotourists into their homes. Blue Ventures works with a network of host families at each of the three expedition sites, supplying training and technical and financial support to help the hosts provide a comfortable and rewarding homestay experience. The hosts introduce their guests to their culture, cuisine and customs, and earn a reliable income in return.



The need for alternative livelihoods

More than one billion people, mostly in developing countries, live in communities bordering tropical seas. This coastal population is expected to reach almost two billion people by 2050. Fisheries are a lifeline for coastal families and economies, and underpin food security for entire nations. Many of these fisheries are now in severe decline, threatening the lives and livelihoods of those who depend on them. There is an urgent need to diversify coastal livelihoods to reduce pressure on resources, yet in remote regions there are few economic opportunities beyond fishing.

Homestays can therefore provide a reliable income stream for host families and help promote further conservation activities, as part of a holistic conservation and development strategy. However, as ecotourists numbers are limited, it is important to recruit hosts in a fair and transparent way and ensure that the whole community has access to opportunities and benefits in order to maintain harmony.



Madagascar



Madagascar



Timor-Leste



Belize



Benefits

- **Supporting the local economy:** Since 2003, our staff and ecotourists have spent more than 150,000 tourist bed nights supporting local accommodation providers, helping to diversify local economies in partner communities in southeast Asia, the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and the Caribbean.
- **Providing a reliable income stream:** In Belize, we have provided more than **US\$300,000** in income since 2010 to the Sarteneja Homestay Group.
- **Capacity building:** To prepare them for their role, host families are given basic training in hygiene, food safety and cooking.
- **Providing viable alternative livelihoods:** Communities suffering from a decline in local fisheries benefit from diversified income streams, providing greater resilience to fluctuations caused by overfishing, cyclones and closed seasons.
- **Food security:** The homestay income may be used to pay for school fees, clothes and other necessities, so that the family can eat (rather than sell) more of their fish catch which supplies vital dietary protein.
- **A stepping stone for conservation:** Homestays represent a definite link between protecting the local marine environment and the economic benefits ecotourism can bring, helping to pave the way for further conservation and sustainable management initiatives.
- **Catalysing local entrepreneurship:** In Belize, some hosts have taken their skills to the next level and set up their own small bed and breakfast businesses.
- **Empowerment:** By joining together as a community, host families can become a political force, securing land tenure rights and driving tourism policy, empowering previously disenfranchised communities.
- **Offering language learning opportunities:** Both host families and ecotourists can practice their language skills, creating a more enriching experience and potentially leading to future learning or employment opportunities.
- **Cultural exchange:** The ecotourists have the chance to discover their hosts' culture, which is usually an eye-opening and transformational experience. "I immersed myself in this unique experience, taking home new perspectives and a different understanding." Jared, former Blue Ventures expedition ecotourist.

Starting up a Homestay programme

We have adopted the homestay model in Belize, Madagascar and Timor-Leste. Due to differences in the cultural and economic contexts between these three locations, each programme has evolved slightly differently, but the overall process is the same. To set up a homestay programme, we recommend that you follow these four main steps:

Recruit host families

- Advertise for potential hosts in a locally appropriate way (e.g. at village meetings, via the radio), explaining the basic requirements and expectation for the role.
- Keep participation in the homestay programme open to all, and spread the benefits as widely as possible by recruiting different providers for accommodation, meals, and day trips.
- Conduct house visits to ensure accommodation meets accepted standards.
- Select a number of host families to take part in the pilot homestay programme.
- If you have more hosts than visitors, produce a rotation schedule that you and the hosts feel is reasonable and fair.

Build capacity

- Provide basic hygiene and food safety training for all hosts, to ensure that all meet the standards required by local authorities.

- Carry out a risk assessment with each host family and provide guidance for required adaptations.
- If necessary, provide or facilitate loans for hosts to be repaid over 12-24 months so that they may invest in essential facilities to ensure the visitor's comfort and security (fans, doors, extra rooms or washing facilities).
- If appropriate, organise an exchange with a successful homestay programme in a similar cultural/economic context, so that new hosts may learn directly from experienced hosts

Carry out a pilot homestay

- Prepare separate manuals for hosts and visitors, preparing them for their upcoming visit.
- Transport visitors to their host families.
- Maintain communication with hosts and visitors throughout the homestay.

Monitor and evaluate

- Gather feedback from hosts and visitors via questionnaires and/or meetings.
- Address any problems in collaboration with the hosts, and adjust homestay manuals accordingly.
- Provide further training if possible, e.g. basic business skills.
- Check host facilities routinely, always in a respectful manner.





Case study

Moises Alves, 43, homestay host from Ataúro Island

Like the majority of people on Ataúro, Timor-Leste, Moises supports his family through subsistence fishing. In order to increase his household income, he joined the homestay programme and started hosting Blue Ventures ecotourists in January 2017.

As well as the extra income his homestay business brings in, Moises enjoys practising his English skills with his guests and learning about their cultures.

Although communication can sometimes be a challenge, he is determined to improve his language skills.

Through the homestay programme, he plans to raise money to give his children a better future, to promote ecotourism on his island home, and eventually to expand his ecotourism business.



Our Homestay programme in Timor-Leste is supported by:



“
What I like most about being a host is meeting people from other parts of the world, and for my sons to make friends with them. My two youngest are really happy every time we have guests, as they get to show them around and introduce them to our beautiful village. It also really helps them with their English, as they get to practice it more outside of school. ”

IVETTE COBB, SARTENEJA HOST



For further information or to discuss partnership opportunities please contact:

Richard Nimmo
Managing Director
richard@blueventures.org
www.blueventures.org
Tel: +44 (0)20 7697 8598