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Director's Cut: The eternal cycle of hope and hopelessness...and hope



Nature, hopeless, hopeful

The past two weeks have seen two major humanitarian disasters, in Myanmar and China, which have shown once more, two years after Katrina, four after the Tsunami, the fragility of civilisation compared to the forces of nature, which we ignore and abuse at our peril. Could it perhaps be not 'We', but 'They', 'they' who put power & profit above ordinary people and the planet? A big question, as we are all responsible to an extent. The big answer of course is getting active through civil society or politics, rather than complain in front of the TV, on the couch.

Another tragic disaster was last summer's mega-fire in Greece when a forested and agricultural area amounting to 2% of the whole country was destroyed, a result of extreme weather conditions combined with forest neglect and general environmental mismanagement. Earlier this month I toured the area with a [greek Greens](#) delegation. There was hopelessness in the eerily silent burnt forests, but also hope in the villages from the few elderly who have decided to stay. There was hope in the charred but hardened century-old olive trees sprouting new branches. And there was great hope listening to the Mayor of Pyrgos, capital of the worst-hit Ilia prefecture, saying 'we must change the world', and promising to give priority to green solutions for the reconstruction of the local economy.

We must! Fortunately people around the world unite in the face of major disasters, this to some extent explains why humans have evolved and can evolve further. But equally tragic are smaller, every day, silent disasters. Some of these take place in Tourism destinations, with or without its participation. Our annual Awards, that allocate around 10% of our annual Membership revenue, are tiny drops in the global ocean of misery and pollution, but tiny drops can sometimes make a difference in tiny places. This year's theme is "Tourism Without Plastic". We call upon our Members to interpret the theme in a broad way and to submit any project that results in minimising non-locally sourced inputs, in minimising waste, in novel ways of handling plastic, in reusing, reducing, recycling, in benefiting local society. The deadline for receiving completed applications (by email, in text or word format) is Saturday May 31, 2008. All accepted

candidate projects will be simultaneously posted online on Monday June 2, 2008. Winners will then be chosen by democratic vote by Members throughout June, and announced on July 1, the 9th anniversary of ECOCLUB. The total prize, Euros 3,000 (approx. USD 4,700) will be shared, equally, by five winners. The Awards are open to all Individual & Business Members. You may find past winners and projects at <http://www.ecoclub.com/awards.html> , the full terms at:

<http://www.ecoclub.com/awards/08/terms.pdf> and the application form at <http://www.ecoclub.com/awards/08/application.pdf>

Very relevant to our Awards is also the emerging concept of Travellers Philanthropy, and we are therefore supporting as Media Sponsors a major conference on the topic in Tanzania in November 2008. It is organised by our friends at the Center on Ecotourism and Sustainable Development and you will find more details at <http://www.travelersphilanthropyconference.org>

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THE ECOCLUB INTERVIEW

Kelly Bricker

Chair & Executive Director, The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)

"Ecotourism has proven its place in the world, that if done well and with principles in place, it is one of many solutions to biodiversity conservation and wise use of resources around the globe."



Dr. Kelly S. Bricker completed her Ph.D. research with The Pennsylvania State University in 1998, where she specialized in sustainable tourism development. She has special research interest in sustainable tourism, natural resource management, outdoor recreation, and community and heritage tourism development, ecotourism, sense of place and incentive travel programs. Dr. Bricker has worked all over the world, employed as guide, tourism manager, wilderness instructor, scuba and sailing instructor, professor, and researcher. With her husband Nathan, she started an ecotourism company called Rivers Fiji in the rural highlands of Fiji, which is now protected Fiji's first RAMSAR Wetland of Importance. She has taught at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, West Virginia University, Sacramento State University and Cal Poly Universities in California. She is a part-time Senior Scientist in recreation with Devine Tarbell & Associates, an environmental management company focused on alternative energy resources. She continues to conduct research on the social, cultural, and environmental impacts of tourism development in Fiji and the US. Kelly serves as Associate Professor at the University of Utah in the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism.

Dr. Bricker has been a Board Member of The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) since 2000, and currently serves as Chair and Interim Executive Director. Founded in 1990 in Vermont and now based in Washington DC, TIES is the oldest international

ecotourism organisation with members in over 90 countries. As a non-profit, non-governmental and multi-stakeholder association, TIES provides guidelines and standards, training, technical assistance, research and publications to foster sound ecotourism development and to make tourism a viable tool for conservation, poverty alleviation, protection of culture and biodiversity, sustainable development and educational, as well as enjoyable. In May 2007 TIES organised with great success the Global Ecotourism Conference in Oslo, Norway.

The Interview follows:

ECOCLUB.com: How and when did you discover Ecotourism as a philosophy and practice?

Kelly Bricker: My husband and I travelled extensively for an adventure travel company back in the late 80's and up through 1994. During this time, we would see areas once pristine and natural deteriorate – in a relatively short period of time. About the time that TIES started, I realized there are alternatives ways to develop and operate tourism products—and as a result, decided to dedicate my PHD focus on ecotourism and sustainable approaches to tourism development. I also attended one of the first board meetings TIES held in the early 1990's and was thrilled that there was an organization addressing these issues.

ECOCLUB.com: Five issues that have sparked debate in ecotourism circles in recent years, are certification (feasible?), carbon-offsetting (necessary?), hunting (acceptable?), luxury (compatible?) and caring for human rights vs. leaving no footprints - not disturbing the status quo. Where do you personally stand on these issues?

Kelly Bricker: Certification-with the growing number of successful certification programs around the globe in a range of sectors (i.e., coffee, lumber, home products, and tourism), yes, I believe it is feasible. I am continually impressed with those programs that have led the way, and continuously improve their systems.

Carbon offsetting - this is but one strategy to work to achieve a change in the current status of our world. I think we simply have to remember to utilize this as part of developing a portfolio of actions, including behavioural change on all our part! We also

have to consider where and what type of offsetting is occurring. Like many strategies we are reviewing to address the climate change issues, it is a start, an action, and something to consider in the mix.

Hunting - Hunting is an activity that is laden with considerations from a range of perspectives. Whether I believe it is "acceptable" (your term) or not, is not relevant. What I believe is relevant is that we must address sustainable practices in everything we do, not just ecotourism. I believe principles that support ecotourism are and will continue to shape how we conduct ourselves on our planet.

Luxury - I think luxury in ecotourism certainly has a place. As with all product offerings, ecotourism businesses do well to offer a range of opportunities to engage in ecotourism at all market levels—luxury being no exception as long as we adopt all principles supporting ecotourism.

Human rights? - as part of our responsibility to being good citizens on this planet, we must engage in practices that embrace the rights of every human. We must promote best practices in all of our work. It is my belief that we embrace and respect all living things—humans are not separate from the rest of the ecosystem and must be treated fairly and with dignity and respect. I am not sure why this would be debated—it seems like a natural process and the way we should be doing business and running governments.

 **ECOCLUB.com: There are many definitions for Ecotourism, but rather fewer for Ecotourists. Who is entitled to be called an Ecotourist? All nature tourists, or tourists (nature or urban) who follow certain guidelines / rules both in their travels and everyday life?**

Kelly Bricker: I think what we promote at TIES and as individuals is simple, Ecotourists are those people who support nature-based tourism products and services that follow the principles to which the concept is aligned—including, contribute to conservation biodiversity, respect and support the well-being of local people, support local economies, involve nature and culture interpretation of the places visited, and involve ecologically sustainable practices. We hope that over time, people will learn how to move what they see in practice into their own lives, and will assimilate best practices into their every day life, and educate those around them.

 **ECOCLUB.com: TIES in recent years has been increasingly organising major events with great success. The usual criticism against any event in Tourism or other sector, particularly from those who have not been invited...are that they are not representative, are not green, and that little takes place apart from networking and rubber-stamping existing decisions. How is TIES addressing these concerns for its own ecotourism events, and what fundamental principles should any Ecotourism Event meet to do justice to its title?**

Kelly Bricker: All public events TIES organizes, including conferences, workshops, forums, and fund raisers are open to all. As you can see in our organizational mission statement, we have an obligation "to promote responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well being of local people by: Creating an international network of individuals, institutions, and the tourism industry; Educating tourists and travel professionals; and influencing the tourism industry and governments to integrate the principles of ecotourism into their operations and policies." Our events serve not only to disseminate up-to-date information about ecotourism and provide networking opportunities, but also to effectively engage various stakeholders in discussions around critical issues in ecotourism and sustainable tourism.

With respect to greening our events, since our first North American Conference in Bar Harbor, we have implemented responsible strategies to help minimize our impact. For instance, for all our past events, we have partnered with appropriate carbon offsetting programs to both offset the carbon emissions produced by the events, and to educate the participants about reducing their carbon footprint.

The following are some examples of the steps we have taken to green our events: - Select event venues that are eco-certified and/or have strong environmental profiles. - Utilize organic and locally produced food and drinks wherever possible. - Utilize recycled or reusable materials (e.g. conference bags, badges, paper) wherever possible. - Utilize public transportation whenever possible and encourage participants to use public transportation or car pool.

 **ECOCLUB.com: In many associations there is a conundrum: what criteria if any Members must satisfy to be accepted, and through which democratic process, Members can change these criteria. What is the current TIES approach, and your view on this matter?**

Kelly Bricker: At present, TIES asks all members to support and implement the following Code of Conduct: "We agree that ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people, and further agree that we will undertake to adhere to the principles of ecotourism as outlined below: Minimize impact. - Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect. - Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts. - Provide direct financial benefits for conservation. - Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people. - Raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climate."

We welcome all members that believe their practices are in line with these principles, and hope that we can reach beyond simply "preaching to the choir". We cannot ensure this 100%, but we also hope that by supporting TIES and being active members of TIES' network, they are learning new and better ways to instil best practices, support conservation, and increase the benefits to local communities.

We also believe best practices will change as we all change over time along with changes in our understanding of sustainability, changes in technology, changes in better and more efficient processes to achieve the sustainability goals we set for ourselves each day. We believe, and others have shown, that the bar set today will be different in the future—and hopefully this will be a very good thing.

 **ECOCLUB.com: What is your own view and experience with direct democracy in decision-making? Would it be practical for TIES to hold online Member votes on key issues, or is representative democracy (board decides) the way forward?**

Kelly Bricker: As a membership organization, we are here to provide a service to our members. We listen and make changes in what we do for our members, how we do things, based on feedback and on-going dialogue with those who support us. The Board is primarily there to ensure we stay on track with our mission, financial oversight, and helping TIES move forward in all its programs and membership supported activities—finding resources and bringing global awareness to issues we all face in ecotourism and sustainable development practices and policies.

We encourage members to contact us on issues they are finding important in their daily lives—we have such a range of members, from NGOs, government, private business, corporations, that often we help bring issues people experience to the forefront. We seek to help facilitate debates, problem solving, and solutions to those ideas brought forward, and to provide information important to all, and we will continue to do so through advocacy campaigns (i.e., global climate change), conferences, forums, educational certificates—so people can participate in a wide range of dialogue, discussion, and critical thinking on issues identified.

 **ECOCLUB.com: Should there be an increased role for the growing number of national ecotourism societies - assumed that they do democratically represent a nation rather than private interests - in the framework of TIES?**

Kelly Bricker: TIES acknowledges that national and regional ecotourism associations play a critical role in providing the vital links between governments, NGOs, businesses and citizens, and thus effectively promoting ecotourism and sustainable travel worldwide. We look forward to increased partnerships with associations from around the world. We have been active in working with a number of associations and support their efforts through speaking engagements, workshops, and marketing their efforts on our web site and through other channels within their region. We believe, and many of our partners have agreed, that TIES can serve as an umbrella organization to bring together ideas from around the globe, link associations to share challenges, solutions, and knowledge. It is a very exciting time in this way.

 **ECOCLUB.com: A few years ago, TIES felt the need to pass regulations so as to avoid conflicts of interest with its own Members when bidding for consultancy projects. What prompted this, and what is your personal assessment of the level of transparency for major ecotourism-related consultancy projects.**

Kelly Bricker: Through our membership, people contact us with projects they need assistance on—we in turn assist our members by posting their information and expertise in various ways. We simply did not have anything in place to explain our process and thus found it necessary to promote this as a genuine benefit of being a member of TIES. We are a natural for bringing folks together to help each other with projects.

 **ECOCLUB.com: From your data and personal experience, is Ecotourism becoming more or less popular as an academic discipline among students and Universities in the United States? Are young Ecotourism graduates in demand, and from what sort of employers?**

Kelly Bricker: Thanks for raising this question. A few years ago, I noticed that many of my academic colleagues were seeing an increased interest by their students in Ecotourism, and, as a tourism operator as well, I know many of us were always searching for good students interested in Ecotourism—but there appeared to be a disconnect in bridging the two worlds. Together with a consortium of partner universities, TIES has established the TIES University Consortium Field Certificate (UCFC) program, which we believe is helping to address this issue.

The goal of the UCFC is to work collaboratively with university programs/departments, to administer an ecotourism certificate of study applicable to a range of academic disciplines and degree programs and professionals who desire a holistic understanding of ecotourism and sustainable tourism development. The UCFC assists individual university and extension programs in the provision of a concentration of study in ecotourism, and in connecting these students with the sustainable tourism industry. The certificate is designed to enable students and participants to undergo a focused concentration within their

major or professional position on international issues in ecotourism and sustainable tourism development and acquire a unique pedagogical opportunity in experiential, service, and theoretical learning.

The UCFC incorporates the following into a comprehensive study plan: a) at least one international course provided through a university consortium member; b) on-campus course work; c) engagement in at least one internationally focused seminar through TIES (e.g., web-based or onsite, Eco-certification, Community Development, Sustainable Development Law); and, d) an internship focused on some aspect of ecotourism/sustainable tourism development consisting of 400 hours. The blend of unique learning opportunities and academic and professional disciplines will provide students with holistic experiences, international perspectives, and service learning encounters in ecotourism.

We have seen growing interest from both universities and students in this innovative program, and we hope to connect more students and professionals through the program to meet the growing interest and needs.

 **ECOCLUB.com: Do you agree that sometimes Ecotourism gets bad press, unfair reviews from uninformed journalists, and over-pedantic scholars who tend to blame all the evils of Tourism on a concept and a movement that actually wants to improve Tourism? And if so, what measures should TIES and its Members take?**

Kelly Bricker: I think we live in a society of free thinkers and critics, and as such will always be open to criticism in one form or another. I believe we have to pay some attention to this critique, as it challenges us to do a better job in communication, clarifying principles, and creating a place for open dialogue. We must continue to move forward and not get too hung up on what people criticize. We need to continue to strive for excellence in our products, correct mistakes of the past, and look forward to doing things better in the future. I think critics keep us on our toes and help us understand the range of perspectives out there. It is important for us to simply listen, learn, and as corny as it may sound, continue the good fight the best we can with the resources we have.

 **ECOCLUB.com: What will be the priorities of your tenure as Executive Director of TIES in terms of the role and organisation of TIES? And what mark do you want to leave on Ecotourism worldwide?**

Kelly Bricker: My priorities are focused on building our network of ecotourism associations; strengthening our programs such as UCFC; finding new and exciting ways to serve our membership in the best way possible; further developing our Board of Directors representative of ecotourism worldwide; and enabling our dedicated and dynamic staff to the fullest extent, so that they can best serve our membership and ecotourism; and finding ways to increase the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of our organization as a whole.

I think we all hope that when we leave, some place, community, or person, is a little bit better off because of efforts we achieved together and ideas we implemented to make things work in a sustainable way. For TIES, I desire a future where our role changes due to the world-wide adoption of ecotourism and sustainable tourism principles into practice. We will continue to face global challenges due to political unrest, increasing populations, and challenges to biodiversity conservation - Ecotourism has proven its place in the world, that if done well and with principles in place, it is one of many solutions to biodiversity conservation and wise use of resources around the globe.

 **ECOCLUB.com: Finally, it is election year in the United States, the world's major power, and there is a prospect that the new administration will be more enthusiastic about environmental issues. It is customary that major environmental NGOs question and rate candidates before elections. Should TIES perhaps also ask candidates where they stand vis a vis Ecotourism? Or do you believe that TIES should stay away from politics altogether?**

Kelly Bricker: TIES is a relatively small NGO with a very clear and direct focus on ecotourism and sustainable strategies. I am not sure it is necessarily our role to evaluate or rate the presidential candidates — I would rather see us focus on our Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism Conference in Vancouver, B.C. October 27-29, and many other exciting initiatives we are engaged in! We have a lot work to do to make these the best yet—so it would be my vote to focus our efforts on building the ecotourism community, with of course all candidates invited to participate!

 **ECOCLUB.com: Thank you very much!**



THE ECOCLUB INTERVIEW

Babu Varghese
Director, Tourindia

“The natural environment and the multicultural social environment coupled with a progressive political environment and an enterprising people are responsible for making Kerala a unique destination”



Babu Varghese was born in Kerala, India in 1951. He obtained an M.Sc in Zoology and an M.Phil in Behavioural Science from the University of Kerala. In 1972, when Tourism was a still a minor sector with only a few hotels in Kerala, he saw far ahead: together with two more 'educated & unemployed' students, they set up a 'tourist guidance' office and Tourindia was born.

Within just ten years Tourindia had become a leading tour operator with a young and committed team, who looked upon tourism not only as an economic activity but as a 'challenge to do the impossible'. Thanks to the constant interaction with travellers as a guide, Babu understood that visitors wanted to get a glimpse of the real Kerala, and thus looked into the possibility of converting authentic Kettuvallam cargo boats, which were then being phased out from the backwaters displaced by roads & trucks, into tourist boats. After many trials and errors, so that the boats could be made both viable and environmentally-friendly, the first Kettuvallam cruises in the backwaters of Kerala were launched in 1991 and promoted by Tourindia in trade shows all over the world. It was a runaway success, to the point that the 'house-boats' are now iconic, and central to the Kerala 'tourism brand'. Today over 500 boats allow tourists take in the unique Kerala Backwaters experience, directly employing over 2,000, and thousands more in repairing, maintaining and support roles.

Since the early 1990s, in cooperation with the Kerala Department of Tourism, Tourindia provided support, including travel & research to travel writers and television teams from major stations visiting Kerala and thus became instrumental in promoting Kerala to the world in the 1990s. Another great inspiration came in 1996, when Babu spotted two huge ficus trees suitable for supporting tree-houses at the top, and the Green Magic Resort in Wayanad was born. By 2002, when he deservedly represented his region at the 1st World Ecotourism Summit in Quebec, GMR was a multi-award winning resort. However, it was built on leased land and the lease would not be renewed...Undeterred, in 2007, Babu Varghese and the Tourindia Team went on to create Green Magic Nature Resort II in Kalladi, with 3 tree-houses, 4 eco-lodges and a cave house, this time in 30 acres of their own land. GMR II improves on the original, by also applying the ecological principles of reducing, reusing and recycling, featuring renewable energy - solar, bio gas and hydroelectric - and it is currently one of the hottest ecotourism projects in India. Beyond his award-winning work in Tourism, Babu Varghese is also involved in various development programmes empowering local community members.

The Interview follows:

ECOCLUB.com: You are one of the pioneers of Ecotourism in India, and represented your region at the 1st World Ecotourism Summit in Quebec in May 2002. What is your evaluation of the progress of Ecotourism worldwide, in India, and in Kerala ever since?

Babu Varghese: Ecotourism all over the world has become the keyword used and misused for the vested interest to see a destination. Eco washing is becoming more damaging to those who practice the principles of ecotourism. Fortunately the movement among the actual and serious ecotourism practicing properties are coming under an umbrella to weed out the pseudo resorts is one of the pleasant changes I have noticed. So many voluntary organization has been formed to assist these genuine ecotourism practitioners.

In India especially in Kerala, we have been worshipping rivers, mountains, trees from time immemorial as part of our religion and culture. The Banyan trees where sages would always find shelter and a local administrative unit called Panchayat are examples. The river Ganges is worshipped as mother nature. The natural resources are respected and used with reservation - Reduce, Reuse, Recycle - the basic principles of ecotourism are practiced from the origin of the land itself.

In Kerala the sacred snake groves called 'Kavu' adjacent to living quarters is a classic example of how we practiced balance of nature. A place is left alone with a pond, a lot of trees creepers, shrubs are allowed to grow without any interferences of agriculturalist. An ecosystem with a water body, plant, animals, snakes, rats, frogs, birds, butterflies are allowed to live without any kind of disturbances from humans. Snakes are revered as symbol of fertility and prosperity at many places they are worshipped and feed regularly. The honey hunting tribals knew how to protect the gene pool of honeybees without the basic knowledge of genetics. Agriculturalists always kept the stock of seeds for the next season before the era of terminator seeds. Keeping drinking water clean and without pollution and saving it for the next generation are clear cut example of how we do water harvesting even where the modern technologies have failed to learn lesson from them.

In Kerala, Mother Nature has been too benevolent to bless us with misty mountains, gurgling rivers, golden beaches, cool lagoons and the blue seas. The swaying coconut palms in the coastal region and the green network of backwater canals are examples. The people of Kerala are the most literate of all other Indian states. Our rulers in ancient time were quite different from the other ruler of India. They were great connoisseur of art, literature, painting etc... In stead of hunting animals and birds they were lovers of nature. Planted shading trees along the sides of the roads, created wildlife sanctuaries and even started hospitals for animal about 400 years ago. The permission of the trees are obtained before cutting down any tree in olden times as part of tradition. Thus Kerala became nature blessed area from very olden times. Planting trees were routine after the cremation of the dead bodies, a coconut tree is planted at the site. The state government has started a project – My Tree. All the children in the school will plant and nurture a tree which has caught up and now extended to colleges.

The forest cover in Kerala has shown considerable signs of improvement after 50 years. The conservation measure of forest department aided by the UNDP, The Periyar Tiger Trail has become very popular among the very serious ecotourists.

 **ECOCLUB.com: Kerala is recognised as the most successful Indian state, in terms of attracting international Tourism, and touted as a leading Ecotourism destination. Is this mainly due to the attractive & varied & unusual natural environment, the colourful and multicultural social environment, or its 'progressive' political environment?**

Babu Varghese: The most important reason for Kerala being the most popular is the blessings from mother nature for a variety vacation land. The second important reason is the social environment. Unlike other states, we are the most literate and political awareness and social commitment are greater. Our independent nature is because we have never been ruled by any forces. At the time of the British occupation also, we had our own kings ruling us.

The colourful multi-cultural social environment is another reason for Kerala to become the favourite of visitors from India and abroad. The Jews were persecuted and driven out even from their 'promised land'. In Kerala at Cochin, the local King allowed them to build a synagogue right next to the palace and gave them power to collect taxes. This synagogue is still one of the best-kept synagogues in the British commonwealth. Islam spread in other parts of the world with the flaming sword. But in Kerala, Islam came through the silken sails of Arab traders. The local king went to Mecca and embraced Islam. The first mosque in Kerala is a temple converted for the same at the time of the prophet. The Hindu, Muslim, Christian and the Jew live in close harmony. There are many example of Hindu temple and Muslim mosque sharing a common wall, sharing water for the prayers and oil for lighting the lamp, while the members of opposite religions are not even allowed to walk in front of mosques or temples in Northern India.

The progressive political environment is the last reason. Kerala is the first democratically-elected communist ministry in the world, where land ceiling, minimum wages for the workers were implemented for the first time in India. The temple entry proclamation were effected, whereby the low-caste members of the Hindus are equally allowed inside the temple. A good level of education, modern leadership and entrepreneurship among the people are the greatest advantages of Kerala. Thus the combination of all these diverse forces, the natural environment and the multicultural social environment coupled with a progressive political environment and an enterprising people are responsible for making Kerala a unique destination attracting domestic and international visitors.

 **ECOCLUB.com: Today, every other company claims that they are doing their best to minimise their environmental impact (e.g. 'we recycle') and maximise the social benefits of their tours and facilities (e.g. 'we employ local people'). How can a genuine company such as Tourindia stand out as award-winning material?**

Babu Varghese: Tourindia, the originators of Kettuvallam Houseboats were practicing environmental friendly methods, where ever possible, renewable energy is always used for minimum purpose. Solar panels are used in trapping solar energy and stored in batteries to provide energy for the C. F. lamps and the fans. A specially designed bio-toilette is used for solid waste disposal. A beneficial bacteria is grown in the Water Closet 12 hrs before the use with a catalyst actizyme imported from New Zealand, the multiplied bacteria consume the human faecal materials to non-toxic by products. Hence the backwater canal system is not allowed to be polluted. The other solid wastes are taken to the mainland for disposal. All our boats are not air-conditioned. We do not use generators that pollute the atmosphere as well as produce noise.

In our boats, the previous owner of the boat is always employed. Our purpose of bringing back the Kettuvallam is also to rehabilitate them. In the operations only local men are employed. Our office only does the marketing to attract visitors. The cooks are local men trained by us and the guides are local youngsters whom we have given extensive training in guest handling.

In our Green Magic Nature Resort II, the energy source is only renewable, solar panels, biogas and hydro-electrical power which we generate at our resort from the water brought from uphill by high density pipes, which through a jet turns the turbine and the dynamo to make electricity which is stored in batteries. The natural resources are used with extreme care.

1. We support community development programme from the revenue of the resort. 2. We are undertaking the expenses for educating tribal students who are unable to support themselves. 3. We are in the process of starting a day clinic for the local community member at our base-camp for small ailments and health awareness. Medical camps were conducted, where free medical checkups are done with the help of local doctors.

 **ECOCLUB.com: So, what share of tourists actually choose your tours - and other Kerala ecotours - because of their eco & social elements, as opposed to other features such as novelty or price?**

Babu Varghese: We are happy to note that more than 50% of our customers choose our tours because of our social commitment, our rehabilitation projects and for empowering the local community members. By our Kettuvallam project, we shared our knowledge and expertise with any interested local men. We have prompted many of our own previous staff to become proud owners of Houseboat, which we use for our clients. Our prices are always on higher side due to our operational costs in order to maintain our high standard of services. Even now after many years many magazines article have recommended our services for an authentic backwater experience.

 **ECOCLUB.com: The Indian Ecotourism Society was recently launched. What pitfalls do you believe it should avoid, and what obstacles should it overcome, so as to be able to effectively promote the philosophy and practice of Ecotourism in India?**

Babu Varghese: Unfortunately in India political interest, wire pulling and manipulation are common. The ecotourism society has been formed without the involvement of people who have actually promoted the philosophy of ecotourism to the core. We do not see much scope for it with the present setup. Personal interest or boosting vested interests will not last the test of time.

 **ECOCLUB.com: Some believe that in India and other countries which are key to world stability, environmental conservation needs to take a back-seat in the face of more-pressing problems such as extreme poverty and inequality, which can only be solved by massive and rapid development, in all sectors including tourism. Can small scale tourism projects involving local communities be a realistic proposition as the mainstay of tourism development, or should the government and private sector think in terms of a compromise, such as 'green' mega-resorts?**

Babu Varghese: Tourism is one way of transferring money from the rich to the poor and needy. The high expendable amount of money once used is the best possible way without damaging the nature but at same time conserving it should be promoted especially in a developing nation like India.

It is wrong to think that more problems like poverty eradication, inequality can be solved with massive projects. Poverty eradication can be achieved by community development programmes with responsible tourism practices. Small-scale tourism projects involving the local community are always the building blocks of tourism. Large-volume movements of tourists is not ideal for Kerala, where the infrastructure is minimal. Mass movement will always upset the delicate balance of nature.

 **ECOCLUB.com: Domestic tourism is already huge in India and it is very likely that with the increasing prosperity of its middle-class, India will soon become a huge outbound tourism market. What percentage of Indian travellers are environmentally-aware in your view, and how can tour operators increase that awareness?**

Babu Varghese: In Kerala, the domestic market is very big. It is producing more revenue than the international tourism. Upper-middle-class people are much aware of responsible tourism especially the younger generation. They are becoming a bigger section in the last few years. Better living conditions as well as more expendable money with the young people especially in the IT sector, more occasionally visit nature resorts with limited down to earth facilities than of the high end of the market. The tour operators should prepare attractive packages enabling the visitors to experience nature without any frills.

 **ECOCLUB.com: Do you feel there is a need for Ecotourism certification in India? And if so, should it be administered by the federal tourism ministry, by state governments, NGOs, the private sector or associations such as the Ecotourism Society of India?**

Babu Varghese: Ecotourism certification is ideal for a smooth operation. Self-regulation is more preferable than policing the operators, stakeholders should wholeheartedly follow the philosophy & practice of ecotourism. We believe that state government is competent enough for the certification rather than the new-born Ecotourism Society of India.

 **ECOCLUB.com: Are working conditions in Indian Tourism significantly different (better or worse) than that those in other sectors? And what measures, if any, should be taken to improve them?**

Babu Varghese: The Indian tourism sector like all other tourism sector in the world is controlled, manipulated by a couple of vested interests. The private sector, hotel industry is quite powerful in India. The condition of the state level tourism department is equally pathetic. Even if the department of tourism is closed down, nothing will happen to the tourism industry in Kerala. Only a few advertising agencies, who monopolize the media advertisement and a few file pushers in the bureaucracy will be affected.

I am the living example of survival without the puny little pennies from the Department of Tourism for the last 36 years. We have even refused to accept the 20% subsidy allowed by the government for our 12 Houseboats. The Department of Tourism is totally incompetent to guide the professionals in the tourism. The private sector entrepreneurs like me has more experience, expertise than the ever-changing bureaucrats, who heads the Department of Tourism.

Possible improvement measures are many:

1. Incorporate more tourism professionals into the department.
2. Outsourcing is another way to improve efficiency
3. Constitution of a Tourism board with like-minded professionals
4. Technocrats at the decision making levels rather than file-pushing bureaucrats

 **ECOCLUB.com: Finally, if the prime minister had your full attention, and promised to fix 1 key problem in Indian Tourism, what would you propose?**

Babu Varghese: Abolish the Department of Tourism and the Minister for Tourism!
The United States is an example of a country without tourism minister and where there is tourism progress every day.

 **ECOCLUB: Thank you very much.**

ECO RESEARCH

CULTURALLY SENSITIVE ECOTOURISM: A SUSTAINABLE IMPERATIVE? A Research Update from Ottawa, Canada

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Summary

This paper presents the preliminary results of a three-round survey exercise. The research involves the collection of international ecotourism expertise on the importance of cultural sensitivity, its definition, and its variables, for ecotourism. This research is informed by both professionals and academics who call for a greater emphasis on the value of culture and the importance of cultural sensitivity for the achievement of sustainable development through ecotourism. In essence, it is a response to a call for definitions and measures that will assist ecotourism professionals, researchers, policy-makers, and participants ensure that culture is not compromised at any time during the planning and management of ecotourism. Preliminary results indicate that considerable vagueness and confusion exists regarding what cultural sensitivity is, is not, and should be in the context of ecotourism. Subsequent survey rounds are to provide additional insight.

Introduction

Since the 1980's, there has been growing recognition and acceptance of the sustainable development imperative. Popularly introduced in the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development Brundtland Report, sustainable development is defined as "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". The concept demands that a balance be achieved between economic, social and environmental needs and limitations. These three elements have become widely known as the *pillars of sustainability*. In recent years, there has been a significant discourse related to the need for a fourth pillar – culture. In terms of global development, the import of culture has been accelerated on the basis of the growing value of cultural assets (goods, services, experiences, etc.) in economic exchange systems, as well as the growing threats to cultural diversity and heritage associated with globalization. And the importance of culture, its protection and celebration, its import for human rights, and its vital role in sustainable development processes, is formally recognized in keystone policies and statements such as the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (2005), the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (reconfirmed in 1998), and the UNESCO Universal Declaration on

Cultural Diversity (2001). This 'fourth pillar' is proposed on the basis that sustainable development is achievable only when there is balance between the objectives of cultural diversity and those of environmental responsibility, economic viability, and social equity (Nurse, 2006).

The sustainable development concept has had significant impacts on tourism, both in the ways in which we think about the relationship between tourism and social, cultural, economic, and natural environments, but also how we manage those relationships. The view that has emerged from this introspection is that sustainable development represents both a considerable challenge and a vital imperative for tourism. Ecotourism, a unique tourism-type that champions environmental conservation and education, is well-aligned with the principles of sustainable development (Donohoe and Needham, 2007, 2008). Because it assumes an ethics-based approach to tourism management and it is naturally aligned with sustainable development, ecotourism is perhaps more than any other tourism type, best positioned to achieve sustainability. Although the principles of sustainable development have been formally and informally adopted by the ecotourism community, in sharp contrast, there is considerable disagreement about whether sustainable development is actually being achieved. Concerns are related to a lack of consensus or universal definition for ecotourism, the absence of operational guidelines, and widespread misrepresentation or 'greenwashing' by so-called ecotourism providers. In the last decade or so, these concerns have been linked with the fourth pillar of sustainability – culture, and by extension the import of culture to ecotourism and the contribution ecotourism has to make to cultural preservation. Cooper and Vargas (2004: 56) identify a failure to consider culture or the absence of "cultural sensitivity" as the "two-edged sword of ecotourism". They argue that attracting tourists into environmental and cultural contexts, many of which are sensitive to a scale of activity and experiential expectations that they are not equipped to manage, can damage both the host environment and culture whilst compromising progress towards sustainable development. Their concerns are not unique. Individuals and organizations involved in the management of the ecotourism industry, both academics and professionals, argue that in adopting the principles of sustainable development, ecotourism has overlooked the importance of culture and has instead focused on the other pillars of sustainability. In fact, there appears a historic disregard for the cultural pillar of sustainability and disproportionate emphasis on the economic and environmental pillars. Doel (2003: 502) puts this in perspective: "Little wonder, then, that culture is often assumed to pale in significance when compared with more pressing concerns like economic crisis, regional conflicts and global warming". And this neglect suggests an imbalance that may predate unsustainable outcomes.

The achievement of ecotourism, and by extension sustainable development, is recognized to be contingent upon successful adaptation to and protection of complex cultural systems. In the context of environmental management and nature-based tourism experiences, the importance of culture is made clear by Nelson (1978:1): "Culture and biophysical processes are inextricably interwoven, and man and 'nature' are one". While the current sustainable development paradigm recognizes this in principle, antecedents suggest that the ecotourism experiment will fail in the absence of a greater sensitivity to the fourth pillar of sustainability – culture, and by extension, the cultural context of ecotourism. Cultural sensitivity is therefore, considered as important as the other pillars – social, economic, environment. Reconfirmed in the *Oslo Statement on Ecotourism* (The International Ecotourism Society, 2007: 6), culture is identified as a critical issue for strengthening the sustainability and potential benefits of ecotourism. A call to action is made by the international ecotourism community:

Encourage the ecotourism industry to operate with integrity to protect and promote tangible and intangible cultural heritage and living cultures, and to preserve and celebrate the multitude of unique cultural, social, religious and spiritual elements of local and indigenous communities around the world.

In recent articles in the *Journal of Ecotourism* (Cater, 2006; de la Barre, 2005; Jamal et al. 2006), *Philosophy and Geography* (Stark, 2002), and the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (Carrier and Macleod, 2005), the beginnings of a 'cultural turn' in our thinking about ecotourism has emerged. This 'turn' may be characterized by a progressive sensitivity to matters of culture and a departure from conventional or 'Western' understandings of ecotourism. This departure mimics the 'cultural turn' in Geography and other disciplines where increased sensitivity to the changing - and now global - intellectual and social landscape has emerged (Doel, 2003; Hughes, 1995; Philo, 2000). To address the current imbalance, they call for a shift in the valuation of reflexive research, a priority shift towards a more-balanced notion of sustainable ecotourism, and the recognition of 'cultural sensitivity' as a precursor to sustainable ecotourism goal achievement. In essence, these academics emphasize a need to introduce the notion of cultural sensitivity into the ecotourism discourse and to develop models, templates, and tools for assisting researchers and professionals in this process. Fyall and Garrod (1997) suggest a four-stage process for applying the sustainable development concept in tourism. Adopted here as a process for ensuring that ecotourism is culturally sensitive, that the pillars of sustainability are afforded equal attention, and that by extension, ecotourism can make progress towards sustainable development, it includes:

1. Defining cultural sensitivity in the context of ecotourism,
2. Establishing cultural sensitivity as a key ecotourism tenet,
3. Developing a framework for measuring the achievement of cultural sensitivity, and
4. Creating a set of techniques, tools, and methods for making ecotourism culturally sensitive.

Purpose Statement

In the context of these tensions, conflicts and concerns, a research agenda has been developed to operationalize Fyall and Garrod's model. That is, to define cultural sensitivity, to identify variables for measuring its achievement, and to test their

validity amongst a group of international ecotourism experts. A three-round survey exercise was initiated in January of 2008. Over 650 ecotourism professionals, academics and educators, from around the world were invited to participate in the research process. In the course of the last few months, over 150 experts from over 40 countries have offered their contributions. They have been exploring “What the ecotourism definition must contain in order to be sensitive to cultural differences (and similarities) in a global community”. On the basis of this international expertise and the survey exercise, and as a first step in the research process, the importance of cultural sensitivity and its definition comprise the focus of the first survey. The purpose of this paper is to provide a research update, that is, to present the preliminary research results from the first survey. In the broader context, the research is meant to assist researchers, planners, professionals, and others in the management of ecotourism, the execution of ecotourism research, and the development of ecotourism policy. And, it is meant to assist the achievement of a balanced perspective of ecotourism; a perspective where culture is considered equally with the other pillars of sustainability – economics, social, and environment.

Methodology

The Delphi technique is a qualitative method used to combine expert knowledge and opinion to arrive at an informed group consensus on a complex problem (Linstone and Turoff, 1975). Using sequential rounds of surveys and feedback reports, the technique relies on the interpretation of expert opinion. The technique was selected for several reasons. First, it provides the framework for an inclusive discussion and for organizing conflicting values, perspectives, and experiences into a group consensus (Briedenhann and Butts, 2006; Day and Bobeva, 2005; Powell, 2003). Second, it is an accepted and valuable tourism research method (Garrod and Fyall, 2005; Green *et al.*, 1990; Kaynak and Marandu, 2006). And third, it has proven particularly useful for exploring complex problems (Miller, 2001). Since exact knowledge about cultural sensitivity and ecotourism is simply not possible, the gathering of expert opinion through the Delphi exercise was judged to be a suitable method for exploring this complex tourism problem.

The Delphi study is constructed on the basis of three surveys that are designed to meet the following research objectives:

Survey Round 1

- Assess the awareness of and importance of cultural sensitivity for ecotourism
- Develop a cultural sensitivity definition for ecotourism

Survey Round 2

- Refine a cultural sensitivity definition for ecotourism
- Identify cultural sensitivity attributes and variables

Survey Round 3

- Determine the relative importance of the attributes and variables in achieving culturally sensitivity
- Evaluate the degree of consensus on the relative importance of the cultural sensitivity definition, attributes and variables amongst ecotourism experts.

To initiate the study, a panel of ecotourism experts was assembled. As the success of a Delphi is directly linked to its expert panel, great care was afforded the panel's construction. Ecotourism experts from diverse international locations, with a variety of experience, knowledge, skills, and cultural perspectives were identified as best-suited for the research. And, two relevant expert groups are identified: (1) ecotourism professionals from government, private industry and non-governmental organizations, and (2) academics engaged in ecotourism research and education. The inclusion of both professional and academic experts is substantiated by Briedenhann and Butts (2006), Sunstein (2006), and Vaugeois *et al.* (2005) as a means for achieving a balance between differing approaches to and perspectives on ‘knowledge’, for mitigating the divide between research and professional communities, whilst ensuring a relevant and inclusive Delphi.

Through a review of published work in four peer-reviewed (*Journal of Ecotourism*, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, *International Journal of Tourism Research*, and *Tourism Management*) and with the assistance the International Ecotourism Society (TIES membership directory and experts bureau) and of ECOCLUB, the International Ecotourism Club, an initial set of six-hundred and eighty-four potential participants were identified and invited to participate in the study. From this initial group, eighty-six professionals, thirty-two academics, and thirty-nine professional and academic experts (self-identified as both), a total of one-hundred and fifty-seven individuals, were selected to join the panel (Figure 1). Participants were then invited to respond to the first of three surveys.



*Markers indicate a participant's location and expertise:
Blue (ecotourism professional) / Green (ecotourism academic) / Red (both professional and academic)

Figure 1 Global Distribution of Research Participants

Survey Results: Round #1

The first survey was meant as a 'scoping round', that is a preliminary or general survey round, designed to get participants thinking about the relationship between cultural sensitivity and ecotourism. It was also designed to allow the researchers to gauge the interest in and importance of the research problem within the international ecotourism community and to establish a basis for subsequent survey rounds. In this first survey, participants were asked: (1) to identify the most important issues surrounding contemporary ecotourism, (2) to judge the importance for ecotourism to be culturally sensitive, and (3) to comment on the appropriateness of a cultural sensitivity 'working definition'. The results for each of these inquiries are handled in turn.

1. Contemporary Ecotourism Issues of Importance

Participants were asked: "In your expert opinion, what are the three most important issues surrounding contemporary ecotourism". Through a content analysis of the survey responses, twenty predominant issues were identified. First, the data was reviewed and a list of preliminary issues was identified. Using this list, the number of references to each issue was calculated. The top twenty issues were then identified and grouped according to the issue type (Table 1).

Table 1 Contemporary Ecotourism Issues

Issues related to Ecotourism Management

Sustainable Development: Recognizing the valuable role that ecotourism plays in sustainable development (SD). Ensuring a balanced approach to ecotourism where all SD pillars are given equal weight.

Environmental Conservation: Minimizing negative impacts and maximizing positive impacts on the natural environment.

Cultural Sensitivity: Ensuring this key ecotourism principle is also an ecotourism practice. It requires clarification of what cultural sensitivity is and is not in the context of ecotourism.

Legitimacy / Greenwashing: Ensuring that ecotourism practice is clearly anchored to its' definition (see issue #7). This may require investments in guidelines, certification, education, and training to avoid misrepresentation.

Definition: Achieving consensus [reducing confusion] about what ecotourism is and is not.

Operational Guidelines and Certification: Creating/enhancing standards so as to facilitate ecotourism benefits achievement and industry legitimacy. Standards must be sensitive to the local context and must be firmly anchored to the ecotourism definition.

Institutional Arrangements: Improving government involvement and support for ecotourism. May include the development/enhancement of ecotourism strategies, policies, and partnerships (supported by action).

Cultural Conservation: Minimizing negative impacts and maximizing positive impacts on communities and cultural heritage.

Research and Development: Undertaking work to increase knowledge, including knowledge of market trends (changes), market composition, visitor and host community needs and expectations, in order to

inform the enhancement of and/or the development of ecotourism.

Ethics / Responsibility: Assuming an ethics-based environmentally, socially, culturally, and economically responsible approach to ecotourism and fostering (lead by example) responsibility amongst ecotourism stakeholders (visitors, host communities, etc.).

Carrying Capacity / Scale: Planning and managing ecotourism so as not exceed the carrying capacity. Scale is suggested as a critical element in the carrying capacity equation (local, national, global), thus the measure of capacity must include considerations beyond the immediate ecotourism location. (E.g. impacts of air travel on global climate).

Infrastructure: Developing and enhancing ecotourism infrastructure (landscapes, architecture) and supporting infrastructure (roads, water systems, energy systems, etc.) so as to support ecotourism product delivery and benefits achievement (environment impact reduction, economic and social benefits for communities, etc.).

Human Resources: Undertaking work to increase the number of skilled employees in the ecotourism field. This may include investments in professional training and certification programs.

Technology: Harnessing the potential benefits of technology – both soft (e.g. management systems, methodologies) and hard (e.g. machines, electronics, tools) so as to facilitate ecotourism experiences, management activities, benefits achievement, and risk mitigation.

Best-Practices: Leading by example and sharing success stories. Efforts required to link to and benefit from best-practices in business generally, and ‘sustainable’ business specifically.

Issues related to Ecotourism Experiences

Community Participation and Benefits: Ensuring that host communities are actively participating in, contributing to, and benefiting from ecotourism.

Awareness / Education: Ensuring that cultural and environmental awareness / education are fostered by the ecotourism experience (amongst all stakeholders).

Benefits Achievement: Ensuring that environmental, socio-cultural, and economic benefits are achieved through ecotourism activities. This requires investments in definition, certification, monitoring systems, and policies in support of ecotourism [and the landscapes upon which it depends]. Efforts are also required to improve the linkages between ecotourism stakeholders (governments, NGOs, operators, host communities)

Issues related to External Forces and Pressures (that may affect ecotourism)

Globalization: Recognizing the influence of globalization on ecotourism experiences and the communities and environments that host them. Concern exists about preserving cultures and celebrating diversity (heterogeneous) and avoiding the internationalization of culture (homogeneous). Economic justice, that is, benefits for communities and not just foreign investors and national government is also of concern.

Climate Change: Considering climate change impacts on ecotourism and taking action to reduce ecotourism’s contribution to climate change processes.

In reviewing the survey responses for this question, it is possible to infer that important ecotourism issues can be identified. In subsequent survey rounds, the issues are to be ranked so as to gain additional insight into their relative importance. It is also possible to understand the issues on the basis of their relation to the ecotourism experience, to ecotourism management, and to external forces and pressures that may affect ecotourism. Management issues appear to be the most important surrounding contemporary ecotourism. This is also to be explored in subsequent survey rounds. And finally, the importance of cultural sensitivity for contemporary ecotourism is recognized by the panel of experts.

2. The Importance of Cultural Sensitivity for Ecotourism

In the second survey question, participants were asked: “How important is it for ecotourism to be explicitly sensitive to culture and cultural differences around the globe?” The results indicate that a majority agree (89%) that it is very important for ecotourism to be culturally sensitive. One participant stated its’ importance very clearly: “To not give the importance of the sensitivity of culture is to set the movement to failure”. Additional representative comments in support of its importance include:

1. “It is of foremost importance for ecotourism to be explicitly sensitive to culture and especially to local cultures and their understanding of nature. The politics of ecotourism do not always put culture in context and this derives in enormous failures of ecotourism projects”.
2. “If we understand that nature and culture have direct links, separating both makes no sense and therefore it seems obvious that ecotourism has to integrate a maximum respect and consideration to cultural differences”.
3. “In many cases the activities of local cultures affect the efforts to preserve an environment. One cannot be addressed while ignoring the other. Ecotourism that is developed closely with local cultures will also provide a more unique travel experience, an urgent necessity in our rapidly homogenizing world.”

4. “Ecotourism should be as directed to the conservation of culture, and thus be sensitive to it, as to the natural environment. Sustainability implies the protection of those factors which attract ecotourists, and to exploit, degrade or in other ways adversely impact upon communities' cultures is to threaten the long term viability of ecotourism itself”.

The analysis, however, also reveals a lack of clarity about what cultural sensitivity is, what it means for ecotourism to be culturally sensitive, who is required to be sensitive, and when sensitivity is necessary. On one end of the response spectrum, some contend that cultural sensitivity is required only when ecotourism activities occur in or near communities. For example, one participant argued:

“Ecotourism may have a primarily wildlife/nature-based focus, with minimal interaction with local cultures, e.g. Antarctic tourism, so the requirement of explicit cultural sensitivity is not a blanket one and will be appropriate to site”.

Others argue that cultural sensitivity is only required of tourists who are visiting local communities. In this case, sensitivity is a stakeholder-specific requirement that does not demand that mutual sensitivity (between hosts and visitors) be a component of the ecotourism exchange. This position is reflected in the following comment:

“People traveling to different parts of the world need to read and study about the country they are visiting and specifically about the local community that lives in the area to be able to interact in a respectful way learning and enjoying through their local knowledge.”

This spectrum of understanding confirms the need to clarify what is meant by cultural sensitivity and how it is to be defined and measured in the ecotourism community. And, this suggests that there is a conceptual and definitional void related to cultural sensitivity. Therefore, investments are required to define cultural sensitivity and the parameters by which it is to be measured. These findings confirm the work of Carrier and Macleod (2005), Cater (2006), de la Barre (2005), Jamal *et al.* (2006), Sofield (2006), and Stark (2002), as well as the Oslo Statement on Ecotourism (TIES, 2007). A call for investments in understanding and operationalizing cultural sensitivity in the planning and management of ecotourism has been reconfirmed by the expert panel.

3. The Appropriateness of a Cultural Sensitivity ‘Working Definition’

In the third question, participants were asked to comment on the appropriateness of the following ‘working definition’ for cultural sensitivity: “*Culturally sensitive ecotourism, by definition, must reflect an awareness and knowledge of cultural differences around the globe*”. A majority agree that the working definition is appropriate or very appropriate (Table 2).

Table 2 The appropriateness of the working definition

Very appropriate	51.1%
Appropriate	25.5%
Somewhat appropriate	16.0%
Not very appropriate	6.4%
Not appropriate	1.1%

However, the responses suggest that the definition needs to be adjusted and enhanced so as to make explicitly clear what cultural sensitivity means for ecotourism. Respondents suggest that the definition reflect consideration of a number of issues including: scale, mutual understanding, cultural similarities, cultural preservation, and positive benefits for all stakeholders. Suggestions were made to bring forward The International Ecotourism Society’s (TIES, 1990) ecotourism definition as the basis for subsequent discussion (and definitional enhancement). The suggestion is made on the basis that the TIES definition captures many of the critical components of cultural sensitivity as suggested by the expert panel:

“To ensure that those who implement and participate in responsible tourism activities should follow the following principles:

- Minimizing impact
- Foster environmental and cultural awareness and respect
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation
- Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people
- Raise sensitivity to host countries’ political, environmental, and social climate”.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the first survey have served four essential functions. First, it has confirmed that the research purpose is relevant and that there is significant interest amongst the international ecotourism community in cultural sensitivity. It is clear that cultural sensitivity is an important issue for ecotourism and efforts to improve our understanding are required. Second, it has also served to identify a preliminary list of important ecotourism issues. This list, once refined, could serve as a framework for improving our understanding of the issues and opportunities involved in the planning and management of ecotourism. Collaborative research may be particularly useful in this regard. Third, it has identified that conceptual confusion about cultural sensitivity exists within the international ecotourism community. There appears a lack of consensus about who is responsible, when it is required, and how cultural sensitivity is to be defined for ecotourism. Definitional enhancement is required to address conceptual ambiguity. Fourth, it has exposed concerns exist about how cultural sensitivity is to be implemented and how success is to be measured. Participants have expressed the need for investments in frameworks and tools that define the parameters by which cultural sensitivity is to be operationalized and evaluated. These findings reveal important knowledge voids where additional research efforts could further our understanding of cultural sensitivity and ecotourism. Thus, not only has the first survey served to begin a relevant and meaningful discussion, it has served to confirm the importance of continued debate, and by extension, the importance of subsequent survey rounds.

The research is presently moving through the second survey round. The findings of the first survey have been used to shape the format and content of the second survey. In the second round, participants are to prioritize the ecotourism issues, to contribute to the enhancement of a cultural sensitivity definition that is appropriate for ecotourism, and to identify cultural sensitivity variables and attributes. The findings of subsequent rounds are to be made available on the researcher's website: <http://www.arts.uottawa.ca/geography.old/student/donohoe.htm>. We invite the ecotourism community to participate in this important and ongoing discussion. Please send comments, suggestions, questions, or other to: hdono069@uottawa.ca.

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Biography

Holly Donohoe is a PhD Candidate in Geography and Environmental Studies at the University of Ottawa, Canada. Her research interests include sustainable development, environmental management, tourism marketing, ecotourism, and international leisure events. She has collaborated on a number of research projects within Canada and abroad and provided research and consultant support to various organizations such as the World Leisure Organization and the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association. She has published scientific articles in English, French, Mandarin, and Portuguese and has presented at events such as the International Conference on Tourism, (Greece, 2008), Leisure Studies Association Conference (England, 2007), the World Leisure Congress (Australia, 2004; China, 2006), and the Travel and Tourism Research Association Conference (Canada, 2004). As a part-time Professor, Holly teaches courses in environmental management, research methods, and tourism geography in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at Carleton University and the University of Ottawa. She is the Chair of the Canadian Association of Geographers Tourism and Recreation Study Group.

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ECO FOCUS Botswana: Water Well for Tourists, Not So Well for Bushmen



Survival International alleges that the Bushmen have been denied access to boreholes such as this, Mothomelo, CKGR Botswana
© Lucy Arnot/Survival International

Survival International (SI) protests that the Botswana government has awarded the South African-based luxury lodge operator ‘Safari & Adventure Company’ a tender to build a tourist lodge near the Bushman community of Molapo in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. The lodge will need to sink boreholes to pump huge amounts of water from the Kalahari – but the Bushmen are not allowed to take water from their single borehole. The Bushmen, evicted by the government in 2002, won the legal right to return to their land in 2006, but the government prevents them from using their borehole and also refusing to issue hunting permits. SI points out that according to international law there should be no development on ‘tribal peoples’ land’ without their free, prior and informed consent, and that the Bushmen have not been consulted about the building of a tourist lodge on ‘their land’. Survival’s director Stephen

Corry said ‘The government has the gall to tell the Bushmen to make the 400km round trip to collect water from outside the reserve when tourists will be showering and sipping their drinks nearby. It’s against the most basic human rights and is, of course, illegal – in other words, pretty normal stuff for the Botswana government where the Bushmen are concerned. Many tourists will stay away when they know the background.’



Melons are almost the only alternative source of water for the Bushmen inside the CKGR, Botswana
© Lucy Arnot/Survival International

The Government of Botswana official website explains that “where conflict of land use arises, the concerned individual or community is advised to seek another place where there will be no such conflict. The former residents of the CKGR are **not the first people to be asked to relocate** in Botswana. Individuals and communities have in the past been asked to relocate **to give way for development or the establishment of Game Reserves**. These include, people who previously resided in the Gemsbok, Makgadikgadi, Chobe and Moremi Game Parks and Reserves.” 17% of Botswana’s territory has been designated as a protected area and an additional 20% as a “Wildlife Management Area”. Population is sparse, with density at just 3.0/km2 while Botswana has the 2nd highest rate of HIV infection in the world (after Swaziland), and **one in three people** are infected.. Since 1971, when diamond mining began, Botswana has enjoyed uninterrupted annual economic growth of around 9%. Botswana is now

the world’s largest diamond producer, and diamonds account for 80 percent of exports and 50 percent of government revenue. Nevertheless in the [official tourism website](#) we also learn that “wage rates are very reasonable US \$105 per month”.

Related: SI report to the UN

http://www.survival-international.org/files/news/ICCPR_report_Survival_2008.pdf

The Botswana Government official position on the relocation of ‘Basarwa from the Central Kalahari Reserve’ http://www.gov.bw/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=13&Itemid=52

MEMBER NEWS – News from our Members around the World

Dominica: Computers from the UK for Schools and NGOs in Dominica

Roseau, Dominica - 16 April 2008

Rosalie Forest Eco Lodge, The Sustainable Living Initiative Centre, NS Optimum, and Lifeline Ministries, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education of The Commonwealth of Dominica, are pleased to welcome a donation of 250 computers for schools and NGOs from NS Optimum and six schools in the UK. An official handing over ceremony took place on Friday 11th April 2008 at St Martin's Secondary School at 11.00am. Mr Steve Hyacinth, Chief Education Officer was in attendance.

Several community organisations and NGOs will also benefit including: The Dominica Ecotourism Association, Escalier Motivators, Committee of Concerned Women, Rhema Centre, Adult Education, The Special Olympics Committee, Life Goes On, PACIS and The Grotto. This is the second donation of reconditioned computers sourced by Rosalie Forest Eco Lodge and The Sustainable Living Initiative Centre to resource schools and other community based organisations in Dominica.

These computers have been donated by the following UK schools: Bromsgrove school, Uppingham School, Sharples School in Bolton, St Josephs school in Horwich, Idsall School in Shropshire and Richmond County High School in Lincolnshire. The AID bank has also donated 70 used monitors. In the past, donated computers have presented a problem as the Ministry of Education lacks the technicians, spare parts and infrastructure to accommodate and maintain the hardware.

Hence, SLIC's Partnering Agency in the UK, NS Optimum, provided the technical assistance needed to train indigenous technicians at the sites together with the technicians from the Ministry of Education. NS Optimum have also donated the spare parts needed and paid for the freight to Dominica and have recently established NS Optimum Caribbean Ltd. to enable them to offer an enhanced support service. The Ministry of Education have identified sites to receive computers and have provided transportation and two of their staff to oversee operations. Rosalie Forest Eco Lodge and Home from Home are providing accommodation and SLIC is providing meals and administrative support.

This project will result in a total over 400 computers installed in schools and NGOs. This is a second set of computers, the first set which were installed with help in 2007 from the British High Commission are still in good working order in secondary schools maintained by the Ministry of Education and school technicians. It is hoped that this can become an annual project helping British Schools to comply with recycling regulations and giving Dominican children greater access to computers.

The Sustainable Living Initiative is a Dominican NGO dedicated to keeping Dominica Green and Beautiful by educating people about Alternative Energy, Organic Farming and Recycling.

►For more details:

Rosalie Forest Eco Lodge & The Sustainable Living Initiative, Dominica

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Tel: +1 7674461886 +1 7676 2751886

Web: <http://www.rosalieforest.com>

Greece: New Seminars in Crete offer immersion into Mediterranean Diet

Crete, Greece - April 7, 2008.

Crete's Culinary Sanctuaries, an acclaimed educational program, has teamed up with Field to Plate, a prominent US food education and events company, to organize dynamic seminars in Crete entitled, The Mediterranean Diet: Refreshing Your Understanding. Translating it to the Plate. This accredited program is designed for members of the healthcare, agriculture and foodservice industries to sink their teeth into the Mediterranean Diet, on site. Attendees meet producers of Crete's cuisine on their farms, in their villages and kitchens. Presenters are noted organic olive oil and wine makers, fishers, artisan bakers, cheese makers, beekeepers, botanists and herbalists. Six-day seminars are limited to 12 people, providing an intensive learning experience. Accredited by the American Dietetic Association and the American Culinary Federation for 35 Continuing Education Credits.

"As more facts about the dangers of conventional agriculture to human health and the health of the planet stream in, CCS seminars provide tangible information about organic food production and healthy cooking techniques that can be applied in many regions of the world," said Nikki Rose, CCS Founder and graduate of the Culinary Institute of America. Seminar attendees discover why Crete's traditional healthy foodways are the focus of modern research and how to apply that information.

"Reaching out to work with Nikki Rose and Crete's Culinary Sanctuaries on this program was a natural for us," said Field to Plate founder, Amanda Archibald. "Field to Plate has its roots in authenticity and sustainable food systems, and we purposely seek out partners who embody the same values and who can design high quality food education experiences for professionals."

Crete's Culinary Sanctuaries is an internationally acclaimed program for best practices in responsible travel and featured in the New York Times, National Geographic publications and many others.

► For more details: Contact: Nikki Rose - www.cookingincrete.com

Guyana: Vancouver's Small Planet Consulting helping Ecotourism in Guyana grow, Guyana

Georgetown, Guyana – 31 March 2008

South America's only English speaking country has been overlooked for long enough. With a low population density, millions of acres of pristine rainforest, a range of ecosystems and an incredible number of flora and fauna species (some 225 species of mammals, 880 of reptiles and amphibians, 6500 of plants and more than 815 of birds), Guyana should be a renowned ecotourism destination. But because of little international recognition and limited tourism infrastructure, Guyana only sees 5,000 leisure tourists per year. This isn't enough for tourism to become a sustainable and feasible aspect of Guyana's economy.

But for more than two years, Judy Karwacki of Small Planet Consulting has been leading the effort to promote ecotourism here through her work on the Guyana Birding Tourism Program. The program is a joint initiative of the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA) and the United States Agency for International Development / Guyana Trade and Investment Support (USAID/GTIS) project. Working with the local industry and conservation groups such as the Guyana Amazon Tropical Birds Society, the program uses a market-led approach to develop Guyana's ecotourism sector.

Birdwatchers are an ideal market because they contribute to conservation through sustainable activities that focus on nature and preservation. Birding tourism also encourages local communities to protect their natural environment, and provides economic alternatives to extractive industries like logging, mining and illegal wildlife trading.

With the program's efforts more than 30 international tour operators are now selling, designing and bringing birdwatching and nature-based trips to Guyana. The international media are also taking note, and many new articles have been published. Perhaps most importantly, the program is building a lasting legacy through the development of relationships and partnerships with leading birding, conservation, tourism, aid and NGO organizations around the world. These links help bring the funding, expertise, experience and influence needed to ensure that birding tourism in Guyana develops in a sustainable manner.

► For additional information, visit <http://www.guyanabirding.com> or contact Judy Karwacki at [jkarwacki \[at\] smallplanetconsulting \[dot\] ca](mailto:jkarwacki@smallplanetconsulting.ca)

Tanzania: Traveler's Philanthropy Conference - Registration now open, Tanzania

Arusha, Tanzania & Washington DC, 17 April 2008

Online registration is now open for the 2008 TRAVELERS' PHILANTHROPY (SM) conference to be held in Arusha, Tanzania, on December 3-5, 2008. Visit <http://www.travelersphilanthropyconference.org> to access the special conference registration site. There, you'll find information about the program and speakers, hotel and meeting venue, flight information, pre- and post- conference safaris, list of co-sponsors, and latest updates.

Under the banner of "Making Travelers' Philanthropy Work for Development, Business, and Conservation" this international conference will focus on the growing trend among responsible tourism businesses to support community and conservation projects in the host countries where they operate.

The 200 to 300 international conference attendees will include representatives from tourism companies, as well as experts from development and conservation organizations, representatives from the UN and other international agencies, academics, government officials, the media, and others interested in how responsible tourism can contribute to poverty alleviation and biodiversity conservation.

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Wangari Maathai, founder of Kenya's Greenbelt Movement, has been invited to give the keynote address. Via plenary sessions and workshops the conference will cover a range of current issues including:

- The role of tourism businesses in supporting HIV-AIDS education and prevention.
- Raising funds from travelers and travel businesses for conservation of wildlife, and parks and protected areas.
- Travelers Philanthropy initiatives to address climate change.
- Developing business models that incorporate Travelers' Philanthropy as a central element.

The conference will be held at the Ngurdoto Mountain Lodge in Arusha, a vibrant tourism town near the base of Mt. Kilimanjaro and Mt. Meru that serves as at gateway to Tanzania's world renowned game parks. In addition, leading tour operators in East Africa are providing a variety of specially designed safaris that will include game viewing and visits to community projects. Details of these discounted pre- and post- conference trips – which are open for conference attendees and their friends and families – are posted on the website.

The 2008 conference is organized by the Center on Ecotourism and Sustainable Development (CESD), a US-based nonprofit which hosted a highly successful Travelers' Philanthropy conference at Stanford University in 2004.

The conference is attracting a growing list of co-sponsors including leading tourism operators (Intrepid Travel, CCAfrica, and Micato Safaris) and NGOs (WWF, Jane Goodall Institute, and Counterpart International). Other co-sponsors are being arranged.

Partners include: ECOCLUB.com as media partner, Ecotourism Kenya, and Basecamp Explorer

► For more details: Contact: Ms. Whitney Cooper, CESD Washington, DC

Tel: 202-347-9203 x414

Email: wcooper [at] ecotourismcesd [dot] org

Web: <http://www.TravelersPhilanthropyConference.org>

UK: Car Free Walks, a new website for green walkers, UK

SouthDowns, UK – 27 March 2008

Car Free Walks (Web: www.carfreewalks.org), a new website for environmentally friendly walkers in the UK was recently voted Best Online Community at the Brighton and Hove Web Awards. The aim of the site, launched by ECOCLUB Member Tim Woods in October 2007, is to build up a database of walks that can be reached using public transport. This will provide information for people who want to reduce their environmental impact when travelling to National Parks and popular walking regions.

How it works: The walks are contributed by members of the public, who complete a simple online form and map to submit their favourite car-free walks. People can send in any type of walk – mountain, coastal, city – but it must be possible to reach the start and finish of the walk using trains or buses. As the list of walks increases, visitors will be able to search for walks near to towns or cities, by county or National Park, or by the type of walk. Each walk has an outline of the route, points of interest along the way, and a map showing key points to help with navigation. The website also links to information about public transport to and from the walk.

Tim says "I have added my favourite car-free walks, and I am now asking people from across the UK to contribute theirs. This will make the most of people's knowledge of the best walks their local area. The website has already received a lot of publicity in the UK, featuring in several walking magazines, local newspapers and train magazines. The aim now is to have at least one walk in every county in the UK by the end of 2008".

► For additional information, visit:

<http://www.carfreewalks.org>

ECOTOURISM POLICY ROUNDUP-Important policy developments from around the world

World:

UNEP launches Green Passport Campaign

Green travel tips for the world's growing number of international tourists were launched today by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The internet-based campaign, 'Green Passport' (Web: www.unep.fr/greenpassport), aims to raise tourists' awareness of their potential to contribute to sustainable development by making responsible holiday choices.

Achim Steiner, UN-Under Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director, said: "Tourism, the world's biggest industry is booming. By 2020, the number of international arrivals by air and by sea could reach 1.6 billion annually. This growth brings the prospect of income and economic development to countless tourist destinations in rich and poor countries alike. The challenge is to manage this growth sustainably. Governments have a key role to play, but so too do individuals and families when planning and going on holiday" he said. "Many consumers are now making green domestic choices from sourcing electricity from renewable sources and choosing eco-friendly investments up to buying leaner and greener cars. Packing a Green Passport along with airline tickets, the swimming costume and the sun lotion means tourists no longer need to leave their green credentials at home but can make them part of the holiday of a life-time" added Mr Steiner.

Stefanos Fotiou, head of UNEP's tourism unit, said: "By browsing the Green Passport web site consumers will be able to find practical tips to help them reduce their environmental and social footprint while they are on vacations. Tourists will discover that travelling green is not as hard as they imagined." In 2007, international tourist arrivals reached nearly 900 million and by the end of the decade this number is expected to reach more than one billion. As tourist numbers grow, so will their demand for energy, water, and natural resources to support their holidays. "There are some encouraging signs in terms of market response to the problem. Tourists are increasingly expressing concern about the quality of the environment at their holiday destinations" said Fotiou. "However, there is clearly a gap to fill in order to shift from discussions on responsible holidays to concrete actions."

The Campaign has been launched by UNEP, jointly with and the French Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Spatial Planning and the Brazilian Ministries of Environment and Tourism. It is an initiative of the International Task Force on Sustainable Tourism Development, firmly rooted in the move to accelerate a global shift towards sustainable consumption and production (SCP) that emerged from the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), held in Johannesburg in 2002.

PATA endorses CO2 offsetting for its events

In the context of its CEO Challenge event, the Pacific Asia Travel Association has announced plans to invest in an Atmosfair (CO2 offsetter) supported project in the Chumphon district of Thailand, so as to 'offset' the emissions from its event. The Atmosfair supported project cleans and recycles sewage water in a palm oil factory. PATA also located the 'CEO Challenge' in a venue benchmarked by Green Globe, following a January 2008 'carbon footprint reduction' agreement between PATA and EC3 Global, a private consultancy which manages the Green Globe brand in Asia Pacific.

Royal Caribbean creates new Environmental Stewardship post

Royal Caribbean Cruises has announced that it has hired Jamie Sweeting, formerly with Conservation International and the Ecotourism Society, as its new vice president of 'Environmental Stewardship'. In mid-April the company, which is the world's second largest cruise operator, had announced that its 5,400 capacity 'Project Genesis' ship, to be the world's largest cruise vessel when it is delivered in 2009, will be so extravagant that it will include 7 'neighbourhoods' including a replica (to scale) of Central Park...Just 10 years ago, the company had to pay the largest ever cruise fine imposed by the US Department of Justice for a 'fleet-wide conspiracy of dumping oil into the ocean and lying to the U.S. Coast Guard to cover up the crimes'. The company had also entered into plea agreements in 1999 and 2000.

Consolidation in Green Globe Brand, launch of new website

Green Globe International, a Delaware corporation, has announced the initial launch of the company's new corporate website, greenglobeint.com, in an effort to increase worldwide brand awareness, and to provide easy access for shareholders to access information and SEC filings, as required by law. In mid-March 2008, Green Globe International increased its ownership of Green Globe UK Ltd, controlled by UNWTO's Geoffrey Lipman, which holds the rights to the Green Globe brand, to 88% with a press release stating that "The company expects to purchase the remaining 12% of Green Globe, Ltd. (UK), which would be positioned as a wholly owned subsidiary of Green Globe International." No details of sums involved have been announced. Green Globe also recently appointed Travel Mole as official Media Partner, with Travel Mole's Charles Kao becoming one of the 4 directors of Green Globe International. In turn it was officially announced that Mr. Geoffrey Lipman resigned his Board position with Green Globe International in order to continue to focus on critical work in the public sector.

World Tourism Organisation to 'ensure' that Women benefit from Tourism

The positive contribution of tourism to women empowerment can only be determined if poverty reduction and the enhancement of women's dignity and role in the work place are addressed. These are among the issues in UNWTO's Action Plan to Empower Women through Tourism, unveiled during ITB Berlin 2008 in early March. The Organization is committed to play a leading role in economic empowerment of women in the tourism sector. The Plan encompasses the following activities:

- * Establish a multi-stakeholder Taskforce;
- * Put in place of a Data Collection System, including desk research and case studies;
- * Initiate a biennial UNWTO-UNIFEM Report on the situation of women in tourism;
- * Expand the website www.tourismgender.com into a portal to serve as a global knowledge sharing e-network;
- * Build international awareness about opportunities for women in tourism
- * Call upon UNWTO Members to take vigorous steps to support gender mainstreaming in national development processes so as to achieve women's equality in the tourism sector;
- * Foster a NETWORK of activists, ambassadors and advocates and experts in gender issues from around the world.

Canada: Alberta Sustainable Tourism Workshop - Summary of Participant Group Discussions by Paul Radchenko

On February 28, 2008 the Tourism Development Branch of Alberta Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture hosted a workshop to provide a forum for participants to examine options to advance sustainable tourism in Alberta. The Assistant Deputy Minister of Tourism, Marketing and Heritage for Alberta Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture provided some thoughtful opening remarks. Statements like "We want to build a stronger, more responsible and competitive tourism industry in Alberta by embracing sustainable practices" and "Our department supports the development and preservation of Alberta's tourism sector – and that means we are looking at sustainable practices that will promote longevity for the industry" demonstrated the importance of moving forward with this initiative.

Participants had opportunities to discuss the many issues, opportunities, goals, priorities, and next steps in our collective beginning to build a more sustainable future for tourism in the province. These discussions were further fuelled by guest speakers (consultants Sydney Johnsen and Aaron Heidt as well as Dave Butler, Director of Land Resources, Canadian Mountain Holidays) who shared their experiences and perspectives on sustainable tourism. There were many different stakeholders present for the workshop, including: tourism operators, tourism marketing professionals, tourism planners, representatives of provincial and national parks and protected areas, other government agencies, tourism industry organization representatives, and tourism researchers (38 participants altogether).

Using this report, the Tourism Development Branch compiled this summary of the critical issues and opportunities surrounding sustainable tourism in Alberta that were identified by the stakeholder group in the workshop. It also includes suggestions that participants made regarding how to move towards sustainable tourism policies and practices. The work of the individual breakout group sessions has been collated into six key goal areas and suggested actions that were identified to support each goal. In many cases, each of the three breakout groups had identified similar goals and actions.

Cuba: Tourism segregation 'lifted'

On 31 March 2008, following a resolution that authorised the free sale of computers, microwaves and dvd players, the Ministry of Tourism announced that Cubans can now stay at hotels previously accessible only by foreign tourists, as long as they can afford to pay by convertible pesos worth 24 times more than regular pesos. The ban had long been dubbed by critics as a 'tourism apartheid' and in recent years was increasingly not enforced. In addition, it is alleged that many hotels would turn a blind eye to the illegal but tolerated practice of 'jineterismo', a form of unofficial prostitution in exchange for free meals from tourists. A month after officially assuming the helm of Cuba from his brother, Raul Castro has pledged to improve every day life and ease 'excessive restrictions'. Tourism was a thriving industry in Cuba from the early 20th century until the revolution of 1959 and the US travel ban on US citizens in 1961. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the resulting collapse of the favourable regime under which Cuban sugar was exchanged for cheap Russian oil, a decision was taken to ignore socialist orthodoxy and rapidly develop tourism infrastructure through joint ventures with European and Canadian (probably US) hotel groups. By the late 1990s tourism was the #1 earner, despite the US travel ban.

Ecuador: Galapagos, victim of tourism success, or of fishing?

In a recent article, mistitled ' "Ecotourism" & Economics' The Economist argues that success in tourism, along with expenditure by conservationists and scientists, has led to a 60% growth in population in the Galapagos, which in turn threatens the fragile insular ecosystem and therefore tourism. It estimates that for every 3 additional visitors, 1 migrant is attracted from the mainland, where the economy is stagnating. If this is so, the government may either have to raise the cost of the park permit to stop the number of visitors, have to draw the line and say no more tourists, no more migrants, however it would probably be an unpopular decision. However Tourism growth is not the only problem. In recent years, there has been frequent violence between (illegal) fishermen and conservationists, with a number of migrants actually employed in the lucrative fishing sector, which focuses on sea-cucumber and shark-fin, for export to Asia, rather than in Tourism. Currently over 100k visitors experience the Galapagos each year, which were declared the world's first Natural World Heritage Site (1978) and constitute the world's second largest marine protected area after the Great Barrier Reef, and conservation has apparently led to greater fish populations!

Greece: Mega-resort court battle postponed

On 9 May, Greece's 'Council of State' a constitutional court was expected to decide whether to give the go ahead to controversial long-lease deal between a Cretan Orthodox Monastery holding title deeds from the Ottoman era, and a well-connected group of UK investors, to create a mega-resort complete with golf courses and marinas, on the barren north-eastern tip of Crete, called Cavo Sidero (Cape Iron). The area, just north of the famous Vai palm forest & beach, is protected and part of the Natura 2000

network of E.U. protected areas. The project enjoys the support of both main parties, however there is opposition by some local groups, major greek environmental organisations, the ecologists-greens party, and parties of the left. The developers claim they have gone to great lengths to ensure that the resort is sustainable, and have hired the services of Jonathon Porritt former head of the UK Ecology Party and Friends of the Earth in Britain. In the end, the hearing of the appeal lodged by environmentalists against the Greek government regarding environmental approval for the Cavo Sidero's Environmental Impact Assessment has been further postponed by the court to November 7, 2008. This is the second time the case is being postponed. In the mean time, the Greek government has submitted to the parliament for approval a new National Land Plan, which is more-friendly to golf-developments and mega-resorts. The government has a thin majority in parliament, so the new national land plan will probably go through, however green groups are poised to resist this and other mega golf developments in Greece at every level.

India: Ecotourism Society of India launched

Mandip Singh Soin, a trustee of the Himalayan Environment Trust and proprietor of Ibx Expeditions, has launched the Ecotourism Society of India at the Second International Conference on Responsible Tourism Destinations which took place in Kochi in Kerala, 21-24 March 2008. Mr Soin told The Hindu that he favoured the Australian Ecotourism Society model, whereby, "documentation and the mandatory ecotourism certification are done by the Ecotourism Society of Australia and even the government depends on it". The society is registered under the societies Act, and will be open to officials, academics and practitioners through local chapters across India. Mr. Soin, is also chairman of the PATA India Chapter Environment and Ecotourism Committee

Jamaica: Tourism Master Plan to undergo review

Quoting Althea Heron, senior director of tourism policy & monitoring in the Ministry of Tourism, The Jamaica Gleaner recently reported that the Jamaican government is commissioning a mid-term review of the Master Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development, introduced in 2002, following a tendering process. Environmentalists have criticised the government for poorly implementing the plan and failing to promote sustainable tourism development and have called for alternatives to beachfront construction projects, with several large hotels having been built on the north coast since the master plan came into effect. At the same time, biodiverse areas such as the Cockpit Country are in risk from bauxite mining.

Kenya: UNWTO to support Kenyan Tourism recovery

UNWTO Secretary-General Francesco Frangialli visited Kenya (May 5-7) to 'underline the Organization's support of the country's all important tourism industry'. The recent troubles in Kenya resulted in a major drop both in visitors and tourism income amounting to a loss of up to 90% of tourism business in the first two months of 2008, according to Kenyan tourism authorities. In 2007 Kenya had 1.5m international arrivals and tourism accounted for 15% of Gross Domestic Product. Frangialli stressed that no tourist was ever threatened and no tourism infrastructure damaged, as the events took place away from the resorts. UNWTO would assist with marketing, promotion and Internet positioning through its partnership with Microsoft, providing technical assistance and organising a joint conference with UNEP on tourism recovery and ...climate change. A member of UNWTO's Technical Cooperation Department will also be visiting Kenya in the second half of May to follow-up and prepare a new project by the UNWTO's ST-EP Initiative (Sustainable Tourism – Eliminating Poverty).

Malaysia: Minister: National Ecotourism Plan will be given 'new direction'

Malaysian Tourism Minister Azalina Said announced that Malaysia's National Ecotourism Plan, drafted in 1997, will undergo a review 'to give it a new direction', following recommendations from 24 environmental NGOs who feel the plan is dated. The ministry also plans workshops and seminars to develop the ecotourism sector and attract tourists 'from niche markets in the United States and Europe'. The minister also recognised that law enforcement of ecotourism-related regulations was lacking.

Pakistan: Promotion of tourism in Chitral without polluting natural environment

by Shams Uddin

Promotion of ecotourism is really a challenging agenda especially in the places where there is lack of awareness amongst the locals. In Chitral, northern Pakistan there are three places where tourism-related waste are posing threat to the natural environment and ecological system. They are: First, the Kalash valleys where large numbers of tourist arrive particularly during festivals such as Chilimjosht, chitirmas and phool. Second, Chitral town where waste are produced in particular during Jashan-e-Chitral and other polo festivals. Despite CAMAT installed dustbins, controlling of waste is in no sight. Third, during Shandur festival, it presents a scene of waste strewn all around the beautiful alpine meadow, which the local people use as pasture. These wastes results in damages to the livestock of the locals living in the villages nearby the festival venue. We have been making efforts to dispose the waste through the help of the local communities for the last 4 years. But the waste goes on unabatedly in the course of years because the festival attracts more and more visitors that also results in producing more wastes. In order to reduce human waste, CAMAT has constructed environment friendly toilets.

Saudi Arabia: Opens Up for Tourism, cautiously

With an eye on domestic and religious tourism, the Supreme Economic Council has recently approved a Red Sea tourism masterplan, identifying 19 sites along the length of the west coast, from Jordan in the North to Yemen, with an average investment at each site of \$2bn. Approx 5 m. Saudis travel to the UAE every year, spending around \$15bn. A visa e-system is now being into place to facilitate the conversion of religious visas to tourist ones, while, the Chairman of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA) now reports directly to the Saudi King, in another sign of the growing interest in Tourism.

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