



SIX MINUTES WITH... ... NICOLA SHEPHERD, the founder of The Explorations Company, which organises life-changing adventures in Africa and Asia

**Nicola Shepherd tells Mundi & Co about philanthropy, adventure – and just how tough the last 20 months have been**

by *Mundi & Co Editors* September 17, 2021

**You've been in the business for 31 years. How has the pandemic affected you?**

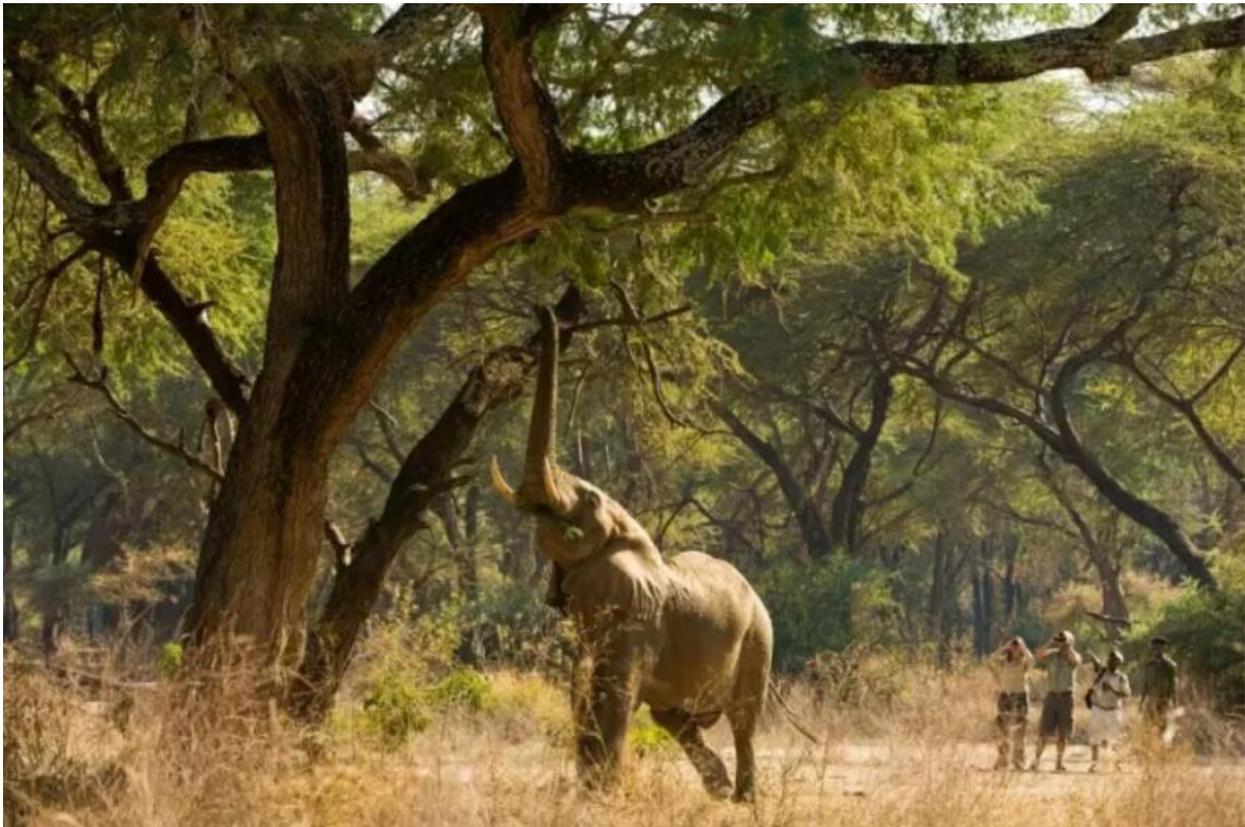
It's been enormously challenging. The travel industry has really suffered, and has had very little support from the British government. Thankfully, the US market has picked up and Americans are travelling again.

**And how are things in the destinations you cover?**

It's been terrible. In many African countries, every employed person supports up to 10 family members, so if they're laid off it is absolutely devastating. There is often no social security or support network. Then there's poaching, which has increased exponentially. Without tourists, all those anti-poaching units that look after conservation areas have been hit.

## **Travel and philanthropy: how does that work?**

We've always included a philanthropic slant to our holidays. It raises awareness, educates the traveller, and delivers a far richer and more rewarding experience. The regions we operate in depend very heavily on tourism, so when we bring Travellers in, we want to make sure their money is going to the right places.



### **How does it work?**

We add a £400 levy per person that goes straight into the charities we support. And we talk to our customers about their personal interests and match them up to something philanthropic as part of their trip – animal conservation, for example, or education, or healthcare. It could be funding a well, or helping collar a lion or microchipping a rhino – whatever they're interested in. And they are always thrilled that they can make some sort of tangible difference.

## **What could the travel industry be doing better?**

So much! Companies should verify their suppliers, and verify the sustainability credential of the places they use. There's a lot of greenwashing. Camps operating in conservation areas should charge more. They all have a per night bed levy that goes towards conservation and community projects, but when you're charging \$2000 per night for a room, just adding \$10 for conservation is clearly not enough.



## **What is your top philanthropic travel experience?**

I particularly loved the Uganda carnivore project in Queen Elizabeth National Park, where you get to collar lions and leopards. It is absolutely extraordinary. You get to spend time with one of Africa's top wildlife vets, and really understand the challenges of human-wildlife conflict – and then be part of making a difference. It's fantastic.



Find out more at:  
[explorationscompany.com](http://explorationscompany.com)  
[@theexplorationscompany](https://www.instagram.com/theexplorationscompany)