

The mauritius as a green destination tourism essay



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Fifty years ago, tourism was a word rarely used by most people. However, over the time, it has witnessed a dramatic transformation into a multifaceted activity. Travel and tourism have been confined to a privileged few, namely the rich at the early time. Now, tourism has grown to such dimensions and importance that it is regarded as one of the fastest growing industry in the world, transforming into a mean of development for several countries, including many Small Island Developing Countries (SIDS) like Mauritius (UNWTO, 2011). Today, it is understood by people all over the world, many regard holidays as part of everyday life and foreign travel is taken for granted. Consequently, holidays making has become a booming business. Tourism and hospitality industry is now recognized as the world's largest and fastest growing industry, as it is estimated that between 1950 and 2004, tourism activities have increased from 25 million to 763 million worldwide, with an estimation of 1.6 billion by 2020- an average annual rate of about 6.5 percent (WTO, 2004).

Profile of Mauritius

Mauritius, an island on the outskirts of tropical Africa, has a nice card to play as a tourism destination and it is endowed with resources and has the potential to be a green destination. Mauritius surrounded by cobalt blue seas with long beaches and soft and silvery sand makes the island an ideal tourist attraction. Mauritius is a fascinating island which is loaded with historic sites, cultural diversity, geographic variations and nature. The Aapravasi Ghat- the Immigration Depot where indentured laborers disembarked, was declared as a World Heritage Site by the UNESCO in 2006. Later on in 2008, Le Morne Cultural Landscapes- which encompasses a natural fortress that was used as

a retreat for escaping slaves in the island in the 18th and early 19th century was nominated as World Heritage Site. Black River Gorges National Park is on the tentative list of Mauritius to be nominated by UNESCO as World Heritage Site.

1. 2 Mauritius as a green Destination

Across the globe, public is increasingly concerned about environment issues, thus tourism destinations are realizing that adopting green practices and green management are rapidly becoming a strategic tool that can enhance a destination's competitive advantage. The facts that people are beginning to look at green practices in a whole new way; it is a must to involve sustainability in the hotel industry. The perception of green has change; it has gone from a fringe movement to a mainstream. The tourism market has been diversifying into different sub segments in order to respond to the exact needs and wants of their customers.

Tourism is regarded as the main economic pillar of Mauritius, indeed the Travel and Tourism industry brings many positive impacts in Mauritius but the fact that alongside with these advantages, other factors like climate change, pollution and effects of tourism practices have also created a hot issue in the Tourism arena. The negative impacts of tourism activities has resulted in an increasing demand of " green destination", meaning destination where there are visible efforts of protecting and sustaining the environment by dealing with issues like carbon emissions, bio diversity conservation, resources usage, water supply and waste management. It can

be said that the tourism and the environment sustainability concept are visibly becoming natural partners.

Green tourism, for the past couple of years, has been a crucial factor for tourists while opting for a destination. Mauritius has several sites that encourage green tourism such as Pamplemousses Garden (it ranks among the most famous botanical gardens in the world with its giants water lilies and evocation spice plants), Domaine Les Pailles (a natural park spreading over 3000 acres at the foot of a mountain range), Casela Bird Park (which stretches over 25 hectares and contains more than 140 species of birds from five continents), Black River Gorges, Ile aux Aigrette and among others.

A green destination can contribute to favourable behavioural intentions: intentions to revisit or an intention to offer positive recommendations to others.

1. 3 Problem Statement

Although Mauritius is heavily dependent on income derived from tourism, it is important that the country's natural resources be maintained for future generation to experience. Therefore, going green is a key component of the next phase of change in the industry. To better analyze the relevance of Mauritius in relation to green destination, the concept must clearly be defined: Green Tourism may be defined as " In short, green tourism is all about adapting to and mitigating climate change in relation to tourism, about green market, green programmes, green practices and among others. Originally, the term " green" related in business operations to environmental matters but now it embraces all aspects of sustainable development.

Mauritius hosted 925 000 tourists excluding transit and cruise passengers in 2011, whereas in the year 2010 the arrival rate was 898 000. Although there is an increase of 3% which may seem respectable at first sight but, however, it pales in comparison to double digit growth rates earned by Indian Ocean peers, for example Maldives +18%, Seychelles +11% and Sri Lanka +31%. Mauritius registered a decline which was partly offset by greater penetration into Eastern Europe and Asia. Mauritius has plunged from a dominant 41% to 33% of Indian Ocean market in just two short years. The tourists arrival for 2012 was 938 000 and the year 2012 was a difficult year wherein Europe slipped back into recession and this recession is unlikely to be resolved any time soon. It is feared that 2013 may be as harsh as 2012.

However, tourism has not reached the end of the journey; it finds itself at a critical juncture where Mauritius has to diverse to a new market segment which is the green market. Mauritius must realize that in order to stay competitive, becoming green must be a principal element of branding and marketing policies. Failing to adopt such an approach may mean losing a loyal customer base.

By advertising Mauritius as a green destination, the tourism industry will show their environmental responsibility of tourist operations to attract green tourists and improve their standard with customers.

1. 4 Aims and Objectives of the research

Green tourism has been identified as one of the most important economy driver for most developing countries. My objective is to market Mauritius as a

green destination to benefit from competitive advantage. Therefore, my aims are:

To explore the reasons why Mauritius should be promoted as Green-destination

To explore the possible ways to build up a sustainable image of the country

To focus on the potential ways for establishing green tourism that can benefits local community

To examine on some critical issues which could act as barriers from benefitting from green tourism

In particular based on the research findings, I will offer recommendations in the field of green tourism in Mauritius

1. 5 Organisation of the study

This study is organized into five chapters listed as below:

Chapter one: deals with the background information, problem statement, research aims and objectives

Chapter two: provides a review of the literature on Green Destination

Chapter three: presents the methodology of the study, explains the steps involved in developing research design, sampling and data collection procedures

Chapter four: includes and presents the findings and results in the statistical analysis

Chapter five: summarise the whole study with a conclusion and recommendation.

LITTERATURE REVIEW

The modern tourists opt for green tourism: Green Tourism, synonymous in meaning with eco-tourism is “ responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people” (TIES, 1990), as they want to lower their carbon footprint. Nowadays, customers no longer accept just linen and towel reuse programs as being enough green practices in the green destination concept. They consider factors that are leading to energy efficiency, a proper waste division, procurement, and water conservation (Heisterkamp, 2009; Wolff, 2008). Tourism destinations and tourism industry need to position themselves to meet these challenges and take advantage of new opportunities arising from changing consumer preferences as well as changing environmental and business practices.

Green Research within Hospitality Industry

“ Buying a certificate doesn’t make you green” said Lyndall De Marco, executive director, International Tourism Partnership, The Prince of Wales International Business Leaders Forum.

“ Being green begins with a thought process” De Marco said. “ What makes hotel sustainable involves an integrated, holistic process that encompasses
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site use, water and energy use, materials and resources, operations and community and social relations.” (DESIGN: Patricia Sheehan, Hotel Design Managing Editor)

The global environmental certification program for the travel and tourism industry was developed in 1996 by three international organizations: the World Travel & Tourism Council, the World Tourism Organisation and the Earth Council. These organizations jointly launched an action plan entitled “Agenda 21 for the Travel & Tourism Industry: Towards Environmentally Sustainable Development.” Subsequently, “Green Globe,” a benchmarking, certification and performance-improvement program based on the Agenda 21 principles, was created. This program identifies the environmental and developmental issues which threaten the economy and ecological balance, and presents a strategy for transition to more sustainable development practices. Hotels receive “Green Globe” certification by addressing major environmental issues in key areas including: greenhouse emissions, energy efficiency, management of freshwater resources, ecosystem conservation, and waste water and solid waste management.

Reasons to go for Green Destination:

Eco-tourism is not a new phenomenon. Nature-based tourism has a long tradition (Ousby, 2002). Modern forms of eco-tourism became popular in the 1980s but can be traced back to the wildlife conservation reserves in Kenya opening to tourists in the 1960s (Honey, 2009). Academic study of eco-tourism has grown steadily over the past two decades (Jayawardena et al., 2008). Enthusiasm for the issue reflects the segment’s buoyancy over the

past 20 years (Mastny, 2001, The International Ecotourism Society, 2006) and greater consensus on the meaning of key concepts (Horobin, 1996). A destination's environment, often a core component of its image, is a key factor motivating tourists' destination choice and loyalty (Meng and Uysal, 2008; Hosany et al., 2006). With rising concern over the impacts of global warming, there is a danger that tourism operators and destination marketing organizations (DMOs) will exaggerate their eco-credentials.

Consumer Demand

The last few years have seen a considerable increase in consumer awareness of green tourism, partly due to extensive media coverage. Consumers are increasingly seeking environmentally friendly products and have a greater understanding of the impacts of green practices and climate change. There are an increasing number of consumers who are willing to change their actions in relation to these issues, and the tourism industry can target these consumers to gain a competitive advantage.

A range of studies, three of which are referenced below, have been undertaken to look at the correlation between environmental impacts of tourism and changes in consumer behavior. The studies have investigated the gap between what people who have changed their behavior or are willing to pay more for a green experience. Tourists are increasingly demanding that destinations be pollution-free as well as interesting. Consumer awareness regarding green tourism has also fuelled concern among some travelers and made them reluctant to undertake tourism activities such as long-haul travel.

In May 2008, a joint Commonwealth and State study into consumer awareness found that although consumers feel that the environment is of major importance, they have the tendency not to take responsibility for environmental issues. Many also feel that travel is a compensation to be enjoyed with carefree and without any tension that they are causing any harm to the environment. Their main purpose is to enjoy. The study notes that there is a difference between attitudes and behaviours for approximately 44 percent of those surveyed.

However, supporting the findings of the 2007 Lonely Planet Travellers' Pulse Survey (24, 500 respondents worldwide) found the following in relation to consumer demand:

84 percent of respondents said they would consider offsetting their emissions in the future (3 percent had done so in the past).

90 percent of people said they would or might purposefully travel in a low impact way; and

93 percent of people said they would or might purposefully partake in environmentally friendly travel in the future.

A Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC) study also found out that 70 percent of tourists surveyed indicated that they would change their travel pattern or plans in the future to be more 'green'.

Another study conducted in India which surveyed Indian consumers about their attitudes towards green practices in the tourism industry showed that 22 percent of the respondents seek out environmental properties (Manaktola <https://assignbuster.com/the-mauritius-as-a-green-destination-tourism-essay/>

& Jauhari, 2007). In the United States, 43, 000, 000 travelers are environmentally concerned (“ Greening’ your travel experience,” 1998). Gustin and Weaver (1996) found that 73. 7 percent of respondents considered themselves “ environmentally conscious consumers;” while 54. 3 percent thought of themselves as “ environmentally conscious travelers”.

Competitive Advantage

Green destinations are becoming increasingly popular due to the current environmental crisis that is occurring worldwide. It has become obvious that the tourism industry does more than its share in damaging and exploiting environmental resources. As a result, more and more tourists are looking for destinations following practices to protect environment. Becoming a green destination can be the foundation for a great marketing strategy and the first step in marketing is providing consumers with what they or need. A growing consumer base exists for green destinations, and marketing the green practices of a destination can help to position it distinctly in the market place. Therefore, going green makes each property unique, and furthermore creates a competitive advantage. “ Sustainable competitive advantage exists with the ownership or a valuable resource that allows the organizations to perform better or more efficient than their competitors” (Graci & Dodds, 2008, p. 256).

For tourism industry, green programmes can provide a competitive advantage, as long as green activities are still optional in the market. Eventually, green practices are becoming a baseline requirement, because the cost of non-renewable energy continues to increase. Therefore, proactive

tourism destinations with sustainable green models will have the strongest opportunity of achieving a competitive advantage (Ernst & Young Report: Hospitality Going Green). By doing and practicing environment friendly practices destinations gain positive publicity, customer loyalty, hence a definite competitive edge over competitors (Guskin & Weaver, 1996).

Green hotels create a competitive advantage for themselves by attracting and retaining their employees. Employee turnover is one of the biggest problems and expenses within the hotel industry. However, studies have shown that environmentally conscious hotels have greater employee loyalty. A Canadian study reported that employees are “ far more likely to identify with an employer whose principles and practices are in tune with current trends” (Graci & Dodds, 2008). Environmental initiatives have shown to be a valuable way to create passion and encourage team work to achieve a central goal (Graci & Dodds, 2008). Team work must be inspired from the top down in a hotel. The Orchard Garden’s general manager, Stefan Muhle, said “ you just can’t send out a memo,” (Dicum, 2007) “ All the staffs have to be included front to back. Their heart has to be in it” (Dicum, 2007). Each staff member needs to be educated in what the hotel is doing to achieve sustainability goals so they can not only participate, but also answer guest questions (Dicum, 2007). By educating staff members, including them, keeping them informed and challenging them to achieve goals, management of green hotels excites their staff and allows them to identify with their organization; which leads to lower turnover rates. Lower turnover rates in turn save the hotel expenses involved with recruiting, hiring, and training new employees. The competitive advantages realized by green hotels do not

stop with retaining employees; consumers do seek out green hotels. Green hotels are becoming increasingly popular due to the current environmental crisis that is occurring worldwide. Green hotels are few and far between across not only the United States, but also the world. Therefore, going green makes each property unique, and furthermore creates a competitive advantage. Therefore, “ sustainable competitive advantage exists with the ownership or a valuable resource that allows the organizations to perform better or more efficient than their competitors” (Graci & Dodds, 2008, p. 256). The Cedar House Sport Hotel, for example, has gardens on the roof of their hotel. The gardens attract local birds and insects for guests to observe, which in turn attracts more guests. However, the gardens also serve another purpose, as they cool the hotel during the summer months (Dicum, 2007).

Environment Toolkit

Unplanned or uncontrolled tourism can be a cause of negative impacts such as the physical deterioration of the destination facilities and the destruction of the natural environment. It can also create conflict at the destination areas on the issues of access, irresponsible behavior by tourists, competition for labour, soil, erosion and land prices (Mathieson and Wall, 1982).

Environment responsibility makes ecological sense, because keeping the environment pristine means that tourists will come to appreciate and enjoy the natural beauty of the destination. Gone are the days when going green necessarily meant making large investments in expensive technology.

The main reason for tourists to travel to a destination is to look for authenticity and real experiences (not artificial culture devised to deceive

tourists) such as wildlife, historic townscape, scenery. They also respect local identity, its special features that make a destination different and unique- this could be the Taj Mahal of India, or cobalt blue seas of Mauritius.

Tourism is among the highest contributor to green house gas emissions and these emissions are likely to increase with tourism sector growth. Tourism accommodation, transport, events and attractions consume significant amount of fuel, energy and water and can impact the natural environment. Of these, air transport is by far the largest contributor to tourism, accounting for 40% of the sector's contribution to co2 emissions globally. The introduction of low cost carriers airlines has improved accessibility to flights and opened travel markets but in turn has increased energy consumption.

These wildlife, historic townscape and scenery form the core products of tourism industry and if these core products continued to be harmed by the pollution or other environmental impacts, then the very foundation on which the industry stands will be eroded. The tourism industry in particular has recently received much attention with awareness of the negative impacts that are having on the environment (Kasim, 2004).

Emergence of Alternative Tourism

The government has announced a visitor target of 2 million by 2020, therefore Mauritius has recently been experiencing a surge in tourism and tourism-related activities, but this growth is also raising concerns that mass tourism development could lead to the destruction of the country's fragile coastline, fauna and flora.

There has been a narrow thinking in pursuit of increased number of tourists without seriously understanding the benefit that local communities derived from tourism or the real cost of tourism for the local community and environment being assessed. Setting targets for doubling the tourist arrival rate, which were believed to bring much more capital, but this is not the case.

Alternative forms of tourism tend to be geared to more responsible tourism. Different forms of alternative tourism serve different purposes. Most forms aim to reduce the adverse impacts of mass tourism. Some forms may aim to reduce or dissipate the influence of the existing industry that has developed under a strong western influence, while some aim only for a new or special market that have emerged as a result of shifts in global trade and the political relationship among different nations. Thus, alternative tourism can be seen both as a vision of the future and as an adaptation to mass tourism, however, are closely linked with the sustainable development paradigm.

The benefits of responsible tourism are not far off and unclear. They are achievable, and in most cases, can be perceived immediately. On the other hand, it may take years before the negative impacts of environmental neglect are felt.

By advertising Mauritius as a green destination, Mauritius will not just pursue an increase in tourist number but instead they will focus more on what kind of tourists want and these tourists will then be directed to the most appropriate areas as suitable.

Creating a Green Destination

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The breadth and depth of opportunity for a destination to establish green credentials is immense, and continues to grow. There are a number of ways in which a destination can work with the environment to create a unique, compelling, and competitive destination.

To name a few:

ECO-TOURISM:

One of the most popular approaches to 'Going Green' eco-tourism (as a globally recognized and celebrated niche offering) puts engaging with the natural environment of the destination at the centre of the offering.

Destinations which take pride in their abundant wildlife, flora and fauna have successfully created traveler experiences which make it possible to be immersed in and involved with nature as a tourism attraction which can be seen, felt and even contributed to. In addition, eco-tourism destinations offer the benefit of an enhanced sense of wellness from being in such a 'pure' environment (even if sophisticated in design, that is: Six Senses Wellness Resorts) with opportunity to partake in excursions focused on being at one with nature.

ECO-FRIENDLY:

Destinations which define themselves as 'Going Green' from an ecofriendly perspective openly and voluntarily adopt and express environmentally friendly practices which, while seemingly small, can in fact make a big difference when added up. The desire to be considerate of the impact of the industry (or parts of it) on the environment are there, with efforts made to do

the little things which are simply the right thing to do. Eco-friendly efforts include basic environmentally considerate changes to existing infrastructure, i. e. frequency of linen washing, keypads in hotel rooms to turn on/off power mains, increased air conditioner temperatures in large spaces, replacement of traditional light bulb to energy saving bulbs, selective recycling efforts (like grey water). Interestingly, destinations venturing into these even incremental practices will notice a positive impact on the bottom line.

ECO-POLICIES:

Getting more serious about the impact which the industry has on the environment, enforcement of eco-policies by governments and tourism corporations reflects the fundamental philosophy held by leaders of a destination and tourism business towards energy conservation and environmental responsibility. Enforcement of policy removes the window of choice for members of the Tourism community, making changes to existing and future tourism products and services – changes to increase energy efficiency and/or reduce wastage of resources – a must. These policies do not apply purely to destinations which exist within locations surrounded by greenery and teeming with wildlife. Even the most built-up, uber-urban, heavily-populated areas which could be described more as concrete jungles than even garden cities can successfully impose and activate green policies and incentives. Macau, as an example, has put in place a green hotel awards programme for international developers of resorts and casinos scrambling to get a piece of the action and place a bet on tourism growth in the new Asian tourism hot spot. The initiative by Macau's Environment Council (now Environmental Protection Bureau), which was introduced in 2007, drives

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across the industry the importance of environmental management in the hotel sector while giving high-profile, highly-respected recognition to those hotels mobilising environmentally sound management policies.

ECO-ENGINEERED:

Linked to the above, eco-engineering is the adoption of new generation technology and practices into new tourism products, services and developments, effectively making obsolete old, less energy-efficient methods. This increasing sensitivity to the design and development of tourism industry assets, particularly major structures such as airports, retail centres, theatres, hotels and conference centres, can have a dramatic effect on the impact which the industry has on the environment, both visibly and invisibly. The following eco-engineering concepts are just a few of the energy-smart and environmentally sensitive techniques increasingly being built into new T&T infrastructure:

- o Water heating: heat recovered from the hotel's air-conditioning system used to warm water for swimming pools; solar panels for water used in hotels and spas;

- o Temperature Control: solar glazing in windows and doors assists in maintaining constant interior temperatures;

- o Lighting: energy efficient lights and lamps; movement sensors for after-hour lighting in common areas and underground parking; keycard room power control;

- o Air conditioning: sensors automatically switch off air-conditioning in the bedrooms when doors to balconies or terraces are opened;

- o Irrigation: rainwater is directed off the roofs via an extensive underground pipe network to a large storage tank for use in the gardens;

Interestingly, initial investment into green design often proves to be a valuable revenue protector as operating costs can be dramatically reduced.

The green economy is a reality, a much needed and a deeply meaningful one.

Taking into account the above possible approaches to 'Going Green', and many others which exist, tourism industry leaders within both the public and private sector need to look closely at how they plan to, and often must, incorporate 'Going Green' into their tourism growth strategy, ethos, Brand and business models. Form follows function. Function follows philosophy