Best Practices in Sustainable Tourism

Two enterprising business owners share best practices that they follow in their sustainable tourism journey.
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ABOUT SOST
Spotlight on Sustainable Tourism (SOST) is a complimentary journal published by Market Vision, for internal circulation and to our clients.

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Welcome to the inaugural issue of Spotlight on Sustainable Tourism, a journal for stakeholders in the travel and tourism industry.

Our mission is to motivate stakeholders in the tourism industry to adopt sustainable business practices with the message that sustainable tourism is ‘Good for the Planet and Good for Business.

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries and a strong contributor to economic development and poverty alleviation. International tourism is forecast to reach 1.8 billion tourists by the year 2030, nearly double the current levels. In order to minimize the negative impacts of this growth, it is imperative that sustainability be at the top of the agenda for all tourism stakeholders.

There is a strong link between sustainability and commercial success. Our mission is to motivate stakeholders in the tourism industry to adopt sustainable business practices with the message that sustainable tourism is ‘Good for the Planet and Good For Business’. This journal will provide information, insights and analysis of global sustainable tourism trends. It will showcase destinations and travel companies that are making a conscious difference to the Planet with their sustainable business practices; practices that are impacting positively on the environment in which they operate and upon their business profitability. Our focus will be on destinations and travel businesses in emerging economies. We hope to inspire, educate and guide small, medium and large companies every step of the way on their journey towards responsible, sustainable and successful businesses.

In this first issue, we present to you two young entrepreneurs, Clemente Edmond in India and Prem Khatry in Nepal, who own and operate their respective tourism businesses in a responsible and exemplary manner. We hope you enjoy their stories.

We also interviewed Brian Mullis, an internationally recognized expert in sustainable tourism development and destination stewardship, who highlights the long term benefits for companies that embrace the concept of sustainable tourism.

We look forward to your comments and feedback on our inaugural issue. Let us know what else you would like to read about.

Happy Reading!

Kumud Sengupta
Managing Editor
Certified Assessor & Consultant for Sustainable Tourism
Founder-Director, Market Vision

Kumud Sengupta
Sustainable Tourism
- Not a Choice but an Imperative

When it comes to an industry that will host up to 1.8 billion tourists by 2030, sustainability must be the top priority for all tourism operators and stakeholders.

Sustainability is the capacity to endure. The word sustainability is derived from the Latin sustinere (tenere, to hold; sus, up). The most widely quoted definition of sustainable development is that of the Brundtland Commission of the United Nations on March 20, 1987: “sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

In the context of tourism, the World Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.”

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries and a strong contributor to sustainable development and poverty alleviation. As per the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) statistics, world tourism has grown from 528 million international tourist arrivals in 1995 to an estimated 980 million international tourist arrivals in 2011.

The tourism sector is directly responsible for over 5% of the world’s GDP, 6% of total exports and employment for one out of every 12 people in advanced and emerging economies alike.

The UNWTO forecasts 1.8 billion tourists by the year 2030. In order to minimize the negative impacts of this growth, sustainability must be at the top of the agenda for all tourism stakeholders. All sectors of the travel and tourism industry will need to work together along with governments and local communities, to factor in this growth in future policy and decision-making.

According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), responsible and effective management of the relationship between tourism and the environment is imperative for the development and long-term success of the travel and tourism industry; else, the
Sustainable Tourism Feature

The environmental footprint of travel and tourism activities may be detrimental to sustainable growth. Managing tourism responsibly will involve:

- Establishing partnerships at all levels of society – industry must join hands with governments, communities and other stakeholders to ensure a sustainable tourism product;
- Empowering local residents through consultation and participation so that sustainability strategies are accepted and upheld;
- Influencing consumers to effect change since they have an integral role to play in driving the demand for, and development of, sustainable tourism products;
- Creating the necessary policy framework to enable tourism and encourage it to thrive;
- Investing in technological systems and applications to encourage and promote sustainability – as well as incentivising industry to do so;
- Ensuring a level playing field free of restrictions to trade; and
- Consulting the industry in designing and developing environmental policy infrastructure which could potentially impact its livelihood.

Encouragingly, the momentum for sustainable tourism is gaining ground - travel industry suppliers are developing new green programs, and governments are creating new policies to encourage sustainable practices in tourism.

Expected uses of the GSTC criteria

→ Serve as basic guidelines for businesses of all sizes to become more sustainable, and help businesses choose sustainable tourism programs that fulfil these global criteria;
→ Serve as guidance for travel agencies in choosing suppliers and sustainable tourism programs;
→ Help consumers identify sound sustainable tourism programs and businesses;
→ Serve as a common denominator for information media to recognize sustainable tourism providers;
→ Help certification and other voluntary programs ensure that their standards meet a broadly-accepted baseline;
→ Offer governmental, non-governmental, and private sector programs a starting point for developing sustainable tourism requirements; and
→ Serve as basic guidelines for education and training bodies, such as hotel schools and universities.

Source: Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)

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Source: Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)

Encouragingly, the momentum for sustainable tourism is gaining ground - travel industry suppliers are developing new green programs, and governments are creating new policies to encourage sustainable practices in tourism. Yet, efforts need to be measured and credibly demonstrated, in order to build consumer confidence, promote efficiency, and fight false claims or green washing.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), a global initiative dedicated to promoting sustainable tourism practices around the world, represents a diverse and global membership – including UN agencies, leading travel companies, hotels, country tourism boards and tour operators.
The GSTC fosters sustainable tourism through the adoption of universal sustainable tourism principles; compiling, adapting and creating the tools and training to engage in sustainable tourism practices; and increasing the demand for sustainable tourism products and services.

The GSTC has developed a set of 37 Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria, the minimum requirements that any tourism business should aspire to reach in order to protect and sustain the world’s natural and cultural resources while ensuring tourism meets its potential as a tool for conservation and poverty alleviation.

These criteria are organized around the four pillars of sustainable tourism: effective sustainability planning; maximizing social and economic benefits to the local community; reduction of negative impacts to cultural heritage; and reduction of negative impacts on the environment.

Individual businesses such as hotels or tour operators must work with certification programs that are GSTC-Approved or Accredited or have developed a standard that has been recognized by the GSTC. So far, there are just eleven GSTC-Recognized Standards from around the world.

Sustainability is an ever-increasing concern in tourism. Various studies suggest that consumer demand for ethical, responsible and eco-friendly travel is on the rise. A seal of approval would inspire confidence among consumers.

Sustainability is an ever-increasing concern in tourism. Various studies suggest that consumer demand for ethical, responsible and eco-friendly travel is on the rise. A seal of approval would inspire confidence among consumers.

Bottom line:
Responsible management of tourism is an imperative for sustained growth—the travel and tourism industry needs to rise to the challenge and pro-actively adopt best practices to ensure the environmental footprint of travel and tourism activities is not detrimental to sustainable growth.

Source
1: http://www.un-documents.net/ocf-02.htm
2: World Travel & Tourism Council
Founder and CEO, Sustainable Travel International

Brian Mullis

Brian T. Mullis is an internationally recognized expert in sustainable tourism development and destination stewardship.

He is the Founder and CEO of Sustainable Travel International (STI), a leading non-profit organization, dedicated to delivering innovative solutions to sustainable tourism development and building effective partnerships that help destinations, businesses and travellers protect the environment, preserve cultural heritage and promote economic development.

STI has been at the forefront of the sustainable tourism certification movement since 2002. Its standards have been developed transparently in collaboration with the travel and tourism industry, and are recognized by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC).

In this interview, Brian Mullis speaks to SOST about the solutions STI offers industry stakeholders and highlights the long term benefits for companies that embrace the concept of sustainable tourism.

SOST: How do you define sustainable tourism? Is this the same as green tourism, eco-tourism and responsible tourism?

Brian Mullis: Sustainable tourism, green tourism, eco-tourism, and responsible tourism all mean virtually the same thing, a level of tourism activity that can be maintained over the long term because it results in a net benefit for the socio-cultural, economic, and natural environments of the area in which it takes place.

SOST: As the co-founder of Sustainable Travel International (STI), what do you believe sets STI apart from other organizations?

Brian Mullis: Sustainable Travel International’s (STI) solutions strengthen the positive impacts of tourism, with a clear focus on the bottom line. We are the only organization that specializes in connecting constituents across the value chain in order to effect change in the industry. As a result, we partner with destinations, multi-national corporations, and small to medium-sized businesses to advance their sustainability efforts. We also offer a suite of turnkey, next generation sustainability management and development tools that can be contextualized and replicated within businesses and destinations of all sizes.

The STI team utilizes the Sustainable Tourism Development Approach to foster industry relationships. This consultative and collaborative process is designed to ensure our destination and travel trade partners receive the tailored support they require, and develop the capacity to have a lasting impact on the communities and businesses they serve.

SOST: What, according to you, is the benefit to travel and tourism organizations for going in for sustainable tourism certification? Is this relevant for large enterprises or also for small and medium enterprises?
Brian Mullis: Well designed sustainable tourism certification programs are well suited to businesses of all sizes looking for tangible progress, ongoing learning, and true impact, rather than an easy checklist of best practices. Some of the benefits that businesses can expect to receive from the programs Sustainable Travel International (STI) designs for destinations and offers the travel trade include:

➜ **Bottom-Line Impacts:** STI’s programs include environmental, social and economic best practices to improve your bottom line and increase your market strength.

➜ **Green ROI:** Businesses that operate sustainably see cost savings due to resource efficiencies, reduction in energy usage, and improved supply chain and waste management.

➜ **Management Tools:** More than just a certification standard, STI’s programs are designed to be practical management tools to assess your operations, identify industry best practices, mitigate harmful and negative impacts, and emphasize positive returns.

➜ **Learn by Doing:** STI’s programs’ incremental and systems-based approach easily integrates with your existing business systems and focuses on engaging your audience, so that employees, guests, and communities can actively support your efforts to implement sustainability.

➜ **Consumer Trends:** Research suggests that more and more travellers are seeking sustainable providers. Travellers are savvy and do their research, often preferring businesses that demonstrate and verify their efforts through credible third-parties.

➜ **Designed for the Industry:** The standard was created by travel and tourism industry experts, with a clear understanding of what makes your business unique.

➜ **Simple to Use:** STI’s programs are user-friendly and easily integrate with your existing business systems.

**SOST:** According to you, which sectors or segments of the travel and tourism trade have most embraced the concept of sustainability?

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**Sustainable Tourism Education Program™ (STEP)**

Based on a comprehensive set of sustainability criteria and indicators, STEP is a suite of online tools that help businesses and destinations of all sizes manage their impacts and implement sustainable solutions for long-term success.

Created by Sustainable Travel International to conserve the travel industry’s vital assets, STEP is designed to address all aspects of tourism operations, but is particularly focused on improving business systems, greening workplace practices and cultivating strong relationships with the community.

Components include:

- ✔ education and training programs
- ✔ a self-assessment framework for measuring and benchmarking
- ✔ an independently-verified eco-certification process

The only global eco-certification program in the travel and tourism industry managed by a non-profit organization, STEP is recognized by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) and is quickly becoming the gold standard for the industry.
of sustainable tourism? What are the key challenges that organizations face in adopting sustainable tourism business practices? How can we motivate them?

Brian Mullis: STI has been a leader in sustainable tourism development since 2002. Over the course of the last decade we have seen industry leaders in all sectors of the travel and tourism industry actively embrace the concept of sustainable tourism. The leadership of these companies are more likely to be responsible for sustainability, and top executive incentives are more likely to be a function of sustainability metrics.

Research has found that these companies are more likely to engage stakeholders in the destinations they serve, be more long-term oriented, and exhibit more measurement and disclosure of non-financial information. They consistently outperform their counterparts over the long-term in terms of stock market and financial performance.

The outperformance is strong in the tourism sectors where customers are individual consumers (instead of companies), companies compete on the basis of brands and reputations, and products significantly depend upon the quality of the natural environment. The more other companies learn about the strength of the business case for sustainability, the more likely they are to embrace sustainable tourism practices. Failing to do so in many developed markets is resulting in a loss of market share, decrease in consumer confidence, increased risks and reduction in competitiveness.

SOST: From all the work that you do, which one stands out as the best example of a tourism destination that truly exemplifies sustainable tourism best practices? And why?

Brian Mullis: There are a number of destinations around the world that are taking a holistic approach to sustainable tourism development. Leadership understands the competitive advantage and is seeking out organizations like STI to help them integrate sustainability into their tourism master plans, adopt market-tested sustainable tourism management and policy frameworks, and take an integrated approach to marketing, product development and sustainable tourism development which are all interrelated. This is a cutting edge approach to destination management. Leading destinations include but are not limited to Bonaire, Botswana, Costa Rica, Galapagos, Montenegro, Namibia and Vermont.

SOST: What would you advise as the first step that travel and tourism stakeholders – destination management companies, hotels, resorts, travel agencies, tour operators, attractions, transport providers – should take towards their sustainable tourism journey?

Brian Mullis: To embrace the reality that sustainability is a journey not a destination. Tourism destinations and businesses that successfully integrate sustainable practices into their operational systems typically take an incremental, long-term approach, ramping up their initiatives as time and resources allow. Organizations like STI exist to make the journey as easy as possible.
Ace the Himalaya is a leading tour operator based in Kathmandu, Nepal, offering adventure holidays in the Himalayan region of Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet.

It was founded in 2007 by a young entrepreneur Prem K Khatry, after working as a freelance tour/trekking leader with different adventure companies for many years. ‘Our mission is to provide first class adventure tourism whilst generating a fairer income for the local community. We pride ourselves on our vast knowledge and network which allows us to focus on every detail of the traveller’s journey ensuring minimal impact on the environment and local people,’ says Prem. In this interview, he provides insights into best practices adopted by his company for sustainable tourism.

SOST: Ace the Himalaya provides adventure travellers holidays in the Himalayan region of Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet that are economically, socially and environmentally responsible. Could you enlighten our readers on what that means, and what sustainable tourism business practices you follow?

Prem Khatry: We are well aware of our Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and have integrated sustainable practices in our core business model. Our CSR policy functions as a built-in, self-regulating mechanism whereby we monitor and ensure that all our business practices are in adherence to the law, ethical standards and international norms, and of course, sustainability.

The sustainability of the tourism industry has increasingly depended on responsible tourism. Before the departure of our tours, we brief our environmental policies to our clients, as they are important elements of every Ace the Himalaya trip. We encourage programs and frequently participate in and/or initiate clean up campaigns to promote awareness as well as to maintain a clean and healthy living environment. Our dedication continues to source further ways in which we can conduct responsible tourism. We have a well defined environmental policy, a fair employment policy and a number of local community support initiatives.

SOST: What is your/your company’s prime motivation for adopting sustainable and responsible tourism practices?

Prem Khatry: With the increase in the number of tourists in Nepal, responsible tourism has become ever more imperative to sustain the growth of the industry. The lush natural beauty and the local communities are both facing increasing encroachment, which can be maintained only through responsible tourism, still a relatively new concept in Nepal.
In light of the environmental and socio-economic need for sustainability, Ace the Himalaya has taken a firm stand in how it operates its trips. By adopting these measures, we intend not merely to minimize the negative impacts, rather to contribute positively to the localities our trips operate in. Further, we hope to become an example for incumbent as well as emerging companies in the tourism industry in regards of sustainable and responsible tourism practices.

In essence, our motivation lies in our judgment that sustainable tourism yields immense mutual benefits for our company and the localities, in addition to the growth prospects of the tourism industry altogether.

SOST: Over the years you have also supported few social, environmental and developmental projects in Nepal. Tell us something about the Sambhav Nepal Foundation and about the Volunteering Opportunities at Ace the Himalaya that provide individuals with a chance to make a contribution for the sustainable development of Nepal.

Prem Khatry: Ace the Himalaya fully supports as well as works closely with the social organization Sambhav Nepal Foundation. On a yearly basis, a portion of the proceeds from our company’s revenue goes directly towards Sambhav’s projects, more specifically to cover the maintenance expenses of the state-run Bhairabi School, Dharapani School, Sitala School along with 3 other schools in the remote Arupokhari village, northern Gorkha, Nepal. As a travel and trekking company, Ace the Himalaya has designed several charity treks conducted throughout the year. The charity trek itinerary intends to combine adventure, philanthropy and a fight for a cause, providing the participants with lasting memories of the Himalayas while allowing them to contribute to a remote Nepalese community. From each charity trek, US$200 per person is donated to Sambhav. Additionally, we put a number of our interested clients in contact with Sambhav Nepal for volunteering as teachers in Dharapani and Bhairabi Schools.

As a responsible and sustainable tourism operator, Ace the Himalaya has launched the Child Education Sponsorship project in collaboration with Sambhav. The goal of this program is to provide school-level education to talented, poor, disabled, orphaned and conflict-affected children to empower them to attain a secure and healthy life and future.

SOST: What positive impact has being a sustainable tourism operator had on your business, your clientele and on your business profitability?

Prem Khatry: Our approach in adopting sustainable measures in our practices has certainly borne fruit. Every year, more and more clients email us asking how environmentally and socially sustainable we operate. We make sure that they are aware of and insist on abiding by our environmental guidelines. Needless to mention, our clients are very cooperative in such matters, and where doubtful our guides are always there to help our guests follow the guidelines. The clients who travel with Ace are also particularly interested in our CSR, and express their admiration towards Sambhav Nepal’s work. In fact, a majority of Sambhav’s donors and supporters are Ace’s clients. During the trip briefing and also after their trek, we give them detailed information about Sambhav Nepal. The clients are very supportive of our cause, and many offer to sponsor, donate and/or volunteer with Sambhav Nepal.

Indeed, the positive impact generated by the client’s support has encouraged us to take the volunteer trips one step further. Hence in early 2010, we initiated Volunteer Tourism with guided trips to remote villages where the volunteers teach in schools, provide medical assistance in health outposts or engage in community development activities.

Thus, we reckon that sustainable tourism that Ace follows bears manifold benefits: it has helped maintain the social and environmental integrity of the places we travel to; supported the social organization Sambhav Nepal by solidifying the network of volunteers, contributors and well-wishers; and finally, expanded Ace the Himalaya’s scope of operation and profitability.
SOST: From your experience in leading Ace the Himalaya and knowledge of the industry and customers, what trends do you see for the travel and tourism industry in the future? Is responsible tourism or sustainable tourism going to be more in demand by holiday goers?

Prem Khatry: Following the end of the country’s decade-long civil war, Nepal has again been a popular destination for adventure and cultural exploration. While there has been a sharp incline in the number of tourists, the sustainable trends have too grown enormously. More and more tourists want to embark on a journey that has as little an impact on the environment and the local economies as possible. In the past, the main concern of prospective clients was “Where I should go and how will I be treated?” Now they also ask “What difference can I make from this trip?” We do not believe this trend is merely a passing fad, but a permanent change in future market demands.

SOST: What are the long term benefits tour operators can expect from being involved in sustainable tourism? What message would you like to give them? What does it take to start on this journey?

We believe that businesses should embrace responsibility for more positive impact of their activities on the environment, consumers, employees, communities and all other members of the public sphere.
Prem Khatry: We believe that businesses should embrace responsibility for more positive impact of their activities on the environment, consumers, employees, communities, and all other members of the public sphere. Tour operators ought to deliberately include public interests into corporate decision-making in honouring the environment, the culture, and the community.

From our experience, we can confidently state that the profitability of a business and its contribution to the environment and the local communities are not mutually exclusive. In the beginning, the short-term benefits obtained through off-the-mill trip operations may seem enticing; nonetheless, businesses must understand that the long-run profit potential (individually for businesses and in aggregate for the industry) is exponentially higher with responsible tourism. We strongly recommend getting a head-start in sustainable tourism as early as possible – by integrating the idea in the core concept, values and strategy of the business. This not only puts the businesses in a better competitive position, but also helps gain recognition for the sustainable practices they champion.

SOST: Finally, what are your organization’s plans for the immediate future?
Prem Khatry: Our primary goal for 2012 is to operate trips at the lowest possible carbon footprint and with minimal human impact on the native lifestyles along the routes we tread. We intend to achieve this through systematically phasing in our
responsible tourism guidelines into policies besides taking direct actions (such as clean-up campaigns) and operating volunteer-tourism trips.

Our newly launched volunteer tourism tours, mainly in the villages that Sambhav Nepal is engaged in, have proven to be very popular. The volunteer trips are a melange of philanthropy and adventure, an opportunity for direct social action for the underprivileged. Mountain biking is another popular activity which has attracted immense interest from adventure lovers. Ace has only recently launched its mountain biking trips, which are also a campaign to encourage the locals to take up the activity as a recreation sport. Cycling, whether as a medium of commute or hobby, is not well respected by motorists in Nepal. Our mountain biking trips will definitely promote tourism in the country, and equally importantly, we hope they will advocate an eco-friendly mode of transportation.

While our trekking guides strictly ensure our guests practice responsible tourism, we are soon due to convert the guidelines into policies. Without a doubt, most of the clients are already aware of how fragile the ecosystem is and are hence mindful that each individual ought to act responsibly on the ground-level. Nonetheless, for an unlikely few this is difficult to explain to during the trip and the trip briefing. What we are now striving for is to achieve two interconnected objectives: (i) Attract only prospective clients who are well informed and agree with the idea of sustainable tourism; (ii) Through our clearly stated commitment towards sustainable tourism and the detailed reasoning thereof, we attempt to inform, convince and convert interested folks into responsible tourists!

Ace the Himalaya demonstrates compliance with a number of indicators under the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria

A Sustainability Management Plan, documentation of sustainability practices and evidence of performance measurement and tracking systems would be required in order to be certified as a GSTC-complaint sustainable tourism business
In the Spotlight

Dwarka
Eco-Resort, Goa, India

DWARKA is an eco cottage resort on an isolated beach in Goa, India.

It has ten all natural, rustic thatched cottages, complete with contemporary interiors, situated around a beautiful fresh water lagoon, each overlooking both the Arabian Sea and the lagoon, and nestled beneath the shade of hundreds of palm trees. These cottages are dismantled to the ground at the end of each season, and then re-built again every year, allowing the local environment to rejuvenate and restore its natural beauty before the next season.

Dwarka is managed by partners Arlene and Clemente Edmond.

In this interview, Clemente shares with us his inspiration behind setting up Dwarka and the sustainable tourism policies that govern the operations at this charming eco-resort.

SOST: You are the co-owner and operator of Dwarka Eco-resort. What made you enter ecotourism in the first place? What motivated you?

Clement Edmond: I was born in Goa and have lived here for the last 35 years. I have been witness to the destruction Goa has gone through in the name of tourism. In 2003, a trip to Bali in Indonesia showed me how tourism can flourish in an aesthetic, eco-friendly manner preserving the natural heritage of the place. That was my inspiration. Over the next two years, my partner and I conceived and designed Dwarka, as a small eco-resort totally one with nature. Our motivation was to preserve and nurture a small part of the natural beauty and heritage of our land. Dwarka was launched in November 2005.

SOST: What are the key features of your resort? What sustainable business practices do you follow?

Clement Edmond: Dwarka is in a remote location on an isolated beach in the south of Goa. We have ten all natural, rustic thatched cottages, complete with contemporary interiors, situated around a beautiful fresh water lagoon, each overlooking both the Arabian Sea and the lagoon, and nestled beneath the shade of hundreds of palm trees. As we are so close to the beach we are not allowed to build permanent structures. Hence, the entire resort including all the cottages, is dismantled to the ground at the end of each season, and then re-built again every year. It takes sixty days to construct the resort with the season lasting for about six months from first week of November until first week of May. This way, the local environment has a chance to rejuvenate and restore its natural beauty before the next season – ensuring the equilibrium between business and nature is kept in perfect harmony and balance. We have tried to keep Dwarka simple and eco friendly.

All our business practices are aimed to protect and enhance the environment and support community development. Being in a remote location where we do not have access to electricity, our resort and cottages are designed to make maximum use of natural sunlight during the day; we only use a generator set for electricity in the late evening and night – from 6 pm until 1 am.

We take actions to: conserve water, segregate and compost waste food, recycle wherever possible, source...
food locally, offer local employment, instruct staff in green practices, conserve/care for wildlife in our area and try and source local materials to support the local community. We use only firewood that has fallen from the coconut trees - no trees are cut for this purpose or for any other reason.

SOST: How does your resort contribute to the local community?

Clement Edmond: Almost 100% of our staff comes from the village near the resort. We use local carpenters, plumbers and electricians and source local materials for the construction and maintenance of the resort. We procure local produce (vegetables and fruits) as much as possible and also patronize the women’s co operative stall which sells a variety of vegetables. As we don’t have a fridge we cannot store any food for the next day and therefore we need to shop on a day to day basis. This means our guests get fresh, healthy and nutritious food every day.

SOST: In what way do you see your sustainable business practices contributing to your company’s business?

Clement Edmond: Our aim has always been to adopt responsible business practises that do not harm the environment that we operate in, and that contribute to generation of income for the betterment of the local population. Our measure of success is the goodwill we have among the local community and among our clientele. Most of our staff and suppliers have been with us since the beginning (when we first launched the resort). I would like to believe that our guests too can feel our genuineness and experience our sincere efforts in this direction. That is why they come back to us again and again. Most of our guests have been personally recommended.
SOST: From your experience in running Dwarka and knowledge of the industry and customers, what trends do you see for the travel and tourism industry in the future? Is responsible tourism or sustainable tourism going to be more in demand by holiday goers?

Clement Edmond: Our guests are mainly from the United Kingdom, Europe and some are from within India – the majority are seeking authentic experiences and are environmentally conscious travellers. As awareness for responsible and sustainable tourism increases, demand will certainly rise. Travellers will seek destinations and experiences that align with their personal ethos. Our experience suggests that eco-conscious travellers will become more demanding of real evidence of sustainable tourism practices claimed to be adopted by travel industry stakeholders. Hotels, resorts, tour operators and others in the tourism supply chain must genuinely cater to the needs of this growing customer segment.

SOST: Finally, what are your organization’s plans for the immediate future?

Clement Edmond: We are committed to our vision of practicing responsible tourism in all its facets. We have no immediate plans for expansion or to make any major changes to the resort; we will of course endeavour to meet our customers’ needs better.

SOST Assessment

- Dwarka demonstrates compliance with some indicators under the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria
- A Sustainability Management Plan, documentation of sustainability practices and evidence of performance measurement and tracking systems would be required in order to be certified as a GSTC-complaint sustainable tourism business

SOST Assessment is based on business owners’ responses (self-reporting) to a series of questions on sustainability policies and practices in line with GSTC-complaint criteria. It is undertaken by SOST’s Managing Editor – a certified auditor for sustainable tourism. It does not purport to be a ‘verified’ third-party assessment.
Business travel buyers slow to turn green

TWO-THIRDS OF business travel buyers are still not green, according to a survey by The Business Travel Show – one of Europe’s largest dedicated events for business travel professionals.

Of the 252 business travel buyers surveyed in November 2011, less than one third (32%) of buyers admitted to having a green buying policy in place.

Of the buyers who don’t have a policy, 28% claimed they were planning to look into the issue; 18% believe it’s not economically viable to be green in the current business climate; and for 54%, a green buying policy was not a priority.

Source: The Business Travel Show Survey

28% of business travel buyers claimed they were planning to look into having a green buying policy in place.

32% of business travel buyers admitted to having a green buying policy in place.

18% believe it’s not economically viable to be green in the current business climate.
GCC travellers willing to patronise responsible travel companies

In a first study of its kind, Market Vision (publisher of SOST) surveyed 340 travellers across the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries – Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman on the impact of sustainable business practices by travel companies on travellers’ choice of a travel service provider.

Annually, over 20 million outbound trips are made by GCC travellers to overseas destinations, over one-half of which are researched online. The survey aimed to determine the extent to which demonstration and promotion of sustainability initiatives by travel companies can impact customer choice behaviour.

The results suggest that, all else being equal, about one-third (32%) of travellers would be inclined to patronize a travel company whose sustainability credentials are easily visible while nearly one-half (49%) would be inclined to go with a travel company whose sustainability credentials are easily visible and are endorsed by a credible third party assessor. 19% of the travellers claim they would not care.

The survey was conducted online among 18-45 years old male and female residents of the GCC, with at least two trips abroad per year. For further details on the findings of the survey, get in touch with Market Vision (enquiries@market-vision.com)
Are tourists willing to pay more for sustainable tourism? - A Choice Experiment in Switzerland

ACCORDING TO a research study undertaken by the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Switzerland, holidaymakers are willing to pay a small premium for the inclusion of specific sustainability-related attributes such as the use of local products, environmental management (energy, water and waste), working conditions and CO2-compensation when choosing a holiday. The results are based on an online survey among 2,348 customers of Swiss tour operators Kuoni and Helvetic Tours. The survey revealed that while environmental measures, fair working conditions, local products and CO2 compensation are deemed important by 35%, 30%, 22% and 10% of the respondents respectively, they are only willing to pay a premium of 1.43% for the inclusion of all attributes considered in the survey. Thus, a gap between thinking and acting can be observed in the outcome of the choice experiment. Price was the biggest consideration for those planning a holiday, and there is limited potential to substantially increase prices due to the inclusion of a specific aspect of sustainable tourism in a product.

However, two fixed choice tasks were proposed to all respondents in order to concretely observe if tourists are willing to buy a specific product. In both choice sets, a variant with all attributes on the unsustainable level is compared with a more sustainable product. In the first case, the more sustainable product included CO2-compensation and the use of local product and building materials, and in the second case, the levels of all attributes were set on the most sustainable value. The fully sustainable product was clearly preferred to the basic product. 85% chose the perfect sustainable product compared to the basic product. This indicates that people have a strong preference for a completely perfect sustainable product and that in this case, their price sensitivity might be lower.

Importance (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Importance (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>3.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO2 compensation</td>
<td>9.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local products</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental management</td>
<td>35.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair working conditions</td>
<td>29.70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source
SUSTAINABLE TOURISM development embraces the triple bottom line of environmental protection, social responsibility, and economic health. Simply put, business practices that protect and enhance the environment and support community development are more profitable and competitive in the long-term.

Market Vision, along with its strategic partners, provides strategic planning, technical assistance, and implementation support to destination management companies and travel and tourism businesses of all sizes.

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Our tourism & hospitality consultants & associate global partners have in-depth experience in various aspects of tourism development, developed over decades of professional work experience in the industry.

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If you wish to contribute an article or a research paper in SOST, or would like to share your feedback on SOST, write to: SOST.ed@market-vision.com

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