

International Centre for Responsible Tourism

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What role does certification play in Responsible Tourism?

As the responsible tourism movement gathers momentum, the question is being raised as to whether or not a responsible tourism certificate is needed. There are some truly fundamental differences between responsible tourism and certification approaches. This paper argues that the responsible tourism movement – committed as it is to harnessing the market to achieve economic, social and environmental objectives and to create educated and motivated consumers – is having mounting success. While certification has little or no impact on the attitudes or behaviour of end consumers, it undoubtedly has some utility in the supply chain assisting tour operators and others to identify suppliers who meet minimum standards.

Travelling in the Dark

Ten years ago, when Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) turned its attention to tourism and began an advocacy campaign, it was couched in the language of ethical tourism. A survey of VSO volunteers in developing countries had identified the impact of tourism in communities as giving significant cause for concern. At around the same time, it was becoming clear that holidaymakers wanted to be better prepared for their holiday in the developing world and that they thought tour operators should be providing them with better information about the societies they were visiting. *Travelling in the Dark*, published by VSO in 1999, used a transparent scoring system to create league tables – this captured the attention of tour operators. VSO surveyed 50 UK companies offering holidays in the developing countries where VSO volunteers worked, finding that two thirds of those surveyed failed to reach a minimum standard in providing information and advice on local people, local customs, local goods and services and conserving the environment. VSO asserted that the provision of this kind of information for travellers by tour operators was “a right, not a luxury”.

“We want to interact with local people and enjoy a new environment when we visit a developing country, but all too often we don’t have the guidance we need to get the most from our holiday without undermining local customs and culture.”

VSO *Travelling in the Dark* 1999

AITO

Later that year, a survey of AITO (Association of Independent Tour Operators) companies revealed how much some of their members were already doing, and that there was a significant amount of support for the association to adopt a responsible tourism policy. AITO members identified with a range of reasons for adopting an ethical or responsible approach. More than half of respondents said that they were in favour of adopting a policy for reasons of conscience, their personal values and concern for environment and culture. About a quarter referred to the need for preserving destinations and maintaining product quality – the enlightened self-interest motive. Back in 1999 less than one in five of respondents referred to market forces and consumer pressure, AITO’s policy looks significantly less radical now than it did when it was adopted five years ago, with three of the five commitments being environmental.

There has been considerable progress since then, with more recent tour operator responsible tourism policies placing far more weight on economic linkages to spread economic benefits locally and on the social agenda, thus creating opportunities for more positive and meaningful contact between hosts and guests. AITO did recognise that tour operators have the potential to do both good and harm, and that too often in the past the harm had outweighed the good.

AITO’s Responsible Tourism Policy

As members of AITO we recognise that in carrying out our work as Tour Operators we have a responsibility to respect other people’s places and ways of life. We acknowledge that wherever a Tour Operator does business or sends clients it has a potential to do both good and harm, and we are aware that all too often in the past the harm has outweighed the good.

All tourism potentially has an Environmental, Social and Economic impact on the destination involved. We accept, therefore, that we as Tour Operators should aim to be responsible in all our dealings on each of these three levels. To help us to do so we have proposed a set of guidelines intended to help companies, customers and local suppliers recognise their common responsibilities to:

- Protect the Environment – its flora, fauna and landscapes
- Respect local cultures – traditions, religions and built heritage
- Benefit local communities – both economically and socially
- Conserve natural resources – from office to destination
- Minimise pollution – through noise, waste disposal and congestion

Source: AITO *Responsible Tourism Guidelines* 2000

Diversity

The movement towards responsible tourism is broad and diverse, now encompassing a wide range of tour operators, hoteliers, lodges, B&B’s and destinations such as South Africa, The Gambia and Florida. This diversity is the movement’s strength. Emerging in the mid-nineties, the concept of responsible tourism was always broader than just the environment and the tourism industry, and quickly developed a rich diversity of approaches designed to engage holidaymakers and suppliers in developing richer and more meaningful experiences for travellers. The VSO WorldWide Campaign stressed the consumer benefit and sought to empower the holidaymakers, encouraging holidaymakers to get more out of their holiday.

“Fantastic, you’re going on holiday. A chance to get away, to meet new people. But think for a moment. Who will you meet? A nice couple from Birmingham? Every travel brochure says ‘meet our friendly local people, they are the warmth of our welcome’. But will you actually meet any? Will you go beyond just ordering a meal or a drink?”¹

Most of us want more than that.

Consumer Aspirations

Tearfund took up the campaign, when VSO moved on to campaign on HIV/AIDS, and commissioned commercial market research from Ipsos RSL². This research revealed that holidaymakers regarded the ethical commitments and practice of the operators as more important than whether or not they had travelled with them before. This research, in common with other work, demonstrates that consumers give a higher priority to cost, weather and service than the “ethical agenda”. However, consumers did say that the ethical agenda was more important to them than whether or not they had travelled with the operator before – a point not lost on many operators.

exploration”. He anticipated a “development away from a manipulated tourist to an informed and experienced one, to an emancipated and independent tourist, a critical consumer not only at home but also when travelling.”

This is at the core of the responsible tourism movement. Echoing Krippendorff’s call for “rebellious tourists and rebellious locals”, the Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism in Destinations, a side event at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, called for efforts to create “better places for people to live in, and better places for people to visit.” The responsibility to achieve these goals falls on the industry in originating markets and destinations, national and local governments, conservationists and local communities. Responsible

Table 1

For the last overseas holiday that you booked (whether via a tour company or independently), how important were the following criteria in determining your choice? (%)³

	Importance rating %			
	High	Mid	Low	None
Affordable cost	82	12	3	3
Good weather	78	14	5	3
Guaranteed a good hotel with facilities	71	15	8	4
Good information is available on the social, economic and political situation of the country and local area to be visited	42	30	23	3
There is a significant opportunity for interaction with the local people	37	37	23	3
Trip has been specifically designed to cause as little damage as possible to the environment	32	34	27	5
Company has ethical policies	27	34	30	7
Used the company before	26	30	38	5

Source: Tearfund January (2000) *Tourism an Ethical Issue, Market Research Report*

Table 1 shows that, other things being equal, consumers aspire to make more responsible travel choices.

tourism is about taking responsibility for making change. The VSO WorldWide campaign pointed out that “Your choice of holiday and the way that you visit can make a difference.”

The Tie Breaker

The point is not that there is large group of consumers who choose their holiday destination or activity primarily because it is responsible, any more than a consumer chooses a hotel primarily because it has a certificate for good environmental practice. There is perhaps a small segment of deep green travellers with strong social consciences who are willing to pay a premium for this kind of product. What the Ipsos-RSL research demonstrates, and the experience of increasing numbers of tour operators confirms, is that a meaningful responsible tourism element can be a tie breaker when the destination, activity, quality and price are comparable between different companies. As this is increasingly the case, and operators and hoteliers seek to avoid price competition, a responsible tourism USP (Unique Selling Proposition) is increasingly used by operators and hoteliers to secure bookings, generate repeat bookings and encourage referrals. It is working.

Characteristics of Responsible Tourism

1. minimises negative economic, environmental, and social impacts;
2. generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well-being of host communities, improves working conditions and access to the industry;
3. involves local people in decisions that affect their lives and life chances;
4. makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, to the maintenance of the world’s diversity;
5. provides more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people, and a greater understanding of local cultural, social and environmental issues;
6. provides access for physically challenged people; and
7. is culturally sensitive, engenders respect between tourists and hosts, and builds local pride and confidence.

Real Holidays

The thinking behind responsible tourism drew on the experience of the UK’s most successful consumer campaign, CAMRA (the Campaign for Real Ale) which took on the big brewers, and ensured that beer drinkers would continue to have a wide choice of traditionally brewed ales and a diversity of local pubs and inns in which to socialise. Back in the nineties AITO had used a “real holidays” brand positioning which echoed the concept of real choice and real experiences. The point about a real holiday is that it should be a better, richer experience. John King⁴, argues that travel is increasingly about “experiences, fulfilment and rejuvenation” rather than about “places and things” and that this lifestyle market is of increasing importance. In this, the travel and tourism industry mirrors trends in other leisure and consumption sectors.

Excerpt from Cape Town Declaration available at www.icrtourism.org/capetown.html

Viral Marketing

Krippendorff understood that the ideas of responsible tourism must be as “infectious” as possible. Orders and prohibitions will not do the job – “because it is not a bad conscience that we need to make progress but positive experience, not the feeling of compulsion but that of responsibility.” The ethos of responsible tourism is of a heightened experience, of self-realisation – a better holiday. In a world where there is increasing distance between producers and consumers because of increased globalisation, tourism offers an opportunity to connect with the people who create the holiday experience. Holidaymakers have to travel to the factory to consume the product, and responsible tourism reconnects hosts (the sellers) and guests (the buyers).

Krippendorff

Jost Krippendorff, back in 1984⁵, was the visionary who recognised that the “emancipation of tourists” was possible, that tourists were becoming more demanding and that they were demanding “contact with other people and self-realisation through creative activities, knowledge and

The success of responsible tourism has been in enabling holidaymakers

to experience the difference and to encourage them to talk about it. Good responsible tourism practices are evident to the consumer, contributing to their enjoyment of their holiday. Responsible tourism creates opportunities for holidaymakers to talk about their experiences and to tell stories, stimulating referrals and word-of-mouth viral marketing as well as encouraging repeat bookings. People who experience responsible tourism come back for more. For many operators and hoteliers it makes sound commercial sense.

Amazon and Ebay have pioneered and popularised the online facility for clients to comment on and review products and services. Holidays Uncovered⁶ has been very successful in securing and publishing feedback from holidaymakers – this provides invaluable information and drives consumer awareness. ResponsibleTravel.com⁷ has been generating similar feedback from travellers and publishing it – the consumers are actively engaged in commenting on the responsible tourism elements of the experiences on the site and validating the claims made for particular places and experiences.

Responsible tourism recognises and celebrates the diversity of the world's cultures and environments. Within this broad movement, operators and accommodation owners have developed a rich range of opportunities designed to meet the needs and interests of the world's biological and cultural diversity and the diverse interests and motivations of the holidaymakers and travellers they serve. Responsible tourism is not a niche product – any kind of tourism can be more responsible. As is evident from the Responsible Tourism Awards, launched in 2004, there are competitors in a wide range of categories – winners have included Eurostar, Exodus and the Calabash Trust⁸. In the adventure travel market in the UK there is significant rivalry between companies around the responsible tourism elements of their trips, producing a ratchet effect as companies engage with their staff, suppliers and customers in enhancing those aspects of their practice.

Certification Schemes

The early initiatives post-Rio focused on the green agenda and assisted hotels in particular in securing significant reduction in costs for water, waste and energy. One of the attractions of certification schemes for large enterprises and chains was that they brought with them improved management practices and processes, although the schemes were seen as bureaucratic and expensive by smaller enterprises. There is no evidence that certification schemes have secured greater market access for small businesses. Consumer awareness is low⁹; they have been more extensively used by larger businesses requiring that their suppliers accept auditing as part of their risk management and quality assurance processes – the ISO14001 schemes, of which Green Globe is perhaps the best known example in travel and tourism, have utility in the business to business (B2B) market but little resonance for consumers.

One of the major problems about certification is that such schemes are opaque, the consumer does not know what is special about the hotel or resort – they know only that a certificate has been awarded – it carries no meaning, generates no stories, attracts little PR and few referrals.

There are some 7,000 certified products, two thirds of which are in Europe and mostly accommodation of one form or another, – but it is still less than 0.5% of accommodations in Europe.¹⁰ In Costa Rica 5% of accommodation is certified, but tellingly only half of those businesses which are certified advertise the fact to holidaymakers. The schemes are generally subsidised by governments, donors or development banks. The rate of development of new schemes has slowed¹¹, but as long as a sponsor can be found to develop new certification schemes they will continue to emerge – even if their sustainability and commercial benefits are highly questionable.

The Blue Flag certification has been the most successful; the flag now flown at some 2,700 beaches around the world is widely recognised and carries a clear customer promise – swimming in safe water. The European VISIT initiative is one of the few certification schemes which seeks to engage the holidaymaker or traveller using the concept of Quality +, with a certified eco-label to ensure that the tourism facility the consumer books takes special care of the environment. Recognising that many of the environmental measures take place behind the scenes,

VISIT emphasises the “measures which actively involve the holiday maker: visitors’ tickets for public transport, information about the local environment, environmentally friendly leisure activities and typical regional dishes made from local produce, where possible organically grown.”¹²

There is a plethora of schemes; this reflects the enthusiasm of those who have identified the opportunity and the willingness of governments, donors, development agencies and banks to fund them. From a responsible tourism perspective the large number of local schemes is desirable – it is a product of the cultural and ecological diversity of the world, and the fact that there are different issues and priorities in different places. One of the major problems of the larger schemes is their reductionism; they lack a clear and meaningful consumer proposition. With thousands of local schemes, it is difficult for the certification schemes to get consumer recognition in a majority of originating markets. There is no one globally accepted way of grading hotel rooms for example – tour operators, motoring organisations, guidebooks and national tourist offices have developed their own but the consumer using a particular guide knows that they are getting a consistent view of the merits of the hotels. National systems are markedly different reflecting cultural differences. There is no internationally accepted way of rating hotels. Recognising the heterogeneity of the world's ecosystems and cultures, it is not likely that there will ever be one uniform way of certifying their sustainability in any meaningful sense.

Different Approaches

There are some significant differences between the two approaches of certification vs. responsible tourism. Certification is of most utility for businesses concerned to audit their supply chains and improve their management. It is process orientated and rarely provides the holidaymaker or traveller with an enhanced experience; provided that the business does not claim to have a current certificate when it does not, there is no risk of litigation, and it tends to produce a level playing field with no differentiation between certified products and little marketing advantage. It certainly does not excite the end consumers.

Table 2
Comparing Certification and Responsible Tourism Approaches

	Certification	Responsible Tourism
Driver	Supply-side governance and CSR	Market led
Users	Investors & Businesses	Consumers
Auditing	Third party auditing	Consumer auditing
Orientation	Process orientated	Output orientated
Transparency	Opaque – devoid of content	Highly transparent and content rich
Consumer engagement	Low – the consumer knows only that a certificate has been awarded	The enterprise makes some specific statements about the experience – part of the contract
Focus	Primarily environmental	Economic, social & environmental
Funding	Expensive – subsidised	No subsidy – self-financing
Legal	Very limited liability	Contractual obligation
Improvement	Certified commitment to continuous improvement	Consumers expect to see the improvement
Marketing value	Very weak marketing value – no differentiation between products and experiences	Strong marketing value – high levels of product differentiation focused on experiences of particular places and communities
Competition	Limited – tends to produce a level playing field	Significant – there is a ratchet effect as a result of competition and increasing consumer pressure

Source Harold Goodwin (2005)

By contrast responsible tourism is market driven, both responding to and creating tourists who demand a more real encounter with the environment and the community, based on values of respect for other

people and their places. These informed consumers subject the products and experiences to continuous review. When they like it they recommend it to others and return themselves. When a responsible tourism product fails to match its claims, the tourist complains and in the worst cases the enterprise risks litigation for misrepresentation. There is a ratchet effect as consumers expect and demand more – benefits accrue to those companies and products which enable consumers to realise their aspirations, as do the communities and environments around them.

Continuous Improvement

Certification is often promoted as a means of encouraging enterprises to continuously improve; the 14001 process orientation supports this approach. However it is often difficult for consumers to see the difference year on year. Competition around the responsible tourism agenda and customer comment drives the responsible tourism approach forward; operators and hoteliers listen to their customers (for examples see the responsibletravel.com box overleaf). Responsible tourism is market driven, both responding to changing consumer demands, and enabling people to experience the difference, creating demand for new products and experiences.¹³ How many of us have carefully put the towels back on the rack, only to come back to the room and find that freshly laundered towels have replaced them? The responsible traveller will have taken up that failure to deliver with the management. Who is ultimately more powerful – the demanding consumer or the expert auditing social and environmental performance?

Mutually Exclusive?

The responsible tourism and certification approaches are not mutually exclusive. For example AITO has introduced a certification scheme; as all members sign up to the commitment as part of their membership all members are awarded one star. Only 19 AITO members have secured 3* status and a further 20 have secured 2* status – this out of a membership of 150 or so. Two star status means that a member has gone above and beyond the minimum RT requirements expected by AITO; three star status means the company has successfully implemented and continually improves an RT policy and that the company undertakes a specific project which contributes to the economy, culture or environment of a destination. There is no consumer proposition in the star rating. AITO's main focus is on certification. Only eight of their members (Explore, KE Adventure Travel, Nomadic Thoughts, Audley Travel, Journey Latin America, Intravel, Guerba, and Dragoman) have details of their projects on the AITO site. The AITO scheme is presently more akin to the certification approach than to that of the responsible tourism movement with its clear consumer experience and local benefits focus.¹⁴

The Federation of Tour Operators¹⁵ (FTO) has secured the commitment of all of its members to a programme of introducing sustainable tourism principles and some of them are using responsible tourism as part of their marketing. Neilson¹⁶ for example has a very cutting edge set of responsible tourism commitments and holidaymakers travelling with Neilson should be able to experience the difference. The Federation is also piloting its own certification programme which will enable FTO members to share the auditing of overseas suppliers, essential to delivering on their own commitments.

First Choice is successfully combining a Corporate Social Responsibility approach recognised through inclusion on the FTSE4Good, with a strong responsible tourism movement approach through Exodus, the Adventure Company, Imaginative Traveller, Trips Worldwide and Waymark – all of which are part of First Choice and feature trips on responsibletravel.com. As Peter Long CEO of First Choice makes clear on the website, First Choice is seeking to be the industry leader combining both approaches.

“As leaders in forward thinking we recognise that the success of our business goes hand in hand with the way we treat our natural environment and the people we work with and affect. Three years ago we agreed a vision: to enable people to explore and enjoy the world without harming it, based on a commitment to

sustainable development. . . . We are proud of what we have achieved so far. In November 2004, Exodus, one of our businesses in our Activity Holidays Sector won Best Tour Operator in the Responsible Tourism Awards¹⁷ 2004 and The Adventure Company was a runner-up. Exodus was also the joint overall winner in all categories. In March 2005 our ranking on the UK Business in the Environment index rose significantly, marking us out as one of the ten most improving companies listed. In September 2005 the Group achieved inclusion in the UK's FTSE4Good index, used by the investment community as a reliable indicator of businesses which meet globally recognised corporate sustainable development standards.”¹⁸

Whilst certification and the responsible tourism movement are not incompatible, certification is most useful as a means of ensuring compliance and improvement in the supply chain. Certification is of most use in the business to business supply chain – consumers are best engaged through a responsible tourism approach.

References

- 1 Voluntary Service Overseas (1997) *Every holiday has hidden extras below the surface* Voluntary Service Overseas, London
- 2 Ipsos-RSL undertook the research of a nationally and regionally representative sample of 2032 adults (weighted to 2043) aged 15+. Interviews were conducted 26-30 November 1999, data set accurate to $\pm 3\%$ at a 95% confidence level.
- 3 Tearfund January (2000) *Tourism an Ethical Issue, Market Research Report*
- 4 King J (2002) Destination marketing organisations – Connecting the experience rather than promoting the place. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, Vol. 8 No. 2, pp. 105–108
- 5 Krippendorf Jost (1984) *The Holiday Makers* First published in English 1987 Butterworth Heinemann
- 6 www.holidays-uncovered.co.uk
- 7 www.responsibletravel.com . Harold Goodwin co-founded responsibletravel.com with Justin Francis. He sold his shares some time ago and no longer has any commercial interest in the company.
- 8 See www.responsibletravel.com/copy/copy900002.htm
- 9 The Fair Trade trademark is the exception, it is well known and has clear resonance with consumers – backed by established charities and with a presence in the major supermarkets, the proposition is clear and relatively simple, the producer gets a fair price. Similarly the Soil Association with its clear consumer proposition of organic is now established.
- 10 This paragraph draws on Dodds R and Joppe M (2005) *CSR in the Tourism Industry? The Status of and Potential for Certification, Codes of Conduct and Guidelines* Study prepared for the CSR Practice Foreign Investment Advisory Service Investment Climate Department, World Bank
- 11 Approximately 40% of programs started before 1996 with an additional 40% between 1996-2000 and a number of new initiatives developed since 2000 (around 20% of the total).
- 12 www.yourvisit.info
- 13 Victor Middleton has argued a similar case Middleton, V.T.C (1998) ‘Sustainable Tourism, A Marketing Perspective’, Butterworth, Heinemann
- 14 www.aito.co.uk/corporate_RT_MembersPractising.asp
- 15 FTO established its Responsible Tourism Committee in October 2003
- 16 Part of Thomas Cook
- 17 www.responsibletravel.com/Copy/Copy900024.htm
- 18 www.fcenvironmentandpeople.com/fcenviro/progressing_aims/peter_long.html

Examples of consumer comments from responsibletravel.com



Consumer comment is both informing and enthusing other travellers and securing continuous improvement.

1. Gorilla and Masai Mara safari

What was the most memorable or exciting part of your holiday?

Toss up between sitting feet away from a pride of 14 lions feeding on a buffalo they had just brought down and rafting the Nile's grade 5 rapids at Ginga.

What tips would you give other travellers booking this holiday?

Take part in as many optional activities as you can, these were, almost without exception, hugely rewarding and contributed greatly to our experience. Also, consider travelling in (low) season! We went for the first two weeks in June, saw all the wildlife we could have hoped for and at the same time found the Mara relatively quiet and plenty of space on our truck. We may have just been lucky but will probably book at the same time of year if we return.

Did you feel that your holiday benefited local people, and minimized impacts on the environment?

On the whole yes and this always seemed to be a consideration for the crew looking after us. Only exception was a visit to a Pygmy village, which didn't seem to be benefiting those people and possibly created some tension with other communities in the area.

Any other comments?

Fantastic holiday, saw loads, met a really nice crowd of people and fitted loads in. Would not hesitate to return or recommend to anyone else.

Read the operator's response here:

I have spoken to the local operator about this and we are pulling the visit to the 'Pygmy' village. (It's not actually in the itinerary so we were unaware the guide took them there). Both the local operator and myself agree that neither the clients or the villagers are benefiting from this relationship. An email has been sent to all leaders to put a stop to this.

2. Taste of Borneo holiday

Did you feel that your holiday benefited local people, and minimized impacts on the environment?

I think the holiday benefited local people and the local economy. Overall the impact on the environment was reasonably well managed but I am concerned about the impact on the environment on Turtle Island. Two reasons:

(a) Too many people in a small area. Also the rangers say no photography at night with a flash but on the evening we were there two people inadvertently (one assumes) left their flash on for one photo each. This is not good for the laying of eggs. There are excellent photos to buy so why not just ban photography?

(b) More seriously our guide offered us an optional visit to the adjoining island where snorkelling was better. Indeed it was and made for a fantastic hour's viewing of coral and fish. However whilst we were there the tide fell considerably. When we went to depart, the driver

of the boat was unable to find a passage out of the coral. It ended up with the men in the boat pushing and pulling the boat over the coral until we got beyond the reef. The coral was definitely damaged by this action (and all the men got cuts and grazes). Neither the boat driver nor the guide were too bothered about it. I think it incumbent on us tourists to say that such a situation is not tolerable. All that needs to happen is for there to be a buoy anchored beyond the coral and for tourists to be able to swim from the boat.

Read the operator's response here:

Thanks for that feedback, and delighted to hear that Julie had such a good time. She raised a couple of good points which I will pass back to the authorities via our tour leader. The first point about flash photography is unfortunate. Flashes are banned, and we should be able to trust people not to use theirs. If this is more than a one off I am sure it will result in a ban, but I hope people can control themselves and keep the experience exciting and enjoyable to all. As long as it is well controlled, tourism does bring a lot of very helpful income to the area. Dragging a boat across the reef is inexcusable, and I will make strong presentations on that score. We have had problems using buoys (as Julie suggested) as they tend to disappear, but I am sure there is a solution.

Thanks for the feedback, and yes, the orang-utans are remarkable!

3. Holidays in Sri Lanka: Forests & beaches

Did you feel that your holiday benefited local people, and minimized impacts on the environment?

Mostly, yes. Probably more than any holiday I have had in recent years: there was some great work going on at the eco-lodges in the South. However, I would strongly argue that alternative "eco" accommodation needs to be sought for people visiting the "cultural triangle". In the itinerary it was described as being: "Agro Eco lodge, new chalet. This place is based on a government owned paddy farm and you will be woken up by wild peacocks!"

In reality, the business called itself "Agro-tourism". The company that ran the Chalets was not government-owned: it was part of a large Sri Lankan Fertiliser & Pesticide company, that was also involved in Bio-technology. It was next to some Paddy Fields, and on one occasion I heard a peacock, however, I felt that this location was far from being "eco" (you had to drive through an armed security gate to enter the farm, for example). More positively, as someone very aware of business practice, I did feel that the company had some very positive/progressive programmes in place (strong commitment to charitable donations, good examples of training/development plans for staff, & clearly focused on long-term success rather than "quick-wins", in my opinion). But overall, contributing money towards a company that is a market leader in the agro-chemicals industry of Sri Lanka simply did not feel very inviting.

Any other comments?

Overall, however, this experience did not destroy the rest of our holiday (it's only where we slept at night for 3 nights after long days visiting the cultural triangle sights!), and we would give the whole tour somewhere between 4 and 5 stars!!!

Read the operator's response here:

We had 4-5 families who stayed at the agro eco lodge and we did not have any complaints. This place is ideal for cycling, visiting local villages etc. and also staying somewhere that is owned by Sri Lankans. It is a government owned estate and not an estate where organic farming is practiced.

People who believe in alternative farming may find it difficult to accept that they are running an agro eco tourism project! We are currently looking for other home-stays in the Dambulla area. Thanks to Mark for his comments, we welcome feedback as it helps us to improve our future tours.

4. Garden Route luxury accommodation reviewed

What was the most memorable or exciting part of your holiday?

Since it was my birthday my parents had contacted the hotel and arranged for a bottle of bubbly to be in the room when I came back from a day's walking – drinking that whilst sitting on the balcony was lovely.

What tips would you give other travellers booking this holiday?

Don't expect perfect weather – you are overlooking lush forest because it can be wet – but just enjoy the experience and the attention of the fantastic staff!

Did you feel that your holiday benefited local people, and minimized impacts on the environment?

Not perhaps as much as I would have hoped – there is plenty of scope for more eco-friendly adaptations at the hotel i.e. solar water etc.

Read the operator's response here:

We do try to be as environmentally responsible as possible, but our major emphasis is on people who are ultimately the ones who'll be taking forward new ideas and this country. Responsible tourism for us, in the main, is who we employ and how that, in its small way, benefits the community at large.

We only employ local people and train them in-house and I am sure, that in all the places our visitors travel to, very few match up to ours. Of our 36 staff members, 31 are from previously disadvantaged backgrounds and this includes from room & gardening staff, right up to our front of house, senior management and general manager. The guests refer to the fantastic staff – but where do they come from? From our local previously disadvantaged community. Not from a school of well-trained hospitality students looking for jobs with diplomas in hand. By establishing a solid staff basis, through good, principled training & fair employment & opportunities, we hope that the trickle down effect will lead to a better integrated society where the difference between the haves and the have-nots is lessened. Where communities can see for themselves, that their own peers are upwardly mobile, and so can they too can begin to move upwards.

Through this process of upliftment we continue to make our staff aware of pressing environmental issues that challenge, not only SA, but the world. However, we do have to start small, we live in a country where some people don't even have access to running water, who live in the shadow of AIDS, and they aren't tucked away in obscure places, they are here on our doorsteps. We have to change thinking patterns, teach basic skills & understanding on issues like water resourcing and how to conserve it etc. It's a huge task, but we are slowly getting on with the process. I think it's sometimes easy for first world travellers to miss these small but significant steps, so no, solar heating is not a priority at the moment.

For an example of a trip to the Masai Mara which exemplifies the enthusiasm which responsible tourism generates amongst travellers take a look at

www.responsibletravel.com/Trip/Trip100258.htm

The Market for Responsible Tourism

In 1999 Ipsos-RSL on behalf of Tearfund asked some specific questions about the willingness of travellers – package and independent travellers alike – to pay more money for holidays, which had the ethical characteristics they aspired to. 59% of respondents said that they would be willing to pay more for their holiday if money went to guarantee good wages and working conditions for workers in the destination, to preserve the environment and reverse some negative environmental effects or directly to a local charity. This means that 41% would not be prepared to pay more for any of these reasons.

Which of the following activities would you be willing to pay more money for if they were guaranteed as part of your holiday? You may tick as few or as many as you like.

Money goes towards preservation of the local environment and reversal of some of the negative environmental effects associated with tourism	35%
Workers in the destination are guaranteed good wages and working conditions	29%
Money goes to support a local charity	21%
None of these	41%

Only 45% of respondents were prepared to admit that they were not willing to pay more for the guarantees. 43% were prepared to pay at least 2% more.

These figures are clearly aspirational – they record the views of respondents about how they would like to behave, they do not necessarily accurately forecast how consumers will actually behave when booking holidays. However, consumers provided with comparable holidays at similar prices where one operator meets the ethical agenda to some degree and the other does not, can reasonably be expected to exercise their preference for a holiday that meets their ethical consumption aspirations.

Tearfund asked the same question in 1999 and 2001ⁱ, over the two years the percentage aspiring to be willing to pay more for an ethical holiday increased by 7% from 45% to 52%

Would you be more likely to book a holiday with a company if they had a written code to guarantee good working conditions, protect the environment and support local charities in the tourist destinations?

	1999	2001
Yes	45%	52%
Would make no difference	42%	33%
Don't know	13%	15%

By the end of 2001 52% said that they would be more likely to book a holiday with a company with an ethical commitment. This aspiration is one that companies are increasingly responding to.

As Weeden has argued, ethical tourism “can allow companies to compete on more than just price”ⁱⁱ, Krippendorf too argued that in a competitive market sales often dependent upon a Unique Selling

Proposition (USP) and a responsible tourism commitment is an “added value” which may secure additional bookings. Where there is little to choose between competing holidays and trips, the responsible tourism aspects of a particular trip may provide competitive advantage.

Research by Francis into attitudes towards responsible tourism amongst a range of large, medium and small operators concluded that while destination, price, services and departure date remain, in the view of tour operators, the tourist's key decision-making criteria, those operators practising responsible tourism stated that given broad parity on destination, price, services and departure date, their responsible tourism practices make the difference ‘nearly every time’. All were endeavouring to create points of difference, USPs between their products and those of their competitors and acknowledged that this was a key component in their product differentiation.ⁱⁱⁱ

Weeden argues that existing research in psychological studies highlights the problem of discrepancy between the conscience of the consumer and their actual purchasing behaviour.^{iv} This is not unique to tourism. Consumers purchase holidays for a range of reasons and they coalesce at the moment of decision. Consumer choice is constrained by price and availability, the responsible elements of a tourism product are only a part of the motivation to purchase, but for an increasing number of operators a significant part.

Rebellious consumers will expect the suppliers they purchase from to provide products, which are economically, socially and environmentally responsible. They will not be prepared to pay any price for responsible ethically traded products. They will pay a greater or lesser premium according to what they can afford and the priority, which they accord, to the ethical dimension for their purchasing as against more traditional criteria. The smaller the premium for a more responsible product, the more likely consumers are to purchase it.

Noel Josephides, managing director of Sunvil Holidays argued in the *Travel Trade Gazette* that British tourists have “absolutely no interest in supporting a host country's economy, respecting local customs or acting responsibly while on holiday.” However, he reported in the same article that 8% of Sunvil clients said that Sunvil's environmental initiative encouraged them to book with the company. In the highly competitive UK tourism market few operators can ignore the preferences and ethics of 8% of their clients. It is also true that they cannot pay any price to satisfy their clients, operators cannot be sustainable without making profits. There is a trade off between economics and aspirations for operators as well as tourists.

Where the responsible tourism elements make for a superior product it will attract consumers predisposed to purchase. The responsible tourism product has one particular advantage over many other ethical products – the consumer will often experience the difference. A cup of fairly traded coffee of tea will not taste significantly different from other teas and coffees, it can taste as good but not better. Responsible tourism holidays which bring particularly high quality engagement with local communities and their environments can provide a superior product, the life enhancing experience which a growing sector of the market craves.^{vi}

Extracts from Harold Goodwin and Justin Francis (2003) Ethical and responsible tourism: Consumer trends in the UK *Journal of Vacation Marketing* Vol. 9 No. 3, 2003, pp. 271–284, available at www.haroldgoodwin.info/resources/goodwin.pdf

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more responsible forms of tourism by creating an on-line market place of pre-screened and monitored products/services? Unpublished MSc dissertation, International Centre for Responsible Tourism, University of Greenwich

- iv op.cit. 143
- v Josephides N (2001) Ethics don't interest client *Travel Trade Gazette* 4 February 2001
- vi For examples of responsible tourism trips see www.responsibletravel.com