

*Infusing Your African Travel Business with “Green”
Four Steps to Becoming an EcoTourism Expert :: White Paper
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EcoTourism: A Major Issue... and Growing.

Ecotourism is a growing trend, a growing issue, and a growing industry. According to The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), ecotourism can be defined as, “responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment and improves the well-being of local people.” Back in 1990, it was written that ecotourism, then an offshoot of the adventure travel industry, was “the latest buzzword in organized travel.” Today, ecotourism is something that involves ALL sectors of the travel industry and is big business. TIES reports, that since 1990 the ecotourism industry has been growing between 20% and 34% annually, and in 2004 ecotourism grew three times faster worldwide than the tourism industry as a whole.

Today, traveling consumers are aware of responsible travel opportunities and are in fact *demanding* these travel experiences from their travel providers. According to TIES:

- 66% of the U.S. adult population is interested in environmentally responsible travel.
- About 2.4 million Americans are “ecotourists”, representing a \$77 billion market.
- 55.1 million U.S. travelers are “geotourists” (interested in nature, culture and heritage tourism).
- Ecotourism is projected to be the fastest-growing segment of the tourism industry over the next 20 years.

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“We’re seeing a significant rise in consumer support of green efforts and companies that support them, with Travel Industry Association (TIA) showing 83 percent of US travelers are inclined to support green travel companies, and 24 percent of travelers said they were interested in taking a volunteer or service-based vacation,” Travelocity Public Relations vice president Dan Toporek recently was quoted saying. A Travelocity annual poll also found that 11 percent of the respondents plan to volunteer during their vacation in 2007, up from last year’s 6 percent, furthering support of the trend for responsible travel. In response, Travelocity recently launched a program called “Travel for Good” where they are giving away “grants” to voluntourists for grand travel plans.

There is an opportunity, and a responsibility, for travel companies large and small to incorporate “green” ideals into your travel business model. Especially when it comes to travel to Africa, this is a trend that can not be ignored.

EcoTourism is *Environmental* and *Community* Responsibility Combined

By definition, ecotourism combines environmental conservation with actively improving the well-being of local communities.

Global warming and climate change have increasingly become issues of critical importance and concern in the travel industry. Climate change in the environment is likely to induce a major change in the structure of the travel and tourism industry over the next century. Signs of a changing climate in Africa have already emerged, including melting glaciers in the mountains, warming temperatures in drought-prone areas, and sea-level rise and coral bleaching along the coastlines. Environmental conservation is key to the preservation of Africa and the African tourism industry.

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The second component of ecotourism as defined above is the “well being of local people”. Community-based conservation programs and authentic cultural interaction programs are growing in popularity and accessibility as well. Economic benefits, including national park entry fees, various licenses and concessions, often generate substantial funds to support conservation and management of the world’s fragile, natural environments.

In a number of African countries, tourist expenditures on lodging, transportation, food, guides, and handicrafts is an important source of income for local communities. When the local people understand the value of tourism, they are more likely to help conserve their natural surroundings and the wildlife to help ensure the tourism industry remains strong. So, primarily to help foster wildlife and environmental conservation, Africa’s local communities were brought into the tourism industry. It’s only in recent years that tourists and operators have ascribed a different and important role to local communities in tourism, one based on both their right to benefit from tourism and the priceless value for travelers to interact with people and cultures. This has been key in enabling ecotourism to help reconcile people and wildlife in their competing claims for land across the African continent.

How Does This Trend Impact Your African Travel Business?

You’d have to be hiding under a rock to not know that global warming and other environmental issues are of great concern to the general population today and that these issues are even *more* critical in the African travel industry than ever before, as outlined above.

A recent article titled “Discover Gold by Going Green” in *TravelAgent* magazine highlighted how travel agents are adapting their businesses and profiting from the ecotourism boom. The article states that oftentimes clients are not directly looking for an “eco-experience”, but when the options are presented to them, they get excited about the idea of ecotourism and are glad to have the opportunity to *do something*. Additionally, clients are willing to pay a little more for these types of trips, not just because of their eco-friendly nature, but due to the smaller size and more “hands on” nature of these tours. Travelers are open to environmentally and culturally responsible travel now more than ever before, and if you ignore this trend you are surely missing out on a great opportunity to grow and specialize the focus of your travel business.

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The media is also helping to bring this issue into light among your clients and potential clients. *National Geographic* houses a “center for sustainable destinations” that works to protect all the world’s distinctive places through wisely managed tourism and enlightened destination stewardship. Additionally, *Conde Nast Traveler* has their annual “Green List”, now in its 13th year. Last year’s article starts with this testament to “green” travel;

“The Green movement has arrived. Want proof? Americans buy organic, locally grown produce. We buy hybrids. We spend \$10 to watch not a Hollywood superhero but a politician with a PowerPoint presentation. And travelers are increasingly looking for ways to keep the earth and it’s occupants in mind; more than 75% of *Conde Nast Traveler* readers recently surveyed deemed it important for hotels near impoverished areas to help local people obtain education, clean water, food and health care.”

If we in the African travel industry don't do something about protecting these fragile ecosystems and local communities, there will be no African travel industry left.

Specifically when it comes to African travel, there is both great need as well as great opportunity to enhance ecotourism-focused product development and support. The majority of the African travel industry is focused on wildlife and cultural interaction. If we in the African travel industry don't do something about protecting these fragile ecosystems and local communities, there will be no African travel industry left. It is now our responsibility to bring these issues to the forefront of our business dialogue and make sure traveling consumers are aware of the same.

Is your business doing what it takes to support ecotourism and green travel initiatives? Are you prepared to enter into this dialogue with today's travelers? Where is your niche in this growing segment of the industry and how can you get involved?

The Million Dollar Question; How Can My African Travel Company Incorporate “Green” Into our Business Model?

In the Adventure Travel Trade Association's (ATTA) 2006 membership survey, the majority of members (41%) described their view of sustainability programs as “critical and makes sense for our business (saves money, allows premium prices, etc.)”. Additionally:

- 20% indicated “we do it but the cost/benefit balance is not clear.”
- 16% of respondents view sustainability programs as “critical but costly – worth doing for ethical/moral reasons.”

Currently 46% of ATTA members offer a “customer program focused on sustainability.” Surely each of these programs are as different as the next, but nearly half of the ATTA members are dedicated to supporting the environments in which they do business and are offering their customers a way to get involved.

Ultimately the choice is yours and is best based on thorough questioning of a potential “eco-supplier”, and a healthy dose of instinct.

Primarily, you can make a conscious decision to work with companies who follow a philosophy of ecotourism. There are many suppliers out there who offer environmentally- and socially-responsible travel products. But how can you tell when you're working with a legitimate “green” supplier? Ultimately the choice is yours and is best based on thorough questioning of a potential “eco-supplier”, and a healthy dose of instinct. Without doubt this can uncover some of Africa's best travel experiences for your clients.

Four Critical Things You Can Do To Get Started “Greening” Your African Travel Business...

One: Offer Carbon Offsets

Offer your clients “carbon offset” on their next trip. Sustainable Travel International (www.sustainabletravelinternational.org) sells opportunities for your clients to “offset their carbon emissions” on every trip they take by purchasing credits that work to replace traditional sources of fuel used for energy including coal, oil and natural gas, with clean and renewable sources like wind and solar power. Long haul air travel is one of the worst contributors to global warming. “With the remote nature of many ecotourism destinations, we realize that ecotourism

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consumers are using significant amounts of carbon fuels to get to the destinations that they cherish. As a business community, we must address this," said Dr. Strasdas, author of "Global Warming, Ecotourism and Sustainable Transportation" recently.

The price of these carbon offsets depends on a number of variables. Carbon calculators for air travel, for example, determine the average quantity of greenhouse gases that are emitted per passenger. For example, a round-trip flight from Denver, CO to Nairobi, Kenya emits 5.42 tons of CO₂ per passenger. That passenger can purchase offset credits for this amount of CO₂ for \$82.66. These funds are then invested in renewable energy and energy efficiency projects in developing countries.

Two: Create an “Ecotourism Policy”

Create an “ecotourism policy” and only work with suppliers who have similar policies in place. Are your supplier partners committed to reducing waste and water use, and to minimizing damage to wildlife and marine environments? Do they use local staff and, wherever possible, locally sourced produce? Do they pay fair wages to their local staff? Get your thoughts on these issues down in writing and promote this policy on your web site and other marketing collateral. Your clients will appreciate that you’ve taken the time to think about this important issue and are selective about the companies with which you will work.

Three: Promote Specific Ecotourism Product

Develop one or two set itineraries a year that highlight what you would consider to be the “best of the best” ecotourism programs and a real opportunity for your clients to experience African conservation at it’s best. This will call attention to your services as an African travel expert. You may even want to consider leading these groups as well. Taking the time to educate yourself about ecotourism product in Africa simply adds one more reason why your clients will consider you a trusted advisor when it comes to travel.

Four: Become Certified and Network in the Ecotourism Industry

Explore opportunities to become “certified” as an ecotourism professional or attend conferences and events where the topic is focused on ecotourism. As with any industry certification or membership, these can and should be effectively incorporated into your marketing and promotional materials. By networking in this industry you will uncover even more ways to set yourself up as an ecotourism professional and grow your own expertise in this area.

Some good places to start:

The International EcoTourism Society (TIES, www.ecotourism.org): TIES is a global network of industry practitioners, institutions and individuals helping to integrate environmentally and socially responsible principles into practice. In May 2007 the organization will be holding their Global Ecotourism Conference in Norway. Membership is affordable, starting at just \$75 per year for travel professionals.

Tour Operators Initiative for Sustainable Tourism Development (www.toinitiative.org): This organization, a United Nations program to help integrate sustainability into tourism businesses globally, provides a “how to” manual that helps tour operators respond to international policies and conduct tours that minimize negative impacts and optimize benefits. While this document is crafted for tour operators, but even small companies can learn something from this, Definitely a great resource!



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Explore Destination-specific Ecotourism Organizations, such as Ecotourism Kenya (www.ecotourismkenya.org): Ecotourism Kenya is a civil society organization that was founded in 1996 to promote ecotourism and sustainable tourism practices in Kenya. Founded with enormous industry support, the society was charged with the responsibility of providing the required support for the development of ecotourism and sustainable tourism in the country. Affiliating yourself with such organizations across the African continent will help you stay abreast of all the developments of African ecotourism products and trends.

Conclusion:

Overall, work to become a specialist and trusted source of information on ecotourism for your clients. Take value in your knowledge and education in this ever-expanding segment of the African travel industry and actively promote this throughout your marketing communications. Strive to become a leader in this regard and watch your business flourish!

About Sarah Fazendin

As president of The Fazendin Portfolio, LLC, Sarah works exclusively with African travel companies to provide cost-effective integrated marketing communications solutions. This innovative portfolio also provides the travel agent community an opportunity to develop strong local partnerships with Africa-based companies that foster their individual success in selling travel to Africa.

Formerly, Sarah managed North American marketing communications for the Kenya Tourist Board. Given this high-profile industry experience, she understands the needs of African travel companies, the demands of American travelers, and how to most effectively partner with the local travel trade and media. During her tenure as North American Marketing Manger for the Kenya Tourist Board, Sarah led a team that overcame significant challenges including a U.S. government travel advisory to deliver one of Kenya’s best years on record in 2005. Additionally, in January of 2006 Sarah and her team were awarded an HSMAI Adrian Award for her Kenya Tourist Board’s consumer advertising campaign.

Active in her community, Sarah is a member of the Colorado Women’s Chamber of Commerce, the local board of the Rocky Mountain Association for the Promotion of Travel to Africa (APTA) chapter and sits on the executive board of Just GO! Global. She is also dedicated to her profession as a member of the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA), the International EcoTourism Society (TIES) and the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). Sarah is a guest lecturer for the Hospitality, Meeting and Travel Administration undergraduate program at Metropolitan State College of Denver and sits on their Curriculum Advisory Board.

About The Fazendin Portfolio, LLC

The Fazendin Portfolio, LLC partners with African travel companies to present classic African experiences to the American market. This unique approach to in-market representation includes fully integrated, cost effective marketing, public relations and sales programs to reach consumers, the travel trade and the media. The Fazendin Portfolio, LLC strives to provide representation services that not only drive sales and stimulate bottom-line growth, but work to create a strong brand image and positive awareness in the U.S. market effectively going beyond traditional travel-industry representation services and serving as a valued business partner..

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