

Steps to Successful Ecotourism (10/22/03): Talking Points from the September 2002 Tainan County Ecotourism Workshop

Introduction

Communities around the world are protecting their natural environment, scenery and traditional way of life while continuing to prosper economically. International organizations, national and local governments and environmental groups support these efforts because they are able to satisfy multiple objectives -- economic development and environmental protection.

The extreme popularity and success of ecotourism is evidence of this. The year 2002 is the International Year of Ecotourism. Communities from all over the world have been coming together in symposiums to discuss the benefits of ecotourism and challenges for the future. There is no better time than now for a community to begin developing the plan for a National Scenic Area and sustainable tourism economy. SAVE International is excited to be able to assist in this process.

Tainan County has many wonderful values worth protecting. These include wildlife, scenic beauty, traditional way of life, recreational resources, and wonderful food. People all over the world have recognized the values of Chiku and Tainan and have thus supported the effort to stop the Bin-nan Industrial Complex and save the black-faced spoonbills through sustainable alternative development such as ecotourism.

Over the past four years I have studied and visited successful ecotourism efforts around the world. I began conducting ecotourism research to present to the community in Chiku in 1999 as a graduate student at Berkeley and member of SAVE. In 2000, after graduating, I received a fellowship to study successful ecotourism around the world in Australia, Belize and the United States Virgin Islands. These communities have been successful in:

1. Protecting their important resources values and traditional way of life
2. Increasing jobs and economic development
3. Ensuring that tourism revenues and benefits remain local -- stay in the region.

These ecotourism facilities have all completed the following steps:

1. First and foremost, the most important step in ecotourism planning is permanent protection of the resource -- "Establishment of the Protected Area" -- in this case it is the National Scenic Area Designation.
2. Once the area has a protected status, develop management zones. The most sensitive areas should have no development while less sensitive areas may be zoned for research, minimal tourism, and or higher impact tourism.
3. The third step is the establishment of a "Management Authority" that includes local people. Once the protected area is identified and zoned, this Management Authority

should develop a long-term management plan that addresses regulation of the protected area, guidelines for development, financing and generating local economic development, and monitoring the effects of tourism on the resources over time.

4. Development Design Guidelines are essential to ensuring that tourism development is compatible with protecting the resource and maintaining scenic beauty.
5. Successful marketing and participation in the international ecotourism community can increase visitation and help the community continue to improve visitor services.

I. Protecting the Resource

· The first step in successful ecotourism planning is to define the protected area based on ecological, scientific, economic, aesthetic, and recreational values. Every successful ecotourism area that I've read about and visited was created after the establishment of a protected area.

· As of the year 2000 there were some 30,000 protected area sites globally totaling 13.2 million square kilometers of land managed for conservation purposes.

· Benefits of these areas include the provision of clean water, the protection of soil resources, economic benefit to surrounding communities and a healthier surrounding for neighbors.

· Protected areas are established by government designation, private acquisition by a non-profit organization, private interests, or even voluntary donation. Protected areas are most commonly established by government acquisition. More recently, protection has been accomplished by a combination of public and private tools and resources.

· Often private or environmental groups will develop privately managed preserves on the edge a protected area to benefit from the scenic beauty and wildlife guaranteed to retain its values in perpetuity by the designation.

Example:

· Rio Bravo Management Area and Chan Chich Lodge/Gallon Jug Reserve in Central America. They are adjacent properties located on the Western Border of Belize adjacent to Guatemala and its 1.5 million-hectare protected area, the Maya Biosphere Reserve.

· The Rio Bravo Management Area is owned and managed by the non-profit organization, the Programme for Belize. They protect biodiversity while creating jobs and sustaining the Management Area through revenues from sustainable forestry, farming, farm products, and tourism. The Rio Bravo Conservation Area is 108,313 hectares.

· Chan Chich Lodge is a privately run ecotourism resort within a private reserve called Gallon Jug. The Gallon Jug includes 54,800 hectares.

· Together with the Maya Biosphere Reserve these privately owned protected areas create the largest contiguous protected rainforest in Central America. The Rio Bravo Management Area and the Gallon Jug lands benefit from their adjacency because there is a higher amount of wildlife diversity. This greatly appeals to their ecotourism visitors. Despite their success, the Chan Chich Lodge has been chosen not to increase facilities to accommodate additional visitors. To continue to protect the fragile rainforest, the Lodge has instead chosen to expand business through lower impact adventure/camping tours that do not require additional facilities. The Rio Bravo Management Area continues to find additional revenue through a combination of sustainable forestry, tourism, and organic farming.

II. Define Management Zones

Protected areas are most successful when overlay zones are applied for different types of uses. This ensures that activities that cause environmental impacts such as tourism, agriculture or fisheries take place in less environmentally sensitive areas.

Zones typically include:

1. Strict Protection Zone -- with little or no human contact (e.g. Black-faced spoonbill habitat (roosting and key foraging areas), intact wetlands within the Estuary).
2. Low Impact Tourist Use Zone (Tourism by foot, boat, bicycle), local use for existing farming, aquaculture and fisheries
3. Moderate Use Tourist Zones – visitor’s centers, public facilities
4. Development Zones -- Major tourist facilities with ecological siting and design.

Examples of protected areas with development zones:

- Great Barrier Reef, world heritage site, fishing, tourism, agriculture in the watershed.
- Rio Bravo Management Area
- New Jersey Pine Barrens
- (describe size, location and resource)

III. Establish a management authority that includes local people

A management authority should be established that includes local resident and interest groups. Important for the local community to be involved to ensure that job creation and economic benefit stays within the community. The role of the authority is to develop guidelines, provide input on government planning and initiatives. The management authority is responsible for:

1. Developing a long-range implementation plan that addresses financing (Management Plan)
2. Generation of local economic development
3. Monitoring the effects of tourism on the resources

One example of a protected area with an established management entity is the New Jersey Pine Barrens Reserve, a unit of the United States National Park System. In recent years the United States National Park Service (NPS) established a new kind of park that with joint local, state and federal governmental control. This type of park is now referred to as a “Reserve.” A board that includes local government officials, federal officials, local businesses, and community leaders runs the Pine Barrens Reserve. This is authorized in the legislation that created this protected area.

The Great Barrier Reef Management in Australia has a management authority that includes native Australians, federal, state, and local government representatives. Given the management required for a resource as vast as the Great Barrier Reef the management authority here has developed several working groups to address issues such as fisheries, global biodiversity, water quality, coastal development, and shoreline recreation.

Management Body should work together to develop the “Management Plan” for the Protected Area. Management plans typically include:

- Detailed regulations for the protected area. Detailed regulations on what can happen within each of the zoned areas.
- Guidelines for Site Planning and Tourism Development (see step 4).
- Financing Mechanisms for implementing restoration, maintenance, and financing new ecotourism facilities and acquiring additional land
- A marketing strategy for promoting the resource (see step 5)
- A monitoring Plan

IV. Develop design guidelines

1. Build on the worst, or previously damaged sections.

Example: Couran Cove Resort and 100-hectare private reserve.

- Location: South Stradbroke Island, Australia.
- Built the most intensive structures on land that had been damaged by cattle grazing and altered by dredging.
- Most of the native landscape had been destroyed.
- Conducted restoration and clean-up activities in this area and developed the most intensive tourism facilities here.

2. Structures should blend into the landscape -- do not impair scenic qualities of the landscape. They are subordinate to the ecosystem.

3. Architecture should reflect tradition, reflect the vernacular

Example: Boondall Wetlands

- Location: Brisbane Australia, 1,000-hectare wetland preserve
- Used local vernacular architecture that was used by colonists. This includes porches and raised building. This form allows for better cooling in this hot and humid climate. Raising the buildings also lower impact when raised.

4. The dwellings should be light, open, and oriented toward views.

Example: Maho Bay Resorts

- Location: United States Virgin Islands National Park
- Created a sustainable ecotent that is a cross between a cabin and tent structure
- Light on the landscape
- Oriented to obtain views
- Boardwalks

5. Structures should be easy to build by low-skilled labor, and sit on hand-dug footings or anchored to boulders.

Example: Maho Bay Ecotents

6. Heavy construction equipment should be avoided. Use instead specialized heavy equipment that can work from roads to avoid site disturbance. Creative use or reuse of materials and use of existing structures.

Example: Undara Lava Lodge, Australia

- Location: Queensland, Australia
- Famous Lava Tubes created by an ancient volcano eruption
- Used old trains that were being disposed by the State of Queensland for lodging

Example: Community Baboon Sanctuary, 5200-hectare preserve

- Location: Central America - Belize
- Community homes are converted to guests and bed-and-breakfasts

8. Restoration of landscape following construction

Example: Couran Cove, Australia

- This area was a landscape damaged by cattle grazing and dredging.
- Before construction began, the Resort Owners constructed a nursery. They grew native plants that were later used to restore the landscape to its former condition.
- Couran Cove did a complete restoration of the dune ecosystem where sand mining had once taken place. In addition, rainforests and mangroves were restored.

9. New materials should be local materials -- keep investments in the community -- less impacts on the environment.

10. Showcase sustainable technology

Example: Maho Bay Ecotents.

- Use of solar power to heat water and provide electricity.

V. Successful marketing through research and participation in the international ecotourism community

Marketing

Findings have shown that ecotourists are typically interested in more than one type of visitor activity. This is important both from a destination-wide perspective and from an individual operator perspective, when product package options are being put together. Operators, themselves, need to offer a wide range of experiences or options, or to develop product linkages with others who can provide complementary experiences. Cooperation, partnerships and research are essential.

Marketing Studies

Marketing studies identify tourist preferences and demands. This information can be based on existing regional tourism data or through conducting targeted surveys with current protected area visitors. Thousands that come each year to see the black-faced spoonbill and other attractions.

Surveys should focus on:

- what the visitor would like to experience
- what the visitor enjoys/values most about the area
- types of activities visitors are most interested in
- types of accommodations visitors prefer

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Sources for Training

International groups and organizations can assist in the development of your protected area. Many of these groups provide training and can link you to funding sources.

Examples of ways to Network

- Publish your work. Write papers and submit them to ecotourism journals and organizations.
- Contact web-based international ecotourism organizers.

These groups organize tours to different locations and can work to link tourists to your attraction. Often you would invite them to stay at your locations so they can experience and recommend it to their customers. (e.g. The Ecotourism Society)

- Training
- Develop a “Sister park” relationship. Example: US Department of Interior Sister Park Program offers training in guides and interpretation, environmental management, planning and design, policy development. Current projects are in Indonesia, Nepal, Guatemala, Bangladesh, Mongolia, Georgia, Tanzania, Philippines, Ecuador, Honduras, Croatia, Southern Africa, and Central America, Peru, Kenya.

Funding Sources

Funding Options for Establishing and Managing Protected Areas

- Traditionally protected areas have been funded and managed almost exclusively by government entities. These arrangements have been changing as government funding can run into deficit and conservation goals can change with political administrations. Slides of older, more traditional protected areas -- Lamington National Park in Australia. Land was cheaper, less pressure to develop.
- Public and private partnerships are more common in the establishment of new protected areas.
- Protected area management authorities should develop financing plans that identify sources of funding and ensure that revenue will stay in the local community.

1. International Development Banks and Bilateral Agencies.

For example:

- USAID just announced \$36 [*million?*] in funding over several years to protect including the creation and management of protected areas, capacity building for local communities and development of an ecotourism industry. These efforts are part of a broader partnership - involving other governments, the private sector and additional NGO's - that aims to support a network of up to 10 million hectares (24,710,000 acres) of effectively managed national parks and protected areas and up to 20 million hectares (49,420,000 acres) of well-managed multiple-use forests, while promoting economic development, poverty alleviation and improved governance for people who depend on natural resources for their livelihoods.

- IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA). Membership is by invitation, on the basis of individual experience in relation to protected areas as well as a willingness to assist in a voluntary capacity with the work of WCPA. In general, five types of people are members of the Commission: *[list of five types is missing from these notes]*

2. Mitigation

Some areas use mitigation to protect land. Mitigation requires any loss of habitat for tourism activities to be replaced. For example, if you wanted to develop an ecolodge in a 10-acre [hectare] area containing important habitat, you would have to purchase 10 hectares of fishponds for permanent protection (no development) to be managed by the Scenic Area.

3. Profit Sharing Arrangements

In this case you would share revenue with your neighbors in exchange for agreements that they not to develop their land so that surrounding scenic and environmental qualities are protected. Voluntary Donations -- CBS Some areas even have residents and corporations that voluntarily donate land for conservation such as the Community Baboon Sanctuary in Belize. Rio Bravo Management Area. Owner manages a private ecotourism lodge adjacent. Large reserves around area are protected.

4. Private Reserves

- Ecolodge operators often establish private reserves.
- Preserving a large area of land around the lodge ensures the character of the setting/environment remains intact.
- As was mentioned earlier these reserves are often located next to National Parks or other types of protected areas to benefit from the ecological connections and higher wildlife diversity associated with larger protected areas.

5. Non-profit Organizations and Foundations

For Example:

- Conservation International (CI) has established the Global Conservation Fund. It is a permanent, well-capitalized pool of ready cash that allows CI to compete with extractive industries for the rights to pristine habitats, providing a financial incentive for governments to protect important ecosystems within their borders.

6. Land Adoption Programs

7. Conservation Fees

Fee Structures are essential to many successful protected areas. It is not just important for raising money to acquire land but also for financing monitoring, restoration programs, maintenance, training local people in the ecotourism industry, and providing financing for new businesses and facilities.

Fees can be established at many different levels:

Park or Scenic Area level: Entry fees are charged at the gateways of the protected area
· Example: Community Baboon Sanctuary, Belize. Voluntarily gave land to sanctuary. Subsistence farmers preserve their land adjacent to the River to preserve habitat for the endangered Black-howler monkey. Have ultimately benefited from additional sources of income from tourist that come to see the monkeys. The fee paid to the visitor's center finances operations. Giving tours further compensates locals, opening their homes to guests, selling handicrafts and food for tourists.

Local or Regional tax: Local taxes are placed on lodging/hotel room charges
Example: United States Bed tax (will add in bed tax revenues for the State of California as an example)

National level: Tax upon entering a country for tourism purposes.

- Example: Belize PACT tourism fee.
- Example: In Kenya, the parks give back 25% of their fees as direct payments to local communities.

Funds acquired from fee structures support activities such as:

1. Training,
2. Environmental education,
3. Research, Planning, Monitoring,
4. Financing new ecotourism operations.
5. Landowner compensation

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