GOING GREEN: CONSCIENCE, NOT CAMPAIGNS

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GOING GREEN - COMMITTING BEYOND THE COLOUR

Since the turn of the century the colour green has taken on a whole new meaning. Many years before '*Going Green*' first became a familiar expression, effectively back in the 1980s and 1990s, the colour green was a reflection of the choice to be a part of niche culture, one which actively supported a more eco-friendly way of life. 'Green' implied greater natural texture of life, more awareness and sensitivity to the impact of one's lifestyle choices. The concept of being 'Green' touched the spirits and lifestyles of those who sought to live on Earth in a more earthy way. And when traveling, journeys were to places less known, less accessible, more at risk of extinction, more open to learning about the value of living. It was a statement, one which progressed to even becoming a fashion statement.

The arrival of the year 2000 brought with it a profound shift in how the world understood its connections. And then in 2006, with the growth in global awareness of a truly inconvenient truth, a green wave of consciousness spread across the globe.

Since then the concept of 'Green' has evolved from being about *fashionability* to being about *responsibility*. More and more the colour green has spread, from products and packaging to attitudes and actions.

Slowly, scientifically and sincerely awareness and acceptance of the impact of each and every individual on the world has been occurring. Today the colour green has soaked into hearts and minds of people across all countries, all cultures, and all sensibilities. The need to do things right to be able to do the right thing has gone mainstream. Thankfully.

This is especially true within the global Travel & Tourism (T&T) community, which is committed to showcasing the beauty of the world through all that

nature, culture and spirit has to offer. For years, the T&T community has recognised the importance of treading lightly across the world's array of destinations, leaving only footprints. The dramatic growth of the T&T sector has however, caused a clash of colour. As hundreds of millions of travellers cross borders each year the temptation for increased amounts of bankable green – revenues generated from visitor receipts - can lead to decision making around sector development which decreases amounts of natural green. Yet the number of green tourism campaigns increases, some genuine, some simply green-washing, all impacting Brand and sector credibility.

Before jumping into the green Pantone colours and promotions it is critical for Tourism government bodies and businesses to take a close look at what exactly `G*oing Green´* means for the destination strategically, philosophically, operationally and economically… not just creatively.

And also how genuine are their intentions and commitment to its long-term growth.

CREATING A GREEN TOURISM DESTINATION

The breadth and depth of opportunity for a destination to establish green credentials is immense, and continues to grow. There are a number of ways in which a destination can work with the environment to create a unique, compelling, and competitive destination.

To name a few:

- ECO-TOURISM:

One of the most popular approaches to 'Going Green' eco-tourism (as a globally recognized and celebrated niche offering) puts engaging with the natural environment of the destination at the centre of the offering. Destinations which take pride in their abundant wildlife, flora and fauna have successfully created traveler experiences which make it possible to be immersed in and involved with nature as a tourism attraction which can be seen, felt and even contributed to.

In addition, eco-tourism destinations offer the benefit of an enhanced sense of wellness from being in such a 'pure' environment (even if sophisticated in design, ie: *Six Senses Wellness Resorts*) with opportunity to partake in excursions focused on being at one with nature.

- ECO-FRIENDLY:

Destinations which define themselves as 'G*oing Green'* from an *eco-friendly* perspective openly and voluntarily adopt and express environmentally friendly practices which, while seemingly small, can in fact make a big difference when added up. The desire to be considerate of the impact of the industry (or parts of it) on the environment are there, with efforts made to do the little things which are simply the right thing to do. Eco-friendly efforts include basic environmentally considerate changes to existing infrastructure, i.e. frequency of linen washing, keypads in hotel rooms to turn on/off power mains, increased air conditioner temperatures in large spaces, replacement of traditional light bulb to energy saving bulbs, selective recycling efforts (like grey water). Interestingly, destinations venturing into these even incremental practices will notice a positive impact on the bottom line.

- ECO-POLICIES:

Getting more serious about the impact which the industry has on the environment, enforcement of eco-policies by governments and tourism corporations reflects the fundamental philosophy held by leaders of a destination and tourism business towards energy conservation and environmental responsibility. Enforcement of policy removes the window of choice for members of the Tourism community, making changes to existing and future tourism products and services – changes to increase energy efficiency and/or reduce wastage of resources - a must.

These policies do not apply purely to destinations which exist within locations surrounded by greenery and teeming with wildlife. Even the most built-up, uber-urban, heavily-populated areas which could be described more as concrete jungles than even garden cities can successfully impose and activate green policies and incentives. Macau, as an example, has put in place a green hotel awards programme for international developers of resorts and casinos scrambling to get a piece of the action and place a bet on tourism growth in the new Asian tourism hot spot. The initiative by Macau's Environment Council (now Environmental Protection Bureau), which was introduced in 2007, drives across the industry the importance of environmental management in the hotel sector while giving high-profile, highly-respected recognition to those hotels mobilising environmentally sound management policies.

- ECO-ENGINEERED:

  Linked to the above, eco-engineering is the adoption of new generation technology and practices into new tourism products, services and developments, effectively making obsolete old, less energy-efficient methods. This increasing sensitivity to the design and development of tourism industry assets, particularly major structures such as airports, retail centres, theatres, hotels and conference centres, can have a dramatic effect on the impact which the industry has on the environment, both visibly and invisibly.

  The following eco-engineering concepts are just a few of the energy-smart and environmentally sensitive techniques increasingly being built into new T&T infrastructure:

  o Water heating: heat recovered from the hotel's air-conditioning system used to warm water for swimming pools; solar panels for water used in hotels and spas;

  o Temperature Control: solar glazing in windows and doors assists in maintaining constant interior temperatures;

  o Lighting: energy efficient lights and lamps; movement sensors for after-hour lighting in common areas and underground parking; keycard room power control;

  o Air conditioning: sensors automatically switch off air-conditioning in the bedrooms when doors to balconies or terraces are opened;

  o Irrigation: rainwater is directed off the roofs via an extensive underground pipe network to a large storage tank for use in the gardens;

Interestingly, initial investment into green design often proves to be a valuable revenue protector as operating costs can be dramatically reduced.

The *green economy* is a reality, a much needed and a deeply meaningful one. Taking into account the above possible approaches to 'Going Green', and many others which exist, tourism industry leaders within both the public and private

sector need to look closely at how they plan to, and often must, incorporate 'G*oing Green'* into their tourism growth strategy, ethos, Brand and business models. Form follows function. Function follows philosophy.

TAKING A CONSCIOUS APPROACH

To be truly green is not about posting messages to reuse hotel towels and making corporate statements about being enviro-conscious. It is about making a commitment to making a positive difference by letting one's conscience guide every moment in decision-making when delivering and further developing the traveler experience.

Green consciousness is a compass for waste and risk detection, opportunity and responsibility. Ultimately 'Going Green' is not only good for the environment, it is good for the Brand and good for business.

Commitment to green within the T&T sector goes far deeper than commitment to a colour and a campaign. It is a commitment to responsible leadership of the growth and development of the destination and the global T&T sector – *environmentally, socially, culturally, and economically* – naturally.

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