

## **No. 8: Making Responsible Travel a Marketing Feature and a Business Plus**

**In essence:** Some companies invest in responsible and pro-poor behaviour without making it a marketing point. Others incorporate it into their marketing material in a wide variety of ways, so as to inform their potential clients and attract the interest of those who value responsible business practise. This brief demonstrates the different ways in which companies can market themselves using responsible tourism as a unique selling point.

Many companies invest in responsible and pro-poor tourism behaviour: the question is how do they inform clients of this and in what way do they, or can they, make it a marketing plus? There are many different examples and approaches; this brief highlights just a few.

### **Promotion of Good Practice by the Individual Company**

#### **1) Brochures**

The use of brochures and printed material is one of the most effective and widely used means of marketing tourism operations and establishments. Consequently, a significant portion of most companies marketing budgets is often allocated to brochures. A great deal of planning goes into brochures, and as a result, their credibility is often far higher than a value based statement on a web site. In general, brochures are replaced and revised on an annual basis and attempt to provide as much information about the establishment, tour or destination as is possible. It is key that from one year to the next this marketing does not lose its effectiveness, and as a result, companies are continually attempting to identify new unique selling points. Therefore the inclusion of information on a company's involvement in pro-poor tourism initiatives can make a vital contribution to the overall message and effectiveness of a brochure.

Larger companies, with larger marketing budgets, may even produce a separate brochure highlighting their specific social and environmental programmes and present this in a slightly different manner to the main, or core brand. They are often very useful in articulating the actual efforts an establishment has made. One such example is the Southern African based company Wilderness Safaris who have produced a brochure titled 'A Partnership Beyond Parks and People'. This brochure specifically details Wilderness's work in promoting community partnerships in Maputaland, South Africa, and also contains a donation form which allows guests to support the initiatives.

#### **2) Websites**

While the internet is not used as the primary marketing tool by the majority of operators, as the number of people researching and booking holidays over the internet grows, websites will be increasingly used as a powerful marketing tool. This is likely to be particularly true for small and specialist operators, who can use the internet as a (relatively) cheap and simple tool for reaching potential clients. As with brochures, inclusion of material on pro-poor and responsible activities can act as a unique selling point.

Two companies which exemplify the strong marketing use of 'responsible tourism' activities are the UK-based operator Exodus and Africa-based Conservation Corporation Africa. Exodus dedicates several pages to responsible tourism, including their Responsible Tourism Policy, listings of projects they are involved in, general and specific guidelines for responsible travel, information about carbon balancing, as well as providing links to organisations involved in responsible tourism ([www.exodus.co.uk/restourism.html](http://www.exodus.co.uk/restourism.html)). Conservation Corporation Africa outline on their website their vision for tourism in Africa to go hand in hand with care of the land, wildlife and people. The website provides a comprehensive list of activities they are engaged with ([www.ccafrica.com/vision/cca\\_vision.asp](http://www.ccafrica.com/vision/cca_vision.asp)).

### **3) Direct information to visitors**

Companies can provide information directly to guests during their visit. For example, information about a company's pro-poor and responsible activities can be displayed in rooms, on notice boards and in other appropriate areas. There is a range of material that an establishment may choose to display including the company's own marketing material, materials of partner organisations or material aimed at informing and educating guests.

General marketing material is designed to promote both the responsible initiatives and the tourism establishment. This may be in printed form or through, for example, on-screen information and promotional videos in rooms. A similar example of this is the screening of videos by British Airways during flights to encourage passengers to donate spare change for the UNICEF 'Change for Good' campaign ([www.unicef.org.uk/oldcurrency/index.asp](http://www.unicef.org.uk/oldcurrency/index.asp)).

Materials from partner organisations may include brochures with funding appeals for a charitable project, or a brochure of a small enterprise offering tourist services. For example, brochures of the local baby-sitting enterprise are placed in rooms at Sun City, in South Africa. This approach allows partner organisations to present their 'story' in a way that is not influenced by the company.

Educationally orientated material often simply informs guests about best practise and how to act responsible in specific destinations (for example notices in bathrooms advising guests to use water sparingly) and does not directly promote the establishment. However, it can potentially communicate a very strong message.

## **Promotion of Good Practice via Wider Networks**

### **4) information to tour operators**

As with most of the above, the information that is placed in the public domain is similar to that which is provided to the tour operators. The main difference in this regard is the fact that often, establishments and operators from similar value sets collaborate, particularly in the case of smaller operators, and collectively market a package or set of products. Here the matching of the values is key to the integrity of both operations. For the tour operators to be able to pass the information on to their guests, it is important that they also understand how the responsible actions enhance the guests' experience, for example, by ensuring a friendly welcome or offering unique products.

### **5) Accreditation and Certification**

Voluntary accreditation and certification schemes began appearing on the international tourism market in the early 1990's. They provide a tool by which a company with good social and environmental practises can be visibly identified and differentiated from other operators with less responsible operations. There are now a huge variety of certification and accreditation schemes; the examples below provide one example of an accreditation scheme (AITO) and one example of an independent certification programme (Fair Trade in Tourism).

#### ***AITO – accreditation of small UK operators***

AITO (The Association of Independent Tour Operators) represents around 160 UK based specialist tour operators. As a pre-condition of membership, companies must sign up to AITO's [Responsible Tourism Guidelines](#). These guidelines cover general good practice from UK office, through sales, marketing and pre-departure information to overseas destinations. Companies are also able to progress voluntarily and at their own pace to two higher stages of responsible tourism, for which they receive additional AITO star ratings. By undertaking an environmental review and establishing a comprehensive RT policy they can qualify for a second star, and by engaging in specific RT initiatives or projects they can gain a third.

#### ***Fair Trade in Tourism (South Africa) – certification of South African tourism establishments***

The Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa (FTTSA) Trademark ([www.fairtourismza.org.za](http://www.fairtourismza.org.za)) was officially launched in South Africa in 2002 - the first time in the history of the fair trade movement that a trademark or label for the tourism sector had been created. The Trademark is awarded to tourism establishments that meet stringent criteria, based on FTTSA principles which include fair share of income, democracy, respect, reliability, transparency and sustainability. Companies apply for the mark and pay for the assessment, which is by independent assessors. Once accredited, they are therefore underwritten by an independent verification body

that both authenticates their claims and supports their initiatives. FTSA also actively markets its fair trade partners through a variety of different media.

## 6) Niche marketing

Companies may choose to advertise through marketing agents that specifically target clients with an interest in responsible practice and thus brand themselves as part of a distinct value set. One example of this is the UK based on-line travel agent Responsibletravel.com ([www.responsibletravel.com](http://www.responsibletravel.com)) which specialises in marketing 'responsible' tourism providers. Companies marketed on their website must demonstrate that they meet [Responsible Travel's criteria](#) which were developed by NGO's and academics. All prospective members must demonstrate that their policy and practice meet these minimum standards. An essential requirement for all trips published on responsibletravel.com is that companies must provide evidence that they offer suggestions for destination visits to appropriate local social or environmental projects with direct or indirect benefits to the host community. Responsible Travel also offers guidelines on how tourists can be more responsible while in a destination, including recommendations such as using water sparingly and to read up on a destination before departure.

## 7) Awards

There are a variety of awards that seek to recognise companies' achievements in pro-poor and responsible tourism initiatives. These include (but are most certainly not limited to): internationally, the [Tourism for Tomorrow Awards](#) organised by BA and the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTTC); in the UK market, [The Responsible Travel Awards](#) organised by responsibletravel.com; and in South Africa, [Imvelo](#) awards, organised by FEDHASA, the hotel association. Winner gain in terms of publicity, brand recognition and the added credibility that comes from having been judged by others.

## References and further reading:

Lázne, M. (2004) *Final Report - Public Private Partnerships for Sustainability Certification of Tourism Activities*. WTO Regional Conference for Europe on Public Private Partnerships for Sustainability Certification of Tourism Activities. Czech Republic, 17-20 October 2004. Available at: <http://www.world-tourism.org/sustainable/conf/cert-czech/eng.htm>

Wilderness Safaris (2003) *A Partnership Beyond Parks and People*. Wilderness Safaris, South Africa.

These briefs were produced by the Pro Poor Tourism Pilots (Southern Africa) Programme, as a way to share practical international examples of pro poor actions with programme partners and others. PPT Pilots is a 3 year programme funded by DFID's Business Linkages Challenge Fund, facilitating adoption of pro poor practices by tourism companies in Southern Africa.

There are eight briefs so far in the Business Implementation of Pro-Poor Tourism Series. They cover a diverse range of topics from branding to supply chains and tourism-agriculture linkages. Several rely on material extracted from websites of companies and other organisations, which is provided in good faith but cannot be taken as verification of pro poor impact. The briefs were written by Dorothea Meyer, Caroline Ashley and Clive Poultney (first versions produced May 2004, revised versions uploaded December 2004).

Further programme information and the full set of briefs are on [www.pptpilot.org.za](http://www.pptpilot.org.za). Further background on PPT internationally is on [www.propoortourism.org.uk](http://www.propoortourism.org.uk).