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Women Travel for Peace: Community-based tourism helping women worldwide

22 July 2009 354 views 2 Comments



By Linda Rivero, President and Founder, Women Travel for Peace

As our ferry approached the opposite shore of Senegal's Soungrougrou River, the air began to throb with rhythmic drumming. Waving arms and brilliant smiles beckoned to us. The stunning village women, dressed in their dazzlingly colorful *boubous*, ran to us singing and clapping as we disembarked.

We were the five women who had traveled to Senegal with [Women Travel for Peace](#). Our goal: to fund and help construct a sturdy, concrete well for the women's farming collective. While this project had begun several months before our arrival with village meetings and discussion, on this, our last day in the village, we were all ready to inaugurate and celebrate our much needed contribution.

Women Travel for Peace's community-based tourism enables women from the industrialized world to work side-by-side with women in the developing world in support of a community project improving the lives of women and children. The projects we contribute to are locally chosen. In this case, the women of this small farming collective had met several months earlier to determine what our contribution would be. After much discussion, they decided that of all the needs on their list, their most pressing was a well.



Water is a precious commodity in this village, as in much of Africa. It feeds families and clothes children. But these farming women depend on a sprinkling of hand-dug wells that are spotty in their performance: they cave in during the rains, becoming unusable for 3-4 months a year. The women visiting with Women Travel for Peace would provide financing for the new concrete well in addition to some final physical labor. In the meantime, Women Travel for Peace colleagues in Senegal would work with village leaders to organize construction logistics.

In rural Senegal, the women are the field laborers—as well as the cooks, wood-carriers, nurturers of children, and housekeepers. They're up at dawn; then off to the fields in early morning after feeding children and husband, cleaning house, and praying; and they return home at 7 or 8 in the evening. In other words, these women spend 10-12 hours each day hauling water and doing back-breaking field work to cultivate their crops.

In founding Women Travel for Peace, I held two objectives: 1) to create travel experiences for women that finance and physically support a community-based project chosen by and directly benefiting local women and their children, and 2) to nurture communication among all the women.



This is the rationale behind the language and cultural training we offer our travelers before departure. Our goal is to create an atmosphere of mutual growth, learning and sharing so two disparate worlds may connect for the deep and lasting benefit of all. Those who join Women Travel for Peace give their hearts and minds in addition to their resources, and the local women give their strength, dignity, and spiritual depth.

There is something magical in the inherent connection among women. We may not speak the same language, but we communicate: we cook together, we work together, we adjust each other's *moussaur* (headdress), we laugh. And how we dance and sing!

This natural connection and caring is the foundation of Women Travel for Peace. From this resonance come long lasting, measurable improvement in the lives of women and children and life-changing growth for all involved.

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• **[Jaye-Anne Sartoretto](#)** said:

Hi Linda,

I think women helping women is necessary. Unfortunately, in the USA and most likely internationally, women compete and are jealous for whatever reason, the unfortunate side of human nature. That has been my personal experience. Perhaps indicative of a capitalist society in which everyone is out for themselves can be a side effect but of course that can be in a third world country on a more basic scale. Either way, I am grateful to have the opportunities we have living in this country and we can always do more to help others on a local and global scale. I hope to join one of your groups in the near future. Love what you are doing! Jaye-Anne

24 July 2009 at 7:37 am



• **[Gail-Marie Fiattarone, M.A.](#)** said:

Linda, again, must say this is brilliant. I've posted it on my Facebook page daring students and peers alike to get involved!

My students have started a "club" working to help refugee women, and in memory of my mother, I've started a scholarship for immigrant and refugee women this year. In 2005 my family started a scholarship for immigrant and refugees as well; I was fortunate to have a student that survived the horrors of Rwanda; she is an inspiration to me.

The next clear step is taking a trip to travel for peace and to further and share the achievements of women world-wide.

When's your next trip? Count me in!

24 July 2009 at 8:47 am

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Archive

- [July 2009](#) (6)
- [June 2009](#) (15)
- [May 2009](#) (14)
- [April 2009](#) (13)
- [March 2009](#) (14)
- [February 2009](#) (8)
- [January 2009](#) (4)
- [December 2008](#) (3)
- [September 2008](#) (2)
- [August 2008](#) (2)
- [June 2008](#) (3)
- [April 2008](#) (2)
- [March 2008](#) (2)
- [February 2008](#) (2)
- [January 2008](#) (1)

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