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WEEKEND JOURNAL; Giving: Have **Donation**, Will **Travel**

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Abstract (Article Summary)

Charity Begins on the Road To tap into donors' desire for new experiences, charitable groups are creating more donor trips, where big givers are escorted to far-flung locales to see their money at work. Below, a handful of groups with such programs and the next trip on their schedules.

ORGANIZATION: Global Fund for Women, San Francisco www.globalfundforwomen.org

WHAT IT DOES: Grants to support women's rights in developing nations

NEXT UP: Bangkok, Thailand in October 2005

COMMENTS: Twenty-three people made a trip to India (Mumbai and New Delhi) to attend a human-rights forum and visit women's-rights centers. On the return home, all of the donors increased their pledges; as a group, their giving increased by 20%, according to a development officer.

ORGANIZATION: Global Heritage Fund, Palo Alto, Calif. www.globalheritagefund.org

WHAT IT DOES: Preserves archaeological ruins and ancient architecture

NEXT UP: Guatemala's Mirador Basin, November

COMMENTS: Donors who give a minimum of \$10,000 will take a two-day hike to visit Mayan ruins, sleep in tents and get airlifted home by helicopter. Some travelers will be allowed to bring along friends because big donors "get treated like God," says executive director Jeff Morgan.

ORGANIZATION: Prison Entrepreneurship Program, San Francisco, Calif.

www.prisonentrepreneurship.org

WHAT IT DOES: Prepares soon-to-be-released inmates to start businesses

NEXT UP: Prison visit in January 2005

COMMENTS: After hearing CEOs complain that they longed for meaningful experiences, venture capitalist Catherine Rohr started the prison program with her husband, Stephen. "I'm trying to get to [donors] first through their hearts" before heading for their wallets, says Ms. Rohr.

ORGANIZATION: The Nature Conservancy, Arlington, Va. www.nature.org

WHAT IT DOES: Seeks to preserve ecologically endangered habitats

NEXT UP: Belize, January 2005

COMMENTS: Due to donor demand, the number of invitation-only trips are up 10% this year; in coming year, 25 groups will head to 28 countries like Panama, Brazil and China on tours of remote preserves.

ORGANIZATION: Shared Interest, New York City www.sharedinterest.org

WHAT IT DOES: Guarantees loans to community-based organizations in South Africa

NEXT UP: Rural areas, townships in South Africa; spring 2006

COMMENTS: Cultural and even culinary differences can be a problem on trips abroad, says the group's executive director, Donna Katzin. For example, local bacteria can turn "an unpeeled vegetable into a life-threatening situation," she says.

ORGANIZATION: United Jewish Communities, New York City www.ujc.org

WHAT IT DOES: Supports world-wide Jewish communities

NEXT UP: Prague, Israel

COMMENTS: Six-figure donors will dine at home with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and tour Israeli Defense Force army base. "We want them to have as many 'aha' moments as they can," says an organizer. After a similar trip in 2002, donor increased pledges by 12%, to \$11 million.

ORGANIZATION: World Neighbors, Oklahoma City, Okla. www.wn.org

WHAT IT DOES: Promotes self-reliance in developing nations

NEXT UP: Indonesia, February 2005

COMMENTS: The group sponsors two to three trips per year to remote areas in nations like Honduras and Guatemala; trips are limited to 15 donors. "You don't want a village to become a tourist area," says a spokesman.

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[Show me the project: With giving flat, charities are running tours for top donors to orphanages, slums and jails. Katherine Rosman on the new reality trip -- and who really benefits.]

ON A RECENT TRIP to Mexico, Kaki Hopkins flew on a private plane, stayed in an 18th-century inn and met her friends each evening for martinis and Chardonnay. But the real highlight of her stay was a luncheon with local women -- held in a cardboard-walled hut with a dirt floor and goats outside the door.

Mrs. Hopkins was on a trip sponsored by a charity, meeting with women in Chiapas who were seeking loans to start wood-collecting and taxi businesses. It was a far cry from her usual Dallas fund-raising circuit -- the 63-year-old was named "Dallas Opera Sweetheart" in 1999 -- and the experience spurred her to help raise \$750,000 for the charity, the Chiapas Project. "I can tell you that heart strings were pulled enormously," Mrs. Hopkins says.

In an effort to coax more money out of top givers, charities are increasingly turning to extreme travel as a fund-raising tactic -- sending donors where their money is. From AIDS-relief groups to children's funds, organizations are exposing well-heeled Americans to gritty inner-city neighborhoods, Nairobi slums or villages of Bangladesh. The United States Fund for Unicef now runs a half dozen annual "field visits" to places such as South Africa and India, up from one annual trip five years ago. Opportunity International, which gives small loans to developing-world entrepreneurs, is running 21 trips this year, compared with seven in 2000. And last week, a new charity to benefit inmates started its \$380,000 fund-raising drive -- by bringing 15 top executives to a Texas prison.

"They want to see it -- the land being preserved, the kids being saved," says Jeff Bradach, managing partner of the Bridgespan Group, a consulting firm that advises foundations and nonprofits.

Although members of the philanthropic community are loath to be critical -- donors, after all, typically pay their own way on trips -- the "extreme charity" wave raises questions about how nonprofits are marketing themselves. While there have long been programs for volunteers who want to mend roofs or paint schools, critics say the new trips are stunts that let wealthy donors witness poverty from a safe

distance. Other critics say charities should focus on their core mission rather than organizing trips that resemble adventure tours to hard-to-reach destinations. And some say it's simply an escalation of the old strategy of wining and dining benefactors, raising donor expectations that their generosity will be rewarded with an increasingly elaborate menu of exotic experiences.

Charities say it's just smart philanthropy. These tours appeal to those weary of \$500-a-plate dinners, attracting everyone from adventure-seekers to those who want to see that their money is being used wisely. And it takes creative marketing to stand out in an ever-more-crowded field. Overall, the number of U.S. charitable organizations has risen 9% from 2000 to 2003, according to the Internal Revenue Service. At the same time, giving has remained relatively flat at about \$240 billion a year since 2000, according to the annual report of Giving USA Foundation.

David Bossy says a field visit changed his view of philanthropy. As the Chicago-based real-estate developer approached his 50th birthday last year, he felt a need to boost his giving. Watching TV as he worked out on his home Stairmaster, he saw an infomercial that showed poor children, and it left him "overcome with grief." Last summer, on the recommendation of a colleague, he joined a regional board of the U.S. Fund for Unicef, which raises money for the United Nations children's charity. Mr. Bossy was soon heading up a \$100 million fund-raising campaign for AIDS relief -- yet he wanted a closer understanding of the mission. "I didn't want to be an armchair quarterback," he says.

So when he heard that he could join a trip to South Africa that was part of Unicef's expanded "field visit" program, he booked a trip for himself and his three eldest children. They hiked up a dirt path littered with burnt cars, reaching a hilltop village that smelled of raw sewage and lacked electricity and water. There, Mr. Bossy says, his group met a 93-year-old woman who was raising 10 children, all young relatives orphaned by AIDS. Later, he met an HIV-positive woman with two children who had just lost her husband to the disease.

By the end of the trip, Mr. Bossy says, he had given away most of the clothes he had packed and decided to pledge \$1 million to Unicef -- 20 times the size of any contribution he'd made before. "To this day, I'm haunted by the vision of the two children," he says.

More charities are adopting the come-and-see approach. Global Fund for Women, founded in 1987, took its first donor trip earlier this year, to India, and plans to follow up with a trip to Thailand next October. Room to Read, founded four years ago by a retired [Microsoft](#) executive, has created Trek for Literacy in spots including Cambodia and Nepal to entice adventure-minded donors. And the Chiapas Project is planning two visits in February, following the success of the 30-person trip that Mrs. Hopkins took last October.

Unlike fundraising dinners, which can raise money quickly, field visits can pay dividends for years, charities say -- and eventually yield more money. The American Foundation for AIDS Research, for example, charged \$2,500 and up for tickets to its gala dinner during the Cannes Film Festival in May, with hosts including [Giorgio Armani](#), Harvey Weinstein and Donatella Versace. After expenses and salaries were taken out of its \$1.8 million gross, the event took in around \$1.4 million.

Yet the group could stand to benefit more from its Trek Asia project, which kicks off its first trip this month. Amfar supporters who have raised at least \$10,000 are invited to pay their own airfare to China to hike along the Great Wall and hear lectures about AIDS and HIV in China. The organization says it plans to bring in a minimum of \$196,000 -- but expects participants to stay involved for years. "We are giving birth to a whole new group of spokespeople," says Amfar Chief Executive Jerome Radwin.

The risk, of course, is that travelers may not like everything they see. When Pamela Hawley went to El Salvador to help with an earthquake-relief effort a few years ago, one of her responsibilities was to deliver food to victims -- in the form of energy bars of the sort runners use. Though the locals were hungry, she says, they couldn't stomach the processed food bars. "The few that tried it spit it out even though they were starving," says Ms. Hawley. (She says the incident was part of the reason she has founded her own organization, [GivingGlobal](#), which matches international organizations with donors

looking for trips.)

Extreme charity trips appeal particularly to philanthropy's emerging class -- the wealthy boomers who are retiring earlier, giving at a younger age and interested in seeing their cash in action. Bob Buford, a retired telecom millionaire and author of philanthropy books "Halftime" and "Finishing Well," says many boomers want to add significance to their lives as they look ahead to three or more decades of retirement. "There is a movement of people looking for more impactful experiences than just giving away money," he says.

The impact is enough to keep some people coming back. After supporting an international development organization called the Hunger Project for more than a decade, Suzanne Frindt took her first trip, to Bangladesh, in 2000. At night, she and her daughter, Kristen, stayed in a hotel room lit by a single bulb, and by day they traveled on buses to villages where the charity sponsors a textiles project. Mrs. Frindt says the local women fawned over her 5-foot-9 blond daughter, then 17 years old, and oohed and aahed over Kristen's pink nail polish. "Everyone looked at her like she was Princess Diana," says the 48-year-old from Capistrano Beach, Calif.

Since then, Mrs. Frindt and her husband, Dwight, say they've boosted their giving to the Hunger Project -- \$100,000 last year, up from about \$25,000 annually before the Bangladesh visit. They persuaded a client of their consulting business to join them on a trip, and he became a big donor when he returned. The Frindts have been on about 10 Hunger Project outings in the past four years, from Africa to India. One recent outing: a "blue-ribbon opening" of a new outhouse in a Mexican village. "We were treated as honored guests," says Mrs. Frindt.

Charities say these trips are a balancing act. While communities appreciate outside help, members might be sensitive to visitors who drop in to inaugurate a new health facility but stay in luxury hotels. And nonprofits that plan tours for big donors run the risk of alienating smaller ones. "They're paying their own way, but how does it look?" says Paul Light, a professor of public service at [New York University](#) and a Brookings Institution scholar. "Charities have to be careful that there's not the appearance that [big benefactors] are getting something the base is not getting."

Appearances are particularly important now that donor confidence is at the lowest point in recent memory. In the summer of 2001, 8% of Americans said they had no confidence in charitable organizations. By the summer of 2002, amid questions about the [Red Cross's](#) allocation of funds earmarked for Sept. 11 relief, some 17% of Americans voiced no confidence in charities, according to a study just released by Prof. Light. "Confidence took a big hit and has never recovered," he says.

John Rebeles, for one, was skeptical. The senior bank vice president in Houston was one of 15 top executives invited last week to a minimum-security prison for the inaugural event for the Prison Entrepreneurship Program, a charity that aims to help inmates plan businesses. Mr. Rebeles, 44, was invited to evaluate prisoners' business proposals, but the program's co-founder, Catherine Rohr, was also hoping to turn the executives into long-term donors and supporters. Mr. Rebeles, who had been sent by his boss, was less than thrilled. "I was thinking, 'What a waste of time for me when I could be making more money,'" he says.

The executives convened at 8:30 a.m., mingling with inmates in a fluorescent-lit receiving area. A group of executives chatted awkwardly in a corner ("Have you seen 'The Shawshank Redemption?'" one asked). Then Mr. Rebeles, working in a small group with 20 inmates, listened as 40-year-old prisoner Steven Dunbar presented a plan for a trucking company. "The trucking business is in my blood," said Mr. Dunbar, reading from purple index cards held close to his black-rimmed glasses.

Mr. Rebeles looked over the financials, and pointed out that they didn't add up: Mr. Dunbar had accounted for the cost of purchasing a used truck both as start-up and equipment costs. Mr. Dunbar's eyes dropped to the floor. "That knowledge was worth a couple hundred bucks," Mr. Dunbar said later.

By the end of the day -- after a lunch of barbecued brisket in the prison cafeteria, an afternoon session

and a gospel number by a prison group -- Mr. Rebeles said he was impressed by how well-prepared and appreciative the inmates were. "I'm going to do everything in my power back at the bank to have them get involved and give money -- a lot," Mr. Rebeles said. "This day has meant more to me than to the prisoners. It has restored my faith in humanity."

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