Amy Carter-James is small, blue-eyed and blonde, with a friendly smile. She doesn’t look like she could change the lives of thousands of people but, remarkably, she has.

It all started when Amy took a gap year in Africa after she finished university. ‘I spent eight months volunteering in a very poor rural school in Kenya,’ she says. ‘That was the first time I saw poverty, I was so young and so easily inspired and I thought, “Why can’t tourism do the same thing for community development?”’

On her return to England, twenty-two-year-old Amy and her boyfriend Neal decided to take ‘the road less travelled’. They drove across Mozambique, one of the poorest countries in Africa, but it wasn’t exactly a holiday. Mozambique had two qualities which appealed to them: great potential as a travel destination and local people who desperately needed help. Once there, the couple got off the beaten track and headed for Quirimbas National Park, where they found a tiny stretch of white sand close to a village called Guludo.

Life in Guludo was hard: there was little clean water and not enough food. Healthcare was poor and people in the village had a life expectancy of thirty-eight years. Amy and Neal had no qualifications in tourism or healthcare but they had common sense, enthusiasm and determination. They talked to the villagers about their plan to create a small beach resort which would provide employment for people and lift families out of poverty. ‘We took a translator with us,’ says Amy. ‘Their only question was: ‘When can you start?’”
The couple set to work on a beach lodge, building beach huts from local materials and employing people from the surrounding area. Once the lodge was complete, they set up a charitable foundation called NEMA, which received 5% of its revenue. This money was used to create clean water points, fund healthcare projects, build two primary schools and support conservation projects – it helped to improve the lives of thousands of people. ‘We wanted to show the world the power of tourism, that it could be a vehicle for change,’ says Amy.

It isn’t easy to get to Guludo. It’s not a typical package holiday with airport pick-ups and drop-offs. There’s no public transport, either. The nearest city is Pemba and once there, you have to take a helicopter, a boat or go on a three-hour car journey along bumpy roads. But Guludo Lodge is worth the effort. Today the lodge has nine ‘bandas’, or beach huts, with beautiful sea views. There are no overpriced souvenir shops and other tourist traps. It’s the perfect place to take time out, escape the crowds and soak up the sun. Visitors can see the sights – explore Ibo island with a tour guide, go scuba diving or observe African wildlife at the Mogandula Bush Lookout. But the highlight for many is getting to know people in the village, taking part in festivals and learning about NEMA’s work. ‘People who stay with us often come for the diving or the beach,’ says Amy, ‘but it’s the communities that really blow them away.’

People like Amy and Neal believe that the tourist industry can do much good in the world and Guludo Lodge is leading the way, winning many awards for its responsible tourism. Back in the village, people are talking about NEMA. In the local dialect, it’s a word with a special meaning. ‘It’s difficult to explain,’ says Amy, ‘but it means that kind of hope that accompanies the end of suffering.’
NEMA in numbers

2 new primary schools
150 secondary school scholarships
800 primary school meals
8,000 mosquito nets
Clean water for 15,000 people