

YEARBOOK



DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP





DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP YEARBOOK

2021–2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS

About Us.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Chapter 1: Featured Certified Destinations	3
Wagrain-Kleinarl, Austria	4
Sentosa, Singapore	7
Resorts World Sentosa, Singapore.....	10
Thredbo Resort, Australia.....	13
Chapter 2: Holistic Destination Management.....	16
Sedona, Arizona’s Destination Stewardship Council	17
Collaborative Governance in Snæfellsnes Peninsula, Iceland.....	24
Holistic Regeneration in the Pennsylvania Wilds, USA	29
Teton County Stewardship Journal	36
Japan’s Journey Toward Sustainability	41
Chelenko Opts for All-In Sustainability.....	44
Chapter 3: Preserving Nature & Cultural Heritage	47
Palau: A Conservation Culture	48
Human Encounters from Araucani.....	51
Localizing a Vermont Tour	54
Saving Cultural Heritage: The Singapore Hawkers Case.....	58
The Nisga’a Offer an Indigenous Tourism Model.....	61
Chapter 4: Building Resilience Through Collaboration & Governance	64
Cooperation on Jeju Island	65
Achieving Collaboration in Västerbotten – A Swedish Tale	69
A Himalayan Village Takes Charge of Its Future.....	72
Contrasting Tourism Landscapes in Karnataka, India	75
Chapter 5: Building Back Better.....	78
Vanuatu Tourism Gets a Reboot.....	79
Once Overrun, Dubrovnik Plans for Sustainability	83
A Chance to Tame Cruise Tourism.....	86
Resurrected Matera Faces Overtourism	88
Endnotes	91

ABOUT US



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.



The [Center for Responsible Travel \(CREST\)](#) is a global nonprofit organization based in Washington, DC dedicated to increasing the positive global impact of responsible tourism. CREST provides evidence-based research and analysis to governments, policymakers, tourism businesses, nonprofit organizations, and international agencies to solve the most pressing problems confronting tourism, the world's largest service industry.

CREST initially focused on the role of small-scale ecotourism in empowering communities and conserving precious resources. Over time, our work has evolved to consider how all tourism can be more responsibly planned, developed, and managed across all sectors and geographies. Through innovative field projects, research, consultancies, and advocacy, CREST is taking action to address our world's key threats to securing a sustainable future.

INTRODUCTION

The *Destination Stewardship Yearbook* is a compilation of articles from the Q1-Q4 articles of the 2021–22 Destination Stewardship Report (DSR), an e-quarterly report coproduced by the Destination Stewardship Center (DSC), Center for Responsible Travel (CREST), and the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC).

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 **Wagrain-Kleinarl, Austria, Sentosa and Resorts World Sentosa in Singapore**, as well as **Thredbo Resort, Australia**, 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*, features six destinations with an effective method for holistic management in the spirit of GSTC's Destination Criterion A1

The third chapter, *Preserving Nature & Cultural Heritage*, takes the examples of five destinations from around the world and how they have prioritized protecting natural resources, cultural assets and traditions through strengthened local leadership, community engagement and Indigenous traditional knowledge.

In the fourth chapter, *Building Resilience Through Collaboration & Governance*, four destinations overcome challenges to enhance sustainable tourism governance and develop new models of collaboration.

As the world continues to grapple with the effects of COVID-19 and overtourism, the fifth chapter, *Building Back Better*, provides guidance for destinations on the path toward sustainability.

CHAPTER 1

Featured Certified Destinations



Exploring tropical intertidal ecosystems on SentoSights guided tour. Photo Credit: Sentosa Development Corporation

WAGRAIN-KLEINARL, AUSTRIA

Certified by Green Destinations



Tappenkarsee Lake - The largest mountain lake in the eastern alps. Photo Credit: Wagrain-Kleinarl Tourismus - Erwin Trampitsch

Located in the Pongau region of Salzburg, Wagrain-Kleinarl is comprised of two communities — Wagrain (approx. 3,100 inhabitants) at an altitude of 838 m above sea level and Kleinarl (approx. 800 inhabitants) at 1014 m above sea level.

The Kleinarl Valley has over a hundred years in tourism tradition. The average number of overnight stays is 1,250,000 per year, two thirds of which are in the winter season.

The Tourism Association [Wagrain-Kleinarl Tourismus](#) is the official destination management and marketing organisation of the two communities, Wagrain and Kleinarl.

Wagrain-Kleinarl's unique selling position as an alpine holiday destination is the quality of the stay, as well as the quality of interaction, differentiating them from fake tourist

destinations and clichés. The authentic holiday experience is characterized by interactions with the people of Wagrain-Kleinarl, as opposed to service industry agents, and interactions between people and the natural landscape.

During summer, Wagrain-Kleinarl offers hiking and mountain biking in close proximity to the peaks of the Hohe Tauern, providing hikers with a breathtaking backdrop of the mountain range.

Winter in Wagrain-Kleinarl is generally snowy and transforms the region into a winter wonderland. 210 kilometres of pistes offers limitless alpine skiing. The Absolut Park is the largest fun park in Europe and those who want to take it easy will find plenty of opportunities off the slopes, from sledging to cross-country skiing.

At any time of the year, visitors will find conditions that make up a holiday in the true sense of the word: a fascinating starry sky, clear alpine air, the best spring water, as well as people and a landscape that simply invite you to feel good.

Wagrain-Kleinarl Tourism is particularly committed to raising awareness among locals and guests, initiating behavioural change and motivating the community to not only embrace sustainability as an integral part of their lives, but to live sustainably themselves.

Wagrain-Kleinarl has been certified by [Green Destinations](#) since autumn 2022, in accordance to the [GSTC Destination Criteria](#).

A few examples to demonstrate:

Within our management, we have established structures that think about tomorrow

- We have a full-time sustainability officer and a stakeholder-oriented sustainability board that meets once a month. We also have intensive working groups that develop measures and projects on a wide range of topics.
- In addition, we have created a comprehensive sustainability programme with regular monitoring that keeps our goals firmly in sight.

Our special commitment lies in raising awareness

- In a monthly newsletter for businesses and locals, we provide tips and suggestions on sustainable management and living.
- We have installed a digital competence centre.
- With workshops and further education programmes on the topic of sustainability, we are committed to ensuring that sustainability is lived by the businesses in our region.
- The destination experience focuses on offers where sustainability plays a central role. You come across this theme again and again in the destination, for example

"Green paths in the valley", "On the trail of milk and cheese", "Power of trees".



Educational trails - On the trail of milk and cheese and Green paths in the valley. Photo Credit: Wagrain-Kleinarl Tourismus - Eduardo Gellner

- We, the staff of the Tourism Association, are aware that as initiators of sustainability certification we are on display and have a responsibility to set a good example. This also changes our everyday office life, which is lived a little more sustainably every day.
- A big concern for us is to raise awareness among our guests on site. At every point of contact with the guests, whether on site, digitally or in advertising, we focus on incorporating sustainability. We sensitise guests through a wide variety of measures: "Tips for a conscious holiday experience", "Your forward-looking promise", etc.

Our tourism businesses are on the path to sustainability

- So far, we have implemented two "operational convoys" where the operations have achieved sustainability certification. Here we offer the Green Destinations operational programme (Good Travel Seal). 11 businesses are pioneers and have already been accepted into the programme (leisure, gastronomy, and accommodation businesses). The third convoy will start in winter 2022/23. Of course, with our two tourism offices, we have also entered into a business certification and are setting a good example here. But other business certifications such as EMAS, the Austrian Eco-label, etc. should also be adopted by local businesses.

- A highlight is the innovative and Good Travel Seal certified organic mountain Organic Mountain Restaurant Lumberjackrestaurant in "food hall" style. With its range of almost exclusively regional and organic dishes. Only regional businesses were used for the construction and furnishing.
- We have more than 80 certified organic farms in our valley. As an example "[organic from the valley](#)"
- Snow Space Salzburg ski lifts are a special highlight: has set itself the goal of being a climate-neutral ski area by 2025/26. In doing so, we deliberately forego financial compensation. The reduction of emissions takes place without exception in our own operations. Sustainability can also be experienced by the company Shuttleberg Flachauwinkl-Kleinarl, which is certified with the Good Travel Seal. Be it in piste preparation, the use of green electricity, recycling and upcycling. In summer, the ski slopes are transformed into alpine pastures used by organic farmers.

Looking ahead at challenges we accept:

- Mobility is one of the biggest challenges as a holiday destination without a railway station. We are developing concepts together with our businesses to promote soft mobility with "nudging elements".
- Another goal is to increase the quota of regional food in the hotel and restaurant industry. For this purpose, we have founded our own circle "From the Valley for the Valley". We want to bring together businesses and producers and develop joint solutions.
- We will implement the project "Garden Joy²". The focus is on the near-natural design of public and semi-public spaces, company gardens as well as private gardens. The aim is to increase biodiversity in the gardens and make them

fit for the challenges of climate change.

- Zero Waste - Together Step by Step to a Waste-Free Destination is also a project that we will implement step by step. Through targeted measures and awareness raising for waste avoidance and resource conservation, we want to reduce waste and wastefulness.
- Last but not least, we want to stabilise our sustainability management so that it will increasingly be a natural part of all (thinking and working) processes in our region.



Living with the local resources. Photo Credit Wagrain-Kleinarl Tourismus_Christian Fischbacher

Learn more at <https://www.wagrain-kleinarl.at/en/wagrain-kleinarl/sustainability/sustainability-wagrain-kleinarl.html>

SENTOSA, SINGAPORE

Certified by Vireo Srl



Sentosa, a well-loved island destination in Asia. Photo Credit: Sentosa Development Corporation

Written by Sentosa Development Corporation (SDC)

Sentosa, Asia's leading leisure destination and Singapore's premier island resort getaway, welcomed about 19 million visitors annually pre-COVID. It is located within 15 minutes from the central business and shopping districts. The island resort is managed by [Sentosa Development Corporation \(SDC\)](#), which works with various stakeholders in overseeing property investments, attractions development, and operation of the various leisure offerings and management of the residential precinct on the island. The 500-hectare island resort is home to an exciting array of themed attractions, award-winning spa retreats, lush rainforests, golden sandy beaches, resort accommodations, world-

renowned golf courses, a deep-water yachting marina and luxurious residences – making Sentosa a vibrant island resort for business and leisure.

In 2021, SDC announced its Sustainable Sentosa strategic roadmap underpinned by two key goals: to attain carbon neutrality by 2030 and to be globally recognised as a sustainable destination.

Goal 1: Achieve Carbon Neutrality by 2030

The threat of climate change is an existential threat for many island destinations, including Sentosa and Singapore. In meeting the ambitious goal to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030, SDC has developed pathways to resolve two key challenges in the island business ecosystem:

1. Securing buy-in from the Eco-system stakeholders that sustainability is both a business and environmental imperative

With the goal of achieving carbon neutrality for the whole of Sentosa by 2030, it is imperative that Sentosa's business establishments are onboard the same journey towards carbon neutrality. Through numerous discussions and groundwork, SDC has garnered leadership buy-in across hotels and major attractions to form the Sentosa Carbon Neutral Network (SCNN) which drives collective action towards this goal. To date, SCNN comprises of 21 members, accounting for more than 97% of the island's carbon profile.

2. Catalyse action amongst the island community by closing gaps in knowledge, resource and capability so as to develop commitment and confidence in the adoption of solutions

To enable action among businesses in Sentosa during the Covid-19 pandemic, SDC invested in capability building strategies, including the following:

- i. Developing a carbon accounting methodology and providing assistance to collect and understand businesses' carbon profiles, to demystify carbon emissions
- ii. Developing guidelines for implementing green events, management of disposables, local food sourcing
- iii. Developing courses in sustainability customised for businesses on Sentosa, to equip their staff with the knowledge and skillsets to become environmental stewards

Collectively, this lowered the knowledge and resource barriers for businesses to be onboard key sustainability initiatives, accelerating the pace in which businesses have adopted various sustainability solutions. Coupled with constant engagement and communication of these efforts through in-person SCNN platforms and quarterly bulletins, these initiatives built confidence among businesses on Sentosa to consider relevant initiatives for the future, and created a culture of openness towards

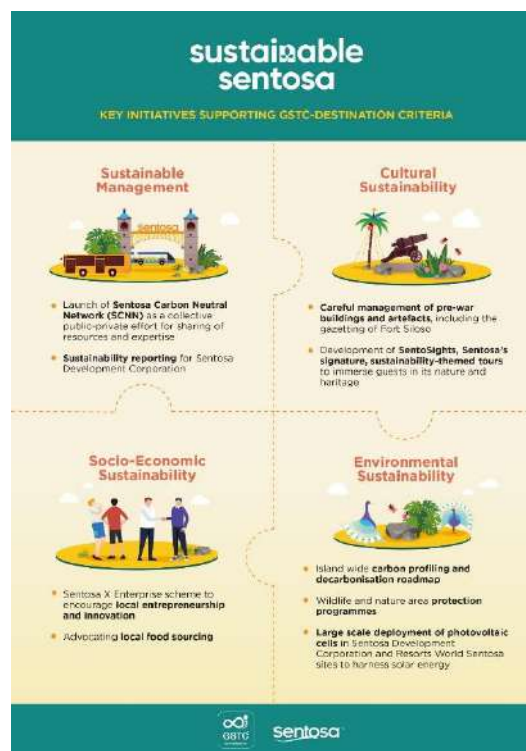
collective action in key sustainability goals.



The trial of waste digesters at Sentosa. Photo Credit: SDC

Goal 2: To be recognised as a Sustainable Destination

While sustainability is not new to SDC and the businesses on Sentosa, there was broad recognition on the need to benchmark Sentosa against international standards. To this end, Sentosa embarked on the journey towards being certified against the [Global Sustainable Tourism Council's Destination criteria \(GSTC-D\)](#). In July 2022, together with Resorts World Sentosa, Sentosa became the first island destination in Asia certified against the GSTC-D Criteria.



As the GSTC-D criteria was broad ranging, SDC mobilised the whole organisation to be part of the Sustainable Sentosa Steering Committee (SSSC), whose members led and delivered initiatives to embed sustainability through SDC's core roles as the island's promoter, operator and master planner.

As a popular tourist destination, there is an opportunity for enhancing sustainability awareness amongst visitors. One example is SentoSights, a series of 11 sustainability- and heritage-themed tours, specially curated to deepen guest's interest in the environment around sustainability issues. This is also true for Sentosa's business visitors, where SDC worked with a carbon consultant to create a carbon accounting methodology for events

held on Sentosa, providing the foundation of green events that meet the needs of sustainability-conscious businesses.



Sentosa's fleet of beach shuttles have been fully electric since 2020

Learn more at <https://www.sentosa.gov.sg/what-we-do/sustainable-sentosa/overview>

RESORTS WORLD SENTOSA, SINGAPORE

Certified by Vireo Srl



Resorts World Sentosa, Singapore

[Resorts World Sentosa \(RWS\)](#), Asia's premium lifestyle destination resort, is located on Singapore's resort island of Sentosa. Spanning 49 hectares, we are home to world-class attractions including Universal Studios Singapore, S.E.A. Aquarium, Dolphin Island and Adventure Cove Waterpark. Complementing the adventure and adrenaline of its theme parks and attractions are six unique luxury hotels, the world-class Resorts World Convention Centre and a casino. We offer entertainment from concerts to public shows, award-winning dining experiences and exciting cuisines from around the world across its many renowned celebrity chef restaurants, establishing itself as a key player in Singapore's vibrant and diverse dining scene.

As the first integrated resort (IR) to open in the world, RWS has dramatically transformed Singapore's tourism landscape to-date. We welcome 21 million visitors per year and account for more than 30% visitor arrivals to

Singapore. We have been named "**Best Integrated Resort**" since 2011 for ten years in a row at the TTG Travel Awards, which recognizes the best of Asia-Pacific's travel industry and was named "**Asia's Leading Theme Park Resort**" by World Travel Awards in 2022.

ESG Integration

RWS longstanding dedication to sustainability forms the core of who we are as a company. Our [Sustainability Framework and 2030 Master Plan](#) serves as a strategic blueprint that outlines our ambitious goals to support our vision to be global leader in sustainable tourism and mission to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030 and create positive socio-economic impact.

Our early adoption and integration of ESG best practices and sustained efforts over the years won us multiple affirmations including

- First destination in the world to be certified to both the **GSTC Destination Criteria** and **GSTC Industry Criteria** for Hotels.
- First destination in the world to achieve Events Industry Council's **2022 Sustainable Events Standards** Platinum certification for Venue
- Named 2022 **Bloomberg Gender-Equality Index**, which tracks the performance of public companies committed to supporting gender equality through policy development, representation, and transparency.



Investing in Innovation and Biodiversity Conservation

We recognize the threat of climate change and its effect on the planet and livelihoods and are committed to do our part to drive decarbonization. Energy, water and waste reduction and transitioning to renewable energy forms an integral part of our decarbonization strategy. We harness renewable energy from solar panel installations across 13 sites on our premises. The IR is fitted with energy efficient LEDs and utilizes advanced technologies to drive energy efficiency such as the Building Energy Management System and District Cooling Plant. RWS recycles >20% waste across 10 different waste streams. Food wastes are processed by bio-digesters and converted into liquid waste, reducing > 90 tonnes food waste per year. We draw from four diversified sources of water including rainwater, seawater and high-grade reclaimed water which enables us to reduce our dependency on potable water by 45%.

Conservation of our oceans and our natural planet is a critical value we embody. We preserve 2.9 hectares of secondary coastal forest within the IR and are host to 59 threatened plant species listed in Singapore Red Data Book, including eight species which were previously extinct in Singapore.

We are home to S.E.A aquarium, an accredited facility by Association of Zoos & Aquariums which champions various education, research and conservation programs to educate the public on the need for environmental conservation and inspire them to take actions towards conservation. We developed over 30 learning journeys for school groups and integrated environmental conservation messaging into education curriculum through partnership with educators such as Early Childhood Development Agency.

Partnership and Collaboration



Solving the world's sustainability challenges requires the collective efforts of the public, private, and people sectors. Through partnership with our stakeholders, we constantly seek to magnify and grow our impact, creating greater value than the sum of its parts. Two such examples are:

- [RWS-NUS Living Lab](#), a 5-year industry-institute partnership with National University of Singapore where RWS committed \$10 mil funding to advance marine science and co-create transformative research for biodiversity conservation and decarbonization. The partnership also aims to pave the way for more industry-institute collaborations and serve as an effective way to spur innovation

to create a responsible and competitive future.

- At a national level, RWS stepped forward as Managing Agent of Singapore's two largest Community Care Facilities for COVID-19 patients in Singapore with a combined capacity of 11,000 beds. More than 2,000 RWS team members volunteered to support the community effort, testament to the strong culture of volunteerism.

Charting Our Way Towards 2030

RWS's vision is to become a sustainable and innovative top tourism destination in line with

the Singapore Green Plan. We will continue to pursue a holistic approach to destination building and embed sustainability innovation and principles in our building design and operations. We look forward to an exciting decade to deliver value to all our stakeholders with 2030 Master Plan goals in sight and pursue best in class sustainability practices as Asia's leading leisure and tourism destination.

Learn more at <https://www.rwsentosa.com/en/sustainability>

THREDBO RESORT, AUSTRALIA

Certified by EarthCheck



Top of Mt. Kosci. Photo credits throughout: Thredbo Resort

Located in Australia's Snowy Mountains, Thredbo is Australia's premier year-round alpine resort destination and voted Australia's best ski resort for six years running at the World Ski Awards. Approximately 5.5 hours' drive south-west of Sydney, this region of New South Wales is known for snow-sports, active lifestyles and wild, picturesque alpine scenery. Surrounded by the internationally recognised Kosciuszko National Park, Thredbo sits on Monero-Ngarigo traditional lands, populated by indigenous Australians for millennia, and is now home to an alpine village at 1,365m above sea-level and a mountain resort reaching to 2,037m in altitude.

Mt. Kosciuszko is Australia's highest peak at 2,228m and is 6km north-west of the resort boundary. The National Park is a protected wilderness in Australia's highest altitudes, housing delicate alpine ecosystems and unique fauna and flora. The significance of the Park and the landscapes in the high country cannot be overstated, and as such it is the responsibility of all who live, work, and play in Thredbo to contribute towards the protection of this fragile and special environment.

Thredbo as a destination was founded in 1955 by two European workers on the Snowy

Hydroelectric scheme. Tony Sponar and Charles Anton had the vision of a European-style mountain resort where guests could stay and ski in similar style to those well-established resorts in the European Alps. In 1957 a rope-tow was installed for skiers, followed by a chairlift in 1958. Alongside this infrastructure came the construction of the Thredbo Alpine Hotel and private lodges, and Thredbo as we know it today was born. A lot has changed in the past 60-odd years, including expanding the area to 957 hectares and the creation of over 4,000 beds of accommodation. Thredbo as an alpine destination has consistently gained in popularity among Australian and international visitors.

Today, Thredbo is a 365-day operation providing snow-sports in winter, and mountain-biking and hiking in summer. To compliment these thrill-seeking activities, Thredbo now hosts music events, food and drink experiences, fishing, and relaxation and wellness retreats, so that anyone can share and enjoy our unique mountain setting.

Driving Sustainability

With the Kosciuszko National Park surrounding Thredbo we shoulder a



Thredbo visitors ride a chairlift above the clouds

responsibility to protect the local and wider environment. Over the last few decades, a number of initiatives have been implemented in this space.

Primarily, EarthCheck has been our sustainable certification partner since 2014. Their destination standard and science-based methodologies have helped guide sustainability efforts in 14 key areas. Whilst this article is too short to delve into each one, more information on these areas can be sourced directly through [EarthCheck](#). We are proud to have gained EarthCheck Gold certification for 2021 and 2022, with the aim to continue to improve performance into the future.

A key sustainability effort is the purchasing of 100% renewable electricity for Thredbo's operations. Continuing our historic link with the Snowy Hydroelectric Scheme, we purchase electricity through their retail provider, Red Energy. As an industry that requires consistent snow fall, moving our electricity usage away from fossil fuels is important to us to help indicate that climate change is affecting the snow-sports industry and that there are ways and means to combat the hydrocarbon-based economy.

We are acutely aware that there are limits to the volume of our CO₂ emissions which can be eliminated by practical means. For example, technologies are not yet widely accessible to power our snow grooming fleet solely on renewable energy, and at present there is very limited availability for fully electric buses for our village service. However, as new

technologies enter the market, we keep our finger on the pulse for anything that can help continue our leadership in sustainable resort management. The introduction of SNOWsat into our snow grooming machinery is one such example of technology improvement to help emission reductions. The highly accurate GPS equipment measures the groomer positions relative to a pre-installed base map to report the depth of the snow in real time under the machinery. In turn, this feeds the data to the operator who can reduce the number of passes on a specific area, thus reducing fuel use, and lengthening the lifetime of serviceable parts.

To reduce waste-to-landfill, a 2023 target of 50% redirection of waste was established. Efforts to reduce wastage, improve recycling rates and redirect resources have led to a village-wide result of the avoidance of over 30% of waste being sent to landfill in 2022. To meet our target has proven to be challenging, but positive steps in on-site food organics composting have greatly helped reduce organic waste heading for landfill, thus preventing the generation of tonnes of methane emissions. Each year, further opportunities are found, ensuring our performance regarding waste-to-landfill improves year-on-year.

Direct support of the environment and ecosystems is a key pillar of Thredbo's sustainability work. In this area we collaborate with Greenfleet to support native forest re-growth projects to help offset both internal and external fuel emissions. Guests are also provided direct access to join us in support of these projects across Australia. Locally, we partner with non-profit organisation Keep It Cool to re-introduce native forests on previously cleared pastoral land in the Snowy Mountains and Monaro region.

The Thredbo River supplies the village with water and Thredbo village is located at the very top of the wider Thredbo River and Snowy River watersheds. In order to be responsible first-users, we undertake all treatment of wastewater from Thredbo on-site and engage with the University of Canberra's Applied Ecology department to measure river health

through quarterly assessments. These efforts ensure that river fauna and flora, as well as human users further downstream, are protected.

Leave No Trace is an important aspect of the National Park user experience, and it is an aspect embraced by Thredbo's outdoor product offerings. Our Guided Hikes and Backcountry Tours help visitors delve deeply, and safely, into the wild areas of the National Park outside the resort boundaries. Through showing guests the beauty and fragility of the alpine areas, whilst allowing enjoyment and providing education, it is intended that they too will become guardians of, and take a share of responsibility for, protecting the environment.

Looking Ahead

Planned upgrades to mountain and village infrastructure will support increased visitation whilst providing improvements in energy and water efficiency. Additionally, improvements in guest access to education on a number of topics will allow greater guest involvement in our sustainability initiatives; also benefitting performance improvements.

Practical work within Thredbo such as installation of free-to-use public electric vehicle chargers and retrofitting insulation to

older structures are part of our strategy to improve Thredbo's environmental sustainability. Behind the scenes, the continuation of our participation in EarthCheck's certification process will allow us to find areas in which positive changes can be made.

It has never been more important for businesses to improve sustainability across all aspects, be it environmental, social, cultural, or economic. There's no time like the present, and if we can use our present to make improvements for the future, then we will have succeeded in ensuring everyone can enjoy the unique mountain areas around Thredbo for many years to come.

Find more details on this topic at thredbo.com.au/about-thredbo/environment



Skiers enjoying a bluebird day at Thredbo

CHAPTER 2

Holistic Destination Management



The dramatic peak of Kirkjufell rises above the Kirkjufellsfoss waterfall, a location on the northern side of the peninsula made popular by the influence of Instagram. Photo courtesy of Visit Iceland.

SEDONA, ARIZONA'S DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

By Sarah-Jane Johnson, Sustainable Tourism Development, PR, and Communications Consultant

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



Sedona red rocks, reflected. Photo credits throughout: Sedona Chamber of Commerce & Tourism Bureau

In Arizona's Popular Red Rock Country, One CVB Put Community First and So Became Its Own Destination Stewardship Council

For decades the Arizona desert town of Sedona (population 10,000) has welcomed an annual average of 3 million tourists captivated by the landscape of red rock buttes, canyons, and pine forests. They can take advantage of distinctly Sedona offerings – an abundance of outdoor recreation such as iconic mountain biking and hiking, well-coordinated arts and culture including festivals, plus the famous Sedona “vortexes,” a staple for spiritual tourists.



Eventually and perhaps inevitably, red-rock fever took grip: Sedona became a victim of successful marketing promotions, reaching a high point of being “loved to death” in 2016 when droves of Instagram-snapping tourists responded to marketing campaigns spotlighting the centennial of the National Park Service, closely followed by another for the Grand Canyon’s 100th anniversary. Visitors clogged Sedona

streets with traffic and packed local trailheads, much to the dismay of local residents. Leaders at [Sedona Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Board](#) (SCC&TB), started to question how much tourism much was too much, and what kind of action was needed.

Context of Sustainability

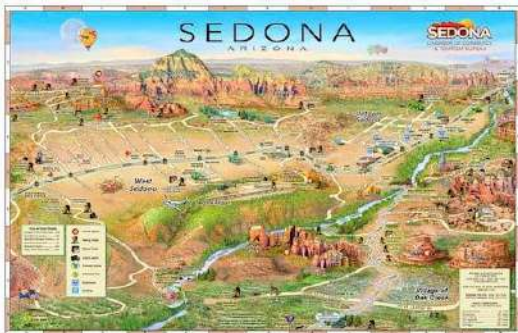
The seeds for sustainability were actually planted 13 years before this watershed moment of overtourism, when Sedona teamed up with four regional DMO partners to form the [Sedona Verde Valley Tourism Council](#), a collaborative effort to coordinate and promote the products and experiences of the entire Verde Valley. An anchor project for this regional partnership was creation of a [National Geographic Geotourism Map Guide](#) promoting regional culture, heritage, and ecological diversity, supported by a grant from the Walton



Red Rock State Park, from Schnebly Hill. Photo by bboserup/istockphoto.com

Family Foundation, which was keen to create value around the Verde River and its watershed through awareness and education. Geotourism has been defined via National Geographic as “tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place—its environment, culture, geology, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents.” As a tactical approach, the values informing Geotourism MapGuide became the first introduction to sustainability before any strategy was conceived.

The crunch of 2016 prompted SCC&TB to embark on a [Global Sustainable Tourism Council](#) (GSTC) assessment. Sedona scored 33 out of 41, placing itself as a leading destination in sustainable tourism management, and only one of two destinations in the United States to undergo assessment (the other being Jackson Hole, Wyoming). So began the Sedona DMO’s transition from Destination Marketing Organization to Destination Management Organization.



After the GSTC assessment results, SCC&TB began in 2017 an 18-month-long journey toward defining a concept for tourism sustainability. Working in partnership with the City of Sedona and external consulting teams from the Arizona State University and Nichols Tourism Group, the Sedona DMO engaged community, business, and visitors in a discovery phase and drafting of a final [Sustainable Tourism Plan](#), presented to the City Council for approval in spring 2019.

By pursuing a mission to become a leader in sustainability, SCC&TB has become the closest thing to a real stewardship council for the destination, although not for the entire valley. The process of developing a solid sustainability

plan has made community the focus of the organization’s updated mission statement: “to serve Sedona by making it the best place to live, work, play, and visit.” This statement reflects the strong relationships created within the community and the corresponding realization that the tourism mission is broader than economic benefits.

Organizational Structure and Governance

Unlike some other stewardship councils being reviewed thus far by the [Destination Stewardship Center](#), Sedona manages sustainability differently. As the Sedona DMO reoriented to focus on management instead of marketing, it has been working alongside the local government, relying on sustainability support teams, and engaging with a community that has become increasingly skeptical of tourism.

“There are really just a handful of communities that are trying to do management rather than marketing. [Sedona] is not a typical visitor and convention bureau. This is really unusual for a CVB,” said Jennifer Wesselhoff, CEO of SCC&TB in 2020. “A lot of DMO’s don’t want to get into visitor management. It’s a debate. Some think it’s a slippery slope. But in fragile destinations it’s the only way to be successful.”

SCC&TB is a membership organization. It is guided and overseen by a volunteer board of directors composed of local Chamber members elected by the Chamber membership. They include local businesses, nonprofit organizations, government, and community organizations. The Board employs a President/CEO who implements the policies established by the Board, administers Chamber programs, and supervises the Chamber’s budget.

To oversee the Sustainable Tourism Plan’s implementation and strategy, a **Sustainable Tourism Advisory Committee (STAC)** helps direct the City Council and the SCC&TB Board, while evaluating the Plan’s progress on an ongoing basis.

Success-tracking metrics for every tactic in the Plan have been refined through the direction of

the **Sustainable Tourism Action Team (STAT)**, a body of 22 members representing tourism businesses, the city of Sedona, US Forest Service, and numerous nonprofit organizations including Red Rock Trail Fund, the Sedona Verde Sustainability Alliance, and Keep Sedona Beautiful. SCC&TB's President/CEO and marketing director spearhead the organization of the STAT and the STAC meetings and report on the status of the work to City Council every quarter.

Setting the agenda is a joint process between the City Council and the Chamber. The January city council work session sets priorities, and SCC&TB then drafts its plan of priorities to be approved by its own board and presented back to the City Council, which approves funding for tourism management and promotion. While there is no dedicated sustainability manager, many different Chamber and City staff members will have sustainability tactics attached to their job descriptions. The marketing director has oversight and coordination of scheduling meetings and tracking metrics.

To make sure SCC&TB is not the only one taking the lead, each tactic has a lead person or organization. Every lead is on the STAC and provides a quarterly update. The City has a part time sustainability coordinator, who also leads the City's climate action plan, currently under development.



Hiking the red rock country is a popular Sedona area activity.

Community Engagement

Integrating the Sedona community into the process for developing and implementing the Sustainable Tourism Plan was – and continues

to be – an unprecedented collaboration. Sedona Chamber describes how thousands of community members were involved over 18 months in planning, and several organizations continue to lead or support current tactics.

In the Plan's development stage, the team conducted the following action steps for research surveying and feedback:

- Interviewed hundreds of residents.
- Analyzed hundreds of business-survey responses.
- Conducted focus groups with area non-profit organizations.
- Brought land management agencies together.
- Talked with tourism industry companies operating tours, lodging facilities, and restaurants.
- Included local arts and spirituality communities.
- Collaborated with governments and industry ranging from Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) and the Forest Service to Arizona State Parks (APS.)
- Provided status updates through regular communication tactics including blog posts, social media, radio spots, guest columns, and presentations. Public meetings were held to review findings and get more input.

Beyond the Plan's development, the SCC&TB ensures continuing engagement with the community about sustainability and the Plan itself. The STAC advisory council is made up of residents and local business owners, who determine the overarching metrics of success for the entire plan.

The DMO's communication with residents is frequent, including updates to the community on the Sustainable Tourism Plan via e-blasts and local media op-eds. "We talk about the STP all the time. We constantly remind the community of how the things we are doing align with the Plan," said Wesselhoff.

Managing Sustainable Tourism

Sedona's community-based sustainability plan has been divided into [four strategic pillars](#) that list objectives designed to implement sustainability:



1. **Environmental Objectives:** Lead the tourism industry in implementing sustainability principles, positioning Sedona as a national and international leader in destination stewardship.
 - A. Implement new waste prevention, reduction, and diversion strategies focused on visitors and their impacts in the Sedona region.
 - B. Expand programs that encourage minimal water usage and protect water quality.
 - C. Create new programs to help businesses and visitors moderate energy use and use alternative forms of energy.
 - D. Launch initiatives that lessen impacts on lands (including noise, air, and light pollution), and stimulate efforts for long-term sustainability.
 - E. Educate and engage businesses and visitors on sustainability initiatives, encouraging visitors to be sensitive guests during their stays.
2. **Resident Quality of Life Objectives:** Protect and enhance the quality of life by mitigating negative impacts of tourism.
 - A. Implement new infrastructure and multi-modal solutions to facilitate visitor traffic flows and enhance access to key destinations.
 - B. Expand use of technology to help solve transportation challenges.
 - C. Deepen engagement with Sedona residents, expanding their knowledge of tourism and efforts to manage it so as to achieve an effective balance.
 - D. Develop new sustainability-focused experiences that resonate with both Sedona residents and visitors.
 - E. Manage current and future accommodations in ways that increase long-term sustainability.

F. Launch initiatives to maintain local quality of life by lessening undesirable tourism impacts on residents including noise, air, and light pollution.

3. **Quality of the Economy Objectives:** Shape the Sedona economy in ways that balance its long-term sustainability and vibrancy. Monitor and adjust levels of economic activity for needy periods and moderate congestion by dispersing visitors. Expand interagency collaboration among diverse Sedona organizations. Monitor and adjust tourism marketing to achieve a balance between quality of life and a healthy economy. Pursue innovative approaches to employee housing and training.
4. **Visitor Experience Objectives:** Continue to provide an excellent visitor experience that highlights Sedona's sustainability values and keeps visitors coming back.
 - A. Deepen understanding of existing experiences, how best to access them, and how to apply sustainable practices while visiting.
 - B. Work to disperse visitors across the broader Verde Valley region to help moderate congestion at key Sedona experiences.

Activities

Some specific destination programs which have been developed prior to or grown since the implementation of the Sustainable Tourism Plan include:

- [Walk Sedona](#) which encourages people to get out of their cars in an effort to decrease road congestion.
- [Sedona Secret 7](#) which encourages visitor dispersion to less populated areas. 
- The [Sedona Cares](#) visitor pledge is an educational tool to encourage better visitor behavior. 
- An initiative led by Sedona Lodging Council to provide photos and b-roll footage of lesser

Funding

Implementation of SCC&TB Sustainable Tourism Plan is supported with appropriate funding for each of the four pillars of the Plan. The City of Sedona provides primary funding for SCC&TB from the collection of sales and lodging tax. Visitor spending makes up 77% of all sales tax collected. Sales and bed tax rates are each currently at 3.5%. In 2014, Sedona's lodging industry agreed to increase bed tax by .5% on the condition the SCC&TB would receive 55% of the total collections. A statewide change in law to allow short term rentals in Arizona significantly contributed still more to the budget, as the 1,000 short term rentals such as Airbnb in the area also pay bed tax. This pushed the tourism budget from \$500,000 in FY14 to \$2.4 million in 2019.

As a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the SCC&TB's FY21 budget is expected to focus on rebuilding the economy. The budget in FY21, as allocated by sustainability objectives, shows a lop-sided tilt toward post-Covid economic recovery:

1. Economy \$1,800,000
2. Environmental \$171,000
3. Quality of Life \$271,000
4. Visitor Experience \$27,000

Measures of success/Results

Transparent tracking of the impact of the sustainability process is key. Using each objective, SCC&TB has developed baseline data points and [measures](#) the following, presented publicly and also reported into the City:

- **Environment**—through perception of sustainability. Metrics include volume of trash collected, number of miles maintained by trail keeper resources, number of visitors signed on with educational programming.
- **Resident Quality of Life**—a citizen survey is conducted by the City to measure perception from locals of quality of life.
- **Quality of the Economy**—sales and bed-

tax collections, measured throughout the year and not just in key tourism seasons.

- **Visitor Experience**—visitor satisfaction, via survey, and whether it's going up or down

Some other key sustainability achievements in Sedona include:

- **Fly Friendly:** In 2020, helicopter tours operators ceased overflights within Sedona's city limits and over neighborhoods, sensitive prehistoric sites and resorts outside the city limits as part of a new **Fly Friendly** policy.



Sedona's "Fly Friendly" policy keeps helicopter tours away from the city and other sensitive areas.

- **Transportation Improvements:** In 2020, the City of Sedona completed Uptown traffic improvements, making vehicle and pedestrian flow more efficient, easing congestion, and contributing to the area's aesthetic appeal; roundabouts that eliminate U turns and give access to new off-street parking; and a median with locally designed artwork that prevents mid-block pedestrian crossing and left-hand turns. Like Fly Friendly, the Uptown Improvements address all four pillars of sustainability.
- **Sustainability Certification:** Low water use, energy conservation, recycling and using local products are hallmarks of sustainable business operations. Dozens of Sedona-based businesses and government offices have achieved sustainability certification, as determined by the Sustainability Alliance, a Sedona Verde non-profit organization that leads sustainability projects.
- **Governor's Award:** In 2019, the SCC&TB

was honored with the Governor's Award for Outstanding Arizona Cultural and Historic Preservation for its efforts in creation of the Sedona Sustainable Tourism Plan. The Award recognizes the year's "most significant contribution to the cultural and historic preservation of the natural, cultural or aesthetic legacy of Arizona that inspires visitation to the state."

Final Commentary

Sedona's effort to research and create a truly comprehensive plan stands out against other Destination Management Organization efforts for several reasons. There are resources; there is a solid partnership with the City and elected officials; plus there has been intense dialogue and listening within the community to create a truly community-based sustainability plan. There was an 18-month planning process, with investment, resources, and then structure to see out the objectives. Wesselhoff believed the plan is solid for five years, with a possible few adjustments to tactics around climate change to be added in the future. She would expect a further GSTC assessment toward the end of the 5-year plan, as a means to benchmark overall progress.

Also striking is the way this plan has been designed to build tourism around the needs of the community, placing residents first and foremost. The planning process has helped the DMO shift its focus from the visitor to the resident as the number one client, including local business owners.

From listening came soul-searching for Wesselhoff. "Previously I was the biggest advocate and cheerleader for tourism. I believed it was really good for our community – the benefits drastically outweighed the inconveniences of tourism. But I don't think I honestly and genuinely listened to complaints, because they were [merely] inconveniences, and [because] 10,000 people depended on

tourism for their jobs – every single resident could have a job in tourism if they wanted to. This process allowed me to embrace the tradeoffs in a more thoughtful way and consider how we can positively impact those negative tradeoffs."

Wesselhoff also believes the Sustainable Tourism Plan has already led to significant tactical wins for the local community. She cited the Fly Friendly program's no-fly zone for air tours over residential areas – one of the legacies she will leave from her personal efforts as leader. For 18 months, the City and County (which operates the airport), tour operators, and other stewardship entities in the community came together as partners to create solutions to control helicopter noise. "Helicopter noise has been a pinch-point for locals," she said. "Without the Sustainable Tourism Plan we never would have gotten there; it provided the framework to say 'this is what the community wants.'"

While Wesselhoff was readying at the time of this 2020 interview to move into a new role as CEO at Visit Park City in Utah, she felt confident that Sedona's stewardship efforts will continue, in large part because the Plan is positioned as something the entire community has bought into, bigger than just one person or one organization.

Having steered the process to create what she feels is a truly community-oriented tourism plan and meaningful engagement with residents, Wesselhoff offered words of wisdom for other DMOs: Engage with residents and recognize your potential role as community builders: "We need to listen to our residents as much or more than we listen to our visitors or our businesses. I learned so much through this process. The value of listening to that perspective was really meaningful."

Keywords: Community Engagement, Destination Stewardship Council, Sustainable Management, GSTC Destination Assessment

COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE IN SNÆFELLSNES PENINSULA, ICELAND

*By Tiffany Chan, GSTC Destinations & Communications
Coordinator, & Jonathan Tourtellot, Founder and Editor in Chief,
Destination Stewardship Report*

Article first appeared in the [DSR Winter 2022 issue](#)



The Snæfell shield volcano rises above a beach. Its capping glacier, Snæfellsjökull, is the centerpiece of its namesake national park at the far western end of the Snæfellsnes peninsula. [Photo courtesy of Visit Iceland]

*On a long, skinny Icelandic peninsula, five small municipalities have teamed up to create a modest destination stewardship council and supporting network. **Tiffany Chan**, with **Jonathan Tourtellot**, explores the Snæfellsnes model of sustainable collaboration – a work in progress that has already earned a platinum sustainability rating.*

A Council-and-Network Approach to Destination Stewardship

Iceland's narrow Snæfellsnes peninsula pokes out 90km westward into the far North Atlantic from a point partway between Reykjavík and Vestfirðir (the Western Fjords). Its wild and diverse landscapes offer a blend of culture, nature, and history – waterfalls and lava fields, black and white sand beaches, an archeological site, a glacier-capped strato-volcano in [Snæfellsjökull National Park](#), and rich cultural heritage woven into Icelandic folklore and history. The peninsula is a two-hour drive north of Reykjavík, putting it

within day-trip range of tourists based in Iceland's capital city.

Lots of tourists.

Iceland, "Land of Fire and Ice," draws visitors from around the globe to observe the country's gleaming glaciers, active volcanoes, erupting geysers, and cascading waterfalls. They come to hike in Icelandic parks and admire the dance of the Northern Lights. However, mass tourism did not reach this island nation until the last decade. According to the [Icelandic Tourist Board](#), Iceland received just under half a million foreign visitors in 2010 – still larger than the country's population of about 330,000. Thereafter, growth of foreign overnight visitors increased annually, peaking at a high of 2.3 million in 2018 and around 2 million in 2019, right before the global pandemic – almost seven times the number of inhabitants. Iceland's overtourism can contribute to ecological damage of the wild landscapes that visitors hope to see. Further, coachloads of tourists are not conducive to the

wilderness experience itself. To disperse the masses, Iceland encourages visitors to explore more of the country, to go beyond Reykjavik and nearby day trips. Traveling slower and staying longer in each region is the responsibility of the traveller, but creating incentives to do so, and do so sustainably, fall to the destination itself. Snæfellsnes (“snow mountain peninsula”) has been at the forefront of sustainable destination development in Iceland. Certified by EarthCheck under [Global Sustainable Tourism Council criteria](#), this regional standout employs a collaborative approach to sustainable tourism and destination stewardship.

Sustainability is Rooted in Nature

Unsurprisingly, the rapid growth in number of visitors through 2019 has affected Snæfellsnes. However, environmental protection and social responsibility are deeply rooted in this region of Iceland. Fishing is a very rich part of their cultural heritage. Residents relied on the fishing industry until tourism took over a couple of decades ago. The five Snæfellsnes municipalities, each different in size, form a small and connected community of less than 4000 residents. While most residents live in the towns, some 200-300 continue to live on farms, including one of the municipal mayors.

Overall, Snæfellsnes has taken a collaborative approach to various areas of sustainable development, including creation of Snæfellsnes Regional Park. The regional park was founded in 2014 by the five municipalities, nongovernment organizations, and other stakeholders to channel cooperation and share the area’s unique attractions with visitors and residents alike.

Additionally, for Snæfellsnes, destination certification was a step towards meeting sustainability goals. Snæfellsnes was the first European destination to receive an EarthCheck certification, in 2008. The certification program has been an effective project, keeping the environment, society and economy top of mind. According to the [10-year review on Snæfellsnes as an EarthCheck Destination](#), waste in landfills has been reduced by almost

half, greenhouse gas emissions and energy performance are much improved, and the development of environmental programs and social initiatives have increased. Snæfellsnes Peninsula is now a certified platinum destination under the EarthCheck system.

Collaborative Governance

Collaboration in Snæfellsnes is based on an informal network of overlapping organizations.

- Byggðasamlag Snæfellinga is the destination stewardship council, made up of mayors from each of the five municipalities -- Snæfellsbaer, Helgafellssveit, Grundarfjörður, Stykkishólmur, and Eyjaog Miklaholtshreppur.
- Natturustofa Vesturands (the West Iceland Nature Research Center) manages Umhverfivottun Snæfellsness (the Snæfellsnes Sustainability Program).
- The Snæfellsnes Regional Park, West Iceland Marketing, tourism unions, and the private sector are all involved in sustainable development as well. Hold Annual General Meetings.

Within this web of stakeholders, two particular individuals drive the sustainability effort in



A significant portion of the Snæfellsnes population still lives on small farms. [Photo courtesy of Visit Iceland]

Snæfellsnes. Guðrún Magnea Magnúsdóttir, at the West Iceland Nature Research Center, is the Sustainability Program Manager. She coordinates sustainability programs and projects, including the EarthCheck Certification. Ragnhildur Sigurðardóttir, the Regional Park Manager, is equally involved in spearheading sustainability initiatives, as well as regional planning.

Although several tourism councils and stakeholders make up this informal network, they all share common goals when it comes to the future of Snæfellsnes. To address issues in the region, meetings are called, often in neighboring farms. The community comes together, and the discussions begin. As Ragnhildur puts it, “the beauty of our work is cooperation. *Þetta reddast*’ is a common slogan in Iceland, meaning ‘it will work out.’” The community is committed and invested in the sustainable development of Snæfellsnes. Ragnhildur continues: “Those who have moved to Snæfellsnes and are involved with tourism have never seen such strong tourism collaboration in a rural area. This is especially true of those who come from other rural areas. They are impressed with the work that we’ve done.”



The Snæfellsnes EarthCheck Green Team celebrates 13 consecutive years of certification. [Photo courtesy of Guðrún Magnea Magnúsdóttir]

Sustainable Management as a Community

Oftentimes, political changes alter the course of sustainability progress. In Snæfellsnes, an election is held every four years. If not re-elected, the mayors all change at the same time, which can delay certain initiatives, but it does not impact the destination management plan in a significant way. However, multi-stakeholder involvement doesn’t come without challenges. Every municipality is different in

size, funding and resources, with the smallest being 66 people with a tiny budget. There has been formal and informal dialogue about the potential of combining two municipalities, possibly even all five.

Regardless, sustainable management involves broad cooperation of parties and public participation. [Snæfellsnes Regional Park](#) (not to be confused with [Snæfellsjökull National Park](#)), is a joint effort by the municipalities and tourism stakeholders. The governing bodies include a Founder’s Council, under which a Steering Group and Working Group work in collaboration. Additional consultants assisted with landscape assessment, regional plan development, and project management.

Sharing a common vision allows for cooperation through environmental conservation and promotion.

Multiple parties are also involved in regional planning. Over 200 people from various groups and stakeholders come together, including the five municipalities, a local planning committee, and a local steering committee. The five municipalities appoint a regional planning committee to overlook zoning under their supervision. Every municipality has an individual plan, which must also align with the regional plan.

The municipalities are financially responsible for the social services and schools within their own community but collectively take care of the Visitor Center, the history museum, and the sustainability program, including the EarthCheck Certification.

The regional park is funded by municipalities, the tourism union, the workers union, and farmers associations. Through the regional park, Ragnhildur Sigurðardóttir is responsible for training staff and running the Visitors Center. Guðrún Magnea Magnúsdóttir oversees the EarthCheck Standard and sustainability program, holding courses at the center. The Visitor Center is located at Breiðablik, the entrance to Snæfellsnes. It is open daily and provides tourists with trip planning information to help guide their visit within the

region.

Most residents share an understanding that protecting natural resources benefits the entire community, but there are limits. “It would be great to have more happening in the Visitors Center, but once the work has been done, reality hits. You have to hire employees, pay for electricity costs and all that comes with running the center,” says Ragnhildur. “When the five municipalities come together, they also have to consider money that is needed elsewhere, such as building a kindergarten.”



The snowy destination of Bjarnafoss receives an environmental award in 2018. [Photo by Heimir Berg]

Projects & Activities

The Regional Park is working on two important projects:

- Taking the initial steps for applying to become a UNESCO Biosphere destination.
- Destination branding and marketing under the “Choose or Stay” policy.

Choose or Stay is a national strategy for converting daytrippers from Reykjavík into overnight visitors. In Icelandic it rhymes: *veldu eða vertu*. It encourages visitors to travel slower, either by *choosing* just one site for a day trip or *staying longer* to see more. The approach helps create a circular travel route around Snæfellsnes while avoiding congestion due to large tour buses.

To further disperse tourists, a categorical system was created whereby a list of 28 popular locations is labelled A, B, C or D, based on various risk factors for the environment and the visitors. Visitor-ready locations with appropriate infrastructure in place are labelled A, while B is still in progress, C is a wishlist of

places that they want to market to be visitor-ready or at least heading in that direction. D is for sensitive places where they don't want visitors. This system helps manage the number of people visiting each location. Overall, it is going well and helps manage crowding by spreading people out.

Measuring Progress in Rural Iceland

When asked how Snæfellsnes measures success, Ragnhildur responded: “We discuss results at our annual meeting. We ask everyone at the meeting for input. We work together and see Snæfellsnes as a whole, which is better when it comes to funding and finishing projects. At the same time, Guðrún and I often reject projects because we have to be selective.”

Additionally, there are plenty of evaluations. Following an action plan of what Guðrún and each municipality is doing, there is an evaluation at the end of the year to discuss how each project will proceed, with environmental and social factors in mind. The EarthCheck certification also requires an annual third-party performance audit. The benefit of being one of two areas in Iceland with certification (the other being the municipalities in the Westfjords), is the joint effort within the entire community. Many decisions in Snæfellsnes are directly linked to being certified, ensuring continued progress toward sustainability.

Commentary

As a council made up of mayors, the Byggðasamlag Snæfellinga seems to serve technically as the core of the informal network of overlapping organizations that address destination stewardship in Snæfellsnes. Threats of overtourism are weighed against a desire to grow.

“Twenty years ago, there was little tourism. Residents lived off the fishing industry, along with farming and agriculture. We are traditional and old fashioned, but we have deep roots. We want new inhabitants and companies to come to Snæfellsnes. This is the luxury of having a low population of residents,” says Ragnhildur.

Tourism started to increase about 20 years ago, but more rapidly within the last 10.

Sustainability seems to have proceeded as well, if haltingly. Snæfellsnes tourism enterprises that are certified have seen results, such as savings from energy efficiency and other best practices. However, getting business to become certified is a challenge, according to the two managers. Businesses are small and mostly rely on busy summer periods. It is costly and takes time and resources to get certified and audited. Since there is little competition, it is not very compelling.

Economic, cultural, and ecological factors all come into play. “With elections bringing in a new board of municipalities, it is kind of political,” says Guðrún. She lists the major challenges:

1. Politics
2. Budgets to finance the program
3. Mobilizing the community
4. Reaching out to inform visitors – Mainly because of budget limitations, the villages don’t have the resources, the marketing, the informational signs, nor anyone for managing tourism.

Some say it would make sense for the regional

park to manage all of it, but that will take more resources and collaboration. Meanwhile the certification consultant, EarthCheck, provides some measure of continuity, if tipped strongly toward environment over social and cultural sustainability. Snæfellsnes’s current governance arrangement may seem somewhat messy, but the destination is of manageable size, there is broad cultural support for sustainability, and the outlook encouraging. Perhaps that Icelandic aphorism does apply: “It will work out.”

Keywords: Collaborative Governance, Destination Stewardship, Protecting Natural Heritage Resources, Stakeholder Engagement, EarthCheck Certified, GSTC Destination Criteria



Búðakirkja, the Black Church of Búðir, has become a popular destination for photographers, who travel to the rural southern side of the peninsula to capture its beauty. [Photo courtesy of Visit Iceland]

HOLISTIC REGENERATION IN THE PENNSYLVANIA WILDS, USA

By Ellen Rugh and Jacqueline Harper, DSC Volunteers

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



A Pennsylvania Wilds landscape. Photo: Ellen Rugh

*It's a destination described by one expert as having "one of the greatest, rural, natural resource-based economic development programs in the U.S." The remarkable Pennsylvania Wilds here joins our ongoing "Doing It Better" series on places with a holistic approach to destination management in the spirit of GSTC Destination Criterion A1. Over the past three years two DSC volunteers, **Ellen Rugh** and **Jacqueline Harper** have been collecting and documenting information on the region's remarkable PA Wilds Center. Here is their report.*

A Holistic Destination Regeneration, from Conservation to Design

This forested multicounty region in northwest Pennsylvania, once known as the "timber capital" of America, was depleted of its trees and wildlife by the beginning of the 20th century. Poor forest management and increased demand for lumber led to raging wildfires and floods. The elk population went extinct; the whitetail deer nearly so. With the timberlands denuded and an oil boom played out, the region went into decline. The government ended up buying the land to create state and national forests. Now, after 100 years of conservation, the elk are back, and the

rebranded "Pennsylvania Wilds" has been restored, hosting a rich, thriving forest that educates others on the importance of responsible forestry.

One opportunity for regenerating the depressed region was tourism, focused on the area's rejuvenated landscape, rich human history, and living artisanry. Facilitating that vision has been the [Pennsylvania \(PA\) Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship](#) (often shortened to the PA Wilds Center).

We believe the PA Wilds Center (and its associated Planning Team) constitute a good example of a destination stewardship council because to this organization, tourism and sustainability go hand in hand. This is not just stated in the organization's mission statement or values, but also demonstrated by its actions. The organization goes beyond the normal scope of work of a Destination Management Organization (i.e., focusing on accommodations and operations) to integrate tourism as an important element of rural economic development. TED speaker Ed McMahon, a national expert on sustainable community development, calls the PA Wilds Center's effort "one of the greatest, rural, natural resource-based economic development programs in the US."



The largest wild elk herd in the Northeast lives in the Pennsylvania Wilds. [Photo by Matthew Schwartz]

The PA Wilds initiative was launched in 2003 by then Governor Ed Rendell to coordinate the efforts of various state agencies and local stakeholders in an initiative to marry conservation and economic development. Ten years later, the non-profit PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship, Inc. was founded with support from the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and PA DCED. The PA Wilds Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit with the mission to “integrate conservation and economic development in a way that strengthens and inspires communities in the Pennsylvania Wilds.” Currently, the PA Wilds acts as the coordinating entity among local partners to promote a sustainable form of nature-based and heritage tourism, seeking to “celebrate and nurture our natural wonders by connecting people with nature.” According to their website, tourism in this region pre-pandemic has accounted for about 11% of its economy with a visitor spend of approximately \$1.8 billion annually.

This non-profit shows that integrating conservation and economic development goes beyond a mission statement; it is incorporated into every aspect of their operations. The [PA Wilds Center’s Brand Principles](#) include ‘stewardship of the land’ as a guiding value and include many references to the importance of cultivating a healthy relationship between people and the environment. The organization believes that all its staff share responsibilities that impact sustainable tourism, whether in the realm of marketing, conservation and stewardship activities and partnerships,

education, grants and funding, and promotion of local businesses and products, among others.

Geographic Context

The Pennsylvania Wilds jurisdiction comprises 12 ½ counties in North-Central Pennsylvania and is one of the 11 official tourism regions designated by the Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development (DCED) Tourism Office. Although the PA Wilds cover over a quarter of the state, it is home to a mere four percent of the state population. It covers 2.4 million acres of public land (more than Yellowstone National Park), most of which is working forest. The Pennsylvania Wilds boasts two National Wild & Scenic Rivers, 9 state and national forests, 29 state parks, the largest wild elk herd in the Northeast, and some of the darkest skies in the country. It has a rich heritage in oil and lumber. Now however, with the coordination of the PA Wilds Center, many local partners are involved in the growing push towards nature-based and heritage tourism to create jobs, diversify local economies, inspire stewardship, and improve quality of life.



Source: PA Wilds Center website @ <https://www.pawildscenter.org/about-us/>

Activities

The PA Wilds Center uses strategic, coordinated regional planning to protect the region’s scenic quality, natural resource preservation, and individual community character. Several activities support this approach.

- **Marketing** – The PA Wilds Center receives dedicated funding to market the region’s distinct character to visitors, as well as to

promote and enhance community character and pride for residents. Launched in 2018, the region's first paid advertising campaign in nearly a decade promoted the Pennsylvania Wilds lifestyle – its beautiful landscapes and journeys, experiences, destinations, and distinctive place-based businesses. The organization provides information for tourists to discover what they can see, do, and experience when they travel to this wild landscape. There's also a dedicated blog that features guest editorials showcasing the Pennsylvania Wilds lifestyle. For example, blog posts from 2020 highlight suggestions on spending time immersed in nature, where to explore historic ruins, and even visit the mysterious Ice Mine at Coudersport. The PA Wilds Center's sustainably built gift shop, the PA Wilds Conservation Shop, features locally made products. Profits from this brick-and-mortar shop are invested back into the Center's mission.

- **Visual Appeal** – The PA Wilds Center wants new development to protect the region's sense of place and community distinctiveness – whether that growth is due to tourism or other industries. With this in mind, the organization created the landmark PA Wilds Design Assistance Program, publishing in 2017 the extensive [PA Wilds Design Guide for Community Character Stewardship](#).

This free, downloadable guide promotes protection of scenic views, energy-efficient building designs, architectural styles, and other stewardship actions, highlighting how local communities can choose to protect or enhance their unique character as they grow.

- **Entrepreneurial Assistance** – The PA Wilds Center also offers assistance to businesses in the region through grants and free [consulting](#) services. The Center is the point of contact for two in-house business development programs, the Wilds Cooperative of Pennsylvania (WCO) and the PA Wilds Licensing Program. They act as a consultant to provide aspiring local businesses with connections to lenders, technical assistance providers, marketers, and other resources. The

Center also offers mini grants to local organizations, providing financial aid for projects that tie into regional strategies, such as signage, interpretation, façade upgrades, etc. More information about past and present grants can be found on their [website](#).

- **Events** – The PA Wilds Center does not play a direct role in routinely creating and hosting catalyst events, with the exception of a Buyer's Market, a tradeshow for regional makers and businesses to promote their products to retailers in the Pennsylvania Wilds and the PA Wilds Conservation Shop. Instead, the Center has created partnerships with certain event organizers and will provide a platform for promoting events.



A charming Pennsylvania Wilds barn. [Photo by Ellen Rugh]

Community Engagement

PA Wilds Center works with local, state, and national partners from the public and private sectors. These include entrepreneurs, small businesses, corporate leaders, land and waterway managers, conservation organizations, non-profits, tourism and heritage, and economic developers. For example, the PA Wilds Center created an entrepreneurial ecosystem and business development program, Wilds Cooperative of Pennsylvania ([WCO](#)). The WCO includes a membership network of “creative makers” and place-based businesses. This arrangement contributes to the value-chain of local products and services tied to the PA Wilds lifestyle brand. Additionally, the PA Wilds Center has a process in place for collecting comments from

people and partners in the PA Wilds that will help inform the work. By listening to community members' feedback, the Center can work out any kinks in future programs and plans.

Managing Sustainability and Stewardship

Because of its unique natural resources, the Pennsylvania Wilds region is designated one of seven Conservation Landscapes in Pennsylvania. The PA Wilds Center works closely with the PA DCNR to coordinate activities by the many local partners involved in the conservation landscape work. This aims to grow nature and heritage tourism in the region while creating jobs, diversifying local economies, inspiring stewardship, and improving quality of life.

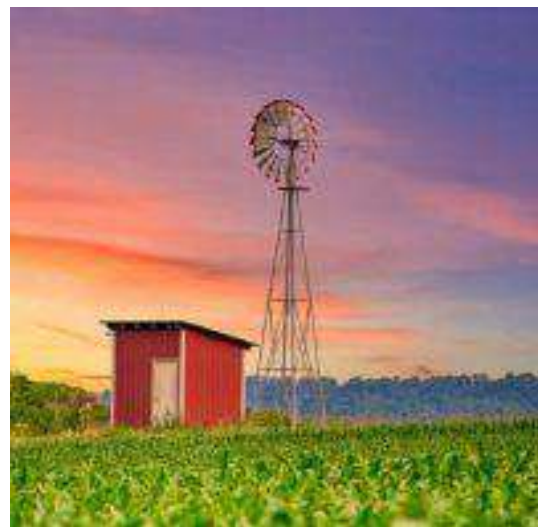
One example is the PA Wilds Conservation Shop's online and physical gift stores. The Conservation Shop focuses on selling locally made and value-added products. By sourcing local products, it helps reduce the products' transport-related carbon footprint and benefits the rural economy, minimizing economic leakage and keeping profits local. Products in the Conservation Shop are sourced from the WCO's network of more than 100 local producers, artists, and craftspeople from across the PA Wilds. To boost stewardship, shoppers can add a donation during check-out. The proceeds help the PA Parks and Forests Foundation fund projects in the local state parks and forests. The PA Wilds Center goes beyond traditional destination marketing by taking action to be sustainable, such as making their buildings energy efficient. [West Penn Power Sustainable Energy Fund](#) (WPPSEF) has been a major investor in the PA Wilds. WPPSEF has helped fund energy-efficient upgrades to have high-performance buildings across the region. This collaboration shows that sustainable energy investments can drive local economic development in rural communities. The PA Wilds Center offers resources such as a brochure for both visitors and residents on (1) how to build energy-efficient visitor centers and (2) how to travel smarter while reducing

their environmental impact. The PA Wilds Center and WPPSEF raise awareness about the difference energy-efficient technologies can have on the environment and on an organization's bottom line. Their financing and grant programs help many communities in the region tackle such projects.

Every year, the PA Wilds Center recognizes outstanding local Conservation/Stewardship efforts through the PA Wilds Champion Awards program, honoring individuals, groups, organizations, communities, and businesses that made significant contributions toward nature tourism alongside economic development and conservation goals. The awards include Outstanding Leader Award, Conservation Stewardship Award, Artisan of the Year Award, Inspiring Youth Award, and Event of the Year.

The Center has no formalized language for explicitly de-emphasizing mass tourism. The council does claim that by promoting the authentic character of the vast rural and forested region, the area naturally lends itself to more individualized tourism experiences.

There are two components of PA Wilds Center's organizational structure. The first is the PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship and the second is the PA Wilds Planning Team.



Building relationships with nearby farming communities enables businesses to source local food products. [Photo by Cameron Venti]

The PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship is governed by a Board of Directors, which is made up of 11 members from various public and private organizations in the region. The organizations in the region that have a member on the Board of Directors include Straub Brewery, Warren County Planning, Tioga County Planning, and Williamsport-Lycoming County Chamber and Visitors Bureau. The final authority on decisions lies with the Board of Directors and the Executive Director. The Board of Directors works alongside the PA Wilds Planning Team. As of 2018, the PA Wilds did not have a leadership succession plan, however, they were in the process of creating one as the organization is committed to longevity and believes that their work is generational.



The unique architecture of the Warren Business District. [Photo courtesy of PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship Inc.]

Although it is still housed under the PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship, the Planning Team largely functions as its own entity. It encompasses a 13-county stakeholder group, giving local stakeholders a voice in the PA Wilds Center work. This group is made up of county planners and dozens of organizations from across the PA Wilds in addition to three executives: Chair, Vice Chair, and Treasurer/Secretary. The Planning Team was formed in 2006 through an Intergovernmental Cooperative Agreement, largest of its kind in Pennsylvania. Under that agreement, the Planning Team shapes its own projects and has been the force behind the PA Wilds Champion Awards, the PA Wilds Design Guide for Community Character Stewardship, and the mini grant program. This team meets monthly to share information and to undertake activities that will capitalize on economic gains, without harming the region.

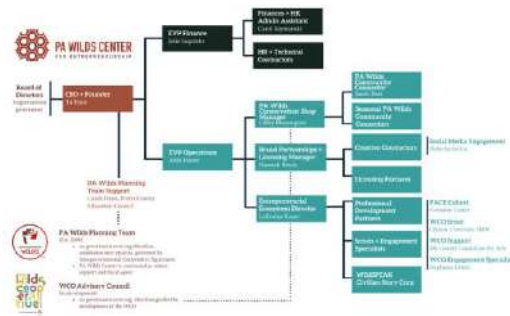


DIAGRAM: Source: PA Wilds Center @ <https://www.pawildscenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020-PA-Wilds-Center-Org-Chart.pdf>

Funding

Several core donors support the Center, including the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources, PA Department of Community & Economic Development, the Appalachian Regional Commission, and the region’s 12 county governments. Additionally, the PA Wilds Center’s work is sustained through program fees, philanthropic giving, government grants, and entrepreneurial activities related to the Pennsylvania Wilds brand. As of June 30, 2018, the PA Wilds Center received \$697, 720 in grants; \$41, 572 from corporate, foundation, and individual contributions; and \$210, 104 in program income. Between 2017 and 2019, the PA Wilds Center received more revenue than they spent on expenses. This non-profit seems well-funded, and based on the recent financial statements, the organization demonstrates stable funding.

In May 2020, the PA Wilds Center released a white paper entitled, “[Early Impacts of COVID-19 on the rural Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative](#)”. While the paper discusses funding challenges from local conservation groups and DMOs with PA Wilds’ territory, how COVID-19 has directly impacted PA Wilds Center’s organizational funding was not yet specified. Ta Enos, Chief Executive Officer of the PA Wilds Center, encouraged small businesses within the PA Wilds to apply for the COVID-19 Relief Statewide Small Business Assistance Program. This program provided grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$50,000 to small businesses with 25 or fewer employees and that have an annual

gross revenue of \$1 million or less.

Things could have been worse. The pandemic actually resulted in a 22% increase in state park visitation, as tourists sought the relative safety of outdoor experiences. “We’re in a position for a strong recovery, because of the kind of destination that we are, because we are rural, we are outdoor based. Coming out of this crisis, people are kind of looking for those experiences,” Enos told local TV station WPSU. “The pandemic has not slowed that at all, the overall scope of what we’re trying to accomplish in the long term. If anything, it’s sped it up. I think it’s shone a new light onto it.”

Measures of Success

The PA Wilds Center uses metrics generated both in-house and by their partners to measure success. Some of the in-house indicators include the number of members in the WCO, multiple revenue streams, Conservation Shop sales, and employment statistics from the WCO. Additionally, other data sources come from reports generated by the US forest service, state tourism office, and the PA DCNR.

Some highlights include:

- Overnight visitor trips to the Wilds grew 57% from 2010-2015
- From 2009-2016:
 - visitor spending in the region grew an average of 37%
 - tourism employment increased by 19%

Beyond these basic metrics, the PA Wilds Center has a guiding strategy known as BUDS:

- BRING visitors to the region to boost local economies, attract investment, and improve quality of life;
- UNIFY partners around the PA Wilds Work;
- DELIVER programs and services to our businesses and communities; and
- STEWARD our region’s public lands and natural assets, rural lifestyle, and unique community character, while sustaining our

organization and vision for future generations.

Each of the four function areas has six to nine key performance indicators (KPIs) used to guide and track progress both short term (< 3 years) and long-term (10-30 years). A KPI under Unify, for instance, is to have 2,000 small businesses participating in the WCO annually within the next 10 years. A KPI under their Steward strategy is to raise \$25,000 annually for conservation through their charity checkout campaign at the PA Wilds Conservation Shop. The KPIs are not set in stone and are reviewed annually to ensure they are still relevant, essential for post-pandemic planning. To learn more about PA Wilds Center’s KPIs, download [their Strategic Plan](#).

Commentary

Coming from a once depleted forest – or perhaps because of it – this organization is remarkable in how strongly sustainability is incorporated into its business strategy, ranging from selling products made by local businesses to incorporating energy efficiency into building design to creating the Design Guide for Community Character Stewardship. PA Wilds Center not only talks the sustainability talk, it walks the sustainability walk: “Here – conservation is not just a buzzword. Stewardship of the natural environment is our way of life,” they say. Their business strategy strongly connected to sustainable development, and it’s working. Between 2009 and 2017, visitor spending in the Pennsylvania Wilds grew an average of 42.6% and tourism



The Nature Inn at Bald Eagle State Park incorporates Design Guide principles of green technology and local artisan products into its building design. [Photo courtesy of PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship Inc.]

employment increased by 20%. This is a great example of how good destination stewardship can marry the idea of economic growth and sustainable development.

The PA Wilds Center is also proficient in its engagement with local businesses. It is rewarding to see a non-profit source all the products in its gift shops from local businesses, thereby keeping money in the rural economy, supporting local jobs and entrepreneurs, leaving a smaller energy footprint, strengthening community ties, and finally, giving tourists something unique to bring home and better remember their trip. Since the Conservation Shop opened in August 2016, the high demand for regionally made products has generated more than \$1 million in sales. The PA Wilds Center demonstrates how buying local is a great way to support the community, complete with tourist support.

One concern regards the apparent lack of a succession plan. Even though the organization is fortunate to have full-time staff and stable funding, it is vital for it to have a plan to pass on the reins and ensure the continuation of its sustainability efforts. A succession plan allows

for a smooth transition if any individual in a leadership role (including the Chief Executive Officer) must part ways with the organization. With no succession plan in place this wonderful example of a functioning destination stewardship may not be able to capitalize long-term on their tourism achievements.

It is often a challenge for environmental organizations (especially in rural areas) to be adequately funded. However, the PA Wilds Center has had a stable funding stream over recent years. One hopes this will help the organization continue to make great strides in the environmental conservation field despite the pandemic in 2020. If this region continues to bounce back quickly, it will show that more organizations should adopt a mission to integrate conservation and economic development in a way that strengthens and inspires both communities and their visitors.

Keywords: Community Engagement, Destination Regeneration, Protecting Natural and Cultural Heritage Resources, Rural Development

TETON COUNTY STEWARDSHIP JOURNAL

By Tim O'Donoghue, Executive Director of the Riverwind Foundation

Article first appeared in the [DSR Winter 2022 issue](#)



The snow-capped peak of Mount Moran rises above the fall foliage in Grand Teton National Park. [Photo by Roi Ariel]

*What does it take to align a destination's differing stakeholders and separate agendas into a coherent sustainability program? In Teton county, Wyoming, USA, better known as Jackson Hole, a mission to "unite efforts" sounds simple. As **Tim O'Donoghue's** journal shows, however, those two words conceal a host of challenges when dealing with a complex, often overtouristed destination that includes two iconic national parks. The good news: The challenges can be overcome, with patience.*

Jackson Hole's Journey Toward Sustainability – A Journal

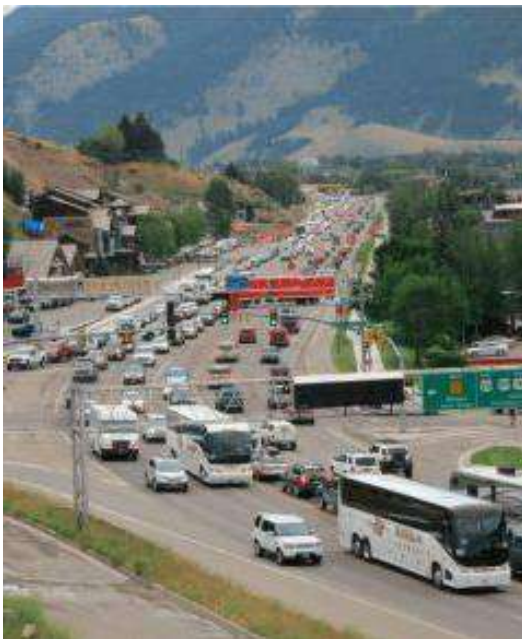
Before I start: Teton County covers 4,200 square miles of some of North America's most pristine wild lands and is home to the most abundant, diverse wildlife in the lower 48 states. Also, known as Jackson Hole, our destination includes Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks, two national forests, the National Elk Refuge, and the headwaters of eight major rivers in the United States. Our year-round population is 23,500 with an annual visitation of over 4 million. Since 2014,

our visitation has markedly increased with all visitation records breaking during Covid. Simultaneously, budgets that support the infrastructure and services that visitors and residents have relied upon have decreased, as has staffing in our national parks, other federal agencies, and local businesses. We are experiencing the "perfect storm" of overtourism challenges. To meet these challenges, the [Riverwind Foundation](#) and I as its Executive Director created the Jackson Hole & Yellowstone Sustainable Destination Program to "Unite efforts to minimize resident and visitor impacts on the Greater Yellowstone and other ecosystems now and for future generations." These efforts started with energy efficiency and renewables, waste management and recycling, alternative fuels and transportation, and have expanded to embrace local and whole foods, biodiversity restoration and conservation, and visitor and resident outreach and education. The following are my journal entries of our sustainability journey.

September 2012 – The Global Sustainable Tourism Council and their

contractor, [Sustainable Travel International](#), have briefed our stakeholders on their findings from evaluating us against the world's first comprehensive, integrated set of destination sustainability criteria. In one room were gathering representatives from our national parks, national forests, the National Elk Refuge, nonprofit organizations, schools, and too-many-to-count businesses. As one of the first Early Adopters of the [GSTC Destination Criteria](#), we received a two-part challenge: (1) despite all of the sustainability activities that we engaged in, we have no organization or current program to coordinate and unite these activities toward community goals and international sustainability standards and (2) according to their evaluation, "Teton County (a.k.a. Jackson Hole) more than any other place in the world has the potential to become a leader as a sustainable destination" in that we have the natural capital, human capacity, and financial resources to realize this potential. In other words, we need to organize and manage – not just market – our destination. This will be a challenging evolutionary step to take over the next 10 years, given that we have never before collaboratively managed tourism.

December 2013 – Our newly formed Steering Committee of sustainability subject-matter



Heavy traffic in Jackson during the summer months. [Photo courtesy of Buckrail News]

experts and key stakeholders just finished the first action plan for our sustainable destination program after nine months of meetings and one-on-one conversations. The initial response to announcing the formation of our Steering Committee was unexpected. We expected it would be challenging to convince people to give their time and see the value of lending their expertise. Instead, to accommodate all the requests to participate, we had to limit the Steering Committee to 12 and form a larger, informal "partners" group with volunteers we activated depending on our planned actions. We discovered that our planned work aligned with the goals of many of our new partners, either through work they were already doing or work they hoped to accomplish. All that was needed was a centralized group to bring together various stakeholders and pool resources.

One of our goals is to go for destination certification within five years. We have a lot of improvements to pursue, especially concerning destination management. We have our work cut out. I guess we should have thought a little more about all of this before taking this on.

March 2014 – Our sustainability training and technical assistance programs hit the 100-business mark with after just three months! Actually, not just businesses but also nonprofit organizations, government departments, and schools.

October 2014 – Our first inventory of Jackson Hole's sustainability assets has been completed! We collected detailed information on our community's sustainability organizations, programs, facilities, and capabilities from 120 stakeholders. Importantly, we also learned what their sustainability needs and interests are. That will help us design future sustainability trainings.

January 2015 – We had a great session with over 30 high school students during their arts and literature retreat out in Grand Teton National Park. We brainstormed ideas for a sustainability code of conduct for our entire destination.



Onlookers gather to watch the Town Square Shootout re-enactment during the Old West Days Celebration in Jackson. [Photo courtesy of Jackson Hole Travel & Tourism Board]

June 2015 - Thanks to our sustainable destination Steering Committee and our school faculties, we finished the [Jackson Hole Sustainability Code of Conduct](#). Little did we know that over 200 students would eventually get involved in designing the graphics and wording of it! Guiding the creative processes of that many students to a finished product was a major exercise in patience and coordination (they were very creative), but it was fun and definitely worth it. Our chamber of commerce wants to include the code of conduct in their visitors' guide. So we will be reaching our first 100,000 visitors in the next six months.

March 2016 - We just worked with the 150th business participating in our sustainability workshops and technical assistance programs. It's great to see the momentum build within our business community to learn about sustainability principles and incorporate them in their practices. One of our newest workshops was created to help businesses institutionalize their sustainability efforts - putting in writing their goals, policies, and practices in a Sustainability Management Plan, formal training program, and/or employee manual.

January 2017 - The Community Foundation of Jackson Hole just released the results of a survey of our local conservation organizations. It found that negative tourism impacts are one of the most significant concerns for protecting our environment and natural resources. Since we just started to implement our sustainable destination action plan, this study ought to help our cause.

March 2017 - I just returned from ITB travel trade show in Berlin. The Riverwind Foundation and Jackson Hole were selected by NatGeo as a Destination Leadership Finalist for the World Legacy Awards. What an honor! An even more fulfilling part of this experience was meeting kindred spirits from other destinations around the world and hearing their inspiring stories.

April 2017 - After the Riverwind Foundation discussed with diverse stakeholders what a desired future of tourism would be and with our local government staff on how to write a resolution to express that, our town and county elected officials unanimously voted in support of it: a resolution for Jackson Hole to be a world-leading sustainable community and destination! Now we have an official rallying cry!



A herd of bison grazes on a hilltop with the mighty Teton Range looming in the background. [Photo courtesy of Jackson Hole Mountain Resort]

June 2017 - After conducting over 20 one-on-one stakeholder interviews, the Riverwind Foundation and our partner, the Jackson Hole Center for Global Affairs, hosted a very telling workshop with our key destination stakeholders. We received a clear message: We must shift our tourism priorities from quantity to quality of visitors. We had a very promising discussion among these community and destination leaders on our tourism challenges and opportunities. We have a running start toward ideas for near- and long-term solutions and building a consensus that we need to focus on attracting and cultivating environmentally and socially responsible travelers. Visitor and resident outreach and education programs will be central to supporting all other destination

management strategies and actions, from reservation systems to shuttles, to seasonal access restrictions and wildlife movement. Now the really intensive and fun part begins – building partnerships and collaborative projects. This is going to take a lot more time and a lot more meetings at the coffee shop. I need to be careful of my caffeine intake.



A bear sighting causes traffic to block the road in Grand Teton National Park. [Photo by Ryan Dorgan, Jackson Hole News]

November 2017 – We just finished our first sustainability “Hotshots” program comprised of young “green-collared” team members. They doubled the number of businesses that have been trained by helping each enterprise work through a 90-question survey. The answers would yield a to-do list of sustainability practices in such areas as energy efficiency, waste management, biodiversity protection, and community investment. By my calculations, we just passed the 300 mark for businesses and organizations that we’ve worked with. Proof of concept: We can provide basic sustainability training to newly graduated university students and then unleash them into our community with the survey to train businesses.

February 2018 – With the help of students, we just created our community’s first report card on our destination’s sustainability status and progress toward our goals and international standards for sustainability, including energy and fuels, transportation, waste and recycling, and food. There was quite a bit of enthusiasm with the students who seized the opportunity to issue a report card on adults!

April 2018 – In Buenos Aires at the World Travel & Tourism Council’s annual meeting, I was in a conference room with dozens of other

finalists for the Tourism for Tomorrow Awards. Even though we didn’t get the top Destination award, sharing meals and stories with visionary, passionate, and highly effective leaders from all around the world is perhaps the most fulfilling part of my work. I wonder how we can have more regular gatherings of such people . . .

December 2018 – We just passed the 400 mark with businesses and organizations that we’ve engaged with in our local sustainability training, technical assistance, and certification programs. Speaking of certification, we are in our initial year of our local [BEST sustainability certification program](#). Our first cohort of business and organization participants are developing their sustainability management plans and preparing for their assessments (we don’t like “audits”). It’s really great to see these future community and destination leaders pushing their sustainability envelopes.

January 2019 – Here we are, five years after we began our sustainable destination program, and ready to go for destination certification! We’ve selected [EarthCheck](#) for our first go at certification. Why are we pursuing certification? Because we want a system and set of standards as a practical means for our stakeholders to work together to improve our sustainability performance. (For more details on this process, see [our GSTC report](#).)



The Teton Pow Wow offers an opportunity to experience Native history and culture from regional tribes. [Photo by Tim O’Donoghue]

March 2020 – After more than a year preparing for, conducting, and responding to the results of an audit by EarthCheck, even as the Covid-19 pandemic struck, we officially

received notification that we achieved sustainable destination certification. I'm truly grateful to the 44 volunteers and the Riverwind Foundation's community partners in contributing so much of their time, energy, and information to make this happen. We know that like most other travel and tourism destinations we won't ever be completely sustainable, but we now know what it takes to become more sustainable, and how to use a set of standards and processes to engage our community in that effort.

September 2021 - One of the great lessons that came from our destination certification efforts was that we needed to coordinate all of our sustainability and tourism plans and policies. In doing so, we engaged our stakeholders in creating a destination management plan for striving toward our vision of being a world-leading sustainable community and destination. Our Jackson Hole Travel & Tourism Board has transitioned its focus and funds from solely marketing to planning for a balanced, complementary approach for marketing and management. Importantly, our community's values will now drive plans for tourism rather than tourism driving our community's values.

January 2022 - While there will be much more to say about the destination management activities that have transpired in Teton County from 2019 to the present day, I want to note that Teton County has also sought a balanced relationship between tourism and Covid. Other



Vertical Harvest energizes local food systems via hydroponic, vertical, controlled environmental agriculture to deliver healthier food and futures. [Photo courtesy of Vertical Harvest]

than in the spring of 2020, when we asked our visitors to reschedule their trips, we have been open for business. Our record-breaking visitation since then has been the result of a large U.S. drive market with a pent-up desire to flee restrictions and densely populated areas to less-restricted, wide-open spaces such as our Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks. I expect that even when Covid becomes a "normal" disease in our lives, challenges to sustaining and regenerating the integrity of our natural and community resources will continue. Thus, a holistic approach to destination management will also be "normal" for Teton County.

The story of our journey continues . . .

Keywords: Destination Stewardship, Community Engagement, GSTC Destination Assessment, Protecting Natural and Cultural Heritage Resources, EarthCheck Certified

JAPAN'S JOURNEY TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY

By Emi Kaiwa, GSTC Membership Coordinator

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



*It's a tall order for a large country to change its national policy and commit to improving stewardship for hundreds of its tourism destinations, but Japan is taking tentative steps in that direction, spurred on by one young official and a lot of collaborators. GSTC's **Emi Kaiwa** reports on how this tentative change of heart came about, what's happened to date, and how far it has to go.*

Springtime for Destination Stewardship in Japan

In 2018, a book left in an office rack snagged the attention of a young Japanese official. Beginning with that moment, Japan, a country of 126.17 million in 2019¹, finally began action toward sustainability in tourism. In 2020 the Japan Tourism Agency (JTA) decided to adopt the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Destination Criteria as policy and create a national set of guidelines called the Japan Sustainable Tourism Standard for Destinations (JSTS-D)².

Unwilling to be left behind, Japan is on the trail to becoming a sustainable country with a national program to support its hundreds of tourism destinations. In addition, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga declared that

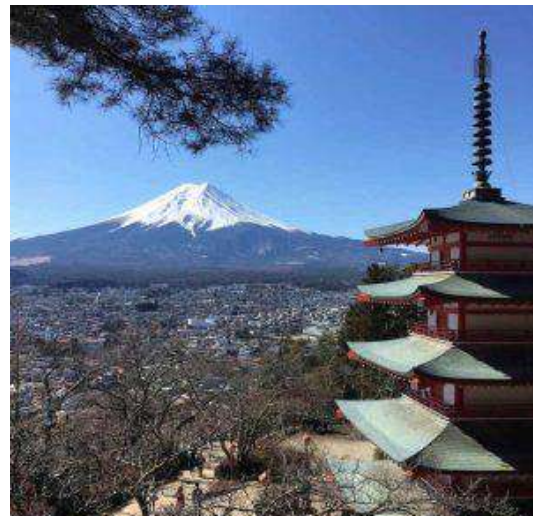
Japan will achieve zero carbon emissions by 2050.

How Did This Come To Pass?

Over the past decade, JTA focused on marketing, seeking an ever-increasing number of international visitor arrivals (IVAs)³ while still aiming for a measure of sustainability. The target was for 20 million IVAs by 2020, which was quickly met, and then revised to a goal of 40 million. The Covid pandemic kept this goal from being achieved, but Japan decided to aim for a target of 60 million IVAs by 2030.

This increase might seem contradictory to meeting sustainability goals, but Japan is larger in size than Italy, which received 131 million visitors in 2019 (albeit with some dire overtourism situations). Arguably, Japan has room. For an entire country, economic goals are still as important as sustainability.

It was challenging to impart the importance of destination management to industry stakeholders whose priority used to be



Fuji-san draws both domestic and international tourists. ©Emi Kaiwa

marketing. In order to do both, Japan had to find a way to sustainably manage destinations so that they can receive 60 million visitors. The solution came in the form of the GSTC framework, which promoted the idea of destination management [in its Destination Criterion A1] while still supporting economic goals.

The Book and the Man

In 2018, GSTC was not well known to Mr. Hajime Ono, the young Chief Official from Visitors Experience Improvement, JTA. One day, a book that “someone” left on the rack in his office caught his eye. It summarized in Japanese a 2017 forum on sustainable tourism. The contents of the book were all about GSTC, which aroused his intense curiosity to learn more.

Understanding the value of GSTC’s comprehensive global standard for managing destinations made him consider the connection between management and overtourism issues. He concluded that the GSTC-Destination criteria could be the broad management tool needed for dealing with overtourism, a critical problem for Japan before COVID-19 arrived. Even if this pandemic stays for a while, the tourism business will bounce back sooner or later.

Japan may in fact have sufficient capacity to receive its goal of 60 million IVAs by 2030. One way is through promoting rural areas as tourist destinations. So is development of transportation infrastructure – airport facilities and mixed-mode commuting to rural areas, accommodation facilities, and tourism resources – that will make it possible for tourists to spread out and visit different regions in Japan. By using information and



Cars jam the same spot to see Mt. Fuji. “I saw one car hit another due to the limited parking space,” says the author. ©Emi Kaiwa

communication technology, popular destinations can control tourists’ visiting times and mitigate the impact of seasonality.

A plan for comprehensive management of destinations was therefore deemed essential, and adopting the GSTC approach as a tourism policy was the solution. Mr. Ono became the lead in creating the JSTS-D guidelines to comply with GSTC-D criteria. The guidelines employed user-friendly wording, with references and examples, as a way to provide self-guided management at the destination level.

How To Make It Work?



Even though the JSTS-D was based on the global GSTC standard, nationwide penetration at the destination level was going to be quite challenging. How then could the local municipal and

Destination Management Organization (DMO) officers be motivated to read the JSTS-D and implement it along with other tourism stakeholders? Fortunately, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) acted as a catalyst. SDGs have been included in many municipal comprehensive strategy plans and have gained traction in almost all industries year by year. Corporations seem eager to find ways in which they can achieve the SDGs. One is by collaborating with destinations to support them in becoming more sustainable by using the GSTC Industry Criteria (GSTC-I) for tourism businesses.

That “someone” who left the book on sustainable tourism for Mr. Ono was actually one person representing many people who worked hard to get attention from the government for many years. Their earnest effort has borne fruit. Mr. Ono left the Visitors Experience Improvement department in March 2021 and moved to the Office of Director for Travel Promotion. Now, a newly formed

organization called “Japan Tourism for SDGs”, which is not government mandate, will take over the initiative from the national government to continue Japan’s journey. This independent organization is led by Mr. Hidetoshi Kobayashi, who has declared that he will spend the rest of his life working for sustainable tourism.

Commentary

JSTS-D is not perfect. There is room for improvement, and that is one of the important characteristics of sustainability. Obtaining a sustainability label does not mean everything is entirely sustainable. Other aspects of improvement will be found in the learning process of getting certified. For now, think what the best approach is to move toward sustainability for the destination. The answer will not be the same, single, perfect solution for every prefecture and municipality. Perfect sustainability cannot be achieved at once, but destinations should keep moving forward patiently, one step at a time.

As the proverb says, Rome was not built in a day, nor was it built by only one man. Accelerating the sustainability movement requires fostering talent, expanding partnerships, and creating a network of people with sustainability mindsets. It might take time and endurance, but it thrives unexpectedly once a destination is ready. Sustainability is a long journey, probably without end, and the government is not the only one to lead its path. Society also needs to keep catching up and adjusting to rapid changes in a globalizing world. On this Earth of limited resources, however, the pathway of sustainability is required to maintain all humankind.

Thanks to Mr. Ono for his commitment to sustainable tourism initiatives as a government official and his assistance with this report.

Keywords: Destination Stewardship, National Policy, Overtourism, Sustainable Development Goals, GSTC Destination Criteria

CHELENKO OPTS FOR ALL-IN SUSTAINABILITY

By Fernando Ojeda, Touristic Interest Zones in Aysén's Regional Tourism Office, & Natalia Naranjo, Development and Tourism Expert Advisor

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



The Leones River, stemming from its namesake glacier, pours into the Chelenko Lake (a.k.a. General Carrera Lake). [Photo courtesy of Sernatur Aysén]

*Some beautiful destinations are recognized as such with special governmental designations. That may provide an opportunity for a holistic approach to destination management. **Fernando Ojeda and Natalia Naranjo** describe how the Chelenko Lake area of the Chilean Patagonia has done just that.*

Chile's Chelenko Adopts a Structure for Stewardship

Chelenko is a scenic, nature-based destination in the Aysén region in the Chilean Patagonia. The Chilean government designated it a Touristic Interest Zone (Zona de Interés Turístico – ZOIT) in 2000, due to rising tourism and an increasing need to protect the lake.

In 2017, an update of the Chilean tourism law

created an opportunity to formulate a participatory work plan at a local level that would establish sustainability guidelines in the ZOIT. That process resulted in identifying this vision for Chelenko:

“In 2030 it will be a consolidated touristic destination, responsible and inclusive with the communities, that protects and values its natural resources, its identity and traditions, and assures sustainable development for the local communities. Generosity and kindness of its inhabitants are an important part to generate a high level of satisfaction for visitors.”

Context

Chelenko was the first place to receive the ZOIT

designation from the Chilean government. This was an opportunity to strengthen participatory planning skills; contribute to the conservation of touristic resources, and also promote public and private investments in this area.

The Chelenko ZOIT is an area defined within the General Carrera Province, encompassing the General Carrera Lake – better known as Chelenko Lake – as well as Bertrand Lake and the surrounding area. There are more than 10 towns distributed between the two municipalities of Chile Chico and Río Ibáñez.

Chelenko in the Tehuelche aboriginal language means “Lake of Storms.” Shared with Argentina, it is the biggest lake in Chile and the second largest in South America – 200 km long and 590 meters maximum depth, at 350 meters above sea level. Chelenko Lake is linked to the Bertrand Lake and nurtures the most abundant river in Chile: The Baker River. The main economic activities of the region are agriculture, cattle, mining, and nature-based tourism, which includes hiking, horseback riding, and wildlife watching. Numerous rivers and lakes provide opportunities for sports and adventure activities like recreational fishing, sailing, rafting, and kayaking.



Kayaking is a popular tourist activity in Chelenko, especially alongside the breathtaking Marble Chapels, a series of islands sitting atop glacial waters. [Photo courtesy of Sernatur Aysén]

Management Strategy

The main strategy for managing tourism is to establish a collaborative (public and private directorate) and participatory structure to plan and implement actions for the destination – Directorio Público Privado ZOIT Chelenko (Public-Private Directorate for the Chelenko ZOIT). Its main characteristic has been to integrate private stakeholders so that they can have greater participation in the governance of

the lake. Their continued efforts and commitment have been key to advancing a sustainable agenda, with participation happening at different levels (within the ZOIT plan, outside the ZOIT plan, or at the local level led by the civil society).

Even so, stakeholders’ active involvement can be a challenge; there is an active participation at a local level from both public and private stakeholders regarding their concerns towards sustainability. Being a small community, local leaders are involved in different initiatives beside the tourism activity; they are also involved in other coordination entities like water, electrification, neighborhood committees, etc.



An aerial view of the Marble Caves (Capillas de Mármol) Nature Sanctuary, on the shores of General Carrera Lake in the Aysén region. [Photo courtesy of Sernatur Aysén]

The Action Plan

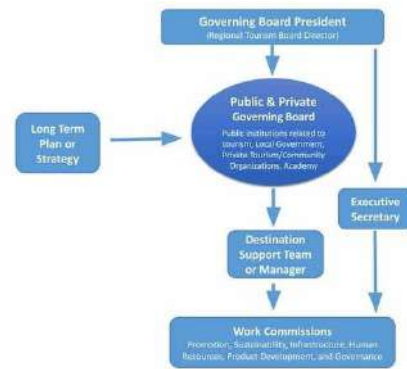
The participatory action plan identified these strategic pillars: promotion, sustainability, infrastructure, human resources, product development, and governance. Here are the key aspects identified for sustainable management of Chelenko and lessons learned since implementing the participatory structure and plan:

- Private plus public governance – a must.
- Government commitment to the process at national, regional, and local levels.
- Governmental support in technical knowledge, data, information, logistics, and facilitation in meetings to strengthen participation from all local stakeholders.
- Involvement and empowerment for enterprises and community.
- A public, concise, long term, and participatory plan based on a diagnosis.

- Measurable goals and regular meetings for follow-up.
- Continuous motivation and team building, especially for community and NGO leaders.
- A private stakeholder corporation that supports the long-term vision regardless of changes in government and public administration. It also allows leveraging resources.

At a public level, key aspects of local engagement towards sustainability have included communication and articulation: training, awareness, access to information, [promotion of local identity](http://www.recorreaysen.cl/sernatur-aysen/zoit/), tourism awareness campaigns, and development of new touristic products and cultural events. You can see more details here: <http://www.recorreaysen.cl/sernatur-aysen/zoit/>

On the private side, entrepreneurs have established a network: “Chelenko Redponsible” (“responsible network”). This network is a cooperative of enterprises where all members implement and promote sustainable practices: socio-cultural (local products purchasing, exhibition of regional handcrafts), management (local workers), and environmental aspects (energy efficiency, waste management), working to develop community-based tourism. Many of these leaders are part of the directorate. One of the main topics addressed last year was water quality. Water treatment plant malfunctions,



mine tailings, sewage, etc. have generated concerns about water quality and its management, especially for the lake. Chelenko Lake should have one of the purest waters on the world, and the community wants to preserve it for future generations.

Participation of public and private organizations within the destination has succeeded in developing wide commitment toward sustainability in the territory, in large part because local communities love and care about their territory; they love their history and identity. These are of course the main assets for sustainability, providing the destination with a unique sense of place. The community’s sense of co-responsibility within the destination provides a unique tourism experience.

Keywords: Sustainable Management, Governance, Protecting Natural and Cultural Heritage Resources, GSTC Destination Assessment, GSTC Destination Criteria

CHAPTER 3

Preserving Nature and Cultural Heritage



Cerro Torre and Fitzroy, Patagonia. Photo Credit: Tiffany Chan

PALAU: A CONSERVATION CULTURE

By Tiffany Chan, GSTC Communications & Destinations Coordinator



The Rock Island archipelago, a major tourism draw for Palau.

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

The Micronesian nation of Palau has been gaining a reputation not only for trail-blazing conservation measures, reports **Tiffany Chan**, but also for putting the brakes on irresponsible mass tourism. Now they've set their sights on carbon neutrality.

Micronesian Archipelago Leads the Way in Pacific Stewardship

*Children of Palau
I take this Pledge*

*To preserve and protect your beautiful and
unique Island home....*

—The Palau Pledge

The tiny island nation of Palau is known worldwide for its marvelous environment – turquoise waters, unexplored lands, biodiversity – and for the innovative regulations that have been implemented to ensure its pristine condition.

This Micronesian country of hundreds of islands, however, has been facing many challenges due to high-volume tourism growth and a dramatic increase in budget-oriented

travel. Tourism accounts for approximately 31% of Palau's GDP, as well as 38% of jobs in Palau's private sector. In recent (pre-Covid) years, annual visitors to Palau averaged almost [seven times greater than the local population](#). Prior to 2014, higher spending consumers in the diving market fuelled tourism in Palau. Thereafter, a large spike in pre-packaged travel groups from China resulted in lower in-country spending and a shift towards mass-market tourism.

As identified in the [Palau Responsible Tourism Policy Framework 2017-2021](#) by the Bureau of Tourism, “dramatic increases in visitor arrivals within the past two years and the rapid



Tourists enjoy the Milky Way, an often crowded mud bath in the Rock Islands.

proliferation of budget-oriented tourism development to service those visitors have led to concerns about devastating consequences on the industry, environment and society.”

A Conservation Leader

Led by a president focused on natural conservation, Palau is on the path to discourage mass tourism and promote destination sustainability, with innovative policies and initiatives, such as:

- The world’s first shark sanctuary, created in 2009. Given that half of the world’s oceanic sharks are at risk of extinction, this sanctuary protects an area about the size of France where commercial shark fishing is banned.
- The [world’s sixth-largest marine sanctuary](#), established in 2015 to protect 80% of its maritime territory, meaning no fishing, or other uses such as drilling for oil, in an area of tuna-rich ocean.
- Introduction of the “Palau Pledge” in 2017, the [world’s first mandatory eco-pledge](#). This signed promise, stamped in the passport of all incoming visitors, is a pledge to respect the environment and preserve it for the “children of Palau.” The pledge received almost 6000 signatures within the first two weeks.



Unique among responsible tourism pledges, the Palau Pledge is the entry visa stamp – and directed to the next generation

- A “reef-toxic” sunscreen ban restricting the manufacturing and import of sunscreen containing toxic chemicals that lead to coral bleaching in 2018, followed by a world-first ban on selling harmful sunscreen products in 2020.
- Palau joined the [High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy \(Ocean Panel\)](#) in 2020 along with 13 other world

leaders, in a commitment to sustainably manage 100% of national waters by 2025.

To ensure compliance with environmental responsibility, the [Responsible Tourism Education Act](#) was passed in 2018. Apart from endorsing the Palau Responsible Tourism Policy Framework, the Act requires tourism businesses to provide visitors with environmental education, conservation awareness and sustainable options, such as reusable alternatives to disposable plastic cups, straws, and containers.



A taro patch, key source for the Palauan diet.

How did Palau do it?

These conservation efforts and mitigation measures are largely led by Palauans in both the public and private sectors. Various groups outside of the government have pushed for each of these initiatives and made it successful by collaborating with the government to create laws and regulations, along with the assistance of international partners when needed.

According to Ivory Vogt, a Palauan sustainable tourism consultant, “The essence behind our conservation and mitigation policies stem from our traditions and culture. These ideas can be reflected in Palauan words like **bul**, which means to restrict the use of a natural resource to allow it to regenerate over some time, and **mengereomel**, meaning to conserve a resource in a way that you replant what you harvest, so you always have a good supply of it.”

The main tourism authorities in Palau are the Palau Visitors Authority and the Bureau of Tourism. The former plays the role of marketing and the latter in regulating the tourism industry. Prior to 2021, the Bureau of

Tourism was part of the same Ministry, called the Ministry of Natural Resource, Environment and Tourism.

Aspiring to Become the World's First Carbon-Neutral Destination

It seems clear that Palau is a pioneer in addressing environmental sustainability and tourism management issues with innovative solutions, and its most recent development is no different. Apart from overtourism, [climate change is one of the greatest threats to Palau](#). With most Palauans residing, working, and producing food in low-lying areas, the global rise in sea level will be devastating for the island state, not to mention tropical cyclones, typhoons, and severe weather patterns posing massive threats to the livelihood of vulnerable communities and ecosystems.

To improve climate resilience, the Bureau of Tourism is collaborating with Sustainable Travel International, Slow Food and the Palau Pledge to make Palau the [world's first carbon-neutral tourism destination](#). This program is led by the Bureau of Tourism with the assistance of several international partners, such as the [TaiwanICDF](#). By aspiring to be a carbon-neutral tourism destination, Palau will have to market the program to their visitors and encourage them to offset the carbon footprint of their trip.

Building on previous sustainable tourism efforts, the program began in August 2020 with a value-chain analysis, and later data collection from tourism-related businesses and a needs assessment with a small group of local food producers. The goal is to mitigate the tourism-based carbon footprint by promoting local food production along with a carbon management program for travelers. Less reliance on imports and a redirected focus on local food production allow for better food security and local economic opportunities, all while lowering CO2 emissions.

To compensate for tourism-associated emissions, visitors will have the opportunity to voluntarily calculate and offset the carbon footprint associated with their trip through a

digital platform. Using 2019 arrival numbers, a projected \$1 million could be generated through the calculator if all visitors offset their trip. The contributions would then be reinvested into conservation projects and certified carbon offset initiatives. Due to COVID-19 and the transition to a new government administration, the Carbon Neutral program is still in progress, with the hopes of the calculator being completed soon.



A national dish, demok (taro leaf soup) is favored by visitors.

A Pioneer in Conservation

Within all of Palau's initiatives, the people and biodiversity of Palau come first. Overtourism has taught Palau the importance of prioritizing high-value tourism. In today's climate, destinations that once suffered from mass tourism have been given an opportunity to rethink how they will handle the pent-up demand. For the sake of building a more resilient and regenerative tourism economy, COVID-19 recovery plans must not ignore the intersection of climate change and sustainable tourism development. Palau's latest initiative in carbon neutrality is a destination-level approach that can act as a guiding model for other destinations. Balancing tourism growth with climate action is a difficult feat to accomplish, but with countries like Palau taking the lead on such initiatives, there is hope that other destinations can implement similar initiatives into their climate action strategies, while also fostering sustainable economic growth.

Keywords: Conservation, Carbon Neutrality Community Engagement, Governance, Protecting Natural and Cultural Heritage Resources

HUMAN ENCOUNTERS FROM ARAUCANIA

By Ann Becker, Founder of Travel With Ann Experiential & Jorge Moller, Director of Regenera ONG & Latin America Program Director for GSTC

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



*Lessons from the pandemic have revealed how stronger rural communities can make for stronger cross-cultural touring, say **Ann Becker** and **Jorge Moller Rivas**. They propose a framework for doing so.*

Pandemic Insights Suggest a Course for the Future

As long-time travel leaders, we joined forces in 2019 to create and lead a US/Swiss women's small group cross-cultural exchange trip predominantly in the Araucania region of Chile, home to the majority of the native Mapuche.

Our group experienced homestays in traditional rukas, stayed in locally owned lodges, and visited with many small business owners and community leaders, mainly women. Local guides led us on hiking adventures that showcased the extraordinary beauty of Araucania's forests and lakes. They shared as well the interwoven history and culture of the communities for whom this area is home.

Experiences like this one illustrate what we call "human encounters": Connecting visitors with

local hosts in deep, meaningful ways—sharing and learning with one another; eating local specialties; building cultural bridges; and contributing to more sustainable communities and a healthier planet by integrating more sustainable practices.

Within less than a year of our return, the Covid-19 pandemic exploded globally. A new reality confronted many rural communities – how to keep the pandemic at bay and minimize human casualties while addressing income loss due to job and business disruptions. Hosting visitors was out of the question.

Located in central Chile, Araucania is one of the most diverse regions in the country, with rich culture, history, and environmental beauty. Scenic attractions such as rainforests, volcanoes, lakes, and the Andes combine with an indigenous culture to provide visitors with a special interactive experience.



Traditional Ways Help Cope with Covid

In some cases, the pandemic has been a catalyst to draw on traditional practices for safety and survival. For instance, in the Mapuche community that we had visited, Llaguepulli, the families have returned completely to farming and bartering different crops with one another to sustain themselves. Traditional practices have revived elsewhere as well.

The island of Rapa Nui (Easter Island), a special territory of Chile, is home to more than 7,000 people. Recognizing the island's fragile health care infrastructure and its many elderly residents, the Mayor responded quickly to the first signs of Covid in March 2020. He called the community to TAPU, the ancestral concept of self-care based on sustainability and respect. The community reacted by responding diligently to lockdown protocols which have led to successful virus containment.

In July 2020, the Mayor revived another ancestral principle, Umanga: teamwork among neighbors to help support one another and their communities. Many indigenous Rapa Nui inhabitants are now working together to cultivate the land and manage family gardens.

Crisis as Opportunity

The new Covid reality also offered new opportunities. In the community of Drake Bay on Costa Rica's Osa Peninsula, the Covid disruption provided time for local leaders of the Drake Bay Nature Guides Association (AGUINADRA), to engage with residents, national park rangers, and other nearby communities in collaborative problem-solving and actions to address issues such as emergency food distribution, spikes in wildlife poaching, and area infrastructure improvements. Efforts such as these have helped to strengthen community connection, capacity, and resilience that will help mitigate the negative consequences of future pandemics or natural disasters.

Covid has thus revealed new everyday heroes, including local producers and suppliers, guides, and small business owners. With

increased community recognition and appreciation, these local heroes now have greater pride in their efforts and identity.



An Aguinadra guide leads a client in crossing the Rio Claro in Corcovado, Costa Rica. [Photo by Maikel Sanchez]

Realizations

Living life in lockdown has also affected the vision and emotions of many travelers. Perhaps it took the pandemic to realize fully the importance of connections and spontaneity with others. While technology has afforded virtual connections for many, it is no replacement for physical proximity and time together. As the months dragged on, we have yearned for connection even more.

Other realizations have come into play as well. These include the freedom and joy of being outdoors for one's physical and mental well-being and a deeper appreciation of nature's gifts.

Life in lockdown has also contributed to a growing awareness and appreciation of local businesses and their importance in home communities. The pandemic put a spotlight on area farmers and local business owners who were able to sell food and essential wares while major supply chains stumbled. These are the people who helped sustain their neighborhoods; in turn, their communities often stepped up to help support them when they faltered due to ongoing Covid restrictions and illnesses. Neighbors began to understand that they were doing more than buying food from a restaurant; they were supporting mothers, fathers, and families whose lives were

intrinsically intertwined with the well-being and vitality of the community.

In addition to Covid, the year since George Floyd's death has begun finally to illuminate for many that connecting with people and communities different from our own teaches us, pushes us, and sometimes forces us to confront our normal way of thinking and operating. These learning muscles are absolutely vital in the ongoing fight for racial justice in destinations anywhere.



The group celebrates a successful hiking adventure amongst the scenic mountains and volcanoes of Araucania. [Photo by Maikel Sanchez]

Human Encounters Framework

The pandemic put human needs and connections front and center. As we think about the future of tourism, we propose taking what we are learning about ourselves and one another to encourage more “human encounters” such as those of our Chilean cross-cultural exchange two years ago, as well as earlier individual efforts that we have made in Central and South America.

We envision a **Human Encounters Framework** that includes the following dimensions:

- Greater appreciation, respect and economic support for host communities;
- Deep cross-cultural engagement and increased pride in purposeful travel;
- Diversification of offerings, suppliers, and

sustainable value chains for the travel industry;

- Contributions to repair and regeneration of the destination and the planet.

The Human Encounters Framework can be an important change factor in the development of rural communities and destinations post-pandemic. A focus on the autonomy of local communities and stronger bonds among the different actors in the value chain is a good foundation on which to build powerful cross-cultural experiences with visitors.

Trips centered on human encounters must be designed with sustainability in mind. They should, prioritize care for local identity, traditions, and values, as well as for the natural surroundings, minimizing detrimental impacts and respecting limits of acceptable change. We hope this can lead to more co-development of visitation protocols that are in the best interests of travelers, local communities, and destination ecosystems,

In Drake Bay, Costa Rica, there are signs that this is already happening. As the nature guides have resumed carefully leading small numbers of visitors into Corcovado National Park and contiguous reserves, these local stewards are proud to share stories of how they helped combat poaching and improve and diversify trails in the protected areas.

Over time such travelers will become change agents themselves and build greater awareness of the importance of rural communities – their identities, their interactions with natural surroundings, and value of their work.

Keywords: Human Encounters, Community Engagement, Protecting Natural and Cultural Heritage Resources

LOCALIZING A VERMONT TOUR

By Todd Comen, Senior Associate, Vermont Strategy Group

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



Visitors have a personal encounter with a young calf, as they visit a local farm and learn about the importance of rural and agricultural communities in a strong regional food supply network [Photo by Todd Comen]

*A key part of good destination stewardship is to favor tour operations that support the people who live there. But does that really work in practice? And actually make money? Agritourism specialist **Todd Comen** decided to give it a try in his home state of Vermont.*

Hypothesis: Integrated Rural Tourism Actually Works

In 2015, I wanted to test a theory of rural tourism: my own. In the year 2000 I had introduced a theory of Integrated Rural Tourism at the 1st World Congress on Rural Tourism held in Perugia, Italy, organized by Prof. Adriano Ciani of University of Perugia. The theory went something like this: In rural communities, entrepreneurs can supplement their income stream by delivering services to visitors based on their personal strengths and core assets. Once a number of entrepreneurs successfully do this, the rural communities in which they live and work should begin to experience some level of economic revitalization. Direct visitor services in rural communities might include guided tours, food or beverage, lodging, retail, and cultural or adventure activities.

To test my theory I created and operated for

three years a part-time Vermont tour company named Bonafide Tours and Expeditions. Would operating a small rural tour business be an effective way to diversify my income and, perhaps more to the point of the theory, would the tour operations encourage economic development in struggling rural communities? The goal of the trial was to provide opportunities for visitors staying in regional centers such as Burlington or Stowe to venture to off-the-beaten-path places in the surrounding rural areas. Theoretically, the result would be financial support and recognition for rural entrepreneurs, especially small farmers in those areas.

The bundled components of an Integrated Rural Tourism experience should give visitors a sense of the unique flavor of a region – natural attractions, unique value-added agricultural enterprises, tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and the people who bring life to the visitor experience.

My test area was central Vermont, a rural region within 30 miles of Burlington and Stowe. Here I could design driving tours to a variety of agritourism enterprises that became the backbone of the touristic experience. For transport, I rented vans of various sizes from a locally owned company suited to the size of the group. I was both guide and driver, which provided me the opportunity to introduce all sorts of visitors to the places, farms, and people I had come to appreciate across rural Vermont.

The tours began around 9:00a.m., when I



Vermont's rural landscape is home to many small farm operations that form the basis of the local food supply network – and tourist appeal [Photo: "Summer at the Vermont Barn" by 'fossilied']

picked up guests at their hotel. The tour was designed for stops at least every 45 minutes. As tour guide, I kept up a steady discourse on the history, geology, land use, and cultural aspects of the places we passed on the way to each stop, such as views of mountain ecosystems, rushing rivers and tranquil lakes, historic covered bridges or meeting houses, and small farms or maple sugar operations.

The tours were typically six-to-eight-hour drives that included lunch and snacks at a historic general store or a locally owned café. Farm and specialty food entrepreneurs shared personal stories and gave personalized tours to the visitors. The visitors frequently purchased specialty gifts and food and beverage products from the businesses. Guests paid between \$150 – \$250 per person for a guided, day-long tour. Meals, snacks, and wine and beer tastings were included in the total price. All-inclusive pricing ensured that visitors ate heartily and that the businesses would receive fair compensation from hosting the visitors. Donations were encouraged at historic sites where no attendant was present. Wealth from tourism was thus spread across the rural community.



Four tour guests pose by Lake Elmore [Photo by Todd Comen]

Food, Glorious Food!

As you can see, a typical tourism experience involves food. For many popular destinations, however, most of the food consumed by visitors is part of a long-distance supply chain stretching from where ingredients are grown and processed to where the meals are served. Initiatives to build sustainable linkages between local farmers and tourism businesses have faltered in many parts of the world, but in

Vermont linkages have strengthened over the past twenty years due to support from a variety of key stakeholder groups including state government, farmers market organizations, consumers, and interested restaurant owners and chefs. One goal of Bonafide Tours and indeed an Integrated Rural Tourism strategy is to encourage and support a robust local and regional food system supply network to benefit farmers and other community members, thus building local linkages and ultimately contributing to the resiliency of destination.



A maple syrup producer explains the process of sugaring [Photo by Todd Comen]

As a tour guide, food is a great way to share stories of the landscape and cultural heritage along the tour route. A stop at Rankin dairy farm, for example, sets the stage for a story of how the land was home to first-nation peoples, how the first European settlers raised sheep prior to the Civil War, and how that evolved into its current use as an organic dairy farm. Visitors could meet the farmer, pet the calves, and even try milking a cow by hand. A stop at Morse Farm Maple Sugar Works would provide an opportunity for the tour guests to meet the seventh generation maple producer, whose tales of the evolution of maple sugaring span two hundred years and include the modern machinery currently used to make the sweet stuff everyone loves, maple syrup!

Stopping points during the Bonafide tour experience reinforced the story of regional food. Such tour operators can work with local restaurants to find out where they source their raw ingredients. The stop at Morse Farm, for

instance, enabled tour guests to learn the story behind the syrup that they may have had for breakfast at their hotel. Visiting farms, food processors, and craft beverage makers that sell to restaurants where tourists have eaten demonstrate the dynamic relationships of a resilient local food system.

Urban-Rural Linkages Through Food and Agriculture

The model (shown below) of a local and regional food supply network represents key components of an interconnected, circular economy built on mutually beneficial partnerships. Tour guests are introduced to the complex food system networks evolving in the state of Vermont. They meet the chefs who prepare specialty food products for them and learn of the culinary training programs that teach chefs how to source and prepare ingredients grown and processed locally.

To enrich the Bonafide guest experience, tours connected visitors to the farmers and specialty food producers that supplied restaurants where visitors were inclined to dine while in the region. For example, tourists lodging at Hotel Vermont would often dine at either Juniper or Hen of the Woods, two farm-to-table restaurants in the hotel. Both restaurants have actively participated in reimagining the local and regional food system that they are a part of, including how ingredients are sourced, how food is grown, and how food is processed, delivered, stored, and even prepared.



From Dirt to Dirt

Guests also discover business innovations, including food waste hauling enterprises, bridge organizations such as the Vermont Fresh Network and other food hub or

distribution enterprises, and composting operations at various scales. Managing food waste from restaurant operations has also been a focus of these and all other restaurants in Vermont since diverting food waste from landfills is required by law in Vermont as of spring 2020. This new approach to food waste management requires disposal, waste hauling, and processing of food waste into soil amendments that go back to farmers, completing the circular economy from farm to table and back again.

This diagram of a local and regional food supply network of the Juniper Restaurant in Juniper Restaurant Local Food Supply Network



Hotel Vermont, a frequent pick-up point for my tours, illustrates the relationships the chef and hotel management team built over time with local and regional specialty food and beverage suppliers. This robust supply network features farmers, fishers, and myriad other small businesses contributing to the unique, authentic menu of the restaurant. Symbiotic relationships such as these build a healthy and resilient food system.

In situations where farm-to-table partnerships are limited or non-existent, a good substitute is visiting farmers markets or specialty food stores that carry locally grown produce or locally raised meats or dairy products. Sometimes, stopping by the edge of a farm field may have to suffice to explain how the farm and its crops fit into the economic and cultural milieu of the community. In time, the tour operator will realize that relationships with the farmers will inspire them to share their story of the farm and farm life, which in turn opens the door to expanding partnerships with the consumer and possibly restaurateurs.

Tour Operation: Lessons Learned

Business partnerships – Hotels and resorts are the conduit for customers for small tour companies. Visitors staying in primary anchor destinations are eager to explore backroads and agritourism enterprises with the assistance of an experienced guide.

Marketing partnerships – Hotel and resort employees become spokespersons for the tour operation. Familiarization trips, newsletters, and personal relationships add up to referrals, which are the lifeblood of the small tour business.

Market segments – People who enjoy exploring a rural destination include young professionals, food and beverage enthusiasts, retired explorers, seasoned photographers, landscape appreciators, and friends and families.

Community benefit – Tour design can spread the wealth from visitors. By integrating a variety of distinctive small businesses and special places you can achieve cohesive and personalized visitor experiences for specific market segments. Small farm operations with retail sections, historic cultural sites, local eateries, general stores, and craft food and beverage enterprises make up the tour experience.



Key takeaways from my three years of participant observation operating Bonafide Tours include:

1. Low start-up costs if done right; primarily variable costs rather than fixed costs.

2. Marketing is about building relationships with people who will promote the experience.
3. Partnerships need to be mutually beneficial and cooperative.
4. Pricing communicates value of the tour, so don't underprice a high quality experience.
5. All-inclusive pricing ensured that tourist wealth was shared among rural enterprises.
6. Monitor guest satisfaction during the tour, and adapt the tour as needed with input from guests.
7. Even in a drive market such as Vermont, people appreciate guided driving tours that get off the beaten path accompanied by experts with local knowledge.
8. High ratings on a third party review site such as Trip Advisor will help sell tour experiences!

Testing my theory of Integrated Rural Tourism demonstrated that over time, even a small tour operator can make a profit while boosting revenue streams in rural communities. Stopping at farms, maple sugar houses, general stores and cafes, and even the historic sites enabled visitors to spend money on gifts. Since the price of the tour included lunch, snacks, beverage tastings, and entrance fees, businesses visited by the tour always received revenue, achieving the goal of the theory of Integrated Rural Tourism. The test was a success!

The lesson for destinations seeking sustainable economic benefits? Encourage would-be entrepreneurs to diversify their income by launching small tourism enterprises like the one described in this article. Requirements include time, energy, customer service skills, partnerships, persistence, and a little creativity. That's it, combined with a steady stream of visitors eager to get off the beaten path and out into rural communities.

Keywords: Agritourism, Stakeholder Cooperation, Rural Tourism, Community Engagement

SAVING CULTURAL HERITAGE: THE SINGAPORE HAWKERS CASE

By Chris Flynn, CEO of the World Tourism Association For Culture & Heritage

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



*Drives for sustainability may sometimes overlook the endangered arts and traditions that make a place and a culture come to life. The World Tourism Association for Culture & Heritage (WTACH) aims to rectify that. In Singapore **Chris Flynn**, WTACH's CEO, discusses a particularly delicious case – one recently recognized by UNESCO.*

The Amazing Hawkers of Singapore

The Singapore Hawkers and their food stalls are a culinary society of their own making. A community that's taken shape over decades, if not centuries. The Hawkers hold a sacred place in Singapore history and in the hearts of its people. Now they have gained UNESCO recognition, even as their contribution to the culture of Singapore is threatened.

Can the right kind of tourism help?

Those of us familiar with Singapore and the splendour of Hawker Culture will know and appreciate that it's more than just somewhere to grab a quick bite to eat. For many it's a way of life. A rich part of their living culture. A gift handed down from generations past. Put simply, it's in their DNA.

On December 16th 2020, 24-member UNESCO's Inter-Governmental Committee decided to recognise Singapore's Hawker Stalls by adding them to the ['Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity'](#) – a process that took two years to reach its successful conclusion. UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list comprises unique cultural practices and intangible elements that promote the diversity of a place's cultural heritage. The idea being that it's not just the bricks and mortar of our world history that's worth preserving, but those elements of a community who make their place in that history significant and unique.

Culture Worth Sustaining

In my opinion the Hawker Centres and their array of food stalls are Singapore's equivalent of the great British Pub. A place to meet family and friends. To gather and chat or gossip about your day. Tell stories. Reminisce. It's not about being one of the crowd. It's about being part of something bigger than yourself.

Even for someone like me who only gets to inhale the magical smells and taste the skills of the Hawker's art every once and a while, I know it goes deeper than that. It's like a belief system. A place that offers sanctuary through food and good cheer. Somewhere you know you'll be welcome and leave more content than when you arrived.

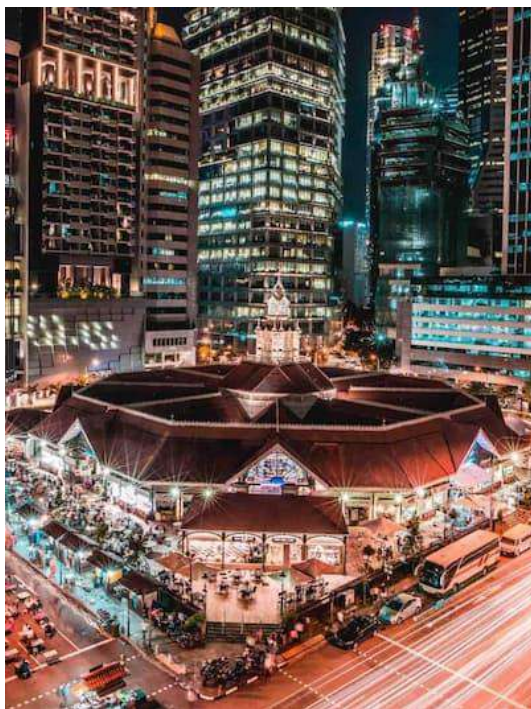
The Hawkers trade – providing quality nutritious food at affordable prices – is a resource traditionally viewed as a critically important, necessary part of Singaporean life. So the hawkers have as much right to be placed

on the UNESCO list as any stone monument or indigenous people.

The Threat

Hidden in the shadows is a downside to this story. Whereas once Hawker vending was viewed as a respected profession or lineage for families to inherit and continue, the attraction of this worthy craft is wilting. If things don't change, and change quickly, there's a very real threat the Singapore Hawkers could soon become a thing of the past.

Today the increasing cost of fresh ingredients presents a challenge. So too does age. It appears that younger generations are foregoing the opportunity to follow in their ancestors' footsteps, unwilling to accept the long hours needed to become a profitable Hawker vendor. With an average vendor age of 59, a tally that continues to grow in the wrong direction, we may very well be witnessing the last hurrah of the Hawkers skills.



*Singapore's Lau Pa Sat market, converted to a Hawker Centre in 1972.
Photo: Galen Crout*

The Opportunity

So, now the question is whether this prestigious recognition bestowed by UNESCO

could offer a new and very timely lifeline for the Hawkers. Or maybe the impetus needed to explore new ways of protecting, preserving, and re-shaping this culinary art form in ways the traditional practitioners could never have imagined. The simple answer is, yes!

As a first step the Singapore Government celebrated the UNESCO inscription with an 18 Day festival in celebration of the Hawkers' art and position in local community. Billed as the SG HawkerFest and launched on 26 December 2020, the concept behind the festival was for Singaporeans to thank and show appreciation to all hawkers for their nearly century-long service to the community. A key element of the celebrations was the Hawkers Succession Scheme, a project for facilitating continuation of the Singapore Hawker trade. It featured official invitations to retired and veteran hawkers to pass down their stalls, recipes, culinary skills and practices to aspiring successors.

The only question I have regarding the SG HawkerFest is why this has been planned and executed as a one-off event? Why not expand this idea to become an annual festival to drive both local residents and visiting tourists to Hawker Centres all over Singapore, where they can watch, learn and participate in the culinary experience that is the essence of living, breathing culture?

Other destinations around the world, seeing declines in appreciation for their cultural heritage, are launching pro-active incentives to reignite interest in local history and traditions. In the Philippines, for instance, the government has given local residents of Manila free entry to all museums, art galleries, cultural centres, events, and festivals. In Egypt, a 'Memory of the City' initiative is designed to preserve the urban and social history of local neighbourhoods. Seen as a new vision for cultural heritage tourism, guided tours are conducted through the streets of these historic areas to give a deeper, richer appreciation of the significance these communities have played in the past. What's more, the project drives revenues and income for residents.

By securing its rightful place on the UNESCO World Heritage stage, Singapore now has an opportunity to attract a new generation of visitors who seek more immersive, authentic and culturally rich experiences. People who are willing to pay a higher, more equitable price for these experiences. Who have a genuine desire to give back to local communities, recognising the true value they play in protecting and preserving local treasures. People who want to be travellers, not just tourists.

With celebrations of UNESCO recognition fading into the distance, it's time for the real work to begin. It's not good to sit back and hope that visitors will seek and out these extraordinary culinary pleasures for themselves. Or that these temples of Singaporean street food will continue to exist just because, well, they always have.

At times like this, opportunity and potential need a little push.

The UNESCO recognition is a conversation starter. Now is the time for planning, preparation, policy and people. A time to engage fully with the Hawker communities. To listen, learn and appreciate where they are, where they came from and where they can and should be in the future. It's a time to hear *their* story. And to act on it.



to counter threats to cultural heritage without

At the [World Tourism Association For Culture & Heritage](#), we recommend strategies lofted on evidence-based research. Trying

fully understanding the complexities would be premature. There's no quick fix. Destinations need development based on research, advice, funding, and support.

With the world having been in lockdown due to the pandemic, there is a window for Singapore to take positive steps to re-grow the Hawker experience in new and exciting ways. To give back its dignity and rightful place in Singaporean hearts by offering it to a new and eager audience of travellers. With people keen to share their experience with other likeminded souls around the world, the delightful art of the Singapore Hawkers will flourish for generations to come.

And by doing so, visitors like me will still get to pass through once in a while to inhale the past, whilst celebrating its future.

Keywords: UNESCO, Cultural Heritage, Hawker, Culinary Tradition, World Tourism Association for Culture & Heritage



Family dining at a Hawkers Centre. Photo: Galen Crout.

THE NISGA'A OFFER AN INDIGENOUS TOURISM MODEL

By Bert Mercer, Economic Development Manager for Nisga'a Lisims Government & Laura Hope, Communications Manager at Coast Funds

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



Nisga'a chiefs, elders, matriarchs, youth, and guests celebrate the raising of a Pts'aan (totem pole) in Gitwinksihlkw. Photo by Gary Fiegehen, courtesy of Nisga'a Lisims Government.

Written on the Land—Weaving Together a Cultural Tourism Story

The Nisga'a Highway, running through the heart of our Nation's lands in Canada's rugged northwest coast, was given the numeric designation 113. The number was not chosen arbitrarily; between 1887, when Nisga'a chiefs travelled to Victoria to demand recognition of Title, and 2000, when the Nisga'a Treaty was ratified and the [Nisga'a Lisims Government](#) passed its first law, exactly 113 years had passed. Over the next five years, our government extended and upgraded the highway, connecting the four Nisga'a villages

and inviting the world to visit.

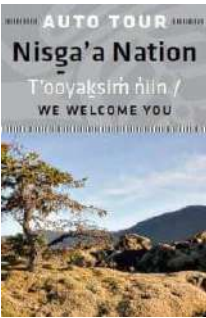
The lands and waters of my First Nation, encompassing 200,000 hectares from the K'alii Aksim Lisims (the Nass River) to the Hazelton Mountains is astounding in its beauty. It is a place of aquamarine waters, soaring snow-capped mountains, and an enormous lava field. The story of our people is written on the land, so visitors to our lands are offered more than breathtaking scenery—they are offered the opportunity to experience Nisga'a culture.



The plentiful resources of the Nass Valley have supported Nisga'a citizens for millennia. Photo: Gary Fiegehen, courtesy of Nisga'a Lisims Government.

Bringing Cultural Tourism to the Nass Valley

Visitors to the Nass Valley are greeted by Txeemsim, a super-natural being who brought light to the Nass River in a time when Nisga'a lived in semi-darkness. His image is the centrepiece of the Nisga'a [cultural marketing and tourism initiative](#). The initiative was expanded and enhanced to develop an [auto-tour route](#) along the Nisga'a Highway, in addition to [a brochure](#) to guide visitors along



the route and [a website](#) devoted solely to tourism in Nisga'a lands. The project and the partnerships that developed as a result have boosted tourism in the Nass Valley, raised the profile of entrepreneurs in the four Nisga'a villages, and reinforced the sovereignty and culture of the Nisga'a Nation.

Nisga'a lands have been dramatically shaped by the volcanic eruption of Tseax Cone. The eruption 263 years ago – Canada's most recent – irrevocably moulded the surrounding landscape and lives of the Nisga'a people. The lava traveled into the nearby Tseax River, damming it and forming Sii T'ax (Lava Lake). It traveled 11 kilometres north to the Nass River filling the valley floor for a further 10 kilometres. Two villages were destroyed, and 2000 people perished.

The land, with its [storied and scenic landscape](#), is a perfect fit for a tourism initiative. And tourism, with its many cultural and economic

benefits, is an ideal undertaking to pursue.

As economic development manager for the Nisga'a Lisims Government, it has been my job to develop our tourism industry. According to a [2019 report](#), the Indigenous tourism sector is outpacing Canadian tourism activity overall. The direct economic benefits of the Indigenous tourism sector was valued at \$1.7 billion in 2017, having grown 23% over the previous three years.

The whole idea of the cultural tourism initiative was to draw people into the Nass Valley. We had a number of tourism elements in place throughout the valley—a [volcano tour](#), the [Nisga'a Museum](#), our hot springs, and a unique and culturally rich landscape—we just had to package everything together.

The centrepiece of the initiative, an 18-stop auto-tour along 100 kilometres of the Nass Valley, takes visitors to [culturally significant stops](#), all within an easy walk of the Nisga'a Highway. The auto-tour signs create driver awareness by improving wayfinding, stimulating interest in our culture, and providing visitors with cultural, social, and geographic interpretations of our lands.

By tying all the attractions together in this way, we can welcome visitors to stay longer. We can point them to local accommodations—like [Vetter Falls Lodge](#)—and local places of significance. We want visitors to get to know, and fall in love with, Nisga'a lands.

The Nisga'a tourism and marketing initiative exemplifies Indigenous cultural tourism, the



Bert Mercer, economic development manager for the Nisga'a Lisims Government stands in front of the newly opened Vetter Falls Lodge. Photo by Laura Hope.

symbiotic relationship between visitors who want to have an authentic cultural experience and First Nations like ours, who want to share and strengthen our culture.

Lessons Learned

Government Dynamics: I'm proud of the work I've done for our government in developing the cultural tourism initiative to bring visitors into the Nass Valley, but the project has faced its share of challenges along the way.

One of the more challenging aspects was working to ensure that the initiative reflected the vision of each of the four Nisga'a villages. Though I work for our central Nisga'a Lisims Government, early on I began working closely with the governments of the four villages to develop and approve the auto-tour and brochure.

One of the keys to success has been developing a steering committee consisting of representatives from Nisga'a Lisims Government and each of the four villages. We developed a terms of reference for the committee that clearly outlined its scope, what kind of recommendations it can provide to leadership, and what types of projects it can become involved in.

If I were starting this project over again, I'd put my steering committee in place right from the very beginning, even before planning with a consultant. They are the stakeholders and can help overcome the siloed nature of government structures.

Importance of Branding: In order to establish Nisga'a Tourism as an international-quality product, I worked closely to follow the established brand guidelines of our government. The government designer, Jim Skipp, always reinforced that following brand guidelines is of the utmost importance and can really lend strength to a tourism initiative.

Cultural Sensitivities: I also worked closely with our elders to ensure the Nisga'a language was responsibly incorporated. Though the

process took time, it was so important to include the language and cultural interpretations into the auto-tour. Providing wider access to culturally significant sites like the hot springs, and the [lava bed memorial park](#) required careful thought and planning.

The hot springs are increasingly becoming a destination for outside visitors and we have to manage that impact with a desire to protect our cultural sites.

Allowing Room for Growth: The auto-tour and brochure were purposefully designed to allow for growth of tourism in the region. We knew we'd be opening Vetter Falls Lodge—owned and operated by the Nisga'a Lisims Government—and wanted to make sure we could add that to the printing of the auto-tour brochure.

The COVID-19 pandemic has paused tourism across the world. Here in the Nass Valley we are using this time to thoughtfully prepare for local tourism in the coming year when our Nation is ready again for visitors. We look forward to a time in the near future when we can once again welcome the world to our home.



Tourists outside of Bonnie Stanley's U See Food U Eat it restaurant in Gingolx. The restaurant is gaining international recognition; visitors are starting to return each summer from Europe. Photo: Laura Hope

Learn more about the Nisga'a Cultural Tourism Initiative at coastfunds.ca

Keywords: Cultural Tourism, Protecting Natural and Cultural Heritage Resources, First Nations, Governance

CHAPTER 4

Building Resilience Through Collaboration & Governance



Elephants in Sri Lanka. Photo Credit: Roi Ariel

COOPERATION ON JEJU ISLAND

By Dr. Mihee Kang, GSTC Assurance Program Director and Asia Pacific Director & Jeryang Ko, Chair, Jeju Ecotourism Association

Article first appeared in the [DSR Winter 2022 issue](#)



Residents of all ages participate in roundtable meetings, where they can share resources, concerns, and ideas. [All photos courtesy of Seonheul Village]

*Seonheul village on Jeju Island has undergone several transformations throughout its history, but in the last ten years, community-based tourism has become a mainstay — bolstering conservation, the local economy, and the social fabric of the village. **Dr. Mihee Kang** and **Jeryang Ko** explain how stakeholders came together to establish a social cooperative that changed the future of the village.*

Power of Working Together: A Lesson from a Ramsar Wetland Village in Jeju, South Korea

Many government-supported rural development schemes focus too heavily on infrastructure; many villagers don't know how to run a business. By contrast, the Korean village of Seonheul on Jeju Island has established a local business that would ensure economic sustainability even without government financial support. The goals were for all stakeholders to participate, with the village as the leader, and for profits to be distributed widely. This 'social cooperative' was just one feature of the area's communal conservation and ecotourism development, which has been underway for years.

Seonheul lies inland on Jeju Island. This southernmost and largest island of South Korea has a population of around 670,000. It was formed by the eruption of an underwater volcano about 2 million years ago. Today, there are nine inhabited islands and 55 uninhabited islands in its administrative boundary. Jeju Island has been designated as a UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site, a Biosphere Reserve, and a Geopark.

Seonheul is an agricultural village with about 900 residents in 2021. It is one of 29 Korean ecotourism destinations designated by the Korean Ministry of Environment that are designed to protect nature and support community-based ecotourism development.

A key site in the village is a gotjawal (rocky lava) volcanic forest called Dongbaekdongsan (or Camelia Hill), which is included in the biosphere reserve and the geopark. It is surrounded by an evergreen forest with a relatively warm climate at an elevation of less than 100m. Dongbaekdongsan was formed by lava as thin as tomato juice, which formed a plate at the base of the forest, eventually creating the wetlands of today.



Hikers pause to admire the local tree species during a guided ecotour in Dongbaekdongsan.

Around 0.59 km² of those wetlands, centered on 'Meunmulkak', have been designated a Ramsar Wetland. Dongbaekdongsan is rich in biodiversity; 13 of its more than 370 types of plants and 900 animal species are protected. There are more than 100 freshwater springs that are used for sacred prayers, drinking water for residents and animals, as well as for bathing water.

Forming a Committee with Stakeholders

Residents' participation in the conservation and ecotourism development of Dongbaekdongsan (Camelia Hill) can be divided into three stages: (i) before 1981, (ii) after 1981, and (iii) after 2010. Until the early 1980s, Dongbaekdongsan was used as a village communal ranch and for water. There was a village forestry club that oversaw decision-making and enforced the rules of how the forest was used. This changed in 1981, when it was designated a Jeju Special-Governing Province Monument No.10 by the national government, due to its unique location as a natural forest in the center of the mountainous regions of Jeju. By this time, residents no longer depended on its resources. Water, wood, and charcoal were not the main necessities since sources for fuel changed, and a public water supply was introduced to the village, ultimately changing the village lifestyle.

In 2010, the Ministry of the Environment designated Dongbaekdongsan as a Protected Wetland and implemented capacity-building programs for the residents to protect its resources. From this point on, ecotourism and eco-education became the focus of the residents as a vehicle for conservation and a wise use of the resources through participation.

The following year, in 2011, the Village Council (VC) formed Dongbaekdongsan Conservation and Management Council (DCMC), inviting stakeholders surrounding Dongbaekdongsan to join, such as provincial and municipal governments, environmental NGOs, experts, research institutes, and other related organizations. The Village Council leader is

also the president of the DCMC. The DCMC meets every quarter to bring together outside stakeholders to discuss issues related to conservation and ecotourism development of the Dongbaekdongsan. However, the final decision is made at the village general assembly.



Members of the Village Council come together to discuss tourism strategies and divide up leadership responsibilities amongst each other.

Learning Together, Sharing Responsibility, and Making Decisions Collectively

The VC internally holds resident meetings three times a year for residents to share information, prevent alienation, discuss responsibilities, and share benefits together. Once a year, a roundtable meeting is held for all residents to discuss the vision for the village.

The first roundtable meeting was held in February 2014. At least 100 -130 residents from all age groups attended the roundtable meeting. Each year, one table is saved for village children of all ages that allows them to proudly participate in village discussions and in the decision-making process as members of the village.

Resident-led Conservation, Restoration, Monitoring, and Documentation

The VC also organizes capacity building training sessions for its residents regularly so the residents can take leadership in conservation and tourism development. Ecological monitoring by a group of residents is an important part of the ongoing training programs.

The ecological monitoring group consists of about 10 people including 5-6 residents, one expert, and 2-3 people from ecotourism associations and/or advisory groups. Since 2011, the group surveys ecological resources and monitors ecological changes monthly in Dongbaekdongsan. Based on the results of their activities, restoration of endangered species is continued by the village and/or the environmental agencies. The village also has a monitoring program engaging local students led by the village eco-teachers combined with the advice of a local professional organization. Currently, a few books about camellia trees, local grasses, and ferns of Dongbaekdongsan have been published by the VC in collaboration with resident monitoring groups and experts, and a book about mushrooms will be published soon.

Building a Village Enterprise — the ‘Social Cooperative Seonheulgot’



Rather than relying on government subsidies, the village worked to establish a business that would ensure economic sustainability even after government subsidies stop. The business structure was to ensure that all stakeholders

would participate, with the village as the primary leader, and that the profit from the business would be distributed widely.

After discussion and deliberation for many years on the type of business required, a collective decision was made during a roundtable discussion with 130 residents in attendance: To create the ‘Social Cooperative Seonheulgot.’ Its objective was ‘conservation of Dongbaekdongsan and residents’ happiness’.

Resident concerns and satisfaction are monitored regularly. Currently, Seonheulgot manages the Dongbaekdongsan Wetland Center and operates ecotours, local product sales, interpretation service, and community eco-education programs. Their two ecotour products are certified as low-carbon tours by

the Korean Ministry of Environment.

All Age Groups Participate in Ecotourism Development

Older residents engage in literary and artistic activities, drawing, writing, and producing books that are sold as souvenirs.

Residents in their 40s and 50s typically take the role of planning and leading ecotourism programs, while there are women’s groups in their 50s to 70s that conduct food-experience programs to provide tourists with local specialties. There are even teenagers who serve as eco-guides, and men in their 70s serving as “uncle” eco-guides. In addition, the annual village festival is a plastic-free event.

Residents Teach Nature and Culture at Schools, Drawing Outside Students

The Seonheul elementary school invites village eco-guides to its regular environmental classes. These trained village eco-teachers deliver classes for the students every week, teaching not only ecology but also traditional knowledge and cultural values of the village. In 2014, this elementary school nearly closed with only 20 students enrolled, but the popularity of this program has led students to transfer in from other provinces. Today, the school has over 110 students, 90% of which are transfer students.



A plastic-free event lunch box.

The Power of a Cooperative Network and Intermediate Supporting Organization

Seonheul is regarded as a good case of community-based ecotourism development in

Korea because the VC engaged with different stakeholders and it took a democratic process in the decision making. Support from Jeju Ecotourism Association and Jeju Ecotourism Center provided advice from the start of the village ecotourism development.

In Korea, there have been hundreds of rural village tourism development projects supported by the relevant government agencies. Many are government-led projects that focus too heavily on infrastructure development, and/or the villagers lacked the capacity to establish a sustainable tourism business structure. Only handful of cases can be considered successful community-based tourism examples. But when the roles of each stakeholder are clear and when the local

community takes primary responsibility, then sustainable community-based tourism is possible.

This is not to say that the Seonheul Village case is perfect. Conflicts between residents and/or stakeholders still exist, there is a risk of overtourism, and the community has experienced difficulties in operating a business that is economically sustainable. However, the future is certainly positive. This village has learned over the past 10 years to communicate and solve its problems together.

Keywords: Cooperative Network, Conservation, Protecting Natural and Cultural Heritage Resources, Governance, Stakeholder Engagement

ACHIEVING COLLABORATION IN VÄSTERBOTTEN – A SWEDISH TALE

By Annika Sandstrom, Region Tourism Chief, Region Västerbotten Tourism

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



Dogsledding in Lycksele, Västerbotten. All photos: Region Västerbotten

*After the Västerbotten regional tourism authority developed its sustainable tourism initiative, it then faced the hurdle of how to get stakeholders on board. **Annika Sandstrom**, Region Tourism Chief, explains how they not only overcame this challenge, but also encouraged other destinations in the county to commit to better destination stewardship.*

Västerbotten Brings Together Stakeholders to Highlight Nature and Culture

The county of Västerbotten, in Northern Sweden, extends from the Gulf of Bothnia west to the Norwegian border and comprises one eighth of Sweden's total land area. The sprawling county, roughly the size of Denmark, offers "grand mountains, deep forests, mighty rivers, and ... sea breezes," according to [Visit Sweden](#). It has around 250,000 residents and welcomes about two million visitors every year. People come to Västerbotten to enjoy nature and culture. More than 75% of total

visitors come from within Sweden, mostly during the summer months.

In 2015, [Region Västerbotten Tourism](#) (RVT), which is responsible for regional development and growth in Vasterbotten County, recognized the need for many businesses to have a more sustainable approach. RVT looked to VisitScotland, Scotland's National Tourist Organization, as to how they have approached sustainable tourism development. RVT was inspired by the way that VisitScotland approached quality and sustainability assessments and star ratings of tourism



Hiking in Hemavan, Västerbotten.

businesses in a well-developed scheme. In 2018, [RVT joined the Global Sustainable Tourism Council as a destination member](#).

Based on the Scotland model, RVT formed a regional sustainable tourism initiative that was directed to local destination organizations, municipalities, and tourism businesses. The [initiative is based on the GSTC Criteria](#) and directly linked to several of the 17 goals in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

RVT developed assessments on tourism businesses and organizations based on the [GSTC Industry and Destination Criteria](#), in addition to a few criteria of their own. The team at RVT conducted the assessments. They used the same method to assess municipal offices in order to address development needs in planning, permits, waste management, etc. As an incentive to get tourism businesses to participate, RVT offered those who had been assessed to take part in business and product development, digital skills and marketing knowledge free of charge. These offerings were directly based on needs that were noticed during the assessments.



Canoeing in Skellefte river.

The Västerbotten Experience

RVT developed an additional incentive called [Västerbotten Experience](#), which is a seal granted to businesses after passing an assessment. Businesses that have received the Västerbotten Experience seal must be role models in environmental considerations, climate-smart solutions, and local

responsibility. The business is re-assessed by RVT every two years to maintain the level of sustainability and quality.

This initiative aims to instill a sense of pride for these businesses in their work and their products. It also serves as a platform to communicate the best of Västerbotten's nature and culture to visitors. The featured experiences encapsulate Västerbotten's sense of place, lifestyle, and hospitality.



Västerbotten cheese.

Building the Program

One of RVT's challenges was how to get all the region's tourism businesses on board with the Västerbotten Experience program. In the beginning, only the local DMOs were interested in participating, but eventually several municipalities became interested as well. Many tourism businesses thought it was a pointless effort, so RVT focused on those who did want to take part.

Progress was slow at first, so RVT decided to focus on those early adopters and gave them extra incentives to do more, such as opportunities to go on study trips, feature in special promotions, or be part of a film project. At some point those already involved started to become ambassadors for Västerbotten Experience, incentivizing others to sign on. RVT then decided to involve the local destination organizations even further by educating them in the method of assessing businesses, and this has made them great ambassadors of the Västerbotten Experience as well.



Horse riding in Grönåker.

Four Guiding Principles

Sustainability work has become the core of Region Västerbotten Tourism's mission and has brought together the region's municipalities, local destination organizations, and the [80-plus tourism businesses that have joined](#). Several municipalities and destinations have now launched their own sustainability initiatives as well, all with the [GSTC Criteria](#) as a starting point.

Thanks to this consensus, four basic principles have been developed on which different actors in Västerbotten can build their activities. The goal is to develop a long-term sustainable hospitality industry which:

- Is good for residents
- Is good for visitors
- Creates jobs and viable businesses; and
- Takes place within the conditions of nature and culture.

By focusing on and the four guiding principles, RVT's regional tourism strategy has furthered collaboration among regional tourism organizations, local destination organizations, municipalities, and tourism businesses.

What's Next

The leading politicians in the regional council will formally endorse the Västerbotten Experience strategy in December 2021, underlining the importance of the joint initiative for sustainable tourism.

The next step for RVT is to begin re-assessing all the Västerbotten Experience businesses to make sure that they are still up to date on their sustainability work. The same will be done for the municipalities to encourage them to keep sustainable tourism development in focus.



Biking in Tärnaby, Västerbotten.

RVT has recently formed a green team consisting of representatives from all municipalities, from the local destination organizations, and from regional tourism projects. The goal is to identify joint actions that the team can address to further enhance sustainable tourism in Västerbotten. RVT believes that through motivation and education on the benefits of sustainable tourism development the county of Västerbotten can pick up the pace and achieve more together.

Keywords: Destination Stewardship, Sustainable Tourism Development, Local Businesses, Governance, GSTC Criteria

A HIMALAYAN VILLAGE TAKES CHARGE OF ITS FUTURE

By Aditi Chanchani and Sandeep Minhas, Himalaya Niti Abhiyan

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



Stakeholders gather in the Sharchi Village for a discussion on tourism at the Gram Sabha Meeting. [Photo courtesy of Aditi Chanchani]

After witnessing unprecedented environmental damage, and despite pressure from tourism investors, the Indian village of Sharchi put regulations in place to limit unbridled growth in its attractive Himalayan valley. **Aditi Chanchani** and **Sandeep Minhas** detail how the valley's village councils are coming together to protect the region's nature, culture, and its very future.

Strengthening Tourism Governance: First Step to Sustainability

The [Tirthan](#) and Sainj Valleys of the Himalayas are in the northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh in the Kullu District and adjoin the [Great Himalayan National Park](#) (GHNP). While this area has long been popular within the trekking community, it gained prominence on the tourist map about a decade ago and got further impetus when GHNP gained inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2014. Markers of unplanned and unsustainable tourism development are on the rise in the Tirthan Valley, with the growth of hotels, resorts, campsites, hostels, and homestays on the periphery of the park's boundaries.

Disasters in the Indian Himalayan region have increased in intensity and pace, with landslides blocking roads and rivers, leading to the loss of lives, livelihoods, and property. So far in 2021,

Himachal Pradesh witnessed 35 major landslides (as compared to 16 in 2020), cloudburst occurrences have increased by 121% (around 30 this year), and there have been 17 incidents of flash floods (9 in 2020). Climate change and anthropogenic activities, with tourism being a contributor, are mainly responsible for the massive destruction that we are currently witnessing. Ironically, even during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic when travel came to a standstill, the four-laning of highways and construction of tunnels, ropeways, hotels, and homestays continued unabated, especially in the remote regions of the state.

Tourism in the mountain regions is dependent on forests, grasslands, and natural ecosystems as well as human societies and cultures. The impact of excessive, unregulated tourism has resulted in unplanned urbanization, loss of traditional livelihoods, severe and lop-sided demands on scarce and fragile natural resources (forests, water, and land), deforestation, pollution, traffic jams, and spiralling prices. The safety of women and children and the loss of cultural traditions remains a constant fear.



What tourists come for: The view into the Great Himalayan National Park. [Photo courtesy of Aditi Chanchani]



Construction is underway to build in lanes for the Kullu Highway.
[Photo courtesy of Aditi Chanchani]

Enabling Governance Makes a Difference

In India, there is no specific legislation for tourism that is all-encompassing (and maybe rightly so, given the multi-faceted nature of this sector, and the needs of different geographies and cultures). There are however two legislations that provide a framework for the planning and regulation of tourism at the local level.

- First, the Panchayati Raj Act (1994), which allows for the organization of village councils (called Panchayats) and endows them with the authority to function as units of self-government.
- Second, the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers Act (2006), which empowers holders of forest rights to protect, preserve, regulate, and put a halt to or refuse to allow any activity that has a detrimental impact on the wildlife, forest, biodiversity of the area and which negatively affects their natural heritage and culture.

With 66% of the geographical area of Himachal Pradesh covered with forests and with ample examples of negative impacts of tourism, the village councils (called the Gram Panchayats), the village assembly (called the Gram Sabha)[1] and the Conservation and Management Committees[2] have become key institutions for the planning and governance of tourism in and around forest areas.

Sharchi Village Decides to Regulate Tourism

On the boundary of the GHNP in Himachal Pradesh, Sharchi village, with a population of only 2,413, has taken a stand to prevent the exploitation of the environment and to protect the aesthetic value of the village.

In the past year, residents have seen a drastic

increase in the sale of land with scenic views of the GHNP, mainly by people outside the state who wish to start tourism businesses.[3] This has propelled the Sharchi Panchayat (village council) to plan and regulate tourism and curtail commercialization while preserving the natural landscape and cultural traditions of the area.

Other Villages Join In

In July 2021, seven Panchayats of the Tirthan Valley passed a resolution that to open a tourism business requires a No Objection Certificate, or a written permission, from the local Panchayat. They also decided that the construction of hospitality units will be limited to a maximum of 10 rooms. This decision created a stir among tourism developers who had already invested in land or planned to invest in the area, and who now feared restrictions. The district's Deputy Commissioner[4] was roped in to intervene.

Recognising that tourism impacts go far beyond that of just hotel construction, SAHARA [5] (Society for Scientific Advancement of Hill and Rural Areas) and [Himalaya Niti Abhiyan](#), two civil society organisations, are working with the region's communities to further their understanding of tourism and its impacts. The hope is to work towards a long-term, sustainable, and mature tourism plan able to withstand the ever-increasing impacts of tourism on the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural resources of the region.

Both organizations worked together with the Sharchi Village to prepare a memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner. A public notice was also posted inviting comments and suggestions.

Key points in the memorandum included:

- Tourism is developed and promoted so as to respect the land, its people, and natural and cultural heritage.
- Tourism development is undertaken with people's consent, keeping to their views for how tourism should develop.
- Planning and implementation processes

are transparent, participatory, and inclusive, and local tourism policy respects people's vision and aspirations.

- Tourism is regulated, and decisions and norms developed by local communities and local governance bodies are upheld.
- People's rights over common and community property resources and natural resources are ensured.
- Tourism is developed based on the carrying capacity of the region.
- Local ownership is strong, small and medium enterprises are vibrant, local employment and local economies are stimulated by tourism development.
- Tourism is culturally sensitive, striving to balance the need for commercial viability with the supporting and reviving of cultural traditions, arts, and crafts.
- The sacred spaces of the local deities (Nagaddi) are protected.
- Tourism industry does not expropriate communities' land, water, or natural resources, nor alienate or displace people from traditional livelihoods.
- Tourism practices ensure responsible use of resources, low energy use, effective waste management, and minimum negative impact on the environment.

On August 30th, a meeting was held with the District Commissioner, who was positive about the steps that the community has taken. However, implementation depends on approvals from the Gram Sabha, District Administration, and State Government. As of publication, these meetings are pending

The Way Forward

The next few years are crucial, as it will define the tourism trajectory of these remote regions of Himachal Pradesh. The people of Sharchi are not against tourism or businesses that would like to operate in the area, but they see this as a matter of their rights and the survival of their culture. SAHARA, Himalaya Niti Abhiyan, and

the Panchayats are working on a sustainable tourism policy and action plan for the Valleys that involves all, both rightsholders and stakeholders (as the impact will be felt cumulatively). Additionally, they see the need to put in place institutional mechanisms that consider, and in fact accord primacy, to constitutionally guaranteed governance structures.

The people of Sharchi have taken a step in the right direction to embark on the long road towards achieving sustainable tourism. We will face many trials and tribulations, but we hope that we are able to stay on the path we have chosen.



Villagers practice the ceremony of welcoming the Devas (Gods) during a festival in Jamad Village. [Photo courtesy of Aditi Chanchani]

Aditi Chanchani and Sandeep Minhas are associated with Himalaya Niti Abhiyan, a collective of grassroot people's resistance defending local livelihoods, environment, and social equity with the idea of a sustainable mountain-specific development model. A key area of their work has been to advocate and fight for the implementation of the Forest Rights Act. Sandeep Minhas is Secretary of organisation, while Aditi Chanchani coordinates Mountains, Communities and Tourism programme.

Keywords: Protecting Natural and Cultural Heritage Resources, Governance, Sustainable Development, Village Councils

CONTRASTING TOURISM LANDSCAPES IN KARNATAKA, INDIA

By Gayathri Hedge, conservation architect with Dual-Masters in World & Cultural Heritage

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



Amara homestay cottages decked in Warli paintings. Homestays such as this, combined with multicultural experiences, offer a resilient alternative to the risks inherent in over-exploiting a single adventure-tourism product. © Amrut Joshi

*The pandemic exposed the dangers of 'tourism monocultures' – dependence on one product only – versus a more holistic approach to tourism fare. **Gayathri Hegde** has been researching the differing tourism experiences of Dandeli and Joida, neighbouring towns in Karnataka, southwestern India.*

River Rafting Alone Does Not a Destination Make

The town of [Dandeli](#), located in the serene, verdant green forests of Western Ghats in northern Karnataka, has become synonymous with 'adventure tourism' in the region, popularized as the river-rafting destination of southern India. Fueled by dam waters, the Kali River flows with robust furor, enthralling all visitors. The spike in tourists visiting this biodiversity hotspot brought considerable profits to tourism service providers, but it has also resulted in unchecked growth that has hampered the ecological and financial sustainability of this tourism model.

What was once a novelty experience has now been reduced to a gimmick in recent years.

Rafting through the rapids was initially envisioned for a 12km stretch, which would allow the adventurer to have a complete experience of rafting through multiple rapids in the flowing river. However, to offer the experience to a larger number of visitors traveling on a smaller budget, the local tourism operators started offering the rafting experience for lower fees and a shorter distance. As a result, while the tourism experience in Dandeli has become more accessible across all economic classes of the society, the overall quality of the product has taken a massive hit.

In an attempt to cater to many, even the few are deprived of the delights of nature that this place truly has to offer. With no checks in place to regulate the tourism impacts, tourists are littering the area, and most service providers take no responsibility for restoring the disturbed places they leave behind. As a result, the once verdant landscape is now dotted with plastic and tin. The sensitive ecology is home to a multitude of flora and fauna that are endemic to the region. The unchecked spurt in tourism stands to upend their lifecycle.

Then, when the government banned water-sport activities as a preventive measure during Covid-19, many tourism service providers who had anchored their business model solely on adventure tourism took a major financial hit.

But what is unique about Dandeli? What can one take away from here? The actual potential of this place in the current tourism model does not benefit the tourist or the tourism vendor. It exploits the place without any regard to either maintaining the place or developing it more thoughtfully.



Cultivated terraces and wild forests of Joida testify to multiple layers of influence by man and nature. © Gayathri Hegde.

The Joida Model

Potential solutions to such challenges have been successfully and sensitively incorporated not too far away in the neighbouring region of [Joida](#). Both Dandeli and Joida are home to many native communities, some of them tribal, who have immense knowledge about the ecology of the place and have several unique skills in arts and crafts, which can be leveraged for the benefit of both locals and visitors. Even the cuisine that is consumed locally is unique, featuring an array of tubers, which have an annual festival. This cuisine ought to be featured in restaurants menus and be celebrated accordingly.

In all of this, I see hope in a cluster of homestays of the region, which are modelled on the public-private profit (PPP) sharing approach for the purpose of providing the best experience of a nature retreat and a cultural taste of regional specialties.

Even when river rafting was closed and the bigger hotels and resorts suffered losses from their adventure-tourism business model, some homestays of the region were not affected by this decision. Rafting was only an add-on to their tourism products. These homestays are run by members of the local community who offer rare view into their own cultural diversity. In the remote village of Gund, last in the region, Amara Homestays offers *Yakshagana* (a local theatre and dance

form) workshop for its visitors and offers meals typical of the Havyaka people. These opportunities are cherished by the visitors. The owner claimed that his business is sustained by repeat visitors who look forward to this experience.

My Take

In hindsight, Dandeli-Joida offers the perfect canvas to showcase a panorama of evolving tourism trends in smaller cities in India and their impacts on multiple levels. In my experience of having travelled across different parts of India over the years and of viewing it through a cultural lens, it struck me that often the ideal tourism experience for an Indian tourist in India is hinged primarily on material comforts more than having an immersive cultural experience. The representation of local cultural identity in built and intangible forms is lacking too.

When our tourist infrastructure does not reflect this in design or application, the disconnect is but a natural consequence. The gap here is due not only to the tourist who chooses familiar material comfort as his priority, but also to the way these experiences are curated. The idea of 'ecotourism' has found traction only in recent years, and we are still grappling with what it means. Textbook definitions and generic principles of ecotourism seem not very relevant for the region, while failing to recognize that the local traditional systems offer perfect solutions to this dilemma. *[Editor: See instead the "[geotourism approach](#)" put forth via National Geographic.]*



Annual tuber exhibition in Joida by the tribal Kunabi people. © Amrut Joshi.

The contrasting tourism models I witnessed in

Dandeli offer many lessons for building a sustainable tourism model in these eco-sensitive habitats, while creating a unique experience for the visitor and safeguarding the natural landscape and culture for the future.

Keywords: Community Engagement, Protecting Natural and Cultural Heritage Resources, Tourism Experiences



Sangway homestay nestled in the greenery. © Amrut Joshi

CHAPTER 5

Building Back Better



Chamonix-Mont-Blanc, France. Photo Credit: Tom Podmore

VANUATU TOURISM GETS A REBOOT

By Geoff Hyde, Managing Director and Principal Consultant of Sustainable Tourism International Ltd. (STIL)

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



Naluandance, Malekula culture. All photos Courtesy of the Vanuatu Department of Tourism

*The pandemic has caused massive disruption to the tourism industry around the world. But it has also created an opportunity for destinations to reboot the sector to move forward in a more thoughtful and sustainable way. Here, **Geoff Hyde** shares how Vanuatu is doing just that.*

Living its Ni-Vanuatu Values: Vanuatu Plans for Resilience, Agritourism, and Cruise Reform

“I rely on volcano tours for my livelihood but I also want to protect my family and community from getting sick from Covid,” said a local guide at a recent tourism workshop in Ambrym, Vanuatu. Indeed, Vanuatu’s Department of Tourism (DoT), in conjunction with public health officials, has been conducting workshops around the country to deliver the twin messages of business survival through financial grants while following health protocols, including vaccinations, to provide safe business and community environments

when borders reopen.

Located in the South Pacific, Vanuatu has a strong and authentic Melanesian culture and an abundance of natural assets within its 83 islands. Closure of international borders has plunged the economy into a serious socio-economic crisis. Like most small island states, Vanuatu has been heavily dependent on its tourism sector.



Gaua Beach, Torba Province.

Economic Reliance on Tourism

According to World Bank [data](#), from 2016-18, Vanuatu had the eighth highest proportion of tourism receipts and the seventh-highest direct contribution of tourism to GDP. More recent pre-Covid 2019 tourism [statistics](#) from the World Travel and Tourism Council, show the direct and indirect contributions of tourism in Vanuatu accounted for 48% of GDP (Vt 46.8 billion). This data, combined with over 135,000 cruise ship arrivals in 2019 add another Vt 2.1 billion to Vanuatu's economy (DoT [Sustainable Cruise Tourism Plan, 2020](#).) All totalled, these statistics reveal a high level of reliance on the tourism sector.

Such a dependency was recognised by the Vanuatu DoT well before the pandemic hit. From 2016, the DoT had been planning for and implementing a more sustainable and diversified approach to tourism development. In 2018, [Vanuatu DoT joined the Global Sustainable Tourism Council \(GSTC\)](#) as a destination member and [signed an MOU](#) to support Vanuatu's tourism industry on the progress it had made in the path to becoming a sustainable tourism destination. Funded through NZAid, the *Vanuatu Strategic Tourism Action Plan* produced the [Vanuatu Sustainable Tourism Policy 2019-2030](#), a key initial project informed by nationwide stakeholder consultation. A vital piece of this policy



Tam-Tams in the Nasara sacred Rom Dance Ground.

included its Vision, which states, "To protect and celebrate Vanuatu's unique environment, culture, *kastom* [traditional, authentic culture], and people through sustainable and responsible tourism" with its goals and objectives based on a set of these shared values:

"Tourism in Vanuatu embraces the traditional and formal economies; it provides sustainable growth by strengthening national and community resilience with the ultimate goal of delivering equitable economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits for Vanuatu and its people."

Vanuatu's Crisis Response in Action

In response to the international border closure, the DoT quickly established the *Tourism Crisis Response and Recovery Advisory Committee* comprising government representatives, including the Director of Public Health, and private sector stakeholders. Tourism sector policy advice and information was then fed into the *National Disaster Management Committee*.

This resulted in two planning documents with action plans:

- The *Immediate Safety, Response and Economic Recovery Plan, May to December 2020* for short term responses delivered under the five pillars of health, access, product, marketing, and communications; and
- the [Tourism Crises Response and Recovery Plan, 2020 to 2023](#) which became part of – and is now – being implemented through the [Vanuatu Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2021 to 2025](#). Following four themes, the VSTS is more aligned to the [GSTC Destination Criteria](#), the *National Sustainable Development Plan*, and the *UN Sustainable Development Goals*:
 - Wellbeing: through High Value, Low Impact Tourism
 - Resilience: through Niche Tourism Product Development

- Diversification: through Agritourism
- Sustainability: through Certification, Investment and Ni-Vanuatu Entrepreneurship

Despite the setbacks from the pandemic, the DoT has been further encouraged and inspired to implement this sustainable tourism strategy and program as part of the recovery process. This will help diversify the product and create resilience within the tourism sector. Under the VSTS, DoT and its partners are now implementing sustainable tourism programs, utilising one or more of the above themes.

The programs are:

Tourism Business Support Program (TBSP) – launched in March 2021 and managed by DoT through a representative Steering Committee. The TBSP provides financial support and technical assistance for eligible tourism businesses to survive the pandemic’s impacts and have them ready to receive tourists when borders reopen. The eligibility criteria encourage tourism businesses to follow the principles of sustainable and responsible tourism by signing a code of conduct promoting product diversification and increasing local benefits. Financial assistance is available in these categories:

- **Tourism Business Survival Grants:** for costs associated with cleaning, maintenance, gardening, security, safety, and utility bills.
- **Renewable Energy Subsidy Scheme:** for equipment and appliance purchasing through the National Green Energy Fund.
- **Agritourism Support Program:** assistance for selected projects that have integrated the tourism and agriculture sectors into their products. For example, the famed Jungle Zipline attraction is now diversifying into cacao and macadamia nut production to supply local chocolate manufacturers and develop tours when borders reopen.

Safe Business Operations (SBO) Training Program – commenced in October 2020, SBO

is mandatory industry training across all sectors to ensure workplace compliance with the health and safety protocols for Covid-19. To date, training workshops and awareness sessions have been delivered to over 2,000 participants in 1,323 businesses across all provinces. SBO is managed by DoT in partnership with the Department of Public Health, the Australia Pacific Training Coalition, the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry, World Vision Vanuatu, Vanuatu Institute of Technology, and Vanuatu Skills Partnership.

Agritourism Support Program – encourages diversification and resilience by integrating agriculture and tourism products. It attempts to create a point of difference with Vanuatu’s local cuisine through the ‘Traditional Cuisine Revival Program’ and the ‘Slow Food Educational Program.’ The latter aims to increase the use of local, sustainable, and organic produce within the tourism industry and raise the nutritional quality of food served to tourists. The DoT is implementing a business mentoring program for 27 local businesses who have now formed the Vanuatu Agritourism Association. This includes business planning, management and digital



marketing, as well as presentations on the SBO and TBSP.

Cruise Tourism Product Development Program – has been implementing the *Vanuatu Sustainable Cruise Tourism Plan* adopted in March 2020. The Government of Vanuatu is adopting a stronger presence in the management and control of the cruise tourism segment under ‘high value–low impact’ sustainable tourism principles. The DoT has also recently commissioned independent local consultants to undertake a feasibility study for an Expedition ship to be based in Vanuatu to develop a ‘fly-cruise’ product more conducive to sustainable

tourism principles and increased *Ni-Vanuatu* benefits. A more representative management committee, chaired by DoT, has been established to implement a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the two main cruise companies, Carnival and Royal Caribbean. This MOA was independently reviewed by Sustainable Seas Ltd (UK) and includes references to the [*GSTC Destination Criteria*](#).

Keywords: Agritourism, Destination Management, Product Development, Resilience, GSTC Destination Criteria

ONCE OVERRUN, DUBROVNIK PLANS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

By the Mayor's Office, City of Dubrovnik

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



View over the medieval historic core of Dubrovnik, 'Pearl of the Adriatic'. [All photos courtesy of the City of Dubrovnik]

*Dubrovnik, Croatia, a UNESCO World Heritage city, is known as the 'Pearl of the Adriatic Sea', its historic city center surrounded by original medieval stone walls – and until recently, thronged with cruise ship passengers. In 2017, that began to change. The following before-and-after story has been provided by the **Mayor's Office, City of Dubrovnik** (with a closing note on the Covid hiatus).*



Cruise ships pack the main Dubrovnik port in times before "Respect the City".

'Respect the City' Program Includes Limits on Cruise-ship Crowds

Dubrovnik, a champion of Croatian tourism, is a city that is both a museum and a performance stage, a unique combination of history and modernity – a city with a capital C. Its rich cultural heritage, different architectural styles, various cultural events, film tourism (think Game of Thrones), Mediterranean flavors, and

superior accommodations draw millions of tourists each year. The old city center, surrounded by original medieval walls, has been under UNESCO World Heritage inscription since 1979. The coastal city is a popular stop-off for cruises. In 2013, for instance, there were more than one million cruise passengers in Dubrovnik, occasionally resulting in more than 10 thousand visitors in the historic core at one time.

By 2017 the city was facing **negative publicity** in global media due to overtourism and uncontrolled tourism development. The city was falling victim to its own success, and its citizens were becoming more openly critical. Amidst such chaos, many visitors could not fully experience the city's history and culture. Eventually, UNESCO warned that the overwhelming number of tourists could result in its World Heritage listing being revoked and advised that no more than 8,000 tourists be in the historic core at any one time. Shortly after being elected in June 2017, mayor Mato Franković introduced the multidisciplinary project "Respect the City" (RTC), aiming for more sustainable development of Dubrovnik. He began tackling the difficult challenge to reduce overcrowding through different measures for relieving traffic congestion and implementing smart city solutions. In particular, he reduced the number of souvenir

stands by 80 percent and cut the number of restaurant tables and chairs by 30 percent. As a result, the City has lost some revenue, at least 5 million kuna a year (around €660,000 or US\$786,000). To illustrate, the highest rent for a small stand at that time was more than 400,000 kunas annually, achieved at public tender.

'Some of the measures we implemented are unpopular, but such moves are necessary if we want to reach the sustainable tourism we seek', said Mayor Franković about financial losses. 'Our task is to put the needs of citizens first. Everything we have done and will do in the future will greatly contribute to creating a unique destination experience and increase the quality of the overall service for all visitors'.

Various strategies have been implemented in cruise tourism. The City approached the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) and, in partnership with them, reorganized cruise schedules to stagger departure and arrival times. It is essential to emphasize that the cruise industry is an important segment of the economy in Dubrovnik. The city policy was that the number of people was never a problem; it was the flow. Better flow was achieved by organizing the ship-arrivals timetable more carefully, both daily and throughout the year. The maximum number of ships was set to two ships at once and the limit of visitors in the walled city coming from cruise ships at 4,000 – half the number suggested by UNESCO. Harmonization of arrival times has relieved pressure on the historic core in the summer seasons of 2018 and 2019 (pre-COVID years), compared to 2017 and earlier.



The 16th-century Pile Gate, main entrance to the old town, blocked by crowds in 2017 . . .



. . . and flowing freely in summer 2019.

CLIA's repeated willingness to cooperate in order to resolve the existing problems in the spirit of partnership is precious to the City of Dubrovnik. As a part of that partnership and the "Respect the City" project, Dubrovnik in 2019 became one of the 30 world destinations for which the [Global Sustainable Tourism Council \(GSTC\)](#) has done a Destination Assessment and Action Plan. Development of the Plan represents the City's firm commitment and unshakeable determination in moving tourism towards a sustainable future.

The City achieved 70% of excellence in the GSTC report, attesting to its focus on a sustainable future for tourism and the city. GSTC recognized numerous examples of good practices in the process, mainly regarding public safety, urban cleanliness, and a high degree of heritage conservation. These included the reconstructed [Lazareti site](#), special measures for heritage protection, local festivals, products, and entrepreneurs, as well as protection of biodiversity, and monitoring the Respect the City project itself.

Sustainable Tourism for a Sustainable Future

'This report represents a new beginning of the story of a sustainable Dubrovnik and a sustainable way of managing tourism as our main industry,' said Mayor Franković. 'Working on assessment in 2019, GSTC consulted with 70 stakeholders from national and local government, the private sector, NGOs and universities, and residents. All stakeholder inputs are very valuable to us, because we want our city to be a great place for anyone – residents and guests alike', he concluded. The conservation of cultural heritage, the quality of citizens' daily lives, and the provision of the best possible experience of Dubrovnik as a

destination – all those are motives for this shift in destination management. Respect the City attracted the attention of international media and the global tourism sector. Dubrovnik is increasingly becoming perceived as a city that has started managing its tourism in a sustainable way. As key factors in years to come, the City of Dubrovnik is planning to take over cruise ship shuttle services and gradually eliminate traffic around the gateway area. In COVID-19 times Croatia was recognized as a safe destination due to its good epidemiological situation in 2020, and safety continues to be the focus in 2021.



Evening in Dubrovnik, after many cruise passengers have left.

Keywords: Destination Management, Destination Planning, Overtourism, Port City, Cruise Tourism, GSTC Destination Assessment

A CHANCE TO TAME CRUISE TOURISM

By Ross A Klein, PhD, an international expert on the cruise industry and cruise tourism

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



Cruiselineer dwarfs Ketchikan, Alaska. Photo: Jonathan Tourtellot

*Cruise critic **Ross Klein** argues that now is the time for port cities to gain control of cruise tourism crowds, explaining three ways to do that – and why it won't be easy. But if not now, when?*

OPINION – Re-imagining Cruise Tourism, Post-Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has given port cities an opportunity to reflect on the impacts of cruise tourism, both positive and negative. At the same time, the cruise industry has been forced to in effect reset. It begrudgingly ceased cruise operations and since April 2020 has floated many restart dates; few have materialized and only in limited markets. Many countries closed cruise tourism through 2021; some like the U.S. expect to reopen November 2021 at the earliest. In the interim, there have been changes in the cruise industry – ships have been scrapped or sold, some cruise lines have ceased operations, other cruise lines have been sold.

The largest cruise corporations will return streamlined, more efficient, and with a revised business model corresponding to the new operating environment – they will seek to increase revenues while decreasing expenses. This negatively impacts ports as they are asked to give more to cruise lines in return for receiving less. The challenge for a port

community is to have the cruise market align with its values and requirements rather than sacrificing its interests to align with the demands of the cruise industry.

Port communities can use the respite from cruise tourism to think rationally about the ideal scope, size, and nature of day trippers from cruise ships. In post-Covid-19, the first issue is public health – keeping cruise tourism safe. What public health measures must be in place in a port and for arriving cruise ship day-trippers – e.g., masks, social distancing, vaccinations. Public health measures should be defined by health authorities in the port community; not by cruise ships.

Three opportunities come with the break in cruise tourism.

Traffic Taming – One is to rebuild cruise tourism in a size that “fits” the port community. People pollution (when the number of tourists overtakes the comfortable carrying capacity of a port) was first recognized by the cruise industry as a problem in the late-1990s and has become worse in the past 20+ years. Port communities, especially historic locations, take the brunt of the growing over-tourism associated with cruise ships. Some ports have taken measures to contain cruise tourism, including:

- Dubrovnik’s “Respect the City Campaign” that caps cruise visitors at 4,000 per day. This is a significant reduction from the peak days when the port saw a million or more passengers in a year (2012, 2013); but it still results in a significant potential traffic load. Twenty-six cruise days a month can result in more than 100,000 passengers a month.
- Venice, in response to social and political action, initially limited cruise ship size and now has banned cruise ships from the Lagoon and the St. Mark’s Square area.
- Key West replaced previous limits on cruise passengers – limits that had been systematically violated over the years – with limits on ship size (1,300 passengers and crew) and total passengers allowed ashore (1,500 per day). The limits were the result of a public vote in November 2020. Almost immediately, the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) and its friends in the Florida legislature began steps to disenfranchise the will of the citizens of Key West and Monroe County.



Key West cruise port in pre-pandemic times. Photo: Kolossas

Baseline Research – Second, the respite from cruise tourism gives a port community a unique chance to measure baselines because cruise ships are absent. Some ports have already used the break to measure water and air quality as a point of comparison to the past and for the future; others are asking whether seasonal “red tides” along cruise routes return when there are no cruise ships. Measures can also be taken ashore – social indicators, economic indicators, and indicators of quality of life, though these need to be understood in the context of Covid-19 and its impact on tourism and commerce generally.

The point is that ports have a chance to systematically understand the impacts –

positive and negative – of cruise ships. It is possible to measure the impact of cruise tourism on infrastructure (garbage, sewage use and treatment, road maintenance and sidewalks, parks and public areas) and on the costs of operating as a destination (e.g., increased need for police and public safety personnel, other public employees in many areas). Knowing the increased cost of public services when cruise tourism is active gives a concrete base on which a port community can know the minimum income needed in port fees and passenger head taxes from cruise ships.

Define the Future – Last, a port can restart cruise tourism in a mindful manner following the respite. There is a chance to define the number of passengers that fit the port (daily and weekly) rather than being faced with volumes foisted on the port by cruise lines. There is a chance to create parameters for cruise tourism that reflect systematic knowledge about environmental, social and economic impacts. The best chance of all is to intentionally define cruise tourism going forward (e.g., how many ships, how many passengers, and controlling the cruise ship schedule) and to treat it as a business (as reflected in port fees, passenger head taxes, taxation of cruise business conducted ashore, taxation of alcohol-sales and casinos while a ship is in port). Cruise lines are all in business to make money, which potentially places them in competition with a port community that also sees itself in business to make money. Cruise lines often see money spent ashore as lost income. This is the core of the competition. The cruise industry has traditionally dominated its relationship with ports. The respite from Covid-19 gives a chance to resume with a more equitable and fair relationship.

Ports now have a chance to ensure that cruise tourism truly benefits the community, and to avoid people pollution and other social and environmental costs.

Keywords: Cruise Tourism, Destination Management, Destination Planning, Destination, Port Cities

RESURRECTED MATERA FACES OVERTOURISM

By Arild Molstad, Author, Photojournalist, Consultant

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



Daniel Craig poses in front of Matera's famous cathedral while taking a break from filming his new James Bond movie, No Time to Die. [Photo courtesy of Esquire Middle East]

*Inviting Hollywood into your home can backfire badly. Often, a roaring success on the screen may cause instant, irreversible collateral damage to the destination, its culture and citizens. **Arild Molstad** explores the too-much, too-fast story of Italy's ancient, now-restored town of Matera.*

Once Called “the Shame of Italy,” Matera Grapples with Modernity, UNESCO, and James Bond

Until three years ago few but Italians had heard about this little town at the southern end of Italy's scenic Apennines' mountain range. For centuries it was a neglected, forgotten place. Now millions of travelers are placing Matera near the top of their bucket list of dream destinations.

Hard to find – and for those who knew its awful past – easy to keep hidden in the [Sassi Gorge](#) (Italian for “stones”), Matera fills a narrow ravine where its stacked dwellings, churches, and monasteries were carved into the limestone.

Had somebody in the 1950's told the poor, overcrowded, and undernourished inhabitants of Matera that their children and grandchildren would be living in a site inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List (1993), they would have been laughed out of town. The Sassi, which once housed 20,000 inhabitants, was reduced by then to around 1,500 people – still today's population.

The Town that God Forgot

It was only in 1986 that the Italian government, with World Heritage status in mind, decided to invest serious money into the rehabilitation of Matera. A handful of years later rumours about this unique site started slowly to circulate. Its position – deep in Italy's Mezzogiorno region and off the beaten track – was the reason that early visitors called it “a hidden treasure.” Even backpackers exploring the triangle between Naples, Rome, and the Adriatic port of Bari missed it.

When I found myself at the edge of the Murgia plateau in 2021, staring speechlessly down at Matera's unique network of caves, churches, and alleyways, I was looking at what is said to be one of the three oldest continuously



*Matera was first caught in the global spotlight before World War II, when Benito Mussolini's regime deported a young anti-fascist artist to this desolate town, where he could do the regime no harm. Instead, Carlo Levi wrote *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, shock*

inhabited towns on our planet (the other two: Aleppo and Jericho).

For an absorbing half-hour video presentation of Matera's history, today's visitors flock to [Casa Noha](#), an interactive museum housed in a former palazzo. Here I was to learn the long and dramatic journey Matera had taken, from abject poverty during two world wars, to winning *European Capital of Culture* status in 2019.

Dangerous living conditions, poor sanitation and disease forced residents to abandon the Sassi after World War II. The writer Carlo Levi, an anti-Fascist writer exiled to the region by the Mussolini regime, compared Matera to Dante's *Inferno* in his immortal book, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*. Matera became known as "the shame of Italy" as its hapless, suffering inhabitants succumbed to malnutrition and water-borne diseases at the bottom of the ravine.

Levi's book, a heart-breaking wake-up call to Italian authorities, was also filmed here. Wrote Levi: "To this shadowy land, that knows neither sin nor redemption from sin, where evil is not moral but is only the pain residing forever in earthly things, Christ did not come. Christ stopped at Eboli."



La Grotte della Civita: one of the exclusive, repurposed cave dwelling boutique hotels by owner and conservationist Daniele Kihlgren. Photo: atp.basilicata.it

Comes the Resurrection

The restoration of Matera begun in the 1980s was partly hard labor, partly an outstanding artistic and architectural achievement as the



Matera by day. Photo: Charlotte Molstad

wild, limestone canyon prepared for the coming of more visitors. "It was a sight to behold," sighs Gianni, a local filmmaker. "Now tourism is outpacing us, year by year, in our efforts to safeguard Matera's authenticity and integrity."

In the street, older inhabitants had stories to tell of those who left, and how they refused to return to face the old town's sudden prosperity. To them, it brought back dark memories of desperation and ignominy. All complained about tourism-driven higher housing and grocery prices. "Where are the benefits?" they asked as Matera received a record-breaking one million visitors in 2019.

UNESCO Inscription Requires Protection and Management

Numerous laws, plans, statutes, institutions, and departments to safeguard Matera came into being when Matera was accorded UNESCO World status in 1993. Later, a management plan was drawn up to address tourism and visitation challenges in the historical area.

The Municipality established a special department, "Ufficio Sassi," in collaboration with several local offices of the Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities, recognizing "the need for vigilance in respect" to prevent "negative impact to the development in the buffer zone between the ancient quarters and the modern town of Matera." I wonder: Has this turned into a bureaucratic maze, to be exploited by fast-money investors with little time for conservation? -A.M.

Matera – A Movie Set

Matera's appearance has often been compared to a movie set. It is hard to disagree, as I rise early to watch the sun embrace the town's

facades, adding patches of orange and deep shadow to the Sassi Gorge down below, from which only the soft sounds of street sweepers and somebody strumming a guitar emerge.

Connoisseurs of movie classics will recognize Matera – known as “little Jerusalem” in films by famous directors such as De Sica, Visconti, Pasolini, the Taviani brothers, and Mel Gibson’s controversial *The Passion of Christ*.

My terrace is only a stone’s throw away from a film location shot near the cathedral – a film now being watched by millions of James Bond fans all over the world, as Daniel Craig, in his slick, souped-up Aston Martin, performs impossible hairpin turns in the narrow alleyways and steep staircases. I’d hired a guide to Sassi’s secret hideaways, who suggested that the title of the film, *No Time to Die*, might be a fitting headline for “an editorial in the local newspaper to help save Matera’s priceless treasures.” He was referring to the numerous unique, fragile cave paintings depicting scenes from the holy scripture.

Others were more direct. The manager of high-end boutique hotel (who spoke on the promise of anonymity) decried the recent wave of “too many restaurants, bars, arts and craft shops, guides that are not ambassadors of this beautiful town, or neglect to respect rules and regulations.” He said, “Residents who moved back in the 90s are now leaving the historical center.” They fear further exploitation and commercialization.” Surely not an unknown phenomenon in UNESCO sites such as nearby Naples or in Sicily – not to mention Venice.

Taking on 007

During my stay, I spoke to others who would welcome a “007 workshop” – to be convened urgently, similar to a town meeting held in 2019, during the Capital of Culture festivities. Already at that time, prominent local leaders were expressing concern about the tourism onslaught, led by Raffaello De Ruggieri, then mayor, who famously told New York Times, “We don’t want tourists,” adding, “it could deplete a city of its soul.”

On my last evening, the view from my terrace

transports me deep into history, bringing to mind Carlo Levi’s words: Matera “seemed to melt away, as if it were sucked back into time”

A potent cup of espresso kicks me back into the present. With Daniel Craig as Matera’s unofficial, possibly reluctant tourism ambassador, will the film’s spectacular sky dive into the shadows of the gorge spell the end for this still authentic, well-preserved UNESCO site?

The current mayor prefers to take an optimistic view of the worldwide attention that the Bond spectacle can bring to a place still reeling from the pandemic. In a way, I understand. The Matera of today looks and feels like a treasure chest, filled with vitality, culture, priceless traditions, shared heritage – and a need to survive. Its story continues. Clearly, Matera has sent me on my way with an *arrivederci* – “until we see each other again.”



Evening comes to the Sassi Gorge of Matera. Photo: Arild Molstad

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Destination Management, Destination Planning, Restoration, Overtourism, UNESCO

ENDNOTES

CHAPTER 2

Sedona, Arizona: A Destination Stewardship Council

The following community partners participated in the Plan development process:

- Arizona Department of Environmental Quality
- Arizona Department of Transportation
- Arizona Game and Fish Department
- Arizona Public Service
- Arizona State Parks and Trails
- City of Sedona City Council
- Coconino National Forest
- Friends of the Forest Sedona
- Friends of the Verde River
- Keep Sedona Beautiful
- Local First Arizona
- National Park Service – River and Trails
- Northern Arizona University Climate Program
- Northern Arizona Climate Alliance
- Northern Arizona Council of Governments
- Oak Creek Watershed Council
- Red Rock State Park
- Red Rock Trail Fund
- Sedona Airport Authority
- Sedona Compost
- Sedona Events Alliance
- Sedona Heritage Museum
- Sedona Lodging Council
- Sedona Mountain Bike Coalition
- Sedona Recycles
- Sedona Sustainability Alliance
- Sedona Verde Valley Tourism Council
- Sedona Verde Valley Sustainability Alliance
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- US Forest Service
- Verde Front Collaborative

Springtime for Destination Stewardship in Japan

[1] Statistics Bureau of Japan. *Statistical Handbook of Japan 2020*. [Online]. Available from <https://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/handbook/c0117.html#:~:text=Japan's%20total%20population%20in%202019%20was%20126.1>

[7%20million](#) [Accessed 23rd November 2020].

[2] Japan Tourism Agency. *Japan Sustainable Tourism Standard for Designations (JSTS-D)*. [Online]. Available from <https://www.mlit.go.jp/kankocho/content/01350848.pdf> [Accessed 10th January 2021]

[3] Japan Tourism Agency. 観光立国推進閣僚会議 「観光ビジョン実現プログラム2020 – 世界が訪れたい日本を目指して –」. [Online]. Available from <https://www.mlit.go.jp/kankocho/content/01353662.pdf> [Accessed 10th January 2021]

[4] Japan Eco Tourism Center. *100年先を見ずえた観光地域づくりのために 島原半島フォーラム*. [Online]. Available from <https://ecocen.jp/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/ea3cb83b4770677bfa7ecda0280d78ba.pdf> [Accessed 23rd November 2020] *This book was produced by Japan Eco Tourism Center's grants projects to promote GSTC in Japan since 2015.

CHAPTER 4

A Himalayan Village Takes Charge of Its Future

[1] Gram Sabha or a village assembly which shall consist of all adult members of a village.

[2] Committees from amongst its members work to protect wildlife, forest, biodiversity, catchments areas, water sources and other ecologically sensitive areas; to shield the habitat of forest-dwelling communities from any form of destructive practices affecting their cultural and natural heritage; and to ensure that the decisions taken in the Gram Sabha to regulate access to community forest resources and stop any activity which adversely affects the wild animals, forest and the biodiversity are complied with.

[3] To protect the rights of the people of Himachal Pradesh, non-locals are not allowed to purchase land unless approval is given by the State and therefore through other means, circumvent this process.

[4] Deputy Commissioner is representative of the government at district level and is responsible for the implementation of programmes and policies of Centre Government and State Government as well as to coordinate the working of all Government offices within the district. The Commissioner looks after the law and order situation and is the primary relief agency in cases of natural calamities (http://himachalservices.nic.in/rti/rtihp/RTI_Desc/117-2.pdf accessed as on 14 October 2021).

[5] SAHARA is a registered society that came into being with a mandate of empowerment of women in the interior areas of Kullu district. They work towards addressing the economic and social needs of the communities living adjacent to the Great Himalayan National Park.

DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP

YEARBOOK
2021-2022



HOME PAGE
destinationcenter.org



HOME PAGE
gstccouncil.org



HOME PAGE
responsibletravel.org