Ecotourism and sustainability

- Tourism and development
- Alternatives for local communities
- Certification programmes
- Protection of biodiversity
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The opportunities of ecotourism

Klaus Toepfer
United Nations Under-Secretary General and Executive Director, UNEP

To many people ecotourism is a “buzz word”. It is a word that is often misused or misunderstood. As the authors of several articles in this special issue of Industry and Environment point out, definitions of ecotourism are still evolving. However, as a general goal ecotourism should provide an opportunity to develop tourism in ways that minimize that industry’s negative impacts. As a sustainable tourism tool, ecotourism can be a means of avoiding environmental degradation while sharing economic benefits with local people.

Travel by individuals or small groups to relatively untouched natural areas - where they can experience the natural environment and encounter local people directly - has been increasing rapidly in the last two decades. Although this type of tourism ought to have positive environmental and social effects, it could be as damaging as mass tourism if not properly organized.

Because ecosystem projects typically focus on pristine or fragile ecosystems, these projects run the risk of destroying the assets on which they depend. Among their possible impacts are loss of biodiversity and wildlife habitats, and the creation of waste and pollution in areas with little or no capacity to absorb them. Problems relating to social fairness and stakeholder involvement and control may also need to be considered where ecotourism is introduced.

Some ecotourism operations have succeeded in minimizing negative impacts on vulnerable ecosystems and, at the same time, offered local people much-needed alternative livelihood options. It has been shown that in these cases ecotourism can help finance the protection of ecologically sensitive areas and support the socio-economic development of communities in or near these areas.

Ecotourism is one of the fastest growing segments of the expanding international tourism industry. Despite uncertainties following the destabilizing events in the last few months of 2001, the World Tourism Organization estimates that there will be substantial growth not only in the number of international tourist arrivals (expected to exceed one billion by 2010) but also in the percentage of tourists who choose to take part in ecotourism activities. As ecotourism becomes more important economically, ensuring that it follows a truly sustainable path will require cooperation – and partnerships – among the tourism industry, governments, local people and, above all, tourists themselves.

To address these issues, the United Nations has designated 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism (IYE). The UN Commission on Sustainable Development has mandated the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Tourism Organization to coordinate and carry out international activities. During the IYE, ecotourism’s effects on biodiversity, its other social, economic and environmental impacts, and its potential contribution to sustainable development will be reviewed. The effectiveness of regulatory mechanisms and voluntary programmes in monitoring and reducing these impacts will also be assessed.

A number of non-governmental organizations have expressed concerns about the International Year of Ecotourism. These NGOs fear the IYE could lead to the promotion of unregulated forms of nature tourism that damage the environment and have undesirable effects on the lives of local people. UNEP recognizes these concerns and the need for effective dialogue. In this regard, the creation of an International Forum on Ecotourism at the World Ecotourism Summit in Quebec in May would be an important step towards ensuring that such dialogue continues at the highest level.

The articles in this issue of Industry and Environment are intended to contribute to the process of review during the International Year of Ecotourism. They cover a wide range of issues and practical experience. I invite you to give us your comments, and thus to become part of the process.
World Tourism Organization perspectives on the International Year of Ecotourism

Francesco Frangialli, Secretary-General, World Tourism Organization (WTO), Capitán Haya, 42, 28020 Madrid, Spain (omt@world-tourism.org; www.world-tourism.org)

The International Year of Ecotourism demonstrates the United Nations’ recognition of ecotourism’s social and economic importance. The UN General Assembly wished to draw the attention of governments, and the international community, to the potential impacts (both positive and negative) of ecotourism on the natural environment, biodiversity conservation, and the social and cultural fabric of host communities. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) is coordinating a series of activities – leading up to and during the IYE – with UNEP and other international and regional organizations, as well as its Member States, Affiliate Members and other groups.

The ecotourism concept was adopted comparatively recently and is subject to various interpretations, some more accurate than others. On the occasion of the IYE, WTO and other collaborating parties have agreed that the ecotourism concept reflects “all forms of tourism in which the tourists’ main motivation is the observation and appreciation of nature, that contribute to the conservation of, and that generate minimal impacts upon, the natural environment and the cultural heritage.”

IYE will further efforts towards a generally acceptable interpretation of the term “ecotourism” and its more rigorous commercial application. Ecotourism operations should minimize negative impacts on the natural and socio-cultural environment and contribute to the conservation of natural areas by:

* generating economic benefits for host communities, organizations, and authorities managing natural areas for conservation purposes;
* providing alternative income opportunities for local communities; and
* increasing awareness of natural and cultural assets among local people and tourists.

As a market segment, ecotourism can be distinguished by visitors’ motivations and the types of destinations and attractions that attract them. It is a form of nature-based tourism and, as manifestations of traditional cultures are often found in areas visited by ecotourists, it is associated with cultural tourism.

While sustainability needs to be encouraged in all segments of the tourism industry, it is a much stronger imperative in the case of ecotourism. Nonetheless, unsustainable ecotourism is practised throughout the world. It threatens the survival of the natural environment that is the basis of nature-based tourism, and can undermine and even discredit this type of travel.

The International Year of Ecotourism presents opportunities and challenges for the international community. WTO, which would like to involve the widest possible range of stakeholders, has defined the following objectives for the IYE:

* to generate greater awareness among public authorities, the private sector, civil society and consumers regarding ecotourism’s capacity to improve conservation of the natural and cultural heritage and local communities’ standards of living, as well as to encourage respect for nature, indigenous cultures and their diversity;
* to disseminate methods and techniques for ecotourism planning, management, regulation and monitoring to ensure its long-term sustainability;
* to promote exchanges of experience with ecotourism;
* to increase opportunities for efficient marketing and promotion of ecotourism destinations and products;
* to promote minimum quality standards, as well as trustworthy and comparable certification systems for ecotourism suppliers.

WTO has undertaken a number of activities at different levels to meet these objectives:

* It has recommended that Member States create local and national multi-stakeholder committees. These would continue to exist after the IYE, coordinating and monitoring ecotourism activities in each country. Forty-one Member States have responded with respect to creating committees and/or national action plans, or initiating national ecotourism fora or local ecotourism development activities within the framework of the IYE.
* Regional WTO conferences are being organized to exchange experiences, examine problems, promote cooperation nationally and internationally, and identify future challenges. Regional preparatory meetings have already been held for Africa, the Americas, CIS countries, Europe and Mediterranean Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. Further meetings are scheduled in the Seychelles for island destinations, in Algeria for countries with desert areas, in the Maldives for the Asia-Pacific region, and in Fiji for South Pacific islands. As of November 2001, over 1500 people had participated and some 150 case studies had been presented.
* The conclusions and recommendations of these and other official preparatory conferences will be presented at the World Ecotourism Summit in Quebec, Canada, in May 2002, jointly organized by UNEP and WTO.
* WTO is preparing a series of publications including Compilation of Good Practices in the Sustainable Development of Ecotourism (55 case studies from 39 countries), seven country reports on the main European and North American ecotourism markets and a joint UNEP/WTO/IUCN edition of Guidelines for the Sustainable Development and Management of Tourism in National Parks and Protected Areas.
* A special page has been created on the WTO web site for IYE related activities.

The global tourism industry must now respond to the consequences of the attacks on New York and Washington in September. At its recent 14th General Assembly, WTO Members adopted a resolution on terrorism and drew up an action plan to help the tourism industry recover from the effects of these attacks and their aftermath. In the current situation, the International Year of Ecotourism has even greater importance. Ecotourism, which is based on the unique natural features and traditional cultures of destinations, is intended to conserve resources while providing benefits for local communities. It has a special role to play in strengthening international understanding and rebuilding the images of affected countries.
Ecotourism: facts and figures

Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people.

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)

Ecotourism is environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features – both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impacts, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations.

International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

A number of definitions of ecotourism exist. UNEP uses both of those above. In addition, various regions and organizations emphasize particular features of ecotourism. The Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), for example, has defined ecotourism as “any travel to or through wilderness areas that has minimal impact on the natural environment and its wildlife while providing some economic benefits to local communities and the area’s indigenous stewards.”

There is broad agreement on ecotourism’s basic characteristics – or at least on what these characteristics should be, as there is often a gap between ideals and practice. Ecotourism generally:

- is nature-based (visitors are mainly interested in observing and appreciating nature and traditional cultures in natural areas);
- contributes to biodiversity conservation;
- supports the well-being of local people;
- involves responsible action by both tourists and local people to minimize negative environmental and socio-cultural impacts;
- requires the lowest possible consumption of non-renewable resources;
- stresses local ownership, as well as business opportunities for local (especially rural) people.

Ecotourism tends to be modest in scale (e.g., tour groups of no more than 25 people, hotels with fewer than 100 beds). It is also likely to be operated by small or medium-sized companies that specialize in leading – and providing accommodation for – small groups in natural areas. These companies may furnish guides from the local population. Visitors may be given extensive information concerning ecosystems, local cultures and their relationship to the environment, and sustainability issues.

The tourism industry: economic and environmental impacts

Ecotourism is one of the fastest-growing segments of the tourism industry. Long-term forecasts by the World Tourism Organization have predicted substantial growth not only in the number of international tourist arrivals worldwide (expected to exceed one billion by 2010) but also in the percentage of these tourists who will take part in ecotourism.

The World Tourism Organization has estimated that “nature travel” – of which ecotourism is one form – generated about 7% of all international travel expenditure in 1997. According to the World Resources Institute, at the beginning of the 1990s tourism overall was growing at a rate of 4% per year and nature travel at a rate of 10-30%.

These figures are supported by a 1997 survey of tour operators in the Asia-Pacific region, who were experiencing annual growth rates of 10-25%.

World Tourism Organization estimates show global spending on ecotourism increasing by 20% per year, about five times the average rate of growth in the tourism industry as a whole.

One element affecting demand for nature-based tourism is the increase in environmental consciousness worldwide. Nature films and publications have made destinations which are of special environmental interest much more widely known than they once were.

The economic value of tourism-related activities is difficult to assess. Many types and sizes of enterprises are involved. Some of them engage in other activities as well. Tourism-related products and services can also be subject to considerable seasonal fluctuations.

By some measures, tourism-related activities make up the world’s largest economic sector. World Tourism Organization figures indicate that these activities account for over 4% of global GDP, and that their combined direct and indirect contributions to global GDP are over 11%.

Tourism-related activities provide over 200 million jobs.

The World Tourism Organization defines international tourists as those who stay at least one night but less than 12 months in a country other than the one where they usually reside, for purposes mainly other than conducting activities that will be remunerated within the country visited.

Most of the sources used in compiling these “facts and figures” follow the World Tourism Organization definition or a similar one. Within this definition, however, tourism may take vastly different forms – ranging from mass travel to adventure or wilderness treks, to religious pilgrimages, to cultural or educational visits, to sports and ecotourism (Figure 1).

Tourism-related businesses include:

- travel (e.g., travel agents, tour operators, airlines, bus or coach companies, railways, taxis);
- accommodation, catering and retail establishments (e.g., hotels, guest houses, hostels, camping sites, cafes and restaurants, shops);
- leisure and entertainment (e.g., theatres, museums, theme parks, cinemas, spectator sports);
- sports and recreation (e.g., athletic centres, diving clubs, chartered transport, safaris and other guided visits).

Both domestic and international tourism have important direct and indirect impacts on many other economic sectors.

Tourism is one of the world’s fastest growing industries. According to the World Tourism Organization, receipts from international tourism grew an average 9.7% per year between 1985 and 2000, reaching US$ 476 billion in 2000, a 4.5% increase over 1999 (Table 1). The number of international tourist arrivals in 2000 was over 698 million. This represented an estimated 7.4% annual increase – the highest growth rate in nearly ten years and almost twice the increase reported in 1999 (Figures 2 and 3).

Although all the world regions represented in World Tourism Organization statistics received more tourist visits in 2000 than ever before, the highest growth was in East Asia and the Pacific, where there were 14.3 million more.
tourists than in 1999, an increase of 14.7%. The number of domestic tourists within countries is more difficult to measure, but is often estimated to be up to ten times the number of international visitors.

The industrialized countries of the Americas, Europe and Asia are the main destinations (and the main source) of international visitors. Nearly 58% of international tourist arrivals are European residents and more than 18% are from the Americas. However, there has been substantial growth in the number and diversity of tourists from other parts of the world. In terms of international departures, East Asia and the Pacific is the fastest growing region.

In many countries tourism has become the major source of foreign exchange earnings. According to the World Tourism Organization, tourism is one of the top five export categories in 83% of all countries and the main source of foreign currency in at least 38%. As a source of employment and poverty-alleviation tool, tourism plays an essential role in many countries’ economies. Nature-based tourism is especially important in developing countries, for example those lacking significant industrial, financial or resource extraction industries.

While tourist visits may be concentrated in critically important conservation areas, often these areas do not benefit economically from tourism – or not to the extent required to protect the ecosystems on which this type of tourism depends. The IUCN considers most of the world’s park programmes to be underfunded and to provide only a minimum of resource protection. Tourism in these areas can have destructive effects (e.g. trail erosion, wildlife harassment, poaching, road damage and sewage run-off). Many parks cannot undertake adequate visitor management. In some countries the scope of the ecotourism industry is limited by the financial non-viability of park agencies.

**Measuring ecotourism**

Figures on ecotourism are incomplete and difficult to obtain. Before an industry sector can be measured, that sector needs to be clearly and objectively defined. Besides the definitions above, two general viewpoints are associated with the evaluation of ecotourism: “aspirational” (i.e. concerned with what ecotourism should be) and “phenomenological” (i.e. concerned with products that are presented as examples of ecotourism, many of which are far from the idealized image). The diversity of ecotourism ideas and products, as well as an ongoing debate with respect to definitions, render measurement-taking extremely difficult. The many stakeholders (e.g. governments, the tourism industry, park management, social and environmental NGOs, organizations representing indigenous or traditional inhabitants) can make defining and measuring even more complex.

Regarding the “aspirational” aspect of ecotourism, most of those involved are idealists, at least to some extent. But how can aspirations be measured? Small-scale local operators or groups do not have the ability to hire market survey consultants. Most tourism trade associations do not consider the current volumes of ecotourists large enough to justify major investment in market research. As ecotourism can be highly controversial, with very vocal NGOs and indigenous people, for example, presenting their opinions, a great many operators may prefer not to offer ecotourism.

No in-depth studies have been carried out to determine the extent to which travel decisions by nature tourists are based on ecotourism principles. However, at least two such studies have been initiated. The Inter-American Development Bank has included a regional South American study in a US$ 1.8 million bid, to be released by the Brazilian government as part of the Proecotur package (US$ 200 million to support ecotourism in the Brazilian Amazon); and the World Tourism Organization has undertaken a European market survey (see page 64).

Ecotourism is often equated with “nature tourism”. This can distort figures indicating market size. Studies concerning nature tourism have shown that up to 50% of all tourists would like to visit a natural area (e.g. a national park), which suggests a very large potential market. But these tourists do not necessarily want to travel in small groups, learning about wildlife and culture with a local guide. Figures on nature tourism and on visits to national parks and other protected areas nonetheless give some idea of ecotourism’s potential size and rate of growth.

During the last ten years the number of visits to national parks in potentially important ecotourism destinations has grown dramatically – demonstrating a shift in tourism preferences from traditional popular destinations in Europe to nature destinations mainly located in developing countries. The number of foreign visitors to Costa Rica’s parks increased from 65,000 in 1982 to around 400,000 in 1998. Other countries have experienced similar trends (Table 2).
Who benefits from ecotourism?

Local people are those most immediately affected by the emerging market for international ecotourism. They also have the most to lose. Ecotourism seeks to increase local control over tourism’s effects by stressing that local communities and business owners should be considered a vital part of an ecotourism programme. One of the principles of ecotourism is that local people are to be informed in advance of all the possible consequences of tourism development, and that they must formally consent to tourism development in their area.

According to the World Bank, ecotourism (along with adventure travel and cultural travel) is one of the three types of tourism most amenable to community-based initiatives. These niche markets provide especially desirable “customers” for culturally or environmentally sensitive areas: i.e. visitors who typically spend more and stay longer at a destination than the average tourist, generating a higher yield but with less impact on the life of the community and on local culture and the environment. Community-based tourism can generate a sense of pride in the local population and make funds available for maintaining or upgrading cultural assets (e.g. archeological ruins, historic sites, traditional crafts production). It may also provide some of the best opportunities for “pro-poor tourism”, which takes the needs of impoverished local people into account in the planning of tourism development.

Ecotourism can have both direct and indirect economic impacts on a community. Direct impacts are derived from money spent directly by tourists, for example at a restaurant; indirect impacts occur when the restaurant purchases goods and services from other businesses and pays its employees, who can use their wages to buy other goods and services. If the restaurant obtains goods or services outside the local area, the money has no indirect impacts on this area – it is “leakage” (Figure 4).

By their nature, certain projects have an unavoidably high leakage rate. In many African countries nature-based tourism is the first or second most important foreign currency earner. However, there is often severe leakage since so many products used in tourism, from safari vehicles to guidebooks, are imported.

Ecotourism’s economic contribution to local communities needs to be evaluated based mainly on the success of local vendors. The types of products and services most often offered to ecotourists by local community members include food (e.g. from stands, restaurants), vehicle rentals, taxis, guided visits, recreation (e.g. using horses, boats, rafts, bikes) and crafts. Vendors are crucial to the success of any ecotourism venture and its ability to benefit local communities. Frequently their businesses are quite small. Owners may need some encouragement or capital assistance to get started. This could be provided by NGOs or the ecotourism industry.

The economic contribution of ecotourism to local communities can vary tremendously, depending not only on the nature of the project but also on the destination’s characteristics. In
Belize over 40% of local people in the vicinity of Hol Chan Marine reserve feel that they benefit from the reserve economically. In the nearby village of San Pedro there are small local businesses such as hotels, bars and clothing shops. On the other hand, Tortuguero National Park in Costa Rica, is characterized by all-inclusive lodges where visitors pay in advance, travel by boat to view wildlife in remote wetlands, and then return to the lodges, which are not owned by local people. Less than 10% of local households are estimated to benefit economically from the park.\textsuperscript{13}

At Tortuguero there is no small-scale economy of any kind to provide services or goods for ecotourism projects. Localities mainly survive through subsistence fishing. There is little diversity of goods in local communities: long dominated by large-scale banana plantations or cattle raising.

The greater the number of micro-enterprises in a tourism area, the more likely it is that a significant percentage of local people will benefit. In areas where there are few small businesses, leakage can be reduced by instituting lease fees, land rental fees and other per-person use charges, and making sure they go to local residents. Successful efforts to encourage community entrepreneurship are based on local cultural needs and value-added approaches to local products, such as improving packaging and design.\textsuperscript{14}

Ecotourism-related goods and services can provide local people with supplemental income, but they are also of importance in creating new jobs. For example, private nature reserves and ecotourist destinations are being developed in Africa. The reserves are generally established primarily for conservation purposes (rather than hunting) and are increasingly viable economically due to tourism income. The average African private reserve, which creates 457 months of employment per year, is an important source of income in a local community.\textsuperscript{15} In the case of other types of ecotourism projects the number of jobs created may be low. However, in rural areas even a few new jobs can make a big difference.\textsuperscript{16}

**The role of governments**

One of the fundamental problems with respect to environmental protection is the difficulty of putting a value on the environment and on resources such as scenery or biodiversity. Ecotourism helps create a direct commercial value for environmental protection through entry fees charged at national parks and protected areas. Well-regulated protected areas, like the Galapagos Islands (Ecuador) have created significant local and national-level benefits from entry fees paid by nature and ecotourism companies on behalf of their clients and from license fees for tour boats (see page 34). In 1998, Galapagos entrance fees totaled US$ 4.3 million. Over the years, such fees have enabled Ecuador’s national park service to manage the islands by limiting visitor numbers, requiring high-quality guide services by local people, controlling which islands are visited and which trails are used, and providing some support to park management.

It is important to set fees high enough to cover the expenses of proper park management. When entrance fees are too low, the government may be subsidizing tourism – and its attendant impacts.\textsuperscript{17}

**Environmental impacts of ecotourism**

Because of its scale and global extent, tourism inevitably has important environmental impacts. At the same time, it depends heavily on natural resources such as beaches, mountains, rivers, forests and biodiversity. It threatens the environment therefore threatens the tourism industry’s viability. The growth in tourism worldwide presents a significant threat to cultural and biological diversity. Ecotourism, despite its environmentally friendly goals, can also have negative impacts if it is not managed correctly. Major environmental impacts of tourism are listed in Table 3. Many of these could result from unsound ecotourism projects as well.

Ecotourism projects have especially high potential environmental impacts owing to its nature, as they are typically located in pristine or fragile ecosystems. Such areas often have a high degree of biodiversity (one reason they are desirable for ecotourism), but also tend to be extremely vulnerable to environmental damage. Even more than other forms of tourism, ecotourism risks damming the environmental assets on which it depends.

Among the potential negative impacts to which ecotourism developments are vulnerable are overcrowding, erosion, deforestation for increased access and construction of facilities, loss of biodiversity and habitats, increased competition for scarce resources, and increased waste and pollution in areas with little or no capacity to absorb them. Ecotourism also has the potential to create positive environmental and social impacts. Indeed, it is this potential that has attracted so much attention to the concept of ecotourism. Potential positive impacts include the community benefits mentioned above, as well as the opportunity to develop tourism in a way that minimizes negative impacts from the start – without the crowding, sprawl and environmental degradation so often associated with mass tourism. Since ecotourists are often more tolerant of simple or rustic facilities than average tourists would be, tourism income can be increased with lower capital investments than those required for mass tourism developments. In some cases, ecotourism can support capital improvements over the long term.\textsuperscript{18}

Most ecotourism takes place in national parks, wildlife reserves and similar protected areas established to serve environmental conservation goals. The motives for ecotourist travel are a natural fit with the aims and management philosophy of park agencies. However, tourism – including eco-

### Table 2: Visitation rates: nature-based destinations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>1990 Visitation</th>
<th>1999 Visitation</th>
<th>% Increase</th>
<th>Average Visitation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>1,029,000</td>
<td>6,026,000</td>
<td>486%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>435,000</td>
<td>1,027,000</td>
<td>136%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>2,178,000</td>
<td>4,700,000</td>
<td>116%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belize*</td>
<td>88,000</td>
<td>157,000 (1998)</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>362,000</td>
<td>509,000</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botswana*</td>
<td>543,000</td>
<td>740,000 (1998)</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Visitation rates not available for 1999

Source: World Tourism Organization, 2000

### Table 3: Major environmental impacts of tourism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pressure on natural resources</strong></td>
<td>Land and landscape: sand mining, beach and sand dune erosion, soil erosion, urbanization, road and airport building, resulting in land degradation, loss of wildlife habitats, landscape deterioration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marine resources</strong></td>
<td>recreational impacts (scuba diving, snorkelling, sport fishing), damage to coral reefs and subsequent impacts on coastal protection and fisheries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Atmosphere</strong></td>
<td>high energy use by tourism facilities and transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Freshwater</strong></td>
<td>overuse of critical water resources by hotels, swimming pools and golf courses (this is of particular concern in regions such as the Mediterranean (where water is scarce and tourists consume over 200 litres a day)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pressure on other local resources</strong></td>
<td>e.g. energy, food and raw materials that may be in short supply locally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Biological resources</strong></td>
<td>harm to wildlife and habitats, with associated biodiversity loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marine waters and coastal areas</strong></td>
<td>disruption of wildlife habitats, clearance of vegetation for tourism development, increased pressure on endangered species due to trade and hunting, increased demand for fuelwood, forest fires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ecologically fragile areas</strong></td>
<td>e.g. rainforests, wetlands, mangroves, coral reefs, sea grass beds (if not properly planned and managed, nature tourism threatens the world’s most ecologically fragile areas including parks and natural World Heritage sites)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Air</strong></td>
<td>at local level, air pollution from transporting tourists, global impacts, especially from CO2 emissions, relating to energy use in transportation, air conditioning and heating of tourist facilities, etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Noise</strong></td>
<td>from ground as well as air transportation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pollution and waste**

| Land: solid waste and litter (tourists produce on average around 1 kg of waste a day) |
| Freshwater: pollution by sewage |
| Marine waters and coastal areas: sediment run-off, pollution from land-based hotels and marinas; waste and litter associated with marine sports and cruises (in 1995, it was estimated that cruise ships in the Caribbean alone produced over 70,000 tonnes of waste per year) |
| Air: at local level, air pollution from transporting tourists; global impacts, especially from CO2 emissions, relating to energy use in transportation, air conditioning and heating of tourist facilities, etc |

**Social and cultural pressures relating to conservation/sustainable use of biodiversity**

| Social and cultural impacts: disturbance of local way of life and social structures, changes in traditional practices that contribute to conservation (including conservation of biodiversity) |
| Adverse impacts on livelihoods: lack of benefit sharing with those who bear both human and environmental costs |
| Resource use conflicts: competition between tourism and local populations for limited water, sanitation and energy resources, competition with traditional land uses (especially in heavily used areas such as coastal zones) |

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\textsuperscript{17} UNEP Industry and Environment 

July – December 2001
tourism – can degrade environmental quality through overuse, unplanned access to sensitive sites and inappropriate use levels. Ecotourism depends on the long-term sustainability of natural resource management by government agencies. Inadequate financial resources for national park and protected area management can result in overuse, environmental damage, and reduction of ecotourism’s potential benefits.\ef{19}

Ecotourism therefore focuses not only on activities but also on environmentally and socially desirable results: conservation of the natural resources being visited, and contributions to the well-being of local people. Efforts to generate these benefits have been the primary objective of ecotourism programmes for over ten years. During this period it has become clear that some concerns still need to be better addressed, such as:

♦ land tenure and control of the ecotourism development process by host communities;
♦ the efficiency and fairness of protective measures for biological and cultural diversity;
♦ the need for more precautions and monitoring when operating in especially sensitive areas;
♦ indigenous and traditional rights in areas suitable for ecotourism development.

If ecotourism is to become a successful sustainable development tool, adequate funds will be needed to allow planning and long-term management of ecotourism destinations. The size and nature of the ecotourism market should be sufficient to make government funds available to conserve areas, both cultural and environmental, for ecotourism development. Fees and taxes need to be used for resource protection and visitor management.\ef{20} No tourism destination (particularly an “ecodestination”) can prosper in the long term if it is overcrowded, dirty, environmentally degraded, and threatened with the loss of its biological and cultural identity.

Notes
5. For example, a resident of Country A who has a job in Country B would not be considered a tourist in Country B, but a resident of Country A whose main work location is in Country A would be considered a tourist when visiting Country B on business. See World Tourism Organization, WTO Tourism Highlights 2000, 2nd edition, 2000.
10. Ashley, C., C. Boyd and H. Goodwin (2000) Pro-poor Tourism: Putting Poverty at the Heart of Tourism, online document (Overseas Development Institute).
15. Eagles, op. cit.
16. Lindberg, op. cit.
17. UNEP/TIES, op. cit.
20. UNEP/TIES, op. cit.

For more information on ecotourism:

Web sites
• UNEP Tourism Programme: www.unep.org/tc/tourism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The International Year of Ecotourism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing ecotourism’s global importance, the United Nations designated 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism. The UN Commission on Sustainable Development requested international agencies, governments and the private sector to undertake supportive activities. UNEP and the World Tourism Organization have joined forces to take the leading role in preparing and coordinating activities to be undertaken at the international level. The International Year of Ecotourism is intended to offer an opportunity to review successful ecotourism experiences worldwide, in order to consolidate tools and institutional frameworks that will ensure its sustainable development in the future. Among the many activities to be undertaken at the global, national, regional and local levels is the World Ecotourism Summit to be held in Quebec, Canada, on 19-22 May 2002. The World Ecotourism Summit is expected to be the largest ever worldwide gathering of all types of stakeholders involved in ecotourism, including ministers, public sector officials, tourism companies and their trade associations, local authorities, national park managers, NGOs relevant to the ecotourism sector, the academic community and others. It will examine ways to maximize the economic, environmental and social benefits of ecotourism, while avoiding past shortcomings and negative impacts.</td>
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Ecotourism and sustainable development

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Summary
The International Ecotourism Society has adopted a standardized approach to the development of ecotourism guidelines. This article presents an overview of standard-setting for ecotourism; the evolution of ecotourism as a market niche; government policies relating to ecotourism; and ways to increase benefits for local people. In general, the sustainability of the tourism industry is just beginning to be addressed at the international level. International efforts to certify ecotourism are at the earliest stages of development.

Résumé

Resumen
La Sociedad Internacional de Ecoturismo ha estandarizado su enfoque para desarrollar pautas sobre ecoturismo. En este artículo se presentan las generalidades sobre la fijación de estándares de ecoturismo, la evolución del ecoturismo como nicho de mercado, las políticas gubernamentales para el ecoturismo y las formas de aumentar los beneficios para los pobladores locales. En general, este enfoque orientado a la sustentabilidad de la industria del turismo a nivel internacional es incipiente. Los esfuerzos por certificar el ecotourismo se encuentran en su etapa inicial.

Ecotourism has developed during the last ten or 15 years as both an industry and a form of sustainable development that conserves natural areas and sustains the well-being of local people. As a concept, it aspires to achieve sustainable development results in all cases. But ecotourism products have become numerous enough to be considered a market segment with sustainable and unsustainable characteristics.

Ecotourism has been widely used (and often misused) as a market label in a variety of circumstances. Nonetheless, the strong orientation of the ecotourism field towards the evolution of principles, guidelines and certification based on sustainability standards gives it a market niche strongly associated with sustainability.

During the 1990s, dozens of conferences were held to discuss ecotourism principles. A variety of definitions emerged worldwide to describe this new phenomenon. In 1991, The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) coined one of the first and best recognized definitions: “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people.”

While there are certainly lessons to be learned from good and bad examples of all kinds of tourism development, a genuine analysis of ecotourism should probably be based on projects formulated to follow ecotourism principles. Efforts to set sustainability standards for the ecotourism industry are less than ten years old. For those interested in understanding how sustainability can be achieved, analysis of projects developed with ecotourism principles in mind will likely produce the most interesting and consistent results. The articles in this issue of Industry and Environment should provide some excellent new examples for researchers and practitioners to study.

Efforts to look at the wide variety of nature-based tourism products which were not formulated with sustainability standards in mind may be less productive. While ecotourism is in nearly all cases nature tourism, not all nature tourism is ecotourism. Rarely has the mainstream cruise line industry, for example, defined itself as ecotourism – despite its dependence on natural resources. While more work needs to be done on cruise lines’ sustainability standards, it would not be accurate to analyze them as an ecotourism industry.

It is important to recognize that any discussion of the sustainability of the tourism industry is very new. Tourism was not included in the global dialogue on sustainable development that took place at the time of the Rio Summit, resulting in the formation of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD). Only in 1998 did UNCSD address the sustainability of the tourism industry. In general, international discussion of the tourism industry’s sustainability is still a very immature process that needs more expertise and fuller commitment from governments, industry and the development community. That process is just beginning.

Ecotourism standards
The process of establishing principles for ecotourism in the 1990s primarily took place at conferences, attended for the most part by academics and NGO representatives. Usually there was little involvement by industry members. This resulted in a variety of principles and standards that may or may not be applicable in practice.

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) found that guidelines offer a practical participatory tool for coming to the consensus directly with industry members on sustainable development practices. The guideline development process was studied by TIES in the early 1990s to help determine how best to get a variety of stakeholders to adopt sustainability principles. TIES then adopted a standardized approach to the development of ecotourism guidelines. First, best practice information is gleaned from industry members through surveying. Second, participatory multi-stakeholder meetings (involving researchers specializing in impacts on natural areas and local people, industry, NGOs and communities) are held in Northern and Southern locations. Finally, international review takes place, helping ensure that a wide variety of viewpoints from many nationalities are incorporated. TIES has completed this procedure for nature tour operators (International Ecotourism Society, 1993), ecologodes (Mehta et al., in press) and marine ecotourism (Halpenny, in press).

Efforts to certify ecotourism are at the earliest stages of development. Certifying ecotourism businesses involves gathering data on their environmental and social performance and then verifying these data. Difficult issues arise when trying to establish measurable benchmarks for principles that are highly qualitative (such as the level of community involvement). Efforts to certify ecotourism businesses have been led by Australia, which established a research programme in 1994 and launched a federally funded initiative in 1996 (see article by Meaghan Newsom beginning on page 25 of this issue of Industry and Environment).

It is the only ecotourism-specific certification programme in the world. The author, with former TIES staffer Elizabeth Halpenny, has published a proposal for Guidelines for Successful Ecotourism Certification in a recent article (Epler Wood and Halpenny, 2001). This article suggests that indicators must be arrived at for each segment of the industry via local stakeholder participation, and that independent verification procedures are needed to ensure
objectivity. Final standards for ecotourism certification programmes are likely to appear in the next two to three years.

**Evolution of ecotourism as a niche market**

International nature-based businesses began to thrive in the 1980s with the growing interest in outdoor travel and the environment, spurred by excellent new outdoor equipment for camping and hiking and events such as Earth Day. Specialist companies close to the destinations of interest began to run ground operations and developed their own cadre of highly trained local guides. Nature-based tourism companies from San Jose, Costa Rica, to Katmandu, Nepal, proliferated. This created a significant opportunity for local entrepreneurs and nature guides (not to be confused with community-level business development, which will be addressed in another section of this article). International tour operators and their ground-based counterparts offering trips to the Galapagos Islands, Costa Rica, Kenya and Nepal – among other destinations – saw rapid market gains in the 1980s and early 1990s. These companies began to realize that they could take the initiative to conserve the environment by sponsoring local conservation groups at the destinations they visited or raising funds for local causes. So many individuals with unique ideas and creative approaches were involved in the early days that it was rare to see ecotourism carried out the same way twice.

Today many ecotour operators around the globe are working to create well-planned, interactive learning experiences that introduce small groups of travellers to new environments and cultures, while minimizing negative environmental impacts and supporting conservation efforts. These service providers can be local or international. They range from seasonal community-run and family operations to medium-scale outbound operators with yearly revenues in the millions of dollars.

Of course, many companies operating throughout the world offers what is falsely labelled as ecotourism. Sometimes these companies even receive aid from governments because of their purported environmental standards. The damage being done by companies that relocate indigenous people in order to build golf courses (under the guise of ecotourism) has clearly been considerable. It is difficult to quantify what percentage of the market is seeking to meet sustainability standards. The argument over how beneficial the ecotourism industry is, or how harmful it can be, is therefore difficult to resolve. It is likely that this industry will have both sustainable and unsustainable components for years to come. Whether or not this overrides ecotourism’s potential benefits is a matter of opinion, but without question there is a continuing need to closely monitor how the industry is evolving, particularly in rural areas and among peoples that lack genuine land and other legal rights.

Ecolodges have emerged in the marketplace in the last five years. Their definition and guidelines have only recently received international review (Mehta, et al., in press). A recent study of 121 lodges in 35 countries (Sanders and Halpenny, 2001), the only study ever performed on the business formulas used by ecodge owners worldwide, shows that the majority (about 70%) of lodges built in natural areas in developing countries around the world are locally owned. In fact, there is little evidence that ecolodges are becoming large “corporatized” businesses earning substantial profits for foreigners. The large majority of the lodges studied (87%) have fewer than 30 rooms and over 50% operate with profits of less than 10%.

The management and operation of an ecolodge differs from that of a mainstream hotel for many reasons, which undoubtedly helps account for their small size and low profit margins. According to International Ecolodge Guidelines (Mehta, et al., in press), ecolodges are most often found in wilderness areas that are the least developed, most remote areas in any country, and therefore the last places to receive government investments in health, education, electricity, potable water, roads, etc. This poses a special challenge to the ecolodge owner or manager, who must achieve sustainable development by supporting local communities in a long-term development programme and in putting their own land conservation programme in place with a minimum of outside assistance.

Overall, the part of the ecotourism industry that is seeking to achieve green standards is developing its own ethics and has used highly individualistic approaches to achieve sustainable development results. At present, the ecotourism industry is still dominated by small to medium-sized, owner-operated businesses that seek to improve their sustainability record only if the owners themselves have a strong sense of the importance of social and environmental goals for their businesses.

The challenges ahead for improving the green performance of the ecotourism industry will primarily involve a process of working with small, individually owned businesses that operate in remote areas and helping them find solutions to the difficult problem of working profitably (but equitably) in areas that often lack the full range of government services or oversight.

**Government policies for ecotourism**

Governments have an extraordinarily important role to play in developing ecotourism, yet their role is complex and must be defined by a variety of agency players. Several countries have adopted specific ecotourism strategies. The first national ecotourism plan in the world, prepared by the Australian government in 1994 and already mentioned above, is the most important example of national ecotourism planning. In Australia, the decision to formulate an ecotourism strategy was made in response to growing international interest and the increasing profile of Australia’s natural environment as a tourism attraction. Working on behalf of the federal government, a small team undertook a literature review and proceeded to public consultation, which involved local government agencies, natural resource managers, tour operators, tourism providers, ecotour operators, and community groups from around Australia. The result was a five-year plan that set out a number of goals and strategies for developing the ecotourism industry in Australia.

In the United States, the National Park Service has developed a comprehensive ecotourism strategy for its national parks, which includes the development of ecotourism guidelines, training programmes for park staff, and partnerships with local communities and businesses. The strategy aims to balance the needs of visitors with the protection of natural resources, while promoting economic development in rural areas.

In Europe, the European Union has established a number of policies and programmes to support sustainable tourism development, including the European Union’s Sustainable Tourism Action Plan. The plan aims to promote sustainable tourism practices, such as ecotourism, and to encourage the development of new tourism products and services that are more environmentally friendly.

In Asia, many governments have also adopted ecotourism policies and programmes. For example, the government of Thailand has established the Thai Ecotourism Association, which provides training and guidance to local communities and businesses interested in developing ecotourism activities. The association also works to promote sustainable tourism practices and to protect natural resources.

In South America, the government of Brazil has developed the National Ecotourism Plan, which aims to promote sustainable tourism practices and to protect natural resources. The plan includes the development of ecotourism guidelines, training programmes for park staff, and partnerships with local communities and businesses.

In Africa, the government of South Africa has established the South Africa National Parks, which includes a number of national parks and nature reserves. The parks are managed to protect natural resources and to promote sustainable tourism practices.

In Oceania, the government of New Zealand has established the New Zealand Ecotourism Association, which provides training and guidance to local communities and businesses interested in developing ecotourism activities. The association also works to promote sustainable tourism practices and to protect natural resources.

Overall, the government policies for ecotourism are designed to balance the needs of visitors with the protection of natural resources, while promoting economic development in rural areas. The policies and programmes aim to promote sustainable tourism practices, such as ecotourism, and to encourage the development of new tourism products and services that are more environmentally friendly.
marketers, planners, conservation and community groups, developers and indigenous Australians. Workshops were convened around the country, and a call for written submissions was published in the national press.

In Brazil, the government decided to address the environmental threat of rapid tourism growth by establishing the Interministerial Ecotourism Task Force in the early 1990s. This group produced Guidelines for an Ecotourism National Policy, officially endorsed and released by President Fernando Henrique Cardoso in March of 1995.

A technical cooperation programme was developed for the Amazon region and signed in 2000 by President Cardoso. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) loaned US$ 13.8 million to establish a framework for implementing the investments necessary for the nine Brazilian Amazonian states to responsibly prepare themselves to manage selected ecotourism areas. This loan package, called Proecotur, is a pre-investment for a major US$ 200 million initiative to develop the country’s Amazon region for ecotourism. The pre-investment stage will proceed by having all nine Amazonian states develop ecotourism strategies, including the following measures:

- strengthening the legal framework of these regions to regulate tourist activities;
- preparing a detailed market study;
- developing 19 management plans for existing and newly established protected areas;
- making key pilot investments in ecotourism products and sites;
- preparing 19 pre-feasibility and feasibility studies for infrastructure projects;
- implementing training and capacity-building programmes throughout the region; and
- creating a website to keep the public informed on the project’s progress.

Because there is a growing ecotourism market, governments are expressing increasing interest in attracting ecotourism as part of their tourism development programmes. The above examples give a good idea of the importance of government planning in the process of developing an ecotourism market. While no guidelines for government planning of ecotourism exist, the following starting points on page 11, developed by the author, provide a checklist for governments interested in developing an ecotourism programme to bring to the table for participatory, multi-stakeholder review.

### Increasing benefits for local people

Community-based ecotourism (CBE) is a growing phenomenon throughout the world. The CBE concept implies that the community has substantial control and involvement in the ecotourism project, and that the majority of benefits remain in the community. Three main types of CBE enterprises have been identified (Wesche and Drumm, 1999). The purest model suggests that the community owns and manages the enterprise. All community members are employed by the project using a rotation system, and profits are allocated to community projects. The second type of CBE enterprise involves family or group initiatives within communities. This is based on voluntary participation. The third type of CBE is a joint venture between a community or family and an outside business partner.

At present there is a large demand, especially in Latin America, for assistance to communities seeking to develop local ecotourism products. The Nature Conservancy’s Latin America division reports that of their 60 local NGO affiliates, 36 have requested assistance with ecotourism feasibility studies (Eppler Wood, 1998). This is just one example of what is well-known throughout Latin America: ecotourism has been chosen by thousands of communities in the region as their preferred development alternative.

The NGO community has a role to play in assisting local communities with viable sustainable development projects. However, inadequate expertise and understanding of the ecotourism product has led to inappropriate assistance patterns.

Some of the primary problems are:
1. lack of cooperation with the private sector that is already offering ecotourism in the destination country;
2. poor communication between NGOs and the private sector;
3. use by NGOs of their tax-free status to offer products that are in direct competition with the private sector;
4. business and tourism planning occurring after communities are targeted by NGOs for ecotourism development;
5. top-down, bureaucratic management of projects where the intent is to foster community management.

The most important new trends in development assistance include better pre-assessment of community needs and community readiness; a full analysis of land tenure and other legal issues relating to long-term access to the political process; training that is more targeted at community needs; research on the market for community ecotourism, paired with efforts to develop

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**Ecotourism**

**Ecotourism in development cooperation**

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**Definitions**

Although there are many different ideas on the subject, the author perceives “ecotourism” as a development concept with a distinctive set of objectives and not necessarily as a market segment (which would be referred to as “nature tourism”). Ecotourism is therefore seen as a sustainable form of nature tourism that strives to achieve environmental, social and cultural compatibility and to generate economic and other benefits, especially for local rural people and nature conservation purposes.

**Ecotourism’s importance in developing countries**

As a sustainable development concept in rural areas, and to support nature conservation, ecotourism is especially important in developing countries. To begin with, most biodiversity hotspots as well as many types of natural landscapes and wildlife are found in the tropics. These features are the natural resources on which ecotourism depends.

In view of the very difficult situation of nature conservation, and the widespread poverty of rural people in most developing countries, the need for the benefits expected from ecotourism is particularly urgent. There is usually a large percentage of protected areas, but these areas are often not much more than “paper parks” suffering from low levels of acceptance (e.g. there may be poaching, timber cutting and numerous other encroachments) and general government failure. Support for conservation by national governments is marginal, and most protected areas in developing countries depend heavily on international funding.

This dilemma has been recognized by the conservation community. There is now a broad consensus that biodiversity can only be conserved by attaching an economic value to it, with ecotourism being one of the most significant possibilities for generating direct income through sustainable use of natural areas (both for agencies managing these areas and for local people living in the buffer zones).

On the demand side there are corresponding trends. “Third World” tourism has been growing steadily. There is increasing demand for “alternative” forms of tourism, including nature/ecotourism. In many developing countries tourism has become an important source of foreign exchange earnings.

**Shortcomings of ecotourism in developing countries – a critical review**

In view of the far-reaching expectations associated with ecotourism, it is clear that this very ambitious concept requires not only professional business management but also a high level of steering and cooperation among many stakeholders, especially the private sector and conservation agencies (both government-related and NGOs). In most developing countries the needed structures or capacities are not in place. The same government failure that...
appropriate linkages to the global marketplace; and development of improved systems to protect communities from competing land uses, such as logging and oil exploitation.

One of the key issues in ecotourism today is the extent to which this portion of the global marketplace can actually represent a different kind of responsible commerce. A growing number of articles assume that ecotourism will use the same model as much of the rest of the global marketplace, and that it will, by default, disempower local people for the purpose of selling off their land and culture to the highest bidder.

Ecotourism can be a form of commerce in which local people actively participate in the formulation of social “contracts” that go well beyond standard business formulas. Given that the great majority of ecotourism businesses are locally owned (Sanders and Halpenny, 2001) and that socially conscious ownership is frequently involved, communities can achieve more than the status quo. The involvement of NGOs and the development assistance community can frequently help reverse top-down business patterns.

Participatory decision-making processes can make a difference. These processes are being used increasingly, even in regions where communities have been sidelined in the past.

Certainly no new economic development system can completely transform the social and political context of a people or region. Finding genuinely equitable formulas for responsible commerce between cultures, and between those in the North and the South, can without question be challenging. But honest efforts to find increasingly equitable approaches to the development of ecotourism continue.

**Conclusion**

The ecotourism principles, practices and policies reviewed in this article represent a consistent and long-term approach to achieving sustainability. There is little evidence that ecotourism is “big business.” It remains a specialized market niche occupied by a variety of small businesses, NGOs and interested communities. Mislabelling of ecotourism by businesses and governments seeking to cash in on its perceived market allure is a very thorny problem which will not disappear without better regulations and international standards for certification.

Progress on certification of ecotourism is slow, and must be governed by realistic efforts to provide proper oversight and guidelines for the certification process. No researcher or author really knows what proportion of the ecotourism market niche genuinely represents a sustainable development alternative. Ecotourism businesses, NGOs, government and development agencies all need to properly analyze and investigate better ecotourism policies that result in both conservation and community benefits.

While much work needs to be done to achieve acceptance of new guidelines and policies, there is reason to believe that ecotourism can improve sustainability standards for commerce in areas which have traditionally had few development options; that it can help governments diversify their tourism economies with a more sustainable alternative; and that it can assist communities in finding new formulas to gain social contracts that respect their culture, intellectual property, and legal rights.

Ecotourism is commerce, and as such it is no different from other forms of development. It offers good opportunities, but can never provide an entire solution. The solution must come from the will of all those involved to achieve sustainable results.

**Acknowledgements**

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**Literature cited**


International Ecotourism Society, Burlington, Vermont, USA.


### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Uncontrolled nature tourism</th>
<th>Small-scale ecotourism</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attractiveness of access to destinations</td>
<td>high/easy</td>
<td>limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of landscape</td>
<td>sea coasts, bodies of water, mountains, open landscapes with animals</td>
<td>dense forests, areas with high rainfall, visibly degraded ecosystems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating stakeholders</td>
<td>national/international tourism companies</td>
<td>NGOs, development organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steering/planning</td>
<td>deficient or non-existent</td>
<td>more developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Impacts**

- Environmental: sometimes significant, insignificant
- Social/cultural: sometimes significant, acceptable
- Contribution to conservation: low
- Generation of local benefits: low or unbalanced
- Awareness creation: low

*Source: Strasdas, 2001.*

*Phase I: “classical” tourism promotion (financing of conventional tourism infrastructure, hotels, and marketing attention to environmental or social issues) in the 1960s and 1970s.*

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Phase II: almost total withdrawal from tourism promotion (after social and environmental problems occurred and economic benefits turned out to be disappointing) in the 1980s and early 1990s; Phase III: rethinking of tourism within the framework of sustainable development, albeit hesitantly, beginning in the mid 1990s.

No DC organization currently has a specific tourism or ecotourism programme, despite the importance of tourism in many developing countries and the official recognition of ecotourism’s potential benefits by the UN Commission on Sustainable Development. Until recently, when this matter was discussed with donors, an undifferentiated, almost “fundamentalist” critique of tourism prevailed. Tourism does appear in some programmes concerning economic development, private sector assistance, poverty alleviation, and (most notably) biodiversity conservation, but no further specifications or official guidelines can be found.

This is all the more astonishing since ecotourism, in particular, has managed to “sneak” into development cooperation on the project level as a real if minor component. For example, almost 50 projects funded by the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) have an ecotourism component, and almost all of these are concerned with biodiversity and natural resource conservation and rural development. This has led a number of GTZ staff to establish an informal working group. Still, on the policy level tourism is steadfastly rated as non-priority, without a single person (not to mention department) officially assigned to it. The same applies to other donors, such as the World Bank.

On the other hand, classical tourism promotion has not entirely disappeared. The European Union, for example, financed such projects until recently. Nowadays it is especially the International Finance Corporation and some of the regional and bilateral development banks that still finance relatively large-scale tourism investments, mostly in hotels. Although this is increasingly being done in the framework of sustainable development principles, there are no specific guidelines and no particular emphasis on best practice. The amounts of financing available under these programmes (loans) are much larger than those for the ecotourism components within “green” projects (grants or loans) and are usually not tailored to the multi-sectoral needs of ecotourism programmes and investments.

Typical weaknesses of donors’ ecotourism projects

With no guidelines or coordination on the policy or programme level, it comes as no surprise that ecotourism is often dealt with in a haphazard manner on the project level. No development cooperation organization has yet systematically monitored or evaluated its ecotourism project components, but some studies (SECA, 2001; Strasdas, 2001) indicate that at this initial stage there are more failures than successes. Typical weaknesses when ecotourism is implemented as part of “green” projects include:

- a tendency to favour small-scale projects not connected to the overall tourism market or to the general conditions of a country;
- a certain preference for areas with a limited appeal to tourism, whereas highly attractive destinations are left alone (Table 1);
- lack of tourism-related professionalism among project staff and partners;
- little cooperation with the private sector, which is sometimes considered too “commercial”;
- little consideration of long-term feasibility and possible target markets;
- overestimation of local people’s capacities to manage their own ecotourism projects (frequent failure of community-based projects after support is withdrawn);
- implementation of isolated measures in the absence of a comprehensive strategy, since ecotourism is not sufficiently planned for in project designs and budgets. Measures taken tend to focus on certain aspects while neglecting others (Table 2).

A final note following this critical analysis: things are about to change. As was evident at a 1999 workshop organized by The International Ecotourism Society which addressed several US-based donors (World Bank Group, Inter-American Development Bank, USAID), most participants had at least recognized the importance of ecotourism and the degree to which it was being neglected. A few ecotourism projects that have incorporated some of the recommendations below are listed in Table 3.

Conclusions and recommendations

While it is not absolutely necessary to declare sustainable tourism (including ecotourism) a development cooperation priority, it should be officially acknowledged as an important tool for use in achieving overarching objectives such as biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation. The adoption of consistent policies and guidelines in project design is mandatory if ecotourism’s potential to help achieve these goals is to be used fully.

A cross-sectoral approach integrating economic development with conservation objectives and participatory planning is also necessary. Financial and technical cooperation programmes need to be adapted to the specific requirements of ecotourism projects (e.g. small- to medium-scale investments, community participation, training programmes, marketing support).

On the institutional level, DC organizations should create ecotourism (or sustainable tourism) departments with a coordinating and advising role. These departments may be small, as long as professional personnel are assigned to them. Specific tasks such as market research and marketing support could be delegated to specialized NGOs or consultants on a contractual basis. This is also an option for smaller donors dealing with ecotourism only occasionally.

On the project level, the following recommendations are made:

- Seriously assess the feasibility of ecotourism in a given project. Since the

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<td>carrying capacity studies</td>
<td>economic feasibility/market studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>simple infrastructure (trails, camps)</td>
<td>hospitality training</td>
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<tr>
<td>training of guides</td>
<td>business management</td>
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<td>simple brochures</td>
<td>marketing</td>
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Table 2

Elements that tend to be favoured or neglected when ecotourism is implemented
promotion of ecotourism is complex and demanding, it is better to concentrate technical and financial means on a limited number of promising projects than to disperse them.

- In implementing projects, conceive a comprehensive strategy that covers the entire range of necessary ecotourism aspects from participatory planning and product development to marketing and monitoring.

- Training programmes are a key component of successful ecotourism projects, with local communities, NGOs and protected area agencies as the main target groups.

- Create stronger links with the private sector, especially with committed individual companies. Public-private partnerships and joint ventures between tourism companies and local communities, NGOs and protected area administrations are particularly promising. Tourism businesses, many of which do not have sufficient knowledge of ecotourism, should be the target of training programmes.

It is to be hoped that the International Year of Ecotourism will create a sufficient dynamic facilitating the transition within development cooperation organizations from “clandestine” ecotourism promotion to clear policies and programmes.

Special thanks to Sylvie Blangy and Megan Epler Wood for providing specific information on certain development organizations.

Notes
1. “Biodiversity hot spots” is a term used by the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature), Conservation International and other conservation organizations to describe areas with exceptionally high biodiversity.

References


Ecotourism in the Caribbean region: seizing the opportunity

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Summary
Ecotourism can generate income while contributing to the protection of natural and cultural resources. It is especially appropriate in protected and remote rural areas. This article focuses on initiatives taken in the Caribbean region (e.g., by Belize, Bonaire, St. Lucia, the Cayman Islands, Cuba and Venezuela) to make the tourism industry more sustainable.

Résumé
L’écotourisme peut à la fois produire des revenus et contribuer à la protection des ressources naturelles et culturelles. Il est particulièrement indiqué dans les zones protégées et les zones rurales isolées. L’article examine les initiatives prises dans la région Caraïbes (notamment Belize, Bonaire, Sainte-Lucie, les îles Caïmans, Cuba et la Vénézuela) pour rendre le tourisme plus compatible avec un développement durable.

Resumen
El ecoturismo puede generar ingresos y al mismo tiempo contribuir a la protección de los recursos naturales y culturales. Es especialmente adecuado en las zonas protegidas y en las zonas rurales remotas. Este artículo describe las iniciativas tomadas en la región del Caribe (Belize, Bonaire, Santa Lucía, Islas Caimán, Cuba y Venezuela) a fin de lograr que el turismo se convierta en una industria más sustentable.

The natural and cultural resources with which the Caribbean region is blessed have made it the world’s most popular warm weather destination. The fact that it is very fortunate to have tourism as a development option could be taken as the starting point for an extensive discussion concerning tourism’s costs and benefits. All indications have been that the region’s dependence on tourism for economic development – if not survival – is likely to increase in the immediate future, as other economic sectors encounter a hostile competitive situation. The good news is that Caribbean countries have a comparative advantage in an industry where world demand has been almost unlimited, and where this region has demonstrated credible industry performance over the years. The bad news is that 1) the Caribbean faces fierce competition as the world’s premier warm weather destination, and 2) regional tourism plans have been more focused on “growing” than on “developing” the industry, and therefore countries must address several environmental and social problems in addition to possible loss of market share.

Tourism growth vs. tourism development
As the Caribbean is the most tourism dependent region in the world, tourism stakeholders are faced with immense challenges: maintaining the tourist flows necessary to guarantee economic stability; ensuring proper use of resources for the benefit of visitors and inhabitants; and ensuring that the resources that now attract visitors will continue to exist and will continue to attract them. If the tourism-environment relationship can be considered an infinite circle, this is certainly the case in the Caribbean region, with its many islands of all shapes and sizes.

The question remains: What does the Caribbean want – tourism growth or tourism development? If we say development, how can we ensure sustainability? Ecotourism has been recognized as a viable form of sustainable tourism development. Its capacity to generate economic benefits by contributing to the protection of natural and cultural resources (and involving local communities) has made ecotourism an alternative form of tourism, especially in protected and remote rural areas. This article focuses on the initiatives taken in the Caribbean with a view towards sustainable development of our tourism industry and the use of ecotourism as an instrument to achieve this goal.

Ecotourism is not a new concept in the Caribbean. With a generous tropical climate, landscapes that range from volcanic mountains, lakes and limestone cliffs to lush green hills, mangrove swamps and forests, not to mention our well-known sandy beaches and astonishing coral reefs (including the world’s second and third largest barrier reefs), our region had been welcoming visitors in search of this natural world well before the term “ecotourism” was coined. The question is: was this really ecotourism? As a way to help answer this question, the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) convened the First Caribbean Conference on Ecotourism in Belize City in 1991. At the time it was recognized that “despite the growing importance of ecotourism and a general concern for the protection of the environment, the Caribbean region has, with the exception of a few countries, not made any serious efforts to examine the potential which this type of tourism may hold for the region or to capitalize on any advantages which the region possesses.”

Five more conferences were organized subsequently, at which governmental tourism officers, hoteliers, cruise liners, NGO representatives, academics and students had the opportunity to discuss the issue in a regional forum. In 1997, the focus of this regional meeting was broadened to embrace not only ecotourism as a type of tourism, but the whole concept of making our tourism industry sustainable. Dominica hosted the First Caribbean Sustainable Tourism Development Conference in 1997; since then, three more meetings have been held in Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname and Guyana.

The past decade
In 1993, the Caribbean Environment Programme (Kingston, Jamaica) evaluated the competitiveness of ecotourism in the wider Caribbean. The results of this study showed that while countries in the region supported the ecotourism concept, its significance varied among countries. The study revealed that ecotourism development was considered directly proportionate to the increase in traditional tourism, and that it seemed to be geared towards economic development more than preservation. Difficulties distinguishing between visitors interested in ecotourism activities or traditional activities were explained. These difficulties make it almost impossible to ascertain the economic benefits to be gained from ecotourism.

Regarding the institutional framework necessary for developing ecotourism, the study concluded that “although institutions are being established in the countries with the specific purpose of looking after tourism activities and/or the environment in general, the majority do not consider ecotourism as a section of the framework, but only as a part of their programmes.” In general terms, the most important reasons for not developing ecotourism were identified as the lack of qualified staff, infrastructure, legislation, facil-
ities and institutional set-up. With respect to the future, countries showed evidence of having more willingness than concrete or real plans.

It would not be fair to say that the situation existing almost ten years ago still exists today. Some progress has been made, but not as much as could have been, given ecotourism’s enormous potential in the region. Progress is more evident in countries where ecotourism has been integrated as an important tool in national plans. Belize, for example, has established a system for collecting information on visitors to natural and heritage areas, both in terms of numbers and motivation. Most of its accommodations are distributed throughout the inland country and cays, in small hotels or guesthouses. Bonaire has one of the best managed marine national parks, which has put it on the map as one of the best diving destinations in the world.

In some other countries, despite the recognition that ecotourism is the best alternative for tourism development, separating it from more traditional forms of tourism has not been easy. Dominica, the “Nature Island of the Caribbean”, is struggling between the ecotourism potential of its natural and cultural resources, which include the Morne Trois Piton National Park (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), and the high-impact cruise tourism that makes use of its ports every week. There is also the controversial issue of whether a larger airport should be built to facilitate the arrival of long-haul aircraft.

What is happening today?

It is expected that orienting the tourism industry towards more sustainable development would facilitate resolution of the conflict between traditional tourism and ecotourism. Provision of a sustainable tourism framework for all tourism operations, not only those in protected or rural areas, would allow ecotourism to find its own dimension in the Caribbean and to be seen as a true option, not a merely a response to the market.

As a region that moves around tourism, the Caribbean has taken steps to define regional sustainable development guidelines. All stakeholders are playing their roles. The regional work carried out by entities such as the CTO, the Caribbean Hotel Association (CHA) through its subsidiary the Caribbean Alliance for Sustainable Tourism (CAST), the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI), the regional programmes of international entities such as the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), and the environmental and development activities of the United Nations (e.g. those of UNEP and UNDP) have been complemented by different sized efforts in different areas at the national level.

A Regional Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework, prepared by CTO and approved by the Ministers of Tourism of the organization’s 33 member countries, would facilitate the establishment of the Caribbean as a Sustainable Tourism Zone by harmonizing ongoing individual and regional initiatives. Under the guidance of CAST, hoteliers in the region are seeking certification by Green Globe 21, an international environmental management and awareness programme, in recognition of their commitment to implement environmental management systems.

At this moment the Caribbean region is embarked in a project for the establishment and dissemination of quality standards to ensure healthy, safe and environmentally conscious tourism products and services. This project, Quality Tourism for the Caribbean (QTC), is a joint venture between the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC) and CAST, with financial support by the Inter-American Development Bank/Multilateral Investment Fund (IADB/MIF). Complementing the QTC’s work, CTO has defined a Regional Sustainable Tourism Standards and Indicators Framework which, once approved by the Caribbean countries, would serve as a reference for establishing national tourism standards.

To contribute to the protection of our most precious resource, the Caribbean Sea itself, the region has begun to implement the Blue Flag campaign, a voluntary certification scheme for beaches and marinas operated in Europe by the Foundation for Environmental Education in Europe (FEEEE) since the middle 1980s. This scheme has proven effective as an environmental tool to enhance safety management and environmental quality. The Caribbean campaign is being operated by an inter-agency consortium made up of CTO, CAST (through QTC) and the Caribbean Conservation Association (CCA).

Countries’ best practices

Throughout the Caribbean region, initiatives deserving recognition have been taken by individuals, communities, governmental entities and NGOs. Now to be found under the sustainable tourism umbrella, these are only a few of the many projects in the region that illustrate the possibilities of this type of activity.

St. Lucia: the Heritage Tourism Programme

The Heritage Tourism Programme is an initiative of the Government of St. Lucia which is jointly funded by the European Commission (EC). It was initiated in 1998 to establish heritage tourism as a viable and sustainable component of St. Lucia’s tourism product through facilitating a process of education, capacity building, product development, marketing, credit access, and promotion of environmental and cultural protection for the benefit of host communities.

The Heritage Tourism Programme operates at five levels. The public awareness and community mobilization element is centred around national campaigns focusing on economic and employment opportunities, and on the link between environmental management and sustainable tourism development. In the area of institutional strengthening and capacity building, the Programme seeks to increase the capacity of individuals and organizations within government, civil society and the private sector through training, technical assistance, strategic planning and organizational development processes.

Product development is another important component. The Programme offers a range of facilities and services aimed at facilitating the involvement of new, small entrepreneurs and creating new tourism product. It also collaborates with relevant national and regional partners to define and market the Heritage Tourism product, as well as promoting the island as a sustainable tourism destination. It advocates a supportive policy framework for community involvement in the development of heritage tourism.

Cayman Islands: the Cayman Brac Heritage Site and Nature Tourism Development Initiative

The Cayman Islands, located in the Western Caribbean, comprise three islands – Grand Cayman, Cayman Brac and Little Cayman. Grand Cayman, the largest island, is the focus of most tourism development, accounting for 96% of all stay-over visitors. However, tourists are increasingly discovering the beauty of the small Sister Islands. The Cayman Islands Ten Year Tourism

Belize

In the 1997 Visitor Expenditure and Motivation Survey, marine attractions were rated as the highest motivating factor for visitors to Belize (over 46%), followed by climate (38%), people/culture (32%), wildlife (29%), rainforests and Mayan ruins (27% each). Language, accessibility and cost were rated “very important” by less than 20% of visitors.

Bonaire National Marine Park

The Bonaire National Marine Park surrounds the islands of Bonaire and Klein Bonaire in the Netherlands Antilles. It covers an estimated 2700 hectares. The park’s objectives are to protect and conserve marine resources while maximizing returns from both recreation and commerce.

The park is visited by approximately 28,000 divers per year, as well as an unknown number of snorkellers, sport fishermen, windsurfers and local people. It is self-financed through collection of diver admission fees. An annual tag costing $10 is sold to each diver. The park also collects fees from 41 public yacht moorings, with a charge of $10 for boats under 60 feet and $15 for longer ones. Specific projects are funded by outside agencies or donations.

The “Tortugan di Boneiru” is a project to help local children learn to snorkel and teach them about the marine environment. This project has been running since 1995 and has successfully certified over 250 “tortugan” as well as 15 “ScubaKids” to PADI open water/advanced open water level.
Ecotourism

Development Plan (1992-2002) recognizes that the character and pace of these islands’ development must be different from that of Grand Cayman, with its commercial, mass type product. It is against this background that the Cayman Brac Heritage Site and Nature Tourism Development Initiative began in 1998.

The objectives of this project are to present the defining areas of the natural and cultural heritage of Cayman Brac as a sustainable land-based nature tourism initiative, in order to increase business opportunities, create jobs, provide a living laboratory for schools, and protect the environment. Walking and hiking trails have been opened, scenic cliff walks, caves and overlooks marked, flora and fauna identified, and aspects of the social and cultural life of Cayman Brac presented.

The project covers the entire area (38 square kilometres) of Cayman Brac, which has a population of 1600. There are 35 natural and heritage sites island-wide, including around 15 kilometres of hiking trails through endemic tropical forest and xeric shrub lands, boardwalks to the wetlands, shore and scenic cliff walks, bird-watching hot spots, marked tree trails, historic caves and monuments, a picnic park, swimming and snorkelling beaches, and an interpretative centre and park. The project already includes a museum, and a historic architectural walk is in progress. An estimated 2500 visitors per year have visited one or more heritage and natural sites since the project’s inception. Additional funding is being sought to upgrade it and undertake further initiatives that would assist in ensuring its long-term sustainability.

Belize: the Lodge at Chaa Creek

The 330-acre private nature reserve on the Macal River has an internationally recognized Natural History Centre, Butterfly Farm, miles of trails for walking, birding, mountain biking or horseback riding, and access to Belize’s richest Mayan archeological sites. The Lodge at Chaa Creek, at the Macal River Jungle Camp, has 19 cottage rooms and 10 cabañas.

Caribbean Regional Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework

Six policy objectives have been identified as providing opportunities for policy intervention:
- improving planning and management;
- maintaining and developing a high environmental quality standard;
- addressing socio-cultural and economic issues;
- encouraging conservation and sustainable use of natural and cultural resources by tourism enterprises;
- intensity training and in-service education for a more sustainable approach to tourism;
- involving local communities and other stakeholders.

Fair Trade in Tourism

At Tourism Concern we are aware that there is a confusing array of descriptions of certain forms of tourism which imply they are solutions to the problems created by tourism development. In our opinion, such labels as “responsible tourism”, “green tourism”, “pro-poor tourism”, “ethical tourism”, “community tourism” and “ecotourism” divert attention from the serious need to create fundamental changes in tourism’s structure and development.

Ecotourism has been promoted as the answer to sustainable tourism by the tourism industry, and by governments, since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. Although ecotourism is well-meaning and promising at its core, since it aims to benefit the environment and local people, it has failed to address the structural causes of economic inequality, reinforced by the unfair trade practices of powerful tour operators and hotel chains from tourism-generating countries: these include ownership and land use issues, unfair payment and employment terms, low wages and discriminatory working conditions, management and marketing control concentrated in the hands of foreign operators, and high leakages. “Leakages” refers to money which leaves the destination to pay for services, goods and infrastructural items that are imported to satisfy international tourism standards, as well as income that never reaches the destination because much of what customers have paid goes to suppliers within their own country.

This puts the onus on fairly traded tourism to tackle the structural imbalances that are invariably associated with tourism. At the crux of our thinking is the belief that the terms of trade between industrialized and developing countries are embedded in economic inequality. The fair trade movement worldwide addresses the disadvantages for developing countries in the world’s trading systems. It creates opportunities for producers in the South to receive a fair share of the returns from the sale of their products. The concept of fair trade has been driven mainly by non-governmental organizations. Although still very small in world market terms, the fair trade concept is effectively challenging exploitative trade practices and bringing noticeable benefits to producers.

Tourism as a service industry is very different from the provision of such primary commodities as coffee and tea, which is normally tackled by the fair trade movement. The task is to understand what lessons can be learned from this driving force for change in market systems – given that tourism is an export, that it is considered a service industry, and that tour operators from the tourist-generating countries of the industrialized world are in the powerful position of controlling both demand and supply.

Our work in Tourism Concern over the past twelve years has highlighted the fact that the trade in tourism often reinforces social and economic inequality in the developing world. For example, 50-54% of the population of popular tourism destinations such as Kenya, Peru and Nepal were living below the poverty line in 1997. Receipts from tourism have not, however, contributed to the eradication of poverty, as financial leakage from tourism is as high as 70-85%. In Nepal, where climbers, trekkers and tourists compete with local people for the same scarce resources, it has been estimated that approximately 69% of the total expenditure of a mountaineering expedition was spent outside Nepal and that only 1.2% of the total remained in the mountain communities.

The economic inequalities of tourism and the consequent impacts are much in line with the opinion that poverty contributes to environmental and cultural degradation, and that addressing sustainability on the planet means addressing poverty.

We have defined Fair Trade in Tourism as a key aspect of this definition of sustainable tourism. It aims to maximize the benefits of tourism for local destination stakeholders through mutually beneficial and equitable partnerships between national and international tourism stakeholders at the destination. It also supports the right of indigenous host communities, involved in tourism or not, to participate as equal stakeholders and beneficiaries in the tourism development process.

The main premise of Fair Trade in Tourism is that:
- the people who live in the places tourists frequent should be consulted and should be in control of the process; and
- tourism operation and development should incorporate partnerships between service purchasers, developers, service providers and communities (as essential interest groups), based on mutual respect and equitable sharing of the costs and benefits of the investment (taking into account that the investment can be both financial and non-financial).

Tourism Concern has established an International Network on Fair Trade in Tourism. This is an open, widespread network of organizations from both the South and North with whom we are working and consulting. It is intended to provide the means for a more coordinated, international response at grassroots level to issues arising from the globalization of
tourism. The guiding principle for Tourism Concern has been to ensure that Network members from the South are included as crucial stakeholders in determining Fair Trade in Tourism. The Network’s aims are to strengthen the bargaining position of local destination interest groups, facilitate equitable market access for small stakeholders, raise awareness among consumers, and influence international trade policy.

At present a Fair Trade in Tourism kite mark does not exist. A “kite mark” is an acknowledged symbol whose use is authorized when certain standards are achieved. Although a small number of exemplary model initiatives exist worldwide, it is not easy to compress the complex socio-economic and cultural issues at destinations into a few measurable indicators and establish credible monitoring mechanisms.

In the absence of a kite mark, Fair Trade in Tourism therefore needs to be considered as a long-term process towards a global shift in favour of more equitable tourism trade policy and stakeholder behaviour.

Fair Trade in Tourism focuses on five areas where change is necessary in order to achieve greater equality for destination communities:

♦ international trade agreements;
♦ the tourism industry (both transnational corporations and independent investors);
♦ destination community stakeholders;
♦ consumer behaviour; and
♦ destination government policies.

It is recognized that due to the diversity of local destination circumstances and the complexity of the tourism system, there is no one single model for implementation.

Integral to our thinking on fair trade and tourism is the role it can play in enabling the tourism industry to develop corporate social responsibility. Tourism Concern is convinced that the fair trade criteria are a strong basis on which the tourism industry can work towards reaching a commitment to corporate social responsibility. It is time for:

♦ consultations and negotiations to be equitable;
♦ businesses to be transparent and accountable through environmental and social audits;
♦ local residents to be employed in more than simply menial work, and provided with opportunities to develop their potential;
♦ training and development for managerial positions to take place at the local community level, if appropriate as part of a public, private and civil society partnership; and
♦ investors to be aware of and adhere to international, national and local regulations on planning, environment and corruption and to follow anti-corruption practices.

Fair wages and working conditions are also at the core of Fair Trade in Tourism. Wages and working conditions should reflect relevant international labour standards with regard to national minimum wages. There should be freedom of association, health and safety, no child and slave labour, and no discrimination, within the context of UN Declarations on Human Rights.

Consumers have a vital role to play. Ethical issues are increasingly directing our purchases and investments. Tourism consumers want to make a positive contribution to people’s lives at the destination. It is Tourism Concern’s job to help direct consumers towards ethical providers and enable them to understand what a powerful role they play in ensuring that maximum benefits go to everyone involved in their holidays.

Tourism Concern has just produced a glossy new consumer magazine, Being There, which is being distributed by Body Shop and the British Association of Fair Trade Shops. Being There is directed towards women, as research has shown that 64% of people researching holidays on the internet are women. And it is often women who are at the heart of the growing interest in responsible tourism.

Tour operators and guides often don’t want to antagonize their customers and “spoil their fun” by being too moralistic, but their customers’ fun will be spoiled if they feel ill briefed and if their experience is marred. Tourists will value being properly informed before and during their trip, in order to avoid misunderstandings and bad feelings between themselves and local people which may be caused by ignorance of the culture they are visiting. Tourism companies should be concerned about the “feel-good factor” produced by adherence to Fair Trade in Tourism criteria, enhancing the tourist experience and customer satisfaction.

Experience shows that tourists are often shocked and dismayed when confronted by the acute poverty surrounding some of the most luxurious tourism resorts. Fair Trade in Tourism cannot address all the causes of poverty or all the problems in developing countries. However, if tourists know that their hotel or tour operator is dealing with the issue of poverty by using fair trade criteria, they can at least feel some assurance that their money is used to help direct consumers towards ethical providers and enable them to understand what a powerful role they play in ensuring that maximum benefits go to everyone involved in their holidays.

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We strongly hope that Fair Trade in Tourism will become an integral part of the sustainable tourism process and will not be viewed as yet another marketing ploy.
Ecotourism

Tourism was introduced in 1994. The tourism complex was designed to improve the area’s economy in a sustainable way, involving the local population, and to properly manage natural and cultural values.

Las Terrazas is located in the middle of the Sierra del Rosario Biosphere Reserve (declared a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1995), which acts as a buffer. An Ecology Station was created in the complex to carry out environmental-scientific studies.

Tourism is the complex’s main activity. In addition to the 26-room Moka Hotel, there is a network of interpretative trails. In 2000, Las Terrazas received 30,000 visitors (30% more than in 1999). The tourism facilities are the most important source of income for the local population, including women. Other management areas are forestry, farming and animal husbandry, light industry, and social services such as health, education and culture.

Venezuela: Los Roques Archipelago National Park

Located in the Caribbean 166 kilometres due north of Venezuela’s central coast, the 221,120 hectare Los Roques Archipelago has 42 cays surrounding a 400 square kilometre lake. There are a little over 1200 inhabitants. In 1972, this area was declared a National Park (IUCN Class II). In 1996, it was designated a Ramsar site. Its biodiversity with respect to ecosystems and marine species has therefore been recognized.

Due to the beauty of its landscape and its unique and original environment, Los Roques had tourism flows well before it became a National Park. Commercial fishing is also an important activity. In 1990, to coordinate the efforts of the various governmental agencies involved in managing the National Park, the area’s authority was made the archipelago’s highest government agency. The Strategic Plan for the Archipelago supports sustainable development and focuses on the importance of involving the local community in the park’s two major economic activities, ensuring protection of its invaluable natural resources and that of its cultural resources.

Both local roqueños and visitors have benefited from the improvements made on the archipelago (e.g. regarding fresh water supply, sewage, electricity and solid waste management). In 2000, Los Roques reported a 49% increase in self-generated income; 93% of the area’s total budget comes from self-generated income. While the rest of Venezuela experienced a significant reduction in international tourism arrivals, Los Roques showed a 1% increase. Domestic tourism had increased by almost 100%, with visitors mainly comprising family groups.

Trends in coastal ecotourism in Southeast Asia

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Summary
There are increasing pressures on Southeast Asia’s coastal resources due to the subsistence requirements of local communities, the need to conserve biodiversity, and recreational tourism. In such a context, coastal ecotourism can play an increasingly important role. This article surveys developments relating to coastal ecotourism in Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Viet Nam.

Résumé
Les ressources côtières de l’Asie du Sud-Est subissent de plus en plus de pressions à cause des besoins en subsistance des populations locales, de la nécessité de préserver la diversité biologique et enfin du développement du tourisme de loisirs. C’est le type de contexte dans lequel l’écotourisme côtier peut jouer un rôle de plus en plus important. L’article passe en revue les progrès de l’écotourisme côtier en Thaïlande, aux Philippines, en Indonésie, en Malaisie et au Vietnam.

Resumen
Las presiones relacionadas con los recursos del litoral marítimo del Sudeste Asiático son cada vez mayores, debido a las necesidades de subsistencia de las comunidades locales, la necesidad de conservar la biodiversidad y el turismo recreativo. Dentro de este contexto, el ecotourismo del litoral marítimo puede jugar un papel cada vez más importante. Este artículo analiza los desarrollos relacionados con el ecoturismo en las costas de Tailandia, Filipinas, Indonesia, Malasia y Vietnam.

Southeast Asia is one of the world’s fastest growing areas with respect to ecotourism development. There is a trend away from overcrowded beaches and resorts to more nature-based tourism. According to one Thai study, 30% of foreign and 67% of domestic tourists can be considered ecotourists. Malaysia has estimated that 10% of its tourists are ecotourists or nature tourists.

A variety of coastal ecosystems are available in Southeast Asia for development of coastal ecotourism (Table 1). Diving is the most important activity; others include canoeing and those activities normally covered under marine ecotourism. According to the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI), Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines are important areas for the potential growth of scuba diving in Southeast Asia. Sabah in Malaysia, for example, has already experienced healthy growth in diving in recent years, with 15,000 to 20,000 overseas divers annually.

The context of coastal ecotourism
Coastal resources in Southeast Asia are important sources of food for local villagers. Coral reefs provide half the animal protein in Indonesians’ diet. While traditional harvesting has little impact on reefs, a minority of harvesters use harmful methods such as blasting or cyanide. This is still a problem, for example, in both the Philippines and Indonesia. The demand for aquarium fish and live corals has aggravated reef degradation. Coral reefs are also affected by pollution and sedimentation from mining and other industries. Mangroves are cleared for shrimp and fish ponds, overlogged for timber and charcoal, and converted to land for housing and industries.

Southeast Asian countries have systems (ranging from recently initiated to well-established) to protect their coastal resources in designated areas. Legislation exists but enforcement is often lack-
ing. Thus, in practice marine protected areas are exploited. For example, the Philippines and Indonesia have environmental laws but these are not enforced adequately. Biodiversity conservation is urgently required as damage to coastal resources becomes critical. In Indonesia, 6.49% of reefs are in excellent condition and 24.28% are in good condition. Reefs in western Indonesia are in the worst condition, compared with those in middle and eastern Indonesia. In the Philippines, 5% of the reefs are in excellent condition and 70% in poor or fair condition. Mangroves have suffered a similar fate. In Indonesia, they were reduced from 4.2 million hectares in 1982 to 2.7 million in 2000.

Historically, coastal tourism in Southeast Asia began with a low impact on coastal resources and generated benefits to the local community. But as demand has increased, unplanned or uncontrolled development has contributed to environmental degradation (e.g. at Pattaya Thailand), Botacay (the Philippines) and Kuta (Indonesia). Some rehabilitation measures have been taken, including use of planned integrated resorts. As the trend is towards more nature-based tourism, reefs and mangroves are seen as potential resources for coastal ecotourism development.

Increasing pressure on coastal resources arises from the subsistence requirements of local communities, biodiversity conservation and recreational demands from tourists. It is in this context that coastal ecotourism can play an increasingly important role. Various approaches have been developed.

**Approaches to the development of coastal ecotourism**

Although the private sector has often been associated with abuse of the ecotourism concept, there are some examples of good practices in coastal ecotourism involving environmental planning and social responsibility. These include the SeeCanoe operation in southern Thailand and two resorts operated by Ten Knots in El Nido, North Palawan in the Philippines. These tend to be unique, high-end operations. Although not truly community-based, they are trailblazers compared with other private companies.

Marine protected areas are normally developed for biodiversity conservation, with protection measures to ensure conservation while allowing maximum compatible usage. In the face of continual destruction of resources in marine protected areas, one approach has been to develop community-based sustainable tourism. CBST is based on two concepts: community-based management, and alternative livelihood. According to the community-based management concept, regulatory power over natural resources is placed in the hands of resource users and stakeholders. Alternative livelihood focuses on providing a sustainable income, so that coastal residents need not resort to overfishing or use of destructive methods. If properly established, managed and promoted, ecotourism can generate increased income for coastal villages. The results are improved if ecotourism activities coincide with marine sanctuary and other protected areas.

Community-based sanctuaries have therefore been developed in Indonesia and the Philippines, with strong links to community-based ecotourism as an alternative livelihood. This has operated through various projects on biodiversity management (e.g. the Biodiversity Conservation Network in the Padadoi Islands, Indonesia), conservation (e.g. Conservation International in the Togean Islands), reef management (e.g. COREMAP in Indonesia) and coastal resources management (e.g. CRMP in the Philippines and Proyek Pesisir in Indonesia). Continuous injection of funds is normally required in order to bring a community-based ecotourism project to a critical level of self-sufficiency before it becomes fully successful.

Other approaches to protecting coastal resources and developing coastal ecotourism at the same time include adoption of villages by resort operators and patronage of villages (e.g. Nusa Tenggara in the Similan Islands, Thailand) by live-aboard vessels. Scuba certification agencies, airlines, hotels and equipment manufacturers can also support environmental agencies that contribute directly to the local people, in order to eradicate destructive fishing and ultimately save coral reefs.

Development of coastal ecotourism is not an easy undertaking. It requires investment, skills and marketing. However, it is suitable for small-scale enterprises, which are often thought to provide the maximum benefits to the local community in that facilities and services can be easily provided by locals. The small-scale enterprise is sometimes seen as community-based tourism. In the Gili Islands off Lombok, Indonesia, the success of a small-scale enterprise depends on a local entrepreneur, who can initiate, sustain, and act as disseminator for the rest of the community. At one stage of its success, the government resettled the small-scale enterprises of Gili Trawangan to a defined area with individual lots. Other locals have moved to the disputed land north of the resettled site and imitated the success of the resettled area. The diffusion and imitation processes are important to small-scale enterprises.

**Thailand: an ecotourism leader**

Thailand has had a national commitment to ecotourism since 1993, beginning with the carrying out of studies and cooperation among agencies involved in tourism. Ecotourism policies and guidelines were made available subsequently, with many policies and plans placed under the responsibility of different organizations prior to 1998. Ecotourism's potential was recognized and it was included in the tourism plan for 1998-2003. Ecotourism is one of the components of the National Tourism Master Plan 2001-2010.

Thailand, the leader in ecotourism development in Southeast Asia, is noted for its hill trekking, scuba diving and nature tours, which started in the mid 1970s. Coastal ecotourism takes place in the provinces of Chon Buri to Rayong, Chanthaburi and Trat on the east coast of the Gulf of Thailand; Surat Thani, Chumphon, Petchaburi and Prachuap Khiri Khan on its west coast; and Phuket, Krabi and Trang on the Andaman coast.

As much coastal ecotourism is provided by private enterprises, the “eco” label has been abused. There is a need to develop better standards and better control. For example, the SeaCanoe operation pioneered cave exploration in Phang-nga Bay in Phuket. This activity was copied by mass tour operators, resulting in a price war, and product quality was ruined. Because there is a strong private sector, community-based coastal ecotourism is absent in Thailand.

Thailand has the greatest number of protected areas in Southeast Asia. All parks are under the Royal Forestry Department (RFD). From 1993, marine national parks were managed separately from terrestrial parks but still under the RFD. Up to 1999, there were 21 marine national parks along the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand. They received about 2.5 million visitors, a third
of whom were foreigners and fewer than 15% of whom stayed overnight. The RDF’s responsibilities include resource protection and development projects. However, there are constraints on their responsibilities and efforts, including inadequately trained personnel, lack of proper management, and lack of adequate facilities for visitors. Of particular concern is the need for clear development guidelines and the weakness of regulations relating to concessions for private investors. The thin line between conservation and tourism has become an issue, as the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) provides funds for the RDF to build additional tourist facilities in 19 protected areas.

The marine parks in southern Thailand are a top priority for development because of their strong potential. Last year entrance fees doubled for foreigners, but for Thais they remain low and have not changed. The increased fee provides ecotourism revenue. It also is part of a wider strategy to reduce the number of tourists, whose impact on the parks is beginning to be negative. For example, the popularity of Phuket as a tourist destination has affected marine parks from Phangnga Bay to the Surin Islands. During the peak season, the Similan Islands are overcrowded due to live-aboard tours.

Encroachment by neighbouring villagers and illegal developers is still a major problem in the protected areas, e.g. Koh Samet, Phuket and Krabi. Encroachment has intensified in recent years. Legal action has been taken by the RDF. Unable to remove all the developers on Koh Samet, the RDF has proposed legalizing the remaining ones on short leases. However, given past park mismanagement and the drive to develop ecotourism, legalization of illegal developers may not be a suitable measure as it may seen as encouraging further encroachment.

More power has been vested in provincial and local areas regarding tourism development. In March 1998, the government established tourism promotion and development committees for provincial and local areas (tambon administrative organization). These facilitate development and management of coastal ecotourism, since ad hoc subcommittees on ecotourism can be established within this structure. The new administrative structure replaces a previous liberal system with lines and the weakness of regulations relating to concessions for private investors.

Table 1: Assessment framework for coastal ecotourism in Southeast Asia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coastal ecosystem</th>
<th>Sensitivity to impact</th>
<th>Ease of management</th>
<th>Local participation in development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sandy beaches</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coastal dunes</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocky coasts/caves</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small islands</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coral reefs</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sea grasses</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mangroves</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coastal forests</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Tourism Authority of Thailand, A Study to Determine the Pattern of Marine Ecotourism Management: Summary, 1998.

Five major areas have been identified for development. In order of priority these are: 1) the Andaman Triangle Group (Phuket, Phang Nga and Krabi); 2) the Surat Thani coast and islands; 3) the Trat Group; 4) the Satun-Trang Group; and 5) the Samui-Yai Group.

The study identifies five new types of area management for utilizing tourism resources, each to be conducted according to the laws and regulations formulated by the agency responsible for such areas. These are: 1) owner-operated; 2) leasing; 3) concession; 4) joint venture; and 5) community-operated. Thus, a formal structure for community-operated ecotourism is included.

Thailand has been a pioneer in coastal ecotourism, with wide experience, and coastal ecotourism is still evolving with ongoing studies. Valuable lessons could therefore be provided for other countries.

The Philippines: great potential

In the mid 1990s, Conservation International identified the Philippines as a country with tremendous ecotourism potential. It urged the government to develop ecotourism products. Clear and strong action was taken by the government with the passing of the National Ecotourism Act 1998. This Act sets out the institutional framework for a national ecotourism strategy; to be supported by a programme and a network of sites to be identified as National Integrated and Protected Areas (NIPAS) as well as other areas. A national policy-making body, the National Ecotourism Development Council (NEDC), has been created to establish the national strategy and is supported by regional committees. The first national ecotourism congress was held in 1999 to finalize a national ecotourism master plan. Executive Order (EO) 111 provides operating guidelines for ecotourism development in the Philippines.

While the national ecotourism master plan is being finalized, the Department of Tourism (DOT) has identified four locations for ecotourism, three of which are islands (Bohol, Guimaras and Camiguin). Bohol is marketed by the DOT as a prime ecotourism destination because of its diving sites and beaches. The DOT has also identified Coron Island (Palawan) and El Nido Marine Reserve (Palawan) as marine protected areas suitable for coastal ecotourism.
Five marine parks were seen as a source of ecotourism development, but they face problems of management, lack of trained park personnel and infrastructure, and no enforcement. An example is Bunaken National Park, the first to have a management plan with an emphasis on locals getting involved in ecotourism. Small family-run enterprises are based at two beaches on the island.

In contrast, Ujung Kulon National Park is an example of the introduction of ecotourism adding pressure to conservation. The park does not have enough security and lacks personnel and equipment. Blast fishing and coral theft still prevail. Its facilities are poor in comparison with private sector tourism development outside the park. Villages in the buffer zone are not considered in tourism development by the local government and park management. Pressure is exerted on core areas like Cibunar, Ciremea Beach, Handeuleum Island, the Cigenter River and Panaitan Island. Take Bone Rate is to develop its management plan with an emphasis on locals getting involved in ecotourism. Small family-run enterprises are based at two beaches on the island.

Future coastal ecotourism development may be associated with the national coral reef management strategy, the Coral Reef Rehabilitation and Management Program (COREMAP), which is supported by the international community. Phase 1 (1998-2001) has been extended for a further year. Its objective is to develop viable community-based management systems in pilot areas of Indonesia. If Phase I proves successful, Phase II (2002-2008) will implement pilot community-based management in the Taka Bone Rate Natural Park in South Sulawesi and the Lease Islands in Maluku. Take Bone Rate is to develop its management plan and assess the priorities identified by the local communities, including establishment of “regeneration zones”, creation of credit and marketing cooperatives, development of value-added marine products, mariculture and ecotourism.

In 1999, a new step was taken with respect to marine policy when Indonesia’s coasts and seas came under a single Ministry of Marine Exploration and Fisheries. This has implications for coastal ecotourism. At the political situation initially calmed down, the government wanted to rebuild the tourist industry by shifting the focus from land-based tourism to marine and ecologically based tourism (i.e. coastal ecotourism). The marine tourism policy was meant to attract investment in diving and cruising, especially in the eastern part of the country, which has a large number of islands and has lagged behind the western part economically. However, political unrest has recently increased in eastern Indonesia.

With the 1999 law on regional autonomy, there has been a rapid devolution of government. Substantial powers have been given to kabupaten/kota-madya (regency/municipality) governments, of which there are about 350. With political reforms and foreign aid, scuba diving operators and villages are taking measures to protect coastal resources. Villages have seized the opportunity for community involvement in resource management, as can be seen in reef protection efforts. Recent reef patrols in Komodo National Park, sponsored by scuba diving operators and The Nature Conservancy, were controversial as they divide the communities that welcome protection and those that resent intrusion by a foreign NGO. Such measures are more successful in the local communities around Bunaken National Park, which have charged $5 per diver, paid by the North Sulawesi Watersports Association. The villages have gone so far to set up their own community-run sanctuary at Blongko, consisting of six hectares of degraded reefs and mangroves. Encouraged by aid from NGOs, such community-run marine sanctuaries, although they cannot be compared to national parks, are widely replicable at low cost and make coastal ecotourism more feasible.

It would take some years for Indonesia to develop a national ecotourism policy that also included coastal ecotourism. The country still faces conservation problems in marine parks (e.g. lack of commitment to staffing and operation), while development of coastal ecotourism has many obstacles to surmount.

**Malaysia: steady development**

Malaysia was the first in the region to have a National Ecotourism Plan, completed in late 1995. This plan lists existing and potential ecotourism areas, focusing on 42 areas and highlighting ten areas including some coastal/riverine ones. Malaysia adopted the IUCN definition of ecotourism. An action plan serves to implement, manage, strengthen and build the capacity of ecotourism areas. While functioning as a guideline for operators of (and participants in) ecotourism packages, the plan was set up to tap ecotourism’s vast potential and is a tool for sustainable development of the tourism industry.

Malaysia’s ecotourism products are varied and well-known, e.g. Taman Negara, Mount Kinabalu, the orangutan, and the caves and diving sites available on many islands and in Sabah. Many small islands have faced similar infrastructure problems, e.g. with water and supplies. Islands in marine parks in peninsular Malaysia are not necessarily protected. The need for security of another kind was made evident when tourists on Sipidan Island in Sabah were recently kidnapped.

Malaysian coastal villages are relatively well-off and developed. Thus, there is no community-based approach in coastal ecotourism similar to that of the Philippines or Indonesia. In recent years the homestay programme has been introduced and implemented in Johor, Kedah, Melaka, Pahang, Perak and Selangor. This programme is based on the concept of bread and breakfast. Tourists stay in fishing villages or on farms. About 25,000 tourists have signed up.

Potential for coastal ecotourism exists in Sabah and in peninsular Malaysia. Sarawak has little coastal ecotourism, although this state is in the second phase of an ecotourism plan up to 2005. Malaysia continues to develop and upgrade its coastal ecotourism through more systematic monitoring of the quality of island ecotourism and homestay packages. Apart from the private sector, much depends on local governments, island development authorities and island management boards guiding islands’ coastal ecotourism. For example, island carrying capacity needs to be determined. The popular Sipidan Island has imposed a ceiling of 80 visitors per day.

**Viet Nam: a newcomer**

Viet Nam is a relatively newcomer to the tourist industry. As the state is both the regulator and a key operator, governmental conflicts of interest sometimes arise. At the national level, the Viet Nam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) and its Institute for Tourism Development Research (ITDR) are in charge of tourism. The state recently recognized ecotourism’s importance. A National Ecotourism Strategy was developed in 1999. There are plans to develop tourism...
Encouraging and rewarding best practice: Australia’s Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Programme (NEAP)

Meaghan Newson, Ecotourism Association of Australia, GPO Box 268, Brisbane, QLD 4001, Australia (meaghan@eastwind.com.au)

Summary
The Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Programme (NEAP) is the first scheme of its type in the world. It was designed to provide a mechanism by which the country’s nature tourism and ecotourism sectors could continue to work towards the ideal of long-term environmental, socio-cultural and economic sustainability. The programme is voluntary, industry-driven initiative developed in consultation with key stakeholder groups. It aims to provide those working at the sector’s coalface – the operators – with a way to gain knowledge of best practice principles, apply techniques within their own operations that contribute towards sustainability, and embark upon a programme of continual improvement.

NEAP was also developed to provide consumers and protected area managers with a way to recognize operators of genuine nature tourism and ecotourism products. As it develops, some form of environmental code labelling may be adopted to identify the quality of the product. NEAP is now in its fifth year of operation, with over 300 accredited operators.

Resumen
El Programa de Acreditación de Ecoturismo y Naturaleza reconoce y recompensa las operaciones relacionadas con el verdadero ecoturismo y el turismo natural en Australia. Es una iniciativa voluntaria, inspirada en la industria, desarrollada conjuntamente con los operadores, directores de áreas protegidas y otros accionistas clave. Este artículo trata sobre el desarrollo de PAEN (NEAP), sus relaciones con otros programas y su posición dentro de la coyuntura internacional.

Australi's Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Programme (NEAP) is the first scheme of its type in the world. It was designed to provide a mechanism by which the country’s nature tourism and ecotourism sectors could continue to work towards the ideal of long-term environmental, socio-cultural and economic sustainability. The programme is voluntary, industry-driven initiative developed in consultation with key stakeholder groups. It aims to provide those working at the sector’s coalface – the operators – with a way to gain knowledge of best practice principles, apply techniques within their own operations that contribute towards sustainability, and embark upon a programme of continual improvement.

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in the coastal area during the next ten years, with the coast from Quang Ninh Province to Ha Tinh Province having the greatest potential.

Symptomatic of the problems and conflicts involved in overall tourism development, Viet Nam faces major problems with coastal ecotourism (e.g. environmental degradation, poor infrastructure, poor management, lack of investment). In the case of marine parks, problems include cross-management conflicts. There are unclear or conflicting responsibilities for tourism within protected areas, as national parks are under the Forest Protection Department (FPD) while tourism development is the responsibility of the provinces and districts. Few protected areas currently have the capability or means to plan for, manage and develop ecotourism. There are conflicts between national park managers and provincial or district authorities concerning the priorities for, and development of, tourism within protected areas.

There is a case for more international assistance (financial, technical, etc.) to demonstrate and promote the benefits of coastal ecotourism and conservation in Viet Nam. Conditions are suitable for ecotourism pilot projects to demonstrate cross-sectoral collaboration (involving key stakeholders, e.g. the FPD, national park management, local communities). One focus is on Halong Bay, declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1994, where development of coastal ecotourism is not based solely on limestone islands but also includes the floating fishing population. Within the bay, coral reefs face the threats of illegal blast fishing, pollution from coal mining, and shipping to and from the harbour. Halong Bay could be the first site in the country to show positive links with coastal ecotourism and conservation. Overall, Viet Nam still has a long way to go to develop sustainable coastal ecotourism.

Conclusion
Attention has been focused on various approaches to planning and developing coastal ecotourism, so as to maximize the benefits. However, it should be noted that successful coastal ecotourism can have negative impacts on local communities. As the number of ecotourists increases, there is a strain on the very resources being protected. This includes increased demands for water, food and waste disposal facilities, which are scarcely available to locals. Possible remedies include limiting numbers at a site, fees, etc. Carrying capacities must be determined.

Coastal ecotourism can be a high-quality product if matched by proper planning and developed. As it develops, some form of environmental code or labelling may be adopted to identify the quality of the product. Coastal ecotourism development becomes more defined as state, provincial and local policies and strategies become clear. In any approach to coastal ecotourism development, operation at the local level is seen to be increasingly important for locals (Table 1). A variety of approaches are available (depending on local conditions), in which involvement of stakeholders within government, NGOs, the private sector and communities is vital since each will be affected by the growth in tourism. There is ample scope for all to develop a sustainable coastal ecotourism, which requires careful planning, proper management, strict guidelines and regulations.
Development of the programme
NEAP was conceived and developed as an industry driven and run programme. Development of an accreditation programme was identified in Australia’s National Ecotourism Strategy (DoT, 1994) as a key way to help ensure sustainability, raise industry standards, provide a means of industry self-regulation, and deliver marketing advantages to Australian ecotourism operators. NEAP was subsequently developed with the objective of providing:

♦ competitive advantage to operators with accredited products, via an easily recognized logo;
♦ financial savings to operators, resulting from industry recognition of accreditation (e.g. extended tenure in protected areas);
♦ baseline criteria against which operators can assess their compliance with current best practice principles;
♦ a framework in which operators can implement continuous improvement; and
♦ a means for consumers, community groups, managers of protected areas, and other industry groups to recognize genuine nature tourism and ecotourism products.

Seed funding provided by Australia’s Office of National Tourism for initial establishment of NEAP was augmented by substantial in-kind support from key organizations and individuals. The programme is now owned by the Ecotourism Association of Australia (EAA). In administrative terms, it operates as a separate, self-funding nonprofit entity. However, NEAP’s viability in a wider sense (e.g. continued development and monitoring of standards) relies to a great extent on the commitment of a team of dedicated professionals, who give all or part of their time to the programme on a voluntary basis.

From its inception, NEAP has been a collaborative and consultative effort. The programme’s initial and ongoing development has drawn on the collective expertise of individuals involved in fields as diverse as protected area management; guiding and guide training; environmental consulting; business accreditation; and tourism marketing. Another feature has been extensive communication and consultation with the programme’s key constituents, operators and protected area managers, facilitated by pilot studies, workshops, newsletter articles and conference papers. The result is a programme that not only provides comprehensive criteria for assessing nature tourism and ecotourism products, but also seeks to create linkages with existing tourism business accreditation programmes and protected area licensing systems.

Management of NEAP
An honorary Panel consisting of two EAA representatives, two tourism industry representatives and an independent Chair oversees the management of NEAP. The Panel usually meets monthly via teleconferencing to discuss accreditation applications and general management issues. A team of assessors, each paid a nominal sum per hour, reviews applications for accreditation and makes recommendations to the Panel. An Administrator, subcontracted by the EAA, manages day-to-day running of the programme.

Continuous improvement
A central tenet of NEAP is the inclusion of a continuous improvement programme, which allows it to remain current with (if not to lead) the latest best practice principles and technologies, as well as to respond to the changing needs of the industry. The first review of NEAP under this regime took place in 1999. During that period, a strategic plan was written to guide the programme’s development into the new millennium, followed by a comprehensive review and redrafting of accreditation criteria. The revised programme, NEAP Edition II, was launched in March 2000. The first products to be accredited under this edition were approved in November 2000.

Prior to the launch of NEAP Edition II, the programme applied only to ecotourism products and was known as the National Ecotourism Accreditation Programme. However, during the review a number of key issues were identified, leading to a decision to expand the programme’s scope to include nature tourism products (hence the amended name). These issues are summarized below:

♦ All tourism in natural areas – not just ecotourism – should embrace the principles of environmental sustainability in order to ensure the long-term viability of the entire sector.
♦ Many operators, such as adventure tourism operators, reach a suitable standard of environmental sustainability although their products do not incorporate the full range of principles required of ecotourism (such as interpretation) and are therefore ineligible for accreditation. The fact that they operate a minimal impact product should nonetheless be recognized.
♦ Many protected area managers and government tourism officials have been reluctant to develop concrete strategies for accredited operators, due to a perception that the programme applies only to a small market segment. There has been a need to create a critical mass of product potentially eligible for accreditation, so as to encourage increased formal recognition of the programme and the subsequent delivery of real business advantages to accredited operators.

Early indications are that expanding the programme has increased its relevance to industry. Since NEAP Edition II was launched, two managers of state government protected areas have indicated that they will provide extended tenure to accredited operators. There has also been unprecedented interest on the part of state and local government authorities in facilitating NEAP workshops to encourage operators in their regions to apply for accreditation en masse and then participate in cooperative marketing opportunities.

How are the NEAP criteria applied?
As mentioned above, NEAP was developed to apply to products (tours, attractions, accommodation) in two industry sectors: nature tourism and ecotourism. Under the programme, nature tourism and ecotourism are defined as follows (NEAP, 2000):

♦ Nature tourism is ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas.
♦ Ecotourism is ecologically sustainable tourism, with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation.

Using these definitions as a basis, NEAP has developed a range of principles of eligibility for accreditation, each encompassing specific core and bonus assessment criteria against which products are assessed. As suggested by the definitions, ecotourism products must satisfy a wider range of assessment criteria than nature tourism, although products in both sectors must meet the same standard for natural area focus, environmental sustainability, responsible marketing and customer satisfaction.

The key “filter” for distinguishing ecotourism products from nature tourism is interpretation. Products must meet 100% of applicable core criteria to be eligible for nature tourism or ecotourism accreditation. A product meeting 100% of ecotourism core criteria as well as an additional 80% or more of bonus criteria (including further compulsory core criteria relating to interpretation) is eligible for advanced ecotourism accreditation. Provision is also made for discretionary bonus points, to be awarded for examples of innovative best practice. The principles of eligibility criteria are as below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature tourism or ecotourism products</th>
<th>Nature tourism</th>
<th>Ecotourism</th>
<th>Advanced ecotourism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focuses on directly and personally experiencing nature</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides opportunities to experience nature in ways that lead to greater understanding, appreciation and enjoyment</td>
<td>Optional</td>
<td>Mandatory but not necessarily core to experience</td>
<td>Core element of experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Represents best practice for environmentally sustainable tourism</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positively contributes to the conservation of natural areas</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides constructive ongoing contributions to local communities</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is sensitive to and involves different cultures, especially indigenous cultures</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistently meets customer expectations</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is marketed accurately and leads to realistic expectations</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How is adherence to the criteria verified?
The application process for accreditation under the programme is based on self-assessment, augmented by a system of referee checks and audits. While NEAP has received some criticism for implementing an application system based on self-assessment rather than independent audit, this has proved the most effective means of ensuring that the programme remains cost-effective and non-threatening to operators as possible. Given that the vast majority of Australian ecotourism businesses are small if not micro in size, the expense associated with incorporating an on-site independent audit into the application process would simply put the programme out of their financial reach — thus negating the programme’s aim of improving sustainability across the board.

Additionally, the scope of the criteria means operators do not always have all the necessary management practices in place that would allow them to seek accreditation immediately after expressing interest in the programme. For example, operators may focus heavily on the environmental management aspects of their businesses, to the detriment of other considerations such as providing interpretation of a suitable standard or engaging in consultation with traditional custodians. By taking the self-assessment document back into a business for a period of months (or sometimes even years), operators can implement the necessary improvements according to their own timeframe and budget before applying for accreditation.

Once accredited, a product is eligible to display the NEAP logo immediately after accreditation. However, it is significant that many of the new applications have resulted from industry workshops in which a NEAP Assessor and/or Panel member has been present to assist operators with the essentials of the accreditation process. Where the self-assessment process seemed to present few significant problems under Edition I, anecdotal evidence suggests that operators find completing the Edition II application document challenging, due at least in part to the large time commitment involved.

It appears that the average length of time taken to return an application for assessment has increased substantially, compared with the three-month period usually required under Edition I. It should be borne in mind that in the “real world” of running a tourism business, NEAP applications compete with paperwork running to strict deadlines, such as completion of Goods and Services Tax activity statements and tourism award submissions. This often means that operators give the application process a lower priority, at least until they have an urgent promotional strategy to implement (such as production of a new brochure) and wish to use the NEAP logo. Nonetheless, such developments may signal new challenges for NEAP to develop communication strategies to assist and encourage operators during the application process.

Although the programme’s overall growth has been exponential, Figure 2 shows that this growth has by no means been uniform throughout Australia. Despite the emergence of many ecotourism destinations around the country, and the potential for operators in those regions to meet the NEAP criteria, Queensland far surpasses any other state in its proportion of accredited products. Notwithstanding its mature industry and undoubtedly excellent products, a major reason for uptake of the programme in this state has been the support of Tourism Queensland, the government tourism body. The only state tourism bureau to establish a dedicated environmental tourism unit up till now, Tourism Queensland has been highly proactive in developing strategies to promote NEAP to operators, the travel trade and consumers.

Given that NEAP keeps its fees as low as possible to encourage maximum participation, and so has an extremely limited marketing budget, support of this nature is invaluable in attracting operators to the programme and retaining their ongoing support. However, NEAP’s success in one state has proved to be a double-edged sword at times, creating some reluctance among operators and marketers in other states to become involved in what they perceive as a Queensland based and dominated programme. This situation points to another key challenge for the NEAP over the short to medium term: the need to consolidate linkages and further encourage the support of state government tourism marketing bodies, so as to create across-the-board recognition of the programme.

gibility for accreditation outlined in Table 1 further illustrate the programme’s scope.

Ecotourism
Linkages to other programmes

NEAP operates as a stand-alone, sector-specific programme. Operators can apply for accreditation of their products without initially having to satisfy the requirements of other, broader industry schemes. However, the programme recognizes the importance of encouraging operators to participate in other industry schemes that will increase their professionalism. To this end, it has established a formal linkage with the Victorian business accreditation programme, whereby operators receive discounted fees if they undertake the two schemes in tandem. NEAP is also currently an industry partner, along with Tourism Tasmania and Tourism Council Tasmania, in a state-based pilot programme aimed at finding ways business and sector-specific accreditation can work together to the benefit of operators.

Another significant development has been the recent launch of the EAA’s EcoGuide Programme, designed as a complementary initiative to NEAP. The EcoGuide Programme is a certification scheme intended to provide nature tourism and ecotourism guides that meet specified competency and standards with voluntary, industry-based “qualification”. The current edition of NEAP awards bonus points, counting towards Advanced Accreditation, to operators that employ certified EcoGuides in the delivery of their products. By the time NEAP Edition III is launched in 2003, it will be a core criterion that lead or head guides are either certified as EcoGuides or can otherwise demonstrate that they meet the standards for certification.

NEAP in an international context

NEAP has consistently generated a great deal of interest on the part of international researchers and tourism professionals. In November 2000, two members of the NEAP Panel were invited to attend a three-day workshop convened by the Institute for Policy Studies and the Ford Foundation on ecotourism and sustainable tourism certification/accreditation. The workshop was held at Mohonk, in upstate New York. Attended by delegates from 20 countries representing all the known ecotourism and sustainable tourism programmes, it provided an excellent opportunity to showcase and benchmark NEAP in an international context.1

The Mohonk workshop highlighted many of the NEAP’s strengths, such as its formal linkage with the EcoGuide Programme and its ability to run as a self-funding operation. NEAP is also one of the few programmes that ascribes such fundamental importance to the integration of interpretation into ecotourism products. However, it was also apparent that some aspects of the programme, particularly in the area of social justice (e.g. workplace relations, appropriateness of land acquisition) could be interpreted as inadequate when looked at outside the Australian legislative context. These considerations have been taken on board by the NEAP Panel and will be acted upon in the event of NEAP being exported.

One major concern expressed by workshop delegates was that the proliferation of extant or proposed accreditation or certification programmes might ultimately be counterproductive to the cause of sustainability, due to inevitable variance in standards and resultant consumer confusion. Consequently, a key outcome of the workshop was the development of the “Mohonk Agreement”, which provides an agreed framework upon which sustainable tourism or ecotourism programmes should be built.

This framework includes principles encompassing recognition of best practice, continuous improvement, community benefits, monitoring of standards, ecological and socio-cultural sustainability, responsible marketing, and the integration of interpretation into ecotourism products. Of course these principles already underpin NEAP, illustrating that the programme is, by an objective standard, at the forefront of ecotourism accreditation in a global context.2

Conclusion

By many measures, NEAP is an undoubted success story. After five years the programme remains in a growth phase, is self-sustaining, and is receiving a high level of support for the standard of its criteria from operators and protected area managers. In an international context, it can truly be seen as a leader in the development of ecotourism standards. The keys to NEAP’s success have been its consultative approach to the development of standards, its independence, and the high degree of dedication to the programme shown by the individuals involved in its development and management.

There are, of course, areas in which the programme has yet to reach its full potential. For example, widespread consumer recognition of the NEAP logo remains elusive outside Queensland, and the programme still has to garner the full industry support it needs to flourish in a number of areas of Australia (in many ways these two problems combine to create a “Catch-22” situation). However, it appears that expanding the programme’s scope to incorporate nature tourism has created the critical mass of products needed to overcome these problems. It is not unrealistic to assume that NEAP will continue to experience significant growth well into the future.

Information on NEAP, as well as a pdf copy of the NEAP criteria document, can be accessed via the Ecotourism Association of Australia’s website (www.ecotourism.org.au). A complete copy of the Mohonk Agreement can be obtained from midnight2000.org.au.

Notes

1. Until February 2001, NEAP operated as a joint venture between two membership-based industry bodies, the Ecotourism Association of Australia (EAA) and the Australian Tourism Operators Network (ATON). The establishment of the programme as a joint venture was initially a condition of the ONT grant. The NEAP Panel consisted of two members from each organization, moderated by an independent Chair. In light of changes in its strategic direction, ATON recently determined that accreditation no longer formed part of its core business and ceded ownership of NEAP to the EAA. However, both the NEAP Panel and EAA Committee recognized that the programme’s independence was perceived as one of its key strengths, both in Australia and internationally. They consequently decided to create two independent Panel positions in place of the ATON representatives, and to retain the independent Chair.

2. Also see the following article by Martha Honey.

References


Certification programmes in the tourism industry

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Around the world, researchers have identified some 250 voluntary initiatives to set standards within the tourism industry. These include codes of conduct, awards, benchmarking, best practices, and some 70 eco-labelling and certification programmes offering logos or seals of approval. A growing number of these programmes are designed to showcase socially and/or environmentally superior practices.

In November 2000, the Institute for Policy Studies sponsored the first-ever international workshop on certification programmes for sustainable tourism and ecotourism. This three-day workshop, held at Mohonk Mountain House outside New York City, brought together some 45 practitioners, academics and NGOs involved in certification from 20 countries. As we begin the International Year of Ecotourism, efforts are increasing to establish a single global certification programme, as well as the framework for a global accreditation programme for sustainable tourism and ecotourism businesses.

While tourism certification and eco-labelling are hot topics, they are also relatively new. Before the 1970s, little attention was paid by companies, governments or NGOs to the environmental and social impacts of the travel and tourism industry. The oldest tourism and hospitality industry labelling programmes, such as Michelin's guide to hotels and restaurants, measure cost, quality and ambiance, not environmental, socio-cultural and economic impacts. Green certification programmes within the tourism industry didn't begin in earnest until the 1990s. Increasingly, they have incorporated social and economic as well as environmental standards.

These certification programmes involve a combination of stakeholders — industry, consumers, NGOs, host governments and local communities — and cover a variety of geographical areas. They range from global programmes such as Green Globe 21, ECOTEL, and the International Hotels Environment Initiative (IHEI), to regional efforts in Central America, Europe and the Caribbean, to national certification and eco-labelling programmes in Costa Rica, Australia, New Zealand, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Germany, Norway, the UK and other western European countries, to state or provincial efforts including in Guatemala (Peten), Canada (Saskatchewan) and Ecuador (the Galapagos Islands).

Unlike other green and socially responsible certification programmes for food, wood, bananas and coffee, where a chain of custody can be established running from the fields to retailers and consumers, the tourism and travel industry is multi-faceted and offers both services and products, therefore presenting a number of complex challenges. Most certification programmes target the easiest component, accommodations. Europe alone has about 30 programmes for accommodation services. However, a growing number of programmes cover other sectors, including Blue Flag for beaches and marinas and PAN Parks for protected areas. In addition to accommodations, Australia's NEAP also covers attractions, tours and tour guides. Green Globe covers all tourism sectors, and Horizons in Saskatchewan certifies tours and attractions.

Two types of methodologies are used for these certification programmes:

- **process-based**, using internally created environmental management systems (EMS) tailored to particular businesses; and
- **performance-based**, using externally set environmental and often socio-cultural and economic criteria or benchmarks against which a business is judged.

Understanding the process vs. performance distinction is vital to any analysis of the integrity of a certification programme. Today the most popular EMS certification programme is ISO 14001, which is being used, for example, by Green Globe, IHEI, Green Flag for Green Hotels in Europe, and a number of individual hotels and chains around the world. While its standards are tailored to the needs of individual businesses, its drawbacks are considerable:

- it is costly (setting up an EMS usually requires outside consultants and can cost $20,000 to $40,000 for a medium-sized company);
- it is heavily engineering oriented;
- it is focused on internal operating systems, not on companies' social and economic impacts in the surrounding area or on how businesses compare with others in the field; and
- it is concerned only with how a company operates, not with what it does.

An increasing number of certification programmes are performance-based. They do focus on what a business does in a variety of environmental, socio-cultural and economic areas. These programmes tend to be less costly and permit comparisons among businesses, since all are audited based on the same criteria. Costa Rica's CST (Certification for Sustainable Tourism) programme, for instance, has a list of some 150 yes/no questions, while the Blue Flag programme has two sets of criteria for certifying beaches and marinas. One set contains the “essential” criteria, and the other contains “guideline” or desirable criteria. Increasingly, many of the newer or revamped programmes such as Green Globe 21 or NEAP represent a hybrid of process (management systems) and performance (standards or benchmarks).

All certification programmes, whether they use process or performance methodologies, have at least five components in common:

- **voluntary enrollment**: All certification programmes in the travel and tourism industry are currently strictly voluntary, i.e. businesses can decide whether to apply for certification. Most do so only if they believe that certification can bring them market distinction and increased profits.
- **logo**: All programmes award a selective logo, seal or brand designed to be recognizable by consumers. Many certification programmes use logos indicating different levels of achievement (e.g. from one to five suns or leaves). Most permit logos to be used only after certification is achieved. A notable exception has been Green Globe, which initially permitted companies that joined to use the logo immediately before any certification process began. As reorganized in 2000, Green Globe 21 now allows businesses or destinations that become members (and pledge to undergo certification) to use the logo before they have implemented actions and been externally audited. Once certified, a slightly different logo — one with a “check” in the middle — is issued. Many experts argue that this is still inappropriate, as such a slight distinction is lost on most consumers.
- **criteria that comply with or go beyond government regulations**: Process-based certification programmes require, at a minimum, that companies comply with local, national, regional and international regulations, while most performance-based programmes have criteria that always go beyond the regulations. One challenge is that regulations differ substantially from country to country in both rigour and enforcement. In poorer countries where tourism is expanding, but government regulations may be weak, certification programmes could help promote and ensure compliance. However, those in developing countries also argue that certification schemes, by setting criteria beyond the financial and technical capacity of many small and locally-owned businesses, may unfairly tilt their awards and logos towards international chains and foreign owned establishments.
- **assessment and auditing**: This can be first party (by the company itself, typ-
membership and fees: Many programmes charge an enrollment fee to those seeking certification. This money is used for administration, and to support advertising and promotion of the logo and of the companies that are certified. They (or the independent auditing body) also charge fees for on-site assessment. Usually there is a sliding scale, with larger and more profitable businesses paying more. While some programmes have received start-up funds from government, industry or NGOs, one challenge is how to make certification programmes self-supporting over the long haul.

In terms of developing public policy, model programmes, and international standards, it is useful to view certification programmes as falling into three tiers, all of which can be based on process, performance, or a combination of both methodologies. Briefly, these three types of programmes are:

♦ tourism certification programmes: Most often used by the mass tourism industry, particularly large accommodations or hotel chains, these programmes focus on the physical plant or the internal business, not wider conservation and community impacts. They issue logos based on setting up environmental management systems that emphasize environmentally friendly and usually cost-saving procedures and renovations, compliance with existing legislation, and best practices that go beyond compliance. Often these certification programmes are created and run by industry trade associations without wider stakeholder involvement. While tourism certification programmes can lead to some “green” innovations, they are insufficient to generate sustainable tourism practices.

♦ sustainable tourism certification programmes: These are primarily or totally performance-based programmes, using independent auditors and multifaceted questionnaires drawn up in consultation with a variety of stakeholders. Questionnaires include criteria on environmental, socio-cultural and economic impacts both within the business and on the surrounding community. Some examples are CST in Costa Rica, Horizons in Saskatchewan, and Blue Flag. This category appears to offer the best option in terms of developing global standards and a model programme. Criteria are broad enough to encompass various sizes of businesses and types of tourism, including niche markets such as nature, historic and cultural. At the same time, this category can include specific questions concerning conditions in a particular country, state or region and is administered locally. Because it focuses on performance both inside and outside businesses, it offers a more holistic approach to measuring the effects of a tourism business.

♦ ecotourism certification: This type covers companies that describe themselves (through brochures, websites, etc.) as involved in ecotourism. They are invariably located in or near protected areas or other fragile and pristine ecosystems and emphasize a business’s impact on the local community and the ecosystem in which it operates. While “green” innovations for mainstream tourism reduce energy consumption and waste, ecotourism standards go beyond questions of eco-efficiency and are more responsive to national and local stakeholder concerns. While sustainable tourism certification strives to reduce the negative impacts, ecotourism certification gauges whether companies contribute positively to conservation of protected areas and what mechanism are in place to ensure benefits reach local people. NEAP in Australia is the best known ecotourism certification programme: two of its three levels distinguish and rate enterprises involved in ecotourism: the third category rates nature tourism enterprises, or those more properly defined as involved in sustainable tourism.

Even though ecotourism constitutes a small sector of the market, measuring and rating it is clearly vital both because of effects on local communities and fragile ecosystems and because sound ecotourism can help ratchet up performance standards for the broader tourism industry. In terms of developing a global certification model, it seems most appropriate that ecotourism certification programmes should be incorporated as distinct components of sustainable tourism certification schemes that cover a wider market spectrum.

This is what last year’s workshop at Mohonk attempted to do. Participants drew up and unanimously approved “The Mohonk Agreement: An Agreed Framework and Principles for the Certification of Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism,” a four-page document setting out the ingredients that should form the framework for credible sustainable tourism and ecotourism certification programmes. In addition, workshop participants unanimously endorsed a proposal presented by the Rainforest Alliance to proceed with a feasibility study on the development of an international accreditation body that would set standards and certify the auditing firms. As the International Year of Ecotourism begins, it is hoped that this workshop has laid the foundation for future constructive work on certification and accreditation programmes.

Notes
1. Also see the article by Meaghan Newson, “Encouraging and rewarding best practice: Australia’s Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Programme (NEAP),” beginning on page 25.
2. Ibid.
Galápagos: ecotourism versus conservación

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El medio
Galápagos es un archipiélago océánico constituido por una isla mayor (Isabela) que cuenta con una superficie de 4588 km², cuatro islas medianas con áreas entre 1000 y 500 km² (Santa Cruz, Fernandina, Santiago y San Cristóbal), seis islas menores cuya extensión fluctúa entre 500 y 20 km² y ocho cuerpos terrestres de hasta 1 km², un total de 19 islas y 42 islotes. (Rodríguez, J. 1993). Este territorio insular fue anexionado como patrimonio de la República del Ecuador en 1832. De este conjunto archipiélagico, distante mil kilómetros del continente, cinco son las islas pobladas: Isabela, Santa Cruz, San Cristóbal, Santa María y Baltra, esta última es una base militar de 27 km² de superficie. A pesar de que la extensión de estas islas pobladas corresponde al 80,3 % del total del área terrestre del archipiélago, la superficie de las áreas de asentamientos humanos de tipo urbano-portuarios y agrícolas, solamente alcanza los 263,5 km², es decir un equivalente al 3 % del área terrestre total de Galápagos, el 97 % restante es territorio de protección bajo la categoría de Reserva Marina, con una superficie total de 200,000 Ha.

Las Islas Galápagos han sido reconocidas en el ámbito mundial por su historia natural y, particularmente, por la singularidad de sus ecosistemas y especies que merecieron la atención y estudio por parte del naturalista inglés Charles Darwin, quien durante su periplo científico alrededor del mundo visitó el archipiélago el año de 1835. Entre las distinciones que se le han otorgado a Galápagos cons-tan: Patrimonio Natural de la Humanidad (UNESCO, 1979), Reserva de la Biosfera (MAB/UNESCO, 1985) y Santuario de Ballenas (1989).

Existe una permanente presión por ampliar la capacidad de operación turística, pero se mantiene el control del ingreso de visitantes dentro de los límites de la oferta establecidos por los Planes de Manejo, 68,000 pasajeros fueron registrados el año 2000 por la administración del Parque Nacional y la Reserva Marina de Galápagos.

La política de manejo turístico
El análisis del turismo en la región insular de Galápagos se circunscribe dentro de la problemática ambiental y humana de este entorno único, de características naturales especiales que desembo-can en el tratamiento de dos aspectos sustanciales: el manejo sostenible de los recursos naturales y el bienestar social de la comunidad residente.

En 1924 el Gobierno Ecuatoriano emite un primer estatuto para la conservación de las singula-res especies de fauna del archipiélago, posteriormente en 1936, se establece una legisla-ción protectora de los ecosistemas de algunas islas, hasta que en 1959 se crea el Parque Nacional Galápagos (PNG) como primera área natural protegida del país. El manejo de este territorio protegido se con-solida en 1964 con la inauguración de la Estación Científica Charles Darwin y con el establecimien-to del Servicio del Parque Nacional Galápagos (SPNG) en 1968, en la Isla Santa Cruz, centro geográfico del Archipiélago. Luego de un prolongado proceso de concertación con los usuarios, en 1986, estableció la Reserva de Recursos Marinos, que en 1998 se integra al Sistema Nacional de Áreas Protegidas, bajo la categoría de Reserva Marina.

Entre 1966 y 1967 se realizó el primer “Estudio de Factibilidad para la Operación Turística en el Archipiélagode Galápagos”, partiendo de los postulados de conservación determinados para el área protegida. El primer Plan Maestro de Manejo del PNG se elaboró y entró en vigencia el año de 1974 y al año siguiente el Gobierno Nacional ejecutó el Plan de Conservación y Desarrollo Selectivo de la Provincia de Galápagos, integrando las áreas pobladas bajo criterios de control de las acciones antrópicas, en apoyo a la conservación de los ecosistemas.

Se ha establecido como principio fundamental para el desarrollo de la actividad turística en las islas, el uso sostenible de los recursos naturales mediante un modelo de turismo de naturaleza, claramente reglamentado y controlado en función de lineamientos científicos y técnicos, que garan-ticen la permanencia de los procesos ecológicos, con la participación de las comunidades locales. Este modelo de operación turística diseñado en 1967, coincide con la modalidad de “Ecoturismo Selectivo” definida treinta años después por la UICN y se sustenta en la singularidad del medio físico-biótico que, por su aislamiento y fragilidad, requiere ser protegido de intervenciones nocivas. Indudablemente el sistema de visita itinerante a bordo de “Floteles” (hoteles flotantes), hacia los sitios terrestres y marinos seleccionados por su capacidad de carga, así como el control de las ope-raciones con base en los puertos, ha minimizado el impacto de las actividades turísticas sobre el ambiente insular. Este modelo de operación turis-
Ecotourism

La gestión ambiental y turística

En la gestión de Galápagos ha sido una constante la intervención política al nivel más alto de la Presidencia de la República y la conformación de Comisiones Presidenciales de Alto Nivel, para garantizar la toma de decisiones sobre su administración y manejo. En 1991 se instituyó la Comisión Permanente Galápagos (CPG), dependiente de la Presidencia de la República, como un amplio foro de discusión y negociación entre los actores involucrados en la problemática de la conservación y el desarrollo. Como fruto de la labor de esta Comisión se logró un conjunto de reformas a la Constitución Política de la República, para conferir un régimen jurídico de excepción a la Provincia de Galápagos.

Como resultado de las deliberaciones y de los consensos al interior de la CPG, se formalizó la creación de la Reserva Marina, se formuló el Plan Global de Manejo Turístico y de Conservación Ecológica (1991), el Plan de Manejo de la Reserva de Recursos Marinos (1992) y se elaboró la Ley de Régimen Especial para la Conservación y el Desarrollo Sustentable de la Provincia de Galápagos, que propone un nuevo estatuto jurídico-institucional para optimizar la gestión ambiental en el archipiélago, Ley que fue promulgada en marzo de 1998.

Desde el principio el manejo y la administración del turismo, recayeron en el Servicio del Parque Nacional Galápagos (PNG) cuya autoridad comienza a consolidarse en 1967 y se fortalece con la promulgación del primer Plan Maestro de 1974, en el que se determina las funciones para la protección y uso del área protegida. Con la expedición del Estatuto Administrativo del PNG en 1979, se crea la Dirección del PNG como dependencia del Ministerio del Ambiente, con el status de “entidad desconcentrada” que se regía por normas especiales y de autonomía del Sistema Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas del Estado.

El ente nacional de turismo formaliza su presencia en Galápagos en 1982, cuando se establece la primera oficina de la Dirección Regional de Turismo en Puerto Ayora (Isla Santa Cruz) que en 1989, al crearse la Corporación Ecuatoriana de Turismo (CETUR), se convierte en delegación provincial con funciones de facilitación turística y control de la calidad de los servicios. En la actualidad el Ministerio de Turismo mantiene una Gerencia Regional con sede en el capital de la provincia insular.

Las autorizaciones y patentes de operación turística son reguladas por la Dirección del PNG basándose en el Plan de Manejo y al Estudio de Capacidad de Carga. El Ministerio de Turismo otorga permisos de funcionamiento a solamente a aquellas personas naturales o jurídicas que han cumplido con los requisitos constantes en los reglamentos de aplicación del Plan de Manejo. Se cuenta con los instrumentos técnicos suficientes, para llevar a cabo el seguimiento de las distintas modalidades operativas, configuración de los paquetes turísticos, circuitos y/o excursiones que se comercializan en el archipiélago.

El espacio para el turismo

La realidad geográfica, la posición oceánica, la confluencia de las corrientes marinas y la situación eucatorial, son algunos de los elementos que han determinado un espacio atípico para acondicionar una operación turística tan peculiar. Es un vasto territorio marino-costero los atractivos turísticos se concentran en 54 sitios de visita terrestres y 62 sitios de visita marinos (Plan de Manejo PNG, 1996). Se trata de un espacio turístico discontinuo y focalizado, cuya zonificación prevé la mitigación de los impactos y propicia el disfrute del turista en contacto directo con el medio natural, para lo cual se ha diseñado circuitos que guardan relación con las características de las embarcaciones y su autonomía de navegación.

Existe una concentración de atractivos en la parte central del archipiélago, en la zona correspondiente a las islas Santa Cruz, Santiago y Santa Fe, las que con sus áreas de influencia acogen a un total de 48 atractivos (41.4%). Comparativamente las islas San Cristóbal y Española, en el sector sudeste, concentran 22 atractivos (19%). La zona de las islas Isabela Norte y Fernandina tienen un total de 14 atractivos (12.1%), mientras que el sur de la Isla Isabela acoge a 13 atractivos que representan el 11.2% y la Isla Floreana 11 atractivos (9.5%). Las islas del norte Genovesa, Marchena, Pinta, Wolf y Darwin, acumulan 8 atractivos (6.9%).

En cuanto a los atractivos turísticos el Ministerio de Turismo tiene registros un total de 1.199 plazas de alojamiento en tierra, siendo Santa Cruz la isla con mayor equipamiento de servicios (63.22%). Las islas San Cristóbal y Floreana suman el 28.61% y la Isla Isabela, cuenta apenas con un 8.17% del total.

Los servicios de alimentación reúnen 1.965 plazas incluyendo las de los hoteles, restaurantes y cafeterías. No se incluye bares ni fuentes de soda y, para efectos de la estructuración del espacio turístico, tampoco se han incluido las plazas de comercio en los barcos. De la cantidad anotada 1.310 plazas (66.67%) se localizan en Santa Cruz; 500 en San Cristóbal (25.43%) y 155 (7.89%) en Isabela.

La planta de alojamiento flotante (fletos) suma 1.090 plazas, de las cuales el 66.79% corresponde a Santa Cruz y al 33.21% a San Cristóbal.

La infraestructura turística de apoyo a la operación se reduce a un muelle de aguas profundas en la isla Baltra y puertos naturales en las bahías de las islas Santa Cruz, San Cristóbal, Isabela, Floreana y Floreana.


La operación turística

El tema conlleva en primera instancia a examinar la llegada de visitantes al Parque Nacional Galápagos, cuyas estadísticas provienen del registro de las tarjetas de turismo que actualmente se cobra al ingreso, por un valor de US$ 100.00. La Dirección del PNG mantiene series históricas del ingreso de visitantes, detalladas por orígenes desde 1973 y datos generales desde 1969.

Durante los primeros años de operación entre 1968 y 1972, el volumen de visitantes al Parque Nacional se mantuvo estabilizado y con ligeras fluctuaciones propias de un destino turístico emergente, además la oferta estaba cubierta por una sola empresa. La flota turística se amplía paulatinamente hasta que en 1975 se llegó a contar con cuatro barcos con una capacidad total de 202 plazas y 13 pequeñas embarcaciones locales que transportaban a 74 pasajeros. Para contener el crecimiento turístico espontáneo el Plan Maestro del PNG de 1974 establece un límite de 12.000 visitantes al año “hasta que se pueda entender el impacto”, sin embargo en 1979 se llegó al umbral de dicho límite. Por disposición del Presidente de la República se conformó la Comisión de Alto Nivel para el Estudio de Impacto Turístico, que definió una revisión de las condiciones de manejo de la visita y planteó regulaciones correctivas.

Después del sensible incremento de 1980, el siguiente repunte importante se registra en a partir de 1986 cuando, como consecuencia de la apertura del nuevo aeropuerto de San Cristóbal, se produjo un crecimiento promedio anual en la llegada de turistas en el orden del 12 %. Desde el año 1994 y como resultado del ajuste propuesto en el Plan de Manejo y de las medidas complementarias (moratoria y reducción de cupos), se ha mantenido un incremento moderado del ingreso de visitantes.

El volumen de turistas extranjeros siempre ha sido superior al de los nacionales, como consecuencia del alto costo y del carácter temático selectivo de la operación turística. Actualmente hay una tendencia dominante a explotar las excursiones en crucero, con duración entre 4 y 15 días con todos los servicios incluidos y los inversionistas turísticos ponen énfasis en la preparación y oferta de productos con mayor margen de beneficio.

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Fuente: Dirección del PNG. 2002
coherente con una demanda de turismo receptivo creciente que contrasta con el turismo interno, menos significativo en volumen y nivel de consumo, relativamente estancado.

Dentro del sistema de operación turística establecido, el desarrollo de la modalidad de cruceríco es coherente con la ubicación dispersa de los atractivos, viabilizando el camino futuro de un eventual desarrollo de la actividad, sujeta a la incorporación de nuevos y lejanos sitios de visita. Otro esquema aplicado es el que combina estancias en tierra en pequeños hoteles de las islas pobladas, con salidas en excursiones de “Tour Diario”, hacia sitios de visita de las áreas consolidadas en torno a los puertos, para lo cual se cuenta con el soporte de barcos de capacidad limitada (10-12 pax) con menores niveles de comodidad. Durante la última década se ha puesto en práctica otras modalidades como los “Tours de Buceo” y los “Tours de Balada”, operados generalmente por armadores y guías locales que orientan sus itinerarios de vistas, hacia sitios de visita cercanos a los puertos.

La rentabilidad del “Tour de Crucero”, lo ha convertido en la modalidad predominante con una capacidad instalada de 1.040 plazas (54.4% de la capacidad total de los cruceros). En segundo lugar se sitúa el crucero estándar con 428 plazas (22.4%) y, por último, el Crucero Económico con 268 plazas (14.0% de la capacidad en cruceros).

Los barcos utilizados en excursiones marinas y formas de vislumbran el camino futuro de un establecimiento, el desarrollo de la modalidad de cruceríco, hemos anticipado, ha avanzado como paradigma, incorporando piezas de vistas, hacia sitios de visita cercanos a los puertos. Se ha convertido en la modalidad predominante con una capacidad instalada de 1.040 plazas (54.4% de la capacidad total de los cruceros). En segundo lugar se sitúa el crucero estándar con 428 plazas (22.4%) y, por último, el Crucero Económico con 268 plazas (14.0% de la capacidad en cruceros).

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La dinámica económica del turismo ha sustentado progresivamente las actividades productivas tradicionales de la población local, por formas de ocupación relacionadas con las diversas opciones de prestación de servicios que ofrece la operación turística, produciendo una alta dependencia de esta sola actividad. Con la “congelación” de la oferta, derivada de las disposiciones legales de los últimos años, grupos de pobladores que no encuentran opciones en la actividad turística, han retomado prácticas como la explotación de las pesquerías, generando conflictos sociales por la competencia de los espacios para sus tareas extractivas. Durante el lapso de treinta y tres años en el que se han desenvuelto las actividades turísticas organizadas en el archipiélago, siempre la acción de la empresa privada ha estado supeditada a los plan-teamientos de la gestión estatal, por lo que normalmente se ha ejercido controles preventivos que han evitado el actuar sobre hechos consumados. La práctica de sistemas de planificación participativa ha propiciado un espacio de amplio diálogo y concertación en las autoridades con los usuarios.

El mérito del manejo en Galápagos radica en haber implantado un modelo de “ecoturismo” de bajo impacto que, además de una normativa afín a reglamentar los procesos “adaptativos” y de revisión permanente, tiene un mecanismo interno de control como el altamente eficiente sistema de “guías naturalistas” y la estructura de administración del turismo de la Dirección del PNG, que realiza un seguimiento estricto para la aplicación de las regulaciones y prescripciones de los Planes de Manejo. Es importante resaltar el alto grado de madurez del empresariado turístico tanto local como continental, que ha interiorizado la necesidad de mantener acciones continuas de capacitación profesional, educación ambiental y conservación del patrimonio natural. El máximo logro consiste en haber liderado el proceso de concertación ciudadana para conjuntamente consolidar un modelo de gestión local de características sui generis y que culminó con la promulgación de un marco legal de excepción en Ecuador, acorde con las particularidades de la región insular de Galápagos.

Referencias bibliográficas


Evolving ecotourism alliances conserve biodiversity in the Galapagos Islands

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Summary
Badly managed tourism contributes to pollution, disturbs wildlife, and brings undesirable influences to once isolated cultures. Ecotourism is an option conservationists can offer rural people who want to conserve their ecosystems and sustain a social and cultural structure with economic benefits. The strong potential of certification (the process of assessing compliance with pre-established environmental and social criteria) is illustrated by the SmartVoyager™ programme developed to support conservation efforts in the Galapagos Islands.

Résumé
Un tourisme mal administré aggrave la pollution, perturbe la faune et la flore et a des effets indésirables sur des sociétés autrefois isolées. L’écotourisme est une option que les défenseurs de la nature peuvent proposer aux populations rurales soucieuses de préserver leurs écosystèmes et de renforcer leur structure sociale et culturelle par des avantages économiques. Le potentiel considérable offert par l’homologation (évaluation de la conformité à des critères environnementaux et sociaux préétablis) est illustré par le programme SmartVoyager™, mis au point pour soutenir les efforts de sauvegarde dans les îles Galapagos.

Resumen
El turismo mal administrado contribuye a la polución, perturba la vida silvestre e inluye de manera indeseable sobre culturas que alguna vez estuvieron aisladas. El ecoturismo es una opción que los conservacionistas pueden ofrecerle a las poblaciones rurales que desean conservar sus ecosistemas y sustentar una estructura social y cultural con beneficios económicos. El fuerte potencial de certificación (el proceso de evaluar el cumplimiento de acuerdo con criterios ambientales y sociales predeterminados) está ilustrado por el programa SmartVoyager™, desarrollado para apoyar los esfuerzos de conservación en las Islas Galápagos.

T
ravel has become the world’s largest industry, generating 11% of global gross domestic product (GDP). Nature-related tourism is the fastest growing segment of the travel business. Less developed countries like Costa Rica have joined the ranks of developed countries largely due to nature-related tourism. Costa Rica, in which travel has become one of the top industries (surpassing coffee and bananas), is only one example. The tropics are dotted with tens of thousands of enterprises that depend on tourism.

Some state and national governments have surrendered to the economic lure of mass tourism, choosing visitor volume over quality of experience and abandoning other conservation and social goals in the process. Few governments have demonstrated sufficient resolve and consistency to guide tourism development. Many indigenous and rural community leaders often have good ideas and the best of intentions, but do not have the political power or the access to international markets to implement these ideas.

Tourism as an ally in conservation and social well-being
Conservation leaders, from the presidents of major NGOs and foundations to chiefs of Amazon tribes just entering the cash economy, recognize the potential of socially and environmentally sound tourism. Conservationists can point to dozens of world-class attractions that were saved by tourism, from national parks in Africa, to the Galapagos Islands, to the cloud forests and turtle beaches of Costa Rica, to Khao Yai National Park in Thailand.

Most conservationists, village leaders and government officials have also learned that tourism has its pitfalls, some hidden and some obvious. For example, it can be just as destructive as traditional extractive industries like logging and mining. The “industry without smokestacks” requires infrastructure – hotels, roads, parking lots, trails, restaurants and other services. Success and profit breed more development, which can quickly overwhelm a vulnerable natural area. Improperly managed tourism contributes to pollution and erosion, disturbs wildlife, tramples delicate plants, mars scenery and brings undesirable influences to once isolated cultures.

Ecotourism, defined as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people,” is one of very few industries that depends on protecting rather than exploiting natural resources. Responsible travel means complying with principles such as the following:

• involves travel to natural sites;
• minimizes impact;
• builds environmental awareness;
• provides direct financial benefits for conservation;
• provides financial benefits and empowerment for local communities;
• respects local cultures;
• is sensitive to the host country’s political environment and social climate;
• supports human rights and international labour agreements.

As defined above, ecotourism represents one of the options that conservationists and advocates of social well-being can offer to rural people who want to conserve forests, coastlines, coral reefs, wetlands or other types of ecosystems and sustain a social and cultural structure with economic benefits. But how do we promote this type of tourism, and how do we ensure that so-called “ecotourism” ventures live up to the name?

Certification as a tool for change
Traditionally, several tools have been designed and implemented by ecotourism experts, governments and NGOs to promote and sustain ecotourism operations: technical assistance, policy statements on ecotourism, research departments or projects, public education for travellers and local communities, informational material for travellers and tour guides, ecotourism projects/facilities in developing countries, and travel programmes.

This article focuses on another important tool that has been used to address the impacts of nature-based tourism: certification. Certification is the process of assessing compliance with pre-established criteria. Credible and transparent certification programmes provide a tool for differentiating tourism operations from others that are less environmentally and socially sound. Through voluntary independent certification, the tourism industry can engage in evolving alliances with NGOs to conserve biodiversity and foster social well-being.
Tourism operations involved in certification programmes have access to a tool that provides market differentiation and recognition. These alliances, in turn, can support local and national government plans, as well as regional sustainable development plans. The SmartVoyager certification programme, created to support conservation efforts in the Galapagos Islands, illustrates certification’s potential.

**SmartVoyager™: promoting change in alliance with the tourism industry**

The Galapagos Islands are many different things to different people: a world-renowned national park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, a marine resources reserve, the birthplace of Charles Darwin’s evolutionary theory, the home of species found nowhere else on Earth and a unique tourist destination. This visually stunning yet delicate ecosystem, located approximately 600 miles west of Ecuador, faces its share of threats—from fishermen, colonists, invader species from the mainland, and (some say) tourists.

Tourism is growing rapidly. About 60,000 people visited the islands last year, compared to 46,000 in 1994.1 Tourists travel from island to island on specially equipped tour boats which also serve as floating hotels.

In May 2000 the Rainforest Alliance, an international non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of tropical ecosystems, and Conservación y Desarrollo (C&D), an Ecuadorian conservation group, introduced a voluntary certification programme called SmartVoyager designed to harness the power of well-managed tourism as a conservation tool. SmartVoyager’s immediate objective is to help the tourism industry minimize its impacts, give a “green seal of approval” to tour boats that tread lightly on the Galapagos, and give concerned visitors an opportunity to choose responsible and certified tour boats.

The broader goal of the programme is to provide a forum and incentives for improved interaction between conservation agencies and the tourism industry, so that visitors and the companies that profit from them are increasingly integrated, active and vocal allies in a coordinated campaign to enjoy and conserve the Galapagos Islands.

SmartVoyager’s goals were based on Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry. After three years of work performed by C&D with scientists, conservation experts, tour operators, and others, SmartVoyager standards were developed. The programming is also guided by an International Advisory Committee comprising a multidisciplinary group of experts.

Box 1 summarizes the steps that were taken to create certification standards for environmentally and socially responsible tour boats. Through these research and consultation steps, the definition and principles of ecotourism were translated into concrete certification principles (Box 2) adapted to the reality of the Galapagos Islands. These SmartVoyager certification principles are subject to continual research and improvements.

The standards currently cover potential sources of pollution, such as wastewater and fuels, and set rules for the management of everything from docks to the small crafts that ferry visitors ashore. Procurement and supply management guidelines are designed to minimize the chances of introducing alien wildlife species to the area. The standards require good living conditions and advanced training for the boat crew and guides. Passengers must be given the maximum opportunity to appreciate the beauty of the islands and close encounters with wildlife, while leaving no trace of their visit.

The SmartVoyager programme has been subsidized by C&D and the Rainforest Alliance. In the upcoming phases, it will require additional support from governments and foundations, as well as from certification fees paid by certified operators.

**How SmartVoyager works**

To ensure transparency, the following mechanisms have been established:

- Certification standards are public documents available to any interested party, and suggestions for improvements are welcomed (recommendations are collected throughout the year, formal revisions are conducted every six months);
- Certification audits are performed by properly trained independent third-party auditors with no conflict of interest;
- The certification is awarded by an independent international certification committee;
- Public presentations and consultation meetings are conducted whenever possible.

The following is an overview of the general steps that constitute SmartVoyager’s certification process:

1. **Application**: Applicants should submit an application form to C&D or to the Rainforest Alliance. Once this has been done, the applicant will receive the necessary documentation to continue with the certification process.
2. **Self-assessment**: After the application has been submitted, the tour operator usually performs a self-assessment or internal review to determine its level of compliance with the standards.
3. **Evaluation**: In some cases, and as a complement to the self-assessment, the operator may request a short evaluation to decide whether or not an on-site assessment needs to be performed. If so, C&D

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**Box 1 Developing SmartVoyager Guidelines**

- Field identification of the different environmental impacts caused by tourism operations and identification of the main causes of environmental degradation in the Galapagos Islands.
- Identification of mechanisms that tourism operators could implement to conserve and protect the islands.
- Understanding the procedures involved in a tourist operation.
- Investigation of the processes used to control the entrance of products from the continent, sanitary systems and environmental control.
- Evaluation of the mechanisms for environmental control and safety on the boats.
- Dialogue with tourism operators on the environmental problems that exist in the Galapagos.
- Analyses of existing international norms and agreements with which compliance is demanded in order to obtain navigation permissions.
- Analysis of warehouses and supplying centers.
- Analysis of the fuel systems.
- Analysis of the boats’ maintenance systems (paintings, machinery).
- Analysis of the fumigation systems.
- Analysis of the consumption of fresh water, energy and fuel.
- Analysis of the consumption patterns of tourists.
- Evaluation of the behaviour of tourists and operators on the islands.
- Identification and analysis of the level of environmental conscience of the personnel and crew.
- Conversations with different tour guides in the Galapagos on environmental problems and handling of tourist groups.
- Compilation and improvement of four draft sets of standards through internal revisions and partner NGOs.
- Validation and evaluation in the field (pilot project with one operator).
- Introduction of adjustments to the standards and creation of the fifth draft. Discussion with tourism operators to analyze the programme and evaluate its acceptance on the part of key operators.
- Delivery of standards to the Galapagos National Park for their revision.
- Circulation of the standards among key players and members of the International Advisory Committee and incorporation of their recommendations.
- These standards are subject to continual improvement with formal revisions every six months.

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**Sea lion**

34 ✦ UNEP Industry and Environment July – December 2001
Conservation of Natural Ecosystems

Integrated Waste Management

The paint used on the hull is TBT-free and the superstructure is lead-free. Exterior lights have been replaced with yellow lights that do not attract insects. The cooling element has been given courses with an emphasis on environmental themes directly related to their work.

Soaps, detergents and shampoo used on board are biodegradable.

Sewage and grey waters are treated under aerobic conditions and the residual water is filtered and decomposed. The residual water is filtered and purified with ozone before it is discharged in open waters.

Water is produced on board using desalination units. It is purified with ozone to eliminate chlorine discharge in the ocean. Passengers are asked to refill the plastic water bottles provided in each cabin.

To conserve energy, only towels placed on the floor of the cabin are replaced.

A waste disposal management system has been implemented on every vessel, including garbage bins on each deck to separate organic, paper, glass and plastic waste. Signs are posted in all cabins to remind guests to conserve, reuse and recycle.

All outboard motors on dinghies or pangas have been changed from two-stroke to four-stroke engines. Four-stroke engines are 70% quieter than two-stroke ones. They emit virtually no fumes and consume 50% less fuel.

The paint used on the hull is TBT-free and the paint on the superstructure is lead-free. Exterior lights have been replaced with yellow lights that do not attract insects. The cooling elements used in the refrigeration and air-conditioning systems on board are gas-free to prevent gases escaping and adding to the greenhouse effect, and R-12 has been changed to R-134A.

Collaboration efforts have been arranged with the Galapagos National Park to patrol the marine reserves, in order to prevent fishing, commercialization, and consumption of flora and fauna species that are prohibited by law.

Employment priority is given to local villagers.

Crew members’ living quarters have been significantly improved. Hygienic and sanitary conditions have been provided to improve the quality of life on board.

All employees receive life and health insurance, and their families.

Tourists must be guided in their involvement in protecting natural resources and local cultures, tread lightly, and collaborate with the island conservation programmes.

Planning and Monitoring: Tourism operations must be planned, monitored and evaluated, taking into consideration technical, economic, social and environmental factors.

Commitment on the Part of the Tourists: Tourists must be guided in their involvement in protecting natural resources and local cultures, tread lightly, and collaborate with the island conservation programmes.

Achievements

SmartVoyager has benefited from priceless support given by numerous individuals and organizations, devoted staff and friends of the programme, and the members of the International Advisory Committee, who have given advice to ensure the success of the programme. Visionary outbound tour operators such as the International Galapagos Tour Operators Association (IGTOA) have also endorsed the programme’s mission and objectives. Government officials have expressed support for the programme and have seen the potential for incorporating it into the country’s tourism plans.

Yet the biggest achievement comes from the changes that have already occurred on the ground and on the boats. These changes are having a positive impact on conservation and social well-being in the Galapagos. Currently two companies have their boats enrolled in the programme, representing five of the 20 larger sized vessels that operate in Galapagos. It is expected that other conscientious companies will follow in the near future. Some specific practices implemented on certified boats include the following:

- Soaps, detergents and shampoo used on board are biodegradable.
- Sewage and grey waters are treated under aerobic conditions and the residual water is filtered and decomposed. The residual water is filtered and purified with ozone before it is discharged in open waters.
- Water is produced on board using desalination units. It is purified with ozone to eliminate chlorine discharge in the ocean. Passengers are asked to refill the plastic water bottles provided in each cabin.
- To conserve energy, only towels placed on the floor of the cabin are replaced.
- A waste disposal management system has been implemented on every vessel, including garbage bins on each deck to separate organic, paper, glass and plastic waste. Signs are posted in all cabins to remind guests to conserve, reuse and recycle.
- All outboard motors on dinghies or pangas have been changed from two-stroke to four-stroke engines. Four-stroke engines are 70% quieter than two-stroke ones. They emit virtually no fumes and consume 50% less fuel.
- The paint used on the hull is TBT-free and the paint on the superstructure is lead-free. Exterior lights have been replaced with yellow lights that do not attract insects. The cooling elements used in the refrigeration and air-conditioning systems on board are gas-free to prevent gases escaping and adding to the greenhouse effect, and R-12 has been changed to R-134A.
- Collaboration efforts have been arranged with the Galapagos National Park to patrol the marine reserves, in order to prevent fishing, commercialization, and consumption of flora and fauna species that are prohibited by law.
- Employment priority is given to local villagers.
- Crew members’ living quarters have been significantly improved. Hygienic and sanitary conditions have been provided to improve the quality of life on board.
- All employees receive life and health insurance, and their families.
- Soaps, detergents and shampoo used on board are biodegradable.
- Sewage and grey waters are treated under aerobic conditions and the residual water is filtered and decompos...
Project Summary
The Rainforest Alliance has received seed funds to function as coordinator of this study, whose primary objective is to investigate the possibility of establishing an international accreditation body for sustainable tourism certification, and provide a fully developed implementation plan. The main responsibilities of this accreditation body would be to establish international criteria for accreditation, monitor compliance with such criteria, promote consumer awareness, and increase the credibility of certification schemes. In addition, an accreditation body for sustainable tourism could indirectly raise the environmental and social standards for all sectors of the tourism industry.

The motivation to initiate this study comes from lack of transparency and participation in the definitions of standards, lack of clarity of the evaluation and monitoring systems used, absence of harmonization and reciprocity among certifiers, and manipulation of the terms “sustainable” and “ecotourism”, all of which diminishes the potential benefits of certification and leads to consumer confusion. The international community needs a tool to address the fragmentation among current certification schemes that exist, and to help sustainable tourism suppliers and consumers effectively contribute to biodiversity conservation and social welfare. While it is argued that credible, local certifiers have the advantage of their knowledge of the environmental, social, political and economic realities of the country where the tourism operation takes place, they often do not have the possibility to promote their certification schemes because of limited access to resources and information, as well as a lack of networking and marketing capacity.

An international accreditation body would help establish generic criteria for ecotourism and sustainable tourism certifiers, accredit certifiers, guide the definition of local standards for each country/region, guarantee stakeholder participation, promote the accreditation system and standards internationally, and perform random audits of certifiers and certified companies. Having credible, accredited certifiers could be beneficial not only for governments and NGOs trying to promote sustainable tourism through certification, but also for tourism operators looking to promote sales of environmentally and socially sound destinations as well as for conscientious tourists. Certifiers themselves could benefit from having an independent body that assures that their systems are designed and implemented in a credible, transparent way.

A strong participatory approach is needed for this project, given the multiplicity of stakeholders and the need for establishing a credible accreditation system with the potential to have a significant, positive impact worldwide. A core working group of representatives from international organizations has been established as the Executive Advisory Committee for the project. The project has been divided into six components with the following specific objectives:

1) Understanding current certification and accreditation schemes. To determine the need to have an accreditation body for sustainable tourism certification.
2) Project management. Communication mechanisms must be established to assure an efficient flow of information internally and externally. The Rainforest Alliance will have the role of the project’s steering agent and communications facilitator.
3) Consolidating the Executive Advisory Committee. The Rainforest Alliance as coordinator is in charge of establishing the Executive Advisory Committee to guide the execution of the programme and attest to its credibility. This is the primary challenge. In that regard, the Rainforest Alliance is participating in a feasibility study for establishing such an organization;
4) Determining the feasibility, organizational structure and implementation plan for a sustainable tourism accreditation body. This is the core component of the project, which seeks to determine what the different stakeholders need from an accreditation system. This component will also assess the demand for accreditation services and the credibility of current certification schemes, the financial mode developed out of the needs assessment, the feasibility of defining minimum international standards, the financial feasibility for establishing and maintaining an accreditation organization, its marketing potential, the most adequate organizational structure for it, and the steps that need to be taken for its implementation.
5) Regional workshops. The goal is to build consensus among all stakeholders, including NGOs, certifiers, government representatives, and members of the tourism industry, in regard to the creation of a sustainable tourism accreditation body. A total of six workshops are proposed, for different key regions of the world.
6) Implementation. The consultants will be responsible for presenting a complete implementation plan to the Committee, whose members will agree upon the final recommendations to be made to their various parent organizations. It will be the responsibility of the Executive Advisory Committee to pursue additional funds for the implementation of the plan.

The aim of the organizations involved in this project is to provide the international community with its results during 2002, the UN International Year of Ecotourism.

Marketing efforts and the strengthening of collaborative alliances will increase in the upcoming years. In summary, SmartVoyager will be actively looking more towards evolving strategic alliances to become a model for collaborative sustainability in tourism development.

Notes
Reducing the environmental impacts of cruise ships in the Arctic and Antarctic

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Cruise ships increasingly travel to remote areas including the Arctic and Antarctic, two of the last pristine nature reserves on Earth. Both regions have extremely sensitive ecosystems. While this is one reason they attract visitors, it sometimes appears doubtful whether tourists should really be there at all. Tour operators offering Arctic and Antarctic cruises have a clear responsibility to protect the environment.

The scenery, wildlife and cultures in these vast tracts of wilderness – in a world without roads or other traces of development – are rapidly changing. Their beauty would be spoiled by roads, pipelines and oil rigs, but also by litter, pesticides and toxic chemicals. Dioxins and other chemicals are already present in the air, water and wildlife. Indigenous and other inhabitants have expressed concern about the threats of persistent pollution and environmental degradation relating to tourism.

The UNEP/UNESCO/World Tourism Organization “Tour Operators Initiative for Sustainable Tourism Development” (TOI) is a group of like-minded tour operators. As a member of this group, Hapag-Lloyd Kreuzfahrten is committed to promoting development of sustainable forms of tourism. TOI members recognize the importance of conserving and protecting ecologically sensitive landscapes. Operating practices are based on the concept of ecotourism: that is, responsible travel to natural areas for the purpose of enjoying and appreciating nature, keeping visitor impact as low as possible.

For Hapag-Lloyd Kreuzfahrten (HLK), one important element of environmental protection is choosing appropriate technology for its cruise ships. Those ships visiting polar regions belong to the highest “ice class” (i.e. they have especially thick hulls) and are equipped with the most modern technology. This is one way environmental impacts can be reduced to a minimum. Ships also have biological sewage plants. Wastewater is recycled and solid waste is burned in incineration plants aboard or discharged at ports with suitable facilities. Thus there is much less pollution of the ocean, and less influence on ocean ecosystems.

Another way to protect the environment is to use diesel instead of heavy fuel oil. Diesel is used by both the HLK expedition ships that visit polar regions, the MV Bremen and the MV Hanseatic.

By 2003, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) plans to ban application of anti-fouling paints used on ships’ hulls if they contain organotin compounds. These chemicals’ presence should be completely banned by 2008. Organotin compounds like TBT (tributyl tin) are among the most toxic chemicals ever produced. TBT-free paint is already used on all HLK’s cruise ships.

TOI members are convinced that tourism can contribute significantly to the viability of local economies. Respect for nature and sensitivity to ethnic groups, and to the well-being of all inhabitants, have top priority. One key to sustainable tourism development is creating consciousness, comprehension and respect among passengers. To achieve this goal, senior officers need to be highly experienced in polar regions.

Guidelines concerning Arctic and Antarctic visits are distributed during a briefing to passengers and crew members before cruise ships enter polar waters. To minimize environmental impacts and improve visitor experience, HLK has also developed a handbook for travellers containing information on history, geology, climate and vegetation, including details on fish, insects, krill, underwater creatures, seals and whales, and how to protect fauna and flora.

The following is based on extracts from the handbook:
We regard appropriate behaviour and attitude as a part of your equipment. Please overcome your sense of individuality and remain attached to your group at all times.... Never come closer than five metres to even harmless animals.... We should not leave litter behind – all we should take home are memories and photographs. We never visit stations without a prior invitation....

Tour assistants who have received training on destinations’ environmental, cultural, social and legal issues are conscious of their role as models for tourists. They are supported by qualified lecturers, biologists, geologists, glaciologists, marine biologists and historians. Assistants accompany passengers ashore to answer questions and ensure that guidelines are respected. HLK also gives scientists working in polar areas the opportunity to travel on its cruise ships.

Tourism should not be allowed to alter the lifestyles of individuals or communities. The rights and wishes of inhabitants are to be respected. Permission must be obtained to visit churches, graveyards and other holy places, and camps and fishing sites. To help conserve cultural assets, HLK has agreed to contribute money to the Antarctic Heritage Trust for restoration of historic huts. In the Arctic specific agreements with inhabitants make it possible for visitors to take part in the presentation of historic and folk dances as well as arts and crafts displays. In small villages, ship’s doctors sometimes provide medical assistance and supply medicines.

A good reason to allow ecotourism in these pristine parts of the world is that customers are becoming more and more sensitive to the total quality of the holidays they have paid for. There is growing demand for more environmentally friendly tourist destinations. Having experienced the beauty and uniqueness of these areas, passengers often become advocates of their protection.

Tour operators like Hapag-Lloyd Kreuzfahrten have an important role to play in catalyzing positive changes to protect the natural environment, conserve plants and animals, and promote the welfare of host communities – while protecting their commercial interests and meeting customer expectations. These are the most important aims of sustainable tourism in the long term.

Web sites:
Integrating biodiversity conservation planning into the tourism sector

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Summary
The UNEP/UNDP/GEF Biodiversity Planning Support Programme (BPSP) assists national biodiversity conservation planners in developing and implementing national biodiversity strategies and action plans. BPSP is studying the integration of biodiversity concerns in the tourism sector, with a focus on incorporating “global best practice” into these strategies and action plans. In this article ecotourism in Costa Rica, South Africa, Belize and other countries is highlighted.

Résumé
Le Programme d’aide à la planification de la diversité biologique (BPSP), initiative conjointe du PNUE, du PNUD et du FEM, aide les planificateurs nationaux de la préservation de la diversité biologique à élaborer et à mettre en œuvre des stratégies et des plans d’action nationaux pour protéger cette diversité. Le BPSP étudie la prise en compte des préoccupations relatives à la diversité biologique par le secteur du tourisme, privilégiant l’incorporation de “bonnes pratiques mondiales” dans les stratégies et plans d’action. L’article présente des initiatives d’écotourisme au Costa Rica, en Afrique du Sud, au Belize et dans d’autres pays.

Resumen
El Programa de Apoyo a la Planificación de la Biodiversidad de UNEP/UNDP/GEF colabora con los planificadores de conservación de la biodiversidad en el desarrollo y la implementación de estrategias y planes de acción nacionales de biodiversidad. PAPB (BPSP) se encuentra abocada a lograr integrar la preocupación por la biodiversidad al sector de turismo, concentrándose en incorporar “los mejores usos y costumbres a nivel global” a estas estrategias y planes de acción. En este artículo se destaca el ecoturismo en Costa Rica, Sud Africa, Belice y otros países.

As we all know, tourism has become one of the most important economic activities in the world. According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), in 2000 world tourism grew by an estimated 7.4%. A record 698 million international trips were made in 2000 (WTO, 2001). The number of domestic tourists is estimated to be probably as much as ten times the number of international tourists.

Clearly tourism has a paramount economic role for countries around the world and, if planned and managed correctly, can significantly contribute to sustainable socio-economic development and environmental conservation. The appropriate interaction between biodiversity conservation planning and tourism planning and development has become a key concern for many institutions at the local, national and international levels.

The Biodiversity Planning Support Programme (BPSP) of UNEP/UNDP/GEF has a mandate to provide assistance to national biodiversity conservation planners as they develop and implement their national biodiversity strategies and action plans (Duthie, 2000). Sustainable tourism has been highlighted recently as an area of major concern within the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). It was the focus of attention at the recent Conference of Parties in Nairobi (UNEP/CBD/COP/5/20). In the CoP’s final decisions, Parties were requested to submit case studies of best practice in sustainable tourism.

For the above reasons, BPSP is presently carrying out a study on integration of biodiversity into the tourism sector – with a specific focus on how best to incorporate “global best practice” into national biodiversity strategy and action plans. Within the scope of this study, a compilation of national case studies from 12 countries has been obtained. The countries are: Belize, Botswana, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Kazakhstan, Korea, Mexico, Peru, Seychelles, South Africa and Trinidad and Tobago.

Also within the framework of this study, an International Workshop was held in Mexico City in March 2001. One of the main outputs that will result is a document presenting global best practice guidelines for integrating biodiversity conservation planning into the tourism sector.

The 12 selected country case studies, apart from containing much valuable information on the interaction of biodiversity conservation planning and tourism planning in general, represent an interesting, updated cross-section of ecotourism development around the world showing very different stages of progress and achievements, including the state of the art in countries well known for their ecotourism track record such as Costa Rica, South Africa and Belize. The following brief description of some of these developments is based mainly on the country case studies received (still in draft form) and the Workshop discussions.

Costa Rica
Tourism has long been considered by the Costa Rican governments as a key generator of employment, distributor of benefits, promoter of foreign investment, and supporter of growth which is compatible with the environment and rural development. The main success factors of this activity have been the quality and variety of attractive nature the country possesses, its excellent protected areas system, its well functioning democracy, and its traditional hospitality to foreigners.

Ecotourism in Costa Rica has experienced an interesting evolution over the last 20 years or so. Over the past five or six years the government authorities, with the strong collaboration of the tourism industry and a number of NGOs, have been endeavouring to consolidate the tourism process, fostering tourism activity with a strong nature component but with a multi-phased and varied character, diversifying the line of tourism products and services offered. The government now faces the challenge of integrating ecotourism into a diverse mosaic of tourist activities and attractions with the aim of offering a single extensive tourist product: “a peaceful, green, and clean country”.

This is not an easy task, as there seems to be a dual policy of heavily marketing Costa Rica’s natural areas and ecotourism attractions, and at the same time trying to augment visitor numbers by means of huge beach resorts and urban hotels owned by transnational chains, cruise ships and prepaid air charter tours (Honey, 1999).

From 1995 to 1998, tourism (with a strong ecotourism component) was the country’s top dollar earner. Although still growing, in 1999 and 2000 it moved to second place due to the surge of high-technology industry, especially electronics.

Tourism represents 72% of national monetary reserves, generates 140,000 jobs and produces 8.4% of the GNP. Over 500,000 Costa Ricans (16% of the total population) depend directly or indirectly on the tourism sector. In 1999, for the first time in history, the country welcomed over a million tourists (1,027,000). This figure is expected to double by 2010. Income from tourism was US$ 829.4 million in 1998.

Regarding protected areas, 25.1% of Costa Rica’s territory is classified under some category of conservation management. In 1999, protected areas welcomed a total of 866,083 national and foreign visitors, which generated about US$ 2.5 million in admission fees and payment of services. The number of domestic visitors now exceeds the number of international tourists visiting protected wilderness areas.

An important achievement of the Costa Rican
government has been the division of the country into eleven "conservation areas", by means of which the National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC's) administration covers all the national territory in protected areas as well as in the rest of the territory, where biodiversity conservation is promoted and regulated. Apart from State-administered protected areas, Costa Rica has an important and very successful network of private reserves, established as non-profit entities. Most of the associated reserves are involved in ecotourism activities.

Despite the many bright points of ecotourism development in Costa Rica, there are still many shortcomings with respect to the harmonious interaction between tourism and conservation. These can be summarized in terms of three closely interrelated issues: inefficient coordination between responsible parties, serious negative environmental impacts of non-planned tourism, and a generalized lack of environmental awareness in society of the importance of sustainable tourism.

The main challenge for Costa Rica is maintaining a high level of quality in its important ecotourism industry, while finding ways to provide more tangible benefits from this process for the national park system and preserving the country's unique biodiversity heritage.

South Africa

Tourism, which is the fourth largest generator of foreign exchange in South Africa, also ranks third in its contribution to the economy. Although South Africa attracted just 0.9% of total world tourism arrivals internationally in 1998, tourism was the economic sector with the most significant growth in the country, having generated an income of US$ 8.9 billion. There were 5.9 million foreign visitors in 1999 (a 37% increase over 1994).

The dominant forms of nature-based and adventure tourism include safari tourism, whale watching, white water rafting, hiking, bird watching, 4x4 trails, bush survival, deep-sea fishing, hunting and diving. There are also excellent opportunities for cultural tourism activities. The most popular activity undertaken within the foreign visitor market is visiting game and nature reserves (61% of visitors), followed by visits to historic sites (37%).

South Africa is one of the 17 "megadiversity" countries. It is one of the Earth's biologically wealthiest countries and probably has the highest level of plant endemism in the world. The White Paper on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of South Africa's Biological Diversity is currently being adapted to form a Biodiversity Chapter within the National Environmental Management Act.

Since the first democratic elections in 1994, there has been much emphasis on stakeholder consultation and participation in all sectors of government policy and planning. The 1996 White Paper on the Development and Promotion of Tourism states that government is committed to facilitating responsible tourism through a series of participative processes. Each of South Africa's nine provinces has a Provincial Tourism Organization (PTO).

South Africa has 422 formally protected areas covering approximately 6% of the land surface area. There are also 160 privately owned reserves, apart from several thousand privately owned game farms that attract large numbers of ecotourists. Many privately owned game reserves (which are now basically ecotourism destinations) adjoin public protected areas, by which the area effectively protected is vastly increased.

There are a number of policy links between tourism development and biodiversity conservation and planning in South Africa. However, there is a perceived institutional gap in that there is no overall structure overseeing and coordinating biodiversity conservation and tourism planning in the nine provinces. Each of the provincial conservation authorities acts independently. These authorities do not answer to a central regulating body. In addition, successful conservation and tourism strategies are not efficiently transferred between agencies.

Ecotourism has been playing a dual role in the new post-apartheid South Africa, serving to reintegrate the nation into the world economy and to help redress grievances and redistribute wealth to the country's poor. Ecotourism is recognized as a tool for social change. A number of the community-based ecotourism developments sprouting up around South Africa (e.g. the Simunye ecologe in the Zulu country) are providing opportunities for sustainable development among local populations.

It is important to remember that the apartheid era ended only a few years ago. A new South Africa is emerging, with great expectations but also considerable risks. The great challenge is to reduce the enormous socio-economic gap between the white and black populations. Ecotourism may play a key role in this endeavour, but that will require major efforts by all the parties involved as well as intensive training programmes.

Belize

Tourism is the biggest contributor to Belize's economy. In 1999 it accounted for approximately 18% of GDP, 25% of total foreign exchange earnings, and one in four jobs. The trend during the past ten years has shown a steady increase in visitation. This small country, with its well preserved rain forests containing a wealth of biodiversity (including many beautiful and interesting tropical birds as well as jaguars), its Mayan archaeological sites and living Mayan culture, and the second longest barrier reef in the world, has an enviable ecotourism resource base to present to the world.

In 1999, the total number of foreign visitors to Belize was 180,795. Total tourism earnings amounted to US$ 111.5 million. There were 145,159 visitors to six key national parks and reserves and to Mayan archaeological sites.

The then Ministry of Tourism and the Environment produced an Integrated Tourism Policy and Strategy Statement in 1991 which re-valued many important assets, widely recognizing that tourism in Belize is totally tied to its diverse natural and cultural resources and that protecting these resources is crucial to the industry's future. Under an agreement with the Government of Belize, an influential NGO, the Belize Audubon Society (BAS), administers eight protected areas established under the National Parks Systems Act and other reserves. The Program for Belize (PfB) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of Belize's natural heritage and to promoting wise use of its natural resources. This organization, designed as a land-owning and managing entity, is also engaged in education, public outreach, research and professional training.

The Government has been promoting ecotourism as a strategy and as a developmental model that can protect Belize's rich natural and cultural heritage at the same time that it contributes to the welfare of the Belizean people. Its policy is that ecotourism should be the main focus of the developmental and marketing efforts in the tourism industry. However, several weaknesses are perceived:

- enforcement of environmental laws and regulations is weak in Belize due to a lack of financial resources;
- institutional capacity is insufficient to carry out the needed land use planning, park management activities, environmental inventories and impact assessments;
- parks do not receive any government funding, the most important being managed by NGO mechanisms; and
- there is a perceived lack of political commitment and compromise to fully engage in implementing conservation programmes and developing a sound ecotourism strategy.

Renewed investor confidence, an integrated tourism strategy and clear policy direction will set the platform for further economic growth while protecting Belize's rich natural and cultural resources.

Ecotourism progress and achievement in other countries

Apart from the three cases briefly described above, the remaining nine BPSP country case studies depict, among many other things, the very different stages of ecotourism development in widely differing countries around the world.

Countries like Canada and Mexico have a long-standing reputation as popular tourism destinations ( WTO, 2001). Tourists from the United States constitute by far the largest proportion of foreign visitors to these two countries. A significant share of their foreign visitors take part in conventional activities (city tourism, conventions and shopping in Canada: border tourism, beaches and shopping for hand crafts in Mexico).

Although Mexico is one of the five top megadiversity countries (as regards biodiversity), until the early 1990s most of its protected areas and biosphere reserves were simply off limits to tourism. However, over the last decade organized tours and individual travellers have been discovering and raving about the natural wonders of Mexico. At long last the Government is recognizing the country's enormous ecotourism potential. In the coming years it is to be hoped that Mexico will encourage more organized and planned ecotourism development.

In 2000, the Government and several other institutions published a National Policy and Strategy for Sustainable Tourism which represents a

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good inter-sectoral effort and contains valuable guidelines and action plans. Unfortunately, the document appeared only a few months before the end of the previous six-year administration. Hopefully, much of the valuable material contained therein will be considered by the new authorities.

Although very low on the biodiversity wealth scale, Canada is well known for its spectacular outdoors, its magnificent forested mountains, rivers and lakes, and its many adventure tourism options. It is also becoming an important destination for ecotourists. The national park network receives some 15 million visitors per year. However, the following drawbacks impede more sustainable efforts to conserve the Canadian natural environment and to develop ecotourism in a more effective way (Wight, 2001):

- no National Action Plan has been developed from the Canadian Biodiversity Strategy;
- the National Parks System has not yet struck a successful balance between its two main goals, enjoyment and protection of the parks;
- tourism and conservation responsibilities are split among many departments, agencies and levels of government;
- there is no enough practical action, nor are there enough model projects on the ground; and
- there is lack of follow-through on commitment from government and from industry as regards protecting the environment.

However, there are some recent good practice examples. The Canadian Tourism Commission recently developed a practical study on Parks and Eco-Adventure Operators: Best Practices in Natural Heritage Collaborations. CTC also recently created the Ecotourism Product Club (a strategic tourism alliance among Canadian Biosphere Reserves and adjacent communities).

If ecotourism opportunities are to grow in Canada, protected areas must grow and improve their management. As long as tourism and protected areas are seen as competing for a limited land base, the possible synergies between the two will likely not happen.

Tourism and Local Agenda 21s
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At the request of UNEP’s Division of Technology, Industry and Economics (DTIE), a study has been carried out to determine how tourism has been addressed in Local Agenda 21s as they are drawn up and implemented by local authorities. The study is based partly on hands-on experience acquired by several local communities which are involved to varying degrees in tourism activity, and which have adopted a Local Agenda 21 approach. The survey report includes:

- the position of tourism within Local Agenda 21s;
- the utility of the LA 21 process in dealing with problems posed by tourism at destinations and in defining tourism strategies;
- possible limits to this approach as far as tourism is concerned;
- recommendations for improving the way specific tourism-related aspects are taken on board in Local Agenda 21 processes.

Tourism has a major impact on local communities at tourist destinations. It can have positive effects on local development. It can also generate jobs and income. However, tourism threatens these destinations’ natural and cultural heritage and the local social balance. Damage to the environment and landscapes, and to cultural diversity and wealth, will have a negative effect on tourism itself in the long run.

Local authorities
Traditionally speaking, tourism development depends to a great extent on initiatives taken by the private sector (i.e. all companies operating in the tourism sector, which has an abundance of small and medium-sized enterprises). For many years local authorities have not really been involved in tourism development. They often have little experience with tourism planning, development and management. But now they are increasingly involved in developing and managing tourism activities due to:

- the trend towards administrative decentralization in many countries, which increases their ability to intervene;
- the peculiarities of tourism activity. While it is the consumer who is brought to the product (and not the other way round, as happens with most other goods and services), the primary tourism product comprises elements which are produced not by the tourism industry but, for example, by geography, history and culture. The attractiveness of the product largely depends on the overall quality of the destination, as well as correct management of “common property” in the form of nature areas, landscapes, beaches, etc.;
- an awakening to the need for a tourism development model that respects the principles of sustainability. Public authorities need to be involved in regulating tourism development at destinations, rather than leaving it up to the laws of the market.

Local authorities have an important part to play in building sustainable tourism through:

- preparing overall strategies for destinations;
- participating in these destinations’ enhancement and management;
- balancing the interests of residents with those of tourists, operators and others; and
- generating partnerships, such as between public and private actors.

The international level
Using the experience of local communities and tourist destinations that have already initiated their LA21 process, a certain number of recommendations can be made at various levels. For example, organizations working at the international level (e.g. UNEP, UNDP, UNESCO, WTTC, ICLEI and WTO) have an important role in raising awareness of tourism’s impacts on sustainability. These organizations should:

- identify, become more closely acquainted with and better disseminate good examples from tourist destinations throughout the world (established, recent and emerging) that have embarked on LA21 processes or adopted similar approaches under a different name. Tourism communities face specific problems with respect to sustainability, and there is a tremendous need for information exchange. Support for the establishment of networks of sustainable tourist destinations could assist these communities;
- prepare and circulate documents concerning methods and guidelines, tailored to the peculiarities of tourist destinations. Implementing an LA21 process at a tourist destination should involve participation, negotiation and partnerships with tourism operators, carriers and the tourists themselves. Local authorities need to increase their know-how in this regard;
- acquire more knowledge about public demand for sustainable tourism and circulate it among communities. Destinations are rallying round and accepting their roles with respect to sustainable development at the local level, and to the development of corresponding supply (e.g. the sustainable destinations concept, ecotourism products). Yet they question the reality of market demand and visitors’ willingness to pay for this type of visit;
- increase mobilization in the economic sector of tourism concerning sustainability, and disseminate good examples of partnerships between private companies and local authorities at destinations;
- make international public opinion and tourists aware of sustainable
endeavour to communicate Chile's southern regions with the rest of the country. Since 35% of Chile's total protected area will be affected by this project, it is of utmost importance that this highway not negatively impact the rich environmental heritage of this part of the country. It is to be hoped that ecotourism will become the main tourism activity.

Countries like Kazakhstan and Korea are just starting off in the ecotourism development process. Both of these countries have a wealth of ecotourism attractions, and their governments are starting to show strong interest in developing these attractions' ecotourism potential.

To conclude, it is difficult at the beginning of the 21st century to find a country that is not developing, or at least interested in developing, eco-tourism as a tool for biodiversity and cultural conservation and as an instrument for sustainable development, especially in rural areas. In 2002, which has been declared the International Year of Ecotourism by the United Nations, it is to be hoped that ecotourism will receive a worldwide impetus that will definitely transform it into the engine of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development it has been promising to be over the last two decades or so.

Notes
3. See the article "Local community benefit systems at two nature-based tourism operations in South Africa" by Anna Spenceley on page 50.

References

tourism, and support and increase awareness of codes of behaviour relating to tourism;
• identify, broadcast and promote labelling for sustainable destinations, based on reliable and transparent criteria.

National authorities
National authorities also have an important role to play in creating conditions for more sustainable development of domestic tourism, and in providing support for tourist destinations involved in LA21 processes. They should:
• develop national sustainable tourism strategies based on dialogue with the private sector, local authorities and NGOs;
• use their statutory powers (particularly relating to transport) to create conditions for more sustainable tourism;
• better mobilize administrations and other national tourism organizations towards sustainable development, an area which still tends to be addressed largely by environmental administrations and NGOs;
• launch national campaigns to inform communities (especially tourist communities), encourage them to embark on LA21 strategies and action plans or global approaches, and support them in their efforts. Countries like the United Kingdom where this type of campaign has been launched have seen a large number of local authorities come out in favour of LA21s;
• strengthen capacity building in local communities and encourage networking, particularly between communities in the same major tourist region.

Working towards sustainable tourism
One of the most important challenges for tourist destinations is to strive towards sustainable development of communities. All tourism destinations should initiate Local Agenda 21 processes, and tourism enterprises and organizations should ensure that their initiatives become part of the local authority’s Local Agenda 21 efforts. In relatively non-tourist municipalities, the Local Agenda 21 strategy or action plan should include the tourism sector as well as other business sectors.

There are documents published to help local communities implement LA21 processes which provide recommendations to this end. Some aspects are specific to the tourism context:
• Since by definition tourism cuts across all sectors of activity, LA21 leadership within a tourist destination’s local authority should be at the local executive level (mayor or president of the community). This will also enable all departments in local administration to be brought in (as well as relevant bodies at other levels, e.g. regional, national);
• Particular care should be taken to integrate the sustainable tourism project into the community’s sectoral activities – e.g. environmental protection, land use planning, tourist marketing, management of tourist services, economic development – using appropriate management tools;
• The local population should be at the heart of the community’s sustainable tourism project. Projects should reflect the aspirations of the local population, which should participate actively in preparing them and drawing up action plans;
• Partnerships between public authorities and the private sector (which provides and markets the tourist supply) are essential at tourist destinations. Economic players should be involved at a very early stage in the LA21 process, so they can work together to construct a shared vision of the destination’s sustainable development;
• A sustainable tourism project should be based on an objective assessment of the tourism situation and its positive and negative impacts on the community. Prospects for developing more sustainable tourism should also be worked out, depending on available natural resources and the area’s carrying capacity;
• Particular care should be taken to introduce qualitative and quantitative criteria for the sustainability of local tourism development, as well as indicators for assessing local conditions and how they evolve. Besides indicators created for study purposes, a small number of simple indicators should be developed to allow communication with residents, companies and tourists. It is important for everyone to be in a position to measure progress on the long road towards sustainable tourism;
• A sustainable tourism strategy would be pointless if it did not include demand (i.e. tourists and visitors) as well as tour operators. Partnerships with domestic and foreign tour operators and tourists should be included in local sustainable tourism strategies, and should therefore be strongly developed.

Notes
1. UNEP, Local Agenda 21 and Tourism (forthcoming).
2. Bournemouth (UK), Winchester (UK), Stornstrom County (Denmark), Calvià (Balearic Islands, Spain), Marie Galante (French Caribbean).
3. For more information on the WTTC (World Travel and Tourism Council), ICLEI (International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives) and World Tourism Organization (WTO), see their web sites: www.wttc.org, wwwICLEI.org and www.world-tourism.org.
The Takitumu Conservation Area: a community-owned ecotourism enterprise in the Cook Islands

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Summary
The Takitumu Conservation Area was created in 1996 on the island of Rarotonga in the Cook Islands. Its main purpose is to conserve biodiversity for the benefit of present and future generations. Only local people own the land and its resources. Ecotourism will be the area’s main economic activity. A guided nature walk has been organized with landowner agreement and support.

Résumé
La réserve de Takitumu a été créée en 1996 sur l’île de Rarotonga, dans les îles Cook. Son but principal est de préserver la biodiversité biologique au profit des générations actuelles et futures. La terre et ses ressources appartiennent exclusivement à la population locale. L’écotourisme sera la principale activité économique de la zone. Des randonnées guidées avec découverte de la nature ont été organisées avec l’accord et le soutien des propriétaires terriers.

Resumen
El Área de Conservación de Takitumu fue creada en 1996 en la isla de Rarotonga, en las Islas Cook. Su principal objetivo es conservar la biodiversidad en beneficio de las generaciones actuales y futuras. Las tierras y sus recursos pertenecen exclusivamente a los pobladores locales. El ecoturismo constituirá la principal actividad económica de la zona. Se ha organizado una caminata guiada por la naturaleza, que cuenta con el acuerdo y el apoyo de los propietarios del lugar.

For so long we landowners have been left out in major developments concerning our lands. It is the normal procedure for Government to tell us that they would like to develop our land. Because we are told it is in our best interest, we agree. They then go ahead and develop the land without our input. This project is a major step forward in listening and involving us.

Rarotonga landowner

The Cook Islands in the South Pacific are made up of 15 islands spread over an ocean area of 1,830,000 square kilometres (between 9° and 23°S latitude and 156° and 167°W longitude). Total land mass is only 237 square kilometers. Tourism is the main source of foreign exchange.

The Takitumu Conservation Area (TCA) is on Rarotonga, the largest island. Forested, with an area of 155 hectares (380 acres), it is located in the southern part of Rarotonga (Figure 1). The TCA’s overall aim is to conserve biodiversity for the benefit of present and future generations of Cook Islanders and others.

In 1987, the Cook Islands Conservation Service initiated a bird recovery plan to help save Kakerori (dimidiata). Only 38 birds remained; this figure had fallen to 29 two years later. Studies showed that ship rats (Rattus rattus) were largely responsible for the Kakerori’s decline. In August 2000, through the Kakerori Recovery Programme (KRP), the Kakerori population had grown to over 200.

Throughout 1995, the Environment Service (the government agency responsible for environment) discussed with the traditional leaders and landowners of the Kakerori’s core breeding area the idea of creating a Conservation Area (CA) on their land. At first the landowners were suspicious. They believed that if they agreed to designate their land as a Conservation Area, this would become its legal status and their continued ownership would be threatened.

During consultations, it was emphasized that designation as a Conservation Area would not involve legal proceedings but only a verbal agreement. The owners would still control their land. In time this assurance was accepted by the owners. The three valleys that make up the TCA were declared a Conservation Area by the three major landowning tribes (Kainuku, Karika and Manava) in early 1996.

Planning and management
Establishment of the TCA was facilitated by the Environment Service, under the auspices of the South Pacific Biodiversity Conservation Programme (SPBCP), and executed by the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). The landowners’ declaration has not been made part of legislation or formally recorded, as there remains some element of belief that access to their land would be restricted if the land were formally declared to be a Conservation Area.

The SPBCP was deemed an appropriate source of support for the establishment and implementation of the project, as it recognizes the land tenure situation in the Pacific countries and the fact that the resources found in this area are used by local people for sustenance. SPBCP funding, initially made available to the TCA for three years, was extended for another two years. This funding ceased at the end of June 2001.

The TCA project has not been without its problems. The first year was a difficult one. The concept of empowering landowning clans to conserve the environment had been all but lost when western-style government came into existence. In addition, the bureaucracy associated with provision of aid money was unfamiliar to those outside government.

TCA planning and management is carried out by the Conservation Area Coordinating Committee (CACC), a core committee consisting of six representatives from the landowning tribes. The CACC meets on a regular basis to discuss issues relating to the project. It takes all major decisions with respect to the TCA.

The Environment Service was involved in the project design and acted as a facilitator, providing technical advice during the project’s initial phases. It has since stepped back and left management of the TCA to the landowners.

An agreement reached between the government of the Cook Islands and the landowners has allowed the CACC to execute and manage funds from the SPBCP. This was an unusual move, as SPREP is an intergovernmental organization responsible to its member country governments.

Under CACC management, the scope of the TCA Project was broadened to include:
• the existing Kakerori Recovery Programme;
• wider environmental concerns such as biodiversity;

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Ecotourism

The Cook Islands, the island of Rarotonga and the Takitumu Conservation Area

Guatemala

The endangered Kakerori

Existing community use of the TCA is limited to recreational activities such as walking and collecting coconuts and coconut fronds, mountain bananas and chestnuts. Harvesting of freshwater prawns and eels, and recreational hunting of the Pacific fruit bat and Pacific pigeon, were common in the past. These practices are now discouraged in the TCA. Groups such as Outward Bound (which runs a challenging course for adults and young people at least 14 years of age), and school and church youth groups, sometimes visit the area for training and educational purposes.

Sustainable income-generating activities

To assist with efforts to be self-reliant following the end of SPBCP funding in June 2001, income has been generated since 1997 through two activities: nature walks, and sales via a "one-stop environmental shop". TVA nature walks are the primary source of income. The TCA office doubles as the environmental shop, where t-shirts, posters, calendars, books, videos and other items are sold.

Guided nature walks were an obvious choice for income generation, as there is already a well established tourism industry in the Cook Islands. The number of visitors to the Cook Islands has remained at around 60,000 during the last three years.

History of the ecotourism project

In early 1997, work to accommodate guided walks began in the most accessible of the three TCA valleys, Turoa. This consisted of track development, installation of interpretative signs, safety ropes and an entrance gate, and upgrading of the main road giving access to the area. Planning for an interpretation shelter was initiated in 1996, with construction beginning the following year.

In August 1997, the SPBCP and NZODA (New Zealand Overseas Development Assistance) funded a two-week regional community-based ecotourism workshop in Kosrae, Federated States of Micronesia. Two representatives of the TCA project attended. The knowledge gained at this workshop helped in the development of ecotourism in the TCA.

Following the Kosrae workshop, the TCA project held a three-day locally based community workshop in September 1997 to assist ecotourism development. This workshop also served to create ecotourism awareness, and to involve the community in developing ecotourism in the TCA. Guidelines were prepared in 1998 for the landowners, as managers of the TCA, in consultation with the CACC and key stakeholders. The purpose of the management guidelines is to ensure sustainable management of the TCA now and in the future.

Nature walks

In 1998, 298 tourists visited the TCA. The following year saw a 74% increase, to 518 (Figure 2). There were 539 visitors in 2000. Tourist visits generated NZD 540 in 1997 and NZD 19,167 in 2000.

The Takitumu nature walks were established to help provide money to sustain the Kakerori Recovery Programme, as well as to provide the landowners with a small income to encourage them to retain the Conservation Area and with its special values.

These nature walks are fully guided four-hour tours. They started off small (half-day tours one day per week in 1997) and grew as tourist interest increased. More staff were added to strengthen the landowners' capacity to run such an operation. The walks were extended to two days per week in 1998. They have gained such popularity among tourists that in early 2000 they were further increased in number. They now take place Tuesday through Friday from 9.30 am to 1.30 pm.

Table 1 presents a breakdown of the costs associated with the nature walks.

The nature walks are popular for several reasons. These include:

- the conservation value attached to the TCA project;
- the chance to see the endangered Kakerori and other birds;
- a knowledgeable tour guide with good people skills, who is very popular with tourists;
- tracks of varying levels of difficulty, which provides a degree of flexibility (especially for older, less able tourists);
- increased awareness by tourists, as a result of marketing and word of mouth; and
- an increase in the number of tourists, due to the addition of another international airline operating from October to April (during the northern hemisphere's winter months).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>1997</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nature Walks</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income generated</td>
<td>NZD 540</td>
<td>NZD 835</td>
<td>NZD 1,731</td>
<td>NZD 19,167</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- sustainable development; and
- community involvement and environmental awareness.

On a day-to-day basis, the project is run and managed by the Conservation Area Support Officer (CASO), whose salary has been fully paid by the SPBCP. Other project staff members include a Conservation Officer/tour guide, who has been partially supported by the SPBCP, and a Technical Adviser funded since 1999 by the SPREP’s Avifauna Programme. Monitoring by the SPBCP has involved quarterly progress and financial reports.

Geological and biological features

Rarotonga is a volcanic island about 2.5 million years old. Much of the TCA consists of steep, dissected, forested country with ridges formed by volcanic dykes. About a third of Rarotonga's drinking water comes from the TCA. Management of this area therefore helps protect the island’s most important watershed area.

Three types of vegetation are present: upland forest, disturbed forest/scrub, and fernland. About 70% of all inland Rarotonga's plants are found in this area, including a number of endemic species. Bird life in the TCA is diverse. All four native breeding land birds are found in the TCA, including the island's other endemic species, the Rarotonga starling.

Community use

The three landowning groups comprise a large number of individuals. Although there are many TCA landowners, no one actually lives there. Most inhabitants of Rarotonga live on the coastal plain.
Marketing

The TCA nature walks currently appeal to a niche market of nature and bird enthusiasts and are marketed as such. They are promoted in a number of ways, including brochures, signs on the main road, and Jason's What's On and Jason's Passport Map (free publications for tourists which advertise tourism operations in the Cook Islands). Advertisements for the TCA have appeared on three different Internet sites.

Other means of making the nature walks better known include the TCA newsletters, and articles and advertisements in travel publications. Commissions of 15% for one to nine persons, and 20% for groups of ten or more, are paid to agencies that sell TCA tours. Word of mouth has also helped promote the nature walks.

Based on a visitor survey conducted between January and September 1999, the four most common methods used to attract nature walk participants were brochures, word of mouth, Jason's What's On and Jason's Passport Map. The largest visitor age group was between 40 and 60 years old.

Two other inland tours operate on Rarotonga. One operator offers bush treks and the other uses four-wheel drive vehicles to take visitors on rugged inland "safaris". Both attract tourists in all age groups. The former offers adventurous and more gentle walks on different days; the safari is marketed more as an adventure tour in a 4WD jeep. Neither company offers TCA tours.

TCA management believes the TCA has the potential to increase the number of its visitors to 3120 per year. This would represent an annual turnover of NZD 140,400.

Distribution of profits

Management has established a system to ensure that any profit generated is distributed fairly and in such a way that all the project's major aspects are provided for in the future.

The distribution figures were derived in full consultation with the CACC and formalized in the management guidelines. However, they are flexible and are reviewed from time to time to assess their appropriateness to the current situation. Profits due the landowning groups are distributed by the project on a yearly basis. With the consent of the family, payment is made to its representative to the CACC. Each family group has its own arrangement with respect to how this money is spent. The project takes no position on how landowning groups utilize their share of the profits. If requested, however, it is willing to advise family groups on investing their profits.

The Kakerori Recovery Programme (KRP)

The seven-month Kakerori Recovery Programme consists of two major activities:

- controlling rats with poison from September to December, which helps the Kakerori breed successfully;
- monitoring population trends, which involves undertaking an annual census and noting breeding successes.

There are plans to transfer ten young birds to the island of Atiu, which is free of ship rats. This should ensure the bird's continued survival. The TCA landowning communities and the people of Atiu have given their full support to the transfer.

Discussion

Although the TCA ecotourism venture is generating increasing revenues for the project and its landowners, it is obvious that current income generating activities cannot sustain the project at its existing level after 2001.

In the future, current activities will need to be downsized. SPBCP support of about NZD 72,000 per year exceeds the amount presently generated by the nature walks and product sales of NZD 11,500 (less 35% for land rental). The two principal components (i.e. the KRP and the ecotourism venture) will need to be maintained to continue pursuing the overall objective of the project. The Kakerori is still considered endangered. According to Birdlife International criteria, once the population reaches 500 it is removed from the "endangered" category. It is highly unlikely that the nature walks will completely fund the KRP at their present level (about NZD 35,000 per year).

When needed, landowners provide some voluntary labour. The reality of living in a largely cash-based society has meant that formal work and other commitments by landowners prevent use of voluntary labour on a more regular basis. The TCA has utilized international volunteers to assist with some of the arduous work within the area. International volunteers have a strong appreciation of the environment and are keen to assist with worthy projects. This relieves the need for large community input into the TCAs more laborious tasks.

The experience is not all one-sided, as volunteer work offers an opportunity for a comparatively low-cost holiday. For younger volunteers, it also offers an opportunity to gain valuable experience in their chosen fields and improve their CVs.

The perceived negative impacts of establishing the TCA are that hunting (fruit bats, pigeons, freshwater prawns and eels) and timber harvesting, as carried out in the past, have been restricted due to the landowners' wish to ban these activities in the area. The TCA represents about 1% of Rarotonga's total forested inland area; these activities are permitted on other parts of Rarotonga. Other impacts include soil erosion from small-scale track development and, as the number of TCA visitors increases, greater potential for accidental introduction of exotic plant species into the area.

TCA management is exploring options for enhancing and expanding its tourism product. A Tour Guiding workshop was organized in 1999, with an emphasis on bird watching. The majority of participants came from the outer islands. At this workshop it was agreed to establish a combined outer island bird-watching tour. The project has since initiated bird tours to four outer islands. These tours involve spending a day and night on the islands to observe unique birds.

Although the TCA has good tracks with varying levels of difficulty, specific days for adventure
or more gentle walks have not been designated. If a tour contains a mixed group of young and older visitors, it is up to the guide to determine the best course of action. Since older people are the most common age group to visit the TCA, most nature walks are gentle. Based on experience and feedback from visitors, there is demand for more strenuous walks.

Other components and commitments of the TCA project to be fulfilled under the SPBCP have meant that income-generating activities could not be concentrated on exclusively. Thus, ecotourism has gained momentum slowly against a major competitor which began operations after the TCA. The money derived from nature walks is spread thinly in the TCA project. Compared with other inland tour operators which are owner-operated, there are lower financial rewards for individuals than would be the case in an owner-operated business.

The lack of committed tour guides is a matter of concern. The project has hired several guides in the past, but most lose interest after staying only a short period. It is unclear why the guides leave. We can only surmise that issues such as remuneration, boredom, and the amateur status which the job has been given may be factors. In view of the increasing number of visitors to this area, tours may be negatively affected by relying on only one guide. Additional SPBCP funding has made it possible for other TCA staff members to act as back-up guides when the main guide was not available.

Excessive fragmentation of land ownership, resulting from changes in the land distribution system since colonization, means it is not uncommon for there to be large numbers of owners of blocks of land on Rarotonga. This is the TCA’s case. Land issues (especially those relating to economic details) can be rather sensitive for landowners to deal with among themselves.

The number of landowners in the TCA and the split of profits between the three land-owning tribes make it difficult for landowners to receive significant financial benefits. Nevertheless, there are potential long-term benefits. For example, if the tribes invested their share of the profits in a trust fund, the money could be used for scholarships for landowners’ families or for community projects.

Lessons learned
The TCA project has relied heavily on CACC members to keep their extended families informed. Educational and awareness activities have also provided information to landowners and to the general public concerning the project as a whole. However, they have not been entirely effective at informing landowners about the economic particulars of the ecotourism venture.

It has been found that direct regular consultation with the wider landowning groups is a better way to relay the economic details generated by the ecotourism venture. This was demonstrated when the project held a meeting for one of the landowning tribes at the end of 1999. Lack of knowledge and misunderstandings existed on the part of many of those at the meeting concerning the funds generated by the ecotourism venture. Misconceptions were clarified at the meeting.

Under current accounting procedures, there is an equal distribution of 35% of the profits to the three land-owning tribes. It is important that among the landowners there is total openness about how the money is being distributed. Ongoing consultation with the wider community is essential for the support of the project, not only in monetary terms but also in terms of continuing to achieve the TCA’s aims in the long term.

Empowering landowning communities has given them the will and determination to make this project succeed. The project has drawn attention to the importance of conserving biodiversity throughout Rarotonga and inspired other communities to develop similar projects.

It may be premature at this stage to present the lessons learned. Most lessons will be learned after funding from the SPBCP ceases and when the ecotourism business has operated independently over a period of time.

Conclusions
To continue to work towards the aims of the TCA beyond 2001, the project will need to consider operating as an environmental NGO and actively seek funds to achieve goals that otherwise might not be realized.

It may prove difficult for a group of landowners to operate an ecotourism business effectively and efficiently. In the future, management might consider privatizing the nature walks, with royalties paid to the TCA and to landowners (e.g. five dollars per tourist).

The TCA project has boosted the capacity skills of the TCA staff, not only the skills needed to run an ecotourism operation but also, for example, scientific, management, administration and interpersonal skills. Staff members attended training courses locally and regionally during the period of SPBCP funding.

Through the TCA project, the knowledge gained from operating an ecotourism venture has been shared with other local people.

Apart from the ecotourism venture’s financial rewards for landowners, benefits include:

- three landowning groups working together to achieve a common goal;
- increased appreciation of conservation values;
- training of local people in the scientific aspects of the KRP;
- passing on of local knowledge of resources found in the area, and their traditional uses, to other locals; and
- employment for local people.

It can be argued that the TCA is probably the only true “ecotourism” venture in the Cook Islands, in the sense that it gives something back to the communities and is conserving part of our unique natural heritage. The project is implemented and owned by local people.

Education about the TCA and its biodiversity is a major part of the experience gained by tourists from the nature walks. However, it must not be forgotten that local people also need to be educated. Long-term and focused educational and awareness activities are essential to increase the level of appreciation of – and support for – the TCA and its objectives.

As part of its transition to the imminent discontinuation of SPBCP funding, resources for the project’s educational component have been minimized. The project is now seeking alternative funding to support some educational and awareness activities. This raises the issue of who will seek funds for this component once SPBCP ceases supporting personnel.

As the ecotourism business thrives and grows, landowners (as custodians of the project) should not lose sight of the TCA’s original objectives, i.e. to conserve biodiversity for the benefit of present and future generations of Cook Islanders and others.

With encouragement and continued emphasis on the importance of biodiversity conservation, an increasing number of landowners have begun to appreciate the project’s aims and give further support to the TCA. The fact that the project belongs to the landowners has been a big factor in achieving landowner commitment. However, the
real test of sustainability will come after SPBCP financial support for the project ends.

Acknowledgements
We would like to thank the following: François Martel, who gave us the opportunity to document TCA ecotourism experiences; Joe Reti, who reviewed and provided comments on this article; Kelvin Passfield, for providing comments; the CACC (Philomen Williams, Papa Kapu, Tangi Tere, Teuraki Daniels and Ben Tamariki); Ed Saul and Hugh Robertson, for their passion and dedication to save the Kakertori; SPBCP and UNEP, for giving us the opportunity to write this article; and lastly our extended families, for having the foresight to conserve this special place.

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Monitoring sustainable tourism in Samoa
Louise Twining-Ward, c/o UNDP, Private Mail Bag, Apia, Samoa (walkabout@samoa.ws)

Tourism is an increasingly important sector of the Samoan economy. It also has a valuable, and as yet under-utilized, contribution to make towards social and environmental development in Samoa. But tourism is a vulnerable industry, especially on a small island where its resources can easily be damaged by pollution or inappropriate development. If Samoa’s tourism sector is to be successful in the long term, it must address these concerns. A strategy needs to be developed to ensure that the resources on which the industry and country depend (the attractions, infrastructure, facilities and services that make up the tourism product) are not put in jeopardy.

In November 1998, the Samoa Visitors Bureau (SVB), supported by New Zealand Official Development Assistance (NZODA), embarked on a project to set up a monitoring scheme for sustainable tourism in Samoa. The aim of the project was to develop a clear set of sustainable tourism objectives and identify a practical and user-friendly set of indicators to monitor progress towards these objectives. A team of experienced individuals from government, the private sector, educational establishments and intergovernmental organizations was set up to assist this process.

The 12 members of this voluntary committee provided expertise and advice throughout the project, ensuring the validity of the research and participation by a wide range of stakeholders, and giving weight to the project’s findings and recommendations. The three main parts of the project were:

- establishment of sustainable tourism objectives;
- selection of indicators; and
- setting up a sustainable tourism action plan.

Establishment of objectives
The reason for establishing sustainable tourism objectives was to clarify exactly what sustainable tourism means, not in the international context but in the context of Samoa. In January 1999, the SVB set about gathering information from local specialists, the tourism industry and rural stakeholders in order to develop its own sustainable tourism objectives. After numerous consultations, drafts and re-drafts, the final list of 12 objectives was completed on 7 May 1999 (Table 1). Samoa’s sustainable tourism objectives set the targets for the future of tourism in Samoa. They show how tourism’s potential can be utilized, not only for economic ends but also to achieve environmental, social and cultural development. These objectives can be used as the basis for tourism action plans, to assist operators in considering the wider implications of their businesses and to serve as the benchmarks against which indicators can be used to evaluate tourism.

Selection of indicators
With Samoa’s sustainable tourism objectives in place, there was a clear need to develop sustainable tourism indicators to monitor performance. In the past, the tourism industry has relied on economic indicators to gauge its success. However, these only tell part of the story. The number of tourist arrivals tells nothing about the impact of tourism in rural areas, and the amount of money tourists spend tells nothing about where the money goes. Sustainable tourism indicators focus on the linkages between tourism resources and the country’s environment and culture, giving a more holistic picture of the sector’s performance as well as the tools for anticipating adverse situations. The indicators should provide the impetus for action before valuable assets are irreversibly damaged.

Key results from 1999
To be effective, Samoa’s sustainable tourism indicators had to be carefully selected to suit the situation in Samoa, the expectations of tourism stakeholders, and the research capacity and resources of the SVB. The aim was to develop one or two indicators to monitor each sustainable tourism objective. The Project Advisory Committee brainstormed a total of 270 indicators. Over several months these were tested, screened and finally reduced to the core set of 20 workable indicators.

The indicators, along with the key results from 1999, are shown in Table 2. To make the indicator results easy to understand, the table has been divided into sections. In the first section are the “critical” sustainable tourism indicators. These are the key indicators for assessing the overall sustainability of tourism in Samoa. Following the key indicators are environmental, economic, social and cultural indicators. To help users understand the indicator results, an acceptable range has been calculated for each indicator. This range represents the desirable performance for the indicator. The indicator’s performance has been rated good, acceptable, poor or very poor according to how close the actual result comes to the acceptable range.

Results from the first year of monitoring do not show trends over time, but they do provide a snap-shot of the state of sustainable tourism in Samoa in 1999. They make it clear that it is time for action. Too many indicators fall short of their acceptable ranges, and many of those rated “acceptable” are at the bottom end of the scale,
Warning of possible problems to come.

Looking at the five critical sustainable tourism indicators, two were rated very poor, two were poor and one was acceptable. The highest-scoring indicator this year was the number of tour operators providing visitors with information concerning village protocol. The best improved indicator among those for which several years of data were available was the increase in hotel employment opportunities in rural areas.

**Action Plan for 2000**

Poorly performing indicators are warning signs that things are not progressing the way they should. To secure tourism’s long-term sustainability, action needs to be taken to put these indicators back on track. These ten areas were the focus of Samoa’s Action Plan for 2000:

1. environmental assessment;
2. tourist landscapes;
3. hotel sewage treatment;
4. water quality;
5. nature tourism;
6. attraction sites;
7. conservation efforts;
8. new tourism businesses;
9. tourism’s contribution to GDP;
10. sustainable tourism practice.

**Future perspective**

Initial project development has now been successfully completed and tested, and the SVB has agreed to the following:

♦ that the Indicator Handbook and Sustainable Tourism Status Report be released for public access;
♦ that Samoa’s Sustainable Tourism Objectives be considered for possible inclusion as part of the forthcoming Tourism Development Plan;
♦ that Samoa’s sustainable tourism indicators be monitored annually, the results published in a timely manner, and appropriate management responses taken as part of the annual work programme of the appropriate SVB Divisions;
♦ that the monitoring of Samoa’s sustainable tourism indicators be coordinated on an annual basis by the SVB Manager of Planning and Development, with the support of the Manager of Research and Statistics; and
♦ that the ongoing commitment of the Project Advisory Committee be officially recognized and supported.

The Government’s Statement of Economic Strategy 2000–2001 also stresses the importance of the sustainable tourism indicators. Government commitment, along with assurances from the General Manager of the SVB given at the third Annual Samoa Tourism Association Convention on 27 May 2000, effectively secure the future of the monitoring project.

**Regional perspective**

Although the sustainable tourism objectives and indicators developed for use in Samoa will not necessarily be applicable for use to other areas, the methodology provided in the Indicator Handbook could be adapted for use by other small islands, setting the stage for more sustainable tourism operation at a regional level. It is hoped that this demonstration of the development and success of the sustainable tourism monitoring project in Samoa will inspire other island nations in the region to take up this challenge.

This article is basically the Executive Summary of Anna Tira, an environmental consultant temporarily based in Samoa, was the CASO (Community Area Support Officer) from 1996 to 1999. She belongs to the landowning group Ngati Manavaroa. Ian Karikai-Wilmott was chairman of the CACC from 1997 to 1999. He took over the CASO position in 1999. He is a member of the landowning group Ngati Karika.

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**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic objectives</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Stimulate appropriate employment and income-generating opportunities in rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Enhance the economic benefits of tourism activities for the Samoan economy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical sustainable tourism indicators</th>
<th>Result</th>
<th>Acceptable</th>
<th>Performance range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tourist landscapes under threat from development</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0-5%</td>
<td>Very poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New hotels undertaking environmental assessment</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>90-100%</td>
<td>Very poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of quality of key tourist attraction sites</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>60-80%</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism operators using sustainable tourism practices</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>60-80%</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel staff going on training courses</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>25-50%</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Environmental sustainable tourism indicators**

| Hotels using secondary or tertiary sewage treatment | 8% | 30-50% | Very poor |
| Tourist participation in nature tourism | 8% | 20-40% | Very poor |
| Tourism village participation in land conservation | 26% | 50-75% | Poor |
| Tourism village participation in marine protection | 42% | 50-75% | Poor |
| Tourism sites passing Samoa Water Authority (SWA) water quality tests | 50% | 70-90% | Poor |
| Tourist participation in marine tourism | 23% | 20-40% | Acceptable |
| Hotels composting their biodegradable waste | 76% | 60-80% | Acceptable |
| Water usage per guest night in hotels (litres) | 928* | 500-1000 | Acceptable |

**Economic sustainable tourism indicators**

| Contribution of direct tourism businesses to GDP | 4%* | 10-20% | Poor |
| Proportion of new businesses focused on tourism | 4% | 10-20% | Poor |
| Proportion of hotel jobs in rural areas | 48% | 40-60% | Acceptable |

**Social and cultural sustainable tourism indicators**

| Villages included in tourism awareness programmes | 28% | 25-50% | Acceptable |
| Proportion of traditional events in tourism festivals | 50% | 50-70% | Acceptable |
| Proportion of handicraft stalls in the markets | 21% | 20-40% | Acceptable |
| Tourism operators informing visitors of village protocol | 72% | 50-70% | Good |

* 1998 data
Indigenous peoples, NGOs and the International Year of Ecotourism

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As the International Year of Ecotourism 2002 opens, there is a great deal of uncertainty about the implications for Indigenous peoples of IYE 2002. Indigenous peoples inhabit many areas of the world which remain unspoiled by progress or development. It is recognized that two of the fastest growing sectors of the tourism industry are ecotourism and cultural tourism. States have therefore been wholeheartedly embracing economic development strategies tied to the tourism industry’s development.

According to Joan Carling of the Cordillera Peoples Alliance in the Philippines (a regional Indigenous representative body), every administrative region of the Philippines has been directed by the central government to develop local tourism plans and initiatives. The most lucrative areas will be in the lands of Indigenous peoples.

In Southern Mexico, Plan Puebla Panama, the Northern Isthmus project, and the creation of the Meso-American Biosphere Corridor will have significant impacts on Mexico’s primarily Indigenous communities, specifically communities in the states of Oaxaca and Chiapas. Much of the infrastructure being developed in southern Mexico is intended to facilitate increased tourist traffic. The development of national parks and other protected areas in state jurisdictions often poses particular problems for Indigenous people and local communities, who may rely upon those areas for subsistence economies or for spiritual uses. The social and cultural impacts of ecotourism on Indigenous and local communities must be weighed equally with environmental impacts.

The concerns highlighted above (and others) have brought together Indigenous communities and NGOs concerned with local development and Indigenous issues, in an alliance to bring clear focus and analysis to the issue of ecotourism and its impacts on Indigenous and local communities. Spearheaded by TIM-TEAM (Thailand), the campaign has sent letters to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and issued statements to the UN General Assembly. The concerns raised in these communications have focused around IYE 2002, as reflected in the name “International Year of Ecotourism”, and a call that:

• the name should be changed to the “International Year of Reviewing Ecotourism”;
• the economic hegemony of Northern corporations’ control over the tourism industry in the South should be examined, to determine what real benefits from ecotourism exist for the South;
• ecotourism as an economic strategy in the developing world should be integrated into existing macroeconomic structures, and not be the dominant economic sector for economic development;
• ecotourism as an economic strategy should be conducted in an integrated way with regard to social and environmental conditions and issues of local political concern.

There are concerns that the IYE will contribute to the growing polarity between North and South by deepening the current pattern of exploitation of the South by the North, and by entrenching unequal economic relationships that need to be challenged under mechanisms like the World Trade Organization; and

• the lack of funding committed to the IYE by the United Nations will mean the critical voice represented by NGOs and Indigenous nations will be lost, as the cost of participation in IYE events will be prohibitive without financial support.

With these issues in mind, the NGOs have made three specific recommendations:

• to put forward, at the UN General Assembly, a clear statement of purpose and guidelines regarding the content and process of the IYE in order to assist UNEP, the World Tourism Organization and other concerned parties in the implementation of the programme;
• to help design the programme in such a way that public interest – e.g. in respect of ecological protection, economic equity, social justice and human rights – takes precedence over narrow and short-sighted industry interests;
• to change the name of the event to the “International Year of Reviewing Ecotourism” (IYRE), and to provide for the establishment of an independent commission on ecotourism to conduct a fundamental reassessment of ecotourism-related issues using the expertise of all concerned parties. As for the latter, we believe that the World Tourism Organization is not appropriate to oversee this commission since its primary goal is to promote the tourism industry, contradicting the need for broad-based and critical studies and analyses of tourism, including ecotourism.

While many NGOs have signed on to the above statement, there has been little response from Indigenous nations. This is not indicative of a break with the NGOs on strategy or focus, but rather reflects a different emphasis by Indigenous communities on both ecotourism and cultural tourism.

It also indicates that, up to now, Indigenous communities have had few
forums or opportunities for addressing issues associated with IYE in any systemic fashion. Many of the meetings in which Indigenous people are able to get together to discuss this issue are small Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) or Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) side events. While these provide valuable networking opportunities, they do not allow the time – nor are they structured – for deeper exploration of the issues.

A further issue of far greater importance is that Indigenous communities are often ambivalent about ecotourism and may not agree with NGOs entirely, or may perceive that ecotourism coupled with cultural tourism offers a path to development that ensures minimal environmental protection and one in which they can still practise their culture.

Protection of land and resources, and protection of culture, are the most consistently voiced concerns of Indigenous people in all international and national forums. That their hopes could become a reality presupposes a very idyllic, idealized and integrated, primarily small-scale, development model that is often at odds with tourism models proposed by developers and state authorities. Ideally, this development model should also be tied to development of local political arrangements that support Indigenous self-determination.

Many states and Indigenous communities are currently on a collision course, as states pursue development of protected areas and biospheres as a way to meet their commitments under the Convention on Biodiversity and a way to act as portals to “nature experiences” for tourists. As tourist revenues wane in traditional destination resorts like Puerto Vallarta (Mexico), for example, a number of strategies have been devised to lure a new market and reinvigorate the traditional one. At Puerto Vallarta these include whale-watching and alligator-watching trips, visits to the Huichol villages in the Sierra Madre, and rainforest excursions. In the first wave of Puerto Vallarta’s tourist development, Indigenous communities along the south of the Bahia de Bandera were relocated to make way for condos and resorts.

The community of Yelapa, an hour’s boat ride from Puerto Vallarta, has long been a backpackers’ destination. It now advertises itself as “Polynesia in Mexico”. Every day four or five large tour boats visit its small bay. A proposal has been made to develop the village as a major destination including ecotourism excursions into the mountains and jungle with local guides. The impact of this development has been the fraying of the village’s social fabric and local economy. Increased sales of illegal drugs, an influx of western consumer goods and culture, degradation of the local environment, a shift from the traditional diet to one based on inferior store-bought foods, nuclearization of local families and concomitant loss of authority by village elders, and the loss of local language are all attributable to the increase in tourist visits and the influx of cash into a traditional economy which had been based on exchange and subsistence.

Not everyone in Yelapa is against the increased development of tourism. Local restaurants have flourished, craftpeople and small producers have increased their market, and there has been some improvement of infrastructure (although not always with the best results, e.g. paving of paths with concrete has increased erosion in this community built on the side of a mountain). People also have larger and faster boats, making the outside world more accessible.

Such ambivalence about tourism at the local level needs to be addressed, and IYE provides an opportunity to do. Tourism development is not the only significant social and economic pressure affecting the people of Yelapa, who (like all Indigenous people in Mexico) are caught up in a period of immense transformation of the local polity brought about by state initiatives. However, tourism provides a very useful window into issues of transformation and local control.

The problems faced by people in Yelapa are faced by other Indigenous people all over the world – from the Kuna in Panama, to the Cree in James Bay, to the Bedouin of North Africa. The most germane questions are:

- What benefit will these people derive from IYE 2002? Will IYE only be a time to celebrate ecotourism as a triumph of progressive “green capitalism”? Will it provide an orgy of meetings for the tourism business alone? Will it result only in some shiny posters of palm trees and pristine beach-scapes, or provide a serious forum in which issues of appropriate, culturally based and environmentally sustainable development of Indigenous communities are discussed?
- Can we address the issue of biosphere development and access to traditional lands and resources by Indigenous peoples?
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- Can we address the issue of biosphere development and access to traditional lands and resources by Indigenous peoples?
- Will resourcing be available for Indigenous peoples to represent themselves on this issue?
- Will states commit themselves to entering into a frank and open discussion of national economic development strategies that will have undue effects upon Indigenous peoples?

IYE represents a great opportunity. However, it may easily be squandered to the detriment of all of our futures.

For more information about the Statement to the UN General Assembly and about some of the organizations mentioned here, see: www.irn.org; www.cwis.org; or www.twonside.org.