

# Tourism and Biodiversity

Ministry of Tourism  
Sultanate of Oman  
World Tourism Day  
27 September 2010



وزارة السياحة  
Ministry of Tourism



Ministry of Tourism  
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# Dr Rajha Abdulameer Ali

## Minister of Tourism

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The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) has chosen Tourism and Biodiversity as the World Tourism Day theme for 2010, further highlighting 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity and the tourism sector's contribution in this area. The Ministry of Tourism also welcomes the opportunity to participate in the Sultanate of Oman's broader contributions to the Year of Biodiversity being managed by the Ministry of Conservation and Climate Affairs.

Biodiversity is fundamental to the quality of our daily life, and therefore to our livelihoods, businesses and industry at large. In particular, tourism depends on environmental quality for its wellbeing.

Thinking locally, World Tourism Day highlights the priority for Oman's tourism industry to develop in a sustainable way. As an industry, we must work responsibly to ensure that the genetic diversity of our plants and animals is not jeopardised, species are not threatened or endangered, and our unique ecosystems and habitats remain intact. These imperatives are covered by the professionals who have contributed to this booklet.

The Ministry of Tourism values the collaboration of all the people and agencies in producing this booklet. It is a sign of industry maturity and cohesion that have worked so enthusiastically to highlight the need for sustainability.

Thank you for your efforts.





## WORLD TOURISM DAY MESSAGE

by Taleb Rifai, UNWTO Secretary-General

### Tourism and Biodiversity

China, 27 September 2010

As the international community comes together throughout 2010 to celebrate life on Earth as part of the United Nations International Year of Biodiversity, the tourism industry is pleased to join in this global campaign by celebrating World Tourism Day (WTD) 2010 in China under the theme Tourism and Biodiversity.

The value of biodiversity for tourism is immeasurable. One of tourism's greatest assets, the diversity of life on Earth causes millions of people to travel the world each year. Yet biodiversity, the intricate web of unique species and ecosystems that make up our planet, is at risk on a global scale. Demographic pressures and unsustainable human activities are causing irreversible biodiversity loss at an alarming rate.

Recognizing the value of Earth's natural capital to its long-term sustainability, the tourism industry is called upon to protect and sustainably manage biodiversity. A healthy tourism industry depends on a healthy resource base, and sustainable growth in tourism means increased funds for conservation.

Tourism revenues resulting from the enjoyment of this biological diversity, often located in the world's less developed regions, are a significant source of income and employment for local communities. It is this relationship between tourism and biodiversity and the resulting positive impacts on local livelihoods, development and poverty alleviation that must set the tone for sustainable tourism development.

Against this background, WTD 2010 will highlight the strong ties between tourism development, biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction. Sustainable tourism presents an important opportunity for safeguarding irreplaceable natural wealth and raising awareness of the importance of life's natural diversity.

Safeguarding biodiversity is an urgent challenge that concerns us all – the international community, governments, companies and travellers – but it is not too late to act. I am confident that throughout 2010 and beyond the tourism community will come together to demonstrate its vital role in protecting biodiversity and maximizing its contribution to poverty reduction and development.

We look forward to celebrating the natural richness of our planet with you.

**Taleb Rifai**  
Secretary-General  
World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)





## Mohammed Al Tobi

### The Undersecretary of Tourism

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The language of tourism and marketing professionals often includes the term, ‘the four Ps’. They are making reference to key elements of consumer theory: product, price, place and promotion. For example, the success of a hotel or a destination will depend on a matrix of inter-related factors with key elements being:

- Product - is it market responsive, what is its point of difference, what is the quality of the experience, who are the competitors?
- Price - does the cost of travel and the experience offer value to consumers, and which ones?
- Place - how accessible is the destination in time and cost terms?
- Promotion - will marketing create awareness, a point of difference and bring consumers?

As you can imagine, these propositions are also important across the many layers of the travel and tourism sector to determine the ‘unique value’ of a resort, experience or destinations.

This year’s World Tourism Day theme of Tourism and Biodiversity reminds the Tourism Industry to think about, and give prominence to, two other ‘Ps’: people and preservation. We must work to ensure people respect the environment and that biodiversity is not jeopardized. This is an important message for all levels of the tourism industry if we are to develop in a sustainable way. This applies to local communities who play a leading role in how their destination (and its environment) is managed, and to resorts who look to their local communities to provide local produce, cultural interaction and staff, developers who need to scope and plan developments so that they keep habitats intact.

Another point I would like to draw attention to is that the principles of linkages and interaction levels that are associated with biodiversity are also relevant to the tourism industry. Without linkages and interactions our industry would not grow and prosper. That Oman’s tourism industry has so eagerly contributed to this booklet shows these bodies feel strongly about sustainable tourism, and highlights Oman’s potential to lead in green and responsible tourism.



# Tourism and Biodiversity – Summary of Issues

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## Biodiversity and Tourism

There is a direct link between biodiversity and tourism. Biodiversity is one of tourism's greatest assets and fundamental to its long-term sustained growth.

Uncontrolled land conversion, climate change, pollution and other unsustainable human activities are causing biodiversity loss at a rate many times higher than that of natural extinction. Rising tourism numbers bring with them complex challenges that the tourism sector must address.

## Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism establishes a suitable balance between environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and is key to maximising tourism's positive contribution to biodiversity at the local, national and global level.

## Locally

Sustainable tourism is a key source of income and employment for local communities, which, in turn, provide strong incentives to protect biodiversity. Maintaining the environment, upon which the economic health of the local population is based, becomes the priority, resulting in more tourists who, in turn, generate more funds for conservation. It is often the case that areas of natural beauty and diversity are preserved and protected thanks to the funds that flow in from the tourism industry for infrastructure, maintenance and jobs.

Along similar lines, tourism offers a viable alternative for local and indigenous populations to receive income from natural resources in a way that protects those resources from exploitation.

## Nationally

Tourism often justifies the creation of protected areas. National tourism development strategies should recognise the value of biodiversity to the tourism industry, and therefore tourism's potential contribution to community development.

## Globally

Sustainable tourism raises public awareness of biodiversity issues. With millions of people travelling the globe each year, tourism is an ideal vehicle to further spread environmental awareness.

The products, services and experiences provided by natural ecosystems are countless and all contribute to tourism satisfaction and a concomitant change in consumer behaviour. The emergence of new consumption patterns is already evident in the world of tourism, with the emergence of 'responsible tourism', 'ecotourism' and other markets.

## Causes of Biodiversity Loss

- Habitat loss and destruction — related to human use and destruction of land and waterways.
- Alterations in ecosystem composition — changes in groups of species and dependent environments.
- Invasive alien species — exotic species make an impact on the breeding success of resident species.
- Over exploitation — over grazing, over hunting and over fishing are good local examples.
- Pollution and contamination — biological regeneration is impacted by pollutants.
- Climate change — rapid climate change can impact on habitat areas and adaptive responses.



Greater Flamingo

### Mega flight hub, Oman style

Some tourism destinations measure success by the numbers of arriving passengers, but Oman's nature-based tourism strategy also focuses on other arrivals: 450+ bird species that are endemic to Arabia or join us on their annual migrations. Here, success includes the number and range of birds you can spot, from Arabia's red-legged partridges on our highest peaks to Flamingo that wade along our coast. That's why we think Oman is one of Arabia's busiest hubs for international flights. Oh yes, many of our human visitors think the same!

Beauty has an address ~ Oman

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# Research, Innovation, and the Link between Tourism and Sustainable Development



Thomas Andersson

Senior Advisor of Science, Technology and Innovation Policy, The Research Council of Oman

## Introduction

Tourism is a global phenomenon and represents one of the fastest growing sectors of the world's economy over the recent decades. Constituting about one-third of all international trade in services, it is a major source of foreign exchange earnings and job creation. Moreover, whereas flows of tourism traditionally concentrated on a limited set of popular destinations, new countries and regions are tapping into this great source of potential earnings as more tourists are looking for diverse destinations to explore.

Tourism naturally thrives on, and also in various ways influences, cultural, societal and environmental assets, and this is very much the case in regard to biological diversity. For instance, the introduction of even relatively modest numbers of visitors to juvenile areas with great resources in terms of biodiversity can lead to rapid degradation and the irremediable alteration of the original characteristics that qualified a destination as a tourism attraction in the first place. On the other hand, tourism can serve as a powerful instrument for nature conservation; income from tourism can help finance protected areas and safeguard ecologically sensitive regions against more environmentally damaging alternative uses. Nature-based tourism can contribute to promoting the environmental education of both tourists and the local population.

Oman belongs to the relatively new group of advancing destinations for tourism that draw on unique cultural and environmental assets as major attractions. Although Oman has taken sound steps to realise the potential positive link between tourism and biodiversity, research and innovation are needed to help maximise the benefits so as to realise even greater fortunes that can be gained from the country's mighty natural heritage while halting current serious degradation.

## The Complexity of Impacts

The global economy, with expanding industries, travel, financial and information flows, brings enormously increased pressures on the interrelated ecosystems of our planet. Biodiversity has been set on a course of dramatic retreat around the world. On the other hand, consumer preferences are changing, and the demand for environmental assets to be appropriately managed is on the increase and is being fed by higher incomes and, partially, by improved access to information due to the diffusion of information and communications technology.



Most countries have put in place legal and administrative frameworks to regulate existing tourism projects and the development of new — at least large — ones. Nevertheless, neglect of biodiversity, misinterpretations and abuse are common. Irregularities tend to be uncovered at a stage where damage has been sustained and is either irreparable or extremely costly to rectify.

For such reasons, and given the capacity limits of environmental resources coupled with the quantitative growth of tourism, there is an urgent need for the development of tourism to take biodiversity seriously. The land requirements of large projects (hotels, sporting facilities, beaches, parking lots) can, for instance, be invasive and upset delicate natural balances; they can also determine future developments in other directly and indirectly related sectors. However, the impact of tourism on biodiversity also comes from the everyday actions of large numbers of individuals. Examples of impacts include:

- Increased need for public and private service facilities and infrastructure
- Increased traffic (notably air, and public and private road transport)
- Increased waste, noise, littering, etc.
- Higher consumption, resulting in wear and tear, with a bearing on the conditions that are essential for biodiversity

Supporting the sustainable delivery and consumption of tourism and biodiversity requires meeting the social, cultural, environmental and economic criteria of viability and acceptability. Key players must adopt a long-term perspective relating to both present and future generations:

- Ethically and socially just and culturally appropriate
- Economically profitable and feasible
- Environmentally/ecologically sustainable

In the long term, sustainable tourism depends on:

- The successful balancing and careful utilisation of available means (natural, cultural and financial)
- Continual dedicated effort to conserve and renew natural resources
- Recognition of the needs of the local population involved
- Consideration as to how they may participate in the economic benefits generated by spending on tourism



## Contributions of Research

Given the complexity of its impacts, to learn how tourism can support, not degrade, biodiversity, it is essential to get a handle on the state of biodiversity itself and where it is heading. In the Middle East, there has been a general shortage of documentation in this regard and in Oman, rapid progress is now underway.

The Oman Botanic Garden, part of the Office for Conservation of the Environment, Diwan of Royal Court, is under construction and will open to the public in a few years. Its objective is to eventually house all Oman's 1,200 plant species within naturalistic habitat displays. To achieve this, the dedicated botanic garden team has made over 150 plant-collection field trips across the country, discovering 20 new species, as well as compiling data invaluable for conservation on plant

distribution and densities. Each seed, cutting or plant collected is carefully documented in the field with GPS coordinates, times, habitat data and even the collector's name. Seeds are given a unique accession number which remains with them from seedling in the nursery to tree within the public displays.

As most of Oman's plant species have never been cultivated, each presents a new challenge. The botany and horticulture teams use their experience and data to develop methods for germination, propagation and pest control to encourage seeds to sprout and flourish. All findings are recorded on the Garden's database.

The Oman Botanic Garden will utilise more than 420 ha to conserve, research and disseminate information on plants and plant-related heritage. Apart from research and field study complexes and laboratories, library, herbarium, seed bank and accommodation for visiting students or researchers, immersive plant displays, exhibits, cafes, shops, children's play area, classrooms and mosques will enable reaching out to large numbers of people.

Research is warranted elsewhere as well, including cross-disciplinary approaches that engage both natural and social disciplines. There is also the need of innovation, so that new solutions can be developed, tested and applied. The Research Council is preparing a comprehensive research and innovation program to address a spectrum of issues that are crucial for sustainable development in Oman. The program will take special care to bridge the gap between disparate perspectives, and catalyse joint efforts between different ministries, agencies, scientific institutions and the private sector.

The following are examples of areas that merit further attention in research in order to increase our understanding of how tourism can contribute to biodiversity in Oman:

- The value of ecosystem services and biodiversity for the tourism industry of today and tomorrow
- The risks incurred by tourism through the depletion of ecosystem services
- The mechanisms through which biodiversity is vulnerable to expanding tourism, and what is required to fix potential problems

## *The Need for a Comprehensive Action Strategy*

Some, notably large, enterprises have already integrated environmentally responsible behaviour in their core organisational practices. In Oman there are several examples — some are highlighted in this book — of forward-looking tourism projects crafted to ensure favourable environmental impacts.

Better awareness of such cases can inspire others to break new ground, measurement and disclosure of both good and bad performances are warranted. The private sector has developed useful benchmarking tools for tracking performance by tourism businesses in respect to their environmental practises. Mostly designed for hotels, such tools can be adapted and their use be promoted more broadly by those conscious of how participants in the industry influence biodiversity. This could prompt the industry to better awareness and to start perceiving the area as a priority for action.



Al Bustan Palace Hotel, Muscat

In the short term however, and normally in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), initiatives imply an access to expertise and investments that is simply not attainable. At the same time, because they are small and potentially more flexible, SMEs enjoy inherent advantages in innovation. Such firms could benefit, and generate benefits for society at large, from awareness and training in basic principles to how concerns for sustainability can be turned into new business solutions through tourism, as well as related areas in travel, leisure, hospitality, events management, the arts and cultural industries, etc.

A well-coordinated, comprehensive framework/infrastructure and strategy would foster environmentally friendly tourism. Research and innovation should be drawn upon in government planning and decision making as well as in private business. Ways forward may include a combination of institutional coordination mechanisms, access to accurate and relevant information material, appropriate training, and targeted awareness raising among key stakeholders. Effective public-private partnership is required to facilitate the processes through which business opportunities can arise from linking tourism to biodiversity in a sustainable manner.

## Concluding Remarks

Oman has started an ambitious agenda to research its valuable resources in biodiversity and how to foster sustainable development more broadly. A high-end tourism strategy is also well under way.

Tourism can seriously degrade, or help support, biodiversity. To underpin the realisation of a positive relationship for the long term, constructive collaboration is needed between the key stakeholders, including the government, the private sector, NGOs and local representatives.

Consistency in the measures adopted by different parts of government (not only by individual ministries and authorities), adequate education and competence in the tourism business itself, and an engaged and aware general public are all needed. Substantive progress is much dependent on a holistic approach, an active research agenda and the willingness to embrace innovations and entrepreneurial efforts inspired by the opportunities now offered by sustainable solutions to linking tourism and biodiversity.



# Planning, Enriching, Managing and Marketing Tourism and Biodiversity

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## Ministry of Tourism



### Introduction

Few countries have emerged on the global scene with an immediate focus on high-yield sustainable tourism, and fewer still can boast double-digit year-on-year visitor growth. Oman's natural priorities are at the forefront of decisions taken on the rate of tourism development rather than potential competitor outcomes from rapid-growth strategies that require accelerated infrastructure development.

Responsibility for the development of Oman's tourism industry lies with the Ministry of Tourism. To facilitate industry

development, the Ministry was established with both 'supply' and 'demand' side functions allowing it to take a hands-on approach to facilitate the development of hotels and resorts at selected sites, frequently as joint-venture projects, as well as launching targeted marketing campaigns in key markets and sectors. This approach has also facilitated development that is culturally and environmentally appropriate to ensure its values are intrinsic to Oman's tourism appeal.

The following gives a snapshot of the ministry's current projects in the context of biodiversity principles and values, providing a glimpse of the integrated strategy of a 'product to market' approach and the priority given to best practices and spreading tourism benefits to regional communities. Many of the projects and issues are also relevant to the Ministry's thinking in relation to Oman's next five-year national tourism development plan that is currently being formulated.



## Planning – Mohammed Al Sinani



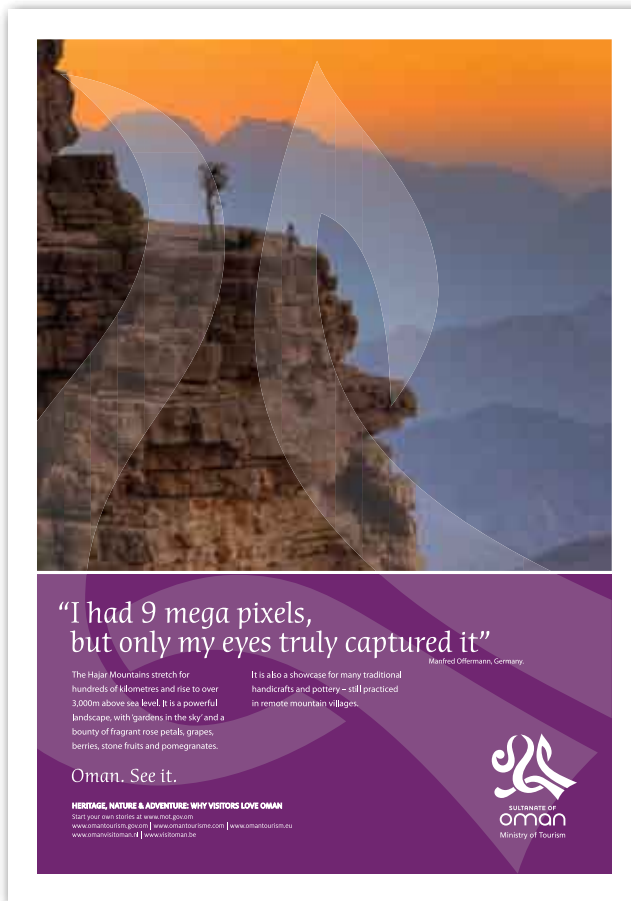
As Director General of Planning and Information, Mohammed Al Sinani has many reasons to think about environmental values and their interaction with tourism. The Division's work operates at national, regional and project-specific levels with the following projects illustrating the scope and range of activities underway.

It is appropriate to begin by referencing the recently completed Development Control Plan Framework — a major piece of work to guide investors and planners in scoping, planning, designing and developing projects in an environmentally friendly manner. The Framework provides engineering, environmental, social and cultural guidelines, and highlights the value of water, energy and wider conservation goals, and provides the context for the Ministry's development work.

A Tourism Master Plan is being implemented in current projects in the Al Jabal Al Akhdar (Hajar Mountains southwest of Muscat) which is a remarkable cultural and environmental landscape where people have been living for thousands of years developing elaborate irrigation systems (aflaj) that support stepped agricultural terraces. Master planning includes environmental, social, cultural and economic studies in collaboration with Sultan Qaboos University and international consultants.

From a biodiversity perspective the key outcomes so far include a proposal, which is the subject of inter-governmental discussions, to designate a large area to protect the juniper stands which include trees over a thousand years old. The protected area will be substantial in size so that representative habitats are also protected. Another outcome is a growing recognition of the need to establish a genetic seed bank of the crops and fruit trees that have adapted to high-altitude stepped agriculture over time. Both the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Agriculture consider the seed bank to be a project of international significance, with tourism playing a positive role in realising these conservation goals.

Improved management outcomes for wadi systems, especially those under local community and tourism pressure are also a focus. Wadi systems host unique terrestrial and aquatic life forms and intact herb fields and grasslands, so their preservation is a priority. Studies have commenced at Wadi Ash Shaab (Sharqiyah) and Wadi Darbat (Dhofar) aimed at documenting and protecting important terrestrial and aquatic environments, and to determine a balance between



community and tourism demands, including practical outcomes such as local job creation. This work is especially important because it provides valuable scientific data and gives local communities and international visitors a better understanding of interrelated environmental and tourism outcomes.

At Bandar Al Khayran, an exceptional coastal tourism reserve east of Muscat, the Ministry is sponsoring economic, cultural, archaeological and ecological studies to assist another major ecotourism master planning process in collaboration with local universities, consultants and IUCN. This is an exceptional coastal reserve encompassing deep bays, fringing islands and coral reefs, and extensive inter-tidal mangrove flats that are rich in life. The hillsides are used for goat herding and host a wide range of native animals including the Arabian gazelle. The area is rich in archaeological terms, further highlighting the need for the master plan to be highly site specific in its recommendations. Again, the Ministry is working with the local community to balance traditional grazing and fishing practices with a true ecotourism experience.

Finally, the Division is working across the Ministry on several environmental initiatives including an update of its sustainable tourism policy and strategy, hosting the 4th Global Responsible Tourism in Destinations Conference in Oman in October and continuing involvement in UNEP's Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism Program.

## Enriching – Mohammed Al Zadjali



As Director General of Tourism Development specialising in the preservation of forts, castles and product development, Mohammed Al Zadjali's Division experiences significant overlap with biodiversity.

The team oversees the important heritage restoration work and management of approximately 30 forts and castles across Oman, including the soon-to-be-opened Bait Ar Ridaydah and the start of Mutrah Fort's restoration at the Corniche, which dominates Muscat's port. International recognition has recently been highlighted when Khasab Fort was awarded the British Museum's 2010 International Project Award.

The Division's work is much more than preserving heritage assets — it is also enriching Oman's cultural understanding and environmental links. The projects provide a unique sense of history and appreciation of how communities once lived and interacted with the environment. At Bait Ar Ridaydah, for example, an ancient and elaborate falaj system continues to water extensive date and banana plantations and nearby citrus orchards. The year-round oasis environment is critically important to many local and migrating bird species as well as local wildlife.

The Division's work on Oman's caves is at the leading edge of the tourism sector. The work focuses on protecting and interpreting intricate and environmentally sensitive limestone cave systems, including some of the world's largest chambers and some unique crystal features. Oman's immense mountain ranges host thousands of caves, many unexplored and most undocumented and the Ministry has funded many exploratory studies and conservation work including crystal chambers and ecosystems that are too sensitive even for incidental visits. However, some, like Al Hoota Cave, provide a unique and sustainable visitor experience where Oman's biodiversity and the cave's fauna in its natural habitat, including *Garra barreimiae*, a rare and endemic species of blindfish, can be viewed.

Finally, the Division fulfils a product development role across the Ministry's activities at forts, castles, reserves and visitor viewing points.

An issue common across the Division's work is how best to interpret natural and heritage assets so that communities and visitors understand the value of a particular site and its environmental context.



Matrah Fort and Corniche

## Managing – Faisal Al Hosni



As Director General of Investor Services and Quality Control, Faisal Al Hosni's focus is on increasing and managing the quality of tourism accommodation restaurants and tour operators. The Division has four departments:

The Investor Services Department responds to investors seeking to provide accommodation. Inspection of a potential location is carried out prior to granting initial formal approval, after which the investor's documents, together with environmental permission from the relevant authority, and other required documents, are sent to the Classification Department and licensing committee for approval.

The Classification Department comprises trained inspectors who assess tourism accommodation six months after opening and then at biennial intervals. The team was involved in creating an internationally recognised classifications system drawing on the knowledge of consultants with a focus on sustaining tourism development.

The Quality Control Department is responsible for ensuring that tourism establishments operate to high standards. The department also deals with complaints from accommodation or restaurant guests and makes recommendations to avoid future problems.

The Licensing Department grants renewable licenses to tour operators for tourist accommodation and restaurants. Another focus of this department is the licensing of Omani tour guides to ensure that they are not only welcoming and informed, but also have and convey a high sense of environmental awareness.



## Marketing – Salem Al Mamari



As Director General of Tourism Promotion, Salem Al Mamari and his team are implementing an international marketing strategy to position Oman as a globally competitive niche destination. From day one Oman has taken a different path to most other destinations by marketing to high-yield and responsible sectors using heritage, cultural, natural and adventure themes. This focus was, in part, a response to infrastructure delivery projections to ensure that accommodation capacity balances visitor numbers, but it also appeals to business sectors that see destination quality as a decision-making prerequisite.

The Ministry's focus on Oman's intact heritage, culture, adventure and natural values using 'Beauty has an address' as a call to action emphasises Oman's difference as a global destination. The Ministry and industry see this positioning as strategically important and giving resonance across international and domestic promotions while appealing to business, leisure, adventure and special interest travellers seeking an authentic destination. Planning and other measures ensure that hotels and resorts are Omani themed to give an image, context and experience consistency rarely found in other destination campaigns.

International promotions are managed by a network of representative offices in the UK, Germany, France, Netherlands, Belgium, Russia, GCC, India and Australia, and span consumer and trade awareness and tactical campaigns as well as travel trade education programs. Here again the focus is to ensure that Oman is 'true to brand' and gives priority to yield outcomes. The Ministry's campaigns are working to ensure that promotions have wider positive flow-on benefits for Oman's other economic sectors as the Sultanate seeks to diversify its economy and boost international engagement.

The Division is leading the implementation of Oman's National Brand Mark with associated creative development and promotions emphasising the Brand's environmental, cultural and heritage elements. Director General Al Mamari points out that it is not surprising that the 'look and feel' of the Ministry's campaigns across all markets, media channels and targeted segments is distinctive and evocative, especially as the cultural and environmental content of Oman's advertisements probably outweighs many other GCC destinations, which mostly project 'biggest or newest' messages.

Closer to home the Division is taking an increasingly active role in developing Oman's domestic tourism through the promotion of regional events and festivals. Working with local government and hotel operators, regional campaigns have



“It was as exhilarating at the bottom as it was at the top”

Muhammad Ramahi, Syria.

Majlis Al Jinn, the meeting place of the spirits, is no ordinary hole in the ground. It happens to be one of the world's largest cave chambers, with a drop of 160 meters.

So if you want to make a spectacular entrance, make sure Majlis Al Jinn is on your itinerary.

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“We were looking for fish and found a marathon swimmer”

Richard Luffey, New Zealand

In December 2010, Oman will host the Second Asian Beach Games. One event is Marathon Swimming and we know who the undisputed world record holder is. Oman's waters are blessed with fine turtle species, and many nest on our beaches.

Every year, the turtles swim tens of thousands of kilometers as they migrate across the oceans, and many return to the clear waters to lay their eggs. Nature is taking us something.

Oman. Let's play.

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been developed that showcase each region's attributes and attractions, and nature and environmental landscapes are major elements of this work. Here too, emphasis is being given to conveying natural values and uniqueness.



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Taking its inspiration from the wonderful diversity that is Oman – amongst other things, Arabic calligraphy; marine environment; local textiles; our magnificent landscape; the sultanate’s historic leadership in trade and pioneering role in exploration; and of course frankincense, which has been at the core of our culture and economy for generations. The bold brand mark is a mélange of the best Oman has to offer. Expertly crafted, the mark draws on a rich and vibrant colour palette which reflects Oman’s natural bounty.

To be more specific and looking at the symbol from right to left the dhow (in purple), the turtle and rich marine life (in marine green), the silhouettes of the mountains (in light blue) and the incense smoke (in light green). These four parts, which will come together to form the brand mark, were drawn in an organic fashion to demonstrate continuous natural growth. The typography in both Arabic and English were drawn in a more contemporary fashion, using ‘sans serifs’ but with soft corners, to create a contrast with the symbol and provide a solid base beneath it. The contrast is meant to create an image of strength, continuous growth and a link with Oman’s historic past.

The four primary colours chosen for the brand mark are: Dawn Purple, Sky Blue, Salalah Green and Musandam Aqua Marine Green.

The green and blue refer to natural growth. The lighter blue and green were selected as young and vibrant energetic colours, and refer to natural growth. The aqua marine green links back to the marine life. The purple refers to majesty.



# Building Sustainable Tourism Destinations

Wael Ahmed Al Lawati  
CEO, Omran



A few weeks ago, I was leafing through the final draft of our latest Operating Review, a summary of the work Omran has done in helping to create new tourism destinations across Oman, when I came across an image we are using which, to me, sums up the challenge of building sustainable tourism destinations perfectly.

The image is a simple one. A turtle, obviously a mother on the way to lay her eggs, drags herself up a pristine stretch of Oman beach.

When I say pristine, I am probably using some typical Omani modesty. The sand is almost white, beautifully fine. The sea lapping at the shore is a deep aquamarine. In the distance, we can see striking hills, rising to mountains, with the jagged majesty that those of you who have visited Oman will immediately recognise.

The photo sends me a number of messages.

To the developer in me, it says, 'You could put a three-hundred-room hotel there and immediately run at a minimum year-round 75% — and during the laying season, you'll be turning them away.'

To the nature-lover in me, it says, 'Leave me alone!'

And to the Omani in me, the photo highlights a balance between these two views. Our beautiful natural landscape — and the wildlife living in it — is a fantastic bounty for the country. It is one of the reasons that tourism offers such a bright future for many of our people who work in the industry and its associated sectors.

But that bounty has to be managed very carefully. The very things that attract visitors — nature, wildlife and beautiful scenery — must be protected. If we over develop, or develop too fast or without thought, we will destroy them. That is why at Omran, we take two core responsibilities very seriously.



The first is our responsibility to create sustainable — in all senses of the word — tourism-related properties across Oman. We are looking to develop hotels, guest houses and resorts that will build employment and economic prosperity in the communities in which they will be sited.

Tourism is one of the pillars for the future economic success of Oman and successive five-year plans have identified it as one of our key targets. Today, the tourism sector accounts for around 3.5% of Oman's GDP, with the major revenue coming from visitors from all over the world.

Sustainable tourism means ensuring that money finds its way into all our communities. Tourism projects should create jobs, directly and indirectly, for Omanis at all levels — from planning to construction to operation to support.

In this area, we feel we are making a difference, as the Asian Beach Games project shows.

The Second Asian Beach Games will be held in Oman in late 2010 and Omran has been given the responsibility for developing the site for them. The site will include hotel accommodation, sporting facilities, marina berths and all other associated infrastructure.

From day one, we have sought to involve the local communities. Contractors have been encouraged to source materials locally and we have tried to give employment to as many locals as possible in the design and construction phase, either directly or through support channels.

But we are also looking forward. Built into the design concept of the games site is a legacy that will see a tourism hub created at the site, encouraging visitors and developing long-term employment opportunities for locals.

The games will be a fantastic chance for Oman to shine on the world stage. But our real success will be measured in the long-term economic opportunities we develop at the site. And those must be truly sustainable.

Our second area of responsibility is to our natural surroundings — the landscape and wildlife around our projects and in this area too, we are aiming to go beyond the basics.

Every project that we consider goes through a rigorous assessment before we even start the formal work. We ask ourselves, will it benefit or damage the local environment? How do we make sure it is the former?

This early analysis will shape the project significantly and because we understand our responsibility to the Omani people and to the nation, we do not let financial considerations alone dictate our progress. This means we often think small, suggesting small eco-resorts and educational tourism options instead of grand hotels. That way, on sensitive sites, we can manage our impact.

But impact management goes beyond that initial stage. Environmental management lies at the heart of our business strategies.

In our commitment to become a leader in sustainable developments, we have developed an Environmental Management System, which aims, among other things, to reduce our carbon footprint as well as other pollution and waste outputs. Our guidelines are now in place and govern every action taken in the construction progress of our developments; the system was designed to exceed national and international minimum standards.

As a result of our effective implementation of high environmental standards, Omran was awarded ISO 14001 certification — an internationally accepted certification for environmental management systems. At the forefront of the industry in environmental responsibility, and Omran is not only the first tourism developer to achieve ISO 14001 in Oman, but one of only a few in the GCC region.

Last year, environmental impact assessments were completed for the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, the Jabal Al Akhdar Hotel, the Fort Hotel, Khasab Hotel and the Daymaniyat Island projects, and this has now become the standard practice for all Omran projects.

In managing large-scale projects, Omran makes every effort to ensure that eco-values filter down to each level of business. All our employees advocate a green office building; almost all our office waste products are recycled, eco-friendly inks and recycled printing paper are used, and water and energy conservation is practiced.

The GCC region is experiencing accelerated growth in urban development and it is, therefore, important that organisations take measures to minimise the impact of their developments on the environment. Through its Environmental Management System, Omran successfully continues to train its staff and contractors in environmental processes for sustainable developments.

In these ways and many others, we seek to develop in a sustainable manner, reflecting those twin responsibilities of economic progress and nurturing our beautiful landscapes.

# Biodiversity of Oman Celebrating the Sultanate's Diverse Biological Wealth

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Dr Roberto P. Rubio

Nature Reserve Expert, Directorate of Nature Conservation  
Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs

One of today's bywords, biodiversity, is coined from the term biological diversity, which was first heard during the adoption of the Convention of Biological Diversity in 1992 at the Earth Summit meeting held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It is tagged for the variety and natural forms of life on earth, which include the species, genetic differences within each species and the variety of ecosystems. The Earth Summit, also known as the Rio Agreement, was a concerted effort by world leaders to attain a comprehensive strategy on sustainable development.

Three goals were established during the convention, conservation of biodiversity, sustainable use of its components and fair/equitable sharing of the benefits from the use of genetic resources. In a decision from the convention's Conference of the Parties, it adopted a strategic plan for 2010. Its target was to achieve a significant reduction of current biodiversity loss at global, regional and national levels that would contribute in alleviating poverty for the benefit of all life on earth. This was favourably endorsed during the 2005 World Summit and the UN General Assembly when it was realised that biodiversity has a role to play in easing the incidence of poverty and hunger, a target set for 2015, thus placing trust in the convention as a key international instrument to conserve biodiversity. The Biodiversity Target of 2010 was one of four new targets that were subsumed into the Millennium Development Goals as suggested by the UN Secretary-General. The international community perceives targets and indicators that will assist in solving each nation's common problem and conflict by providing confidence to tackle their own issues. All signatory countries of the convention, of which Oman was one, committed themselves to fulfil the 2010 biodiversity target.

Considered as the third largest country on the Arabian Peninsula, the Sultanate of Oman's vast landscapes and seascapes host some of the richest biodiversities in the region. Its land covers expansive gravel desert plains and mountain ranges, and a long coastline of 3,165 kms, while the territorial seas are vast. The greater part of the country is arid except the



subtropical south, which supports most of the country's biodiversity. Its unique wildlife and vegetation in the north and central parts of the country share species with Iran and Pakistan, while those in the southern parts have an affinity with Africa.

Oman has varied ecosystems ranging from coastal plains, lagoons, deserts and mountains but four distinct habitat types are recognised: desert, mountain, agricultural/urban and aquatic. In terms of species diversity, recent estimates of species in select groups revealed:

- Macroalgae – 323
- Phytoplankton - 182
- Seagrasses and Plants - 1,299
- Invertebrates - 800 or more
- Fish - 991
- Amphibians and Reptiles - 93
- Birds - 546
- Mammals – 99

There is no official estimate on the number of cultivars or breeds of domestic species in the country, although some are already known for dates (46 cultivars), horses (350 purebreds) and forage and medicinal plants (60 taxa).

A number of Oman's biodiversity was categorised as protected species. Included in the endangered or Red List of the IUCN are the northern bald ibis, slender-billed curlew, hawksbill, leatherback turtle, Arabian leopard, Dhofar white-toothed shrew, two species of sawfish and three species of plants. In the vulnerable class are the sperm and humpback whales, with some other species being listed in the threatened or near threatened categories.

Endangerment has partially been brought about by loss of habitat through over grazing by competing livestock; poaching, pollution and accidents have also been identified as contributing to the decimation of wild fauna. Endangerment of flora has been brought about by erosion, alteration of wadi courses, saline intrusion into coastal agricultural lands, pollutants from pesticides and invasive species, among others. Demographic pressures are also contributing to the further depletion of biodiversity.

## The International Biodiversity Year of 2010

The world is celebrating life on earth and the value of biodiversity to everyone's existence. A kick-off activity was started on 8 January with the inauguration of Oman Environment Day with the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs (MECA) as the main sponsor. It was timed to coincide with the yearly celebration of Gulf ECO, which Oman regularly hosts. School children toured Al Qurm Nature Reserve in Muscat, with similar activities held in various parts of the country including Ras Al Hadd and the khwair reserves in Salalah. A one-day clean up of Daymaniyat beaches and coral reefs was a highlight and was attended by some students from Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). At the same time, a special three-day event was held for children during which they were given first-hand experience in transplanting mangrove seedlings. In a separate program, the local community, particularly women, also participated in planting mangrove tree seedlings, and a batch of college students had their own tree-planting event on another site. During all these events, souvenir T-shirts, caps, car shades and bags carrying messages of celebrating biodiversity were given out, to the delight of the participants.

Earth Day was celebrated on 22 April. A drawing/painting contest and stage play presentation by school children about biodiversity and the environment were held in Al Khuwair, and a small exhibition with contributions by several different ministries, such as MECA, the Ministry of Fisheries, the Ministry of Agriculture and Muscat Municipality, as well as companies from the private sector, was the focus. Some local businesses sponsored the program by providing free food and refreshments. The following day, forty girls from Al Sahwa School were sent to Al Qurm Reserve for a birdwatching activity. A number of boys from Ibn Al Nafis Basic Education School in Muscat also participated in orientation on mangrove planting in Al Qurm.

A photography exhibition on Oman's biodiversity was organised by MECA in cooperation with the Omani Society of Fine Arts. It was opened to the public on 18th May at the Crowne Plaza, Muscat, and showcased the country's rich natural resources, including forests, fisheries and wildlife. One hundred and twenty-eight people participated in the contest with forty entries being honoured. The photo exhibits created a deep appreciation and love of the country's biodiversity among the public, and the attractive and awesome portrayal of the biodiversity in the exhibition provided motivation to preserve Oman's heritage.

The International Day of Biodiversity was held on 22 May with a two-day exhibit at City Centre that was sponsored by the Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of Education. Materials for the exhibition were contributed by a number of ministries: Environment and Climate Affairs, Education, Tourism, Agriculture and Fisheries with the able participation of SQU and the Environment Society of Oman. MECA also participated in a similar exhibit held at the Health Centre in Al Khawd with the cooperation of local community. The topic of the exhibit was Health and the Environment.

World Environment Day was held on 5 June but was celebrated the following day, after Cyclone Phet had moved on. In addition, a symposium was held at SQU, which was attended by various ministries and some faculties. It was jointly sponsored by the Center for Environmental Studies and Research at SQU and MECA. A mini exhibit of posters and other printed material was on show in the lobby.

June 17 was the International Day for Combating Desertification and MECA observed the day through participating in the opening ceremony of the Fog Collection Technology Project in the Niyabat of Qairoon Hairti in Salalah, a five-year project was undertaken by the ministry in collaboration with Mitsubishi of Japan. The water collection scheme is intended to maintain a green belt of a thousand trees, saplings and other vegetation during dry periods in the hope of arresting desertification in fragile areas.

Coinciding with the Khareef Festival in Salalah, MECA's Regional Office will mount a special exhibition to celebrate the International Year of Biodiversity. A mangrove-planting program will also be conducted. Similarly, a symposium on will be coordinated with a number of Ministries and non-governmental groups. Arab Environment Day has been planned for 14 October, while a related program will coincide with Oman's National Day on 18 November. This year's biodiversity festivities will conclude with an event that is expected to be held in mid December.



Frankincense Tree



## Resorting to Biodiversity Steps to Achieving ISO 14001 Certification

Kate Jones

Director of Communications, Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa



Biodiversity initiatives are designed to implement the '4 R's' of biodiversity: Retain what is significant; Restore habitats that have been degraded; Replace habitats that have been lost; and help Recover species that are at risk.

Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa has been fully committed to the environment since the resort opened in February 2006. A series of measures and 'green hotel initiatives' have been implemented to minimise any adverse impact of daily operations on the surrounding flora and fauna, as well as the development of dedicated Environmental Management Systems for the resort as part of the process towards ISO 14001 Certification, which is the ultimate culmination of these initiatives in working towards being a true environmentally friendly hotel establishment and conforming to internationally set environmental standards.

ISO 14001 is a series of voluntary standards covering various aspects of environmental management and procedures that address environmental, or 'green', issues including energy and water consumption, and solid and water waste disposal. The hotel's environmental policy focuses on five core elements — commitment, prevention, compliance, communication and continuous improvement.

In recognition of the implementation and effects of the Environmental Management Systems, Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa became the first hotel in Oman to be awarded the ISO 14001:2004 Certification on 16 March 2010.

Some of the key environmental management plans in place at the resort range from the reduction of paper usage, housekeeping toiletries, cleaning chemical usage and electricity in certain areas, as well as closely monitored and



Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa

controlled solid waste management and emission of natural resources. Many of these plans can be implemented by using simple measures which, in the hospitality industry, ensure minimal impact on the guests' experience and, at the same time, assist the continuous management and improvement of environmental impacts.

In the early stages of the planning and implementation of Environmental Management Plans, initial audits were carried out to identify possible environmental impacts and the findings, which led to the application of innovative methods and strategies, including a series of 'Best Practice' procedures that are followed on a daily basis by over thirty departments across the resort to monitor and improve the effectiveness of operational control measures. More than one thousand 'Best Practices' are currently in place and range from the reduction of water, gas and electricity usage where possible, controlled disposal of waste products, paper recycling, reduction of unnecessary printing and photocopying, switching off lighting, air-conditioning, computers and other electricity-powered items when not in use.

The hotel has both ISO and Corporate Social Responsibility steering committees, which conduct weekly meetings to promote continuous awareness among their hotel colleagues, provide updates on initiatives being carried out and identify any potential new areas in the immediate environment where existing methods and strategies could be applied to contribute to the continued protection of the environment. Fourteen of the hotel's employees are also officially certified auditors as accredited by the United Registrar of Systems.

The official ISO 14001 certification does not mean that all plans and daily practices can cease as there must be continuity and sustainability to ensure the ongoing compliance to standards and the continued protection of the environment. By applying constant monitoring and measuring all related aspects identified as part of Environmental Management Plan definitions, mandatory internal and external audits will ensure that the targets are achieved and meet the benchmarks set at the initiation stage of the ISO 14001 agreement on the design of the Environmental Management Systems.

The effectiveness of the entire program can only really be proven over time with the analysis of the natural resources savings in monetary terms and measurable data. For example, a huge reduction in the use of paper will ultimately reduce the number of vehicles travelling to the resort, and in turn, reduce vehicle fuel consumption. These actions will, in effect, have a chain reaction to the suppliers and manufacturers of items, for which the need is reduced.



As a company, Shangri-La Hotels & Resorts has long been involved in initiating green hotel initiatives in all its hotels and resorts around the world and, as part of the group's Corporate Social Responsibility, the implementation of ISO 14001 has been a mandatory goal for all worldwide properties. At the initiation stage of any resort projects, the implementation of the construction and eventual operations are always considered and measures are taken to adhere closely to the local governmental legislations with regards to any possible environmental impact.

A newly implemented system can only be successful if it is driven, and Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa continues its commitment to support the protection of the environment on a daily basis with established policies and procedures, as well as identifying potential new ways to contribute to environmental management.



## Biodiversity and Responsible Tourism In Musandam

Ali Khalifa Al-Abdulsalam

Environment & Social Responsibilities Officer, Six Senses Hideaway Zighy Bay



At Six Senses Hideaway Zighy Bay, we are committed to operating a sustainable development by reducing our negative environmental and social impact and contributing our resources to the local community so that future generations will be able to experience the beauty of Zighy Bay, its nature and culture. We recognise that accommodation, dining experiences, spa treatments, excursions, sports and adventures have an impact on the environment and we are, therefore, committed to reducing the impact from those activities as well as continuously improving our sustainability and benchmarking efforts. One of our core values is to be in harmony with the environment and our cultural surroundings, and to conserve the natural heritage and biodiversity of the ecosystems in which we live.

The cultivation of date palms represents a central source of income for the local community in Zighy village and has played a crucial role in the development and spread of communities throughout the Middle East and Africa. In Zighy Bay the date palms have been conserved around the resort ensuring birds and other species have a habitat to live in. Palm leaves are commonly used in handicrafts and the midribs from the fronds make effective building materials, which are used throughout the resort.

The area in which Zighy Bay is located is renowned for its impressive diversity of marine life, which ranges from exotic reef fish to schooling barracuda, turtles and reef sharks, and our dive sites boast an array of hard and soft corals splashed with colourful sponges. In order to support the marine biodiversity and coral reefs, we cooperate with the Emirates Diving Association by taking part in the Reef Check Project, which provides a comprehensive view of reefs and gives a complete picture of coral reef health. Furthermore, in order to avoid the needless destruction of coral reefs mooring buoys will be



Six Senses Hideaway Zighy Bay

placed at dive sites in Oman's waters in order to raise awareness about the importance of using them. The mooring buoys will be deployed with the help of the Environment Society of Oman and the exact sites will be chosen depending on funds and logistics.

On December 2009, Six Senses Hideaway Zighy Bay teamed up with a group of experts from across the world to carry out an in-depth study of the Musandam Peninsula's unique coral reefs. Scientists and volunteers from a number of different countries, including Oman, the UAE, the UK, the USA, Germany and Brazil, conducted a detailed study of the reef in order to establish its current condition and the effects of human activity. Biosphere Expeditions, the international award-winning conservation organisation, and Zighy Bay conducted an educational expedition to raise awareness of the environmental and ecological necessity for conserving the reef. Staff from Six Senses Zighy Bay were involved in the expedition, which also ran an outreach and educational program for local children and fishermen focusing on the value of marine resources and local livelihoods and how to protect them. The team visited children and local fishermen in remote villages of the peninsula to distribute educational materials and talk about the importance of the reefs for sustaining local livelihoods. The expedition team also established a relationship with the Ministry of Education, enabling the distribution of educational books to schools on the peninsula.

Commenting on the project, Tara Hammond, Environment & Social Responsibilities Officer at Six Senses Zighy Bay said, 'This is a project that is very close to all our hearts here at Zighy Bay. We took part with a view to being able to give the reefs around Musandam better protection through education and capacity building. At Six Senses, we believe in long-term investment, sustainability and preservation of the environment wherever we operate and because coral reefs are under threat globally, this project is a good example of our commitment.'

Dr Matthias Hammer, founder and Managing Director of Biosphere Expeditions, says of the reefs, 'The Musandam Peninsula is a place of international importance that deserves our attention. Our expedition has found that siltation (for example from construction) and coral bleaching are not a problem and that hard coral cover is slightly above the global average. This is good news. More worrying, however, is that fish numbers and general biodiversity were low, probably due to overfishing, the 2008/2009 red tide and category five cyclones, such as Gonu in June 2007, add further stresses to the fragile reef ecosystem. Other stresses are coral damage due to boat anchors, as well as trash and fish nets. Despite this, the reef life of Musandam is really quite amazing and definitely deserves further study and protection for future generations and local livelihoods.'



Six Senses Hideaway Zighy Bay

Accidentally introduced invasive species can cause major damage. In Zighy Bay no foreign flora or fauna have been introduced to the resort.

While villas and facilities are designed to maximise energy savings, we need the help of guests to further reduce water, energy and resources consumption to further reduce the negative impact on the environment. Burning fossil fuel to generate energy releases greenhouse gasses, which adds to the greenhouse effect, which, in turn, increases global warming. At Six Senses we are currently working on several projects to upgrade systems in order to use renewable energy and reduce our energy usage. We are encouraging the use natural ventilation instead of air-conditioning, but when it is necessary to use air-conditioning, we ensure that doors and windows are closed. We also encourage minimal use of water, especially hot water, and energy by making sure lights and appliances are turned off whenever possible.

Laundry is one area where there is a high use of resources: energy to desalinate and heat water, run the washing machines and dry and iron clothes. In addition, the use of detergents is required. We try to minimise energy and chemicals consumption through the use of energy-efficient procedures and eco-friendly products, and encourage guests to try and reduce their laundry requirements, including the changing of bed linen, to save on water and detergents.

The goal of Six Senses Resorts & Spas is to make the entire Six Senses portfolio not just carbon neutral in on-site operations by 20/20, but to actually implement programs that will result in a net absorption of CO<sub>2</sub>. In other words, Six Senses' properties will emit no material amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in their operations and, additionally, renewable energy will be used to provide neighbouring communities with a zero carbon emission source of power. Six Senses will, thus, become not carbon neutral, not zero carbon or carbon free, but DECARBONISING.

In order to enable Six Senses to set effective strategies for mitigation, reduction and the offsetting of emissions, a bespoke Six Senses Carbon Calculator has been developed modelled on the Greenhouse Gas Protocol, which will ensure, as mandatory, far less carbon emissions than most other companies.

Based on the results of the Carbon Calculator a carbon tax will be implemented, which will be used to enable carbon mitigation by investing in projects that replace fossil fuel energy with clean energy sources such as solar and wind energy or biodiversity restoration such as reforestation. To enable this, Six Senses have forged a partnership with The



Musandam Peninsula

Converging World, a non-profit organisation that generates clean energy in developing countries and re-invests into clean energy and community development. At present, the program enables carbon mitigation by substituting coal-fired power plants with 1.5 MW Suzlon® wind turbines in Tamil Nadu, South India. During its twenty-year lifespan, one Six Senses wind turbine generates approximately 80,000 megawatt hours of clean, renewable electricity, averting the production of 70,000 ton of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere. This figure will, however, be doubled due to 75% of energy sales being invested in new wind turbines and 25% in a number of local community projects.

Six Senses is committed to protecting the environment in many ways. Prior to October 2008, well-known brands of bottled water were imported from thousands of miles away, with transportation creating carbon dioxide. Now, the resort purifies and bottles its own Six Senses Drinking Water through reverse osmosis, UV light and re-mineralisation. Re-usable glass bottles have replaced plastic bottles, creating a plastic-free environment.

As of November 2009, 50% of the income from sales of the resort's water has been donated to provide clean water for people who do not have access to any. It is estimated that 1 billion people worldwide do not have access to safe drinking water, 2.5 billion people lack access to basic sanitation services and 4 children die of water-related diseases every minute. The paradox is that according to the Earth Policy Institute, a doubling of the world's USD 15 billion annual spending is required to reach the goal set. However, this is a fraction of the USD 100 billion that is spent on bottled water annually.

The three organisations that Six Senses Resorts & Spas support as a group are:

- Water Charity — <http://www.watercharity.org/>
- Thirst-Aid — <http://www.thirst-aid.org/>
- Play Pumps — <http://playpumps.org/>

By supporting these non-profit organisations we hope to spread our contribution over different parts of the world to improve the human rights and dignity of individuals by providing them with resources that will impact positively upon their health and wellbeing.





# Towards A Responsible Tourism Policy

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Gautam Broota  
General Manager, Zahara Tours



Tourism has an immense influence on the economic and social fabric of a nation and it is, therefore, vitally important that it is directed in such a way that has a positive influence, the benefits of which are manifold. It is critical for all tourism-related organisations to put together a Responsible Tourism Policy for guidance as part of the role they have to play.

Getting down to the basics, tourism is about people visiting a destination for a good time, relaxation and enjoyment. There is also the possibility that they may wish to learn about another culture, visit historical monuments and view nature's amazing landscapes. Local operators are, on the other hand, running a business and are responsible for fulfilling the tourist's desires, as well as ensuring they make a decent profit.

An organisation embracing 'best practices' in responsible tourism will find that they not only create a positive influence on the tourist, earning respect for the individual and his organisation, but also ensure the availability of resources for future generations. People today are conscious about contributing to, rather than destroying natural resources after learning how rampant and erratic development have led to endangering species, thus robbing future generations of that richness. Organisations must, therefore, believe in and embrace responsible tourism as a first step, then other steps towards the target follow naturally.

Zahara Tours were pioneers in tourism in Oman and have, over the years, built up a strong reputation in delivering quality services to their clients. The company started way back in 1971 when the green issues were only a minor consideration, although even back then they felt responsible for all their actions. Zahara has, therefore, made several policy decisions that have helped in making its contributions felt and ensuring it is considered a 'responsible' tourist organisation.



## Our People

Tourism is a 'people' business — people looking after people. People are the biggest assets of any organisation. During briefings our colleagues are all made aware of the company's policies and training ensures that they understand the reasoning behind those policies so that they wholeheartedly accept them and act accordingly.

Regular meetings take place between team members on the development of each program offered to tourists and it is not surprising, therefore, that suggestions for improvements sometimes even come even from junior colleagues.

Since our guides and drivers are on the road at all times, we ensure that they receive professional first aid and safety driving training at regular intervals. Charity is also encouraged so that the team is aware that we contribute to society. This also helps create a sense of fulfillment.

Rewards act as excellent motivation and we not only reward team members but also immediate family members if they have excelled, for instance in the fields of education, sport, etc. This makes the Zahara family larger than just our team members and encourages them to support initiatives, so spreading the goodness.

## Our Environment

Our colleagues are made aware of the fragility of environment and the importance of sustaining it and they are made to feel responsible for looking after and caring for the it. For instance, litter is brought back to the city ensuring that biodegradable and non-biodegradable items are identified, separated and suitably disposed of. In the office, printing is only done when absolutely necessary and we always recycle paper. We also always ensure that energy wastage is minimal.

## Our Excursions

The excursions we offer tourists always appeal to their senses and local flavours include touch, smell and sight. Visitors are driven in safe, well-equipped, well-maintained vehicles in the company of knowledgeable, friendly, caring and professional guides, who are always locals. We encourage our guides to share a healthy exchange of thoughts as well as traditions and customs, which encourages and develops friendliness between people of different nationalities, removes any misconceptions and improves relationships, thus building on the very basic and the most important benefit of tourism.

Fresh local food is offered in each area of Oman visited and interaction with local people and supporting local small enterprises involved in handicrafts and other local produce is encouraged. Part of the guide's important role is to provide information that helps the tourist gain a better understanding of local cultures and traditions. All our guides are highly trained and have in-depth knowledge of each destination. They are also familiar with local stories and anecdotes, giving an extra dimension to each trip.

As tourism continues to grow in Oman and as we look inwards at our role of responsible tourism, we continually new ways to go forward and to this end we are planning to grow organic vegetables on some agricultural land and participate in the date tree planting drive.

We also plan to introduce a way of measuring our carbon footprint and how we can not only offset but also contribute to keeping our environment in good shape.



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