

*Tourism empowering communities*  
**Ibo Island Lodge: Community Projects**

When tourism pioneers Fiona and Kevin Record envisioned creating a world-class island getaway for discerning travelers, they also wanted to establish a venture which would have at its heart the meaningful development of Ibo's community and a celebration of its heritage.

With this in mind, they founded Ibo Island Lodge. From the outset, instead of importing labour, the skills of the local community were utilised to build the lodge and create the interior furnishings on sustainable, low-impact tourism principles.

Education programmes were implemented to create an understanding of the benefits of the tourism industry, generate an interest in conservation issues and teach potential employees to speak English so that they were able to interact with clients.

As part of the project, eleven members of the trainee staff traveled to other parts of Mozambique as tourists themselves. For most of them this was the first time eating at restaurants and staying in hotels and it provided them with a genuine understanding of the tourist experience and the importance of their role as tourism ambassadors.

Ibo guides have also acquired skills to present their history and culture to international visitors and this has formed a basis for establishing a registered group of Ibo Island Tourist Guides.

To cater for ongoing training requirements, an educational facility, which is open to all community members, has been completed and is used for English teaching, tourism awareness, conservation training, market gardening and guide training. These initiatives serve the broader tourism industry - by providing them with local, skilled staff - as well as community members, enabling them to access job opportunities beyond Ibo Island.

“In order to be a partner in development, and to truly add value to the lives of the people on Ibo, we needed to identify ways in which we could generate long-term and sustainable income for those people not employed by the lodge,” says Kevin.

“The Ibo Silversmiths project was the ideal vehicle to nurture and grow the existing and ancient tradition of the local artisans,” says Fiona. “It also presented a way for a respectful and mutually-rewarding interaction to take place between the local residents and the guests, greatly enhancing their overall experience of Ibo.”

The Silversmith project aims to stimulate a fairer and more equitable distribution of the industry’s benefits and has set up a distribution network to provide greater returns and recognition for the crafters.

Forty silversmiths now practice on Ibo and in order to preserve the tradition, younger members of the community are being trained in the skill. Tourists can observe the artists at work and commission pieces from them.

The Silversmiths project has grown rapidly to become one of the most successful Ibo community programmes to date, with demand stemming from a number of international outlets.

Access to educational facilities in North Mozambique is low and there is one primary school on Ibo that works three shifts a day to cater for the population’s requirements. In April 2008 Ibo Island Lodge, in collaboration with their Project Coordinator, Winnie De Roover, set up a pilot Montessori School that presents children with a stimulating environment in which to learn English and develop their physical, mental and emotional skills. The project is currently run by volunteer kindergarten teachers, with a view to train local people as future teachers. Plans also include opening an Ibo Kindergarten School so that a larger part of the community’s children can benefit from the system.

---

Set in the lush surroundings of the Ibo Lodge vegetable garden, the open-style class rooms provide an ideal learning environment for children. The school aims to be an eco-friendly initiative and children are taught from an early age to respect natural resources and about topics such as the local eco-system, personal hygiene and recycling. In addition, all students are provided with a nutritional snack with future plans to provide a full lunch prepared by a trained person from Ibo.

The overall impact of projects by Ibo Island Lodge on the community is significant. It directly employs forty-three permanent staff who each support a further twenty people, so approximately eight hundred peoples' lives are affected by the lodge.

In addition, many third party services, such as fresh food supplies are sourced from Ibo Island affecting between twenty and thirty individuals. Again they support extended families of up to twenty people. This means Ibo Island Lodge positively affects as much fifty percent of the entire island's population. Each guest's visit therefore, really does make a difference on Ibo.