

MamboViewPoint eco lodge, a new approach for sustainable development and tourism

By Herman Erdtsieck and Marion Neidt, social entrepreneurs and owners of MamboViewPoint in Mambo/Mtae/Lushoto – Usambara mountains – Tanzania - www.MamboViewPoint.org

When you travel from Lushoto through the Usambara mountains with their wide vistas, cool climate, winding paths and picturesque villages you may not expect to find the small paradise of MamboViewPoint. Enjoy the breath taking views, relax or take part in one of the many activities and your stay will be unforgettable.

Background

MamboViewPoint is owned by social entrepreneurs Marion Neidt and Herman Erdtsieck. They travelled through many continents, cooperated with various development agencies and saw very many development projects. In the end they felt unhappy with the often very poor or even counterproductive results of many aid projects and all the money that went to expensive overhead, offices and 4x4 cars.

All previous experiences resulted in a plan for a new approach. The basic idea was to create a permanent socio-economic stable base in a poor area and to start regional development from there. In our vision development is not based on unconditional aid but should be achieved by empowering people, building capacities, giving them ideas and information, knowledge, expertise and support them in obtaining tools. As our current experience learns it sometimes only needs a little push to enable people to pull themselves out of poverty. There are some important features in our concept. First, development is not a one item issue like f.e. education because in the end everything is interlinked. For example, when children are educated but there is no work in the end, it is likely to lead only to depopulation of the area but no improvement. Second, development can best be based on practical experience people already have and try to improve quality of products and give it added value instead of selling raw materials. Third, there is always a reason why projects fail or fall apart. The fact that we wanted to have permanent base and become part of the village gives the opportunity for in-depth understanding of optional failures and make together with the population the right adjustments in time.

After a fact-finding mission early 2008 MamboViewPoint eco lodge was established in the Usambara Mountains in Tanzania. It is situated on a beautiful spot near Mambo, which is an area with many opportunities but the population has an average income below the poverty line.



For the heart of the project is chosen for a lodge because in Tanzania tourism is one of the main income sources. Moreover, for the project it is very important to have an inviting place for people from abroad who can bring knowledge and assistance.

Welcome to MamboViewPoint eco lodge!

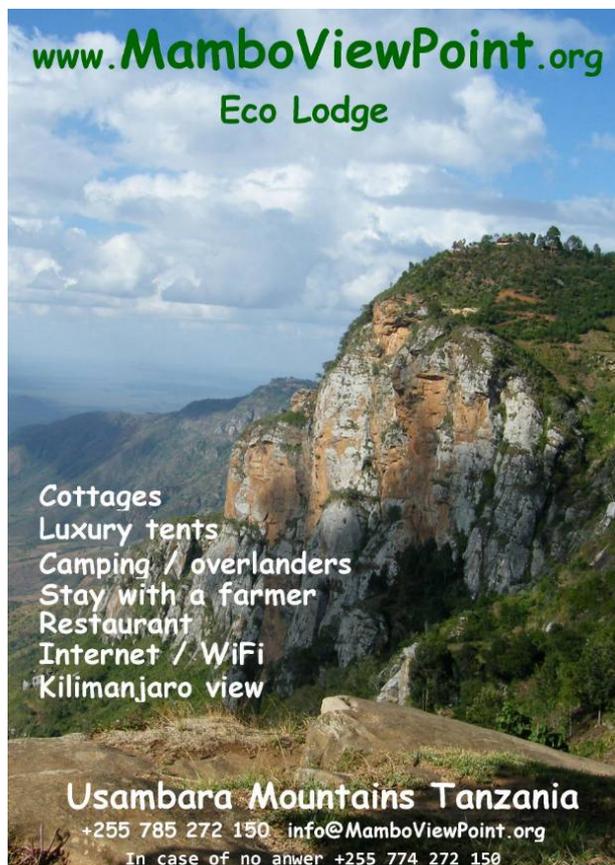
MamboViewPoint eco lodge

MamboViewPoint is a magnificent lodge on the top of a mountain with stunning views over the African plains and mountains, fitting in the landscape with nice cottages, luxury safari tents, camping and volunteering options.

The lodge is situated on the edge of the Usmabara mountains. The mountains are a part of the eastern arc, known from its high biodiversity. With their winding paths and picturesque villages it is a great place for small scale tourism like walking, hiking, birding and biking.

Since it is a kind of far out most tourists that are coming are not the ones who like mass tourism but really are interested in the local culture and nature. However it is remote it is not isolated; did the owners have to go to many places to visit people in the past, now many people, among which the famous and powerful, come to visit and share ideas. Also local people from Tanzanian cities found the place to relax and people from the Usambaras like to spend some time in Mambo, drinking a soda or having a local meal.

MamboViewPoint is near the village Mambo. *Mambo as a word has a very positive association in Kiswahili. (Mambo poa! means "very good!")* Once upon a time a huge rock fell down from the mountain and people were astonished about this happening on this beautiful spot and since then, the village is called Mambo. So the lodge is called MamboViewPoint, Mambo for the village and something good and viewpoint because of the stunning view, but also because of the vision regarding development.



MamboViewPoint is an example for sustainable and responsible tourism. Though the owners are from abroad, there is a strong connection with the local community. Employees, building materials and food are as much as possible from local origin. Moreover the lodge offers a meeting place for people from all over the world including the local people where they can enjoy their holiday in a family atmosphere.

What makes MamboViewPoint special is the associated foundation which is in charge of the various projects that target various development issues. Because of the stable position of the lodge and the many volunteers and guests who contribute to the project, it is possible to spend 100% of the received aid money on the projects without overhead costs.

Karibu sana (most welcome) at MamboViewPoint to enjoy your holiday, join one of the many activities, meet the local people and learn about how people try to get out of their poverty. Or as one of our guest said: "Some may call this place "end of the world" but you made it in a new beginning for a lot of people!"



The MamboViewPoint approach

In the first place the lodge is a steady centre for all the activities. This is not for a limited amount of time but without end. The fact that the owners of the lodge are living permanently in Mambo, created a strong bond already with the local inhabitants because the lodge and its owners are facing the same problems as they do. The cooperation of the village and the lodge creates a bigger potential to solve existing and upcoming problems.

In the second place, the lodge is built with local people. Over 650 women and 350 men worked in shifts for one and a half year. This made the lodge to a kind of product of the people around and gave them the first income and skills.



In the third place the lodge is not a goal in itself but is a vehicle to create development. Experience learned that it is important that the spill of the project is a lodge. It brings many people from all over the world who can contribute with their skills, funding, knowledge and relations. They see with their own eyes existing problems discuss about optional solutions, afterwards see the result of their contribution and stay updated regarding the impact. Nevertheless to actively contribute is not an obligation, only having a nice holiday is already supporting local development because their stay brings work, sales-opportunities and money for the region.

In the fourth place the projects and professionals for the projects are only for a small part financed by the lodge. What the lodge provides is ideas, contacts, the necessary infrastructure and (most important) an eye on the projects once the volunteers who helped to achieve certain goals are gone. We can, together with the people concerned, help to make the necessary adjustments that are needed if specific problems might occur. This ensures the feasibility and effectiveness of the initiatives undertaken.

In the fifth place, the focus is to create added value to the things which are already there. Like making cheese from milk, biogas from cow dung, juice from fruits that are already growing etc. All not in big projects but by encouraging people to start their own business.

In the sixth place MamboViewPoint is an eco lodge which means that the footprint which it is leaving behind is as small as possible by using as much as possible solar power, natural building materials, local produced food and most important, being close to the local people and taking care they are benefiting and not exploited.

"How did you find this stunning place?" is the most asked question. No, in Tanzania you don't find many "for sale" signboards. But we were lucky. During our trip we asked around and it looked like you could "buy" any piece of land as long as you brought money, sometimes a lot, sometimes reasonable. In the end we had about seven options with the present one being far the best. In many tourist places like around Arusha, some development is already there or it got stuck due to facts like the madness of the mass tourism. Not so in the Usmabara Mountains, a potential destination for sustainable tourism. People are friendly, peaceful, happy and hard working, but many live below the poverty line and for mass tourism it's too far out.

About MamboSteunPunt foundation

To make a clear distinction between the lodge and the development activities MamboViewPoint established, the foundation MamboSteunPunt. This foundation is based in the Netherlands but has no office and is only meant to regulate the financial flows and separate these from the lodge. The original idea was to establish a counterpart foundation in Tanzania as well. Experiences with other foundations and NGO's in Tanzania learned that those foundations easily can cause many problems. One of the sources for this is the wide spread corruption and fraud and the too easily use of the possibilities to sue. Especially companies and NGO's who have a believed amount of money suffer from those phenomena. Also having a Tanzanian bank account guarantees a substantial loss of money since the expensive and client unfriendly banking system in Tanzania. Because of this MamboSteunPunt has a bank account in the Netherlands only.



Locally there is a village development fund. From every spent night in MamboViewPoint \$ 1.50 is going to this fund. After experiences with the ingrained corrupt system this fund is not giving the money to the village but the village council is invited to make a list with priorities and the costs for those project are directly paid from the village development fund to the shops or labour or what ever is needed. It is the intention however, to gradually shift this responsibility towards the village or ward, but therefore a lot of discussion needs to take place within the village and training will need to be given

In practice the current system works well since the democratic content is guaranteed by the consultation with the village council and for important matters even the whole village is involved while no money is lost on sitting allowances or other types of bribe and corruption.

Direct connected is the awareness raising that fraud and corruption is one of the main sources why the majority of the people in Tanzania are that poor. On local, small scale it appeared to be possible to create some necessary awareness but the real solution has to come from government level which is beyond the scope of MamboViewPoint.



About the MamboViewPoint approach and the aid industry

Since Tanzania belongs to the poorest countries in the world but the political and economical climate is positive, it is a beloved target for many aid organisations. This causes a main stream from aid funds and many projects concerning public matters which actually should be done by the government. Combined with the earlier mentioned corruption this is resulting in a huge spill of aid money and a not optimal governmental system with, especially on individual level, other targets than the development of the country.

All this resulted in an "aid industry" where even volunteers have to pay a lot of money f.e. to work in an orphanage. MamboViewPoint does not want to be a part of this aid industry but chose for the approach like it is explained before.

This makes it worthwhile to donate to the project since none or only a little money from donated amounts is lost and the results are very visible and projects keep being monitored. Many guests of MamboViewPoint realized this and are contributing to the projects.

About MamboViewPoint and the tourist industry.

A main part of the tourist in Tanzania are heading for the well known hotels and tour operators. Often those are owned by foreign companies which supply food and other needs and staff from far and even the profits go abroad again. A well known saying is "the only thing which is left for local people is the dust from the cars if tourist come or go"

MamboViewPoint is trying to optimize the profit of tourism for local benefit by involving as much as possible the local sources. Employing local staff, purchasing local products and food and being under the national tax system.

The review of two MamboViewPoint guests below gives possibly the best atmospheric description of what we achieved.

By good luck we were introduced to Marion & Herman's little heaven in Northern Tanzania and with our FairWater.org Foundation we started a co-operation to assist in their local WatSan (Water Sanitation) Projects. Last end of December we visited their Eco-Lodge project to set-up the WatSan projects, but little we knew about the amazing place itself.

Literally, an unforgettable breathtaking experience, one day, waking up at the very edge of an 1900m high cliff, overlooking a game park, with the mighty Kilimanjaro in the background, the next day, overlooking the early morning clouds as we were in heaven.

Even the nights on the cliff were amazing; as there was no other light around, and with an altitude of nearly 2.000m high, thousands of stars seem to be fingertip close and between these the Milky Way showed up with brilliance that I have never seen before. This is surely an unforgettable place, not to mention, last but not least, the warm, friendly welcome, the healthy food, and handmade, local yogurts and various types of cheese in the morning, creating a family ambience around Marion & Herman, who are literally living their dream in making this incredible endeavor happen as a natural miracle that seems to be originated in a natural way, as with no effort at all.

Do not tell this to anyone, I thought at first, let's not spoil this hidden place at the end of several hours of never ending winding dirt roads with potholes and sometimes scary corners when the roads makes a sharp turn with the mountain on one side and a deep, deep valley at the other side. You do need to have nerves and to trust your driving skills to enjoy the view while driving.

But OK, if you promise to keep this information just for yourself, or only reveal this to anyone that would understand the beauty of it and keep it a secret as well, you should go there yourself and find out all about it, and come back as reborn, with the Mambo View for ever on your mind.

Stay Well !!

FairWater.org
Sureyya Gok and Paul van Beers

Read more

For detailed information about MamboViewPoint eco lodge:
www.MamboViewPoint.org

For detailed information about MamboSteunPunt foundation:
www.MamboSteunPunt.org

For a detailed list of the MamboSteunPunt projects:
www.MamboViewPoint.org/MV_projects.htm

For the dream of the founders:
www.mamboviewpoint.org/Downloads/dreaming%20of%20MamboViewPoint.pdf

For the experiences from the MamboViewPoint guests:
www.MamboViewPoint.org/MamboViewPointMain/Guestbook2011.htm
or http://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotel_Review-d1554902

For the environmental policy:
www.MamboViewPoint.org/Mamboviewpoint.common/Environmental%20Policy_MamboViewPoint.pdf

