



*Rick Steves'*  
**EUROPE**

# CLIMATE SMART COMMITMENT

## 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

\$1 Million Invested in 13 Organizations





# \$1 Million Invested in 13 Organizations to Help Fight Climate Change

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In late 2019, Rick Steves' Europe launched our Climate Smart Commitment—a program designed to pay back the environmental debt created by our travelers flying to Europe to join our bus tours. Our goal: creatively mitigate our carbon footprint by smartly investing a self-imposed carbon tax of \$30 per tour member (with roughly 30,000 travelers annually, that's a total of \$1 million a year). We invest these funds (totaling about \$4 million so far) in organizations that fight climate change in two ways: by helping farmers in the developing world employ climate-smart agriculture technology, and by advocating in the halls of government to take the threat of climate change more seriously.

After four years of running our program, we remain committed to generating lasting change through a combination of both hands-on work and advocacy. Climate change hits the poorest people in the poorest countries the hardest. Roughly half of the world's population is made up of smallholder farmers and their families. In their desperation to grow enough food and earn enough income, their farming practices contribute substantially to climate change—and their resources are scarce. That's the hands-on work. The advocacy is in lobbying for climate-smart policies in Washington, DC. Without the US taking a global leadership role, the combined actions of all the world's nonprofit organizations won't be enough. That's why we believe the US must implement smart policies that acknowledge the link between climate change and hunger (both at home and abroad) while supporting the transition to a climate-smart economy.

We're presenting this report to show our travelers (and those who might travel with us in the future) what we accomplished in the past year. For us, 2023 was a great year. The global effects of COVID-19 receded, and travel adapted to a "new normal." The result: We had roughly 32,000

people travel to Europe with us on our bus tours, and our funding returned to a pre-COVID \$1 million. (The COVID pandemic forced us to cancel all our tours in 2020 and 2021 shrinking the proceeds of our self-imposed carbon tax to zero. But we couldn't bear to abandon the great work our partner organizations were doing—so even with no tour revenue—we committed \$500,000 to fund our program in each of 2021 and 2022).

While climate change and smart development can seem unrelated, the organizations in this report are perfect examples of how positive and life-changing action for both struggling farmers and their impact on climate change is being realized in faraway places. We are proud to offer those who take our tours the peace of mind that our "self-imposed carbon tax" effectively mitigates the carbon they add to our environment to join us in Europe. Together, we're making a difference. We've taken three villages—and many other farmers—out of extreme poverty, reforested multiple football fields of degraded land, prevented tons of carbon from being emitted, saved thousands of trees from becoming firewood, brought back biodiversity, improved living conditions, and helped enact major climate legislation. It feels good. It's ethical as a business practice. And it's simply good global citizenship.

This annual report shares what nine of our partner organizations accomplished in 2023. These organizations delivered on their missions and fulfilled their pledge to be transparent with us. We hope to continue supporting them in coming years. They inspire all of us at Rick Steves' Europe and, we like to think, our travelers as well. Enjoy reading about their climate-smart work!

Happy climate-smart travels,

Rick Steves

Chief Executive Officer

Craig Davidson

Chief Operating Officer

## 2023 DONATION: \$250,000

DONATIONS TO DATE: \$619,000

Our donations allowed Agros to continue to expand their agribusiness center in Nicaragua and help more than 500 farming families learn how to use hydroponics, vermicomposting, and reforestation techniques to improve soil conditions, increase their yields, produce healthier food, help with the reforestation effort, protect water recharge zones, and generate more income.

Current farming methods produce a third of all greenhouse emissions worldwide—but don't meet the world's growing demand for food and don't generate enough income for the farmers growing the food.

In rural Latin America, Agros believes that there is a solution to break the cycle of poverty for farming families: land ownership, market-led agriculture, financial empowerment, and sustainable climate-smart farming practices.

Since our partnership began, Agros has transformed their development model to incorporate climate-smart techniques, created new performance indicators to track the effectiveness of their programs, and seen outstanding results. In the three climate-smart villages created since our partnership began (San José, Nueva San José, and La Bendición, Nicaragua), Agros has enabled the farmers to create a net worth of about \$29,000 per family, lifted them out of extreme poverty, and built entrepreneurial, prosperous communities out of what was essentially nothing (as Agros builds new villages from scratch).

In so doing, Agros developed a vermicompost production and training facility (which reduced the use of chemical-based fertilizers by 40 percent), created a nursery, carefully cultivated over 41,000 seedlings, reforested over 47 acres of land, registered 226 acres under a sustainable forest management program, installed a water irrigation system and community hydroponic modules, and built family-oriented greenhouses. Their ecological latrines, showers, stoves, and water filters protected water recharge zones and saved over 1.6 million gallons of water and 90,000 kg of wood per year, their certification with the Rainforest Alliance allowed farmers to increase their incomes, and they've given women the opportunity to diversify their household income by selling surplus produce to other community members.

In the upcoming year, our donation will help Agros expand their agribusiness center in La Bendición, Nicaragua, and teach more farmers the skills they need to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and move from subsistence farming to commercial agriculture.

*Agros International works to break the cycle of poverty for farming families in rural Latin America.*



CULTIVATED **41,000**  
TREE SEEDLINGS



REFORESTED  
**47 ACRES OF LAND**



SAVED **1.6 MILLION**  
GALLONS OF WATER







## 2023 DONATION: \$30,000

Our donation helped Andando dramatically increase the food security of rural Senegalese farmers by adding 675 families to their women's cooperative gardening program, germinating over 15,000 beneficial tree seedlings, constructing a Tree Nursery and Agroforestry Center in Podor (including sinking a borehole to provide water security to the facility), and teaching climate-smart agriculture practices that offset the deforestation and loss of soil fertility due to hundreds of years of destructive colonial agricultural practices.

Like other partners in our program, Andando focuses on climate-smart farming. They construct women's cooperative gardens, use solar pumps for water generation, partner with local farmers to incorporate native trees into field crop production, and reforest land using the forest garden permaculture method (intentionally placing plants to mimic the natural environment).

In the last two years, Andando's 33 women's gardens have yielded over 1.5 million pounds of organic produce and generated a profit of over \$400,000 for more than 3,500 women—without any pesticides, herbicides, or synthetic fertilizers. They have reduced their water consumption, created fertile topsoil, and created natural barriers (like thorny fences and windbreaks) that both protect the land and sequester carbon. Going forward, Andando will expand to more communities in rural Senegal adding 400 families to their program, operate two native tree nurseries in the Kaolack and Podor regions of Senegal, and start the process of reforesting 100,000 trees.



**ADDED 675 FAMILIES TO  
WOMEN'S GARDENING CO-OP**



**GERMINATED 15,000  
TREE SEEDLINGS**



**PRODUCED 1.5 MILLION  
POUNDS OF ORGANIC PRODUCE**

*Andando works  
to alleviate  
poverty  
through  
community  
development in  
rural Senegal.*





# BEADS FOR EDUCATION

**2023 DONATION: \$51,000**

**DONATIONS TO DATE: \$61,000**

Our donations allowed BEADS for Education (BEADS) to teach another 125 students about climate-smart farming practices, expand their school farm, and provide climate education workshops for more than 7,000 people in Kajiado, the Amboseli National Park region, and the Maasai Mara.

Due to the ongoing deforestation in Kenya, the traditionally pastoral Maasai communities have embraced farming for their food security needs. BEADS, through their Tembea Academy, teaches students creative and critical thinking while instilling a philosophy of returning everything that came from the earth back to the earth. Their school is completely solar powered, and they grow all their own food (for 300 daily meals), practice no-till gardening, don't use pesticides, use greenhouses, and compost all their organic and paper waste. With over 52 million girls in sub-Saharan Africa not in school, programs like this are essential.

In 2023, BEADS admitted 31 more girls to ninth grade and organized 12 town clean-up days—including the Maasai Mara Game Reserve, the Amboseli National Park, and the Mombasa Coast—to teach the students about the detriments of plastic and how their actions impact the climate. In so doing, the students not only learned about wildlife and marine biology, they also had a chance to experience the world like never before—as they had the opportunity to visit game parks and marvel at the ocean for the first time (and some learned how to swim!).

The climate-smart work doesn't stop there. During school breaks, each student volunteers to teach their families and communities how to generate higher yields and implement a more sustainable farming process by using less water, planting crops to attract and feed insects (along with pollinators), and reforesting the indigenous and medicinal plants that have been decimated. Then, each student petitions the Kenyan parliament to take action on climate change—with one previous student being so successful, she was invited to be a Yale Young African Scholar, selected to be an Ashoka Changemaker, and had her book on climate change and drought published and translated into four languages by World Reader.

Over the next year, BEADS will expand the number of clean-up days, add new solar panels to the school, build a lasting water solution to the ongoing droughts (by buying a plot of land, drilling a well, and creating water storage facilities), and help communities build solar ovens.

*BEADS provides a well-rounded, climate-smart education to girls in the vulnerable Maasai communities in Kenya.*



**REACHED 7,000  
PEOPLE WITH  
CLIMATE EDUCATION  
WORKSHOPS**



**TAUGHT 125  
STUDENTS ABOUT  
CLIMATE-SMART  
FARMING**



**PLANTED  
1,000 TREES**







## 2023 DONATION: \$75,000

**DONATIONS TO DATE: \$215,000**

Our donations allowed Food 4 Farmers (F4F) to partner with six cooperatives representing over 6,200 coffee-farming families in Latin America and increase their food security. F4F's goals: teach climate-smart practices, strengthen local food systems, improve incomes, reduce deforestation, restore local ecosystems, and create a healthier planet.

Industrial agriculture is responsible for about 80 percent of all tropical deforestation globally. F4F aims to disrupt this trend by helping small-scale farmers transform their monoculture farms into sustainable operations that provide food and income security without the need for increased acreage.

Through their Home Garden Program, F4F's families maintain almost 900 gardens and care for more than 120,000 replanted trees—using sustainable farming practices, including making organic compost and pesticides, growing a diverse range of organic food crops, improving soil health, using agroforestry to restore biodiversity, and building low-cost water management systems to sustain gardens through dry seasons. Their Beekeeper and Farmers Markets Program helps to diversify the farmers' incomes and reduce their dependence on a single commodity crop (coffee) by helping them establish supplemental on-farm businesses that have the added benefit of reforesting land to provide pollinators with food and shelter. And their Community Promoter Program trains and empowers young women and men to bring these climate-smart techniques from the workshops to the farms and ensure the farmers thrive long-term.

In the coming year, F4F will expand farm diversification at their partner COMEPCAFE in Colombia, add over 1,000 families to their program (via a new cooperative, Manos Campesinas in Guatemala), plant over 5,000 trees, continue to teach water conservation methods, and engage women and young people to lead their communities to healthier diets, stronger local economies, and climate-smart farming practices.



**PLANTED 37,100  
TREES**



**HELD 130  
CLIMATE-SMART  
FARMING WORKSHOPS**



**MAINTAINED 900  
SUSTAINABLE-FARMING  
GARDENS**

***Food 4 Farmers  
partners with coffee-  
farming families in Latin  
America to increase  
food security, teach  
climate-smart practices,  
reduce deforestation,  
and stabilize incomes.***



# RAINFOREST ALLIANCE

## 2023 DONATION: \$50,000

**DONATIONS TO DATE: \$160,000**

Our donations allowed the Rainforest Alliance (RA) to expand their climate-smart agriculture work in Ghana—benefitting 3,600 local farmers across 76 communities by providing the climate-smart tools and training necessary to produce cocoa sustainably and conserve Ghana's forest landscape.

In Ghana, unsustainable cocoa production is a key driver of deforestation and causes close to half of the forest loss in the high forest zone—resulting in an unbalanced ecosystem with more erosion, heavier rains, longer droughts, and lower crop yields. RA works to conserve Ghana's forest landscape and support agricultural livelihoods of local farmers by providing them with skills and resources necessary to produce cocoa more sustainably and an incentive to manage their shade trees. Properly managed shade trees act as a carbon sink, improve soil conditions, restore tree cover, create a suitable habitat for wildlife, and improve the cocoa yield—resulting in more resilient crops and land, higher incomes for farmers, and greater food security.

Over the last four years, RA has enabled communities to implement climate-smart practices that improve soil conditions, establish 19 tree nurseries, produce 430,000 seedlings (150,000 this year), restore 6 hectares of degraded land, develop GPS technology that monitors tree survival rates and changes in land use/cover, and conduct 36 training classes for 4,000 farmers.

Our 2024 donation will allow RA to expand into new communities in the Bibiani-Anhwiaso-Bekwai district and Sui River area, and to continue to incentivize hardworking farmers, create nurseries, grow and register more trees, conduct more trainings, and transition accountability to local Management Boards, which are responsible for ensuring climate-smart agriculture practices are followed and illegal deforestation is tracked.



**PRODUCED 150,000  
TREE SEEDLINGS**



**ESTABLISHED 19  
TREE NURSERIES**



**RESTORED 6  
HECTARES OF LAND**

*The Rainforest Alliance works with rural communities in over 70 countries to conserve forests and support sustainable livelihoods.*







## 2023 DONATION: \$100,000

**DONATIONS TO DATE: \$400,000**

Our donations allowed the Zeitz Foundation (ZF) to continue implementing its Tree of Life Reforestation Initiative in Laikipia, Kenya, combining women's education and vocational training with reforestation, conservation, and biodiversity. In so doing, ZF offers women an opportunity for independent incomes and financial freedom while regenerating the landscape (with a goal of reforesting over 3 million acacia trees), enhancing soil stabilization and fertility, recapturing water, and ensuring the survival of a biodiverse ecosystem. This initiative follows ZF's sustainable "4C" approach by combining conservation, community, culture, and commerce—a philosophy shared globally through the Long Run network.

ZF has had outstanding results despite an ongoing drought and COVID restrictions slowing down the planting of trees and delaying the launch of their 4C Learning Centre. In the past four years, they have created a nursery; sourced, germinated, and planted over 800,000 acacia seedlings (with the help of over 60 community members); built over 21 km of fencing to protect new forests; purchased 15 acres of land for use in their vocational teaching; sunk a borehole to create new water access; and installed a solar pump, panels, storage tanks, and other plumbing works to generate up to 40,000 liters of water a day for the land, wildlife, and their newly established nursery.

This work is vital, as over the last decade, Kenya has lost much of its forested land and is currently recovering from the worst drought in over 40 years. The effect of this deforestation and drought contributes directly to climate change, degrades the land, and affects not only the biodiversity of plant and animal life but also the well-being of the communities who rely on the land. It's a vicious cycle resulting in more hunger, more destructive agricultural activities (like the expansion of cattle farming), and less stability.

Over the next year, ZF will finish construction of a large dam on the Segera River and create storage capacity of over 600,000 cubic meters to ensure water security in the area, advance plans to reintroduce rhino back to the region (establishing an umbrella species), increase forest cover to safeguard ecosystem restoration, and finalize the designs and curriculum for their new 4C Learning Centre (intended to educate the next generation of conservationists, prevent young adults seeking employment—or education—from leaving the community, and ensure long-lasting impact).



**PLANTED 452,000  
TREE SEEDLINGS**



**BUILT 21 KM OF  
PROTECTIVE FENCING**



**BUILT DAM FOR 600,000  
CUBIC METERS OF WATER**

*The Zeitz Foundation  
develops and  
implements  
ecologically  
responsible projects  
in the Greater Segera  
Region of Kenya.*



# BREAD FOR THE WORLD

**2023 DONATION: \$112,000**

**DONATIONS TO DATE: \$352,000**

Our donation allowed Bread for the World (Bread) to scale up their advocacy efforts and raise awareness in our government of how climate change makes more people hungry which, in turn, makes our world less stable. Climate change is a major contributor to global food insecurity, especially in low-income countries. Extreme weather events such as drought and floods are increasing, affecting food production, and making it harder for those living in poverty to feed their families and provide a nutritious diet.

In 2023, Bread achieved broad support in Congress for climate-smart investments in agriculture and climate adaptation for smallholder farmers with the Global Food Security Act (GFSa). The act, which passed the US House of Representatives in 2022 and was approved by the Senate in 2023, will strengthen the US response to the global food security crisis in 20 target countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Then, in the final days ahead of the passage of the FY23 omnibus package, Bread led outreach to Republican House and Senate leadership on the need to include critical international climate finance in the bill—securing \$500 million in funding for the UN Green Climate Fund and protecting climate finance from major cuts.

Going forward, Bread will educate the incoming Congress on a climate-smart approach to eliminate global hunger and continue to advocate for climate-smart policies that enhance food security, promote sustainability, and expand proven climate-smart technology.



*Bread for the World is an advocacy organization  
working to end hunger at home and abroad.*





# CITIZENS' CLIMATE EDUCATION



**2023 DONATION: \$50,000**

**DONATIONS TO DATE: \$180,000**

Our donations helped Citizens' Climate Education (CCE) strengthen their nationwide coalition of climate advocates, create a powerful counterweight to paid lobbyists advocating for the fossil fuel industry, and educate policymakers and the public about smart solutions to climate change.

CCE believes that the solution to climate change is democracy. With more than 220,000 climate advocates organized into 400 local chapters and representing 91 percent of all US congressional districts, CCE has cultivated one of the strongest grassroots movements working to advance climate legislation in the United States. CCE volunteers are trained to meaningfully engage their elected officials, host public outreach events, and build public support for action to fight climate change.

Over the past year, CCE was active in advancing various climate policies. They recruited 17,000 new supporters, engaged with 1,800 grassroots events, held 880 constituent meetings with Congress, and organized the first post-COVID lobby day in Washington, DC, holding 436 lobby meetings in one day to showcase their constituent power.

Our ongoing donation will help CCE bring Congress together on national climate policies by reaching a wider audience, recruiting new members, expanding their social media presence, and acquiring new endorsements from influential businesses and community leaders. In 2024 they look to continue working on permitting reform, passing the Energy Innovation Act, and ensuring climate-smart policies are included in the 2024 Farm Bill.

*Citizens' Climate Education is an advocacy organization that educates policymakers and the public about smart solutions to climate change.*





## 2023 DONATION: \$100,000

**DONATIONS TO DATE: \$230,000**

Our donations allow the Rainforest Action Network (RAN) to challenge the multinational corporations that use unethically sourced resources and protect the Leuser Ecosystem of Sumatra, Indonesia, from deforestation caused by the illegal expansion of pulpwood and palm oil plantations.

To do this, RAN works with community partners and local authorities to document illegal deforestation, the clearing and burning of peatlands, labor abuses, and other human rights violations. Then, by publishing reports and using high-profile local and international media coverage, RAN focuses public scrutiny on the multinational corporations that benefit from this behavior. RAN's work can be summed up in three campaigns: Stop Deforestation, Defund Climate Change, and Support Communities.

In 2023, RAN co-published their 14th annual Banking on Climate Chaos. They reported that fossil fuel companies made \$4 trillion in profits in 2022 (money used to pay down debt and reward investors with big buybacks and dividends) 60 banks funneled \$673 billion to fossil fuel companies in 2022—bringing the total invested into fossil fuels since the Paris Agreement to \$5.5 trillion—and they debunked the commitments to be net zero of 49 banks.

RAN also continued to make progress in convincing an influential set of brands to adopt and implement cross-commodity no deforestation, no peatland, and no exploitation (NDPE) policies. In their 2023 Keep Forests Standing (KFS) scorecard (which ranks multinational brands and banks as to their success in walking the climate talk), they outlined the many ways multinational brands evade full accountability, while giving their highest grade ever (a “C”) to Unilever. While far from an “A,” the grade recognized that Unilever set a new bar by publishing its detailed policy plan for requiring its suppliers to undergo an independent verification of their deforestation claims and protect human rights defenders (i.e., protesters and inspectors).

Going forward, our donation will help RAN with action and empowerment. Half our donation will be directed towards funding three of their current projects: publicly campaigning for corporations to implement policies to protect forests and human rights; partnering with local governments to document illegal corporate expansion into intact forests and human rights violations; and attempting to stop plantations from encroaching on the 80,000-hectare Rawa Singkil Wildlife Reserve and the 1,750,000 hectares of lowland rainforests that surround it (which are home to the largest density of Sumatran orangutans on the planet as well as breeding populations of the Sumatran rhinoceros, tiger, and elephant). The other half will be used to directly help rural Indigenous communities build the local capacity to defend their land and their rights through RAN's Community Action Grants Program.

***Rainforest Action Network works to preserve forests, protect the climate, and uphold human rights by challenging corporate power and systemic injustice.***







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