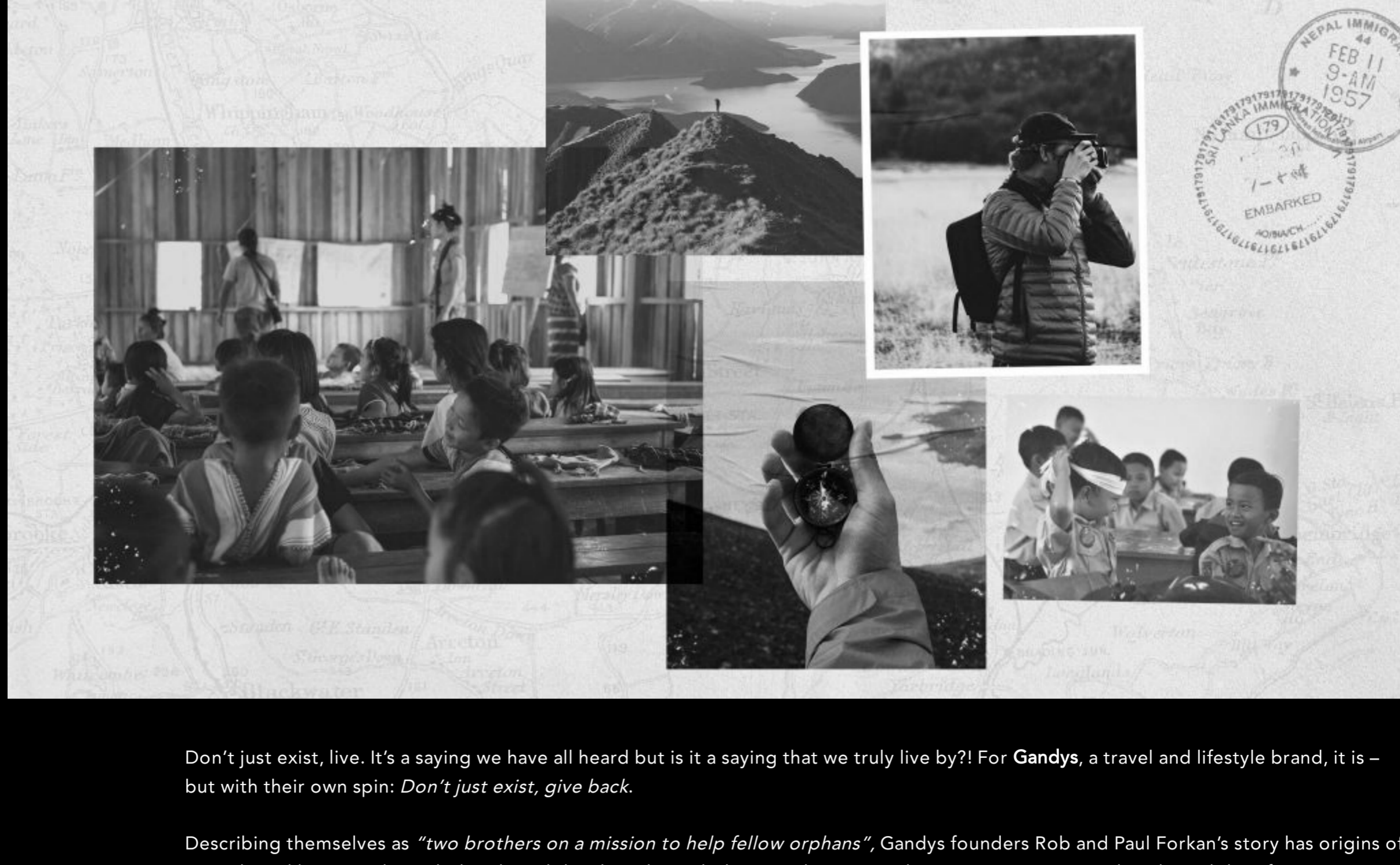


Gandys – A story of vision, transparency and ethics

PICKS | 07 / 10 / 2020 | 5MIN READ



Don't just exist, live. It's a saying we have all heard but is it a saying that we truly live by?! For **Gandys**, a travel and lifestyle brand, it is – but with their own spin: *Don't just exist, give back.*

Describing themselves as *“two brothers on a mission to help fellow orphans”*, Gandys founders Rob and Paul Forkan's story has origins of tragedy and loss, yet through their brand they have brought hope and inspiring change to communities that shaped their formative years.

An inspirational backstory, a visionary company

With a somewhat **unconventional upbringing** that would later be placed at the heart of their brand, Rob and Paul were pulled out of school at 11 and 13 to travel around India for four years with their parents and two younger siblings. During their trip, the whole family volunteered in communities, instilling in the brothers a sense of philanthropy and social responsibility which is reflected in their brand today.

However, during these years of travelling, after an idyllic Christmas in Sri Lanka, tragedy struck the family when both parents died in the devastating 2004 Boxing Day tsunami. With such devastating loss and destruction, the children were faced with **hitchhiking home** to the UK and in the midst of the chaos they boarded the plane with no shoes on their feet, something that would become pivotal to the establishment of Gandys.



Credit: Gandys

The start of Gandys – continuing their parents' legacy

Determined to honour their parents' vision and give back to the people of Sri Lanka who helped them in the aftermath of the tsunami, the brothers founded Gandys in 2012. The brand represented *“giving back, exploring, taking risks and living life to the fullest”*.

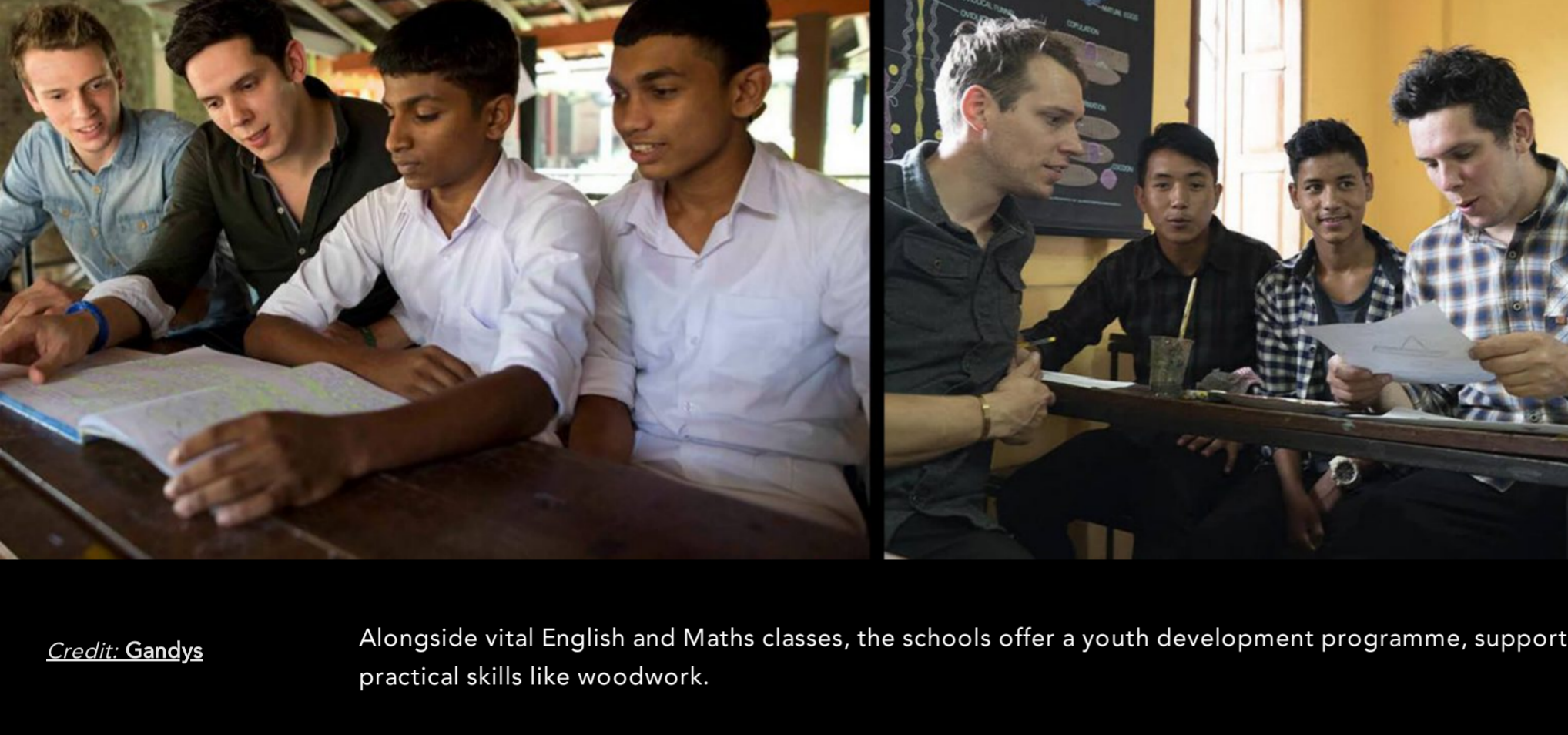
The plan was to design and sell enough flip flops to build a school for impoverished children. However, after accidentally completing their first sale on Facebook, before they knew it, the brothers' flip flops were in **40 stores** by the end of the first year.

The brand's success is of course directly linked to how committed Paul and Rob are to their core values and community projects. They create products with purpose, items the brothers would wear and use themselves that actually answer all your travel needs – *“designed by travellers, for travellers”*. And their authenticity doesn't stop there, it permeates every aspect of the brand and it's crystal clear how much they believe in their own products. After winning a **V&A global fashion award**, they turned up to the black tie ceremony proudly wearing their signature flip flops, despite the frosty November weather!

How Gandys supports children in developing countries

True to their mantra of 'Don't Just Exist... Give Back' the Forkans set up the Orphans for Orphans foundation. 10% of their profits have always been donated directly to this project, which focuses on education, nutrition and medication for children in struggling communities.

As Gandys grew, the brothers remained focused on their goal of building a school and community centre. In 2014 they proudly opened their first **Kids Campus** in Sri Lanka, which was followed by centres in Nepal, Malawi and Brazil.



Credit: Gandys

Alongside vital English and Maths classes, the schools offer a youth development programme, support for parents and workshops in practical skills like woodwork.

On their Kids Campuses, Paul says *“helping as many children as possible and making a difference to their lives is at the heart of everything we do. When we visit a campus and spend time with the children, we're reminded of how they inspire us every day to continue our parents' legacy.”*

The importance of ethics and sustainability

As well as giving back to communities, looking after the planet is also extremely important to the brothers. They believe that what you wear matters. This is why the materials used in their products are all **ethically sourced** – such as the biodegradable rubber used to make their famous flip flops. Their website also clearly states how recyclability and their carbon footprint is considered throughout the entire design process.

The environment that their products are made in and ensuring that they follow ethical and fair labour practices is also extremely important to the brand. To ensure that this is adhered to, they regularly communicate with their suppliers and visit to ensure that legal and ethical requirements are met for all employees.

Always one step ahead in terms of environmental sustainability, when Rob was a guest on **Nobody Panic** podcast he told an anecdote about being laughed out of stockists for being too eco-friendly when they first started. Now flash forward to 2020 and the same shops are enthusiastically selling ethically-produced sandals which really highlights the shift in public mindset towards sustainability, fuelled by movements like Extinction Rebellion and Blue Planet.



Credit: @gandyslondon

Aware that their customer wishes to be mindful of the impact travelling has on the environment, Rob also goes on to say in the podcast how reluctant they are to reissue best selling products without making improvements. Their laser-sharp attention to detail and consistent use of high quality materials means that they hope to make products that are built to last.

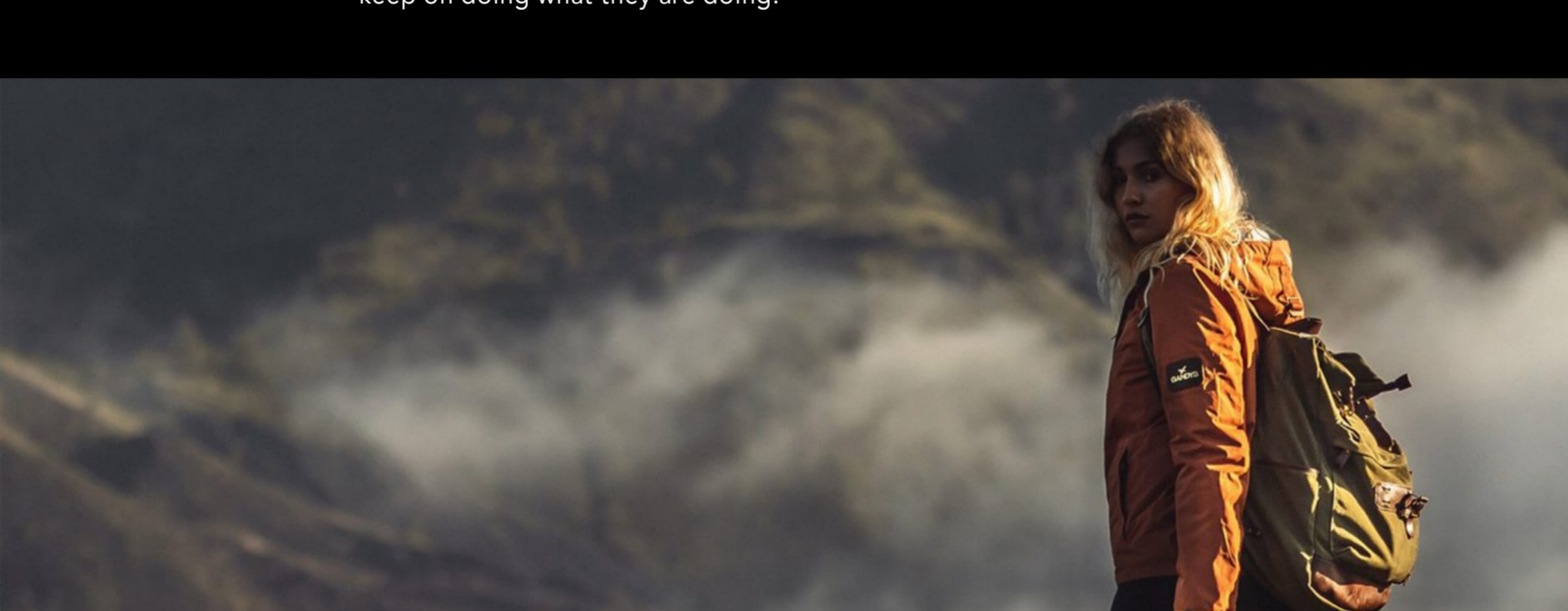
In their latest initiative, Gandys promoted environmental sustainability by giving away branded reusable water bottles with orders above £50. They've also introduced the brand new Basecamp Backpack, made from ten recycled plastic bottles.

However, it should be noted the brand does not yet have a perfect score for sustainability, according to the **Good On You** directory – it scored *Good*, while the highest possible rating is *Great*. Although still a positive rating, we have no doubt that through the brothers' continuous desire to improve and always striving for the best, *Great* may be an accolade they reach in the not too distant future.

Authenticity and brand integrity

Honesty and integrity is at the core of the brand, which is evident in their repeat customers, or should we say Gandys Ambassadors. They recognise that their customers are more than just a customer, they are considered part of the Gandys community and they are just as invested in Gandys products and giving back as Gandys is.

This is why Gandys will always have a responsibility to them. Always remaining honest and authentic in everything they do, designing and making the best possible product and providing the best possible brand experience. After all, it is their customer that allows them to keep on doing what they are doing.



Credit: Gandys

Their *“Designed by travellers, for travellers”* mentality, means that they aren't just making any old product. They are only producing items that they know their customers will need and love and will want to show off to the world (literally). Customers are happy and proud to share their snaps of Gandys products at home and in the wild.

Shunning traditional advertising in favour of influencer marketing and **social media**, Gandys use aspirational imagery on their own platforms yet maintain an inclusive, down to earth tone of voice, aligning with their 'by travellers, for travellers' principles. But don't be fooled, they haven't always had a budget for beautiful marketing campaigns. In the early days, Rob would rope in friends to model gear and he'd take social media photos in the bathtub to get a white background – they really have come a long way!

What's next?

Looking to the future, Gandys has plenty of exciting community projects on the go – even with the uncertain backdrop of a global pandemic! They have begun work on a fifth Kids Campus in Mongolia and introduced coronavirus fundraising efforts in Nepal and Brazil.

By channelling the support of loyal Gandys Ambassadors, the brand is able to continue celebrating their parents' vision and create stunning, ethical products that inspire world travellers. Through their adventures, Gandys' consumers help to address global inequality, so in the company's own words – *“don't just exist – give back.”*

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