

HIGHLY
COMMENDED

Blue Ventures, UK

Goodwill venture

TOURISM IN AREAS OF WIDESPREAD

poverty can present a moral maze. On one hand, the traveller is keen to contribute to the local economy, yet so many tourism businesses seem to be detached from their surrounding communities, taking advantage of cheap labour, but keeping themselves very much apart.

With Blue Ventures' eco-camp in the remote fishing village of Andavadoaka in Madagascar, local people are key to the project. Launched in 2004 to create a pilot marine reserve that would preserve the environment in the interest of both locals and visitors, the scheme now encompasses 21 neighbouring villages, whose members are fully involved in the planning and development of the network.

Blue Ventures clients are put into volunteer positions focused on marine conservation. Alongside the fun of scuba diving and marine surveys of one of the world's most important coral reefs – the Grand Recife de Tulear – they are collating hard data that is used to monitor the health of the reef, an ancient resource on which local communities have depended for decades.

Blue Ventures is not simply a travel business with a conscience, it brings large communities of people together, empowering them to mould a brand of tourism that truly is ecological in its approach and execution. And the goodwill has been reciprocated – in March 2007 the village of Andavadoaka donated a prime beach site of 10 hectares for Blue Ventures to develop a travel lodge that will be managed by the village itself.

'One of our greatest achievements so far has been studies on octopus,' said Blue Ventures MD Richard Nimmo. 'The villages rely on octopus as commercial catch, but our study confirmed what they suspected, that catches were getting smaller. The villages agreed not to fish some of their key octopus collecting sites for six months, and there was subsequently a major recovery in the octopus population.' The success of this particular project has led to a nationwide seasonal ban on octopus collection, proving that data collected by volunteers can affect policy-making at a national government level.

www.blueventures.org ●

