

ARTICLE #3 : SUSTAINABLE TOURISM – PROTECTING THE PRINCIPLE

Sustainable tourism - two words that have become the foundation of destination development. Two words which demonstrate a destination's understanding and maturity when it comes to growth through tourism. Two words which deserve immense credit for bringing credibility and responsibility to a sector once seen as glamorous, hedonistic and potentially damaging to the environment and people which they showcase.

The term *Sustainable Tourism* has, however, become so widely used today that, sadly, it has become a cliché. At this precise moment keying the words 'sustainable tourism' into GOOGLE yields over 1.4 million search results. Policy makers and journalists alike can be forgiven for writing about the industry and, during the editing process, liberally inserting the adjective *sustainable* before the noun *Tourism* as often as it may appear. With its importance, the concept of 'sustainability' in tourism has become omnipresent. With its omnipresence, however, it has become overtraded. And with its being overtraded, its original meaning and purpose has been lost.

But before we move onto the next fashionable, soon-to-be clichéd terminology we owe it to ourselves, to our Tourism industry, to pause and look closer at those words to understand what it is, exactly, we mean when we speak of *sustainable tourism*.

On the surface, *sustainable tourism* can be understood to refer quite simply to the ability of a destination to hold tourism demand (ie traveller interest, arrivals and spend) in the competitive global tourism marketplace as a prelude to protecting revenues generated by the tourism industry.

But if we look beyond the headlines, the bottom lines and the standard party lines, we find what is so truly remarkable about the impact of Tourism and why the word 'sustainable' becomes so important.

CELEBRATING IMPACT

The Tourism sector has become appreciated and respected globally for the very real, very rich impact it has on people, places and spaces around the world. From Mumbai to Montenegro, Munich to the Maldives, Montreal to Macau, Tourism has become an important source of identity, revenues and employment for destinations. With almost a billion people traveling each year the Tourism sector is credited by leading international Tourism authorities including the UNWTO for generating over US\$ 1 trillion per annum in direct revenues and the stimulation of 10% of global employment. The Tourism sector inspires investment into, and the development of, essential infrastructure, both general and sector specific. And of critical importance, with minds and markets opening up across the globe, Tourism has become a powerful driver of global understanding, respect, harmony, and of course, commerce. By any definition this is sustainability.

With Tourism yielding all of these distinct and essential benefits it is understandable why the sector is generating such excitement. Tourism destinations, both those new to enter onto the global tourism stage and those already well established on same, look to the sector as a solid, highly valuable and deeply meaningful way of developing the economy of the destination.

These benefits can make it tempting for governments to throw open the doors to Tourism, reaping as many of the rewards of the sector as soon and as long as possible.

Because of these temptations understanding the concept of *sustainability* becomes critical to Tourism.

INSULATION FOR THE DESTINATION

As much as Tourism can bring prosperity, purpose and pride to a destination, so too can it take these benefits away.

With increases in arrivals of leisure and business travellers to a destination, Tourism has the potential to cause damage to a destination's value and values system as a result of, inter alia,:

- Over-use of infrastructure without re-investment back into maintenance and renewal critical to the 'engineering' of the destination
- Excessive exposure of natural elements and attractions causing erosion and/or eradication of the environment and ecosystems unique to the destination
- Forfeiting of cultural codes and / or principles for the sake of tourist comfort, tourism-generated money and destination competitiveness, ultimately creating a local tourism culture based on short-term personal gains and greed.
- Creation and magnification of seasonal peaks and troughs in tourism industry activity, causing destabilisation in the sector's contribution to the economy and employment.

With these risks in mind, governments and private entities are realizing the importance of adoption of an approach to tourism growth which ensures long-term destination development grounded in:

1. **RESPONSIBILITY:** encouraging and stimulating tourism growth in a way which builds the industry for the enduring benefit of the destination as a whole – its product, its people, its proposition and its profile.
2. **ACCOUNTABILITY:** absolute respect for, and ownership of, the impact of the sector on the destination at economic and social levels
3. **LEGACY:** maximising Tourism sector opportunity today for the long-term benefit of the destination, its stakeholders and its visitors

AREAS OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Ultimately *SUSTAINABLE TOURISM* is a reflection of *measurable* approach to sector growth and development which focuses and invests directly in ensuring on-going strengthening of the following core elements of the destination, namely:

- ESSENCE: the core proposition which uniquely, competitively and proudly defines the destination as a Brand and experience
- EARNINGS: revenues and investment generated directly and indirectly from tourism activity
- ECONOMY: inter-related, inter-dependent sectors which work together to service and support the Tourism industry
- EMPLOYMENT: on-going, year-round job creation of the sector
- ENVIRONMENT: safety, stability and survival of the natural surroundings of the destination
- ECO-SYSTEMS: natural eco-systems which inhabit the destination's land, aqua and air environments.
- EQUITY: the sense of value and worth of the destination, financially and emotionally.

The concept of SUSTAINABILITY is fundamentally important to the long-term viability, credibility, authenticity and productivity of the Tourism sector. As leaders of the Tourism sector it is our responsibility to ensure that the richness and rightness of the term is not diminished by the cliché of its application.

- ENDS -