

Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards

Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards, founded by responsibletravel.com, celebrate organisations, individuals and destinations that make commitments to local cultures and economies.

Metro has been working with responsibletravel.com by asking you, our readers, to nominate the individuals and companies who not only gave you an unforgettable holiday experience but who make a difference to the people and environment around them.

Those who take the time to nominate are in good company – Archbishop Desmond Tutu once sent in a nomination.

In numbers

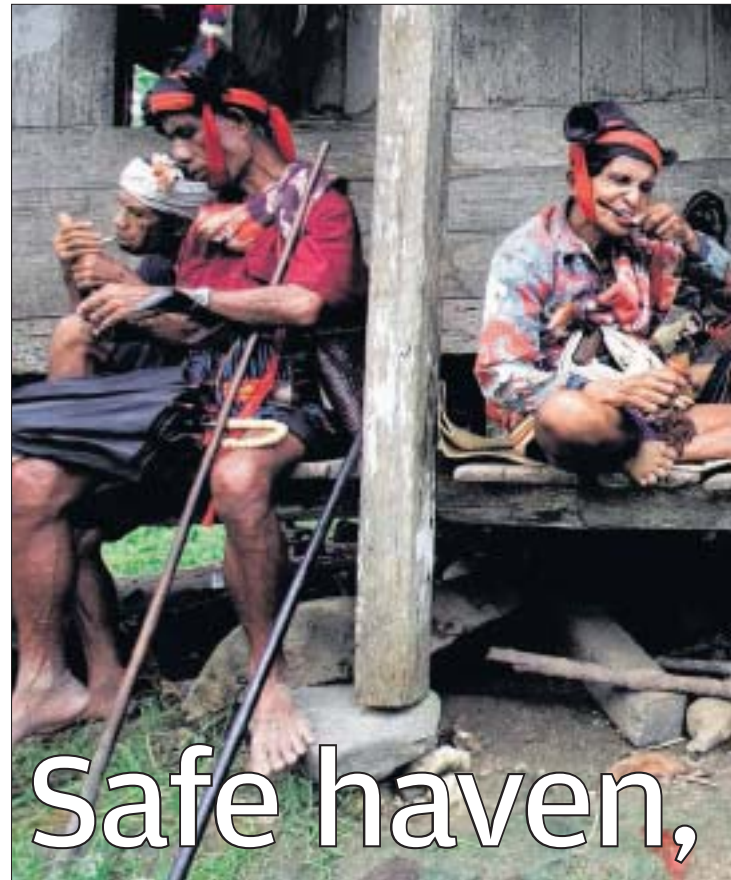
- There are **32** awards in total
- There were **1,756** nominations overall
- Out of the **13** winners, **11** are from islands
- **11** British-based organisations are recognised
- One of the highly commended is a village of just **375** people in France

Competition winner: Metro readers who sent nominations for the awards were entered to win an eight-day trip to the Masai Mara with Virgin Holidays. The winner was Georgia Croxford from Cornwall.



Out Of Office

Edited by Lisa Scott travel@ukmetro.co.uk



Safe haven,

On a tiny island in a remote Indonesian archipelago, a holiday resort is changing lives. Nihiwatu, a 14-room bamboo and thatch paradise powered by coconut bio-diesel fuel, has won the coveted award of overall winner of the Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards 2010.

The chilled-out surf resort has reduced malaria infections on the island by a whopping 85 per cent – no mean feat for the owners, Americans Claude and Petra Graves, who have contracted malaria more than 50 times between them. One bout even left Claude in a three-day coma and on the verge of death.

The couple were on a world trip to find the perfect remote place to build a resort powered entirely by solar energy. Sumba had what they were looking for. 'Believe it or not, there aren't that many remote cultures left in the world – us humans get everywhere,' says Claude from their surf nirvana, which faces south into the Indian Ocean. 'So we started living on the beach and within a year it became clear that our solar resort wouldn't work and that there were huge health issues that had to be addressed instead.'

Award winner: A surf resort that has helped alleviate poverty and cut deaths from malaria is the worthy overall winner of Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards, writes **LISA SCOTT**

So while they built their luxury venture, which opened in 2001, they set up the Sumba Foundation. To date they have dug 44 wells to provide clean water to nearly 15,000 people and established five health clinics for 18,000 patients. The clinics also provide free malaria medicine, which has saved the lives of 53 children in the past two years.

The foundation serves 2,000 children healthy lunches three times a week and brings in volunteer plastic surgeons to perform cleft palate, burns and reconstructive operations.

However, before any of this good work could be done, Claude and Petra had to be welcomed by the local community. When outsiders set up tourist resorts in remote lands, there is always a risk they will disregard the natural resources and local people. Before the couple could even begin addressing the huge health problems on the island, they had to be accepted by the inhabitants who, Claude says, are 'as tribal as tribal can be these days'.

Sumba is one of the few islands in Indonesia where the community still



Claude and Petra Graves

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The certificate frames for the winners are made of recycled bits of Brighton Pier and an old squash court floor



Smoking out the enemy: Village elders roll clove cigarettes as they prepare to fight the Pasola, a ceremonial battle

► Responsible tourism – whose responsibility?

Tourism is everyone's responsibility was the message from The Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards 2010, presented by the BBC's Stephen Sackur at the World Travel Market at London's ExCeL

It's estimated that in the next 40 years, the Earth is going to take its biggest battering yet, said Tony Juniper (pictured), environmental activist and guest speaker at the awards ceremony, held on Wednesday.

As the world's population grows – currently at 6.8 billion and predicted to reach 9 billion by 2050 – we will cause more pollution and use

more of the Earth's natural resources in the next 40 years than have been used in human history. It's a scary prospect but among these dark predictions was joy. The packed room of journalists and tourism ministers from around the world cheered and applauded as winners from some of the most remote places on Earth collected their awards.

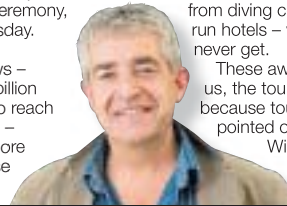
It's recognition these tourism ventures – often tiny and ranging from diving companies to locally run hotels – would otherwise never get.

These awards equally tell us, the tourist, who to trust because tourism does, as pointed out by Amanda Willis (pictured), managing

director of Virgin Holidays, undeniably leave an indelible footprint and we're all responsible.

'We've all witnessed what can happen when ill-conceived initiatives are rolled out in regions without adequate consideration of the impact on their culture and natural habitat,' she said. 'So what we're celebrating here – whether it is in the field of accommodation, transport or protecting cultural heritage – is the understanding that an investment in responsible tourism needs to be lifelong and meaningful.'

The projects we are celebrating here are leading the way but we should all keep challenging ourselves to follow their example.'



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follows its ancestors' rituals, such as the Pasola ceremony, where hundreds of charging horsemen battle with spears, sometimes resulting in injuries and death. The Americans had a challenge on their hands. 'If we weren't accepted by them we wouldn't have been able to move forward,' says Claude. 'Anyone who wants to set up a tourist venture needs to spend time with the surrounding community to see what their needs really are and to work with them to find ways to help.'

So, in addition to surfing, massages and long afternoons spent lazing on Nihiwatu's beach, all guests visit the

villages to learn about local culture and to spend their cash. Claude estimates his guests, who pay \$400 (£250) a night for accommodation and meals, also spend up to \$120 (£75) in villages during a one-week stay. That is, of course, in addition to the \$400,000 (£250,000) donated by guests each year. 'Many people who come to

Sumba are wealthy and I do believe that luxury travel plays a huge part in the future of responsible travel,' says Claude. Nihiwatu shows that tourists can help a local community without taking part in grassroots experiences, such as homestays. 'Don't get me wrong, homestays do help some communities but to make big changes we need money.

Sumba



People who earn big wages want to help the less advantaged, they just don't know how to. So what we do is perfect for them – they can use their lifestyle choices, such as their luxury annual two-week holiday, to help. And they come back: 73 per cent of my guests – bankers, lawyers, film stars – always come back.'

For now, Claude, who is 'overwhelmed' with the award, is working on his next project. 'We are building new fire ovens to help the environment and to reduce smoke inhalation,' he says. 'Now we've managed to get a grip on malaria we can see that respiratory illnesses are a big problem. And then, once we've done that, we'll think of something else to help the Sumbanese.'

Nihiwatu clearly shows that, if done properly, tourism can be a powerful tool in alleviating poverty. And awards such as these help tourists recognise who really is doing the good work. 'If every tourism venture did just a little good, it would be a wonderful world,' says Claude.

So pick your next destination carefully – your holiday could help save lives. www.nihiwatu.com