



# A brighter future

Not content to simply take from the communities it visits, Intrepid Travel is serious about giving back to those who need it most. During a recent trip to Cambodia and Thailand, **Caroline Adam** learned about some of the projects the operator supports

**C**olourful murals adorn the wall of a school building and Cambodian children play happily in the grounds of Green Gecko. Red, blue, purple and orange hammocks hang invitingly inside wooden seating areas with thatched roofs. It's difficult to think that before they came here, these healthy-looking kids were abused and neglected by their families.

Green Gecko provides a home, school and family to 67 children who previously lived and begged on the streets of Siem Reap. They are supported right through until their adult lives, and the project also supports their families and the broader community.

The project was started up by an Australian woman – Tania Palmer, who left the comfort of her Byron Bay home in 2005 to initially be involved with feeding street kids in Siem Reap. “Then I realised that we were giving them fish but not the fishing rod. We were filling their bellies for a day but then I thought – why not give them an education?” Tania subsequently met her now husband Rem, a local, and together they established Green Gecko, which has been nominated as an Intrepid Foundation project and is in its final stages of being assessed. If this is approved, it will join several other projects that the Intrepid Foundation supports in

Siem Reap, home of the magnificent Angkor Wat.

Through its charitable arm, Intrepid supports grass roots organisations that typically struggle to attract funding but which do important work to address environmental, social and financial issues in the countries the operator travels to. “We have operating companies all over the world who get to know local non-government organisations and charitable projects through their day-to-day operations,” Intrepid’s responsible travel manager, Jane Crouch, said. “Once we’ve come to know an organisa-



tion and believe it is well run, we will assess it against an established list of criteria. This includes making sure they are community-based in how they are operated, they are open and transparent in financial management and they focus on delivering services to the neediest and most marginalised.”

Intrepid pays the administration costs of the Intrepid Foundation, and matches donations dollar for dollar (up to \$5000 per donor and up to a total of \$300,000 for all donors per year), effectively doubling travellers’ donations.

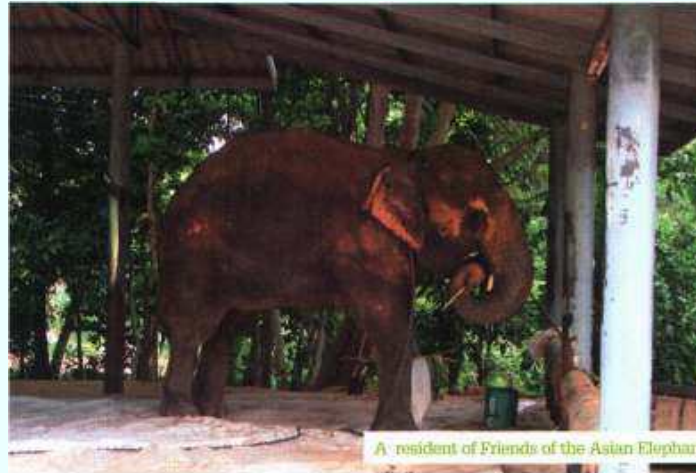
**EATING FOR A CAUSE**

As well as supporting projects through its non-profit arm, Intrepid also practises sustainable tourism by taking its tour groups to places that benefit the local community. For example, groups dine at the Green Star Restaurant, a Siem Reap outfit that supports Green Gecko. The operator also takes groups to another restaurant in town called Sala Bai, a non-profit hotel and restaurant school that each year provides around 100 underprivileged young Cambodians with free vocational training, to enable them to find a job in the tourism industry. Students aged between 17 and 23 can participate in one of four programs – restaurant, front office, cooking and housekeeping. The restaurant atmosphere and menu are French chic and impressive.

Another place that Intrepid takes tour groups to is Artisans d’Angkor, which provides young people from rural areas with highly skilled training and a vocation from which to make a living. Visitors can watch the young artisans hard at work, their crafts including silk painting, stone carving and wood carving, and can buy souvenirs from the shop on-site.

**WILDLIFE MATTERS**

There is so much need among the human population in Cambodia, but the country’s wildlife also faces threats of its own, as there is poaching of many kinds of animals. The Intrepid Foundation supports



The Angkor Centre for Conservation of Biodiversity (ACCB) is home to a collection of animals that have been saved from trafficking. Among its activities are wildlife rescue, conservation breeding and reintroduction of endangered species, as well as environmental education. Residents include gibbons, storks, snakes, giant ibis, turtles and the lorus.

“We’ve made significant contributions to their efforts to educate local teenagers, ensuring they are the future custodians of the environment,” Crouch said.

Over the border in Thailand, the Intrepid Foundation supports Friends of the Asian Elephant, an elephant hospital in northern Thailand that provides free medical care for elephants that have been poorly treated by their owners or have suffered horrific injuries by stepping on land mines.

**A LIGHTER TREAD**

Intrepid offers over 500 carbon offset trips and is working towards rolling them out across its whole range in 2011. In terms of the carbon offsetting projects it supports, the operator hasn’t gone down the well-trodden path of tree planting, instead opting for a variety of projects that benefit the environment and the local communities. One of the projects it supports is a Rice Husk Biomass Plant in northern Thailand, which converts otherwise unuseable rice husks into electricity. Intrepid has partnered with Cleaner Climate, a

climate change consultancy, to help it choose worthwhile carbon offsetting projects to support, such as this one. On average, it costs an Intrepid traveller 44 cents per day to carbon offset their trip. Other adventure travel operators also have responsible travel policies and similarly impressive projects they support, so there are plenty of options to choose from. It’s up to the individual and their travel agent to do their research and work out which operator offers the best of both worlds – a memorable trip and the opportunity to give back.

