

Indagare Impact Insiders: Obá Travel's Tami Larripa and Safari Expert Lee Fuller



Courtesy, from left: Tami Larripa, Indagare, Lee Fuller

Tami Larripa was born in a favela in São Paulo, but it was not until living and studying in the U.S. that she realized how much potential her home country had—and what she could do to bring out that full potential. After returning to Brazil to pursue her education, she spent seven years at one of the country's most prestigious travel agencies before launching her own boutique agency, Obá Travel.

Nearly 5,000 miles east, Lee Fuller grew up on his parents' ranch in rural Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa. For him, the call of the wild chimed early. After completing a Diploma of Forestry at Saasveld College in the Southern Cape, he worked as a forester for a few years before being drawn back to the bush. In 2000, he began a 10-year career with Singita Game Reserves. He became a private guide in 2010 and regularly guides Indagare members. There are few African wildlife hotspots Lee has not visited.

Both Lee and Tami keep purposeful, deliberate travel at the heart of their respective operations. Here, the two share their thoughts on how travelers can have a positive impact on the destinations they visit.

Contact Indagare or your Trip Designer to learn more about Indagare Impact and to plan a trip that not only inspires and empowers you as a traveler, but also helps support the destination you've visited.

How has the pandemic impacted travel to the Amazon and sub-Saharan Africa?

Tami Larripa: During the pandemic, ecotourism completely stopped, which was obviously devastating. This sudden and unforeseen halt essentially forced people to take part in the most environmentally harmful form of economic activity in the Amazon—working for private extractivist companies on timber-extraction and for large-scale agriculture companies, and perhaps worst of all, cattle farming. These illegal activities took advantage of the pandemic to expand into indigenous reserve areas. In these communities, healthcare is also already one of the biggest concerns, especially, where people are more susceptible to diseases.

Lee Fuller: Generally in Africa, and most of rural Africa, the equation is one tourism job supports 10 people. So one employed guide or waiter or barman or sommelier or barista might support up to 10 people back home. The impact's been astounding on a continent where unemployment is fairly high already. Think of a little town like Franschoek—a beautiful little town famous for its wines, about an hour's drive outside of Cape Town. They are 100 percent reliant on tourism and international tourism mainly, so you've got all these wine farms and restaurants and shops and guides, and now with the pandemic, there's less wine being sold, fewer curios being sold and fewer guided trips, and every one of those has an impact.

And environmentally, you had what was called a crime holiday. The lockdowns and initial stringent Covid rules and regulations did create a dropoff in poaching, but that is really starting to ramp up, and with the unemployment rates, people are starting to pursue more illegal actions. Rhino poaching is ramping back up. Subsistence poaching—where people are illegally snaring antelope to feed their families—is ramping up. People are desperate. In Madagascar, where they have been closed for the majority of Covid, they are also having one of the worst droughts in history. Combine the negative effects of lack of tourism with these droughts and unfortunate strikes, and it's been absolutely crippling. It's starting to come back slowly, but it's a long time coming.

What are the biggest ways that travelers can have a positive impact on a destination?

TL: The first is the most obvious: financial impact. According to the World Travel Tourism Council (WTTC), in Latin America, the [travel industry represented some 17 million jobs](#) from 2019 to 2020. There was then [a loss of four million jobs the following](#)

[year](#), due to the pandemic. During normal circumstances, when a destination is in the spotlight, global interest... attracts investments in industry, real estate and development. Even on a smaller scale, buying local handicrafts has an immediate and tangible economic impact, as well. There are also social and cultural impacts: Contact with people of different backgrounds introduces new, broader perspectives ... and new ways of living, thinking and being. It only takes one trip to the Amazon to understand the importance of the forest, how small we are before nature and how our actions have a direct impact on the fragile mechanism. As people come to understand the importance and magnitude of the forest, they tend to become more protective of it. Last but certainly not least, political impact has to be mentioned, when considering a trip to Brazil and the Amazon. Travelers can form educated opinions on various goings-on, like the constant battle between the preservation of indigenous lands and economic interest.

How can travelers make thoughtful choices when selecting a safari destination?

LF: Have a look at the work that a safari camp or lodge does in the communities. Have a look at the work they're doing for wildlife—and at the longevity of that work. How much skin do they have in the game in terms of uplifting the entire area in which they operate? Obviously, things like fast wifi, good food and luxurious rooms are still appealing, but I'm certainly seeing a trend towards booking places that have more of a positive impact on their surroundings.

What about in Brazil? How can visitors have an impact on indigenous communities in Brazil?

TL: It's important to separate two very distinct communities—Indigenous and Riverside. Riverside communities are composed mainly of people from Northeast Brazil who migrated to the riversides during the rubber boom, between 1879 and 1912, and then again during World War II, between 1942 and 1945. During these periods, there was a very strong incentive for people from Northeast Brazil to move to the Amazon, and so these communities are quite plural in their origins and have a mix of Northeastern, Indigenous and Christian-missionary influences (*caboclo* in Portuguese). As to how we target our actions to protect these communities, in broad strokes, we try to think collectively. In most communities in the Amazon, formal education only exists up to fourth grade, so kids 10 and older can't study in their communities anymore. This is a very serious issue, not only for the community itself, but also for neighboring towns, who then have to "receive" these kids (in relatives' houses, usually) to continue their schooling. Instead of introducing educational initiatives to communities, we support existing projects and associations, both governmental and NGO, like [Fundação Almeirinda Malaquias](#) in the Negro River. We helped implement a pedagogical training for teachers who return back to the communities to teach. We want to provide better

conditions to incentivize those already within the community. A dedicated portion of the profit from all of our trips in Brazil go towards a social project in the area.... Not only will the traveler be transformed, but as more people travel to underdeveloped areas in considered ways, entire communities are transformed, too.

Why is it important to get travelers out into nature?

LF: There's a lovely saying, and I'm not sure the origin of it, but it goes, 'Everybody should spend 10 minutes in nature every day, and if you don't have the time, you should spend an hour'. Whether you're on a game drive amongst the migration in Kenya or looking at mountain gorillas, or digging for worms at the bottom of your garden, the same effects of nature are evident. It's basically just taking people away from the concrete under their feet and the concrete above their heads and putting grass or sand or rocks under their feet and the sky above their heads. The mind space that you're able to get into just by being surrounded by nature in its purest form is healing.

Contact [Indagare](#) or your Trip Designer to learn more about [Indagare Impact](#) and to plan a trip that not only inspires and empowers you as a traveler, but also helps support the destination you've visited.

- Bridget McElroy on October 18, 2021