

# Travel For Fun, Adventure And To Make A Difference

by Shawn Miller

Three years ago Corinne Waldenmayer achieved what to many would be the ultimate realization of the American Dream. After 18 years in the high-tech industry, she was offered a corporate vice presidency position. But, suffering from what she describes as "high-tech burnout," Waldenmayer not only turned down the promotion, she quit the industry altogether and returned to her

native African continent to redirect her energy into endeavors less about corporate profit and more about impacting the lives of others.



right: local villagers

for right: final stages of creating textiles at Tribal Textiles cooperative in Mfuwe, Zambia

facing page: the group pauses for a view of a pod of hippos in the river

Months of soul searching culminated in the founding of the nonprofit African Conservancy organization, an entirely volunteer-run agency dedicated to fostering responsible economic development in Zambia, one of the most remote parts of Africa. "I realized from the beginning that I can't fix the continent,

can't even fix Sub-Saharan Africa, so we localized our efforts in an area that didn't yet have too much interaction with or exposure to the world," she explains.

Education is the principle tool used by the organization to accomplish its economic development, wildlife protection and species reintroduction program goals. Waldenmayer believes that people will refrain from behaviors that threaten the cultural purity and environment of their region – poaching, slash-and-burn agriculture, over-fishing regional lakes – if they are educated before modernization arrives. "The goal is not to keep modernization out of Africa, but to empower people to maintain a balance between humans and nature before a reliance on commercialization has been established." Not a no-growth, but a smart-growth



initiative grounded in a respect for native cultural differences.

The African Conservancy raises funds to support its endeavors through traditional fundraising, importing indigenous artwork for sale on the organization's Web-based marketplace and the May 2002 launch of an educational safari program.

The safari program was created in



partnership with African communities and all profits fund organization programs. Says Waldenmayer, "We're providing a unique opportunity for people to combine an education and luxury vacation, while observing firsthand the extraordinary impact that members' contributions have made in many African communities."

During the course of a 14-day tour, participants explore remote locations in Zambia by private plane, canoe, motorboat and on foot. Highlights of the trip include encounters with indigenous and often endangered wildlife species – cheetahs, zebras, antelope, monkeys, leopards, lions, birds – the chance to paddle the waters of the second deepest freshwater lake in the world and feel the mist from the Victoria Falls. The safaris also provide educational sessions on ecology, archeology and geology and interactive cultural activities.

No more than eight people are booked for each tour and the benefits of these adventures, a portion of which is tax-deductible are not just felt by native populations. "People come back from these trips changed; they return with a whole different mindset," says Waldenmayer.

African Conservancy headquarters are based in Vwaa. For more information, call 760/945-2571, or visit [www.africanconservancy.org](http://www.africanconservancy.org).

