

Post-pandemic travel:

Social impact startup socialbnb makes sustainable travel easier

Cologne, Germany, July 2021 **The Corona pandemic has largely shut down tourism. But therein also lies the opportunity to rethink the industry after the crisis and make it more sustainable, something many are increasingly calling for. The sustainability focus of this year's ITB, the world's largest tourism trade show, underlines that sustainability is more than just a trend. The social startup socialbnb is working towards exactly that: The platform allows travelers to stay overnight in free rooms of social and ecological projects and thus support them. Travelers, therefore, have a more authentic vacation experience and do something good with their overnight stay, while the projects become less dependent on donations.**

Authentic experiences with an impact

On the socialbnb platform, travelers can select their desired destination and type of project they want to stay in, from more than 180 projects in 40 countries. These projects work for example in environmental protection, animal welfare, education, equality, health and sports. Instead of booking a hotel or hostel, travelers stay in unused rooms directly at the projects. A stay at the Tenikwa project in South Africa, for example, supports the treatment of injured wild animals and their release into the wild. A stay at the project Mission Surf Mexico supports the integration of disadvantaged children through surf lessons. The travelers can also book their own surf lessons onsite. The money paid is then going straight to the local project. In this way, travelers get to know the project and get in touch with the local population.

Started as a project by two students from Cologne

It all started with a trip to Cambodia. Here the team met Seng Thy, a local resident who wanted to provide free English lessons for the children of his village. This project was like many others around the world: if donations were not forthcoming, the lessons could not take place. So, with the help of the Cologne students, he rented out the previously unused rooms of his house to travelers and let them experience the everyday life of his traditional Cambodian village. With the money, he was able to hire a teacher and buy school materials - since then, the children have been receiving regular English lessons. Back in Cologne, the two founders further developed the idea with the help of the student initiative Enactus at the University of Cologne and were now able to successfully complete the beta phase. The official launch of the new platform will be in July 2021.

Launch in the middle of the pandemic

"The global pandemic has once again highlighted that travel is an enormously important industry, especially for countries in the Global South," says Nils Lohmann, one of the founders of socialbnb. "With our concept, we are creating a new way so that the money from tourism really benefits the local people and improves the situation in their communities. This way, many groups that were previously excluded from tourism can benefit from the positive aspects." The launch of the new platform comes just at the right time, so travelers can now find interesting projects and destinations on the platform and plan their next trip in a simple and sustainable way.

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