

The business of giving

How do you turn a charity fundraiser into a global giving phenomenon?
The Global Gift Gala's Eva Longoria reveals all

Words: Michelle Johnson

The phrase 'fiscal responsibility' is hardly the sexiest of buzzwords, but for Eva Longoria Bastón, it is the single ethos that has turned her charitable endeavour into a modest fundraising empire. While Longoria may be best known for her stylish television roles in *Desperate Housewives* and *Telenovela*, at the heart of this powerful actress, producer and director lies a true entrepreneur, with a conscience. While other Hollywood stars might view philanthropy as a passion project to dip into from time to time, Longoria has turned it into a full-time business with an impact reaching to all four corners of the globe.

When the Latina actress founded the Eva Longoria Foundation in 2012, she aimed to bridge the education gap faced by many Latina adults and children in the US, using her rising celebrity status to create a voice of advocacy. In time, she ended up doing far more, using opportunities beyond the foundation to create education and entrepreneurial opportunities for those less fortunate across the US, Mexico and beyond.

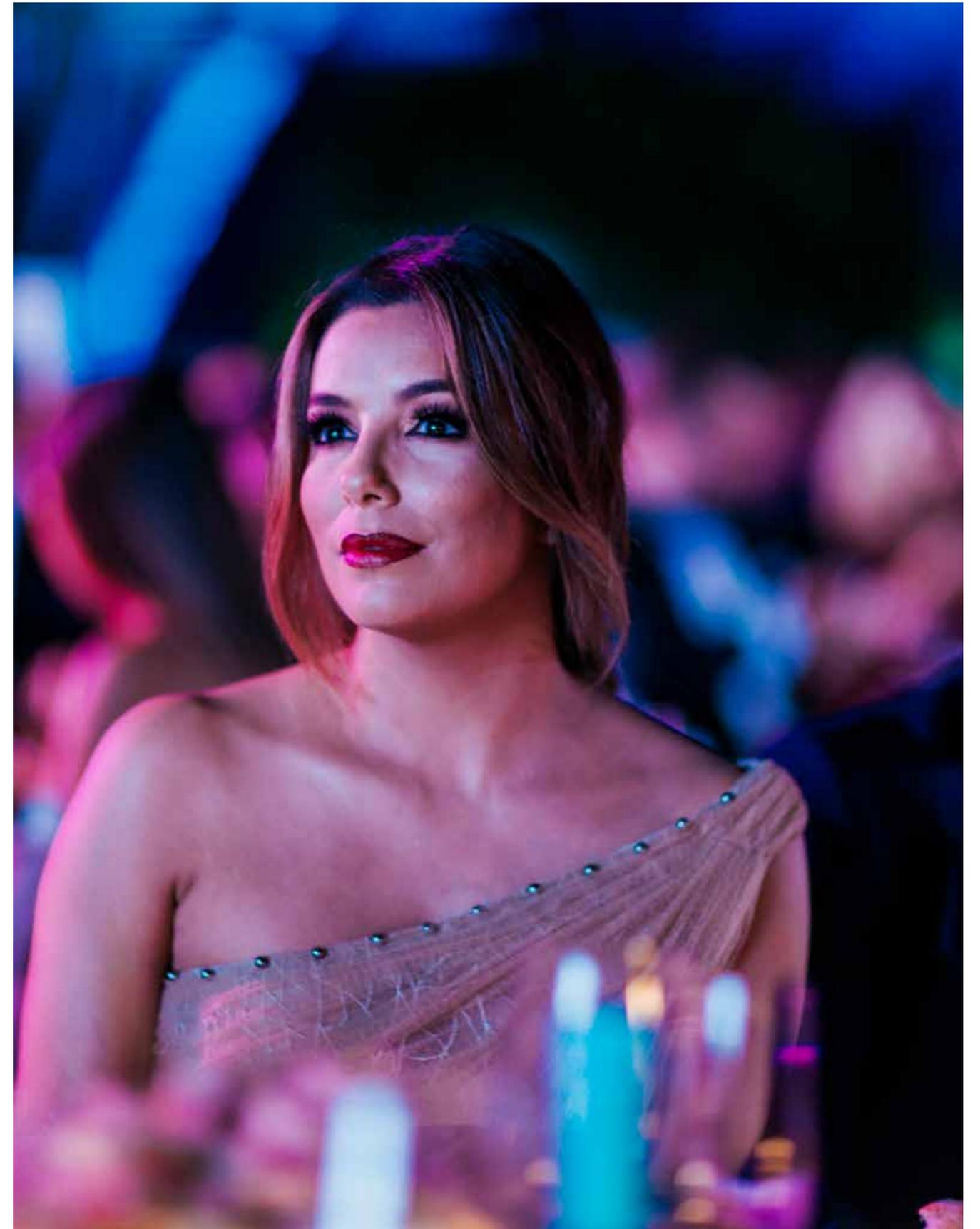
One such endeavour is the Global Gift Gala. Created in partnership with long-time friend and Global Gift Foundation president Maria Bravo, the unique initiative comprises a series of glamorous auction and gala events around the world which produce extraordinary numbers for charities. However, it's not just any gala, as Longoria exclusively tells *Tempus*.

"My foundation has so many programmes in the United States and Mexico," she says. "But all over the world, every country's problems are different. In one country it might be hunger, in another it might be education. We really look hard for fiscally responsible charities, pair them up with companies and celebrities and just connect the dots to ensure that everybody's doing the most good they can do."

And the pace is gruelling. Unlike many of the world's biggest charities, which usually have one major annual fundraising drive, Longoria and Bravo are set to host an astonishing eight Global Gift Galas in 2018, alongside several pop up events in London and Cannes.

Galas in each new city benefit the Global Gift Foundation, the Eva Longoria Foundation, and a local charity that shares a similar ethos or approach – at their record-breaking London 2017 gala that charity was Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital – and each event is treated like the most important event in the calendar.

"The main thing we try to do with the Global Gift Galas is to raise funds for charities all over the world," Longoria says. "We find fiscally responsible charities who have the same ethics that we have, and we want to make sure they have the funding they need to do the good that they're doing. It's so important that we align with like-minded people." »



A global approach

On 24 April 2018, the organisation was the charity partner and beneficiary of a dinner at the Rosewood London that celebrated the centenary of Nelson Mandela's birth, before its organisers jetted off to host the Paris Global Gift Gala at the Four Seasons Hotel George V the next day. Longoria, who is expecting her first child with husband Jose Bastón in May, shows no signs of slowing down and has been deeply involved in the organisation of each event.

"There is a lot involved in any event like this," she says, adding that the most important aspect to making the event pay out to their chosen charities is the sponsoring partners. "We have to ensure our sponsors pay for the actual events, so that our charities can benefit from all the money raised on the night. Every single dollar raised goes to these funds, for these charities. We are so lucky all our partners are so philanthropic and generous – it really means so much to us and the charities we support."

In London, those partners included the Corinthia Hotel, which donated its ballroom, rooms and a three-course meal to the cause, premium vodka brand Beringice, and private jet company JetSmarter, which also donated several holidays as auction prizes.

"And then of course when we have great celebrity friends. They bring the light, they bring the voice and they amplify the message, and that's kind of the secret sauce," she says of supporters including fashion designer Victoria Beckham and singer Ronan Keating. "London is one of our biggest fundraising cities, this is a very generous city, and there are so many generous people here in the UK, who want to get involved and do so much. The charities that we fund here do such amazing work."



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Money on the mind

Longoria says the success of Global Gift Gala – last year alone it raised £1m for charities around the world – is its business model. It's a phrase that comes up throughout conversation with her and partner Bravo, and if it seems like a rare admittance in a philanthropic organisation, it's also refreshingly honest.

"We run it like a business," Bravo tells Tempus. "Everything is paid for before a single guest goes into the Gala, so that 100% of the funds raised can go to the charities. Hotels, such as The Corinthia, offer us rooms and space for the events, our brand partners pay for drinks, and in return we bring brands and celebrities to the gala and that's how we pay them back."

"Because we are raising money for so many different projects that require continued, responsible funding – and because the galas are one after another around the world – you do have to approach it with a business sense," Longoria says. "How do we create a sustainable business model for our beneficiaries to get consistent funding for their programmes? The galas feel like a night of fun and celebration, but behind the scenes it's a lot of hard work – but totally worth it."

Part of their model, explains Longoria, is choosing local organisations. This ensures that the charities they work with have a fuller and more immediate understanding of the issues which need to be tackled, and therefore can create fundable projects that address the needs of their communities.

"We always want to partner with charities that are indigenous to the cities we host the Galas in," she says. "And we like to celebrate the work of charities we feel think like us – we have partnered with mothers2mothers, UN Aids, Place2Be Scotland and the Diana Award. All of these charities concentrate on raising funds and awareness of serious issues for women and children."

Last year, The Global Gift Gala's reach spanned London, Edinburgh, Cannes, Madrid, Marbella, Mallorca, Dubai and Haikou in China, and this year they're looking even further afield.

"This year we are looking at Vietnam as a new destination, and I cannot wait to go as CocoBay are a big supporter of our work. I love all of our Gift Gala cities," says Longoria. [globalgiftgala.com](https://www.globalgiftgala.com)