

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Ecolodge owners and operators are in a unique position to demonstrate the significance and viability of ecotourism practices and concepts through their daily operations. By providing a role model, the owner/operator can ensure that the fundamentals of ecotourism are visible to inspire and educate local communities and officials, and garner accolades and support from guests.

If the ecolodge can successfully convey a commitment to ecotourism through its operations, staff and daily activities, it will benefit from valuable word-of-mouth marketing. Considering the importance of this form of marketing, it should not be underestimated. It is estimated that every satisfied guest tells up to seven friends and relatives of their positive experience, while every dissatisfied guest tells more than 20 people of a negative experience.

The local people are an indispensable resource for an ecolodge's management and operations. The long-term sustainability of the ecolodge and conservation project is substantially dependent on the local community's participation. Land preservation, along with ecotourism, is often done in areas of the world with very low levels of formal public education. Wilderness areas tend to be the least developed, most remote areas in any country; therefore, they are the last places to receive government investments in health, education, electricity, potable water, roads, etc. Education is one of the main mediums that will create successful ecotourism: sustainable development supporting local communities, tourism and land conservation. However, this level of education is unavailable, and therefore it falls to the ecotourism operator or owner to fill this gap.

Unregulated exploitation of wilderness areas is in competition with long-term, sustainable opportunities such as ecotourism. Without an opportunity for education, most locals lack the awareness of options for their futures. Through informal education and on-the-job training, the ecolodge owner provides the community the option of, and perhaps the tools for, sustainable development.

All actions of the ecolodge owner/operator should be in accordance with land conservation. The project's programs and infrastructure should be designed with sound environmental practices. Guests, staff and community members can learn together by participation within these guidelines. Additionally, it is in the ecolodge owner's interest to demonstrate and practice supportive policies for surrounding natural protected areas. Tree planting is a frequently practiced land conservation activity.



Central to sustainability is allegiance to land conservation principles, which have drawn tourists and provided industry to the community. It is through long-term education that the operator, local staff and tourists can embrace this allegiance.

Basic for any program offered to ecolodge guests is the combination of the available natural and cultural resources. Programs can be designed not only with the ecolodge project in mind, but also with consideration of the guests' capacity to participate in conservation projects closer to home. Where possible, the ecolodge can work with other responsible environmental community projects and natural protected areas. This extra step may create some financial gain for the ecolodge, better links with others locally providing environmental awareness, and an expanded experience for the guest.

6.2 MARKET RESEARCH, DIFFERENTIATION AND SEGMENTATION

By clearly identifying the market segments and differentiating the product to meet the needs and requirements of that market segment, the owner/operator can determine the services and products to offer at the ecolodge. Please see Chapter 7 for more details.

Ecotourists usually are curious people who want to learn more about the culture and natural area they are visiting. Your task at this stage is to establish which tourists are likely to be attracted to your development, what they want to do when they get there and how much they will be happy to pay. The more up-market your project, the more sophistication you need to offer, and the higher the capital investment required. Sometimes this is determined by the rarity and perceived value of the experience you are offering

Staff, support, and supply and maintenance costs vary with the range of services offered, but **don't** over-stretch or over-sell your product. The biggest **single** cause of client complaint arises from a mismatch between guest's expectations and the reality of a destination — and client access to law courts and the media has never been easier, nor more readily sought. Staff education and training need to live up to the lodge's marketed image, as do the cultural and natural resources you manage. Remember that bad news, however untrue or unjustified, travels faster and farther than good news.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. Identify your market segments and their needs' and requirements by talking with as many potential clients as possible. Determine the educational level of guest that you want. A more-educated guest is often more widely traveled, and, as a group, these people often have the limitations of age and the higher expectations of the wealthier.
2. Talk with ecotourism travel companies. Find out what the market is "missing" that you could provide, or what "niche" you can fill. Become familiar with ecotourism, environment, hospitality, activity and tourism sites on the internet.
3. Use this market research to develop a range of experiences that **will** attract a high rate of return visits from your target client group. Your return rate, and the **type** of clients returning, are key performance benchmarks.
4. Visit other facilities in your country or elsewhere offering what you want to offer. Through conversation learn where their guests come from, what they offer their guests, what they don't or can't offer and why. Visiting events like the World Travel Market can be immensely helpful, as you can chat with hospitality and ecotourism colleagues from around the globe.
5. Be strictly accurate with your marketing. Do not underestimate the damage genuinely unhappy, mischievous or litigious clients can cause. Consider it instead a far wiser policy to tend to gently understate your product, and let happy guests apply the gloss.
6. Be prepared with answers and hands-on service for the continuous guest questions and needs. Although ecolodges are becoming more common travel destinations, guests are still out of their known environment and have greater personal needs.

WAITER! WHICH IS THE LESSER OF THE TWO EVILS: USING PLASTIC SPOONS AND KNIVES OR USING THE SCARCE RESOURCE OF WATER TO WASH THESE STAINLESS STEEL CUTLERY?



6.3 MANAGEMENT AND EDUCATION OF THE STAFF

Most ecolodges are homey and small by design. Most likely they are owner-operated and offer personalized service. Operational costs will be greater than standard hotels because more staff are needed, no infrastructure exists and supplying daily needs is often more costly.

Depending on the clients, teaching international hotel standards to community members who have never left their locale takes patience and time. Training takes longer for people who have had little or no formal education. Often, the ecolodge owner will be the hands-on teacher, with multiple demands in various arenas. Our experience has shown that it may, take years of dedication to training before the owner is freed from hands-on, daily commitment. It is difficult to find experienced expertise from outside who can assist in training.

By providing on-the-job training to community members and local guides, a built-in incentive occurs for staff to continually improve in order to retain a competitive job near home. Given that these areas are usually characterized by their subsistence economies, the project is further complicated. By choice most community members will only train and work until they have enough money, at which time they leave. A practical solution is to create a larger group of trained people.

Seeing local people working among them helps match the guest's ideals of being in the wilderness, and being with and learning from community members. Mistakes often include having too many city and outside-educated people on staff who do not mix well with local staff, creating tension.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. Seek out inquisitive community members who will make better staff trainees than people with previous experience. Because guests in an ecotourism project will approach staff members at random, select local people who are not shy by nature.
2. Consider and allocate the following basic roles and responsibilities when finding staff (of course, each ecolodge is different):
 - a) Communications-marketing
 - b) Housekeeping
 - c) Reservations
 - d) Maintenance
 - e) Accounting and bookkeeping
 - f) Guide staff for tours
 - g) Nature reserve guards and rangers
 - h) Bar and restaurant staff
 - i) Transportation
 - j) Kitchen
3. English, the unofficial language of tourism, is often non-existent in rural communities and in many countries, therefore reservations and reception should require at least one capable bilingual person. Nature guides, restaurant staff and others communicating directly with guests also need enough relevant English.
4. Create teams for various departments where one member evolves into the leader who will eventually become helpful in staff selection, training and management.
5. Having established standards required in each respective department, create systems to ensure that levels of service are kept high. Such systems should include:
6. Organizational charts, lines of authority and responsibility that stress accountability and a strong reward system. Train to reach the goal in which only the leader reports to owner-management. Rural people are accustomed to dealing only with the owner. It takes a long time for staff to trust one another's authority.
7. Strong purchasing and ordering systems. Teach one trustworthy member of each team to be in charge of inventory controls and ordering, with the leader familiar with the routines.
8. Operational checklists and timetables for teams, with hourly and daily expectations. In addition, create a weekly routine, and a monthly and quarterly checklist. With a computer these checklists can begin very simply and be added to as skills are gained. Pictures, wall charts and sketches can assist teams with non-readers with descriptions of the tasks on the various checklists.
9. Consider local or national hotel organizations or bodies that provide specialist staff training for the hospitality industry. Ensure that this training does not contradict the aims and philosophy of your ecotourism project. Joining a national hotel association is a good way to get proper training assistance cheaply.
10. Make sure that outside suppliers have staff with good communication ability, or supply your own.

6.4 BROADER COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Most people in rural communities have had poor or no educational opportunities. Land conservation and sustainable development are concepts from the educated world. With education and time, local residents can understand that their future might lie in conservation. It is imperative that the lodge owner/operator takes the time and effort to fill this gap. This can be achieved by:

GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. Encourage staff members to learn by providing newspapers, books, games, etc. If a teacher can be found, offer formal education and school supplies for staff members. If the ecolodge has electricity, provide lighting for staff.
2. Provide time off for parents to support their children's educational programs.
3. Have guests and visitors contribute to staff education and community developmental projects involving education.
4. Set up an after-hours program for English as a second language. Try to attract a college graduate trained in the program to participate for one year in exchange for room and board for a year's practical experience.

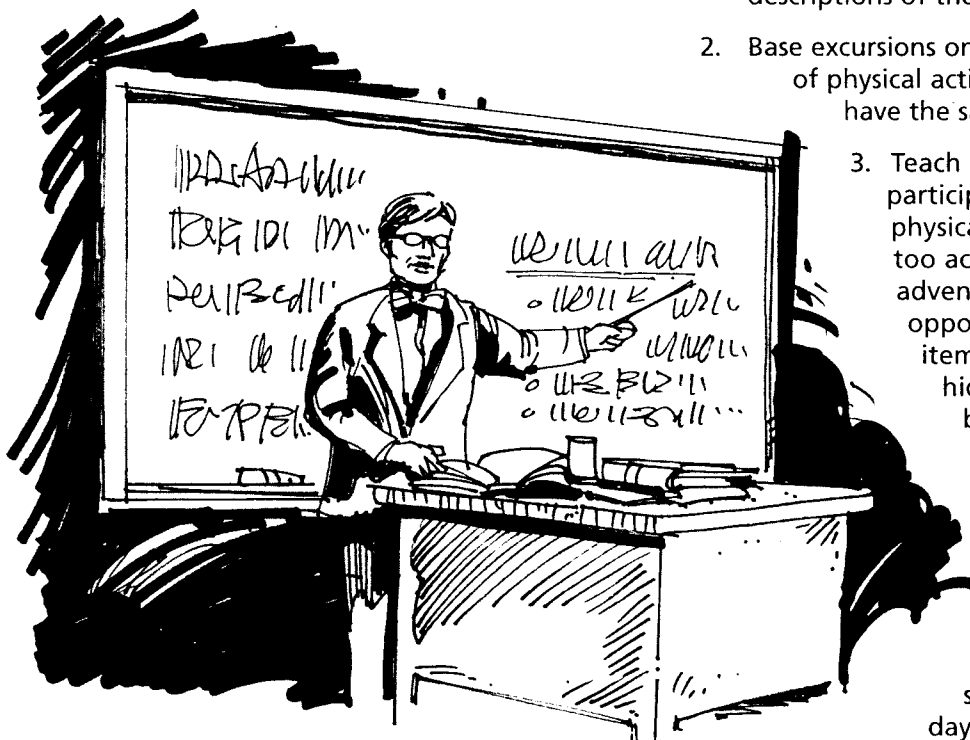
5. Consider the participation of professional naturalist guides that quite often accompany organized groups. They could assist in the training of local personnel regarding guiding and interpretation techniques. Moreover, this will reinforce the teamwork relationship between local and company guides.

6.5 GUESTS PROGRAM

A positive side to ecotourism are the ever-curious guests — they usually want many and varied opportunities to be with local residents in their environment. They expect to see, hear, smell, touch and sense everything as new. The larger the program combining culture with the natural area, the more satisfied the client, especially if the ecolodge has its own natural protected area. It is to the benefit of the ecolodge owner and community's acceptance of sustainability to promote the uniqueness of a cultural and natural area being protected.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. Include written material with reservations in order for guests to learn in advance about tour experiences, community involvement in which they can participate, etc. Provide site maps for everyone with detailed explanations upon check-in. In the communal areas of the ecolodge and in the guests quarters, provide written descriptions of the tours available.
2. Base excursions on different interests and levels of physical activity, as guests don't necessarily have the same interests or abilities.
3. Teach staff to encourage guests to participate, regardless of their age or physical abilities — many tourists are too accustomed to lectures about adventures instead of hands-on opportunities. For this reason, items such as telescopes, bird hides, a weather-station or beehive can act as interesting and educational ice-breakers. Set these items up during communal times to combine guests and guide staff with natural surroundings.
4. Provide a rotating schedule of tours over several days, taking into mind the guests' average stay; include opportunities for everyone every day.





5. Design the program around community members who are trained to communicate what they know about the area and its diverse uniqueness; local guides add more credibility to ecotourism than university-trained professionals from the city. Keep guest numbers low for each excursion (it is more difficult for guides speaking in a new language to manage more than six to eight people); offer a sign-up sheet to maintain maximums on tours; encourage guides to mingle with guests during communal hours.
6. Offer conveniences and equipment for guests, which they might not have brought with them: rubber boots, reef walkers, rain slickers, wind breakers, mittens, flashlights, walking sticks, water bottles, binoculars, a quality telescope, guide books for the local flora, fauna, geology, etc. These services can be offered for loan or for purchase (perhaps as branded souvenirs).
7. Support other projects or activities offering guests experiences to learn about the culture and other natural preserves in the area. Support and demonstrate those projects, encouraging local residents to use their environment in sound ways — vanilla farming from the existing rainforest on a local cattle farm; tree/plant nurseries of indigenous materials to be used in reforestation; butterfly farms, etc.
8. Offer a tour for guests to contribute their talents (and donations) to any community development projects supported by the ecolodge.
9. Promote a system for guests to contribute financially in the ongoing purchase and maintenance of the natural area protected by the ecolodge. There should be fail-safe opportunities for guests to contribute not only to ecolodge programs of conservation, but to community-based or regional programs too. Give them a range of choices and ensure that all donations are visibly spent on the projects being promoted. Keeping records of donations and expenditures, as well as photographs of progress, may be very useful for making reports that help promote the ecolodge.
10. Offer an experience for guests to help in hands-on work if the ecolodge is promoting land preservation and restoration. If the ecolodge has used renewable resources from the area, have guests help in the maintenance

of the areas where products are growing; offer other ways to prompt guests into thinking about how they can contribute to sustainability in their own communities.

11. Establish a program of special visits to the ecolodge (familiarization, or "fam" trips) for local government authorities and other influential institutions or individuals that could contribute either economic support or official endorsement/protection of the area and its conservation projects through ecotourism. This also could include other economic sectors that could potentially pose a problem or obstacle or present an opportunity for ecolodge development and continuity.
12. Contact universities, research institutions or perhaps neighboring conglomerates and make contacts and inquiries regarding opportunities for actual or sponsored scientific research on your site, and discuss the possibility of guest assistance with potential study directors.

6.6 ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICES AND PROGRAMS

By creating an environmental standard for the ecolodge, and publishing its intentions, staff and guests both are bound, by their presence, to participate. Regrettably, apathy and corruption toward the environment continues in many rural and wilderness locations. Conscience-raising and role modeling by an ecolodge dedicated to regional education is the beginning to land sustainability as a grass-roots economic choice.

On the positive side, most ecotourists are familiar with caring for their surroundings. Many EU countries and US states provide or require a measure of recycling and energy conservation. In some more advanced metropolitan areas, wind and photovoltaic energy are being made available to consumers. Their presence validates a true ecolodge's standards and demonstrates to the locals that other people care about the remote community and its surroundings.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. Keep neither caged birds nor animals; feed nothing from the wild; avoid permitting pet cats or dogs.



SET ME FREE!!

SET ME FREE!!

**I WANT TO BE
BACK WITH MY
MUMMY!!**

REFERENCES

As ecolodge management is a relatively new field, very little known literature exists on the operations and management of ecolodges aside from that written by Karen Fletcher. The best references are, in this case, the owners and managers of ecolodges. On the following page is a short list of contacts of well-known ecolodge owners/operators, who may be able to provide some help with specific inquiries. Please be aware of different time zones and other courtesies when contacting people for advice.

1. Fletcher, Karen. (1997). *Striving for Excellence: Communicating Environmental Quality in the Hotel Industry*. London: International Hotels Environment Initiative (15-16 Cornwall Tce. Regent's Park, London NW1 4QP UK)

2. Demonstrate a "what's really needed" approach by refusing disposable containers in the project; offer no carryout restaurant or bar purchases to visitors.
3. Offer flashlights and rechargeable batteries to guests and dispose of spent batteries, and create an electrical system based on need, not want. Batteries should be rechargeable, or recycled wherever possible.
4. Avoid food waste by recommending that guests request smaller portions if serving menu style; create menus that use leftovers from the kitchen into soups, salads, etc. (not recommended for buffet-style service); teach portion controls to staff:
5. Insist on recycling everything: plate scraps to local farmers; compost all peelings; reuse paper; cart out plastics, bottles, paper or metal in empty vehicles going to cities with recycling centers, etc.
6. Demonstrate new ideas:
 - a) Alternative energy sources such as solar-heated water and electricity, solar ovens, wind-generating electricity for water pumping, hydro power and solar pumps.
 - b) More efficient means for food transportation (e.g. build an old-fashioned ice box or Coolgardie Safe*) and food storage techniques (e.g. super insulate a small space for cold fruit and vegetable storage and run a 110-watt, 5,000 BTU air conditioner).
 - c) Use of biodegradable detergents, disposals of used oils, chemicals (paint, thinners, etc.).
7. Consider becoming the community standard-bearer in reporting illegal hunting, marine life gathering, trapping of animals and insects, reptile poaching or any kind of pollution of rivers, oceans, beaches, forests and deserts. The list of responsibilities you could take on is largely dependent on your circumstances: disregard by developers for building set backs, poor waste/water systems, erosion problems, noise pollution, non-licensed lumbering, collecting of any kind, trespassers, etc.
8. Be a model environmental steward — stooping to pick up litter (often rural communities rely on the rains or other natural methods to cleanse their environment); stop vehicles or boats when people toss trash out of them.

* A Coolgardie Safe is basically a cabinet with fly-screen sides covered in a cotton or linen cloth that sits in a tray of water. The water is drawn up to the top of the cloth and evaporates with the help of any breezes passing through the linen, cooling the food on the shelves inside. You can build this to any scale and it will work well as long as you keep the water supplied to the bottom of the cloth via a tray (or guttering).

LIST OF ECOLODGE OWNERS/OPERATORS:

Name	Ec lodge	E-mail
1. Stanley Selengut	Maho Bay Camps	stansel@hamptons.com
2. Jacques van Egeraat	Amazonat Jungle Lodge	amazonat@argo.com.br
3. Paul Beaver	Tahuayo Lodge	paul.beaver@gte.net
4. Daniel Koupermann	Kapawi Lodge	dkoupermann@canodros.com
5. Monique Howells	Lamanai Outpost Lodge	lamanai@btl.net
6. John Lewis	Lapa Rios	john@laparios.com
7. Chandra de Silva	Ranweli Holiday Village	ranweli@sri.lanka.net
8. David Kagan	Lodge at Pico Bonito	dmkagan@ix.netcom.com
9. Albert C.K. Teo	Sukau Rainforest Lodge	albert@borneoecotours.com
10. Randy Kapesht	Cree Village Ec lodge	info@creevillage.com
11. Max Gunther	Explorer's Inn	safaris@amauta.rcp.net.pe
12. Raul Arias De Para	Canopy Tower	stay@canopytower.com
13. Stephen Stroud	Hacienda Baru	sstroud@racsa.co.cr
14. Shireen Aga	Hotel Mocking Bird Hill	mockbrd@cwjamaica.com
15. Mick Fleming	The Lodge at Chaa Creek	reservations@chaacreek.com
16. Michael L. Hartman	Tiamo Resorts	mail@tiamoresorts.com
17. Babu Varghese	Tourindia Treehouse	tourindia@vsnl.com
18. Karl Plunkett	Ecobeach	ecobeach@bigpond.com
19. Sibylle Riedmiller	Chumbe Island Lodge	sibylle@kaributanga.com
20. Pierre Knockhart	Centro Neo-Tropico	magistra@sol.racsa.co.cr
21. Stefano Cheli	Tortilis Camp	safaris@chelipecock.co.ke
22. Amos Bien	Rara Avis	raraavis@racsa.co.cr
23. Ron Clarke	Couran Cove Resort	enquiry@couran-cove.com.au
24. Marcello Murzilli	Hotelito Desconocido	hotelito@pvnet.com.mx
25. Caligo Ventures	Asa Wright Nature Center	asawright@caligo.com
26. Kurt Holle	Posadas Amazonas	kholle@rainforest.com.pr
27. Kaye Bishop	Kingfisher Bay Resort	kaye_bishop@kingfisherbay.com

“The real travel product lies in the human mind and heart — in the impressions, knowledge, understanding, appreciation, insight, friendships and memories the traveler acquires.”

—S. Kameda



CHAPTER 7

MARKETING AND PROMOTION

Terry Pratt
Horizontes Nature Tours

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7.0 MARKETING AND PROMOTION

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7.1 INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism draws from a definite and growing market, yet it continues to be a niche market within the global tourism context. Therefore, it is fundamental to familiarize yourself with the major outbound regions of the world such as USA, Germany, France, England, Holland, Spain, Italy and Japan, among others, and with the profile of your prospective clients.

Compared to conventional lodging, ecolodge marketing demands an ethical and honest presentation of the product and a greater degree of responsibility in the use and management of resources.

This chapter is divided into four main categories:

- Market Research and Product Analysis
- Preparation of Informative Materials
- Promotion Strategies
- Operation Marketing



Generally, the ecotourist is well-educated (a much higher percentage of post-graduate education than national averages), well-traveled (takes two or more trips per year), and has a higher family income than the national average. As a group, they are well-read on the destination, between 30 and 65 years of age, and interested in enriching, learning experiences.

In addition to the ecotourism niche market, a large market of “potential travelers” with a budding interest in nature-based and adventure tourism can potentially be converted into true ecotourists. This segment of the market is a more conventional travel audience, one that requires a more sophisticated level of promotion, both in terms of content and quality.

Ecolodges also provide a market for usually conventional, high-income tourists, who from time to time wish to experience ecotourism, sometimes as a two- or three-day extension of a traditional holiday. These travelers appreciate traditional (indigenous) styles, natural materials and other typical characteristics of ecolodges, but require a high level of comfort and some understated luxury. The size of this market segment also needs to be investigated, along with your ecolodge’s capacity to cater for these people — will doing so unacceptably compromise the project’s values?

7.2 MARKET RESEARCH AND PRODUCT ANALYSIS

The supply of tourism products has increased significantly, a fact which forces us to be increasingly demanding and careful of our own product, and to seek out the best counsel in that regard. To develop an effective marketing plan, it is extremely important to have a clear definition of your product and of your target market; this is achieved through product diagnosis and market research.

Once the product and services are defined, it is necessary to promote and operate them in a way that not only creates appropriate expectations on the part of your target market and the client you have profiled, but also fulfils those expectations. Due to the increasing popularity of ecotourism, some conventional operators offer “eco” packages, without having experience or adequate knowledge to operate them. Authentic ecotourism projects need to take the utmost care with the content and presentation of promotional materials, with direct contact with the client and intermediaries, and with the constant evaluation and updating of products and services, and to ensure delivery of what is being offered.

An excellent product analysis is one of the most important aspects of a good marketing plan. Ideally, it should be done before construction and be geared to the particular lodge's economic resources, setting, etc., and used as an aid in product planning. When conducting this in-depth analysis, it is important to cover all factors of potential interest to your target market(s).

In general terms, the newer and wilder the destination, and the fewer amenities, the more limited the market and the lower expectations of potential clients in regards to comfort. Hard core birders, for example, are often pioneer travelers to untried destinations. Most of them will sleep in very rustic conditions, eat very basic food and suffer poor weather and other discomforts in order to add new species to their list.

As a destination becomes popular and matures, it attracts clients from the much broader segment of the market mentioned earlier. These clients are defined as "soft" ecotourists and they tend to expect much greater comfort levels. Your product analysis will help greatly in determining what market share you can reasonably go after. Again, the more detailed it is, the better.

The analysis becomes the basis for developing a marketing and promotional plan that technically orients the future of your business for a significant period of time.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. Do an in-depth study of your target market(s). Obtain up-to-date statistics and consumer profiles from:
 - a) The World Tourism Organization or the World Travel and Tourism Council for global statistics. Do note that these are country-based, rather than niche-based statistics, which makes them much less useful than other sources. Australia is great for niche records.
 - b) Competing destinations' national figures, from personal contacts in those countries or from their respective tourist boards (the internet can be useful here).
 - c) The overseas offices of the national tourist board, for local data.
 - d) Similar lodges in your own destination and in other destinations.
 - e) Experienced inbound tour operators.
2. Subscribe to travel and conservation magazines and newsletters from your target market; compile a database of magazines, writers and editors to whom you will send press releases (local and international).



EUREKA!! A NEW BIRDIE FOR THE BOOKS!!

3. Join organizations that are excellent resources for their members:
 - a) The International Ecotourism Society
 - b) The International Hotels Environment Initiative
 - c) Local hotel association
 - d) Local ecotourism association
 - e) National tourism organizations.
 - f) Local association of tourism professionals
 - g) Local conservation organizations
 - h) Internet companies who have access to a large online community, membership, travel writers, and experts (no need to join but to simply share information and content that can then be used in the web).
4. Identify the major outbound operators of nature-based, cultural and soft-adventure tourism from your target markets and find out who their local operators are:
 - a) Prepare a questionnaire and interview those local inbound operators; also present them with the reasons your lodge should be included in their programs for wholesalers and in their offering for individual travelers. Be prepared with copies of all your promotional and informative materials, information on staff training, safety, emergency plans, insurance, etc.
 - b) Offer to cooperate with the local operator's promotional efforts and budget by providing courtesy lodging for international writers, photographers and film crews, sales staff of outbound operators, travel agents, and local operator sales staff. Include internet companies that can offer free travel to their members and in turn promote your destination and lodge.
5. Set up meetings with your national tourist board:
 - a) Do the same presentation you did for the local operator.
 - b) Request a copy of the national marketing plan, if available.
 - c) Request contact information for all trade shows in which the tourist boards will be participating.
 - d) Ask to be on the mailing list for all training sessions in marketing that the tourist board offers.
6. Choose a few successful ecolodges from around the world and try to discover the most important elements of their marketing plan.
7. Research possibilities for cooperative marketing.
8. Meet with owners of lodges and other tourism-related businesses in your area and present them with your ideas (something concrete, not vague) for a joint marketing effort.
9. Establish marketing alliances with other ecolodges in other ecosystems in or outside the country, to develop joint marketing projects such as a slide or video presentation to show to guests (or at trade shows). That way, ecotourists could be sold on visiting other ecolodges. A commission could be established for those referrals/sales, making it a win-win relationship between ecolodges with similar high quality standards.
10. Visit the tourism and marketing school of your local university or community college. Ask permission to use their library to study the theory of marketing.
11. Offer to take on a marketing student for his/her practical work and assign that person to help with your marketing plan
12. Do a detailed analysis of your product on the basis of your market study, within the context of all factors covered in these guidelines. Typically, this will include the environmental and cultural impacts of construction and operation; natural attractions (native flora and fauna, geological formations, etc.), as well as historic and cultural values, appropriate architecture and landscaping and so on.
13. Conduct a joint analysis for the area using an exercise called a SWOT Analysis, in which you list, one at a time, the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of a situation. The first are internal factors of the business over which you have control and the last are external factors over which you have no control except as to how you react to them.

S**STRENGTHS****W****WEAKNESSES****O****OPPORTUNITIES****T****THREATS**

14. Offer those things, which are unique to your project — services, activities and attractions that are truly “memorable” and will remain in the hearts and souls of your clients, thus promoting conservation.

15. Include the following factors when conducting a detailed analysis. They are intended only as a basis from which to work. It is strongly recommended that lodge owners seek assistance in order to do the best analysis possible. This will aid not only in aligning your product with your target market but also in determining the price that can be set for the value offered.

a) Physical Structure of Lodge

- i) Style of construction; what materials were used (woods, concrete, etc.)
- ii) Measures for minimizing environmental impact during construction (See Chapter 2)
- iii) Operational factors that minimize environmental impact (See Chapter 2)
- iv) Construction and operational factors that maximize guest comfort and safety, such as lighting in rooms, bathrooms, public areas and grounds, measures for extreme temperature conditions (cross ventilation, wall, floor or ceiling fans, a/c, heaters, fireplaces, storm shutters, etc.)
- v) Fire control (extinguishers, emergency plan, trained staff, etc.), flood control, earthquake emergency plan, etc.
- vi) Detailed description of public areas such as reception, indoor and outdoor sitting areas, verandas, meeting rooms, pathways (earth, concrete wooden, elevated, covered, open, etc.), stairs, elevators, restaurant, bar, pool, docks or piers, parking, shops, etc.
- vii) History — who built it, their commitment to the local environment, etc. (i.e. son inherited lodge from father who was a pioneer in the region)

b) Rooms

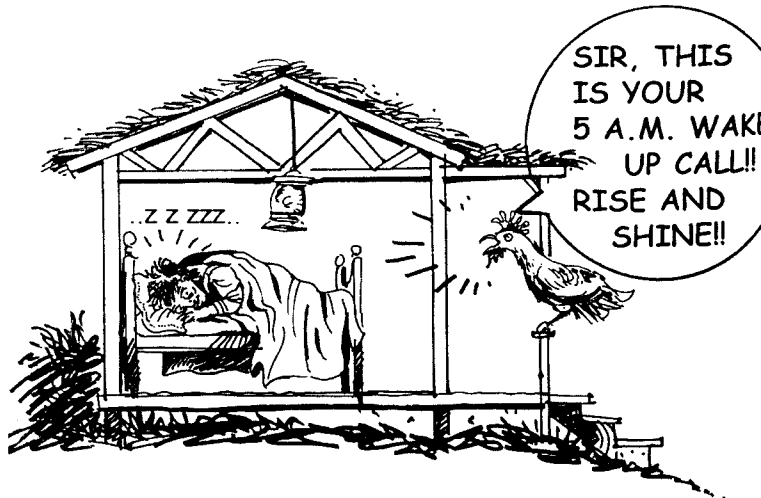
- i) Number of rooms and distribution — ground floor, second floor, access, separate cabins, separate units with several (#) of rooms per unit, distances from each other, from main reception/dining area
- ii) Number and style of beds per room
- iii) Whether extra beds are available
- iv) Number and location of windows, type of window coverings, screening, glass, shades, curtains, etc.
- v) Type of bathroom facilities, including whether they are shared or private,

size, construction material (concrete, wood, tile, etc.) amount of available surface space, mirrors, lighting, shower or tub, hot and/or cold water, flush toilets, waste disposal

- vi) Closets, table surface and other storage (including safety deposit box)
- vii) Location of light switches and fan controls
- viii) Degree of noise insulation between rooms to ensure restful sleep (important for all markets but particularly seniors, families, honeymooners)
- ix) Decorations: related to local culture (such as indigenous art), environmentally friendly (such as non-bleached cotton sheets, wicker lampshades from materials harvested sustainably from the rainforest), etc.
- x) Your policy to reuse towels to conserve energy and water
- xi) Are children/infants welcome?
- xii) Mosquito nets
- xiii) Modern conveniences — outline your balance with the traditional

c) Services and Communication

- i) Staff with more than one language and good verbal communication/socialization skills. Also possibly interpretation or animation techniques/skills
- ii) Map and other information on local area. “Interactive” or “testimonial” maps are useful, which are sufficiently large and clear for ecotourists to record the places where they saw a particular plant or animal species or did something worth recording on their personal map.
- iii) Shop with basic necessities (personal care, first aid, etc.)
- iv) Laundry, security guards, safety deposit boxes, doctor on call
- v) Room service, picnic lunches, wake-up call



- vi) Tour arrangements, transportation rental (car, boat, kayak, dugout canoe, camel or even yak!)
- vii) Telephone, fax, computer (email, internet), television, video, slide projector, screen, etc.
- viii) Food — vegetarian, vegan, own-grown, seasonal or local produce?

d) Factors Pertinent to Target Markets

i) Natural History

- Library of books on natural history, local history and culture
- Slide or video presentation as orientation on the natural area
- Available information on local nature reserves and park, times of operation, costs, what services are available
- If the lodge has its own nature reserve — resident guide, self-guiding interpretative trail pamphlets, well-marked trails with map, list of common birds, animals, plants, etc.
- Orientation on safety in the natural area

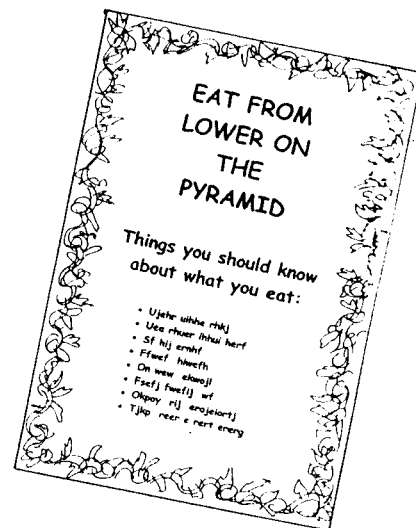
ii) Seniors

- Menu (less salt, spice). Medical list of food cautions.
- Amount of exertion required to reach the lodge, use trails, get around the facility
- Listing of area services offered (such as doctors, pharmacies, gift shops, post office, etc.) and how to contact them or get to them
- Plan staff training for emergency medical situations or evacuation
- Grip bars, non-slip mats or stripping in showers or baths
- Bright lighting in common areas and in rooms

iii) Family Market:

- Activities for children, babysitting
- A crèche
- Children's medicines in lodge first aid kit
- Night lights, child-proof sockets
- Railings with narrow uprights (so children can't squeeze through) in any area where a fall could happen
- Orientation of potential dangers in the natural area (plants, bugs and other non-edibles)
- Shallow children's area, if lodge has a pool

- Child-sized life jackets if lodge uses boats for access and / or tours
- Games
- Menu, portion size, special prices or free sleeping in room with parents



iv) Evaluation of Staff

- Locally hired
- Equal opportunity for women
- Level of training
- Employment conditions, salary, working conditions, benefits, incentives, etc.
- Opportunities for future development
- Baby sitting — can staff be trusted with taking care of clients' children?

v) Comparative Analysis

- Compare your lodge to others in the area or others in successful eco-destinations that are similar to your own (rainforest, desert, alpine, etc.)
- Propose staff exchange with other ecolodges as incentives.

vi) Analyze Uniqueness of Lodge

- Location — in the treetops of the rainforest, on the Arctic Circle, on stilts in a mangrove
- Architecture — igloo, yurt, tent camp, adobe hut, etc.
- Construction materials — all recycled, sustainably harvested, locally produced or grown (e.g. adobe blocks, bamboo, thatch)
- Decorations — paintings by local school children, traditional woven materials, etc.

vii) Analysis of Natural and Cultural Resources

- Do an inventory (using university biology, sociology, anthropology, etc., students in exchange for lodging and meals) — of the natural and cultural resources in the area of your lodge that are accessible to your guests (your own reserve, a nearby national park, the local village, etc.)

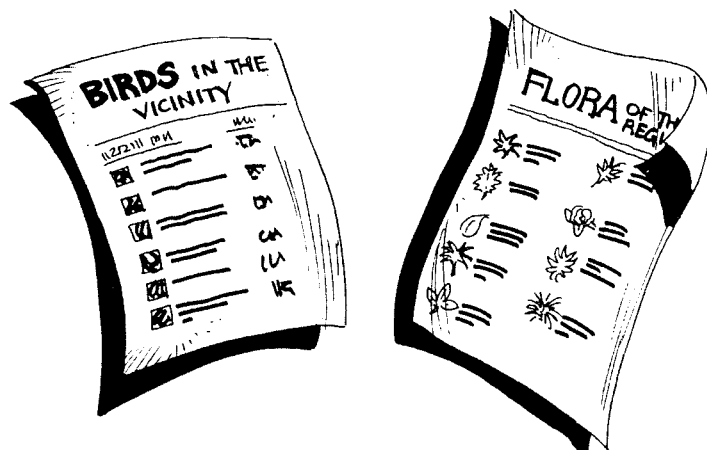
The ecolodge should aim toward cross-platform transferable materials (TIF, JPG, GIF, PDF, RIF) that can be used for the web, radio-friendly TV messages, brochures, etc.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. Develop a logo and corporate image to be incorporated into business cards, letterhead, T-shirts, envelopes, fax paper, invoices, receipts, brochure, website, etc.
2. Use your market study and product analysis as a basis on which to prepare informative materials, in the language of your principal market — able to satisfy varying levels of interest. These materials should include (but are not necessarily limited to):

a) Brochure

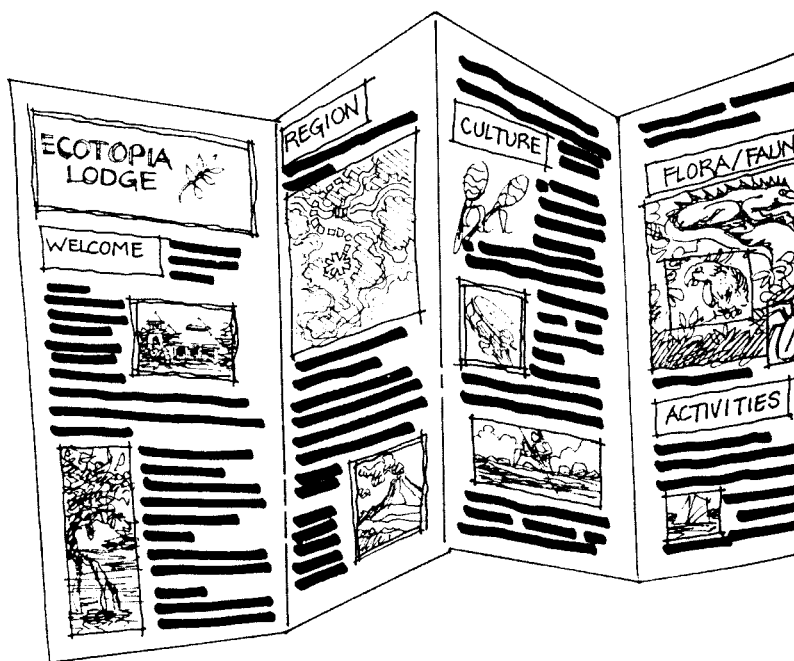
Be sure to include photo of rooms, locals, public areas, natural attraction, basic information on setting, accessibility, facilities (how many rooms, private bath, etc.), services and activities, and contact information. This brochure can be 2-color if 4-color is too expensive. Profile the lodge, its development history, mission statement, and how it is environmentally and culturally responsible. Ideally, hire professionals to design and write it and another to help you plan local and international distribution. The written language (English, German, French, etc.) needs to be perfect to properly communicate with potential clients.



7.3 PREPARATION OF INFORMATIVE MATERIALS

In order to market your ecolodge, you will need to prepare promotional materials that persuade your target consumers to buy. Also prepare descriptive materials, pricing and policies that help intermediaries (travel agents, etc.) to sell your ecolodge; materials that inform guests about the services you offer; and others that help to interpret the natural and cultural values of your local environment.

These materials may be in printed form (brochure, information packages for tour operators, pre-departure information for consumers, press releases, etc.), audio-visual (a videocassette, for example) or electronic (website). Remember that some messages are inherent — for example, the use of recycled paper or non-toxic inks will testify to your eco-practices. However, don't be afraid to include a written testimonial — briefly in your promotional brochure, and in some depth in your guest room materials — explaining how you conform to these ecolodge guidelines.



b) Website

Today's traveler is doing more and more research on the web. It is imperative to have a website that clearly and honestly depicts your lodge. The site should include the same information as your printed brochure, yet be presented in an easily "navigable" manner. Consult an expert who will help you design a website that includes, but is not limited to, the following characteristics:

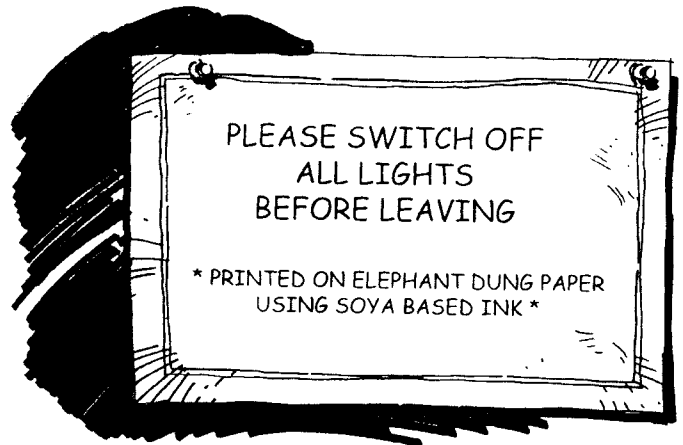
- i) Downloads and moves between screens very quickly
- ii) Has a clear and easy-to-use navigation bar
- iii) Is interactive enough to keep the visitor interested
- iv) Includes a "Frequently Asked Questions" section
- v) Includes your lodge's contact information on every screen, allowing potential clients to e-mail you with questions
- vi) Has automatic e-mail response
- vii) May include guest comments and testimonials from happy, past clients
- viii) Has online reservation capabilities
- ix) May have online payment capabilities (requires security)
- x) Has links to websites with general information on the country
- xi) May have links to websites of outbound operators whose programs include your lodge
- xii) May have links to ecotourism organizations to which you belong

c) Price list

Rack rates (what you charge to the general public), commissions (what you pay to a travel agent, usually around 10%), and net rates (what you charge to tour operators, usually 25 to 35% less than the rack rate according to volume of rooms sold). Include off-season rates, student rates, group rates, policies on lodging and meals for guides and drivers, reservation, cancellation and payment policies. The price list should be on a separate sheet of paper, not in the brochure, so that any changes in rates does not mean having to print a new brochure or correct the existing one. Furthermore, when possible avoid posting the rates on the door of the room, as this can create conflicts with guests, travel agents, wholesalers, operators, etc., regarding the rate they gave their customers. Obviously, such a circumstance does not occur when the accommodations are part of a larger package arrangement.

- d) A folder or attractive envelope for presenting all these materials (recycled paper).
- e) A video, CD-ROM or Power-Point presentation of your project should be considered at some point, when your budget permits.
- f) Press releases for national and international media.

3. Develop materials for your guest rooms and make sure they are kept up to date. These materials should include but are not limited to:
 - a) Information sheet on how guests can cooperate with the goals of being environmentally and culturally responsible.
 - b) Information sheet on services and activities offered by the hotel, as well as rules and regulations.
 - c) Guest comment sheet.
 - d) For inside of room door: emergency information.
4. Be sure that all published information and photographs are technically and scientifically correct:
 - a) Focus on content without detracting from the visual presentation.
 - b) Ask an expert (naturalist guide, biology student, etc.) to review your materials for accuracy, before publishing.
5. Find ways to make your promotional materials more environmentally friendly:
 - a) Keep in mind that publications can be sent by mail, fax, internet or personal distribution without significant cost increases.
 - b) Use non-contaminating products and/or renewable resources wherever possible — for example, non-bleached 100% post consumer, recycled papers; alternate fiber paper products (banana, coffee, tobacco, kenaf, etc.); soy-based inks.



- c) It could be a good idea to print in the brochure, in very visible type, the caption: "Help us help the environment — pass this on to a friend." In this way, it's not only a matter of recycling the paper used to print the brochure, but more importantly, passing the brochure on to other potentially interested friends on the part of the guest.

7.4 PROMOTION STRATEGIES

7.4.1 Positioning

Getting the message about your product to your target consumer often involves a long, and sometimes complicated, chain of communication: lodge owner to sales staff to local ground operators to international wholesalers to organizations with travel programs or travel agents and, ultimately to the consumer. Unless great care is taken in the development of the promotional materials mentioned in section 7.3, the message you want to deliver may not be the message your consumer will, in the end, receive.

The obvious risk here is that unclear or incorrect messages can result in unrealistic expectations of your product. Two possible scenarios can result. The consumer assumes that your product is below his comfort level or that it won't provide the ecotourism experience he is looking for and, therefore, does not choose your product. Or, the consumer chooses your product based on unrealistically high expectations of comfort and/or ecotourism experience and is, in the end, disappointed and won't recommend your product to others.

In short, the goal of all your materials is to create enough interest for the consumer to buy and have realistic enough expectations for him to be more than satisfied by his lodging and ecotourism experience. You need to be able to sell your trip.

7.4.2 Pricing

Studies show that environmentally responsible consumers are willing to pay more for environmentally responsible products, including lodging. Ask clients to leave a donation to protect the environment (leave a buck) but make sure the donation is not used to "clear their conscience," nor is it seen as a trick for extracting a tip. Nevertheless, value for price is always a consideration in any marketplace exchange. Your target consumer must perceive a value that matches the published price, if he/she is to buy. Thus, great care must be taken when establishing your rates.

Each link in the aforementioned chain of communication is in the business of helping to distribute your product and justly expects to receive

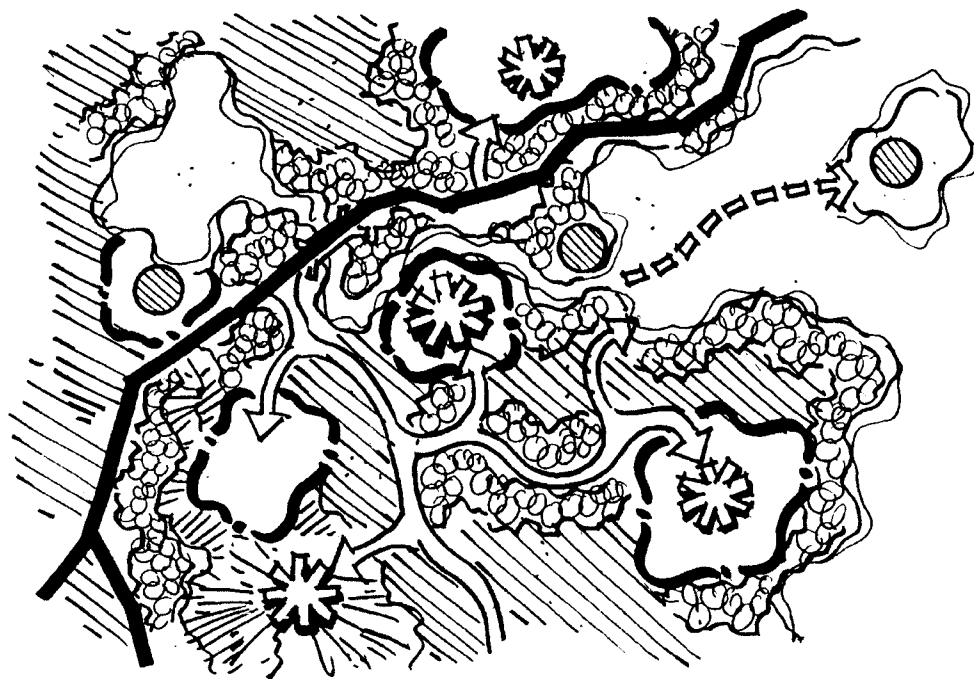
monetary compensation for that service. Take time to learn about the terminology and pricing structures in the travel industry and make sure that your net rates, or your commissions on rack rates, are sufficient to compensate the whole chain of intermediaries, while maintaining a competitive price to the consumer.

GUIDELINES

1. Stimulate social and cultural responsibility within your market. Establish a code of practice.
2. Obtain permission from the community to promote and use their values, symbols and traditions.
3. Make information available to your clients on what is considered dignified and respectful behavior towards the neighboring communities; be strict with your clients and staff in maintaining these standards.
4. Direct your marketing energies to those segments of the market that are really interested in, or show the greatest potential for practicing, this type of tourism.
5. Clearly identify and target the various segments and interest groups within the ecotourism market (birdwatchers, adventure lovers, student groups, families, photographers, scientists, horticulturists, seniors, fisherman, scuba divers, etc.).
6. Do not underestimate the potential of the national market.
7. Market with honesty and be realistic:
 - a) Based on your in-depth product analysis, present a realistic picture of your installations, amenities, services and facilities in order to avoid giving the wrong message to various client types (students, scientists, "soft" ecotourists, etc.).
 - b) Keep an eye on quality control and personalized services that can distinguish your hotel (lodge, etc.).
 - c) Charge fair prices that allow you to compete better in the market but are accessible to a greater number of people.
 - d) Ensure that prices are in accordance with the level of comfort, service and added value that your property offers (for example, a private reserve for which maintenance implies an extra cost to the owner and an extra value and service for the client).
 - e) Do not offer what you can't produce, including natural attractions such as animals that exist in the region but are not likely to be observed by the casual visitor.



8. Use the services of professionals or specialized publicity agencies that (ideally) practice the policies and principals that govern your project. Consider some of the following strategies.
 - a) With the help of a specialist in database marketing (or, if funds are limited, a student in database marketing), develop a distribution list for your printed brochure, considering the following categories:
 - i) Targeted consumers (database research/mining required)
 - ii) Targeted travel agents, wholesalers and outbound tour operators
 - iii) Inbound tour operators and travel agents in your own country
 - iv) Targeted car rental companies and city hotels (with whom you have formed strategic alliances) in your county
 - v) Trade and consumer travel shows (with the cooperation of a chosen inbound operator who will attend the show)
 - vi) Offices of your tourist board around the world
 - vii) Embassies of your government around the world
 - b) Make sure that the consultant who designed your website also offers marketing services for your site such as:
 - i) Placements with major ecotourism travel sites that offer free or very inexpensive links
 - ii) Placements in major travel sites that offer free or very inexpensive links
 - iii) Placements with other relevant sites that offer free or cheap links (such as the guidebook page of amazon.com)
 - iv) Placements in search engine directories (including maintenance)
 - v) Placements in websites that specialize in marketing small businesses
 - vi) Strategic placements of banners for your site
 - c) Hire a professional to design a print ad (2-color and 4-color) for the lodge. Run it as frequently as possible in nationally produced magazines and newspapers directed at tourists and with a good distribution (consistency is important — better a smaller ad many times than a large ad only once).
 - d) If possible, run your ad in destination inserts in travel trade magazines such as Travel Agent or Recommend in the USA (these usually have special rates negotiated by the national tourist boards). Travel agents tend to keep these destination inserts, whereas regular copies of the magazines are discarded or recycled.
 - e) Consider joint marketing, which is usually a very efficient and economical way to promote yourself even more vigorously.
 - f) Market complete regional itineraries or entire areas.



9. Research your particular case and develop mechanisms for consolidating a joint marketing plan. This can incorporate the various services, attractions and activities of your area and/or the assistance of a national tour operator, of the government entity responsible for tourism marketing in your country or of those in charge of the protected area closest to your ecolodge.
10. Use written agreements that identify responsible parties, responsibilities, timing, costs and any other type of obligation.
11. Research various ways and means of getting free promotion, for example:
 - a) Send out periodic press releases and check with the editor that your writing is up to their standards and is likely to appeal to their readership.
 - b) The innovative ideas behind many ecolodges make them newsworthy in their own right, so you have a good chance of being published in various media, and in many cases, such exposure can be achieved with minimal cost.
 - c) Invite the press to visit your project, carefully selecting those media that are of the most interest to you and that have the greatest potential for getting the message to your target market.
 - d) Provide interesting, solid and up to date information and host the press members yourself.
 - e) Find out how to get a feature on your project in a magazine. Often, articles appear in exchange for a free holiday for a specific journalist, although you will have no say in what is written or photographed. If you want (or, sadly, feel you need) to "positively influence" the outcome of an article, there are two main routes to negotiate before a journalist is sent. One is to pay to advertise your ecolodge in that magazine, or one of its sister publications (you will see this ploy time and again once you start looking for it). The other way is to pay directly for a promotional article using your photographs and even text. This is called an "advertorial," and frankly, they rarely work. The best option is to form a relationship with the magazine's editor, sell the feature to him or her over lunch, and then make sure that the journalist has a thoroughly enjoyable stay. If that fails, present your story as a coup for their opposition publishers, which is not a bad idea in any event.
 - f) Offer special packages and discounts for organized groups that represent the market segment you are interested in (conservation NGOs, international agencies, educational institutions, etc.).

- g) Make sure that all the guidebooks on your country receive and publish information on your lodge — and an invitation to visit the next time they are on a research trip.
 - h) Obtain a banner exchange for a free trip give-away to online companies.
12. Learn all you can about the chain of intermediaries that can exist between the consumer (your potential client) and the service provider (you). Consider the following as just some scenarios of client sources for your lodge and of potential intermediaries:
- a) No intermediary:
 - i) Walk-in clients who have come to the country by air only and make reservation upon arrival (may have found your brochure at the airport) or simply show up at the hotel. The latter case is extremely unlikely in remote area.
 - ii) Clients who book directly through the internet, in response to an advertisement or article in an international magazine, in response to your destination guidebook listing or most importantly, in response to a recommendation from one of your satisfied clients.
 - b) One intermediary:
 - i) Client books through an international travel agency who contacts you.
 - ii) Client books through a local travel agency who contacts you.
 - iii) Client belongs to a club or organization that has organized its own group tour and booked hotels directly.
 - c) Two intermediaries:
 - i) Client books a package tour through a travel agent that purchases from an international wholesaler who has either made block bookings with you or will book upon demand.
 - ii) Client books a package tour through a travel agent who purchases from an in-country tour operator who has either made block bookings with you or will book upon demand.
 - d) Three or more intermediaries:
 - i) Client belongs to an organization that has a major travel program (such as a museum or zoo) and books their tour through the organization. The tour is organized and operated by an outbound tour operator who in turn uses the services of an in-country operator who makes all the reservations and actually operates the tour.
- 13. When establishing prices, remember that the intermediaries make a great effort to market both the country and your specific products; this implies a cost for them so it is important to consider commissions for intermediaries in your final price.
 - 14. Seek the support of big operators and wholesalers who will always be more informed about new trends and better connected in the world, instead of investing your money to promote yourself with retail agents.
 - 15. Choose intermediaries that are most compatible with your philosophy and service ethic.
 - 16. Offer fam-trips (familiarization tours) to tour operators in the area, particularly those that specialize or are interested in this type of tourism.

7.5 OPERATION MARKETING

The final and perhaps most critical stage in your marketing strategy is to ensure that your ecolodge (the facility, the service and the natural history/cultural experience) more than lives up to your customers' expectations. To accomplish this goal it is extremely important to start and continue monitoring your operation (see Chapter 9) to ensure that these ecolodge guidelines are being met in all areas. It's equally important to provide ongoing staff training, motivation and incentives so that they share your ecolodge values and your goal of guest satisfaction. Finally, constantly solicit feedback from your guests and take appropriate follow-up action.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. Review your marketing plan periodically and use monitoring and evaluation systems.
2. Design an evaluation or suggestion form for your clients. Include a section for providing names and addresses of the friends of satisfied clients who might like to stay at your lodge. Add these names to your mailing list.
3. Act to rectify, as soon as possible, any problem that has come up or that a client has identified.
4. Follow up appropriately on any good suggestions a client offers.
5. Update your marketing plan and keep informed about new trends and techniques.
6. Remember that a satisfied client is the most efficient and effective form of marketing.

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*“Through interpretation, understanding.
Through understanding, appreciation.
Through appreciation, conservation.”*

—Tilden



CHAPTER 8

EDUCATION: TRAINING AND INTERPRETATION

Pat Ashton

Ashton, Ashton & Associates, Inc.



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8.1 INTRODUCTION

Education is indeed one of the cornerstones of all ecolodge operations and one of the identifying characteristics separating an ecolodge from traditional lodging. Frequently overlooked, however, is the need to educate the owners of and potential investors in ecolodge facilities. Business people involved in property purchase, investment for development or in the day-to-day business operations of ecolodges typically have a background in traditional tourism, with little or no knowledge regarding how to maintain an acceptable return on investment (ROI) while protecting natural and human environments. Nor do they grasp the importance of establishing and maintaining the integrity of their sustainable ecolodge operation and the role this will play in marketing and their ultimate bottom line. The surrounding communities, an integral part of all ecolodge development, should also be taught the significance of investments in ecolodge development, the intricacies of sustainability and the community impacts of ecolodge operations.

The education program should begin with the development of the business plan and continue through site identification and planning, construction, program development, staffing and operations. Understanding the reasons for developing sustainable concepts and linking these concepts to successful accomplishment of economic and long-term marketing goals creates a comprehensible framework for decision making by owners, investors and operations managers. Long-term success is the best encouragement for establishment of sustainable policies by ecolodge owners and investors. Staff education leads to visitor satisfaction and sustains the facility's long-term success. A well-educated operations and program staff recognizes the value of quality extensions and interpretation to the ecolodge's overall marketability. Educating the ecolodge guest ensures that expectations equal reality and "customer satisfaction" translates into economic success.

This Chapter discusses the education and training of:

- Visitors/Customers
- Interpretative Program Providers and Extension
- Operators
- Owners and Investors
- Communities
- Land Managers and Ecolodge Operators
- Ecolodge Operations Staff

8.2 EDUCATION OF VISITORS

An ecolodge exists because of the customers. Depending upon the location and type of ecolodge, these may include only overnight guests or the lodge may attract day visitors to use restaurants, special event services and various interpretative programs. Customers will be of all ages, diverse cultural backgrounds and will have various levels of understanding about ecotourism. Marketing strategies for ecolodges may target selected visitor profiles, but in fact the ecolodge must actually serve a broader cross-section of clientele. Some of these customers will be well educated on what makes an "eco" lodge different from any other lodging facility. Many customers, however, may have no idea why the ecolodge operations and habitat management are driven by sustainability principles. Visitor education on why sustainability of resources governs the ecolodge's operations and management is essential to customer satisfaction.

Customer satisfaction is directly related to the visitors' pre-conceived expectations. The actual "eco-experience" for a visitor to an ecolodge begins with the marketing materials that the potential visitor receives or sees prior to their visit. These materials create an image of the expected experience in the customer's mind, and whether correct or not, that visitor will judge their ecolodge experiences on the basis of these expectations. For this reason, appropriate education of the visitor is in the best interest of all ecolodge operations.

Marketing departments and reservation services are most often directly responsible for lack of information or misinformation leading to dissatisfaction among the ecolodge's clientele. Artistic license seems to be considered a "right" by many advertising agencies. This leads to brochures that picture beaches when the lodge is on the mountain with a view of the beach, or show animals looking in the window of the elegant visitor cabin when the nearest wildlife population is miles away. Calls to reservation services also frequently result in similar misinformation concerning services, location, activities or weather. In all areas, the ecolodge should provide accurate, thorough information and create an appealing but honest image of the ecolodge experience in the mind of the potential visitor. When the ecolodge exceeds customer expectations, the customer usually becomes the best marketing tool any lodge could have an exuberant "word of mouth" endorsement!

View the entire ecolodge as part of the educational experience — this includes the architectural and decorating themes, the uniforms or costumes worn by staff and the simple interpretative aspects of the infrastructure and landscaping.

8.2.1 Creating Ecolodge Visitor Satisfaction through Education

Following are guidelines for helping bring about a healthy learning environment for visitors.

GUIDELINES

1. Make sure that you have a firm grounding in ecology and ecotourism. It may be a good idea to undertake a course of study/seminar/workshop that keep you informed and up-to-date.
2. Hire only marketing companies and marketing personnel that have been trained in sustainability principles and that display values compatible with the ecolodge.
3. Ensure that photographs, graphic art and descriptions used by marketing are honestly (and positively!) representative. If possible, invite the photographer to advise on preparations for photographing the project. Address all aspects of the customer experience in graphic media that is current, yet avoid overly trendy formats or formats that are difficult for the visitor to interpret.
4. Familiarize your marketing people with interesting facts on the habitat, plant species, animal species, wildlife behaviors and sustainable operations.
5. Train front desk and reservation service staff on building customer satisfaction through provision of accurate information. Update this information daily/weekly/monthly and create a feedback loop so managers know that the information is accurate.
6. Help the media and others that may also be responsible for generating inaccurate images in the minds of customers, to get their facts straight.
7. Keep a list of most-asked questions and prepare a list of questions for which the staff usually doesn't know the answer, then make sure they learn the correct answers.
8. Keep all materials current and do not allow misinformation to go uncorrected on printed matter or on your web page. Use update boards in the lobby and access halls and keep them current!
9. Encourage the personal touch — have the general manager or desk manager on duty personally write a message each day on the lobby up-date board. Visitors to ecolodges enjoy personal tours of the operations, the sustainability modifications that make the ecolodge different from any other tourism facility — and they like meeting the staff and understanding the community's culture.
10. Provide visitors with current information or contacts of appropriate staff for interpretative questions about the local wildlife, culture, archaeology, ecolodge design and landscaping.



"...APART FROM A FANTASTIC BEACH, WE ARE LOCATED
IN THE MIDST OF A DENSE FOREST OF COCONUT PALMS."

11. Only use well-trained knowledgeable spokespeople for your facility and train all staff in the correct way to interact and speak about the ecolodge and sustainability. Sometimes the first person a visitor encounters is the groundskeeper or security. These individuals must be trained about the ecolodge in order to give an accurate picture of the facility.



8.2.2 Educating Through Marketing Materials

If the ecolodge has established its market niche and identified its target audiences, then the marketing materials should be directed primarily to this group or groups. Appropriate materials can do an excellent job in attracting business for the ecolodge, including customer satisfaction, which drives repeat business. Repeat business is one key to a successful ecolodge operation. For more details on marketing materials, please see Chapter 7.



"I'VE BEEN HERE TWO WEEKS ALREADY AND STILL HAVEN'T SEEN THE GORILLAS YOU MENTIONED IN YOUR BROCHURE."

GUIDELINES

1. Insist on the accuracy of plant and animal names, and that correct species appear in images or graphics. Also check your current information on ecology, culture or archaeology in text and correct locations and details in photos, by having all copy and printed materials checked in the early stages as well as prior to printing by a qualified biologist, archaeologist or other appropriate specialist.
2. Identify any inaccuracies in illustrations or text concerning the ecolodge infrastructure or surrounding locations. Use old materials as a "history of the ecolodge" and website to keep your ecolodge current.
3. Check all marketing materials for the accuracy of the experiences suggested or illustrated. Be sure materials do not allude to something the ecolodge experience cannot or usually does not deliver.
4. Make sure the marketing materials are designed to inform the visitor about sustainability of operations and land management practices.

8.2.3 Creation of the Visitor Experience

Visitors will come to an ecolodge to live out the intangible expectations that have been created through the marketing materials. This visitor experience cannot be entirely controlled by the ecolodge; it is a creation formed by the melding of the visitors' past experiences with the images brought to life by the nature of the marketing materials and other sources like NGOs, television documentaries, other visitors, etc. Of this mix, only the quality and accuracy of the marketing materials are under the

control of the ecolodge manager.

The experiences at an ecolodge are its greatest assets and the nature of these experiences largely depend upon:

- how closely the ecolodge experience meets (or exceeds) client expectations
- the ecolodge's location or setting
- the atmosphere created within the structure and operation of the ecolodge
- the design of the infrastructure available for wildlife viewing and nature exploration
- the quality of on-site and surrounding natural habitats
- the training and personalities of guides and other service providers
- the quality of interpretative information provided by guides and through signage
- the type of equipment and learning materials available for use by visitors
- the timing of experiences and scheduling of events
- the mix of relationships visitors develop with staff and other guests
- the levels of privacy and protection from unwanted noises, activities and smells
- the intensity of all aspects of the experience

8.2.3.1 Visitor activities and training

Ecotourists are definitely seeking something different from a typical lodging in a natural environment. They may expect:

- More activities and opportunities to experience the natural or cultural environment.
- Less noise, less luxury and wastefulness.
- To share their experience with fewer people and to see or hear fewer cars, trains, or planes and less technology.
- Superior use of environmentally friendly technology like solar power, alternative energy and water use or bio-filtering of sewage.
- Not to hear jet-skis, snowmobiles or radios; nor a loud outdoor concert outside their window.
- More adventure and excitement in their outdoor activities and may expect opportunities to view the most rare species or to see the oldest ruins.
- More hand-on activities rather than observing from a distance.

8.2.3.2 Educating the Visitor in Sustainability

It will be easier to meet the needs of visitors whom have been acquainted with the unique features of the destination and how your ecolodge works. You can pass on information and help the visitor's learning experience in a number of ways. It is important that people quickly come to understand the principles behind the ecolodge and also know how to participate in meeting its sustainability targets.

GUIDELINES

1. Provide the best opportunities for the visitor to experience or discover certain plants, animals, archaeological ruins or cultural aspects of the area in a way that does not ultimately damage the sustainability of the facility or the region.
2. Avoid compromising any basic sustainability principles such as endangering plant or animal species or damaging archaeological or cultural materials, disrupting local cultures, or violating regional or cultural laws or principles.
3. Use innovative and varied interpretative methods to expose visitors to concepts related to the ecolodge's setting, biology and operations. These methods might include live music; hands-on crafts like weaving, carding and dyeing wool; or wildlife photography or videography.



" YESTERDAY... IT'S NOT HALF THE LODGE IT USED TO BE...."