



Second International Conference on
**Responsible Tourism
in Destinations**
21 - 24 March 2008 Kerala

THE KERALA DECLARATION ON RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

The Incredible India 2nd International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations organised by Kerala Tourism and the ICRT India. The 2nd International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations was attended by 503 delegates from 29 countries. The delegates came with a broad range of experience and expertise from diverse cultures, environments and backgrounds. There were delegates from international organisations, national and local government, local communities, airlines, hoteliers, tour operators, service providers, protected areas, NGOs, academia, architects and planners, the media and consultants.

We came with a wide range of experiences from different environments, cultures and tourism contexts and we have shared and discussed our different experiences and approaches over four days.

We recognise the commitments made by policymakers in Kerala who have committed to Responsible Tourism and pledged to take forward the concept of Responsible Tourism into practice, focussing on local economy, well being, local culture and environment. One of the purposes of responsible tourism is that the benefits of tourism are equitably accessed and distributed.

Recognising that it takes time to achieve change through multi-stakeholder partnerships, particularly if local communities are to be empowered to participate in the process; and that due credit should be given for effort and progress.

We encourage all stakeholders to share our vision for Responsible Tourism, to recognise that the journey is worthwhile and that it is possible to consistently create a better approach to tourism where together, local communities, tourism enterprises, destinations, tourists, and governments can all benefit.

ACHIEVING RESPONSIBLE TOURISM IN DESTINATIONS

We came together at the invitation of Kerala Tourism and the ICRT India in Kochi to discuss progress in achieving the principles of Responsible Tourism, to share experience and to learn from each other about how to achieve the aspirations of Responsible Tourism in Destinations and to identify good practices.

Our deliberations focussed on the issues which arise in the management of tourism in destinations where domestic and international visitors, tourism enterprises and local communities meet and interact. It is at this



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local level that the interactions between tourists and local and indigenous people; and between local communities and tourism businesses need to be understood

Recognising that all forms of tourism should be more responsible, we call upon all the stakeholders to play their part in achieving the aspiration.

Aware of the UN World Tourism Organisation's Global Code of Ethics and wanting to encourage all stakeholders to comply.

Recognising that Responsible Tourism is not a product; it is an approach and which can be used by travellers and holidaymakers, tour operators, accommodation and transport providers, visitor attraction managers, planning authorities, national, regional/provincial and local government. An integrated approach is required, involving many stakeholders in any place or space which attracts tourists.

Recognising that tourism takes place in communities, natural and cultural heritage sites and environments where people live and work; and that tourism is only one of the activities which needs to be managed in order to ensure sustainable communities.

Recognising the priority expressed in the Cape Town Declaration call for action to "to create better places for people to live in and for people to visit."

Recognising that the currencies of travel and tourism are those of free time and of money and that when people are on holiday or travelling on business they are generally consuming conspicuously; and that this inequality can give rise to conflict. We endorse the aspiration of the language of hosts and guests and the greater degree of equality it implies. While we recognise the role of the industry, we must be conscious that the power relationship generally significantly favours the industry and the visitor.

Recognising that domestic and international tourism often makes visible inequalities between producers and consumers which becomes more apparent when the consumer travels to the factory to consume the product. Economic inequality does not necessarily have to be compounded by expressions of social superiority evidenced by a lack of respect. The ethic of mutual respect and equity is fundamental to Responsible Tourism.

Aware that tourism reflects the economic and political relationships which empower consumers in our globalised world we recognise that tourism can be managed to have more positive impacts and less negative ones. Recognising that tourism can be a tool to conserve and enhance local natural and cultural heritage.

Recognising the principles of the Cape Town Declaration which defined Responsible Tourism as having the following characteristics:

- minimises negative economic, environmental, and social impacts;



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- generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well-being of host communities, improves working conditions and access to the industry;
- involves local people in decisions that affect their lives and life chances;
- makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, to the maintenance of the world's diversity;
- provides more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people, and a greater understanding of local cultural, social and environmental issues;
- provides access for physically challenged people; and
- is culturally sensitive, engenders respect between tourists and hosts, and builds local pride and confidence.

Recognising that each place, each destination will identify and prioritise different issues and that this is something which should be celebrated, reflecting as it does our world's diversity of cultures and environment. Local communities need to be empowered to exercise control over the forms of tourism that they wish to see developed in their communities, and even to their right to say 'no' to tourism.

Recognising that in India, policy on Responsible Tourism is evolving and reflecting on the experience of the Responsible Tourism policies/practises already being implemented in some parts of India, South Africa, Sri Lanka and The Gambia in pursuing Responsible Tourism strategies; and the experience of Sri Lanka and The Gambia in developing formal Responsible Tourism Partnerships involving formal on going multi-stakeholder processes.. The conference has also drawn on the experience of 29 countries which participated in the conference

Recognising that in order to achieve the necessary agreement on issues and priorities we need to rely more on reliable empirical evidence to define issues and their scale, in this way it is possible to build multi-stakeholder partnerships to address the issues and achieve change. Recognising that the issue of whose interests take priority is a political issue.

Aware of the need to focus on the contribution of tourism to the local economy and that increases in domestic and international arrivals can contribute to this, recognising that governments need to focus more on locally captured yield and the contribution of tourism as part of a local sustainable development strategy

Recognising the role of government in leading an open and inclusive multi-stakeholder process to ensure economic and social development whilst conserving the environment.

Recognising that although the impacts of travel and tourism need to be managed locally in the destination the form of travel to and fro between home and destination is now of major importance.

Aware that there is a global consensus amongst scientists from a wide range of disciplines that Green House Gases are contributing to climate change which is having serious impacts on our environment and that these negative impacts fall disproportionately on the poor in developing countries, we accept that reducing carbon



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pollution from the tourism industry is a priority and urge governments, tourism businesses, the airlines and other forms of transport, and consumers to prioritise carbon reduction, reducing the consumption of fossil fuels, increasing, energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy.

Aware that most communities face increasing water scarcity, unsustainable waste generation and management, serious energy and fuel constraints and biodiversity loss.

Recognising that tourism is increasingly challenged to demonstrate its positive impacts on livelihoods, social and economic development and conservation.

In addition to ensuring that tourism does not cause problems to local communities, increasingly the tourism industry is called upon to respond to critical social problems and to act in the social interest contributing to social justice.

Recognising that generally in the destination no operator or originating market predominates and that this is desirable, the destination does not, and should not, belong to the originating markets domestic or international. In many destinations the consumer and the originating market industry is more powerful than the local community and the local tourism industry and that this can have undesirable consequences with serious negative impacts

Recognising the importance of World Travel Market's World Responsible Tourism Day and its adoption of the Cape Town Declaration in 2002. One of the key challenges facing Responsible Tourism is to engage with the mainstream industry. Whilst there has been some success in some originating markets and in some destinations there is still a long way to go in engaging the industry, tour operators in destinations and source markets (whether domestic or international), accommodation providers natural and cultural heritage sites and other attractions and tourism service providers, to accept and shoulder their responsibility to actively contribute to achieving sustainability.

Recognising that whilst we need to be aware of the complexity of the interactions of tourism in a destination, stakeholders and local priorities need to be identified, an agenda for change needs to be agreed and implementation needs to be commenced. It is important to begin to manage tourism more sustainably in accord with local priorities; we recognise that not everything that may be desirable can be achieved immediately.

Recognising the experience, knowledge and skills of communities, we can listen and learn from them; there are no blueprints – there are only local solutions although we can learn from the experiences of others.

We have used the principles of the Cape Town Declaration during our visits to local initiatives to explore the approaches and methods which contribute to the successful realisation of the aspirations of Responsible Tourism and the ways in which obstacles to progress can be overcome. This experience combined with our diverse experiences of efforts to deliver Responsible Tourism has informed this Kerala Declaration which



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contains a distillation of the lessons we have learnt about how to achieve Responsible Tourism in Destinations.

Aware of the Guiding Principles for economic, social and environmental responsibility in the Cape Town Declaration the Kerala Declaration focuses on process and approaches to implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

EDUCATION AND LEARNING

Education is required at all levels, initial, secondary, community and professional - continuing professional development education is more likely to have an immediate impact on the sustainable management of tourism in destinations.

Tourism and the ideas of Responsible Tourism should be included in the primary curriculum to foster social inclusion, discourage dependency and enable people to engage in the management of tourism impacts.

Use education to build the transferable technical capacity of all stakeholders

Train guides as interpreters aware of their responsibilities to assist the process of Responsible Tourism management and to maximise the positive contribution and minimise negative impacts while enhancing the visitor experience.

Encourage the development of new tourism experiences which facilitate socially and economically positive host - guest encounters.

Undertake learning needs analysis and capacity building for communities, NGOs, the private sector and government staff

Educate tourists, the intermediaries in the transit route, and generating markets on local socio-cultural, economic and environmental issues in the market and the destination; likewise educating the communities on the cultures of the visitors

Research and resource materials need to be available in each country pursuing Responsible Tourism

CAMPAIGNING AND AWARENESS RAISING

Businesses need to be encouraged to recognise that they can do well by doing good

There is a business case to be made focussed on a number of issues:

Cost savings

Enlightened self interest in preserving the product

Staff motivation and retention

Responsibility to stakeholders – in particular to employees and communities

Changes in the investment climate which are moving to favour socially responsible investments in part to ensure the maintenance of brand value.

License to operate

Product enhancement through opportunities for meaningful socio-cultural engagement.

Customer expectation, there is increasing consumer demand for “richer” engagement with destinations and the communities who live there and an expectation that the industry will take responsibility for minimising its negative, and maximising its positive impacts.



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There is market advantage to be gained through referrals and repeat business.

In destinations campaigning may be necessary to raise awareness amongst all stakeholders and encourage change.

MEDIA

We urge the media to exercise more responsibility in the way in which they portray tourism destinations, to avoid raising false expectations and to provide balanced and fair reporting.

We urge the media to communicate the ideas of Responsible Tourism and the enhanced visitor experiences it can provide and to promote Responsible Tourism enterprises.

We ask that the media exercise independent critical judgment when reporting on companies and destinations and address the Responsible Tourism agenda.

EMPOWERMENT

Recognise the importance of strengthening the role of local communities in decision making about tourism development through their existing civil society structures and local governance processes.

Encourage local government scrutiny of joint ventures, co-operatives, and public private sector partnerships, it may be appropriate for local government to assist communities in maintaining some control over the forms of tourism development in their area.

Recognise that communities are not homogenous and that equity, power and gender issues need to be addressed.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR SUSTAINABLE LOCAL SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Responsible Tourism now has to focus on the economic participation of local people as direct owners in the business of tourism not just as beneficiaries of charity.

Tourism has to contribute to socio-economic development by supporting the conservation of natural and cultural heritage.

Tourism has to provide opportunities for employment at the community level

Government and tourism enterprises can make a significant contribution by changing their procurement practices and supporting local entrepreneurs to develop the quality and quantity of their goods and services to meet market demands.

Enclave tourism raises particular issues of market access and control which need to be addressed.

Tourism needs to prove its link with poverty reduction rather than relying on the concept of trickledown

Government and development agencies need to address the challenge of spreading the benefits of tourism geographically and to the poor.

Market access for micro and small enterprises through the removal of barriers can achieve immediate results through increasing the discretionary spend by tourists to informal sector traders and micro-enterprises. Access to viable markets is essential for local micro enterprises to flourish, and workers rights need to be addressed.

Through their supply chain tourism businesses can increase their linkages to the local economy and to economically poor producers.



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Mentoring partnerships can assist in product development and marketing of micro enterprise products.
Provide opportunities for tourists to support communities in a meaningful and dignified way, with responsible and transparent mechanisms for handling donations of finance and resources

GOVERNANCE

Governance is a major challenge often central to engaging all the stakeholders to achieve change. Local government has overall responsibility to bring together the efforts of destination stakeholders through dialogue in multi-stakeholder forums to establish responsible destinations rather than pockets of responsibility in destinations.

“Joined-up government”, a “whole of government approach”, going “beyond the silo” are expressions used in different societies to make the point that the management of tourism cannot be achieved by the tourism department working alone.

Planning control, highways, environmental management, police and a host of other government agencies at the national and local government need to be encouraged to play their role in managing tourism. All relevant departments in national and local government need to exercise their responsibility for ensuring the formulation and implementation of regulations.

Government plays a key role in facilitating the balance of competition and co-operation: businesses need to co-operate to attract tourists to the destination and compete for their bookings and business.

Government should support and facilitate the community to engage in tourism services, integrating equity and environmental concerns.

Governments in originating countries have a responsibility to issue well founded travel advisories and not unnecessarily to damage local tourism industries.

Care needs to be taken to avoid regulation causing corruption or excluding small businesses and communities.

National and local governments should implement public health policy programmes in view of the impacts which communicable diseases may have on local communities and tourism. .

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PROCESSES

Co-operation and competition between different groups in the informal sector and between the informal and formal sectors is required.

Multi-stakeholder processes and co-operation within a shared undertaking to take and exercise responsibility can achieve rapid and significant change.

Avoid fragmentation and parallel initiatives, manage and balance co-operation and competition

Ensure that all stakeholders are engaged

Recognise that different stakeholders have particular but interdependent needs and responsibilities.

It is a sign of responsibility that you engage with those who question you.

Agree implementation plans - short lists, success in implementation breeds success.

The processes of change and management need to be systematised.



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PARTNERSHIPS

Responsible Tourism can only be achieved by government, local communities and businesses cooperating on practical initiatives in destinations through stable local level partnerships.

Partnerships need to be based on transparency, mutual respect and shared risk taking, ensure clarity about roles and expectations.

Build long term partnerships with clear, fair and realistic expectations on all sides.

Patience and persistence are required, proceed with wisdom and hope

COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM

In considering proposals for community-based tourism development there needs to be more focus on business planning and administration, consumer orientated product development, quality, co-operation with the commercial sector, communication, sales channels, marketing and the management of the interaction between tourists and local people..

Robust and transparent financial management systems are needed to empower the community to ensure that earnings are distributed equitably within the community.

Communities and individuals need to be empowered to realise a fair price for their goods and services and to have a say in determining how tourism is developed in their community.

MARKETS

There is advantage in developing those market segments which are likely to be resilient and where long term and repeat visiting is likely to result.

The experiential trend favours those destinations which are able to facilitate engagement between holiday makers and local communities able to provide the cultural richness

There are increasing opportunities to choose to work with outbound operators, who have a responsible approach

Consider focusing marketing efforts to attract specific groups of tourists predisposed to engage in those activities and pattern of spending which maximise local economic benefit and minimise negative social and environmental impacts.

New online travel agencies in destinations and originating markets are providing opportunities for direct sales to travellers and holidaymakers predisposed to purchase experiences with Responsible Tourism characteristics and with the client feedback mechanisms which can assist in driving referrals.

The private sector and government should consider providing marketing support to micro and small enterprises

DISABILITY AND INCLUSION

Ensure access to built and natural environments and provide information about facilities and access

Provide information and interpretation in ways accessible to those with physical or cognitive disabilities

Create opportunities for employment by those with disabilities in the tourism industry



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COMMERCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

The private sector needs to be actively engaged in developing and sustaining Responsible Tourism in destinations

Institutionalisation and systematisation are essential to sustainability; many projects do not survive the cessation of external financial and technical support.

Initiatives need to be mainstreamed and connected to the industry

Responsible Tourism is about changing the way that business is done, recognising that the businesses operate in a competitive market where not all businesses are investing time and other resources in responsible practices.

Responsible Tourism businesses can contribute nothing if they are not commercially viable and sustainable.

Care should be taken to ensure that communities do not suffer a disproportionate risk given their vulnerability

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Investors in tourism at all levels must build and operate in an ecologically and environmentally sustainable manner

Promote conservation and biodiversity during planning, development and operation of tourism.

Adopt a strategic approach to identifying, managing and harvesting natural resources in tourism destinations.

Tourism should recognise how tourism contributes to climate change and should minimise its carbon footprint.

Tourism enterprises should adopt environmental management systems

MONITORING, MEASUREMENT AND REPORTING

Monitoring, verification and reporting on key local social, economic and environmental issues through locally agreed indicators is central to the management of tourism impacts - measure, verify and report.

Transparent and auditable reporting is essential to the integrity and credibility of our work and to establishing benchmarks and targets which enable individual consumers and businesses to make informed choices.

In determining who are the responsible tourists and what are the responsible forms of tourism we need to rely more on the measurement of impacts rather than the self-declared motivations of the travellers or the companies concerned.

Measurement enables the identification of the specific activities, businesses and tourists who deliver impacts which fulfil the locally defined Responsible Tourism priorities recognising that the tourists who have the lowest environmental impacts may also have low economic yield - choices will need to be made within the framework of local sustainable development priorities.

Credible and robust measuring of local impacts assists in ensuring that an holistic assessment is made of the contribution of tourism to sustainable communities and assists in engaging colleagues in local and national government to contribute their expertise and resources to the management of tourism.

Local government should establish with all stakeholders to create the systems and processes to document and report the collective impacts of stakeholder action at local destination level.



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AWARDS

Responsible Tourism Awards assist in identifying and rewarding best practise, it is desirable that there should be a variety of awards relevant to all stakeholders

Create media interest

Raise awareness and drive consumer knowledge and expectation

Local awards based on local priorities are as important as national and global awards but avoid too much fragmentation with competing schemes in one destination.

IN CONCLUSION

Aware that there is a danger that Responsible Tourism will be undermined by businesses, communities or governments which use the rhetoric but cannot substantiate the claims. We call upon those committed to the aspirations of Responsible Tourism to challenge those who pay only lip service to the cause and we call on those who are making a difference to report their contribution in a transparent, honest and robust way so that Responsible Tourism can be identified by the consumer and expectations can be raised to the benefit of those who practise Responsible Tourism and to the detriment of those who do not.

Five and a half years on from Cape Town we recognise that there has not been as much progress as we would have hoped, nor as much progress as is needed if the travel and tourism industry is to contribute its share of the action required to achieve sustainable development.

We call upon those involved in the movement for Responsible Tourism to share their experiences of what works and what doesn't, to redouble their efforts to use tourism to make better places for people to live in and for people to visit and to engage with people, in industry, in communities and across government to achieve Responsible Tourism in destinations.

If you share the aspiration to use tourism to make better places to live in, and better places for people to visit we invite you to join us and to share your experience - together through making many changes we can change for the better the way tourism works in our shrinking world.

We commit ourselves to work with others to take responsibility for achieving the economic, social and environmental components of responsible and sustainable tourism.

This declaration was agreed in Kochi, Kerala 24 March 2008 and is signed by the co-chairs on behalf of the conference.

Dr Harold Goodwin

ICRT and the Responsible Tourism Partnership

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