

# DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP

YEARBOOK





# DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP YEARBOOK

*2020–2021*

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# FOREWORD

## GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE TOURISM COUNCIL

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*By Randy Durband, CEO*



Welcome to the first edition of the Destination Stewardship Report's annual yearbook, based on quarterly editions co-produced by the

Destination Stewardship Center and the GSTC.

Sharing “lessons learned” is the purpose of this report. The destinations featured here have many good stories to tell about what has worked in their journey toward sustainability. Stories that other practitioners of destination stewardship can learn from. We do not make claims that any destination featured here – or frankly any in existence! – are truly and fully “sustainable.” Reaching true sustainability for any destination is very challenging given today’s technologies and market pressures. But those featured here are taking strong efforts in good conscience to operate more and more sustainably through innovation, planning, and the required commitment of public and private stakeholders.

We invite all destination managers throughout the world to learn from these stories and encourage them to join the discussion by sharing with others what has worked – and even a bit of openness on what has not always worked so well.

To those responsible for sharing their experiences in these pages, we salute you for your willingness to share and we congratulate you on your victories! We appreciate that victories do not come easily.

In addition to compiling stories from the quarterly Destination Stewardship Report, we plan to additionally include a sampling of destinations that are certified as sustainable by Certification Bodies that have been accredited by the GSTC. This inaugural edition includes three of those.

The content is also featured online at [www.gstcouncil.org](http://www.gstcouncil.org) and indexed by topic.

We hope you learn from, use, and share the knowledge provided. Here’s to ever-more sustainable tourism to destinations managed and cared for by committed stewards!

# FOREWORD

## DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP CENTER

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*By Jonathan Tourtellot, CEO*



This first collection of stories from the *Destination Stewardship Report* shows the fruits of a program that began as an experiment: Could an all-volunteer team from the Destination

Stewardship Center, with help from GSTC, put together a compilation of articles by volunteer contributors every three months? Could we make sure that the resulting content would help to improve care for destinations?

As Editor of the *DS Report*, I believe this yearbook answers the first question with a firm “yes,” but only you the readers can answer the second. What has helped? What hasn’t? We want your feedback!

We began in the middle of a pandemic, an odd but telling time. The world was going through a forced experiment: What happens when tourism – especially international tourism – stops dead? A new baseline was being set, and with it came surprises. A second question, of course, can be phrased as “What’s the best way to recover as the pandemic begins to recede?” – a process still underway at this writing.

As our collection of stories grew, not to mention selections from the DSC’s [“Destination Monitor”](#) news aggregation, some themes began to emerge.

Overtourism pressures did not disappear; they were merely suppressed. As soon as lockdowns relaxed, domestic tourism surged into relatively virus-safe outdoor rural destinations – and did so with notably mixed results, as reported in our stories from Serbia and Taiwan, and in numerous news media reports.

Tourism entrepreneurs struggled, some of whom work in ways that benefit their own destination communities, as in our Norway story. The “Neolocalism” movement emphasizes the importance of short supply chains in the industry-destination relationship; our “Data Science” article showed ways to begin quantifying such interactions.

That’s critical; conventional economic measures and arrival counts failed to document the totality of tourism’s significance. A broader array of metrics can more clearly portray tourism as a force for good – whether realized, as in our story from Ulsan, South Korea, or still unrealized, as argued in our column on gastronomic opportunities in Crete. On the flip side, the pandemic revealed systemic lack of resiliency. Most small tourism and supply businesses – so essential to both local quality of life and rich, distinctive travel experiences – function without a state-supported crisis safety net. Many died of Covid 19 from the lack of it.

As for the best way to recover, we’ve endeavored to profile places that already set good examples. We’ve addressed the critical importance of GSTC’s Destination Criterion A1 on holistic destination management – a fundamental yet frequently ignored requirement worldwide. We’ve offered profiles of places that are succeeding in our “Doing It Better” series, and places well on their way to success, as in the Italian Dolomites. We hope these models will, in whole or in part, help other places move toward more sustainable management of the intersection between tourism and host communities.

Our final article in this collection offers experts’ suggestions on ten ways to manage tourism better. Now it’s up to the destinations. To you.

# ABOUT US

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The [Global Sustainable Tourism Council \(GSTC\)](#) establishes and manages global sustainable standards, known as the GSTC Criteria. There are two sets: Destination Criteria for public policymakers and destination managers, and Industry Criteria for hotels and tour operators. The GSTC Criteria form the foundation for accreditation of certification bodies that certify hotels/accommodations, tour operators, and destinations as having sustainable policies and practices in place.

GSTC does not directly certify any products or services; but it accredits those that do. The GSTC is an independent and neutral USA-registered 501(c)3 non-profit organization that represents a diverse and global membership, including national and provincial governments, NGO's, leading travel companies, hotels, tour operators, individuals and communities – all striving to achieve best practices in sustainable tourism.



The Destination Stewardship Center (DSC) is a volunteer nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting the world's distinctive places by supporting wisely managed tourism and enlightened destination stewardship. Founded as a program at the National Geographic Society, the DSC gathers and provides information on how tourism can help and not harm the natural, cultural, and social quality of destinations around the world. We seek to build a global community and knowledge network for advancing this goal.

Join us and learn more at [www.destinationcenter.org](http://www.destinationcenter.org).

# INTRODUCTION

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The inaugural *Destination Stewardship Yearbook* is a compilation of articles from the first three issues of the 2020–21 Destination Stewardship Report (DSR), an e-quarterly report coproduced by the Destination Stewardship Center and the Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

In each issue, the DSR features destinations that have embraced effective and holistic management, best practices in sustainable tourism, and insights from tourism leaders on better destination stewardship and development. The Destination Stewardship Yearbook celebrates the efforts and accomplishments of the people behind these destinations. Collectively, their stories showcase how properly managed tourism can be constructive rather than destructive.

The first chapter, *Featured Certified Destinations*, features **Vail, Colorado, Azores, Portugal** and **Valsugana, Italy**, which have been certified as sustainable tourist destinations by a GSTC-Accredited Certification Body. The sustainability journeys of these three destinations, which are ongoing, reveal their longstanding commitment to destination management and the importance of collaboration among a wide group of stakeholders.

The second chapter, *Holistic Destination Management: Importance of a Coordinated Approach*, features a variety of destination practices that involve the destination as a whole—not only the industry and businesses, but also its natural resources, cultural assets and traditions, communities, aesthetics, and built infrastructure.

The third chapter, *Revitalization of Destinations: Environmental and Cultural Greening*, takes the examples of four destinations from around the world and how they have rejuvenated their destination by putting in place carrying capacity guidelines, strengthened local leadership, prioritized indigenous traditional knowledge, and utilized sustainability assessments based on the GSTC Criteria.

The Destination Stewardship Yearbook could not be more timely, as the world, and in particular the travel and tourism sector, grapples with the effects of COVID-19. The events of 2020 may have brought tourism to a crossroads, but it also spurred destinations to enhance sustainable tourism governance and develop new models of collaboration. The final chapter, *Building Back Better: Destination Management Post-COVID*, provides guidance for destinations on the path towards resiliency and sustainability.

# CHAPTER 1

## *Featured Certified Destinations*

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*Skiing Vail Mountain. Photo Credit: Town of Vail*



# VAIL, COLORADO

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*Certified by Green Destinations*



*Gore Creek in the Fall. Photo Credit: Town of Vail*

There is no place like Vail for year-round recreation, nature immersion, and cultural activities in the heart of the Rocky Mountains. Whether you are interested in skiing, biking, hiking, fishing, rafting or more, Vail offers outdoor pursuits for all ages and abilities. Thanks to the magical combination of averaging more than 300+ days of sunshine and 370+ inches of snow each year, plus majestic views of the surrounding Gore and Sawatch mountain ranges, the phrase “Like nothing on Earth” comes to life. One look around and you will understand why sustainability and environmental stewardship are fully embraced to preserve and protect the incredible natural beauty that surrounds you. Step into Vail Village and feel like you are worlds away. Drink in the European vibe and explore the alpine-inspired architecture as you stroll the cobblestone streets. From casual to fine dining and award-winning hotels, Vail’s Villages will charm you from your first step.

The Colorado Snowsports Museum resides in Vail, where you can discover how Vail was conceived. During World War II, the Army’s Tenth Mountain Division used the Vail area for backcountry survival training. After the war, many of the men who trained there were drawn back to the mountain valleys. Vail was born from the European ski towns the Tenth Mountain Division explored while abroad. On top of fantastic skiing and snowboarding, Vail offers year-round activities for the whole family. Embrace your adventurous side and explore our immaculate nature trails on foot, bike, or horseback. Take some time to nourish your soul in Vail, where performing arts flourish, from thrilling musical events to dance festivals and art shows. Explore local food and artisans at the Farmer’s Market and Art Show offered weekly throughout the summer.



Vail Mountain Biking. Photo Credit: Town of Vail

### **Protecting the Ecosystem and Working toward Climate Action Goals**

Protection of ecosystem and wildlife habitat, wilderness, and water is crucial to the Vail Destination. Vail is surrounded by national forest with the Eagles Nest Wilderness boundary just beyond town limits, which is the headwaters for the Gore Creek, the mountain stream that runs through the heart of Vail. It offers a peaceful respite for residents and visitors, important wildlife habitat, and a water supply for downstream communities. Through the [Restore the Gore](#) initiative, Vail is committed to improving the health of Gore Creek and maintaining the recreational and scenic value of the creek and the surrounding region, which supports a robust recreation-based economy and a high quality of life for residents. The Town of Vail also acquires, manages, and protects over 400 acres of open lands within the town boundary; 36% of the total destination is protected from development by local and national legislation due to the important ecosystem and wildlife habitat.

As such, protection of trails and wildlife habitat is critical. Residents and visitors are encouraged to [Leave No Trace](#), a common outdoor ethics practice that is locally embraced and encourages visitors to leave the area the way they found it or better. This includes packing out all trash and personal belongings and refraining from picking any vegetation or environmental features. Other easy ways to preserve the environment are keeping dogs on a leash and adhering to seasonal trail closures, which protect local

wildlife during migration and calving seasons. Some of the very popular trails are being impacted by overuse, so visitors are encouraged to seek out trails less traveled. They all wind through incredible landscapes and lead to beautiful views. If a trailhead is full of vehicles, look for a different option on <https://www.hikevail.net/>.

The Vail Destination is committed to achieving climate action goals of a 50% reduction of GHG emissions by 2030 and 80% by 2050. 100% of electricity used by the Town of Vail is renewable and Vail Resorts is committed to a net zero operating footprint by 2030. Through Energy Smart Colorado, Town of Vail provides residents and businesses with free energy audits and double rebates on energy efficiency upgrades. Vail runs a free bus system throughout town and is transitioning its fleet to fully electric buses. All buses will be fully electric by 2032. The Town of Vail is also increasing electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure and currently provides 24 Level 2 EV charging ports free for the public to use and 4 Level 3 DC Fast charging ports at a nominal fee. Several hotels also provide EV charging stations.

All residents and businesses in Vail are required to recycle by law. Town of Vail provides a free recycling center and hosts two Hard to Recycle events each year that are free to residents and employees. All large events hosted in town are required to provide zero waste services, including compost if food is being served. A compost drop site is available for residents and compost is available on Vail Mountain. Vail's current diversion rate is 29% and Vail will continue to work towards achieving zero-waste.

Several businesses in Vail are certified through the Actively Green Sustainable Business Program which provides a framework of sustainable business criteria and performance indicators that support any business in elevating performance with the use of best management practices specific to

sustainability principles.

Achieving sustainability is an on-going and dynamic process that requires collaboration from a variety of stakeholders. Some sustainability initiatives and goals appear to be very difficult to implement and achieve. Do not let this stop you from you trying. It is amazing to see how big ideas and ambitious goals move from audacious to achievable. Breaking larger goals down into smaller milestones and celebrating successes along the way is important.

### **The View Forward**

The COVID-19 pandemic tested the Vail Destination. The Vail community had never experienced a public health or resulting economic crisis on this magnitude. Spring of 2020 was the first time all non-essential business was forced to close, and the largest unemployment rates seen since the Great Depression. While Vail and Eagle County had developed a Resiliency Plan in terms of climate change, there was not a specific plan in place to respond to the impacts of a global pandemic. However, the Vail and Eagle County communities came together to develop processes and plans to respond and begin to recover through a unified approach. Businesses re-opened and tourism returned-although both at limited capacities. The economy started to rebound. The community is working to get as much of the community vaccinated as quickly as possible, starting with front line workers, teachers, elderly and those with underlying health conditions. The ability to coordinate efforts county wide,

collaborate, adapt, and pivot have been critical as the community continues to recover and navigate the challenges presented by the COVID-19 crisis. During a crisis such as this, leadership

and collaboration are critical.

Communication and trust are foundational. In light of the challenging and uncertain times faced, the Vail Destination will utilize the lessons learned to continue planning to strengthen mitigation, adaptation, and resiliency on all fronts from a global pandemic to global climate change.

The Vail Sustainable Destination Stewardship Council and Steering Committee has initiated discussion around re-envisioning and re-creating sustainable tourism offers to focus on quality of experiences rather than quantity of tourists attending programs or events. They are also exploring options for more independent, self-guided tours and experiences. Vail is home to several special events each year, which are large economic drivers for the town and local businesses. Town of Vail is working with event producers to reimagine events with an approach of quality over quantity. Messaging and communication about personal responsibility and public health orders are required and integrated into all events and tourism messaging. Vail has also joined the [Future of Tourism Coalition](#) and has adopted the [guiding principles](#).

Learn more at [discovervail.com](https://discovervail.com).



*Flyfishing. Photo Credit: Town of Vail*

# AZORES, PORTUGAL

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*Certified by EarthCheck*



*Photo Credit: Governo des Acores*

The Azores, an autonomous region of Portugal, is an archipelago of 9 islands in the Atlantic Ocean, with 246,772 inhabitants about 1.4 km west of Portugal, and about 6,000 km east of North America. The archipelago is known by its wonderful green landscapes and blue crystal waters. The stunning natural beauty coupled with the history and traditions of its population allows the Azores to be a European destination in the middle of the Atlantic. The preserved volcanic islands with their exuberant nature and unique, mystical beauty, allows visitors to experience its variety of activities and products, either on land or at sea.

Since 2015, tourism has become a major driver for the sustainable development of the islands due to the opening of the aerial space. The strategy of the Regional Governments and entities linked to the sectors of tourism and the environment, have consistently defended conciliatory policies of good environmental practices and have safeguarded the Azorean identity, ensuring that the ecosystems and quality of life are preserved and do not neglect the progress of the Region.

## **Conservation Policies and Protection of Cultural Heritage**

The Azores is the first archipelago in the world to achieve sustainable tourism certification by the accredited body, EarthCheck, under the rigorous GSTC criteria. Its well-defined conservation policy incorporates sustainability in its policy and management. The production and management of energy, noise, air quality, waste, and water management and also, environmental, cultural and patrimonial education are some of the examples that this destination focuses on to improve its sustainability.

The archipelago has almost 25% of its land territory classified as protected areas, including the Natural Parks on each island. Not only are the land territories protected but also its vast marine territory. Currently the archipelago has 50 Marine Protected Areas (MPA), which creates a perfect balance between fisheries, marine conservation, and maritime tourism. From these 50 MPAs, 36 are included in the *Natura 2000 Network*, 10 in the *OSPAR Network* and the other 9 are prohibited Fishing Areas, with the purpose to preserve the natural resources and perform

non-extractive marine tourism activities.

According to the performance report from EarthCheck in its benchmarking phase, the Azores were classified as a destination with one of the highest percentages of habitat conservation area, the highest percentage of green areas, and the lowest percentage of theft and robbery. The Azores has worked to improve its water and waste management practices, drinkable and indoor water quality and to decrease the use of pesticides. In particular, the initiatives to improve energy efficiency, have resulted in 38% of the energy produced in the Azores comes from renewable sources.

The archipelago has also prided itself on the preservation of its cultural heritage. The historical center of the Angra do Heroísmo city and the vineyards cultural landscape of Pico island were classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site while the islands of Corvo, Flores, the Graciosa islands and the “Fajãs” of São Jorge island were also included in the *World Biosphere Reserves Network of UNESCO* due to their natural beauty, singularity, and conservation. In 2019, the underwater archaeological map of the Azores was considered one of the best five examples on how to protect underwater cultural patrimony by UNESCO.

### **Collaboration is Key**

The archipelago is the perfect example of how nature conservation, sustainability and tourism can go hand to hand. To achieve all the recognitions mentioned before, there’s a valuable lesson to keep in mind: the destination focuses on collaborative work that includes all the stakeholders of the destination, working together towards a same purpose – the sustainable development of the Azores. In this archipelago, collaboration is seen as the key for successful management. This is done with many working groups, community meetings and other participatory activities. This high-level of collaboration was key to certification by EarthCheck.

One of the best examples of this collaborative structure is the “Sustainability Charter of The Azores” which aims to involve all the regional sectors in integrating the Sustainable Development Goals in their activities, setting an annual goal and contributing to the Azores strategic positioning as a sustainable destination. This initiative started with 45 companies, and now counts with 143 companies that subscribed to the Charter, and more than 500 sustainable commitments associated. The purpose of this initiative is to be a dynamic forum for debate and sharing of sustainable practices, encouraging collaboration and partnerships. These entities have the assistance from the Destination Management Organization (DMO) through workshops, forums and sustainable consultancy services to help achieve their annual goals. This initiative shows that the pathway to improve destination’ sustainability is through raising awareness and setting collaboration between all stakeholders.



*Photo Credit: Governo de Acores*

### **The View Forward**

Sustainability and safety come hand by hand for the recovery of the tourism sector in a post pandemic future. Destinations that privilege nature experiences far from crowded cities will be better prepared for the recovery of tourism. The Azores fits this profile as it is considered one of the “*European Safest Destinations 2021*” by the European Best Destinations and is expected

to have a quick recovery.

The Regional Government implemented the Clean & Safe Initiative which defines and implements a set of measures to mitigate the effects of Covid-19 in the archipelago, to transmit confidence and security of the Destination. This guide aims to help companies and businesses of the Regional Tourism sector to be prepared and more resilient to the pandemic's challenges. The Regional Government has also implemented a system that requires all passengers to show a negative COVID-19 test before travelling to the Azores. This safety measures allied to the valorization of the territory and local people, and promoting unique experiences, aims to guarantee the safety and quality of this positive tourist model destination, where residents, business and tourists are responsible and part of the success of the destination.



*Photo Credit: Governo de Acores*

# VALSUGANA, ITALY

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*Certified by Vireo Srl*



*Valsugana Lago Levico. Photo Credit: Visit Valsugana*

Located in north-eastern Italy in Trentino province, Valsugana boasts among its many attractions, majestic mountains, the Caldonazzo lake - the largest lake in Trentino, cultural journeys that highlight the heritage of the region, and local products and dishes rooted in tradition that follow the philosophy of the Slow Food movement.

The Valsugana Tourism Board counts on 54 shareholders and as a Destination Management Organization (DMO) oversees the territory with 62,000 inhabitants in 24 municipalities. The region has higher renewable energy production compared and a rate of 70% average for recycling. In 2019, Valsugana had 2.2 million yearly stays with 15,000 beds. At its core Valsugana focuses on quality tourism that involves the communities. Last year, the tourism board launched a campaign entitled, *Valsugana: where we love to live!*

## **Sustainability Journey**

Valsugana is the first destination in Italy to achieve a certification in accordance with the GSTC Destination Criteria by Vireo.

Valsugana has adopted a holistic approach to sustainability, focusing on environment protection, enhancement of its rich culture and involvement of the local communities in its tourism strategy.

For over 15 years, the Valsugana Tourism Board planned, designed, implemented, and monitored the tourism activity in the area. After this in-depth process, the Tourism Board decided it was the time to take this to the next level and to consider future tourism development that respects the lifestyle, tradition, and needs of local communities.

The pristine environment in Valsugana is the result of a culture that has been handed down from generation to generation. Sustainability means living in harmony with oneself and with the context that surrounds us. To carry out sustainable tourism in Valsugana, the Tourism Board emphasizes that help is needed from everybody with a message to *“slow down your pace, avoid the use of your car, reduce the production of waste, choose to buy local products and respect the people who welcome you: they will be the ones to pass on their love for this beautiful area.”*

## What has Valsugana prioritized?

- The DMO has emphasized the importance to sensitize business owners, locals and tourists on matters concerning sustainability. One of the actions put into place has been the project “**Giovani Ambasciatori del Territorio**”; during a 3-months period, young adults got the chance to attend several classes on several different aspects of managing a destination and live and work closely to the population.
- The organization of “**plastic free**” event during which protection of the environment and the sensibilization of the participants become the main focus;
- Monitor the economic, cultural and environmental aspects of the destination and collection of data useful for future development;
- Promotion of projects that support mountain businesses, focusing on biodiversity and environment protection. Two of these are the “**Vacanze in Baita**” [www.vacanzeinbaita.it](http://www.vacanzeinbaita.it) project (old alpine huts that have been renovated and then devoted to a new format of “rural hospitality”) and the “**Adopt a cow**” project (through the “adoption” of a cow grazing on the Lagorai chain, the mountain gets new life and the tourist an authentic experience).

<https://www.visitvalsugana.it/en/get-inspired/adopt-a-cow/>

## The View Forward

Valsugana has used the global crisis as a time of reflection, but not as a pause, to appreciate their surroundings and to restart tourism. The challenge is to transform this crisis and build new tourism models that bring about new opportunities and innovation, keeping new needs and requirements in mind, with a constant theme on sustainability. With a mission to reshape the territory by creating partnerships in compliance with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, Valsugana aims to enhance brand awareness and consistency with more stakeholders by investing in the territory.

We want to facilitate collaboration between business owners and public bodies and work towards making actions that create positive impacts on the territory.

To learn more:

[www.visitvalsugana.it/sostenibilita](http://www.visitvalsugana.it/sostenibilita)



# CHAPTER 2

## *Holistic Destination Management: Importance of a Coordinated Approach*

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Photo Credit: Visit Valsugana

# GSTC'S CRUCIAL CRITERION A1

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Article first appeared in the [DSR Summer 2020 issue](#)

## Its Importance

By Randy Durband, CEO, GSTC

The [GSTC Destination Criteria](#) have well proven their value as guides to good destination stewardship. GSTC has chosen not to provide weighting to specific criteria, preferring to present a holistic system. Yet, it is natural to call out key elements.

For example, Criterion A8 on visitor management is essential, and destination management organizations should build strong internal capacity on the principles expressed there and knowledge of successful cases of its application. Criterion A5 is also essential, as community engagement is needed to minimize any harmful impacts of tourism to various community residents, including those who generally lack political voice.

But standing at the top of my list – as with many of us in the global community of experts in sustainable destination management – is Criterion A1, which summarizes the importance and composition of a highly inclusive planning group. Inclusive in terms of a “whole-government” approach and in terms of ongoing and meaningful engagement with stakeholders from the community and from tourism-related businesses.

Creation of some form of council should not be seen as a diminution of the authority of any public agency. Rather, its application should be viewed as wise and effective leadership from the public authority. To make it work, it needs to function with a degree of regularity, and it must continue in perpetuity, surviving changes of government leadership. Because it is essential.

Conforming to all the Criteria can be better accomplished with this type of management commitment and structure.

## The Context

By Jonathan Tourtellot, CEO, DSC

Most tourism is about the place. The tourism industry relies on the character, appeal, and resources of the destination as a whole. Sometimes it may be one particular asset – wildlife, a beach, a historic district. More often it's the interwoven combination of distinctive characteristics that constitutes sense of place. That's why we travel.

Yet when governments and many other policymakers consider tourism, they tend to consider the industry in isolation, compartmentalized, seeing it simply as the aggregate of businesses where tourists spend money. Growth in transactions is a main metric of success, along with employment and tourist arrivals. But where does the money end up, who gets hired, and which tourists are arriving? Most important, who's in charge?



Too often, the answer is “no one.” Different interests can work at cross purposes – preservation versus development, agriculture versus conservation, tourists versus locals.

Without holistic management that includes citizen participation, difficulties can easily arise, and have: overtourism, neighborhood disruption, cultural degradation, and various environmental problems. By contrast, well-managed tourism can enrich communities, improve public education, and provide the means to sustain natural habitats and elements of cultural heritage, from music and theater to architecture and cuisine.

The relationship between tourism and a destination is complex. It requires a collaborative approach. Criterion A1 takes care not to prescribe the structure – ...*an effective organization, department, group, or committee...* – just that it be done in whatever way best suits destination stakeholders and citizens. Today's

coronavirus threat will eventually recede, and tourism will return. Climate change looms in the background. Now is the chance to plan tourism recovery right.

**Keywords:** Community engagement, Protecting natural and cultural heritage resources, Stakeholder cooperation, GSTC Destination Criteria

Criteria	Indicators	SDGs
<b>SECTION A: Sustainable management</b>		
<b><u>A(a) Management structure and framework</u></b>		
<p><b>A1 Destination management responsibility</b></p> <p>The destination has an effective organization, department, group, or committee responsible for a coordinated approach to sustainable tourism, with involvement by the private sector, public sector and civil society. This group has defined responsibilities, oversight, and implementation capability for the management of socio- economic, cultural and environmental issues. The group is adequately funded, works with a range of bodies in delivering destination management, has access to sufficient staffing (including personnel with experience in sustainability) and follows principles of sustainability and transparency in its operations and transactions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Documentary evidence showing relevant make-up and responsibilities of the group.</li> <li>b. A financial plan and budget showing current and future funding sources.</li> <li>c. Evidence of links and engagement with other bodies.</li> <li>d. Records of permanent staff and contracted personnel, indicating relevant experience.</li> <li>e. Management guidelines and processes, which demonstrate awareness and adherence to sustainability principles and transparency in operations and letting of contracts.</li> </ul>	 

# DOING IT BETTER, COLUMBIA GORGE

By Jacqueline Harper, Student at the University of Waterloo

Article first appeared in the [DSR Autumn 2020 issue](#)



As if symbolizing the Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance, a rainbow bridges the states of Washington and Oregon on each side of the Columbia River.

## Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance, Oregon and Washington States, USA

The mission of the Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance (CGTA) commits to “developing the region as a world-class sustainable tourism economy.” This non-profit organization works both to protect and enhance the scenic, natural, cultural, and recreational resources of the Columbia River Gorge and to highlight lesser-known local communities.

The Columbia River Gorge became a National Scenic Area when President Ronald Reagan signed an Act on November 17, 1986. The Columbia River Gorge Visitors Association (CRVGA) was founded in 1990 as a bi-state initiative to promote the gorge to the tourism industry. Thanks to the Gorge Tourism Studio conducted in 2016, over 250 stakeholders – ranging from public agencies to private enterprise and community leaders to youth – came together to discuss ways the local communities could be economically stimulated through sustainable tourism while at the same time protecting the local environment. Thus, the CRVGA grew into the CGTA.

The Gorge Tourism Studio is a program developed by Travel Oregon that addresses and collaboratively solves critical issues in the region such as balancing economic

benefits of tourism with preserving quality of life, natural resources, and cultural resources.



Credit: Travel Oregon, Columbia River Gorge Tourism Studio Program Summary (August 2017)

## Geographic Description

The [CGTA](#) is exemplary as it brings together a bi-state area, representing both Oregon and Washington. The Columbia River, the basis for the Scenic Area, forms a natural state border between Oregon and Washington State. The CGTA includes the National Scenic Area (see map below), reaching from the Sandy River to the Deschutes River (both on the South side of the river) and from Mt. Adams (WA) to Mt. Hood (OR). It is the largest National Scenic Area in the United States. Not only does it cover two states, but it also brings together six counties, and 15 towns, encompassing over 292,500 acres. The Gorge canyon at its core consists of both rain forest and desert. The canyon is 80 miles long and up to 4,000 feet deep. Many visitors travel here for a world-class adventure experience as this region has many scenic trails, rivers, cascades, and mountains. This destination is sought after by windsurfers, kiteboarders, and sailors for the “nuclear winds” created as the rainforest transitions into the desert,

according to the CGTA.

## Context

To the CGTA, sustainability is about optimizing positive impacts of the visitor economy while protecting the land. “Tourism is a sustainable economic driver to protect these [natural] areas and respect them,” says Emily Reed, Network Director of the CGTA.

The Gorge Tourism Studio had another legacy; the event brought stakeholders together where they created a vision to shape the region over 15 years. By 2031, as a part of the 15-Year Vision for Sustainable Tourism, the CGTA wants to achieve objectives in the following areas: transportation, culinary/agriculture, culture, seasonality/congestion, and balance. For transportation, the region would like to be connected by a transportation system that allows visitors to come travel and explore the region without needing a car. In terms of agriculture, they want visitors and locals to eat what is grown and produced in the area in addition to alleviating hunger in the region. The CGTA wants to spread the knowledge of the local culture, so tour guides teach about it and food trails of national significance are marked. Another key factor is to make tourist hot-spots less congested and spread the benefits to less popular areas of the region and times of year. Finally, the CTGA wants to create a visitor experience that balances protecting the local communities, culture, and natural environment.

Under the CGTA’s Statement of Intent, their strategies for being a sustainable world-class destination are to:

- Spread the seasonality of visitation
- Reduce congestion during peak seasons and in high-use areas
- Spread the benefit and increase the economic impact of tourism throughout the entire gorge
- Respectfully and authentically integrate cultural heritage into the visitor

experience

- Connect resources to optimize destination marketing
- Capitalize upon the visionary projects underway in the Gorge to ensure this place remains a world-class destination

While the 15-Year Vision does not specifically mention enhancing the environment, Emily Reed, explains that the National Scenic Area defines everything the CGTA does. Tourism protects the natural area as it generates an economic benefit, showing that if tourism is managed correctly, it is a sustainable economic driver.

## Organizational Structure and Governance

The CGTA is a network of diverse businesses and organizations. It consists of a Board and a Core Team (see the network diagram below). The Board typically has nine voting members and four non-voting advisors. The Core Team is chosen by the Board and is made up of three to five people, representing both Oregon and Washington, and has decision making power. At the center of everything is the Network Director. The Network Director convenes the network and supports the Action Teams under Board oversight.



Courtesy, the Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance

The six different Action Teams have self-appointed leadership. To become a part of

this project or get involved, network participants self-select themselves, based on expertise, interest, and capacity. The Marketing and Communication Action Team communicates about projects aimed at achieving the purpose of the network. The Car-Free Visitor Transportation Action Team is working on visitors traveling in the region without the need for a car. The Culture Action Team is focused on highlighting the history and unique stories of the Gorge and surrounding region. The other three Action Teams are culinary and agritourism, outdoor recreation, and workforce.

There are over 80 active and/or engaged participants. Active Partners collaborate and carry out the purpose of the network. Active Partners meet quarterly with the network to focus on tourism on both sides of the river. You can become a partner/renew your partnership by filling in a form and investing financial resources into the CGTA. Most Active Partners are also involved in Action Teams. Engaged Participants (businesses and individuals) take part in larger events and help with projects. A newsletter and social media keep the public up to date on projects.

Due to the geographical reach of the CGTA, coordination with the local and regional Destination Marketing Organizations is critical, and they are participants and partners in the Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance.

### **Activities**

Network participants have direct responsibility for protecting and sustaining the character of the Columbia River Gorge. The collaborative work aims to share the cultural and natural history of the Gorge with visitors and cultivate a sense of stewardship over time. Some of the projects the tourism alliance is working on include We Speak the Gorge, Hear in the Gorge, Ready Set Gorge, East Gorge Food Trail, Trail Ambassadors, and Columbia Gorge Car-Free.

We Speak the Gorge is a front-line training program so that workers can increase the

awareness of visitor service and resources throughout the Gorge. This program was initiated by the Marketing and Communication Action Team. The goal is to have all front-line staff communicating a consistent message as well as highlighting top spots in each community to visitors. The idea is to serve the customers while growing the sense of community and strengthen bonds with neighbors.

A podcast series, called [Hear in the Gorge](#), was developed by their Cultural Heritage Action Team. It communicates the cultural and natural history of the area while encouraging visitors to encounter the place and its people more thoughtfully, and with greater care. The podcast episodes dig into the stories of a place, listening to the people who know it best. You never quite know what to expect.

### **Sustainability and Stewardship Programs**

The CGTA supports [Ready, Set, GOrge](#), which is an educational initiative that develops messaging and visitor maps to guide sustainable and thoughtful visitation. The website promotes travelers to support the local communities by offering advice on planning your trip, preparing for your trip, and connecting with the community when on your trip. It also promotes tips for traveling with care in nature, such as how to prevent invasive species and leaving no trace.

Another program working to educate hikers is [Trail Ambassadors](#), which places volunteers at popular trailheads in the Gorge. Volunteers engage with visitors around safety, ethical use of public lands, and Leave No Trace practices. They are also trained to help visitors engage with the local community. This program helps keep ecologically sensitive areas from being permanently damaged by tourism pressures.

The [East Gorge Food Trail](#) brings local organizations together to enhance and connect culinary and agricultural businesses to showcase the Gorge food system.

Developed by the Culinary and Agritourism Action Team, the Food Trail links family-owned farms, farm-to-table experiences, crafted cider, wine, and beer, and everything in between. The trail is open throughout the year and can be toured car-free. The website provides examples of itineraries and outlines the best time of the year to travel for specific produce.



Photo Credit: The East Gorge Food Trail Brochure

### Managing Tourism Volume

Although the CGTA is not actively discouraging visitors to overcrowded places, they are promoting visits to lesser-known sites and businesses and making travel accessible by car-free transportation. The organization encourages visitors to well-trafficked areas to come during shoulder season or mid-week. Additionally, the CGTA promotes less frequented businesses and outdoor recreational activities that have capacity available, working alongside tour operators to guide visitors to less congested and lesser-known locations and businesses.

To do that, the CGTA works with transit and public agencies to develop transit connectivity and develop car-free transportation options to trailheads and communities within the gorge. The CTGA's Car-Free Visitor Transportation Action Team manages the Columbia Gorge Car-Free project, comprising a team of transportation professionals from private and public transportation providers, nonprofits, government agencies, and small businesses that offer the best options for exploring the Gorge car-free, whether by bus, foot, or bike.

From the [Columbia Gorge Express Performance Report Card](#), the Columbia Gorge Express was able to divert an estimated 20,700 vehicle trips from Multnomah Falls between 2016 to 2019. Columbia Gorge Car-Free also publishes example itineraries for car-free experiences, such as the Tasting Bike Rides of the Eastern Gorge.

### Community Engagement

The CGTA works extensively with many different organizations in the area. The network includes but is not limited to: the US Forest Service; Oregon and Washington Departments of Transportation; Oregon and Washington State Parks; planning departments; Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission; and cities and counties in this region. The network receives feedback from a diverse range of stakeholders. The Action Groups are designed to respond to this feedback and adapt it into their projects.

Tourism is an important economic factor in the region as it has created some 5,000 tourism jobs for the locals. Businesses play an important role in the tourism community. If a small business, nonprofit, agency, residents, or community group from the six involved counties is interested in stewarding sustainable tourism, they are welcome to attend bi-monthly meetings of the network's active participants. They can also receive CGTA e-newsletters or participate in project teams. The CGTA is beginning to actively engage stakeholders that are not currently involved in the network – emergency services, elected officials, and residents. The tourism alliance deems it is important to engage perspectives, criticisms, and ideas from these stakeholders to ensure local quality of life is upheld. For stakeholder feedback, the CGTA has quarterly network meetings, where stakeholders attend and ask questions and participate in polls and break-out groups. Surveys are also used to touch base with stakeholders.

The CGTA hosts the Gorge Tourism Summit

every two years, which brings together agency staff, small business owners and managers, and nonprofit leaders from across the Gorge to discuss trends, best practices, and network with like-minded businesses and people. The event is geared toward new and current network participants, residents, and industry partners. Along with the Gorge Tourism Summit, the CGTA also promotes events organized and hosted by their network Participants, such as guided hikes, planting native plants, and trivia nights. The CGTA network is keen to expand on organizing events as a way to partner with local and regional associations, organizations, businesses, and agencies.

### **Funding**

The CGTA works with a small budget that is acquired from partner contributions, the annual Gorge Tourism Summit, and grant funding. Partnership investments are made by small businesses, nonprofit and destination marketing organization participants, and from cities and counties within the network's jurisdiction. Typically, funding and resources are more available on the Oregon side of the border, where the Alliance has more community partnerships. Although the budget is small, it has been stable. High priority projects receive funding first. Other projects are allocated funds depending on what remains.

There are [three partnership options](#) and the cost of becoming a partner depends on business type, size, and revenue. The **Full Partner** option has three sub-levels: Private, Non-Profit, and Public Agency. Private Companies have a minimum investment of \$250; Non-Profits have a minimum investment of \$150, and Public Agencies have dues that range between \$500 to \$2,000 depending on the number of employees. The **Sustaining Partner** option requires an investment of \$3,000, with the partner eligible to be featured in special promotions. Finally, **Contributing Partners** invest less than the Full Partner level but are expected to provide additional

support for the CGTA. In return, the GCTA connects their partners with resources, helps partners find funding for their projects, and promotes their efforts and projects.

Funding has been impacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, of course, but the CGTA is still operating and hosting virtual events and stakeholder meetings during the pandemic.

### **Measures of success**

One important measure to get a full picture of the CGTA's impact and progress relates to network building. Metrics include the number of participants regularly attending bimonthly meetings, numbers engaged in project teams, and the number of partners contributing financially. A second measure gauges the network's impact, using metrics that include local quality of life, participation in public forums, transit ridership numbers, visitor numbers to lesser-known locations, seasonal visitation numbers in all regions, the reach of the podcast and visitor messaging, and social media and web impressions.

Two pieces of advice Emily Reed has for other destinations are:

1. Diversity is key. You need to have as many different perspectives at the table as possible.
2. Have a balance between meeting and doing. People cannot meet just to meet; you will not see progress that way. How fast you go, how much time you put in, and how much feedback you receive will determine your progress.

### **My commentary**

CGTA has been challenged with the big task of working across fragmented geographical jurisdictions. However, with the emergence of this tourism alliance, I believe the effort to align multiple jurisdictions, communities, and DMOs is exactly what was needed for the Columbia River Gorge. By bringing together stakeholders from both sides of the



river, it has allowed for management of this National Scenic Area to be a success. Many of the program's websites reference one another to make finding information and resources for visitors to be seamless. It has turned the question from "which organization is responsible for managing which part of the scenic area?" into "how can we collectively make traveling to the Gorge as sustainable as possible?" This collective effort is why the CGTA was chosen as a destination stewardship role model for many other destinations that cross borders or jurisdictions.

The largest concern for the CGTA is distribution of funding for programs and projects across political boundaries. Travel Oregon is well established and has state funding, while the Washington DMO is still in its building stages. It is concerning that more funding and resources are available for projects and stewardship on the Oregon side at risk of neglecting the equally important Washington side. One recommendation may be to partner with businesses that do not have geographical constraints. If the CGTA is not having many partners sign up on the Washington side, they may need to reach out to local businesses that may not be aware of the benefits of joining the CGTA. Having sustainable funding is crucial for continuing the environmental and social progress the

CGTA has achieved over the last four years.

The CGTA's 15-Year Vision for Sustainable Tourism has initiated many great sustainability programs, such as the Trail Ambassadors, Columbia Gorge Car-Free, and the East Gorge Food Trail. However, there is little communicated about the five areas of focus that are outlined under the 15-Year Vision. It would be helpful for stakeholders to see specific goals and targets for each area of focus. Moreover, there is no explanation for tracking metrics or progress of the focus areas. For example, it appears that the CGTA values quality of life for the locals, however, there are no publicly communicated metrics for engaging with locals to ensure that no voice or group is left unheard. Without clear direction, stakeholders are left wondering what exactly the end vision is for 2031 and how the CGTA is staying on track.

Additionally, there is no sustainability leader within the CGTA to help ensure the goals and targets are on track across all the areas of focus and Action Teams to achieve the 15-Year Vision.

**Keywords:** Community engagement, Protecting natural and cultural heritage resources, Stakeholder cooperation, GSTC Destination Criteria

# ENGAGING A U.S. NATIONAL PARK'S GATEWAY COMMUNITITES

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*By Kelly Bricker, Professor, Director of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism; Vice Chair, Global Sustainable Tourism Council*

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*Article first appeared in the [DSR Summer 2020 issue](#)*

## **For Theodore Roosevelt National Park, “Appreciative Inquiry” Provides a Way to Improve Relations with Its Three Gateway Towns**

Theodore Roosevelt National Park (TRNP) encompasses two swaths of North Dakota Badlands, stretching across the Northern Great Plains and the Little Missouri River. The Park was established in 1947 with the initial South Unit and Elkhorn Ranch Unit, and the addition of the North Unit followed in 1948. Its 70,447 acres comprise a variety of great plains flora (e.g., juniper woodlands and hardwoods, salt grass) and fauna (e.g., bison, elk, and pronghorn) as well as traditional lands of the Hidatsa and Mandan tribes, and many more. The Park memorializes President Theodore Roosevelt and his commitment to conservation[i]. It is also situated atop the Bakken Formation, an extensive oil and natural gas reserve tapped by hydraulic fracking, rendering oil and gas flares within sight of many park vistas[ii].

Three primary gateway communities provide access to the Park: Dickinson, Medora, and Watford City. The largest, Dickinson, with a population of about 23,000, offers education, healthcare, museums, libraries, airport, and recreation centers.[iii] Medora, home to Park headquarters, is North Dakota's top tourism destination, and much of its a year-round population of about 130 residents[iv] derives income from the

industry[v]. Watford City is home to about 7,000 residents, a population that has more than tripled in the decade following the Bakken Oil Shale rush, a massive influx of people and commerce that began around 2006[vi].

Unique though they are, the communities are intertwined with each other, the park, and the future development of the region. In anticipation of increased park visitation, the Bakken nearby oil development and associated infrastructure, invasive species and other regional ecosystem issues, Park management began a strategic planning process designed to incorporate a holistic understanding of visitor use with the unique needs of each of its gateway communities. Park staff were interested in the communities' current relationships with the Park and how they could improve to provide a quality visitor experience, advance park goals, and develop and leverage partnerships.



*Focus Group. Photo Credit: Leah Joyner*

Our University of Utah research team conducted a community engagement study on behalf of the Park from February 2017 to April 2018 to assist with the planning effort. Our focus was on the relationships between TRNP and its three gateway communities. What was the role of TRNP related to stimulating regional tourism? What did the gateway communities need? How could tourism's spillover benefits enhance their economic conditions and quality of life, while still upholding the purpose and values of the park?

To find out, we used an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach. The method for helping to manage change strives to understand the relationships among conservation, livelihood, and sustainable tourism development [viii] [ix] [x]. The idea is to elicit public participation in identifying positive qualities that make a destination unique, to analyze how these qualities work, and then build on them.

Our hope in conducting the AI process was to:

- Create a shared understanding of community development, tourism, and resource protection;
- Create a regional dialogue about using public land to improve local livelihoods through sustainable tourism development;
- Envision a collective future based on regional strengths in relationship to developing tourism, improving livelihoods, and protecting natural and cultural heritage resources.

For this project, we visited Park management, mapped assets of each community, interviewed key leaders and online surveys, focus groups with community members, summary meetings and a summit with all communities present. The Superintendent of TRNP attended these meetings, and introduced the strategic planning process they were undertaking – yet only weighed in if there were specific questions by participants. The process itself

is forward thinking and did not allow participants to focus on the negative, rather really focus on the future – discovering what they have, dreaming about and envisioning a future, and then steps to realize that future. In part, AI asks participants to focus on what can be – envisioning a future. This particular strategy allowed us as facilitators to ‘park’ concerns separately, then head back to the questions at hand. As meetings progressed, we did see a willingness of participants to ‘let go’ of their individual issues and work with us on defining a future. By tabling the negative, there was room to think beyond the current situation and envision a future. Guiding questions led our discussions and surveys including:

### **DISCOVERY**

- What tourism assets do you have in and around your community?
- What type of tourism is working in your community?
- What kinds of activities do tourists undertake? Provide the best examples.
- What have you done to improve your community's livelihood through tourism?
- What positive linkages exist now between tourism and the resources you have?

### **DREAM**

- Please close your eyes if you feel like it. How do you envision your community 25 years from now?
- Think about what “ideal tourism” means in your community for your children and grandchildren/for future generations.

### **DESIGN**

- Putting dreams into practice. What actions and strategies do you feel are needed to achieve these dreams? Where/What? How?

### **DESTINY**

- We have achieved or learned about

tourism and its potential contribution to your community. What comes next?

- How can the outcomes and what we have learned to be sustained?
- How and where might these ideas be used in the future?

We found this methodology to be engaging, inclusive, and an opportunity to move the relationship between the park and its nearby communities into a forward-thinking, action-oriented collaborative process. The responses recorded during all interviews, meetings, and surveys were summarized and analyzed thematically by the research team. [\[xi\]](#)

### **What did this process produce?**

Several themes resulted from interviews, surveys and meetings, which had spillover impacts on sharing destinations resources and ideas. Following are some of the most prominent themes and their associated actionable ideas moving forward.

### **Conservation Awareness**

Participants from all three communities value conservation. The viewshed and dark skies preservation was particularly important. Ideas for preserving the viewshed and dark skies included educational programs within the communities and establishing local ordinances.

For example, Medora suggested implementing more local ordinances to protect existing open-spaces.

Dickinson residents also desired a recycling program and the use of the Outdoor Heritage Fund, which provides grants for conservation in North Dakota [\[xii\]](#), to help develop recreation opportunities at Patterson Lake.

In addition some areas touched on regional conservation efforts, beyond park boundaries.

*Actionable Ideas:*

**C1.** Develop programs that educate and

empower residents to play a role in local conservation, such as environmental education programs, information sharing, and youth engagement.

**C2.** Launch an education program to inform neighboring community residents about the natural management of prairie dogs and other species within the park borders.

**C3.** Identify a mechanism for community input into the development of a feral horse management plan.

**C4.** Increase mechanisms for TRNP and Community-level engagement. Example: Park volunteer days (themed) and Adopt-a-Spot programs-whereby people might pick up litter or help with invasive species eradication, etc.

### **Strategic Partnerships**

Community meeting participants identified a diverse collection of potential strategic partners to work with on realizing many of the goals mentioned throughout the visioning process. Medora residents suggested partnering with local authors to advance their goal of educating visitors about the history of the area. They also suggested that increased partnerships with the other gateway communities would strengthen tourism across the region.

These included local university collaboration, CVBs, community centers, libraries, adjacent public land managers, associations and foundations.

*Actionable Ideas:*

**SP1.** Grow partnerships with DSU; if partnerships are occurring take advantage of marketing opportunities to publicize educational collaboration.

**SP2.** Develop a ‘friends of the park’ email communication list or listserv through which to reach all potential partners with any future development or support needs.

### **Tourism Management**

Common to all community meetings was a

continued emphasis aspects of visitor management and tourism development. For example, there was interest in fostering the 'Old West' themed tour development and continue focusing on both Native American and cowboy culture; local food; equestrian and non-motorized trail activities. Transportation efficiencies were also noted, such as a park shuttle to decrease visitor traffic, and enhancing activities for longer stays and some interest in seasonal expansion as well.

*Actionable Ideas:*

**TM1.** Explore options for transportation and infrastructure support, such as park shuttles.

**TM2.** Partner with local authors to enhance storytelling efforts such as events, guided tours, and interpretation within the park.

**TM3.** Conduct research on other national park gateway communities for innovative solutions and best practices elsewhere that have responded to limited workforce and seasonal housing barriers.

### Youth Engagement

Participants in all communities expressed a strong desire for more youth-oriented activities and engagements. Dickinson residents specifically suggested integration with school curriculum, through field trips and library programs, as well as partnerships with the DSU Honors program. In Watford City, suggestions included leadership education, afterschool programs, and more community-based projects for youth to engage. Watford City residents also suggested seeking private or corporate sponsorships for programs that would better engage youth with TRNP.

*Actionable Ideas:*

**YE1.** Partner with educational institutions (such as DSU) to increase use of and further align the existing TRNP curriculum guides with state content standards.

**YE2.** Explore the possibility of a Youth Ranger program. Engage students through

signing up to leading guided hikes, volunteering to visit campsites and share information with visitors, or for clean-up events within TRNP.

**In summary,** the AI method provided an excellent platform to launch new ideas, increase collaboration, and ensure avenues for information sharing. AI marked the beginning of a much longer process that may lead to sustained improvements in the relationships between the park and communities and changes in attitudes in all parties. We believe that AI provided the necessary process to focus on the future. We also felt it served as a forward-thinking and opened the door to future collaborative processes that address issues, such as retaining dark skies, and other natural resource concerns, such as air pollution, feral horse populations, and work on invasive species. For the complete report on the process and associated outcomes, please download: <https://app.box.com/shared/static/8tsc9qedi22jfudhltpz6yhj0yjmy27h.pdf>



Sunrise at Theodore Roosevelt National Park. Photo Credit: Leah Joyner

This article was prepared by Dr. Kelly Bricker and Leah Joyner of the University of Utah, and Dr. Qwynne Lackey, SUNY Cortland University (fall 2020). She and her colleagues designed and implemented this study as part of a larger project with Kansas State University and Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

**Keywords:** Conservation, Community engagement, Protecting natural and cultural heritage resources, Stakeholder cooperation

# MALLORCA TRIES TO TAME TOURISM

By Daza Garcia, Msc. Tourism and International Development

Article first appeared in the [DSR Autumn 2020 issue](#)



Capdepera Lighthouse, Mallorca. Photo Credit: Marci Marc

## Can Mallorca Again Be “the Island of Calm,” Even After Tourists Return?

*“If you are stunned by the noises that civility entails, ... follow me to an island that I will tell you, to an island where there is always calm, where men are never in a hurry, where women never get old, where they don’t waste themselves not even words, where the sun stays longer and Mrs. Moon walks more slowly, infected by laziness.”*

—SANTIAGO RUSIÑOL, SPANISH PAINTER AND WRITER (1922).

That was Mallorca in 1922. Largest of the Balearic Islands, which lie in the eastern part of the Spanish Mediterranean, Mallorca has become the preferred summer destination for so large a number of European tourists that it has turned into an example of uncontrolled and unsustainable development. During the summer months pre-pandemic, it was common to find the Son Sant Joan Airport flooded with new tourists, hotels and resorts at almost 100% of capacity, and the beaches and coves crowded with visitors wanting to enjoy its photogenic crystalline waters. In 2017 the Economy Circle of Mallorca – a private institution that conducts debates and studies on economy and society – stated that “There are objective reasons to think that Mallorca is on the way to dying of success due to the massive influx of visitors caused by its unsustainable growth

... leading to its advanced socioeconomic decline with low-skilled occupations and low wages.” [1]

Now, despite the Covid-19 pandemic, the island has begun to respond, at least partially, to revising some 60 years of tourism practice.

Initially, Mallorca was an island dedicated to agriculture, but in the 60s the tourist boom began, taking advantage of greater international openness in the Franco dictatorship. It was then that the island began to gain relevance at European level. Aside from the pandemic, Mallorca has become one of the most important destinations in Spain. It receives around 12 million tourists annually – for a population of 896,000 inhabitants – and tourism activity generates at least 30% of formal and direct employment in summer months, not including informal or indirect jobs.[2]

It is difficult to provide references to support this kind of information. This figure is provided by the official statistics institution of the Balearic Islands CAIB. Unfortunately, there is no GDP report of the tourism activity after 2014 (and in that year tourism represented 44.8% of the Balearic GDP). Statistics are mainly focused on the Balearic Islands in general and don’t break down percentages for each island. This 30% represents the employees that have a formal

contract, pay taxes and are directly related to tourism (such as accommodation, food and beverage, and transport). It does not include informal jobs, which can be hard to track, and other indirect jobs (shops, agriculture, etc.).

Traditionally, Mallorca has been a destination focused on “sun and beach” and later – since the [1980s](#) and reinforced in the early [2000s](#) – on “party and drink.” Both occur in the summer months at saturation levels, causing congestion on highways, rising rental prices and housing costs, gentrification, and problems in [waste management](#).

All this has generated some discontent among Mallorcans. According to a report made by Fundació Gadeso, “82% consider that the island suffers saturation, and 74% affirm that as a consequence there is an abusive consumption of resources: water, energy and garbage collection.”<sup>[3]</sup> Residents complain of the aforementioned issues and include the increase of precarious and temporary jobs, inability to buy a home, and uncontrolled environmental wear. Moreover, overtourism due to massive numbers of cruise passengers reached the point where, in [July 2019](#), 11,000 signatures were collected from residents who demanded that cruise arrivals should be limited to one per day.

Until now some of the broad measures that had been taken to combat saturation include application of a “sustainable tourism tax” (since 2016 dedicated to environmental issues and tourism projects), greater control of licenses for vacation rentals such as by Airbnb, [limitations on the use of alcohol in party areas](#), and stricter sanctions for those who do not comply.

By contrast, the pandemic summer atmosphere of 2020 made an impression on both national tourists and residents: [half-capacity hotels](#), clear beaches, fewer traffic jams, less crowded party areas, and even shopping streets as popular as “la Calle del Dolar” (Dollar Street) in Alcudia with a large

number of businesses closed in early July.



*Beachgoers enjoy Cala del Moro (Moro's Cove), Mallorca. Photo Credit: 4634656 Pixabay*

### **Mallorca's New Strategic Tourism Plans**

The arrival of the coronavirus together with the expiration of the old Strategic Tourism Plan of Mallorca 2017-2020 motivated the island's government to consider new concerns when designing the new destination strategy. Thus, in June of this year the Council of Mallorca approved the [Strategic Tourism Plan for Mallorca 2020-2023](#), which had been in development since 2019, together with a [Post Covid Tourism Reactivation Plan](#) that prioritizes some actions from the Strategic Plan to help the sector recover. The Reactivation Plan simply adapts the Strategic Plan to this crisis, and its only purpose is to improve the perception of destination safety to attract tourists and recover tourism activity in upcoming months. It does not address overtourism.

Both plans have been developed by the Fundació Mallorca Turisme, which is a 100% public entity supported by an Advisory Council that includes agents from the private sector, such as the Mallorca Hotel Federation and the Chamber of Commerce. The new Strategic Plan arose from collaboration between public and private sectors, including 17 sessions held to analyze Mallorca's current situation and determine what strategic lines to develop. City councils from different municipalities on the island participated, along with chambers of commerce, representatives of business

associations (hotels, travel agencies), and panels of experts. Notably, no citizen participation nor public consultation was carried out during these consultations.

The Strategic Plan is based on four fundamental pillars:

- the strengthening of the image of the destination,
- innovation,
- sustainability,
- transformation toward a “smart destination.”

Of these pillars, strengthening and sustainability strategies tackle in a general way the issue of overtourism. The first objective of strengthening the destination image is to boost the Mallorca brand and unlink it from a reputation for low-cost mass tourism products such as beach-and-beer holidays. Proposed actions would support mechanisms that regulate and control tourist accommodation, carry out an audit of the image of Mallorca’s tourist brand, and develop a repositioning campaign to emphasize other tourist products such as culture, sports, ecotourism, MICE, or film tourism.

As for sustainability, the plan would introduce measures aimed at protecting the destination, its resources, and the territory as a whole from mass tourism and its effects. Some of the proposals to achieve this goal include:

- Reducing the promotion of “sun and beach” without neglecting it,
- Creating new sustainable tourist routes – ecotourism, agrotourism, gastronomic tourism – to extend the season,
- Developing promotional actions to decongest the areas with the highest tourist influx,
- Creating an app that will inform of the places free of saturation and that comply with the necessary sanitary security measures,

- Implementing the UNWTO.QUEST quality certificate for the first time in a European destination,
- Creating an ethnographic atlas of Mallorca and updating its map of handicrafts, and
- Improving management of water and plastics in the hotel sector.

Despite all these measures, the Strategic Plan doesn’t address or provide solutions to the constant complaints from the local population regarding cruise ships and the number of passengers who disembark each day. However, in [July 2019](#), a representative of the government of Palma met with the president of the Port Authority of the Balearic Islands to request their collaboration in jointly limiting the arrival of cruise ships. Currently, the government of the Balearic Islands is working on a new regulation to control the number of berths in high season in the ports of the islands, including the port of Palma. Likewise, the Port Authority is currently finishing up its own Strategic Plan, expected to include Balearic government guidelines in cruise management. At the moment, berthing reservations for 2021 are maintained and those that apply for 2022 will not be approved automatically. Instead, they will be registered and await the regulation prepared by the government to limit the number of stopovers and passengers.

### **A Complementary Plan to Combat Saturation**

Apart from this Strategic Plan to be implemented in the coming months, in July of this year a new plan called [PIAT](#) (Intervention Plan in Tourist Areas of Mallorca) was approved. Started in 2018, it was promoted by the Council of Mallorca to regulate the territorial, environmental, and landscape dimensions of tourism planning in the island. The PIAT in effect establishes a system of tourist zones based on resource carrying capacity and tourist saturation and maturity levels. The plan develops different measures,



improvements, and accommodation limits according to the needs of each type of zone – tourist areas, residential areas, or rustic land.

*Through the PIAT, the local government made a pioneering decision in Spain to reduce the number of accommodation units on the island.*

Through the PIAT, the local government made a [pioneering decision in Spain](#) to reduce the number of accommodation units on the island from 550,000 to 430,000 to combat saturation – 315,000 for hotel accommodations and 115,000 for tourist rentals. The 120,000-unit difference will be eliminated by attrition as their licenses expire. Also, any offers of new short-term rentals are prohibited in tourist-saturated areas of the island such as S'Arenal, Magaluf, Palmanova, or S'illot, and any existing vacation rental will be allowed to offer its services only 60 days per year, of which only 30 can be in a summer month. An area is considered saturated if it either exceeds the maximum tourist offer limit established by the PIAT or has environmental problems caused by high demand.

On the plus side, both the Strategic Plan and the PIAT propose to enhance the island's local culture, gastronomy, and agricultural traditions. In Mallorca, agriculture has been losing weight since the tourist boom to the point that today, “between 70% and 80% of the agri-food products consumed in the Balearic Islands come from outside,” according to the geographer Iván Murray for *Diario de Mallorca* ([2020](#)). The size of the island makes it unfeasible to supply the entire resident population plus more than 10 million tourists a year. In order to preserve agricultural traditions, the PIAT establishes a series of conditions to regulate agritourism and rural hotels – controlling the granting of new permits as long as certain parameters are met such as use of space, age of the main building, limit of places, among others. The PIAT also supports creation of a network of interpretation centers to allow a better understanding of the island's relation to agriculture. Similarly, the Strategic Plan

foresees the creation of ecotourism, gastronomic and agritourism routes, and participation in the product club “Taste Spain” to reinforce local cultural identity linked to agriculture.

### **My Take**

In conclusion, the challenge now is to verify to what extent these new measures will be applied on an island whose economy is highly dependent on tourism. Low visitor levels this past summer leave many businesses desperate to return to “normal” and get the tourism industry back on track.

I think both plans show certain limitations. On one hand, the PIAT proposes some first steps towards controlling overtourism, since it finally defines which areas of the island are tourist-saturated and establishes limitations on expanding tourist accommodation. However, several actors have criticized this plan, such as political parties, [the Balearic Islands Tourist Rental \(HABTUR\)](#) and [the ecologist groups GOB](#) and [Terraferida](#). Among their complaints: The accommodation limit is higher than the previous one, the plan commodifies the island resources, and the PIAT favors hotels over vacation rentals, thereby preventing real distribution of wealth among Mallorcans unable to rent their homes for tourist use.

As for the Strategic Plan, it gives in my opinion great importance to promotion and commercialization of new tourist products intended to reduce saturation by broadening seasonal demand, but it lacks more forceful actions when it comes to avoiding overtourism. In this sense, both plans represent an important initiative in the quest to reduce overtourism but they don't seem to fully complement each other as a whole tourism strategy. Perhaps it will become necessary to combine these stricter regulations with *LESS* commercialization of the product. As things stand, the government of Mallorca's Strategic Tourism Plan 2020-2023 seems to want more to boost tourist

numbers out of season than to redistribute the usual overload in season. Tackling Mallorca's saturation issues requires actually reducing the number of tourists concentrated in summer.

**Keywords:** Overtourism, Product Diversification, Destination Management, Governance

# THE MAYA RIVIERA'S QUEEN OF GREEN

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*By Jonathan Day, Associate Professor at Purdue University*

*Article first appeared in the [DSR Winter 2021 issue](#)*



*All photos courtesy of Beatriz Barreal Danel*

## **Meet Beatriz Barreal**

For more than a decade, Beatriz Barreal Danel has worked to make sure that the Riviera Maya, the Caribbean coastal region of Mexico's Yucatan peninsula, embraces sustainable tourism practices as it continues to grow. Destination sustainability is a long-term commitment, and Beatriz and her collaborators have had to overcome many challenges.

The **Riviera Maya** is one of Mexico's most popular and fastest growing destinations, with numerous all-inclusive resorts and luxury hotels. It stretches along 120 km of coastline on the Caribbean Sea south of Cancun and includes the towns of Tulum, Solidaridad, Playa del Carmen, Akumal, and Puerto Aventuras. As the destination continues to grow, Beatriz has been a vocal advocate for sustainable tourism and good destination stewardship.

Beatriz is the Founder and CEO of [Sustainable Riviera Maya](#), an NGO. She is currently serving her third term on the board of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

Since 2009 Beatriz has dedicated her time to making sustainable tourism the primary driver for development in Mexico, at both national and regional levels. An early adopter of the GSTC destination criteria, Sustainable Riviera Maya is now working toward certifying the municipality of Playa del Carmen as a sustainable destination through GSTC-accredited certification bodies.

Through the years, Beatriz has gained valuable insights into effective ways to implement sustainable tourism. She recently shared these three key lessons from her sustainability journey with the Destination Stewardship Report.

## **Measuring the right things.**

Focusing on sustainability indicators that are meaningful for the local community has been an important step in implementing sustainable tourism in the destination. While the team at Playa del Carmen recognized that sustainable tourism certification requires measuring a wide range of indicators, the importance of giving particular attention to their specific circumstances became an important lesson. Beatriz says, "In our community, focusing on healthy water management, waste management, bio-conservation, and the quality of life of the residents are the key indicators of success for our sustainability programs." Those four priorities gave rise to the second lesson:

## **Getting the right people to the table.**

Early in the process of adopting sustainable

tourism in the Riviera Maya, Beatriz gathered a group of interested tourism industry partners, including hoteliers and tour attraction managers. Over time it became clear that, while these people were important stakeholders, destination sustainability also requires input from people beyond tourism. Working carefully through those four priority criteria and identifying partners that can give meaningful information on indicators for them has been a gamechanger for the destination. Today, in addition to hospitality partners, Sustainable Riviera Maya works with a range of specialists from outside the tourism industry. To ensure effective water management, for example, the local government water department and the water management company, Aguacan, are both at the table and contributing to the plan. Perhaps more important, a benefit of working closely with these new partners is that they have greater understanding of the nuances of how to measure those key indicators.

### **Engaging the Community.**

Perhaps the greatest insight from Playa Del Carmen is the importance of engaging the community, of including other organizations with shared values in the sustainability process. A new website, originally designed to provide information to stakeholders, has now taken on the important role of engaging partners in sustainability projects. It's currently in beta testing with organizations in the destination. By creating a platform where projects can be shared with the community, new partners have aligned their activities with the sustainable destination goals.



*Helping with a tree planting project in the Maya village of Muyil, supported by the Banyan Tree Mayakoba*

In one example, the Mexican Association of Arboriculture, committed to planting trees in the city and creating a living museum. In another project, a caving group, [Circulo Espeleologico del Mayab](#) has joined with local authorities to preserve cenotes, the region's signature limestone pools. The project helps create unique experiences for visitors and improve water quality for the community. In yet another project, an NGO called Guardians of the Caribbean, have committed to an education and awareness campaign highlighting ways to protect water resources for the people of the region.

Sustainability is a team effort requiring many stakeholders who are involved and engaged, including the local people. Beatriz describes the team "like a diamond and its facets, that will only be completed when all the facets



*Beatriz works on a family needs assessment in a village near Tulum.*

come together and shine at the same time.” Beyond just engagement, Sustainable Riviera Maya is committed to ensuring that the benefits of tourism are broadly distributed across the community. Their tagline sums it up: “Paradise is forever, only if it is for everyone.”

### **Committed to the Long Term**

Sustainability is an ongoing process and there is always something more to be done. Beatriz is committed to “*KAIZEN*”, the Japanese term for “continuous improvement.” That allegiance to long-term performance management is central to the story of sustainability in the region. While there is still much to be done, there is now a team in the Riviera Maya committed to ensuring that the growth of tourism places like Playa del Carmen will be built on principles of sustainable tourism.

Website: <http://rivieramayasostenible.org/>

Follow Riviera Maya Sostenible on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/rivieramayasostenible>

**Keywords:** Destination Stewardship, Community Engagement, GSTC Destination Criteria

# DOING IT BETTER: ≠KHOADI-//HÔAS, NAMIBIA

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*By Jonathan Tourtellot, Founder and Editor in Chief,  
Destination Stewardship Report*

Article first appeared in the [DSR Winter 2021 issue](#)



*Klip River Valley. All photos by Jonathan Tourtellot*

## **A Tourist Visits a Model Destination Stewardship Conservancy**

*19 May 2019 – It has taken 10 hours for our van to drive north and then west from Windhoek, first on excellent paved highways, then on broad gravel roads. As daylight fades, we pass a nondescript sign reading ≠KHOADI-//HÔAS CONSERVANCY. (The unusual characters represent different clicks in the local Damara language.)*

*A long drive up a mountain ridge and into growing darkness brings us to Grootberg Pass, elevation 1,540 meters, and a rustic parking area. Eventually a LandCruiser appears. It takes us grinding up a steep rocky track that would challenge a mule. We crest a rise, and behold, fairylandlike, the lights of the Grootberg Lodge.*

Reputed to be one of the best in Namibia, the [≠Khoadi-//Hôas conservancy](#) (pdf) is a repeat winner of destination accolades, including placement in the [Sustainable Destinations Top 100](#). The conservancy constitution describes its mission: “To provide an incentive to rural people to conserve wildlife and other natural resources through shared decision-making and financial benefit.”

The community owns and helps run the

Grootberg Lodge. In a normal year, wildlife tourism is the conservancy’s prime tourism moneymaker, at more than 75% of community revenue. Unlike many tourist accommodations among Namibia’s 86 conservancies operated on a joint venture agreement, Grootberg Lodge is 100% owned by the conservancy, and a contracted management company manages the Lodge on behalf of the conservancy community.

With about one person for each of its 3,300 square kilometers, the conservancy is roomy – larger than Luxembourg or the U.S. state of Rhode Island. The land is divided into various areas dedicated to settlement, agriculture, wildlife tourism (Grootberg and surrounds), and wildlife hunting, or combinations of these.

*The staff treats us to a welcome drink on a deck that seems to hang over an inky abyss. We dine and retire, taken by guides with flashlights each to our own thatched bungalow.*

*Next morning, the seeming abyss reveals itself: The dramatic Klip River valley, scooped out of a semiarid plateau landscape. Its cliffs and mesas are painted in morning pastels, inviting exploration. The lodge was sited way up here for good reason.*

### **Context: How It Began, and Why**

Led by the local Grootberg Farmers Union – itself formed in 1990 – ≠Khoadi-//Hôas formed in 1998 as part of Namibia’s program to help communal area residents benefit from wildlife and tourism by forming conservancies. With foreign assistance, the Grootberg Lodge was built soon thereafter, opening in 2005. It was Namibia’s first lodge to be fully owned by the community. The conservancy constitution describes the purpose: “To link conservation with rural development by enabling communal farmers to derive a direct financial income from the sustainable use of wildlife and tourism.”

### **Governance: Who’s in Charge?**

A Management Committee elected by community members oversees tourism activities throughout the conservancy, along with ecological issues and wildlife management. Of the 3,500 or so conservancy residents 2,500 are voting members. Membership eligibility requires a minimum age of 18 and at least two years in residence. Management Committee members serve 5-year terms, limited to two consecutive terms. An Executive Committee handles day-to-day decisions, with the “Traditional Authority” – ethnic chiefs and their staffs – advising.

Not all Namibian conservancies are so well run, and some have fallen prey to corruption. By contrast, ≠Khoadi-//Hôas is consistently ranked one of the best managed. Why? “Total transparency, no matter how bad the situation might be,” says conservancy Manager Lorna Dax. Everything is audited, and the reports are public. In general, the conservancy strives to adhere to the central government’s [five conditions for good conservancy governance](#):

- Hold Annual General Meetings.
- Properly elect the Conservancy Management Committee.
- Produce annual financial statements.
- Disburse as per the Benefit Distribution Plan.

- Manage wildlife according to a game usage plan, reporting annually.

The Management Committee works with the Namibian Ministry of Environment, Forestry, and Tourism and several NGOs, including the World Wide Fund for Nature, the Grootberg Farmers Union, the Namibia Association of CBNRM Support Organization, and others. The conservancy contracts with Journeys Namibia to run and market the Grootberg Lodge, but most of the staff is local, including assistant managers.

*Many of the carefully trained staff and guides are from the local community. I might imagine it, but I detect a distinct sense of pride and ownership in their bearing and attitude. They don’t manage the lodge yet – that still falls to the joint-venture management company, Journeys Namibia – but one guide told me he thinks they are ready to take over in a year or two. Maybe so.*

### **Funding: Who Pays?**

In comparison to other, still somewhat impoverished rural areas, management reports funding as adequate. Community residents each receive benefits from the lodge, a campground, and a newly acquired smaller lodge, channeled through the conservancy.

According to Manager Dax, the conservancy during a normal year does not get financial support from the government or NGOs, mostly just technical support and a bit of funding to compensate farmers that lose livestock through human-wildlife conflict. “During the Covid-19 pandemic,” she adds, “we have relied heavily on the grants from the government’s Covid relief fund, which help us to cover operational costs and natural resource management. Without these grants most of the conservancies would have closed their doors by now.”

### **How Conservation Works**

Among local wildlife, the conservancy website lists “desert-adapted elephant, black

rhino, giraffe, mountain zebra, eland, kudu, gemsbok, black-faced impala, springbok, duiker, steenbok, klipspringer, warthog, ostrich and baboon. Predators include lion, leopard, cheetah, jackal, spotted and brown hyaena.”

Different areas of the conservancy are set aside for wildlife watching, local hunting, and tourist trophy hunting. (A 2020 [podcast](#) discusses that last controversial activity from the African point of view.)

Eight “[Environmental Shepherds](#)” hired by the conservancy act as game rangers and ecological watchdogs, overseen by a Coordinator who is also employed by the conservancy. The shepherds ensure that any hunting is legal and any claims for livestock losses to predators are legitimate. Payment for livestock loss through predation is based on on-site inspection of the carcass.

*My wife, Sally, signed up for a 6-hour rhino tracking excursion. “It was not just a tour,” she told me on her return, looking suitably trail-weary. “They were really tracking an animal. I’ve never experienced anything like that. This was not easy! We spent hours trying to find a rhinoceros.” Then she described something you cannot do in a national park. “When the trackers finally spotted one, we left the Land Cruiser and went scrambling over rocks to finally see it. A young male, suspicious but patient enough to let us look at it.” In the parks, tourists must generally stay in the vehicles.*

### Land Use

Community-endorsed zonation delineates areas dedicated to settlement, agriculture, livestock grazing, wildlife tourism (where we were), and wildlife hunting, or combinations of these.

This arrangement works only as long as it works. When I asked what would happen if a mining company showed up with an attractive offer in exchange for starting a mining operation with concomitant pollution, the answer came back, “The

community would probably go for it, but all required channels should be followed and all stakeholders involved.”



*Grootberg Lodge guest bungalow, made from local materials*

### Community Engagement

The Lodge gives preference to residents for buying local firewood, vegetables, etc. In addition to electing the Management Committee, residents have priority in applying for Lodge & campground job openings. Conservancy members also participate in game counts for conservation management, and attend an Annual General Meeting to participate in the conservancy’s decision-making process. The conservancy, for instance, uses earnings from the lodge for such things as stationery and supplies for schools, community projects, scholarships, soccer tournaments, and funeral assistance.

*We take a sunset game drive around the Etendeka Plateau behind the Lodge, a barren-looking tableland strewn with red rocks that nevertheless supports a variety of wildlife. We see lots of zebra, an oryx, and a lone jackal. And then, of course, comes the customary gin-and-tonic sundowner.*

*At dinner, Sally mentions her discomfort with enjoying our first-world affluence amid the hard-scrabble reality of rural life in Namibia: “I feel guilty.” I can only point out that we are paying fair prices to a business that earns money for the community and incentivizes wildlife protection, including that rhino. In that sense, we are a useful part of the ecosystem.*



*After dinner, a surprise. The staff and kitchen crew come out and perform songs and a couple of dance routines. They're good at it, a product of the enthusiastic singing competitions organized among the staffs of Namibia's various joint-venture conservatories. Post-dinner singing has become a custom – and a lagniappe for guests. How often do you get serenaded by your chef?*

### **The Measures of Success**

The metrics for evaluating progress are simple: tourism revenues and game counts. If both are steady or increasing, that's a good sign, provided the revenues are distributed fairly and species of game don't exceed sustainable levels.

### **≠Khoadi-//Hôas in the Time of Covid**

With the Grootberg Lodge being heavily dependent on long-haul tourism, the pandemic of 2020 brought a severe test to ≠Khoadi-//Hôas. "As most if not all conservancies in Namibia depend on tourism and conservation hunting as the only source of income, their operations were crippled by the sudden outbreak of Covid-19. The conservancy had to stop all benefits going to the community, as there was no income," reports Manager Dax. "Regular meetings could not be held due to restrictions imposed by the government, and this caused uncertainty among community members. Staff at the lodges were sent home with salary cuts, and poverty increased in the conservancy area."

In Africa's conservancies, that's apparently what happens when tourism goes away.

### **Commentary**

Despite its vulnerability to a sudden tourism drop-off, the ≠Khoadi-//Hôas model is one of the best anywhere in our "A1" search for destinations that come close to meeting the GSTC's Criterion A1 for holistic destination management. "KH" has good community benefit and participation, good conservation of natural resources, appropriate land use,

and at least some cultural benefit.

But this model is most likely limited to places with community-held land, or with land held in trust for the community (as in Namibia), or with what could be called a "commons ethic," a cultural predisposition to see land as a communal asset rather than in terms of transactional ownership. It's hard, for instance, to picture a collection of cantankerous, U.S.-style individual landowners all agreeing to the communitarian structure. The existence of the Grootberg Farmers Union also helped prepare the ground, setting a community precedent for a cooperative undertaking. Destinations with thriving producer cooperatives might consider building on that approach.

All that said, the democratic Conservancy Management Committee approach is one that could well be adapted to smaller destinations anywhere, as it marries tourism management with community benefit and conservation of destination assets – mainly wildlife, in this case.

If other conservancies in Africa and elsewhere can begin measuring up to the same standard, this seems like one of the best possible ways to combine conservation with benefits to local people, funded by responsible tourism. Enlightened leadership and "total transparency" seem to be keystones of success.

*On the morning of our third day, we bid a reluctant goodbye to the enthusiastic staff of the Grootberg Lodge and descend their improbably steep access track down to the parking area, where we clamber back into the van and wind our way off into the flatlands and famed Etosha National Park. There I would see a difference: Etosha would offer many wonderful moments, and the lodge employees, working for a national park management company, were capable enough, but they acted like, well, employees. It wasn't Grootberg.*

Thanks to Martha Mulokoshi and Omagano

Shooya for assistance with this report.  
Portions of my visiting-tourist account  
previously appeared in the former National  
Geographic Open Explorers platform.

**Keywords:** Protecting Natural and Cultural  
Heritage Resources, Wildlife, Rural  
Development, Governance, GSTC  
Destination Criteria

# CHAPTER 3

## *Revitalization of Destinations: Environmental and Cultural Greening*

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*Photo Credit: Roi Ariel*

# THE GREENING OF GRITTY ULSAN

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By Mihee Kang, *GSTC Asia Pacific Director*

Seok Yoon, *Ecotourism Management, Ulsan Metropolitan City*

Article first appeared in the [DSR Autumn 2020 issue](#)



*White egrets speckle the riverside forest in Ulsan.  
Photo Credit: City of Ulsan*

## Urban Ecotourism Brightens a Korean City of Heavy Industry

A city known for its heavy industry has transformed itself in part with an ecotourism approach. In the 1980s, pollution so bad that the city's central Taehwa River became known as the "River of Death." With great effort the city has cleaned and beautified the river and its surroundings, which actually now serves as a sanctuary for salmon and migratory birds and is home to a 2 km long bamboo forest.

That city is [Ulsan](#), one of Korea's seven major cities, with a population of 1.2 million people and occupying an area 1.7 times that of Seoul. Located in the southeastern corner of the Korean Peninsula, Ulsan was designated as a specific industrial zone in 1962 and became a "metropolitan city" in 1997, functioning like a separate province. As Korea's largest industrial cluster for automotive, shipbuilding, and petrochemical factories, Ulsan registers the highest gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in Korea.

Cherished by the local people, the Taehwa River was originally a sandy river with a

variety of fish types enjoying the river. But along with rapid industrial development came more houses built along the river, with unpurified domestic sewage dumped into it.

At one point the city government planned to cut all the riverside bamboo trees for flood management. But citizens and local NGOs took issue with the plan and kept the forest as it was.

In 2000, the public and private sectors started working together on managing the forest by thinning the trees and improving the sewage treatment system. After years of such collaboration, the river and its banks have been largely restored with birds and bamboo abound.

## Saving the Habitat

The Simni Bamboo Grove extends 2 km with the bamboo forest being home to about 48 bird species. For Ulsan citizens it is now a source of pride. Half its length is open to human enjoyment of the dense bamboo forest and fully half is reserved for birds.

This revitalization compelled the national Ministry of Environment to designate the Taehwa River area as a "Korean Ecotourism Destination" in 2013. This designation requires regular sustainability assessments based on the [GSTC Destination Criteria](#). It also required development of the Taehwa River Ecotourism Association to ensure good management that includes public participation. These results are the fruits of collaborative efforts of its citizens, several NGOs, industry, and city government.

Taehwa River, the lifeline of Ulsan, is an exemplary model of an ecological river located in an urban area. It draws global

attention, is cherished by citizens and visitors as a leisure area and serves as an ecological space that reminds them of the importance of nature and environment.

There is a total of 140 species of birds, including 22 species of migratory birds in the summer. In the winter, the area sees over 50 species of migratory birds including 40,000 rooks and jackdaws around the river environment. Some 8,000 egrets migrate to Ulsan every summer – the largest population of egrets in Korea. Ulsan is their only urban breeding ground in Korea and is the only urban place to see the egrets' magnificent group dance.

### **Working with Neighbors**

Along with the joys of viewing the magnificent rooks, jackdaws, and egrets came bad smells, noise, and bird droppings that were not appreciated by many nearby residents. The clever solution was for volunteers to start cleaning the bird droppings from residents' cars early in the morning. Eventually, the city government provided funding to the Taehwa River Ecotourism Association to continue what the volunteers had started.

The Association now cleans 30,000 to 32,000 cars per year during the November to March migration of the messy rooks and jackdaws. The Association regularly holds public discussion sessions and training classes for residents to share the reasons for protection and the strategy for co-living with birds.

The Taehwa River Ecotourism Association has introduced ecotourism to Samho and other villages with bamboo forests along the river, inviting residents to open new ecofriendly businesses including guesthouses, cafes, souvenir shops, ecoguide operators, and so on. The Association supported a social cooperative establishment that operates guesthouses. They also run a 'birding school' and 'birding tours' every winter to enhance visitor awareness of migratory birds and the importance of their

protection.

### **Funding and Results**

The national Ministry of Environment and the city jointly give a subsidy of about USD 85,000 a year for the Association's ecotourism related activities. The city also provides administrative support and has offered new jobs for nearby residents in ecotourism. Under Korean national policy, designated ecotourism destinations get priority for ecofriendly energy solutions, so the city government has installed solar panels on the roofs of 679 neighborhood houses.

Through many community-based ecotourism development initiatives, the Samho neighborhood has transformed itself from one of the poorest in Ulsan to a prosperous ecovillage, known now with pride as "Samho Birds Village."

Tourism's economic impacts have been very positive, largely supported by domestic visitors and with a number of festivals throughout the year, notably a springtime flower festival. The city regularly monitors those economic impacts, along with visitor satisfaction and environmental impacts of tourism in the Taehwa River area.

There are still many challenges for the city to confront to be a more sustainable destination. Both the Association and the city government are GSTC members, looking always for ideas and inspiration to continue that journey. But clearly the successes they have attained can already provide inspiration for others.



*Ulsan's Taehwa River with the Samho Village greenbelt on the right side. Photo Credit: City of Ulsan*

*This article was prepared by Dr. Mihee Kang, GSTC Asia Pacific Director, and Mr. Seok Yoon of Ulsan Metropolitan City. Dr. Kang has assessed the Taehwa Ecotourism Destination in*

*2016 and 2019 on behalf of the Korean Ministry of Environment using the Korean Ecotourism Management Sustainability Assessment Tool. The tool was developed based on the GSTC Destination Criteria. Mr. Seok Yoon worked previously for a local environmental NGO and is now serving as a city government servant in the role of ecotourism management in the Taehwa River area.*

**Keywords:** Revitalization, Protecting Natural and Cultural Heritage Resources, Community Engagement, Wildlife, GSTC Destination Criteria

# CRETE NEEDS TO RESTORE ITS GASTRONOMIC HERITAGE

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By Nikki Rose, Founder and Director, Crete's Culinary Sanctuaries Educational Network

Article first appeared in the [DSR Summer 2020 issue](#)



Horiatiki, traditional Greek Salad, on the coast of Crete.  
Photo Credit: Nikki Rose

## Tourism in Crete can thrive anew with the farming ways of old

People relying on tourism for their livelihood can make their industry more vibrant and progressive by forming alliances with organic farmers and agroecology programs. Both residents and visitors will benefit.

In March 2020, the Greek Ministry of Tourism and the Global Sustainable Tourism Council signed a [Cooperation Agreement](#) to harmonize the Greek tourism industry with international standards for sustainable tourism. Greek Minister of Tourism, Harry Theoharis, said “Our major goal is the restart of Greek tourism sector after the pandemic, capitalizing on sustainable tourism thematics, such as diving tourism, gastronomy tourism and mountain tourism....”

Travelers interested in these themes, especially gastronomy, are typically well-informed supporters of organic food production and conservation. Consumer demand for organic food is increasing around the world. [Data from 2018](#) reports

the global organic market at over USD100 billion and growing. There are 2.8 million organic producers worldwide.

[Agroecology](#) entails more than *producing food without toxins*. It integrates conservation of indigenous traditional knowledge and food self-sufficiency. Agroecological farming has been shown to increase ecological resilience, improve health and nutrition, conserve biodiversity and natural resources, improve economic stability, and mitigate the effects of climate change. Agroecology aligned with sustainable tourism can also help us achieve several UN [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

As tourism begins to recover from the coronavirus crisis, there's an opportunity for residents of Greece to incorporate the concept of agroecology in the process. The island of Crete provides an excellent example of lessons learned and ignored.

## Crete, the “Garden of Greece”

Crete's Minoan history, mythology, and agricultural and culinary artifacts can teach us about our future. Four millennia ago, the Minoans showed respect for nature, living in harmony with it. In the ancient city of Knossos, a sign reads: *Pasi Theis Meli-Honey is Offered to All Gods*. Around the world today, our bees and other pollinators are being killed by pesticides. This is a serious threat to our food supply, farmers' livelihoods, and traditional cuisine. The notion of promoting “gastronomy tourism” is moot until we protect our pollinators.

The traditional Mediterranean Diet is

on [UNESCO's](#) Intangible Heritage list. Studies conducted in Crete before the introduction of industrial farming noted a primarily vegetarian diet based on wild sources and traditional organic cultivation. Today, [only six percent](#) of land in Greece is farmed using sustainable organic methods.

Crete is known as “The Garden of Greece,” but most commercial agriculture today is subsidized industrial monoculture and greenhouse farming. Small-scale organic farmers cannot compete in this “Big Ag” system. Yet this system has not worked well for years. Boreholes have depleted natural aquifers, causing desertification, biodiversity and soil depletion. Production decreases as climate crises increase, impacting all farmers and beekeepers. Amid archaeological sites dating back thousands of years you can find recently abandoned villages. All of the small-scale farmers and artisans are gone, along with their resilient communities.

Large tourist resorts can encroach on communities, increasing the cost of living and doing business. All-inclusive resorts import the majority of their food and stifle local business by their “no need to leave our compound” model. These resorts also extract large amounts of Crete’s natural resources, including fresh water, and erode biodiversity.



*Beekeeper, eastern Crete. “The notion of promoting gastronomy tourism is moot until we protect our pollinators.” Photo Credit: Nikki Rose*

### **The Value of a Holistic Approach**

Greece has a unique opportunity to support Community-Based Sustainable Tourism (CBST) and Agroecology, because some rural

communities still exist and there are many organic farmers still struggling to make a living amid numerous barriers. There are well-established agricultural cooperatives producing organic food and beverages. There is a high percentage of organic-biodynamic vintners in Crete and other regions of Greece.

A CBST agroecology approach covers every section of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council Criteria:

- A) Sustainable management, stakeholder engagement;
- B) Socio-economic stability, social wellbeing;
- C) Cultural sustainability, protecting cultural heritage;
- D) Environmental sustainability, conservation of natural heritage.

That includes several aspects in particular:

**Community benefits:** Greece can collaborate with appropriate experts to support organic producers by providing incentives, training, and establishing sales and distribution structures that rely not just on tourism or exports but every avenue of opportunity, such as schools, hospitals, museums, and events. CBST initiatives in collaboration with neighbors involved in the arts, artisan food production, natural medicine, ecology, history, education, and small-scale accommodation will help to sustain resilient societies, better able to withstand tourism crises like coronavirus.

**Youth:** Greece’s financial crisis has triggered a “brain drain” of young, well-educated Greeks emigrating to seek a better life. One priority for Greece is to create opportunities for the youth to earn a real living at home. Rather than emigrating, many young Greeks have returned to their family’s villages to open small businesses, including organic farmer cooperatives. They are striving to sustain the life they cherish, which also appeals to many visitors. European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, [Stella Kyriakides](#) said, “...without



prospering farmers, we will not ensure food security. Without a healthy planet, farmers will have nowhere to farm.”

To promote Greece’s *cultural heritage and gastronomy*, we need to support our suppliers first

**Fisheries:** The small-scale fisheries industry, nostalgically depicted on postcards, is near extinction. Large-scale illegal operations throughout the Mediterranean, overfishing, and water pollution are depleting precious seafood supplies and poisoning aquatic species. Greece’s current 24% value-added tax rate is pushing small-scale traditional tradespeople out of business, including taverna owners. In order to promote Greece’s cultural heritage and gastronomy, we need to support our suppliers first.

**Heritage plants:** Local heirloom seeds provide the foundation for our extraordinary traditional cuisine. Policies that support industrial farming threaten their extinction. The Global Movement for [Seed Freedom](#) is growing, including the well-established [Peliti in Greece](#).

Agronomist Stella Hatzigeorgiou, co-founder of [Melitakes](#) agricultural cooperative and heirloom seed festival in Pirgos, Crete, said: “Heirloom seeds contain multiple genotypes that give them strength to adapt to external changes, such as climate changes. Their resilience increases good harvests, and farmers have their own seeds for the next season. Plants from local seeds are well adapted to local climatic and soil conditions and external enemies (insects, fungi, bacteria). And rich natural biodiversity is crucial for all healthy cultivation.”



*Peliti Heirloom Seed Festival, Paranesi, Crete.  
Photo Credit: Nikki Rose*

## The Time Is Now

On May 20, 2020 the European Commission adopted a “[Biodiversity Strategy](#) and a [Farm to Fork Strategy](#) for a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system. The two strategies are mutually reinforcing, bringing together nature, farmers, business and consumers for jointly working towards a competitively sustainable future.” These strategies require support of the EU Common Agricultural Policy/Green Deal, Member States, and farmers, but it’s a positive start, which includes:

Reducing dependency on pesticides and antimicrobials, reducing excess fertilisation, increasing organic farming, improving animal welfare, and reversing biodiversity loss.

Protecting and restoring well-functioning ecosystems to boost resilience and prevent the emergence and spread of future diseases.

Agroecology should not be marginally connected with tourism, whether we call it agritourism, wine tourism, or gastronomy tourism. Real, safe food should be embedded into everyday life wherever we live or travel. Agroecology programs can increase the number of visitors supporting conservation programs. If we collaborate with our organic farmers and their communities, we can help leave a legacy of a healthier planet and food system for generations to come.

**Keywords:** Product Diversification, Rural Development, Community Engagement, Protecting Natural and Cultural Heritage Resources

# ANNA MARIA ISLAND RESTORATION

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*By Dave Randle, Managing Director at Blue Community Consortium*

Article first appeared in the [DSR Summer 2020 issue](#)



*Pine Avenue, Santa Maria*

## **Anna Maria's Pine Avenue Restoration Project: A Model for Sustainable Stewardship**

As Anna Maria Island on Florida's Gulf Coast became popular with tourists, retirees, and second homes, the town was in danger of losing its past charm, historic character, and its limited commercial district on Pine Avenue.

Pine Avenue's history reaches back more than a century. In 1911 a steamer would bring tourists from St. Petersburg across the mouth of Tampa Bay to the City Pier on Anna Maria. Guests would walk the Pine Avenue promenade to the bathhouse on the other side of the island, where the beaches are. Later, that bathhouse became today's Sandbar restaurant.

By the turn of the millennium, however, the spotty commercial district on Pine Avenue was languishing. Four lots had been converted from business to residential. When seven more lots went up for sale, Sandbar owner Ed Chiles, already an established leader in the community, and local businessman Mike Coleman became concerned. They could see the potential loss of the island's business district, which neither thought the community could afford. Ed came up with a plan to buy the five lots and

resort the historical nature of Pine Avenue.

The plan was to find 20 people who would each contribute \$500,000 for this \$10 million project, which Mike would supervise. The response was less than Ed had hoped. Only one other person was willing to come up with the \$500,000. Not to be discouraged, they financed the project by leveraging \$1 million they did have.

After meetings with private citizens and elected officials, a new vision was born for Pine Avenue. The consensus was that two story historic cottages would be the best way to reflect the culture, heritage, and nature of their town. The idea was to recreate the old historic promenade walk so that present and future generations of guests could experience a taste of Old Florida.

While the project was underway, it received a large boost from two more entrepreneurs. Mike and Lizzie Thrasher had recently retired from their business in the U.K. and took up residence in Anna Maria Island, where they had vacationed previously. The Thrashers purchased two of the lots from Ed and Mike and collaborated on supporting the restoration by creating the Green Village, a solar business district.

The Pine Avenue Restoration project is now complete. It includes historic architecture in sustainably designed buildings with boutique and retail shops on the first floor and tourism units on the second. Some of the project's major sustainability features include:

**Building Construction** used insulated concrete forms to develop buildings that use very little energy and can withstand 250-mph hurricane winds. The buildings were

certified at the platinum level by the Florida Building Council. Construction manager Mike Coleman said one of the best compliments he received was when he overheard two women visitors commenting on “how good a job they did in fixing up these old buildings,” not realizing that the buildings were in fact brand new. Mike knew then that they had succeeded in restoring the historic sense of place.

**Energy Efficiency** inside the building includes tankless on-demand hot water systems, energy-efficient appliances and lighting.

**Native Plantings** were initiated by landscaper Mike Miller, another vacation visitor turned resident. After settling in, he became disenchanted with his too-lush garden of exotic plants, inappropriate to a barrier-island environment. He went through a [personal transformation](#) that turned him into a champion of native landscapes. He calls his approach “sense of place development.” Mike says, “Rather than change out the sand in order to accommodate exotic plantings, we plant natives for which the sand is the intended home. Rather than hardscapes and lawns that encourage runoff into our water bodies and, ultimately our precious Gulf and Bay, we leave sand wherever possible and create rainwater storage for capture and re-use.”

**Edible Gardens** are placed all along Pine Avenue. The gardens were developed in partnership with [ECHO](#), international experts on tropical agriculture. The ECHO edible gardens [grow food on Pine Avenue](#) year-round. Local restaurants use some of it. The gardens have inspired residents to create gardens in their homes as well.

**Permeable Walkways** have replaced concrete sidewalks on Pine Avenue. Guests and residents alike can stroll on them through the edible gardens and native plants. In the event of a tropical storm or hurricane, the combination of native landscaping and permeable walkways is estimated to reduce flooding by as much as

50%.

**Transportation** – The Pine Avenue redevelopment has spurred some rethinking of transportation. Pedestrian pathways, bicycles, and golf carts are the norm for getting around town. Island visitors are encouraged to use a free trolley.

**Rainwater** is gathered and stored in a 9,000-gallon reservoir and used for both landscaping and the wastewater system.

**Solar Business District:** The [Historic Green Village](#) shopping center includes both historic building restoration and new construction. [Solar, geothermal, energy efficiency, and rainwater collection](#) have helped the village to become one of 100 developments worldwide that have achieved the **Net Zero Energy Building Certification** and LEED Platinum certification. The village produces more electric energy than it uses, [sharing the excess with others](#) on Pine Avenue outside the village. The Village goes even further in the **preservation of historic buildings, including a lodge** and the **greening of their supply chain** as well.

**Local and Sustainable Food** – The anchor for this project is the Sandbar restaurant, known for its [environmental commitment and sustainable practices](#). The Sandbar recently purchased its own farm to ensure that it could get the type of produce it needs. Its seafood is sustainable, much of it purchased from the nearby Historic Cortez fishing village. In addition, the Sandbar has joined with the [Gulf Shellfish Institute](#) to encourage production of shellfish used in their restaurant. The restaurant sometimes also taps the Edible Gardens and its own onsite garden. Other sustainable practices include oyster shell recycling to help restore reefs; elimination of plastic straws, lids, and bags; composting for use by the farm; and a program to put invasive lionfish and wild boar on the menu. The menu also features Grey Striped Mullet, a local heritage seafood that dates back to the Timucuan and Calusa Native Americans who once inhabited the

island. The Sandbar has also teamed up with [START](#) and the [Mote Marine Lab](#) to find solutions to the challenge of intermittent red tides that can shut down businesses.

### **Lessons from Anna Maria Island**

**Local leadership** – It takes a person with passion and leadership like Ed Chiles for change to succeed. This project may not have happened without him. Good management is needed to implement the vision, and Mike Coleman played a critical role, paying attention to the details necessary to bringing the vision to fruition.

**Green planning** – It's important to incorporate environmental features in the initial design – less expensive than adding them later. For this project, green planning made the construction less costly, lowered ongoing operational costs, and increased the value of the product.

**Community support** – Rallying local support helped clear political hurdles and brought more people into the project.

**Openness and flexibility** – Allowing the project to grow organically without controlling of every aspect enhanced this project greatly. Examples include willingness to collaborate with the Thrashers and their idea of the Green Village, utilizing Mike Miller's expertise in native landscaping, and getting local government support for features like the permeable walkway.

**Networking** – Ed Chiles is a co-founder of the [Blue Community Consortium](#), a UNWTO Affiliate and member of the UNWTO International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories. He is also on the boards for [START](#) and the [Gulf Shellfish Institute](#). All three of these groups were invaluable in supporting and expanding the sustainability and heritage preservation vision of the project.

The relationships also have proven to be allies for the business to share the Anna Maria story, to find solutions to the threats of red tide that can shut down business, and the increased sourcing of shellfish for

sustainability. When asked about the greatest success of this project, Ed said “I believe the most important component of the combined projects is their contributions toward elevating the discussion and implementation of sustainable practices in our community.”

**Sustainable supply chains** – A key element of success for this project was building relationships for a sustainable supply chain. While not every restaurant can purchase its own farm, there are ways to negotiate with farmers to ensure supply needs are met. Building relationships with the local fisherman has helped to ensure a good supply of sustainable fish, and local aquaculture – replicable in many places around the world – helps relieve overfishing while creating jobs and strengthening the local economy.

### **The future of Anna Maria**

By 2011, the [Pine Avenue Restoration project was a success](#). Challenges and threats of course remain, such as the red tide events that come and go, as well as such global challenges such as climate change, pandemics, and economic ups and downs.

Aware that there will not always be an Ed Chiles, the community has begun to think about future transitions. Given all the networking that has occurred, coupled with the highly competent team in Ed's organization, the chances for continuity are strong.

One thing that makes Pine Avenue so attractive for an educational model is that within a 15-20-minute walk, a visitor can see and experience all of the sustainability features I have listed. Anna Maria Island serves as a [global model for sustainable tourism](#) and continues to attract interest from around the world. View their [Sustainability Management Plan](#) and consider a visit someday yourself.

**Keywords:** Destination Stewardship, Revitalization, Protecting Natural and Cultural Heritage Resources

# A TAIWANESE ISLAND BOOSTS TOURIST CAPACITY – SUSTAINABLY

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*By Monique Chen, Chairwoman, Sustainable Travel Taiwan*

Article first appeared in the [DSR Winter 2021 issue](#)



Rebuilt stairways can handle increased foot traffic to the peak.  
Photo Credit: Roi Ariel

Taiwan's Turtle Island, an active volcano known for its turtle-like shape, claims a rare lily, an endangered flying fox, a dazzling coral reef, a thriving ecosystem, and a "Milk Sea." Its proximity to Taipei makes it a tourism magnet – and a management challenge.

The island lies 10 km east off of Taiwan's Northeast and Yilan Coast National Scenic Area (NEYC), named as one of the [Top 100 Sustainable Destinations](#) from 2016 to 2020. Known as Guishan Island in Mandarin, it has a surface area of 2.85 km<sup>2</sup> and a high point of 398 meters above sea level with an unused military outpost on top of the hill. The island's location off the northeast coast puts its ferries within an hour's drive of Taipei, and then a mere 20-minute boat ride to the island.

Dated back to the Qing Dynasty (around the 18<sup>th</sup> century), Turtle Island had a population of 700 villagers at its peak. The whole village was relocated to the main island in 1977 because of the limited health, educational, and transportation resources. After the relocation, the island became a military base from 1977 to 2000. All the land was expropriated by the military.

The accessibility restrictions and the

influence of the warm, plankton-bearing [Kuroshio Current](#) (pdf) has resulted in a surprisingly well-conserved area of rich natural and geological resources, home to many fish and coral reef species and a critical area for Taiwan's offshore fishery. Over 50 hot spring vents lie in the sea floor near the "turtle head," where a unique species of crab lives. There are around 16 species of cetaceans in the area according to studies. A diversity of more than 400 species of plants and 120 species of butterflies, snakes, birds are found in the island, as are two native Taiwan species, the endangered Formosan flying fox and the Formosan lily, as well as a native Chinese fan palm habitat.

## Limiting Carrying Capacity

Because of its amazing natural and marine resources, the government reopened Turtle Island for ecotourism in 2000 in response to demand from the tourism industry. To protect island ecology, capacity control was set at 250 persons per day, almost all brought in by ferry. Also, to ensure low impact on the environment, the supporting policy "[Regulations for Guishan \(Turtle\) Island Ecological Tours](#)" (Chinese only) was put into effect. The regulations prohibit fishing, hunting, feeding wild animals, taking any natural resources from the island, and importing animals and plants to the island.

In the first two years, the capacity limit caused some management problems. NEYC, a part of Tourism Bureau Taiwan, was struggling with pressures from local stakeholders, especially private accommodation businesses and ferry companies. Over 10,000 tourists applied to

visit Turtle Island every day, but the low draw rate raised issues and complaints from both tourists and local businessmen on the main island.

### **Increasing Carrying Capacity**

NEYC adopted a strategy of slowly increasing tourist capacity while keeping the ecosystem intact. The daily visitor capacity limit was gradually raised from 250 to 350 (2002), then 400 (2005), 500 (2007), 700 (2010), 1000 (2014), and 1800 (2015 to the present).

### **How did they do it?**

It is easy for a DMO to declare it would like to set eco-social carrying capacity according to academic research, but when the DMO actually begins to implement it, stakeholder voices and facility capacity must be taken into account. There are always academic professors who strongly embrace ecological conservation without tourist access and who may not agree with rising visitation. Other professors will take stakeholder opinions and the environmental situation into account. The NEYC staff told me that there was no conflict in their discussion with professors.

In order to help the local economy by replacing the declining fishing industry with a growing tourism industry while still protecting marine resources, NEYC went on to hold meetings with local stakeholders at intervals on how to increase carrying capacity and improve the facilities so as to achieve a sustainable “ecological economy.” Following these discussions, including professors from marine, biological, and recreational departments, NYEC arrived at a plan that balanced the environmental research baseline with local economics. Considering that only a part of island (the tail part, around a tenth of its surface) was open to the public, the dock, hiking trails, and service facilities (toilets) could be improved and maintained.

The tourist-accessible area is around 19,835 square meters and the capacity baseline was

originally set at 132 square meters per person in 2000. Visitation sessions were set at 150 people a session before 2010, then 250 people a session in 2010, under the operating procedure controlled by an NEYC guard team. Now tourists are usually split into four 90-to-120-minute sessions per day, with a limit of 450 visitors at the same time during March to November. (The island is closed during monsoon season from December to February.) Wednesdays are reserved for academic organizations only, up to 500 visitors, split into different sessions.

Coastal guards monitor when tourists get on board and leave the island. Now, there are 13 recreational ferries with a capacity of 85-94 visitors, among which four ferries are owned by the former Turtle Island residents and the rest run by other locals in NEYC area. Most of the tour packages combine dolphin watching and hiking on the island, so some ferries can go dolphin watching first and take turns to get on the island.

Each group of visitors landed on the island has 90 to 100 minutes to tour along the trail system, guided by licensed guides. After a stop at the tourism center, tourists visit the temple and old primary school buildings, walk around the lake to explore biodiversity, and visit the military tunnel and abandoned fort where they can watch the sea.

According to the report, there are always requests for more facilities and carrying capacity. For example, overnight stay service and submarine tours were suggested. Because NEYC’s main target is to conserve the natural landscape and environment, development with big construction didn’t fit in their plan.

### **Control of Dolphin Watching**

The dolphin/whale watching activity around Turtle Island began even before Turtle Island opened for tourists in 1997. As one observer has noted, “in 20 years, Taiwanese people changed to conserve the cetaceans instead of eating them.”

However, there were no regulations and no

consideration of carrying capacity for tourists participating in a dolphin and whale watching package. Given that all ferries have must acquire a license from Yilan county to run a recreational business, the stakeholders decided to limit the number of licenses in the area to 13, tied to a code of conduct. That put an automatic limit on cetacean watching around the island.

The negative impact from dolphin watching activities brought together academics aligned with NGOs, the Fishery Agency, Council of Agriculture from the Taiwan central government to set up a voluntary certification system, “Whale Watching Mark,” in 2003. Among the 13 ferries, only 5 were certified. Due to the complicated documentation process required for certification and given that green tourism was not mainstream enough in Taiwan, the Whale Watching Mark hasn’t received good responses from ferry companies until now. NEYC has also started to cooperate with Taiwan’s national [Ocean Affairs Council](#) in monitoring dolphin research in the area. Since 2017, researchers have used GPS to track the sight-seeing ferries as an indicator of dolphin movements.

As a DMO, the NEYC has tried to find friendly strategies to get more ferry owners to understand that chasing dolphins may harm the environment. By regulation, tour guides working for ferries and on Turtle Island must be licensed by NEYC twice a year. Through annual tour guide training, the ferry owners have gained more knowledge about protecting the marine dolphins. According to one captain, one protocol among ferries now is to take turns for 10 minutes for tourists to observe nearby dolphin families when more than one ferry approaches them.

### **COVID-19 and Beyond**

During the Covid-19 pandemic, domestic tourism in Taiwan has soared as Taiwanese were not able to travel overseas. Some popular Taiwanese destinations encountered

unprecedented negative impacts of overtourism for the first time. Even though tourist arrivals reached full capacity during weekdays, Turtle Island remained under control because of its carrying capacity system.

One challenge NEYC faces now is the “Milk Sea” close to the island, where “God has spilt the milk” as described by promotional agents. The Milk Sea refers to seawater with milky cream color caused by undersea hot springs. The tourism industry has touted this new sightseeing spot as a novelty, and tourists are flooding in. More and more yachts, stand-up paddleboards, and kayaks have come to this area, causing safety problems and conflicts with the ferry boats.

Fortunately, from 2016, NEYC has been implementing the GSTC Destination Criteria and participating in the [Green Destinations Program](#) has helped NEYC gain confidence and not only assess what they have done so far but also act on guidelines for achieving a more “sustainable-ecological economy” tourism pattern. Now some voices among original residents express hope that Turtle Island can be designated a cultural landscape heritage site and the history of their traditions and culture preserved.

Whatever changes to the Island may be, they will be based on official adherence to sustainability criteria. “‘Ecological Island’ is the main management strategy of Turtle Island, and the priority is to keep the eco-landscape and lower the construction impact in Turtle Island,” says Chia Feng Lin, Coordinator of NEYC.

Following the criteria, NEYC keeps on communicating sustainability principles and marine conservation to business owners, tour guides, and ferry owners, along with continued academic monitoring of Turtle Island’s ecological indicators.

To summarize, from the viewpoint of sustainability, stakeholders’ voices and social conditions should be taken into consideration as well as academic research.

Although the carrying capacity program may not be 100% perfect from scientists and researchers' environmental protection perspective, NEYC has found a transforming strategy to meet the needs of the tourists, local ferry owners, and environmental conservation needs.

Hopefully, this example can inspire other

destinations to find their own balance strategies.

**Keywords:** Stakeholder Cooperation, Wildlife, Destination Management, Community Engagement, GSTC Destination Criteria



# CHAPTER 4

## *Building Back Better: Destination Management Post COVID-19*

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*Oze, Japan. Photo Credit: Harmony Lamm*

# INNOVATION IN THE ITALIAN ALPS

By Marta Mills, Sustainable Tourism and Communications Specialist & Trainer

Article first appeared in the [DSR Summer 2020 issue](#)



Hiking in the Dolomites. Photo Credit: Dolomiti Paganella

## In Italy's Dolomites, a "Future Lab" Inspires DMO Innovation

Dolomiti Paganella Tourism Board is a regional DMO (Destination Management Organization) comprising five municipalities in the Dolomites, a mountain range in the northern Italian Alps. The region became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2009 because of its '[intrinsic, exceptional natural beauty](#).' According to UNESCO, the Dolomites are '[widely regarded as being among the most attractive mountain landscapes in the world](#)'. Their dramatic vertical and pale-coloured peaks in a variety of distinctive sculptural forms is extraordinary in a global context.'

Before 2015, the Dolomiti Paganella DMO suffered high seasonality, low funding, lack of long-term vision for tourism, and no clarity on the DMO's role. The DMO used to manage a lot of different, ad-hoc projects, lacking in specialization, coordination, and leadership. This created unrealistic expectations and demands from the local stakeholders, and also meant that, according to its current Director Luca D'Angelo, the DMO was 'doing everything for everybody and with no prioritization of tasks, and hence doing it badly'.

The DMO began shifting into sustainability in 2015. Its newest initiative is a research-intervention think-tank on the future of tourism in the region. Launched on 29

October 2019, [The Future Lab](#) is engaging not only the industry stakeholders but also – and for the first time – the whole community.

## The Destination

Dolomiti Paganella is the brand name of the destination, Paganella being one of the peaks. The five picturesque '[communes](#)' – [Molveno](#), [Andalo](#), [Fai Della Paganella](#), [Cavedago](#), and [Spormaggiore](#) – are surrounded by imposing, vertical rock walls, sheer cliffs and a high density of narrow, deep and long valleys. They provide opportunities for [adventure tourism](#) (mountain biking, climbing, hiking, paragliding and skiing) and [family-oriented experiences](#), with several aquaparks, [wellness centres](#), and family festivals.

Interestingly, out of the two million overnight stays annually, 65% visit in the summer. That's unusual for the Alps, where most visitors come in the winter. However, the facilities around the stunning [Molveno Lake](#) and a strong Bike Product developed by the DMO allow Dolomiti Paganella to spread the tourism season much wider compared to other alpine destinations.

## The Change

In January 2015, Luca D'Angelo, former senior tourism researcher at the nearby Trentino School of Management (TSM) and

a director of another DMO in Trentino (Valsugana), took charge of the Dolomiti Paganella DMO. Together with the TSM, he used a [St Gallen Strategic Visitor Flow](#) model to work out visitor flows and decided to focus on only four products (biking, hiking, climbing and family experiences). That shifted the promotion of the destination as a whole into developing and promoting specific products, which subsequently changed the whole structure and the strategy of the organization. Such specialization allowed the DMO to prioritize its activities and focus on a long-term vision.

### **Stakeholder cooperation**

Initially, DMO-stakeholder cooperation focused on product development, forming new funding partnerships with local businesses (cable car companies, trail builders, accommodation providers) and the local municipalities who own the land. They jointly create and sell experiences that are then promoted by the DMO through their online channels. The focus on developing selected products (Bike Product for example) and strong cooperation with local business has built trust that allows more participatory, more efficient destination management.

Every year the DMO organizes two to three workshops with lift companies, bike chalets and bike hotels to jointly visualize the short and long-term goals for the destination in the next two to three years. Involving key industry players has been fundamental both in creating a strategy for the destination and for developing quality product.

### **Results and Impacts**

The change has raised destination visibility, extended the season from April to November and broadened the visitor market. The growth in visitor numbers – 500%, from 2015 through 2019 – has significantly increased the revenue for the DMO and for the businesses. However, this growth came with negative environmental costs, and in the summer months overtourism became an issue for residents increasingly concerned

about the region's capacity for yet more visitors. Their enthusiastic support for the growth that had brought economic benefits started giving way to worry that overtourism was hurting quality of life for the communities. The FutureLab was the DMO's response.

### **Next Phase: The Future Lab**

As the confidence and trust in the DMO rose, it was the right time for [The Future Lab](#) to engage the local population in deciding on the future of tourism '[as a positive force for the good of our community tomorrow and in future decades](#)'. The Future Lab is involving hundreds of stakeholders in defining the role of tourism in the region, aiming for a more environmentally and socially sustainable model that benefits local residents, the environment, visitors, and tourism businesses.

I learned about it during a week-long tourism [training on management of UNESCO natural sites](#) run by the [TSM](#) in November 2019. Funded by the DMO and run in partnership with the TSM and [Frame & Work](#), the Future Lab is seen by the DMO as a more innovative and sustainable form of destination management, based on stakeholders' views on how tourism can benefit them and the natural environment. Over 700 local people attended the launch on 29 October 2019, when consultation on the future started. Discussion focused on four issues:

- Destination's DNA;
- Future generations' involvement in destination development;
- Thriving in a future shaped by climate change;
- Improving tourism balance.

The plan was to continue with stakeholder meetings and workshops in 2020, run by the DMO in cooperation with TSM and Frame & Work. A special [Blog](#) and the DMO's Facebook group (only in Italian) allows the local people to check the updates and

interact with the project. Before February 2020, over 20 workshops had been completed, and meetings with various associations and individuals willing to connect with the Future Lab were in full swing.

And then the coronavirus happened.

### **The DMO and the Future Lab Respond to COVID-19**

The most recent analyses predict that the turnover in the region will be 40% less compared with the previous year. During the pandemic, the DMO has focused on two areas:

- Supporting the tourism industry with constant updates; surveys on feelings and emotions; revision of the event calendar; and creation of a toolkit to help with cancellation, vouchers, revenue, social media communication, market insights, and so on.
- Creating a strong relationship with the tourism community. For the latter, they have created new content with a different vision of the future, as in this [short video](#). The community was also [surveyed](#) about their feelings on travelling again. The DMO encourages the community to use this time constructively by focusing on [‘internal resources that can be exploited’](#) – in other words, tapping the ideas, know-how, skills, and experience that locals can exchange to help with recovery. ‘We are working on the re-start phase’, says Luca, ‘but at the same time looking for a “new” vision through the Future Lab. [This is precisely the idea of](#)

[the Future Lab](#): reflecting on today to conceive interesting prospects for the future’.

The next steps will be to reboot project communication and stakeholder engagement, stimulate a new involvement from the community, and build new research tools. ‘It is important to note that we do not aim to turn the Future Lab into a crisis management project for the current challenge’, Luca told me. ‘While there is plenty of work to be done as a DMO to offer continuous support for our local community now, the focus of the Future Lab remains firmly fixed on planning and preparing for a better future.’

Thus, the project is still what it set out to be: a lab focusing on the long-term development and strategic decisions for the destination. The Covid crisis has surely changed the context of the process, and partners TSM and Frame & Work are currently rescaling, refocusing and recharging the project. They intend to incorporate the lessons from the pandemic that can also be replicated in other destinations.

Luca has no plans to leave the DMO as this new phase is just beginning. Even if he were to depart, the Future Lab’s strong foundations, based on cooperation with partners and stakeholder approval, should ensure the continuity of the project.

**Keywords:** Stakeholder Cooperation, Destination Management, Community Engagement, Overtourism

# PANDEMIC BRINGS SURPRISES TO SERBIA

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*By Ivana Damnjanović, Vice-dean for international cooperation at Singidunum University, Faculty of Health and Business Studies*

*Article first appeared in the [DSR Autumn 2020 issue](#)*



*Divčibare Mountain, Western Serbia. Photo Credit: Ivana Damnjanović*

## **Domestic Destinations Cope with Profitable, Unpracticed Tourists**

“Welcome out here to our contamination ZONE,” my hosts say, jokingly alluding to the name I attributed to Serbian destinations swarming with tourists in the midst of the new peak of coronavirus. It is almost unimaginable that Divčibare mountain, located just over a 100km southwest of Belgrade, had resembled a ghost place in March and April 2020. The pandemic then brought destinations to the verge of despair all over the world, and Serbia was no exception. Now, with summer almost ending, I watch people queuing for a table in this traditional local restaurant. For the first time ever it occurs to me: What a thin line there is between undertourism and overtourism.

This unprecedented burst of post-lockdown pent-up need to travel, to move, to change surroundings, to experience, to unwind and forget reassures me once again that this urge is inherent in our species. International visitors have had to stay away, but for Serbia, booming domestic tourism is saving the day, the season, the entire year – in natural and

rural regions at least. And I cannot help but wonder: *HOW PREPARED ARE WE?*

Although economically favorable, the situation developing in some rural destinations has been overwhelming – environmentally and socially. New tourism trends have evolved on both the demand and the supply side. Instead of foreign coastal resorts, Serbian beach-lovers are enjoying their own country’s beauty, filling domestic beds and cash registers, but without stopping to adapt their behavior to the domestic context. That’s causing environmental problems, occasional disruption in service provision, and discontent of loyal domestic tourists.



*Serbian tourists dine pandemic-style. Photo Credit: Ivana Damjanović*

### **The Shiny Side of the Coin**

Supply chains have certainly been ready: Accommodation and gastronomy providers, local farmers, grocery and souvenir shops, entertainment and adventure organizers and many more in this intricate network have been eager to jump on the wagon once the domestic restrictions eased. Throughout Serbia, bookings are already made until mid-November, and business owners are happy beyond expectations.

In the strange framework of 2020, tourism has once again showed its beneficial nature. Due to the increased demand, business owners tell me that the season will last longer than usual. In certain rural communities, stakeholders in accommodation and food supply will profit significantly more than previous years. International-travel budgets saved for typical seaside trips in Montenegro, Greece, or Turkey are instead being spent in country. What's more, these tourists have been prepared to pay more than usual – sometimes double or triple.

Normally outbound Serbian tourists finally have the opportunity to visit all the locations depicted for years on social media by local travel enthusiasts: breathtaking, well-preserved nature, and diverse culture, traditions, and history – Tara National Park, Golubac Fortress on the Danube River, Sokobanja Spa, World Heritage-listed Studenica Monastery, just to name a few from [an array of travel opportunities](#). Many Serbians now recognize that the

experiences Serbia provides are comparable to destinations abroad and may even plan their next trip within the country.

### **The Flip Side**

“What about sustainability?” The professor in me pushes the topic with managers of a local hotel and with owners of short-term rentals, some of them my former students. “Wait until we survive the season,” they readily reply, reflecting its economic aspect. I hide my next thought behind the sip of locally produced raspberry juice: Sustainability cannot wait, it either is or isn't. However, I understand the motive behind their answer. I know they genuinely care about the environment and society of the destinations they operate in but are still driven by the old normal. Focus on attracting and satisfying demand. Meet standards based on arrivals and revenue.

This coin has its detrimental side. With the exception of certain protected areas, most destinations have been caught off-guard regarding the negative environmental impacts such as littering or overvisitation of fragile ecosystems resulting from the sheer volume of tourists. Those places might be years and budgets away from recovery. Some local communities traded off their secluded, rural lifestyles with their specific customs and traditions for the sudden temporary opportunity to profit, their health included: Tourists brought the virus even to the most remote corners of the country.

### **Habitual Beachgoers Discover Authentic Countryside Is Not a Resort**

My observation and conversations lead me to conclude that we are witnesses of emerging tourist segmentation. The larger group is composed of tourists who would typically spend their summer holidays in regional coastal resorts. These coast-lovers are tolerant of crowds, but being compelled to travel within the country resonates with a whiff of resentment. This feeling often manifests itself through unrealistic demands for service providers – a desire for higher

service quality and lower prices, even when the value for money spent is fair. Serbia's diverse inland destinations – mountains, lakes and rivers, thermal springs, villages and towns, historical, archeological and religious sites – call for a more observant type of behavior than that expected at typical coastal resorts. Thus, they may have to withstand overly demanding, sometimes disrespectful tourists, unmindful that a real community is not like staff employed at a resort and expectant that somehow designated people will clean up after them.

The second segment is represented by tourists loyal to domestic destinations or businesses. Their resentment comes from unreciprocated loyalty. The high demand this past summer led to increased prices, all too often not waived even for loyal guests from past years.

Those traditional local enthusiasts, who normally travel to enjoy the peace and quiet of countryside locations, are intolerant of the crowds and related behavior, so they often opted to stay home. Others felt it not safe enough to travel or found increased prices unaffordable.

### **Lessons Learnt**

On my way home I am under the strong impression that these new faces of tourism cannot be overlooked if we are to embark on the new path of a sustainable and regenerative future of tourism. Every country's experience might help us all understand tourism better through lessons learnt. Those currently on my mind are:

- Tourism needs to find ways to become resilient towards sudden, extreme change

in tourism numbers;

- Destination and business management has to rely strongly on sustainability principles with a regenerative approach and promote them throughout the entire network of stakeholders;
- Don't assume. Closely monitor how tourists and tourism stakeholders change their needs and behavior patterns with changing circumstances – in Serbia's case, resort-style tourists being compelled to travel domestically, and inexperienced local newcomers being brought into the tourism sector (e.g. farmers and property owners);
- While continually monitoring their normal tourism profile, destinations and businesses should keep a constant eye on all tourism segments, since in a heartbeat they can become theirs, invited or not;
- Tourism destinations and businesses should not try to be "all things to all people" but rather be explicit about communicating the specific type of behavior that the welcoming destination is ready to accept.

As an afterthought, what if this season's unexpected boom in resort-style tourists doesn't repeat next year? Is it a good or bad thing? The country's entire tourism industry will need to take time to decide on the answer and then act upon it while there is still time.

**Keywords:** Overtourism, Protecting Natural and Cultural Heritage Resources, Product Diversification, Rural Development

# HOW DATA SCIENCE CAN HELP DESTINATIONS

By Irene Lane, Founder and President, GreenLoons

Article first appeared in the [DSR Autumn 2020 issue](#)

## It's Time to Merge Sustainable Destination Planning with Data Science

Before COVID hit, destination stakeholders were concerned about the social, economic, and environmental impact of [overtourism](#) at their locales. On the one hand, tourists eagerly flocked to fragile, biodiverse hotspots thereby assuring plentiful (albeit low paying) service jobs, corporate hospitality investments, and tax revenues. On the other, local residents were facing the costs of an overloaded public infrastructure, a decaying social fabric holding their communities together, and increased residential resistance to fickle travelers looking for their next viral Instagram post.

Throughout, many destination stakeholders had called for both transparent, pragmatic sustainability standards and efficient data collection. An easy way to combine the two would help strategic investment and decision-making. Data modeling and statistical analysis, known as data science, is the key for doing that.

Now comes the age of Covid-19, with its declining tourism arrivals and tax revenues, along with the advent of policy changes (or at least discussions) that promote racial and social justice. That makes strategic decision-making buttressed by data science more important than ever.



ROI Model starts with the operational, community, employee, and customer investments (along with savings and incremental revenue opportunities) needed to adhere to the GSTC Industry Criteria. The ROI Model then incorporates specific GSTC Destination Criteria to allow and incentivize businesses to create their own 5-year ROI Dashboards thereby creating a continuous improvement loop.

## Development of ROI Financial Model for Sustainable Destinations

For those who have been studying and advocating for destination sustainability, none of the social, economic, or environmental impacts of myopic destination planning were surprising. But a few of us with backgrounds in data analytics informally endeavored to go one step further. My contribution was to develop a return on investment (ROI) financial model that accounted for GSTC Destination Criteria along with other pertinent data including local tax incentives, productivity rates, and consumption benchmarks.

Calculation of the ROI of sustainability was not an entirely new concept. Previously, tourism companies had determined ROI based solely on operational investments and cost savings, such as those found with renewable energy, water conservation, waste management, and food and beverage sourcing projects, among others.



The consistent issue was that ROI, calculated under those parameters, was [typically negative for the first two years](#). So, it came as no surprise that destination managers would choose to make other investments with quicker and higher rates of return.

The flaw in such ROI calculations was that they were not holistic in their approach.

By using an environmental scorecard approach for measuring ROI, I built on the traditional operational and environmental elements and expanded it to include the costs for and benefits to employees, communities, and customers.

For example, a company's investment in environmental and wildlife educational materials could be balanced against the savings brought about by free media mentions sparked by its sustainability status and incremental revenue from customers seeking sustainable choices.

Another example is a destination's investment in sustainable tourism apprenticeship and small business loan programs balanced against the savings of shared agriculture, transportation, activity, and renewable energy resources as well as the incremental revenue from customers extending their stay at a destination due to the increased variety of options.

Essentially, rethinking the triple bottom-line financial value of each employee, community (including destination partnerships), and customer interaction that stemmed from sustainable investments greatly expanded the view of ROI at the company level.

The result of our informal collaboration was an ROI model that allowed individual tourism businesses – and, in aggregate, destinations – to determine which sustainable criteria investments would yield the greatest returns based on the destination business climate.

At the destination level, for example, policy makers could see the economic impact gained by rebate programs or tax incentives for promoting renewable energy

investments, supply chain partnerships, apprenticeship programs, or marketing campaigns.

The model further addressed how a sustainable tourism company, and thus a destination, can plan, budget, and market the social, economic, and environmental changes and improvements sustainability will bring to their businesses.



*Lucerne, Switzerland supports sustainable development by optimizing operations and promoting nature-based and cultural opportunities for tourists. © Greenloons*

### ROI Modeling in Action

One of the frequently overlooked [drivers of ROI](#) is the calculation of strategic and supply chain partnerships. When partnerships are encouraged or incentivized, and other aforementioned data is included and weighted appropriately, the ROI calculation generally goes from negative to positive during the first year.

If destinations can factor in visitor interactions, employee training and productivity, community partnerships, and culture and heritage preservation behaviors and investments, then sustainability ROI [increases dramatically](#). In fact, statistics reveal for the UK, New Zealand, Australia, and India, that travelers interested in destinations with authentic [culture and heritage sites spend](#) as much as 38% higher per day and stayed 22% longer overall compared to other kinds of travelers.

### Importance of ROI Data Analysis Post COVID

Now that there is the potential for the reset button to be pushed for the tourism industry,

the focus might well be on communities that are working together to increase living standards, biodiversity conservation, and food ecosystem resilience.

In other words, perhaps we can now start adopting a more sustainable or [regenerative](#) set of travel infrastructure practices backed up by – data collection, data modeling, and data analysis practices – rigorous data science.

**Keywords:** GSTC Destination Criteria, Destination Management, Destination Planning, Overtourism



*By investing in ecosystem preservation, destinations can attach a financial value to wildlife conservation, including this caiman in the Tambopata region of Peru. © Greenloons*

# EVEN IN AFFLUENT NORWAY, INNKEEPERS HAVE STRUGGLED

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*By Arild Molstad, Photojournalist, Author, Consultant and Speaker on travel and conservation*

Article first appeared in the [DSR Winter 2021 issue](#)



Aurland Fjord, Norway. Photo Credit: Montag

## **In Aurland, Norway, Good Intentions Contend with Cancellations**

Is another *ANNUS HORRIBILIS* on the horizon for tourism? The industry is still gasping for air – and rescue funding – in the wake of Covid-19. It was not only the world’s weakest and most fragile regions that were hit hard. Top destinations, from California and China to Portugal and France, are still reeling from the impact.

Even in the legendary fjords and mountains of affluent Norway – high on many travelers’ bucket lists – a sense of panic has permeated the atmosphere.

“Just when we were ready to welcome our first guests of the 2020 season, the cancellations came in thick and fast,” says Tone Rønning Vike, who with her husband Bjørn runs the couple’s prize-winning, high-end ecolodge. Called [29|2](#), after the property number of the farm, the lodge nestles in the

spectacular fjord setting of Aurland. The situation was unusually dire for the couple; they had bet their savings, signed a steep mortgage, changed jobs, and moved the entire family to cater to a fast-growing, sophisticated, environmentally engaged international market.

*“It is impossible not to get a strong sense of the importance of taking care of nature and culture, but also of the need to nurture a close relationship between the government and local entrepreneurs.”*

They had sound reasons to be optimistic. Norway’s tourism engine – “Powered by Nature,” [Visit Norway](#) likes to proclaim – was firing on all cylinders, and their [National Geographic](#) “geotourism”-inspired approach to holistic conservation was beginning to pay off. Their ecolodge is situated near three world class attractions: the stunning [UNESCO World Heritage site Naeroyfjord](#); the narrow gauge zig-zag

train climbing a steep gully from the cruise harbour of Flåm; and the wild, breathtakingly beautiful Aurland mountain trek, also known as “Norway’s Grand Canyon.”

What 8 years ago was a dream, became a reality – and then turned into a nightmare.



*Innkeepers Bjørn and Tone Rønning Vike. “In a globalised world, we’re embracing the local and authentic with our Aurland venture,” says Tone. “Isn’t that why people travel – to explore and expand their horizons?” Photo Credit: Montag*

### **For Guests: Small Footprint, Big Impression**

“We did everything by the book – consulted the eco-manuals, had our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions close to zero, got the price-quality balance spot-on,” explains the couple. “Our clients were enthusiastic, even our dog could smell success! We were looking forward to taking guests on excursions that make a small footprint but leave a huge impression.”

Both Tone and Bjørn strongly believe in supporting the local economy. In restoring the farmhouses, they worked closely with farmers and craftsmen in Aurland and the surrounding valleys. One of the world’s northernmost wine producers has added to the cellar’s ample supply of natural and organic wines.

They have fought hard for restoring the wild fish stock in the Aurland river, once ranked as one of the world’s three leading sea trout rivers by British lords who first made the region famous. As a 29|2 ecolodge guest, you don’t run the risk of being served farmed fish. “It’s not good for the body, or for mother nature,” says Tone.

“The 2019 season proved us right,” says Bjørn, a master builder whose expertise with wood is well known in western Norway. Bjørn constructs and restores wooden houses and cabins in some of Norway’s most spectacular valleys and mountains. Being a “wood surgeon,” he has restored old vicarages and 16th-18th century houses. Few know the region better.

### **The Shutdown**

“We were making good money, and had a waiting list for 2020 bookings,” he says. “Then Norway closed its borders – boom!” Tears come to his eyes. “And 98 percent of our guests were foreigners...”

The family had meetings late into the night. How many domestic tourists would arrive and at least compensate for a small part of the strong international revenue flow that was lost in Norway’s short summer season?

Tourism authorities, too, burned the midnight oil. Clearly a massive government injection of funds would be required to prevent a wholesale financial disaster from hitting the fragile fjordland economy. But even in oil-rich Norway not everybody could be bailed out. Compromises had to be made, not only to save those enterprises forming the backbone of the nation’s sustainable tourism industry, but entire towns and villages.

### **Brighter Prospects**

With an emergency bank loan and a generous government hand-out, the couple now hope for brighter prospects in 2021. Crates of vaccine are crossing the border into Norway to meet the needs of the 5.5 million population.

“We would have to say that we are very fortunate to live in a rich country like Norway,” says Tone. “The compensation we have received from the government has eased the situation. We no longer fear we would have to sell the property at great loss. It’s however a fragile security net. We have to make sure we’re not totally dependent on

cross-Atlantic visitors. As we are turning towards the Nordic and North European market, I think Norway as a destination should focus more on short-distance travellers, too, instead of Asia, Australia, and the Americas, to reduce CO2 emissions.”

*“Norwegian authorities have to understand that our recent dependency on big cruise ships crowding our fjords has to come to an end.”*

Wherever you turn in Aurland, you find yourself in a close encounter with nature, but also with the challenges and responsibilities this entails for local tourism entrepreneurs. As in other remote, fragile, and majestic parts of the world, it is impossible not to sense the importance of taking care of nature and culture, but also of the need to nurture a close relationship between government and local entrepreneurs. This is likely to become one of the keystones in Norway’s post-pandemic tourism strategy, to be launched this spring.

#### **After the Virus, Will Norway Get It Right?**

“I hope so,” Tone says, “Norwegian authorities have to understand that our recent dependency on big cruise ships crowding our fjords has to come to an end. The signs are good; all polluting cruise ships will be banned from the UNESCO fjords by 2026. And long before that, we have to find

a way to generate a tax where visitors are given a chance to co-finance the costs of conserving our precious nature and culture.”

Norway is facing several dilemmas. Its traditional “free access” policy for visitors to explore its natural attractions is increasingly on a collision course with polluting tourism crowds during peak season. Only a relatively small portion of visitor revenue trickles down to the communities along the fjords. Calls for a tourism tax are gaining support, but is it politically viable, given the corona crisis?

“Covid-19 was perhaps our planet’s way of saying ‘enough is enough,’” says Tone. “Plundering ecosystems can cause disease and epidemics, and I sincerely hope we have learned a lesson. As people running a tourist business it is perhaps an odd thing to say: But we have to reduce travelling. More planes on the ground, maybe one wonderful vacation a year, instead of long weekends flying here and there. We will make sure to be ready to give our guests a warm welcome in quaint, quiet surroundings when they come. And continue to focus on the principles of ecotourism.”

**Keywords:** Protecting Natural and Cultural Heritage Resources, Governance, Conservation

# NEOLOCALISM AND TOURISM

By Dr. Christina Cavaliere, Assistant Professor at Colorado State University

Article first appeared in the [DSR Winter 2021 issue](#)



Neocalism in action: Finn Fiver Cider in Washington offers both tourists and locals a selection of cider made from locally grown apples, harvested on sustainably managed land.  
Photo Credit: Jonathan Tourtellot

## Neocalism: A New Way to Enhance Sense of Place

The tourism system relies heavily on sustained biocultural diversity and uniqueness of place. We often travel to experience other places, other cultures, and other ways of knowing. This diversity and uniqueness are at constant risk of extinction from increasing global pressures such as overtourism, inadequate planning, corporate control, economic greed, hegemony, and unequal distribution of power.

During the Covid-19 pandemic many small and medium enterprises have faced challenges with restrictions, closings, and financial hardships. Conversely, many large corporations have been able to remain open, having the financial wherewithal to withstand the downturn. This increases the threats of homogenization and corporate domination as small businesses, and communities continue to struggle.

## Tourism Thrives on Neocalism and Biocultural Conservation

The term “neocalism” was born from the study of place. As related to the tourism system it can be defined as a conscious effort by businesses to foster a sense of place based on attributes of their community. An emphasis on local production, distribution, and consumption can link people to landscapes and contribute to a deeper understanding of sense of place. That in turn supports local enterprises and local identity.

Neocal tourism examples include aspects of festivals, arts, transportation, governance, migration, identity, food, agritourism, and heritage. Dining out, visiting farmers’ markets, sampling breweries and wineries, and participating in agritourism activities can enhance a sense of place and provide enticing narratives that attract tourists. Neocalism also focuses on consumer promotion of local interests such as the “buy local” movement.

The new book, *NEOLOCALISM AND TOURISM: UNDERSTANDING A GLOBAL MOVEMENT*, edited by Drs [Linda J. Ingram](#), [Susan L. Slocum](#) and [Christina T. Cavaliere](#), presents case studies by international authors that explore neocalism as related to tourism management. Along with theoretical contributions, definitions, and ideological discussions throughout the book, several authors offer insights regarding tourism and neocalism with nine case studies from around the world.

For example, one chapter explores neocalism as a strategy for addressing tourism issues in rural Iceland in terms of

place-making, cultural revitalization, and conservation of local wildlife.

Another case study focuses on Bangkok, Thailand, and examines the relationship between neolocalism and transportation as a conduit for biocultural conservation of the Saen-Sab Khlong, a primary city canal.

New narratives of place relating to neolocalism and heritage-based tourism are the focus of another chapter, including the story of Ned Kelly, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Australian bushranger turned outlaw.

Other case-study chapters focus on:

- The role of social sustainability in the case of Öland's Harvest Festival in Sweden.
- Unintended tourism impacts of the TV show "Fixer Upper" on Waco, Texas.
- Benefits of community festivals in New South Wales, Australia.
- The role of young Koreans in enhancing urban experiences in São Paulo, Brazil.
- Food and agritourism as related to neolocalism in the U.S. Intermountain West.

These examples help unpack the various considerations and impacts of linking tourism and neolocalism in different geographical and cultural contexts. They demonstrate how the complexity within neolocalism includes planning, interpretation, implementation, and long-term viability.

By featuring a range of destinations and forms of neolocalism, the case studies can initiate a deeper look at equity and power structures within communities, to provide tourism opportunities for local and foreign visitors and, most important, benefits for the hosts.

### **The Importance of Neolocalism for Destinations**

Neolocalism is about both participation in and resistance to the dominant culture. Neolocalism has the potential to appropriate and re-appropriate power, to circumvent top-

down governance and corporate interests. It can serve as one way to recalibrate local governance to include equitable and inclusive decision-making from multiple stakeholders. It is also about the possibilities for a new type of "growth" that includes diverse cultures.

A final chapter then looks at governance as related to neolocalism in terms of the guiding the creative process. Effective governance requires input from private and public partners working together to implement the best practices for their unique situations. With discussions about food, beverages, festivals, and shopping, it is easy to dismiss neolocal tourism development as just another fad. Instead, the authors emphasize the need for rigorous policy and planning in neolocal tourism development. Synergies between neolocalism and tourism can improve understanding of the complexities of sustainability through increased community involvement, helping to enhance local autonomy and local sourcing.

The book aims to call us, as a global community, to question more deeply the notions of biocultural conservation, the contentions between localism and globalisation, community-based decision making, entrepreneurship, and approaches to tourism management. We need innovation in economic structures, community resilience, and new approaches to governance – even more so in the post-pandemic recovery.

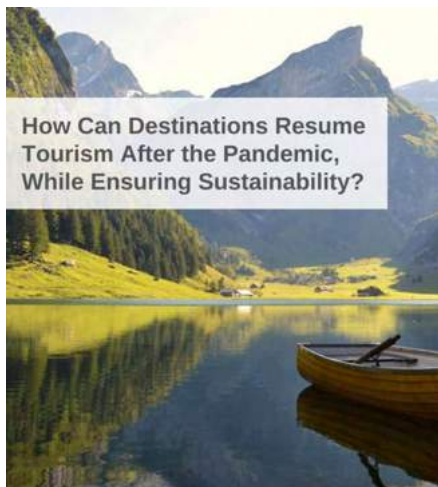
*Dr. Christina Cavaliere, an Assistant Professor at Colorado State University, is a conservation social scientist. Her research involves socio-ecological systems including tourism impacts and biocultural conservation. Dr. Cavaliere runs the Tourism and Conservation Lab and has worked with universities, communities, businesses, nongovernmental organizations, and multilateral institutions on six continents.*

**Keywords:** Revitalization, Conservation, Protecting Natural and Cultural Heritage Resources, Governance

# AFTER COVID, 10 WAYS FOR DESTINATIONS TO MANAGE BETTER

By Florian Kaefer, Editor, *The Place Observer*

Article first appeared in the [DSR Autumn 2020 issue](#)



Inspiration and practical advice for destination developers, managers and marketers, curated by The Place Brand Observer, in partnership with the Sustainability Leaders Project.



## A White Paper for a More Robust Recovery

At [The Place Brand Observer](#) (in partnership with the [Sustainability Leaders Project](#)) we have published a white paper to help you future-proof your destination – city or region. We asked leading consultants, managers and researchers to share their suggestions on how to resume tourism after the pandemic, taking into consideration the challenges and pitfalls that destination managers and marketers will face. The result is our paper, ‘How Can Destinations Resume Tourism After the Pandemic, While Ensuring Sustainability?’

After several months of lockdown, uncertainties, political pressure, economic and social losses – but also inspiring stories of nature renaissance, solidarity, and awareness, we have (hopefully) learnt a valuable lesson or two, as human beings.

The travel industry is among the most affected by the pandemic. At the same time,

the visitor economy is an essential ingredient for the economic recovery of many destinations. That means much pressure on destination managers and marketers to resume tourist flows as soon as possible, and to get back to business just as it was before Covid-19. However, the expectations and needs of customers and communities may have changed post-pandemic, together with external market conditions and bigger picture concerns such as tourism sustainability and the climate emergency.

‘Never waste a good crisis’ – and indeed, destination managers and developers have an unprecedented opportunity right now to rethink tourism and to come up with ways to make it more sustainable and resilient in the face of future crises. Our white paper presents ten approaches for doing that.

Some of them are strategic, such as elevating sense of place and thinking of the visitor as a temporary citizen. Others are tactical acts such as linking tax incentives and public rescue funds to business sustainability. These all need evaluation by new measures of effectiveness – community ambition, investment, and student attraction among others.

*‘There is always a lot of pressure on destination marketers. Their success and failure are nearly always determined by numbers. If that continues to be the most important aspect of the job of a destination marketer, there’s no chance for sustainability.’*

—Todd Babiak, CEO, Brand Tasmania

In a nutshell, destination branding and tourism marketing must be serious about the challenges places will face in opening up again. We need to be accurate, measured,



realistic and honest in our assessments of what is safe to do and to offer. And we need to communicate these requirements proactively.

This is the moment where success will depend on courage, and the power of imagination of a ‘different’ destination—one with greater local participation, and a smaller ecological footprint. Have a clear idea of the ‘why’. What do you (your community) want from the visitor economy? Answer this question as detailed as possible—looking beyond outworn (and often untested) assumptions of job creation and income for the host community.

The first step to lasting recovery is to figure out what a community really needs and wants (and what it does not want), from the visitor economy. Once the ‘why’ is clear, you’ll find the ‘how’ and ‘what’ much easier to write down and implement.

With thanks to our expert panel at The Place Brand Observer and the Sustainability Leaders Project for sharing their thoughts, we invite you to **download the free white paper** [here](#).

I hope you find it useful and inspiring! If you have feedback or questions, contact me by email at [editor@placebrandobserver.com](mailto:editor@placebrandobserver.com). For more about the panel and expert advice on other ‘hot’ topics linked to destination branding and sustainability, visit [PlaceBrandObserver.com](http://PlaceBrandObserver.com).

**Florian Kaefer, PhD** is the founder and editor of The Place Brand Observer and the Sustainability Leaders Project. Based in Switzerland, he has been an observer of destination branding practice and tourism sustainability for over a decade. Follow him on [Twitter](#) or connect on [LinkedIn](#).

**Keywords:** Destination Management, Destination Planning, Destination Stewardship, Revitalization

# ENDNOTES

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## CHAPTER 2

### Engaging a U.S. National Park's Gateway Communities

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xii. Outdoor Heritage Fund. For more information, visit: <https://www.ducks.org/north-dakota/north-dakota-outdoor-heritage-fund>

## CHAPTER 3

### Crete Needs to Restore its Gastronomic Heritage

For More Information on Agroecology

Agronomist [Dr. Vassilis Gkisakis](#), at the Hellenic Mediterranean University, [Agroecology Greece](#), and [Agroecology Europe](#) said, “A major initiative of Agroecology Greece/Europe is the education of agronomists and training of farmers, not just in sustainable farming practices but also in a holistic, systemic approach to agriculture.” For further research, see:

International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems *Communiqué: COVID-19 and the crisis in food systems: Symptoms, causes, and potential solutions*, which states “A paradigm shift from industrial agriculture to diversified agroecological systems is more urgent than ever.”

*Pesticide Action International Report: “Replacing Chemicals with Biology.”*

UN Environmental Program World Environment Day 2020 [Practical Guide](#)

Archaeologists in Crete researching agricultural practices: [Azoria.org](http://Azoria.org)

Organizations based in Greece, promoting Ecotourism: [Ecoclub.com](http://Ecoclub.com)

Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services [Expert Guest Article](#), “Rampant deforestation, uncontrolled expansion of agriculture, intensive farming, mining and infrastructure development, as well as the exploitation of wild species have created a ‘perfect storm’ for the spillover of diseases from wildlife to people.”

Expert reports on coronaviruses, and the rise of chronic diseases due to industrial agriculture and pollution: The International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems ([IPES-Food](#)), [Dr. Michael Greger](#), [Dr. Zach Bush](#), [Dr. Aristidis Tsatsakis](#), [Institute for Responsible Technology](#), [Environmental Working Group](#), [Moms Across America](#), [UN-ESCAP](#)

Short list, NGOs involved in sustainable organic farming that have provided tangible solutions for decades: [Pierre Rabhi](#), [Navdanya International](#), [Rodale Institute](#), [IFOAM – Organics International](#).

Organizations involved in human rights, policy changes, education: [La Vía Campesina](#), [Food First](#), [Food Tank](#), [The Berkeley Food Institute](#), [World Indigenous Tourism Alliance](#), [Agroecology in Action](#), [ARC2020](#) NGO focused on better farming, food, rural and environmental policy and practice.

UN [FAO](#), Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems. The [UNDP](#) and others are striving for food security, protecting biodiversity, water, and heirloom seeds.

[Organic World Key Data and Statistics 2019](#)

### **A Taiwanese Island Boosts Tourist Capacity – Sustainably**

Monique Chen has supplied these additional links (some in Chinese only):

Study on [recreational carrying capacity in](#)

[turtle island \(2004; Chinese\)](#) –

Tour information for Turtle Island (English) – <https://www.necoast-nsa.gov.tw/FileAtt.ashx?lang=1&id=1181>

Wild Animal Conservation Act in Taiwan from 2000 – <https://law.moj.gov.tw/ENG/LawClass/LawAll.aspx?pcode=M0120001>

Visiting application web page of Turtle Island (Chinese only) – <https://events.necoast-nsa.gov.tw/coast/>

Whale Watching Mark Taiwan – <https://www.eastcoast-nsa.gov.tw/en/travel/whale-watching>

Blue Whale Ferry with Whale Watching Mark on website – <https://www.h558882.tw/>

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Neolocalism and Tourism**

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Ingram, L.J., Slocum, S.L., & Cavaliere, C. T. (Eds.). (2020). *NEOLOCALISM AND TOURISM: UNDERSTANDING A GLOBAL MOVEMENT*. Goodfellows Publishers. DOI: 10.23912/9781911635604-4287

# DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP

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YEARBOOK  
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