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Luxury and Philanthropy in Jamaica

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Have you ever planned a fabulous vacation at a posh resort that happens to be on a poor island or in a developing country and then struggled to really enjoy yourself because you feel guilty tucking in to your luxe retreat when surrounded on all sides by such need?

Many traveling moms have shared with me that they won't vacation in poor countries because it can be so uncomfortable. They know that their tourism dollars help, but somehow that's not enough to overcome that feeling in the pit of your stomach that while you are lounging poolside a child just down the road is going hungry.

When I was invited to review the exceedingly swank digs at [Bluefields Bay Villas](#) in Jamaica I didn't know I would also have the chance to give back to the local community. In addition to reviewing the property I was asked if my daughter and I would like to visit the local schools supported by the resort.

We wondered if we could bring anything with us to give the children. As it turns out, they have a list of items the schools need that they provide every guest who is interested. My daughter and I shopped for the Play-Dough, games and dolls we found on their wish list. It was the highlight of our pre-trip planning. We crammed all of our stuff in to one suitcase so we could use the other one for our presents.



This was my daughter's first trip to a struggling country. While Jamaica is leaps and bounds ahead of say Haiti, it's still a world away from her cosseted little bubble. She has always been intrigued by my travels to [Haiti](#), [Rwanda](#) and Honduras. She's asked to

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come along many times and has always loved helping me assemble whatever kits I'm donating at the time. Some years I've done backpacks for the orphans in Honduras and I'm always in the process of sending new mother kits to [Haiti](#). She's never been allowed to experience this philanthropy first hand, taking a child on these kind of trips is not always easy, or in the case of Haiti, advisable. I did take her little brother to [Rwanda](#) for his 10th birthday, it was a life changing trip for him.

Visiting the schools in Jamaica with my daughter was the chance of a lifetime. I think she realized how blessed she is to have access to a first rate education. In many poor countries school might be free, but the uniforms and supplies are not. If your parents can't provide these for you, you can't go to school. Not everyone can go to high school, only those with the highest grades. She was surrounded by children who felt lucky to be in school and thankful for the chance they had. Seeing her really begin to understand the incredible advantage she was given at birth, and the responsibility that comes with it, was a moment I'll never forget.



I'm often asked by readers how they can introduce their kids to the "real world" and to make travel about more than getting a suntan. [Bluefields Bay Villas](#) makes it easy because they support the schools with food, money and supplies. They have a great relationship and any guest is welcome to visit the schools and donate much needed items. It's also very safe, a driver from the resort escorts you and the poverty is not so extreme as to really upset a child. I've been with high school kids on mission trips who have been completely overcome by the desperation that surrounds them.

The next time you travel ask the resort if they support a nearby school, hospital or orphanage. I'm also always happy to have you support my work in Haiti through [Partners in Health](#).