

PRESS BACKGROUNDER

Launch of the Responsible Tourism Code for the Pacific

4.00pm, 6th Floor, PSA House, 11 Aurora Terrace, Wellington

Hosted by: Dev-Zone (www.dev-zone.org), a programme of the Development Resource Centre

Launched by: Winnie Laban, Member of Parliament for the Mana Electorate / Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister of Trade, the Minister of the Environment and the Minister Responsible for Overseas Development Assistance.

Code developed by: Dev-Zone. Endorsed by the South Pacific Tourism Organisation and the Pacific Island Association of NGOs

What is Responsible Tourism?

Tourism and associated revenue is seen, particularly in developing countries, to offer much needed opportunity for economic and social growth. However, a growing number of concerns have been raised about possible and actual negative social and environmental impacts resulting from tourism. Key among these concerns are issues of sustainability, where tourists may inadvertently destroy the frail ecosystems that have attracted them in the first place; cultural survival, where unique cultures may be changed or damaged by exposure to the culture of visitors; as well as issues of who actually benefits from tourism.

These concerns have led to extensive dialogue in the tourism, environmental, and development sectors about how to minimise these negative impacts. While some organisations believe that - handled appropriately - tourism can bring huge benefits to destination countries, others question whether the benefits of tourism outweigh the drawbacks at all.

While a number of travel organisations have developed their own codes of practice, and many community groups are building their own sustainable tourism businesses, there are few systems in place that set universal ethical or environmental guidelines for both those who travel and the tourism industry. The World Tourism Organisation (WTO/OMT), a United Nations agency which operates as a “global forum” for policy and practice issues, has a global code of ethics available for tourists and for industry. Its stated priority is to promote “responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism, with the aim of contributing to economic development, international understanding, peace, prosperity and universal respect for...human rights.” Other organisations, such as Tourism Concern, act as important tourism watchdogs, running public awareness campaigns around issues such as sweatshop labour, porters’ rights, and the impact of tourism on indigenous peoples.

Responsible Tourism extends the idea of “eco-tourism” or “sustainable tourism” to include social and ethical as well as environmental considerations. The World Tourism Organisation has described responsible tourism as a concept that relates to “all forms of tourism which respect the host, the natural, built and cultural environment, and the interests of all parties concerned: hosts, guests, visitors, tourist industry, government et cetera” (Lanfant and Graburn 1992:89).

At Dev-Zone, we feel that responsible tourism is about tourists and the tourism/travel industry making informed decisions while on holiday to ensure that their impact on the peoples and environments they choose to visit is both as minimal and positive as possible. Our Responsible Tourism Code for the Pacific - and our new responsible tourism website, www.responsibletravel.co.nz - aim to provide tourists and industry operations with the tools with which to make those decisions.

What is the Responsible Tourism Code for the Pacific?

Cheap flights from New Zealand have contributed to a recent boom in the numbers of tourists visiting the Pacific Islands. The Responsible Tourism Code for the Pacific suggests seven key ways that Aotearoa New Zealanders can act responsibly while in the Pacific Islands: learn about the country; know the appropriate cultural behaviour; protect the coral; minimise environmental impact; support local initiatives; pay a fair price; think about your impact.

The Code has been developed by Dev-Zone, in consultation with the travel and tourism industry and non-governmental organisations. It is endorsed by the South Pacific Tourism Organisation, and the Pacific Island Association of NGOs.

The Responsible Tourism Code for the Pacific is not a benchmark or standard for the tourism or travel industry. Our aim is to encourage travellers and tourists to take responsibility for their own decisions. However, while the Code is primarily directed at tourists and travellers, the travel and tourism industry have an important role to play in promoting the code to their clients and modelling the choices recommended in the Code.

Background to the Code

In 2002, Dev-Zone – an Aotearoa New Zealand based international development NGO which is firmly grounded in the Pacific – undertook a research study into its role in promoting responsible tourism in the outbound tourism sector. The research involved travel agents, travel wholesalers, embassies and training providers, and explored the best ways to get the responsible tourism message across to travelers.

Through the study it was shown that:

1. More information was needed on responsible tourism.
2. The material should contain information that raises awareness about environmental issues, cultural sensitivities and about ways in which tourists can make socially responsible consumer decisions.
3. The resource should also include a website with more in depth information and links to organisations involved in responsible tourism.

One of the outcomes of this study is the development of the Responsible Tourism Code for the Pacific which involved an ongoing process of feedback and consultation with key stakeholders in the travel and tourism sector, and from community groups and NGOs.

The code, now finalised, aims to educate travellers about how to behave more responsibly (both culturally and environmentally, and as a consumer) while on holiday in the Pacific.

How will the Responsible Tourism Code be used?

Stakeholders in the travel industry who wish to promote responsible tourism can include the code in their promotional literature and travel information and on individual itineraries. The

code is available free of charge in a variety of electronic formats so stakeholders can use the code as their own, in the way they choose.

It is hoped the Code will be used by the travel and tourism industry in the Pacific Islands. The South Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO) have been heavily involved in the development of the code and will be distributing the code through its country liaison units and encouraging its member organisations to use the code.

It is also being promoted and distributed to travel agents, airlines and Pacific Island based local tourism operators in Aotearoa New Zealand where it is hoped they will help promote the Responsible Tourism message to travellers before they depart.

About Dev-Zone

Dev-Zone is a programme of the Development Resource Centre (DRC), a non-governmental organisation governed by a charitable trust operating in Aotearoa New Zealand. Dev-Zone provides information on international development and global issues through its free library, website and email updates as well as development information projects such as the Responsible Tourism Code for the Pacific. As well as working closely with the development and human rights sector in Aotearoa New Zealand, Dev-Zone also has relationships with organisations in the Pacific.

Dev-Zone's sister programme is the Global Education Centre which provides information and education services through its Community, Youth, and Schools Programmes. The DRC is core-funded by the NZAID Nga Hoe Tuputupu-mai-tawhiti, a semi-autonomous body of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. For more information about the DRC see: www.dev-zone.org and www.globaled.org.nz.

About South Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO)

The South Pacific Tourism Organisation is the mandated intergovernmental regional tourism body for the South Pacific. In addition to thirteen member countries, SPTO also represents over 100 of the region's leading private sector operators. Its regional and international membership encompasses National Tourist Offices, hotels, resorts, car rental operators, coach operators, travel agents, tour operators, airlines, cruise and dive operators and all other businesses associated with travel and tourism in the South Pacific.

SPTO works to promote and develop the South Pacific as a desirable holiday destination on the international tourism scene and is dedicated to facilitating the sustainable development of the tourism sector in the South Pacific. For more information, go to: www.spto.org.

About Pacific Islands Association of Non Governmental Organisations (PIANGO)

The Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organisations is a regional network of NGO focal points or coordinating bodies known as National Liaison Units (NLUs) based in 22 Pacific Island countries and territories. PIANGO was formally established in 1991 to assist NGOs in the Pacific to initiate action, give voice to their concerns and work collaboratively with other development actors for just and sustainable human development. PIANGO's primary role is to be a catalyst for collective action, to facilitate and support coalitions and alliances on issues of common concern, and to strengthen the influence and impact of NGO efforts in the region. For more information, go to: www.piango.org.

Case Studies

These case studies demonstrate two of the many initiatives that Pacific Island communities are undertaking to ensure tourism brings benefits to the local community and environment.

The Coral Gardens Initiative, Cuvu and Tuva Districts, Fiji

The Coral Gardens Initiative began as a small pilot project in January 1999 with funding from the Pacific Development and Conservation Trust, and matched by the Fijian Shangri-La Resort. It was expanded to a full project in June 2000, on receipt of three years of grant funds from New Zealand Overseas Development Assistance and subsequent funding by the MacArthur and Packard Foundations.

Destructive methods of fishing with poisons and dynamite, and coral harvesting has resulted in resource depletion and degradation, negatively affecting the health and prosperity of island communities.

The goal of the Coral Gardens programme is to develop and implement a comprehensive and workable community-based model for coral reef management and marine resource recovery. The programme is designed to empower resource-owning communities to take full responsibility for the wise utilization of their marine resources, and in accordance with existing traditional and governmental structures.

Coral Gardens carries forward tested concepts of community-based resource management and marine protected areas and within this framework has developed two key initiatives:

- hands-on habitat enhancement and reef restoration activities to accelerate the resource recovery processes on reefs: coral planting, crown-of-thorns starfish removal, creation of giant clam and *beche-de-mer* spawning aggregations, mangrove replanting, etc.
- active involvement in ecotourism promotion and commercial coral aquaculture as project incentives.

The hands-on approach to management and sustainable enterprise of Coral Gardens reinforces community-based conservation efforts by encouraging (a) faster recovery of fisheries resources in the management area; (b) heightened understanding of marine ecology and the importance of corals; (c) greater community involvement (including women and youth); (d) mutualistic collaborations between reef owning communities and the tourism and fisheries industries

Fiji serves as the pilot site for the regional Coral Gardens Initiative model, and FSP is in the process of establishing sites in Fiji that are representative of the major environmental conditions of the IndoPacific region: land-impacted fringing reefs and associated reef flats, clear water atolls with sandy lagoons, and barrier reefs with mangrove and seagrass lined lagoons.

The primary Coral Gardens site, the eight villages of Cuvu and Tuva Districts, has thus far established a comprehensive management plan, with five no-fishing areas. Another FSP project, Wai Bulabula "Living Waters" was brought in to deal with land-based threats to reefs. The Cuvu site has recently been awarded the status of "Model Site for Coral Reef Conservation" by the United Nations Environment Programme.

For more information: <http://www.fspi.org.fj/program/coral.htm>

Green Turtle Tours, Samoa

Green Turtle Tours offers small group guided day tours around Apia Town, Upolu Island and Savaii Island as well as activity beach tours to Lalomanu and Upolu Island. Locally-owned and operated, Green Turtle Tours works to provide tourism activities that are environmentally and culturally sustainable. Their tourism ventures help fund small village projects like rainwater tanks and fruit tree planting. The locally-owned aspect keeps families in their area, and values traditional knowledge and medicinal plants. With a focus on sustainable resource management and maintaining cultural practices, Green Turtle Tours prioritizes tourism activities that enrich tourist's environmental and cultural experiences, raise environmental awareness, as well as responding to differing tourist needs.

Green Turtle Holidays was established in 2001 by Steve Brown, Maria Meredith and Richard Schultz. Steve is responsible for all ground operations. He has extensive knowledge of the tourism industry having established Ecotour Samoa in 1994 and worked for the Department of Lands and Environment for both the Samoan and Tokelauan governments. Maria was born in Samoa and is involved with all Samoan cultural and land issues for the company. Richard is the financial manager and comes with twenty years of experience in the financial advisory industry.

The services offered by the Green Turtle Tours Project, have helped to offer travellers to Samoa the tourism infrastructure and travel information necessary in rural areas to help meet visitor expectations. Tour packages include a one-day trip to the village of Sauago, Fagaloa, where the tour is conducted by the village Women's Committee. Other tours similarly use only locally-trained guides, and accommodation packages use locally-owned businesses.

The Green Turtle Tour Project has worked with aid donors, development agencies, tourism and environmental researchers/consultants, media, etc. to demonstrate what it takes to implement an eco-tourism and cultural tourism programme that benefits natural resource conservation and sustainable development in Samoa. Their website states "Jointly, we can make tourism beneficial to Samoa, not just to our visitors."

For more information: <http://www.greenturtletoours.com>

More information on responsible tourism

<http://www.responsibletoourism.org.nz>

Dev-Zone's own responsible tourism website with downloadable copies of the Responsible Tourism Code for the Pacific, and more information for travellers, industry, students and the general public on responsible tourism.

<http://www.toourismconcern.org.uk>

Tourism Concern - source of information on tourism's impact, independent voice for justice and sustainability in tourism:

<http://twinside.org.sg/toour/htm>

Third World Network/Tourism - focuses on tourism issues affecting local communities and the natural environment, highlighting voices that usually have little opportunity to influence policy-making structures:

<http://www.ecotoourism.org>

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) - largest and oldest ecotourism organisation, dedicated to information about ecotourism:

<http://odl.org.uk/pptourism/index.html>

Pro-poor Tourism - 'pro-poor tourism' is defined as tourism that results in increased net benefits for poor people

<http://www.ethicaltraveler.com>

Ethical Traveller - grass roots alliance uniting adventurers, tourists, travel agencies who believe in using economic power to strengthen human rights and protect the environment:

<http://www.pirt.org>

Partners in Responsible Tourism – a network of individuals from tourism companies, education and conservation organizations who have a strong interest in adventure travel and ecotourism, who are concerned about the impact of tourism and tourism development on local environments and cultures

References:

Lanfant, Marie-Francoise and Nelson H. H. Graburn 1992. The principle of the alternative. In V. L. Smith and W.R. Eadington (eds.): *Tourism Alternatives. Potentials and Problems in the Development of Tourism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Tourism Concern: <http://www.tourismconcern.org.uk>

The World Tourism Organisation: <http://www.world.tourism.org>