



LGT Impact Fellowship

Testimonial interview



Interview with Justin Arenhold, LGT Impact Fellow at Basecamp Explorer Kenya,

With 28 years of Senior Management experience in the Hospitality & Ecotourism Sector, Justin was one of the Senior Fellows that LGT Venture Philanthropy had the honor to work with. He was responsible for the Strategic Development of BCEK, supporting the Chairman and CEO in their respective roles.

What attracted you to this opportunity?

The opportunity and platform to develop strategies and processes that create a positive impact in the field of Ecotourism. Working hand in hand with local communities, key stakeholders and strategic partners, my role was to continue to develop sustainable and binding best practices, develop Ecotourism partnerships & affiliations and build on the Conservation, Community, Cultural and Commercial initiatives in the Maasai Mara, which is one of the most critically important bio-spheres in the world.

What expertise specifically could you contribute to BCEK?

With my extensive experience in a wide range of tourism related fields, particularly in managing high-end hospitality properties in various countries, I was in a position to share and implement industry best practice and system strategies. Thus, strengthening BCEK's organizational capacity, raising efficiency and service delivery. More specifically, I was able to bring in my strategic and operational expertise into the key areas of Business and Product Development, S&M Strategies, Service Quality Control and Mapping, Asset Control, Project Management, Human Resources, H&S & Compliance as well as into the critical spheres of Community & Stakeholder management.

Your Fellowship required a 2-years engagement, what have you achieved together with BCEK in this time?

Besides defining the overall Organizational and Development Strategy, some of the key projects and activities I was driving over the past two years have been the planning and development of new safari camps, supporting the planning of a Wildlife Training College (with a Research & Educational Hub & Educational Tourism Programs), driving CAPEX/Opex strategies, improving the overall service quality across the four safari camps, developing new revenue streams, training and manpower development and building new global partnerships and affiliations such as with The Long Run Foundation etc. Moreover, I was able to lead BCEK through several emergency situations, such as the western regions river floods in February 2020 and of course the COVID-19 pandemic, requiring the conceptualization and strategic rollout of the necessary Health & Safety Frameworks, ERP's, evacuation, closure, recovery and the re-opening of the safari camps in compliance with Local Government and International requirements.

How was your Fellowship at BCEK different from what you have done before?

The dynamics of working in remote wildlife areas requires so much flexibility and lateral thinking; experiences that I have had before, however, not on a scale or a location of this magnitude.

How has the Fellowship influenced your professional ambitions?

The Fellowship has provided me with the most incredible platform from which to make a positive and sustainable impact in the field of Ecotourism. This has awakened a great sense in me for the need of us as a tourism industry to critically analyse and embed our business models around the four key verticals relating to Sustainable Ecotourism i.e. Conservation, Community, Culture & Commerce.

What kind of opportunities will catch your attention in the future?

The field of Venture Philanthropy and Ecotourism has so much potential, this excites me greatly so I would most definitely look for opportunities where I could combine my experience, expertise and skillsets within this sector.

What's it like to work at a philanthropic organization?

Incredible! Due to the real on time rewards and the value that can be created to positively impact communities, the conservation of the biosphere and the surrounding environment.

What were the most important skills/expertise you have acquired during your Fellowship?

Conceptualizing, delivering and implementing strategies in fast changing natural and commercial market conditions.

What would you compare the experience of being a Fellow to?

There is no comparison in my career to date. Having the freedom and incredible support from LGT Venture Philanthropy to drive positive change in organizations, communities and their surrounding wildlife landscapes is without measure.

What has been the most beautiful, impressive, touching moment of this Fellowship Program?

So many! However, the Fellowship Kick-off Workshop in Switzerland was an experience that was truly mind changing: moon/sunrise hiking in silence up the mountains, supporting, learning and understanding so many intrinsic aspects of our teams different cultures and values in an incredible mountain setting in the Swiss Alps.

How would you describe your Fellowship experience in 3 words?

Contribution, Growth, Inspiration

Context

The Maasai Mara holds 25% of the country's remaining wildlife, but faces three interlinked challenges:

- Threats and damages to the ecosystem (wildlife and vegetation) due to fencing, overgrazing and increased farming activities. This not only decimates the ecosystem's unique biodiversity, but also undermines its role in performing vital ecosystem services, such as carbon storage and water cycling.
- Poverty of the local Maasai population in the surrounding areas as the pre-existing conservancy models provided only few local economic benefits in terms of land-lease payments, employment and grazing land.
- Exclusion of the local Maasai population from decision making regarding conservation and tourism related activities on their land.

Solution

- Many conservancies in Kenya are run solely by tourist operators. The Mara conservancies have developed a unique conservancy model in which both tourism operators and the local Maasai landowners are equally represented on the conservancy board and involved in decision making.
- The model empowers the Maasai economically through income from land leases and employment as rangers, as well as in the tourist camps within the conservancies. The local population (both land and non-land owners) also benefits from other co-created projects, including on women's empowerment, carbon capture, waste management or education.
- Conservancies enable the Maasai to continue their traditional, pastoralist way of life as it allows for controlled grazing within conservancies. This limits overgrazing, serves to promote the health of the ecosystem and maintains the longevity of livestock farming - a significant activity of the Maasai culture.

Impact

- The 16 Maasai Mara conservancies provide stable income for close to 16,000 households, benefitting almost 150,000 local people.
- Since the formation of the first conservancies, there has been a dramatic increase in wildlife, e.g. with Naboisho conservancy now believed to have one of the highest lion densities in Africa and is home to over 220 recorded bird species.
- The conservancy model is being replicated with the aim to secure the entire Greater Mara Ecosystem (ca. 4'000 km²) other endangered ecosystems.