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Donate to those in need, and take a vacation



Photo by: Inspirato/Associated Press

Inspirato shows one of the vacation properties available from Inspired Giving and Inspirato in Los Cabos, Mexico. A new program launched this week gives special vacation deals to those donating to charitable organizations.

By CATHERINE TSAI
Associated Press

DENVER – Denver entrepreneur Ric Harshman had never heard of Inspirato when the destination travel club put its vacations up for bid at a fundraiser for his granddaughters' school.

After looking at pictures of some of the company's properties, "My arm instantly went up," Harshman said. "Truthfully, I figured if it didn't turn out to be what they said, then what the heck. The donation goes to a good cause anyway."

With his winning \$7,000 bid, Harshman booked a vacation through Inspirato for his extended family in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, and was impressed with the welcome they received, the Cadillac Escalades that appeared when they needed a ride, and the deep-sea fishing excursion his concierge coordinated. Today, he's a new Inspirato member.

Inspirato is among companies making sure their charitable efforts give back to the bottom line, too.

Keith Bluford, CEO of ValuedPatron Marketing Services, said many companies quietly support charitable causes. Engaging customers in supporting those causes too, instead of just writing a check to a nonprofit group, can help boost sales and promote a company's values.

"People are passionate about causes. They are more likely to share it with their friends and families. That's what any business owner wants somebody to do," said Bluford, whose company developed a program that allows diners to send donations to food banks from restaurants every time they visit participating establishments. In the "Eat-A-Bite, Give-A-Bit" program, frequent diners "unlock" more restaurant donations to food banks the more times they visit, but they also can get discounts.

"Everybody gets what they need to get out of it," Bluford said.

Denver-based Inspirato LLC typically requires people to pay a \$15,000 initiation fee and an annual membership fee of \$2,500 to get access to the club's properties. Its new Inspired Giving program allows donors who contribute at least \$2,000 to one of 30 selected charitable organizations to buy seven-day vacations at certain properties at member prices. The charitable groups include the Lance Armstrong Foundation and the Global Down Syndrome Foundation.

Inspirato also donates trips that charitable organizations can use for fundraising, and it gives \$2,000 to charity for every new membership resulting from Inspired Giving.

So far, about 20 people have become members since making a donation to try Inspirato, and the club says it has raised about \$750,000 for charitable groups, even before Inspired Giving launched.

"It's a great way to grow our business," said Jackie Benton, Inspired Giving's executive director. "People are going to vacation anyway. What a great way to take some of that money, give back and get this great vacation too."

Michelle Sie Whitten, executive director of the Global Down Syndrome Foundation, said she appreciates that Inspired Giving can help her organization raise money year after year while offering donors something of value.

"In this economy, people want to help, but they also want a good deal," she said. "It's a virtuous cycle of giving that's really quite clever and sustainable."



Photo by:
Benton
