

# STANDARD BEARERS

With increasing pressure on travel companies to prove their social and environmental credentials, Sue Watt caught up with two Africa-specialist tour operators that recently achieved the prestigious B Corp certification

**S**ustainability is becoming a key consideration for discerning travellers to Africa, especially in our choice of camps and lodges. But how do we know that the tour operators who book our safaris are equally committed to running their businesses in a way that goes beyond mere greenwashing?

B Lab, the non-profit organisation that awards B Corp certifications, was founded in 2006 by three friends in the USA who believed businesses could and should be a force for good. They created a framework to verify companies that meet high standards of social and environmental performance, transparency and accountability.

It matters because the 'B' stands for 'benefits for all', ensuring companies are run not just for shareholders but for all stakeholders — for 'people and plane' — embracing the environment, communities, customers, suppliers and employees too. Today, over 9000 companies in 102 countries are B Corp certified. In July, Mahlatini Luxury Travel based in Belfast and ATI Holidays in Namibia were among the first Africa-specialist tour operators to join their ranks. We asked them about their B Corp journeys.

**Q Why is attaining B Corp status important to you?**

**ATI:** We wanted to make our sustainability journey official and encourage others within the industry to do the same. We chose B Corp because it encompasses all sectors (not only tourism), has worldwide recognition and its rigorous independent verification standards ensure there is no room for greenwashing. It was very time-consuming, but we really appreciated the way we could clearly see the areas we're already excelling in and those in which we can improve. Certification is definitely an ongoing journey.

**MAHLATINI:** Creating a positive change through experiential travel across Africa has been central to Mahlatini's ethos for almost 25 years. Our B Corp journey was a natural next step to provide formal recognition, but also accountability, of our commitment to the highest standards of social and environmental impact. The process was extremely intensive, involving gathering concrete evidence, often third-party confirmations, to support every claim we made on our ethical approach to supporting staff, stakeholders and the environment, for both our UK and Africa-based offices and our supply chains.

In this climate of greenwashing, it's a vote of confidence for the responsible traveller looking to explore Africa in an authentically sustainable manner.

**Q How does your company benefit people and the planet?**

**ATI:** We include a N\$100 (US\$6) contribution to our Future Namibia Fund in every booking, which we match with N\$100 from our profits. Contributions are split equally between four local projects. These are Little Bugs, which provides free, quality early education to an isolated community in Sossusvlei; the Desert Lion Conservation Trust; The Catherine Bullen Foundation, which benefits remote communities; and the Giraffe Conservation Foundation. So far we've donated N\$128,400, with another N\$30,000 ready to allocate. Every ATI staff member spends half a working

*This page:*  
**Partnerships:** A team from Mahlatini gets hands-on in a community vegetable garden project established by partner organisation Uthando (Love) South Africa  
**Community:** When planning your ground arrangements, Mahlatini prioritises suppliers who themselves have strong partnerships with local communities, such as at Camp Kalahari in Botswana, where guests join Zu/'hoasi Bushmen on bush walks through the desert



MAHLATINI



NATURAL SELECTION



day each month volunteering at a community project of their choice. And we buy carbon credits through Path Net Zero, assigning the funds to the Gold Standard Uganda clean cookstove project.

**MAHLATINI:** We remunerate our staff well above regional standards and also offer pension and medical aid benefits for our African colleagues aligned to our UK office. We have clear career development pathways. We've exceeded our carbon reduction targets across our offices and only work with suppliers who reach our sustainable tourism thresholds. For each trip taken, we donate on our clients' behalf to our core charities across the pillars of conservation (Save the Rhino); community empowerment (Uthando) and environment (One Tree Planted).

**Q How do travellers benefit from your B Corp certification?**

**ATI:** Booking through ATI ensures their hard-earned money is being

spent responsibly throughout the entire booking chain, right through to their ground arrangements and experiences in Africa. Employees are supported with invaluable training in well-paid jobs with secure benefits, local communities are uplifted, and the unique ecosystems they travel so far to explore are being protected. Their travel experience will be richer and more meaningful from start to finish.

**MAHLATINI:** Travelling with Mahlatini provides peace of mind that you are supporting the communities in which you stay, helping conserve the wildlife you witness, and that the unique travel experiences you enjoy are ethically and environmentally responsible. Your tourism dollar gives back without you having to activate anything yourselves.

**Q What does achieving B-Corp status mean to you personally?**

**ATI:** We are thrilled! We know that what we're doing is having a tangible and long-lasting



ATI HOLIDAYS



**Young hearts.** ATI's Future Namibia Fund supports two organisations focused on rural communities (above), Little Bugs provides schooling in Sossusvlei (below), and the Catherine Bullen Foundation's work has included sinking a borehole in Donkerbos. Previously the school had no fresh water supply (bottom)

ATI HOLIDAYS



CHRISSE WESTGATE