



DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP

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A B O U T U S



The Global Sustainable Tourism Council® (GSTC®) establishes and manages global sustainable standards, known as the GSTC Criteria. There are three sets: Destination Criteria for public policy-makers and destination managers, Industry Criteria for hotels and tour operators, and MICE Criteria for venues, event organizers, and events & exhibitions.

The GSTC Criteria form the foundation for GSTC's assurance role for Certification Bodies that certify destinations, hotels/accommodations, and tour operators as having sustainable policies and practices in place. GSTC does not directly certify any products or services, but provides accreditation to those that do. The GSTC is an independent and neutral USA-registered 501(c)3 non-profit organization that represents a diverse and global membership, including national and provincial governments, leading travel companies, hotels, tour operators, NGOs, individuals and communities - all striving to achieve best practices in sustainable tourism.



The Center for Responsible Travel (CREST) is a globally recognized nonprofit organization dedicated to transforming the way the world travels. Based in Washington, DC but with an international scope, CREST provides solutions, resources, and support to governments, policymakers, tourism businesses, and nonprofit organizations to confront tourism's most pressing issues.

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



The nonprofit Destination Stewardship Center (DSC) is a growing community of people involved in the intersection between tourism and stewardship of places. Founded as a program at the National Geographic Society, the DSC gathers and provides information on how tourism can help and not harm the natural, cultural, and social quality of destinations around the world. We seek to build a global community and knowledge network for advancing this goal.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

The fourth annual Destination Stewardship Yearbook is a compilation of articles from the 2023-2024 Destination Stewardship Report (DSR), co-produced by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), Center for Responsible Travel (CREST), and Destination Stewardship Center (DSC).

Each issue of the DSR highlights destinations that have embraced effective and holistic management, showcasing best practices in sustainable tourism and lessons learned along the way. The Destination Stewardship Yearbook celebrates the dedication of leaders driving these destinations forward. Together, their stories demonstrate how destination stewardship can foster ongoing positive impacts.

The inaugural chapter highlights Singapore, Park City, Utah, USA, and Baião, Portugal—each certified as sustainable tourist destinations by a GSTC-Accredited Certification Body. Their sustainability journeys reveal unique approaches and a longstanding commitment to destination stewardship.

The second chapter explores a stewardship approach to destination management, featuring the Bahamas' Destination Stewardship Councils, Durango's practical applications of destination stewardship, and Indigenous Guardian Programs as an effective destination stewardship tool.

Chapter three examines the theme of strengthening communities through inclusion and cultural heritage. It emphasizes the importance of preserving the personality of place, showcasing how cultural heritage enriches community identity, while highlighting Visit Lake Charles's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in building stronger communities. Additionally, the Indigenous Tourism eLibrary offers valuable guidance for destinations seeking tools and resources.

The fourth chapter delves into distinctive approaches to collaboration and conservation, highlighting a stewardship model involving over 60 businesses in Stockholm's historic Royal Djurgården. It also showcases an initiative in Chile that includes the children of Rapa Nui as key stakeholders. Additionally, the chapter reveals the value of geoparks and their potential to promote destination stewardship.

In the last chapter, two stories from Nepal and Australia illustrate resilience in navigating tourism challenges. It explores how architectural interventions address accommodation shortages in inland areas of the scenic Great Ocean Road region while examining the impact of natural disasters on tourism and the industry's role in recovery, particularly highlighting post-earthquake efforts in Gorkha, Nepal.



CHAPTER 1

FEATURED CERTIFIED DESTINATIONS



Certified Destinations Refers to Destinations Certified as Sustainable by GSTC-Accredited Certification Bodies



SINGAPORE

CERTIFIED BY VIREO SRL

BY DONG LIMIN, DIRECTOR, TOURISM HUMAN CAPITAL AND SUSTAINABILITY,
SINGAPORE TOURISM BOARD

Located in Southeast Asia, Singapore is a vibrant City in Nature where large experiences come with small footprints. Singapore has made strides to push the boundaries in sustainability, leveraging technology and enhancing green skills of the tourism workforce. The island country is multicultural, and this diversity enriches Singapore's cultural tapestry. Singapore is certified by Vireo Srl, a GSTC-Accredited Certification Body.

SINGAPORE: A GLOBALLY CERTIFIED SUSTAINABLE URBAN DESTINATION

Since 2023, Singapore has been certified by Vireo SRL as a sustainable destination based on the [Global Sustainable Tourism Council GSTC Destination Criteria](#). Singapore is the first to apply the certification process on a country level. This milestone, led by the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), with the strong support of over 30 government agencies, industry associations, tourism stakeholders, members of academia and civil groups, cements Singapore's position as a leading sustainable destination.

Singapore is excited to host the [GSTC2024 Global Conference](#). We look forward to having meaningful conversations between international delegates and our local tourism stakeholders and we hope that collaboration opportunities between stakeholders across the tourism sector will be fostered to address critical sustainability issues.

A GLOBAL METROPOLIS AND CITY IN NATURE

Singapore stands out as a sustainable urban destination, offering visitors a unique blend of nature,

architectural wonders and innovative green solutions. The renowned Gardens by the Bay exemplifies Singapore's approach to sustainable development. It houses over 1.5 million plants, with its Supertrees serving dual purposes: they're vertical gardens and functional structures that harvest solar energy and ventilate the conservatories.



The Supertrees at Gardens by the Bay are sustainable vertical gardens housing over 162,900 plants of over 200 species.

The integration of nature and technology can also be seen throughout the city. The Oasia Hotel Downtown for instance, features an external facade that serves as a vertical garden to introduce biodiversity into the city. Such tourism offerings bear testament to how Singapore has pursued environmental sustainability practices while balancing urban development needs.

More than just a bustling metropolis, Singapore is also home to green spaces and natural parks, from tropical mangroves to scenic coastlines. Despite being land-scarce, the city is one of the greenest in the world and is home to four nature reserves, more than 350 parks and more than 300 km of Park Connectors. Singapore also has 155 hectares of skysrise greenery and the city's green cover currently stands at over 40%.



Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve is Singapore's first ASEAN Heritage Park, which is rich in biodiversity and serves as an important site for migratory birds.

Visitors can also explore Singapore's natural areas through various tours. Tour operators run tours that showcase the rustic side of Singapore, such as Let's Go Tours' [itinerary](#), to one of Singapore's offshore islands Pulau Ubin, with a visit to floating fish farms or *Kelongs*.

Beyond greenery, Singapore is a rich treasure trove when it comes to culture and heritage. Singapore's [hawker culture](#) was the nation's first inscription on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Another example is Singlish, a uniquely local slang that is an integral part of everyday life, blending English with Malay, Tamil and a variety of Chinese dialects.



Despite its humble origins, Singaporean hawker fare has earned praise from across the globe, with Michelin-starred dishes and recognition from UNESCO.

Visitors who seek authentic and meaningful travel experiences can explore local [neighbourhoods](#) and cultural enclaves, each with their own distinct flavour and history. To support local products, one can browse the [Made With Passion](#) platform, a national initiative to spotlight Singaporean products and over 100 local businesses. Fashion buffs can head to [Design Orchard](#), an integrated retail and incubation space in the heart of shopping belt Orchard Road to check out up-and-coming local designers, including brands that partake in sustainable practices.



The colourful shophouses of cultural enclave Katong-Joo Chiat tell of local peranakan culture.

Singapore aims to be an inclusive and accessible place for all. Accessibility upgrading and enhancing the built environment through the concept of Universal Design for buildings and public spaces play an important role in enabling the young, the old, and persons with disabilities to work, live and play. For example, The National Gallery Singapore has developed an [access guide](#), in collaboration with the Disabled People's Association, to support visitors with different access needs, including those with disabilities, mobility needs and parents with young children.

LOOKING AHEAD: SINGAPORE'S SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STRATEGY AND EMPOWERING THE TOURISM SECTOR

Today, Singapore continues its journey towards achieving greater strides in sustainability. The [Singapore Green Plan 2030](#) is a whole-of-nation movement to advance Singapore's national agenda on sustainable development. The Green Plan charts Singapore's ambitions and targets over the next 10 years, to achieve our long-term net zero emissions aspiration by 2050.

In line with the Green Plan, STB has developed a [Sustainable Tourism Strategy](#), which sets out actionable strategies for the tourism industry across

product development, industry guidance and workforce development, and amplifying Singapore's standing as a sustainable urban destination.

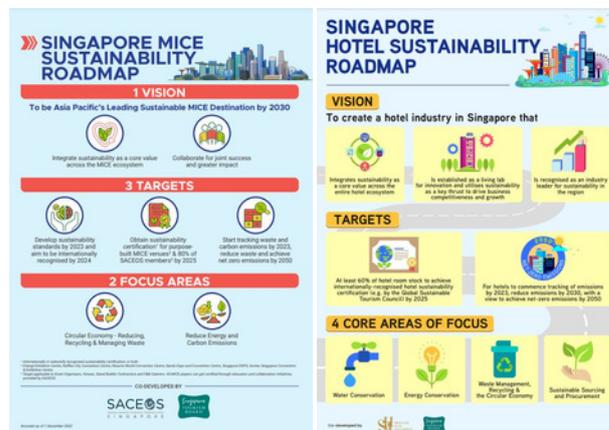
To support the Sustainable Tourism Strategy, the Tourism Sustainability Programme (TSP) will guide the tourism sector in building workforce capabilities and utilising technology to achieve sustainability goals. Since the launch of the TSP in 2022, over 30 companies have rolled out sustainability solutions across waste, water, energy and carbon emissions management. For example, Sofitel Singapore City Centre has upgraded from plastic bottles to filtered tap water in guest rooms. Gardens by the Bay has also partnered Circular Unite to optimise its waste management with the potential of increasing its existing recycling rates by 20%.

To drive such efforts, the tourism workforce must continue to grow its sustainability-related capabilities. The Sustainable Tourism Jobs & Skills Roadmap provides direction on the areas of upskilling such as identifying the 4 key green skills of training related to the GSTC Criteria, carbon management, green marketing and communications, and green procurement/supply chain management.

STB partners with tourism associations to create roadmaps and industry-specific standards, providing clear direction through setting national sustainability targets.

- The Hotel Sustainability Roadmap was launched in 2022, in collaboration with the Singapore Hotel Association. It targets at least 60% of hotel room stock to achieve internationally-recognised hotel sustainability certification (e.g. by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council) by 2025. Hotels see value in pursuing such certification, with Far East Hospitality, Pan Pacific Hotels Group and Millennium Hotels and Resorts achieving GSTC multi-site certification.
- The Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE) Sustainability Roadmap was also launched in 2022, in collaboration with the Singapore Association of Convention & Exhibition Organisers & Suppliers (SACEOS). One of its targets is to have all purpose-built MICE venues and 80% of SACEOS members having internationally or nationally recognised certification by 2025. We are on track to achieving both Hotels and MICE targets.

- Come early 2025, STB will release the Attractions Sustainability Roadmap with the Association of Singapore Attractions.



The MICE and Hotel Sustainability Roadmaps provide industry-specific direction, targets and focus areas for sustainability.

With more business travellers seeking sustainable options, GSTC in collaboration with STB and SACEOS, launched the GSTC MICE Criteria in March 2024 to guide the industry on sustainable practices. To augment Singapore's status as a leading sustainable MICE destination, SACEOS has also launched the MICE Sustainability Certification.

To become one of the world's most sustainable urban destinations - one where large experiences come with small footprints - Singapore will continue to push the envelope in sustainability, to build a City in Nature for both locals and visitors to enjoy.

For more information on the sustainability offerings Singapore has to offer, visit [our website](#).



Ms Dong Limin oversees the strategy and policy matters for human capital development in the tourism sector, and leads the initiatives in building a sustainable tourism sector in Singapore.



PARK CITY, USA

MOUNTAIN-IDEAL CERTIFIED

BY GREEN DESTINATIONS

BY MORGAN MINGLE & HALLE NISSEN, VISIT PARK CITY

Park City, Utah, nestled within the Wasatch Mountain range at nearly 7,000 feet in elevation, is about 30 miles east of Salt Lake City. Originally a traditional hunting ground for the Ute and Shoshone tribes and founded as a silver mining town in 1869, Park City maintains much of its historic character today, especially along its centrally located Main Street.

Renowned for its two world-class ski areas, Park City Mountain and Deer Valley Resort, this once sleepy mining town has become a hub for outdoor adventurers. Park City began attracting skiing enthusiasts in 1960 when a group of mining executives established a revenue stream “above” that of the now-abandoned silver mine beneath Park City Mountain. In the decades that followed, the town experienced a series of watershed events, each vastly raising its profile with travelers. In 2002, Park City hosted several winter Olympic events and will host again in 2034. While Park City is known for winter recreation, there are ample opportunities to explore during summer and fall. With over 450 miles of hiking and biking trails, this town of 8,400 residents has thrived as a year-round destination.

TENSION BETWEEN LOCALS & TOURISM

Park City has a history of attracting skiers, outdoor enthusiasts, and luxury travelers looking to connect with nature. By 2019, Park City was welcoming more than 600,000 visitors each year. Many locals began voicing their concerns related to traffic and visitors’ behavior. When COVID-19 hit, new challenges emerged in the form of a historic real estate boom and an influx of new residents, as affluent citizens fled neighboring coastal states for the mountains. Trailheads that were typically quiet began to seem

congested, childcare was filling up years in advance, and it started to feel more like an “us vs. them” situation among locals and tourists.



Family fall hike.

COMMUNITY BUY-IN

The strength and longevity of a destination’s tourism economy are in part connected to public support for tourism. Without strong pride in place, in the visitor experience offered and interest in sharing the place with others, the tourism economy will face challenges. As the natural bridge connecting tourism and our community, the Park City Chamber & Visitors Bureau recognized an opportunity to plan our journey toward destination stewardship and sustainability. The process began with a Destination Assessment by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, making us the 35th destination in the world to undergo this review. Next, we formed a Stewardship Council representing a diverse cross-section of stakeholders.

Research, a situation assessment, focus groups, public meetings, and online surveys rounded out the process and led to rigorous discussions around objectives, strategies, and initiatives. This finished plan is a comprehensive community vision distilled into seven objectives.



Exploring snowy winter trails on fat bikes.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLAN OBJECTIVES

We developed seven objectives to help represent the high-level categories of work our community is undertaking to achieve its vision of sustainable tourism. Each objective supports multiple Stewardship Principles and [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#).

1. Cultivate local pride and respect for the Park City/Summit County experience
2. Implement sustainable transportation, housing, water, energy and waste management policies and initiatives
3. Protect and manage our natural environment to enable sustainable outdoor recreation
4. Ensure the long-term resilience of Park City/Summit County's economy
5. Equalize the economic benefits and mitigate impacts of the visitor economy
6. Leverage messaging and programming to accelerate sustainable tourism
7. Foster the development and management of Park City/Summit County's art and culture tourism assets

Two years into implementing the Sustainable Tourism Plan, we are proud of our community's achievements. Highlights include:

- Elektron Solar, an 80 MWac solar facility in Tooele County, was completed to provide renewable power to Park City Municipal, Summit County Corporation, Park City Mountain, and Deer Valley Resort.
- All of our local trail managers, Mountain Trails, Basin Recreation, and PC Trails & Open Space Department, have collaborated to create a new, comprehensive [Park City Trails website](#) where visitors can easily find conditions for all trails,

view trailhead cameras, and learn the proper trail etiquette that helps preserve the land they enjoy.

- The Chamber Sponsored Employee Benefit Program allows employers with as few as two employees to avail themselves of these comprehensive benefits. The program offers excellent options for medical, dental, vision, and other ancillary benefits. The array of comprehensive coverage options reflects our belief that employees with high-quality health insurance are healthier, happier, and more productive, leading to greater engagement and less turnover, a benefit to our entire community.
- The [WE RIP](#) incentive program was created by the Housing Resource Center at Mountainlands Community Housing Trust to encourage local homeowners to rent to the local workforce in Park City, as it is increasingly difficult for our workforce to find affordable housing in our community. This program offers homeowners a FREE pair of Rossignol skis or snowboard and bindings if they put their home in the rental pool. Win-win!

LESSONS LEARNED

Sustainability is about preservation for future generations, but it's also about quality of life today. Destinations should never view stakeholders or their local communities as mere audiences for communications; rather, their voices and participation should be considered essential to any program's success. Below are a few more key lessons from our experience:

- Formalize community input - working with an independent research/consultant firm to gather surveys and manage town hall gatherings has proven to be an invaluable resource.
- Sustainability Tourism Grant - we want our local stakeholders involved and on board with our Sustainable Tourism Plan, so we created a grant! [The Sustainable Tourism Grant](#) was developed to fund programs, initiatives, promotions, and events that support the objectives outlined in the Sustainable Tourism Plan.
- Community alignment - keeping the locals informed about our progress and encouraging them to be part of the solution has been a key reason for our success so far.

For Visit Park City, the majesty of Utah's Wasatch Mountain Range will always be what makes our destination special and draws people in. For any green destination, our best advice is to discover and build your program upon true passion for what makes your destination unique.



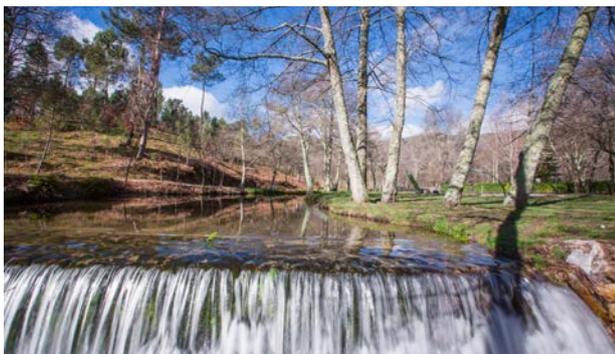
BAIÃO, PORTUGAL

CERTIFIED BY EARTHCHECK

BY PAULO PEREIRA, PRESIDENT OF BAIÃO CITY COUNCIL

Located in the north of Portugal, positioned between the Douro River and the Marão Mountains with an area of approximately 175 km², spread across 14 parishes, Baião is blessed by a huge variety of landscapes that range from rivers to mountains. The same mountains that for years made this territory difficult to access, are those that allowed the almost untouchable preservation of unique landscapes and ways of life in the region.

Between steep slopes, a vast forest that covers 70% of the territory and an ancient agricultural tradition, there are precious testimonies of an ancient human presence, in which civilizational layers overlap from prehistory to the present, with marks that define and are witnesses of the identity of this territory.



Oil River, an important tourist attraction, due to its clean waters and beautiful landscapes.

OUR JOURNEY TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

Our society and planet are living through crossroads, symbolized by an environmental crisis that is dangerously affecting the world due to climate change, jeopardizing this enormous ecosystem and the ways of life in our societies, as well as democracy itself. If this environmental situation doesn't jeopardize

humanity, it at least challenges us and calls for action.

The signs are everywhere. From changing weather patterns, which threaten food production, to rising sea levels, which increase the risk of catastrophic floods, and rising temperatures, which cause fires of gigantic proportions, the impacts of climate change are on an unprecedented scale.

We all have to do our part to reverse the signs.

The Municipality of Baião has long been committed to sustainable development, consolidating an ambitious, integrated, and holistic model to drive transformations in areas such as infrastructure, mobility, and green spaces. This approach results in communities with improved living conditions, greater inclusion, innovation, and job opportunities.

As a community, we have developed foundational projects to enhance our heritage and boost sustainable tourism, which is strategic and in balance with the environment and our intangible traditions. Only with one voice, by multiplying small actions that add value, will we be able to stop the transformations that put our very livelihood at risk.

This is also why, four years ago, we began the process of certifying the territory as a Sustainable Tourism Destination through EarthCheck, a certification body accredited by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, in adherence to the GSTC Destination Criteria.

The focus of this certification centres on balancing four pillars: environmental, socio-economic, cultural and sustainable management, in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. It's an ongoing process that involves concrete improvement objectives based on an action plan, which includes actions and projects for the sustainable enhancement of tourism assets, aligning them with the best practices being implemented worldwide.

This was a bold yet responsible step in defending our populations, sustainably promoting our territory, and fostering its economic and cultural development.

GREEN IS THE NEW DESTINATION

Baião's natural heritage is one of its greatest assets, and its valorisation is an unquestionable path towards common development. We have therefore committed to positioning ourselves at the forefront of environmentally responsible territories, with a vision of development that prioritises both people and the planet, benefiting the whole community.

Our municipality is characterized by countless natural values that invite you to visit. These include the three mountains - Marão, Aboboreira and Castelo - and the three rivers - Ovil, Teixeira and Douro. The Serra da Aboboreira Regional Protected Landscape and the Ovil River Rehabilitation and Valorisation project focus on these ecosystems, which we urgently need to recover and preserve.



The village of Mafómedes, Marão.

On the other hand, various heritage and archaeological values, such as the Eça de Queiroz Foundation, the Serra da Aboboreira megalithic complex, the Monastery of Santo André de Ancede, the vast religious heritage, handicrafts, museums and interpretive centres, and gastronomy, enrich the cultural heritage of the municipality of Baião, which must be preserved and shared with future generations.



Monastery of Santo André de Ancede.

It's been a long and challenging road, but a virtuous one. In line with the 2030 Agenda's goal of 'leaving no one behind', we know how to prioritise the most vulnerable. Baião is, above all, a Land of Affections.

We are all called upon to assume our role and responsibility in the defence of our common home. The same goes for preserving and guaranteeing a future for everyone. Ours and that of future generations.

To this end, we are counting on everyone's commitment and contribution along this path so that everyone, like José Saramago, Nobel Prize winner for Literature, can find in Baião a place to sit "on the sandy ground, pick between two fingers a tender stem that was born next to a post, and, bowing their heads, finally listen to their own heart."

Our motto is 'Baião, Natural Life'. Come and see us up close!

Find out more about Sustainable Baião at: <https://baiaosustentavel.pt/en/home/>

CHAPTER 2

A STEWARDSHIP APPROACH TO DESTINATION MANAGEMENT





Photo by Jorge Fernando

THE BAHAMAS DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP INITIATIVE: A CONVERSATION

BY KATHLEEN PITTMAN, PROGRAM DIRECTOR - CARIBBEAN, AND SPECIAL PROJECTS, GSTC & JANEL CAMPBELL, SENIOR PROJECT MANAGER, THE BAHAMAS MINISTRY OF TOURISM.

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 1

The Bahamas Family Islands have created not one but four destination stewardship councils and consistent communication, collaboration, and community engagement has been the key to their success. In 2023, the Bahamas Destination Stewardship Initiative won the Caribbean Tourism Organization's Destination Stewardship Award. GSTC Program Director Kathleen Pittman discusses the initiative with Janel Campbell, Senior Project Manager at The Bahamas Ministry of Tourism.

Kathleen Pittman: Congratulations to The Bahamas Family Islands on this prestigious CTO Award. Why is destination stewardship so important to the Ministry of Tourism and communities in The Bahamas?

Janel Campbell: The COVID-19 tourism stoppage hit local communities especially hard. The Ministry of Tourism has long prioritized empowering communities to take a greater leadership role in the development and management of tourism within their communities. Harnessing tourism for good and getting this recovery right is a top priority for the Family Islands, and the recent fiscal crisis has made a boot-strapped, cross-sector, and everybody-come-to-the-table approach more critical than ever before.

Tell us about The Bahamas Destination Stewardship Initiative.

The Bahamas partnered with GSTC in June 2020 to provide structural support and training to establish Destination Stewardship Councils ("DSCs"), following

GSTC Destination Criterion A1. The Tourism offices on each island initially acted as the Council Secretariat, guiding them in GSTC-led orientation, stakeholder mapping, and preparations for Council establishment. Through webinars, Councils are exposed to capacity building in tourism planning and development. The Ministry of Tourism has provided seed funding for the first projects that the Councils could then leverage to seek additional financial support. This approach has put communities in the driver's seat for rebuilding tourism on their terms. It also boosts resilience to future shocks, including regular changes in government, by putting civil society at the helm of destination stewardship.

Which islands have installed Destination Stewardship Councils, and how did these communities recruit the wide-ranging stakeholders needed for a thriving Destination Stewardship Council?

Four of The Bahamas Family Islands have Destination Stewardship Councils thus far: Eleuthera,

Exuma, Harbour Island, and South Andros / Mangrove Cay. GSTC's Stakeholder Mapping Tool was used to identify the many stakeholders across government, private sector, and community leaders we wanted to bring to the table. They were invited to a GSTC training and orientation on destination stewardship and DSCs, which piqued the interest of many. Once we had some core champions involved from each sector, and once they identified priorities from the GSTC Destination Criteria for their Councils to advance, they conducted targeted outreach to bring more organizations and community members to the Council.

Council Priorities identified aligned with various GSTC Criteria such as D9 which involves sustainable solid waste management, B7 focusing on the safety and security of visitors and residents traversing the streets, and C3 focused on the protection of intangible cultural heritage through documentation of destination history by consulting elders within the community.

What are some of the positive outcomes you and the communities are most proud of so far?

We at the Ministry of Tourism envisioned what success would look like at this early stage of the project, and we are very pleased with the progress. Four independent Destination Stewardship Councils are robustly operating on our islands with wide cross-sector stakeholder representation and partnerships. In addition to legally incorporating and effectively branding themselves and regularly engaging their community members, the Councils are well on their way with a mix of short- and longer-term projects that advance the GSTC Destination Criteria in their communities.



The volunteer crew from a recent community clean up project. [Photo courtesy of Ocean Aid 360]

Initial projects included sustainable waste management partnerships, protecting and interpreting cultural sites and assets, enhancing safety

and security by installing solar streetlights, and more. The Councils are also engaging in innovative marketing based on stakeholder involvement, strengthening resident buy-in and engagement while raising awareness of the Councils and destination sustainability. For example, one of the Councils held a competition to generate their Council's logo, which enhanced the Council's visibility as well as marketed the destination's sustainability initiatives. After two years of this initiative, some DSCs have already secured grants and/or partnerships with international NGOs for the execution of project work.

A year after forming, the Councils instituted simple monitoring and evaluation indicators to measure their performance in key areas based on input from their membership. The results of that exercise were positive, also yielding recommendations for improvement, which the Councils are following. The monitoring indicators focus on the level of stakeholder engagement, Council stability, and effectiveness of capacity-building exercises conducted during the project. The indicators are standardized across Councils, which further enhances communication and collaboration among Councils as well as good practice sharing and troubleshooting support where needed. The monitoring indicators also serve as a ready data set for Councils to communicate progress to external audiences, including actual and potential donors and the public. Importantly, the progress measurement has helped the Councils identify areas where their members would like to see improvement and keeps communities and membership at the center of decision-making, which is fundamental to the sustainability of this effort.

Lastly, I'll mention that we bring the Destination Stewardship Councils together every six months for a Conclave to share their progress, challenges, and lessons learned. This peer-to-peer sharing has been tremendously valuable to inspire, energize, and mentor each other. Every presentation from the Councils at the Conclave spark pride in communities taking ownership of destination stewardship and accomplishing so much in so little time, and I am confident the best is yet to come.

You said the best is yet to come, what can we expect next from The Bahamas Destination Stewardship initiative?

Involvement and empowerment of tourism stakeholders in decision-making about their community development and management are at the heart of The Bahamas Destination Stewardship

Initiative. The initiative engages cohorts of Family Islands on a staggered basis—so we can replicate and scale the approach, applying lessons learned. Currently, we are continuing the support of the original cohort of Councils, while working with GSTC to build capacity for the launch of an additional four Destination Stewardship Councils this year. We hope to work with yet a third cohort of Family Islands to set up Destination Stewardship Councils after that—with the aim of supporting as many communities as are ready within The Bahamas to adopt and become part of our growing network of communities taking charge of their community’s development, practicing responsible tourism and encouraging environmental conservation for better stewardship of their patrimony and preservation of that patrimony for the next generation.



DURANGO: DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP IN ACTION

BY SARAH-JANE JOHNSON
CEO/SUSTAINABLE TOURISM SPECIALIST, ROADMAP CONSULTING

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 3

Spurred on by the post-pandemic era of travel, tourism organizations are moving away from a singular function of marketing destinations. Some have begun to incorporate “destination stewardship” into plans, functions, and even job titles. Sarah-Jane Johnson reports on how one of Colorado’s renowned recreational destinations has gone about doing it.

A COLORADO COMMUNITY SHOWS HOW TO GET STARTED

Increasingly, tourism organizations have been adopting the identity of destination management or stewardship organizations to officially charter tourism management rather than just promoting places. But destination stewardship must go deeper than a job title; it means collaborating with other caretakers and stakeholders, including those who live there.

In southwestern Colorado, the community of Durango voted to secure funds that will forever be dedicated to sustainable tourism. Now Visit Durango, the local tourism organization for La Plata County and the city of Durango, has a dedicated staffer who is knocking on doors and walking the streets to talk tourism with residents—an authentic effort of destination stewardship that has been well received and is shaping visitor experiences.

HOW IT STARTED: THE VOTERS SPEAK

Visit Durango’s journey towards destination stewardship started in 2019 when a newly appointed

executive director, Rachel Brown, set about reviewing ways to grow a stagnant operational budget. An analysis revealed that lodging tax collections were significantly lower than comparable destinations. At that time, pre-Covid-19, increasing visitation was placing pressure on the community infrastructure in the famed recreational destination, in turn leading to negative resident sentiment towards the tourism industry, according to Weylin Ryan, a born-and-raised Durangoan. Ryan was eventually tasked with developing a sustainable tourism approach when he was appointed as Visit Durango’s first ever Sustainability and Policy manager in 2022.

Under Brown, Visit Durango spearheaded a ballot initiative in 2021 to increase the “Lodger’s Tax” from 2% to 5.25%. Voters were enticed to the Yes vote by the promise that future lodging tax collections would be split across three areas of community-favored needs: arts and cultural event programming; local transportation; and sustainable tourism programming (which would receive 55% of the lodging tax income). With this as official ballot language, the voters of Durango were mandating a sustainable tourism future.

VISIT DURANGO'S FIRST SUSTAINABILITY MANAGER

While Ryan had been employed in various local tourism jobs throughout his career, he was hired by Visit Durango in January 2022 with an official remit to oversee tourism management and sustainability.

He brought with him his philosophy favoring community-led tourism, shaped by his education and ISO 2600 professional development training in social responsibility standards and community development.

Ryan described the first ten months on the job as being spent identifying strategies to help Visit Durango undertake sustainability. Through a review of appropriate GSTC-Recognized Standards such as Mountain IDEAL, and GSTC Destination Criteria A4 and A5 addressing stakeholder engagement and resident engagement and feedback, he understood that a new mode of operation was needed. "With sustainable tourism - and tourism in general - it really does need to be led by the community instead of government or business," says Ryan.



Tourists aboard the Durango scenic railway await departure. [Photo by Jonathan Tourtellot]

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

Since early 2023, Visit Durango's suite of engagement mechanisms include:

- A dedicated tourism engagement and education website for resident input along with status updates on tourism development projects.
- "Listening to Locals" tourism town hall meetings that provided open house settings for locals to meet and share their ideas with Visit Durango.
- An annual resident survey on tourism, so Visit Durango can see if awareness and education is increasing and gather more feedback on projects.

Getting this input has helped shape visitor-experience product development, while also providing locals a

chance to tell tourism officials which assets they care about or want to see preserved and protected from overtourism.

In 2024, Visit Durango will launch an online learning course that locals can complete to learn about the broader local tourism industry and destination information. And there is a prize for doing so: Visit Durango will reveal details about a locals incentive program to encourage locals to participate later this year. Another program set to launch, titled All Are Welcome, is designed to offer tourism business managers and frontline workers gender-identity training and accessibility education, along with local cultural heritage via stories distinctive to la Plata County.

Visit Durango has also shifted its marketing audience to reach locals with responsible travel messaging. "We are doing marketing (campaigns) within a 50-mile radius of La Plata County and inside the county. Our marketing dollars do not just go towards inviting more visitors in, but also to informing residents and visitors on campaigns such as avalanche safety or wildfire safety," said Ryan. Visit Durango also provides Spanish and other language materials in its welcome center that can be printed on demand.



- ESCUCHANDO A LOS LOCALES -

LA VOZ

de la comunidad del Condado de La Plata

TALLERES ALREDEDOR DEL CONDADO
5 EVENTOS LOCALES UNICOS
DEJA QUE TU VOZ SE ESCUCHE

EDIFICIO COMUNITARIO BREEN HESPERUS, CO 3 NOV, 6 PM	CASINO RESORT SKY UTE IGNACIO, CO 9 NOV, 6 PM
BIBLIOTECA PUBLICA DE DURANGO DURANGO, CO 10 NOV, 6 PM	BIBLIOTECA DE PINE RIVER BAYFIELD, CO 15 NOV, 6 PM

EVENTO VIRTUAL
ÚNETE REMOTAMENTE | 30 NOV, 6 PM

Aprende Más: 

DURANGO

La Plata county flier.

But Ryan attests the most success he's had is from his effort to pound the pavement of La Plata County. To reach all demographics of the community, he spent two days last year hand-delivering Spanish-translated fliers about resident tourism surveys throughout lower-income community neighborhoods. He also drove across the sprawling rural county to hold targeted meetings with groups that included agricultural workers and firefighters, hoping to hear from all corners of the county and all local voices.

LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

According to Ryan and Visit Durango, successful community engagement comes from:

- **Identifying Your Stakeholders:** Conduct stakeholder mapping to understand your tourism community and potential partners or groups to build relations with.
- **Building Authentic Relationships:** Get into the community to build connections by participating in community events or attending meetings - or even just to show up and listen.
- **Asking First:** Inquire about how the community wants to be presented to tourists and what is appropriate, so as to create visitor programming that is culturally and environmentally intentional.
- **Being an Active Listener:** Don't speak -listen first - to understand the dialogue among residents and what they care about.
- **Getting Feedback:** Create a review process via community members on tourism committees to get input and feedback on campaigns and projects.
- **Customizing the Approach:** Target and adapt the outreach or conversation to ensure groups are being met the right way.

"[Tourism] should be what the community wants. Let's start with them and build it up," concluded Ryan in describing a tourism development process. "Start there, add some marketing, and then it will be successful."

ELSEWHERE: OTHER ENGAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES

- **The Colorado Tourism Office** (CTO) is in a year-long effort to develop one statewide and eight regional destination stewardship plans. To raise awareness and spread the word, the CTO created a communications toolkit for tourism stakeholders that included email, press releases, and social media boilerplate language that could easily be copied and pasted, as well as fact sheets with tourism terminology. (In 2021, the CTO also became the first state tourism office with a destination stewardship department.)
- **The Jackson Hole Travel and Tourism Board** (JHTTB) reoriented its marketing effort to reach the local community during its 15-month process to develop a sustainable destination management plan. During that time, staff and board members increased local media engagement through letter-writing campaigns, and also penned opinion columns to speak directly to the community. This outreach effort, which saw 4,777 residents complete a sentiment survey and more than 200 attend in-person community meetings, led to a truly community-shaped vision for Jackson Hole's tourism.
- **Visit Taos** is in the final stages of developing a sustainable destination management plan which has driven increased community dialogue around tourism through an awareness campaign.
- **Los Angeles Tourism** has recast itself as a DSO, a destination stewardship organization, with a mission to improve the quality of life for all Angelenos.



INDIGENOUS GUARDIAN PROGRAMS AS A DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP TOOL

BY MIKE ROBBINS
FOUNDING PARTNER, THE TOURISM COMPANY

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 1

Indigenous Guardian Programs in the Great Bear Rainforest and Haida Gwaii of British Columbia are emerging as powerful tools for destination stewardship. Developed by local Indigenous communities, these Guardian Watchmen programs play a critical role in protecting and managing traditional territories, preserving cultural heritage, and fostering a thriving conservation economy. Mike Robbins tells us more.

INDIGENOUS GUARDIAN PROGRAMS AS A DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP TOOL

The first time I experienced Coastal Guardian Watchmen on the British Columbia coast was back in 2009 on a trip to an ancient village site and hot springs in Haida Gwaii. The local indigenous Guardians took turns living in the small remote Guardian cabin at Gandll K'in Gwaay.yaay (Hotspring Island). These Guardians were there to protect the site and cultural features, monitor tourism activity, and provide cultural interpretation.

The Guardian Watchmen on Haida Gwaii were some of the first members of an Indigenous Coastal Guardian Watchmen program, working alongside a strong Indigenous ecotourism sector in BC. Together, they have reconnected the Indigenous communities to their traditional territories, and that plays a critical role in all aspects of stewardship along the entire coast.

BC's Guardian Watchmen are at the leading edge of a global movement toward Indigenous-led destination stewardship.



Along the coast of B.C.'s expansive Great Bear Rainforest. [Photo by Mike Robbins]

THE GREAT BEAR RAINFOREST AND HAIDA GWAII

The Guardians operate in the Great Bear Rainforest (GBRF) and Haida Gwaii regions of British Columbia, encompassing the largest intact coastal temperate rainforest remaining in the world. Stretching along BC's coast north from Vancouver Island to Alaska, the GBRF covers 6.4 million hectares (15.8 million acres). This is an area rich in biodiversity with ancient old-growth forests providing home to a multitude of species including grizzly bears, black

bears, and the iconic Spirit Bear. Spirit bears are rare white or cream-coated black bears with colouration caused by a recessive gene. They inhabit only a small portion of the Great Bear Rainforest.

Twenty-seven First Nations live along this coast, many in communities accessible only by air or water. The rich Indigenous cultures have evolved over the past 10,000 years since the ice receded, living in harmony with the landscape.

Colonialism changed that, forcing the Indigenous peoples away and out of their traditional territories to make way for a lucrative economy, largely based on logging, fishing, and shipping, but with minimal benefit accruing to the First Nations.

A CONSERVATION ECONOMY

In 2016 the Premier of BC and First Nations of the GBRF announced a conservation agreement of global significance securing:

- 85% of the rainforest is legally protected (North America's most stringent commercial logging regulations in place on the remaining 15%)
- First Nations shared decision-making over their traditional territories
- Active support from forestry companies and environmental organizations

This agreement culminated following years of collaborative protests, market campaigns, land use planning, and negotiations orchestrated by environmental groups and First Nations.

Today this incredible intact Canadian wilderness area hosts a thriving conservation economy (an economy that sustains itself on income earned from activities that conserve and restore rather than deplete the natural capital).

THE GUARDIAN WATCHMAN PROGRAM

Guardian Watchmen programs vary from Nation to Nation in the GBRF depending on their priorities. Activities typically include:

- Scientific data collection and analysis
- Upholding and advancing cultural knowledge
- Restoration work
- Monitoring fish and wildlife harvests
- Emergency response
- Tourism monitoring and protocol agreements with non-Indigenous companies

- Planning and management
- Education and interpretation for visitors

There is a lot of overlap in the work and skill sets of Guardians who monitor and protect their territories and tourism guides who bring guests out on the territory to view wildlife, see archaeological sites, and learn from storytellers. In the GBRF there is work progressing towards a combined Guide/Guardian training designation to support growth in the conservation economy.

THE KITASOO XAI'XAIS MODEL

In the remote community of Klemtu (population 500), for instance, the Kitasoo Xai'Xais people have successfully developed what has become a best-practice model for community-based tourism in Canada. At the center of this effort is the Spirit Bear Lodge, a profitable community owned/operated ecotourism venture with a 12-room lodge. The Lodge works closely with the Kitasoo/Xai'Xais Guardian Watchmen program.

As part of their stewardship efforts the community created the Spirit Bear Research Foundation, a collaboration between the community and conservation scientists, together conducting research that is: community-driven, locally relevant, and ecosystem-based.

The people of Klemtu do not view any separation between the people, the land and the sea. Every living thing is interconnected.



Marvin, Guardian and Spirit Bear guide. [Photo by Mike Robbins]

As tourists started to arrive at Spirit Bear Lodge back in 2006 the village's youngsters began to take an interest and started to drop by in the evenings to chat with guests. Out of this initial connection was borne the concept of Sua, a Kitasoo/Xai'Xais youth cultural program sponsored by the Lodge. Sua is a Xai'Xais word meaning thunder, and the youngsters now involved in the program are encouraged to be

'loud and proud' in sharing their identity and culture as they stage song and dance performances in the Big House for guests of the Lodge. Further accommodating youth, the community decided to integrate a new conservation arm of the Nation called SEAS (Supporting Emerging Aboriginal Stewards) with the guardian and tourism programs.

Today the community of Klemtu is benefitting from a thriving ecotourism venture and guardian programs that have helped to protect their traditional territories, act as a catalyst for cultural renewal, and helped in re-connecting community members back to their ancestral territories. The result is a healthier community, building capacity, and engaging youth in learning cultural traditions and language.



The Klemtu Big House, a symbol of KITASOO/XIA'XIAS culture and resilience. [Photo by Mike Robbins]

THE WEI WAI KUM FIRST NATION MODEL

Another southern GBRF First Nation, the Wei Wai Kum First Nation, many of whom live on reserve in Campbell River, are monitoring and gathering data in their traditional territories through a Guardian program launched in 2018.

Through their Guardian program, the Wei Wai Kum are applying traditional knowledge and using scientific techniques to carry out their stewardship responsibilities in a modern way, keeping watch over what's happening and ensuring that visitors and resource users are following local rules.

Today, within their traditional territory, several industries from fish farms to forestry to real estate are competing for resources and space. The Discovery Passage, which narrows to just 750 metres wide in some parts, runs along the northeast coast of Vancouver Island and sees heavy traffic from cruise ships, cargo ships, fishing boats, and passenger ferries. Community members began expressing concerns over resource depletion, spill risks, and

environmental impacts that could threaten the fisheries the community has relied on for generations

Through Nanwakolas Council, the regional Indigenous organization, the Wei Wai Kum receives a large and increasing number of referrals each month for consultation on development and resource use within their territory. As a member of the Council, Wei Wai Kum began to participate in the Nanwakolas regional stewardship network, which provides technical, logistical, and data management support for Indigenous Guardian programs in the region. Wei Wai Kum stewardship staff members participate in training and joint monitoring initiatives with other Nanwakolas members, learning how to run a modern Guardian program.

As an example, Wei Wai Kum Guardians conduct a kelp biomass survey in their territory. Kelp is an important habitat, food source, and carbon sink - and has been declining along the coast, due to climate change and increased predation from purple sea urchins.

THE BENEFITS OF GUARDIAN PROGRAMS

Research suggests that places protected and stewarded by Indigenous peoples in Canada, Australia, and Brazil have levels of biodiversity as high or higher than lands protected by those countries' national governments.

In 2016 research conducted by Coastal First Nations and Nature United evaluated the benefits of Guardian programs for their communities. The research determined that the programs returned benefits at least 10 times the dollar investment. As a result, Nature United helped develop an Indigenous Guardians Toolkit and through a Technical Support Team are offering additional hand's-on technical support.

Indigenous communities across Canada have launched more than 30 guardian programs modeled after the successful Coastal Guardian Watchmen program in the GBRF and Haida Gwaii.

This model could be replicated in many other destinations where Indigenous communities still remain and can resume their historical stewardship role in their traditional territories, resulting in healthier communities, engaged youth, and enhanced capacity for research and tourism.

CHAPTER 3

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES THROUGH CULTURE AND INCLUSION





PRESERVING THE PERSONALITY OF PLACE: THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

BY CHERYL HARGROVE
CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM EXPERT

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 1

Historic city centers often do well at preserving their structures but may falter when it comes to cultural preservation. Heritage expert Cheryl Hargrove reports from the Greek island of Rhodes and offers seven tips on how destinations can retain a cultural sense of place.

[Shortly after Ms. Hargrove's visit, Rhodes suffered catastrophic fires on parts of the island. The old town was not directly affected, but as she notes, "there will be impacts from resort loss, agricultural loss, and community devastation - [a] long tail of recovery." This renders all the more important her points about preserving culture in the following story.]

OLD TOWN RHODES - BONES ALONE DO NOT MAKE A LIVING CITY

After my husband and I spent a day in Rhodes in 2021, we loved it, so we decided to come back for a month two years later. We had high hopes of learning more about Greek food and wine, traditions, and life and gaining a deeper understanding of the history and culture of this ancient island.

We loved our longer visit, too, but that's when we discovered something disconcerting. While the historic character is being preserved, the cultural character is disappearing.

Why Rhodes? Our first visit (via [cruise ship in December 2021](#)) included only a glimpse of the Medieval City's vibrant historic and magnificent Gothic architecture. We were enthralled by the stories about the ancient Order of the Knights of St. John the Hospitaller, responsible for fortifying the city

and protecting pilgrims traveling to the Holy Land for over two centuries. A brief walk along pebbled paths had us peering at public buildings and mosques dating back to the Ottoman period when Rhodes was under Turkish rule. We both wanted to learn more. A highlight of our short visit was meeting a local artist who made leather belts, bags, and hats. When I purchased a beautiful satchel, she gave me a note about how she learned her craft and started her shop, along with instructions on how to care for my leather bag. Following this cultural exchange, we met other local shop owners willing to tell us about their wares. We took home several mementos to help us remember our visit to this incredible city, including locally woven scarves and melekouni (a traditional sweet made of sesame, honey, spices, and almonds). While we only spent a day touring the Medieval City, designated a World Heritage City in 1988, Old Town Rhodes left an indelible impression.

Inspired by our initial visit, we booked a 16th Century

Airbnb for the month of June 2023 in the heart of Old Town and started exploring. We found that Rhodes' architecture and archaeological excavations - its bones - have a strong foundation and are obviously under the watchful eyes of preservationists and government authorities protecting its historical integrity. The [Greek Culture Ministry](#), which owns 365 properties within the Medieval City (50 located on the main street in the historic area), is in the process of implementing a plan to create three zones - the monumental, the residential, and the commercial - that will continue to preserve the city's ancient structure while allowing sustainable development and growth.



The medieval Marine Gate is the main entrance from the harbor to the town center, constructed in 1478. [Photo courtesy of Cheryl M. Hargrove]

"TOURISM DOES NOT GO TO A CITY THAT HAS LOST ITS SOUL"

All well and good, but we only experienced a limited amount of quality local or regional art and craft. Most merchants on Socrates, the main street in the Old City, now sell trinkets (notably the "blue eye" pendants) that are mass-produced elsewhere. Even shops displaying higher-end pottery and decorative arts carry the same design and styles. Only two galleries we visited could tell us about the artists and their work. We enjoyed our traditional coffee at Mevlana, the 14th Century Turkish Coffee House operated by the same family for 200 years, and daily Greek pastries from Fournariko Bakery, but only two restaurants in Old Town - Marco Polo and Pizanias (The Sea Star) - offer a quality Rhodian dining experience.

During our month-long stay, it was almost impossible to find local artists working in galleries, participate in a cooking class, hear authentic Greek music at any of the restaurants/bars/nightclubs, or schedule other immersive cultural experiences that were not pre-arranged for groups - largely marked-up tours for

cruise ship passengers - rather than for independent travelers.

With the decline of local - and high quality - retail, music, and food, I was reminded by the Arthur Frommer quote, "Tourism does not go to a city that has lost its soul." Old Town Rhodes is in many aspects on the cusp of losing its cultural soul.

While the island's sustainability plan, Rhodes Co-Lab (launched in January 2022 by the South Aegean Region Administration and the TUI Group/TUI Care Foundation), will focus on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and EU's goal to be carbon neutral by 2050, there is no mention of preserving and protecting the local cultural and intangible resources. The program cites that "the promotion of cultural heritage benefits the island's society and tourism."

BUT CULTURAL RESOURCES NEED MORE THAN PROMOTION.

They need policies that protect them from commodification, incentives to offset the proliferation of imports, provide access to the supply chain so artists can benefit more directly from tourism, and be recognized as an important contributor to the destination's personality and brand.

"Handicrafts play a vital role in the economic development of a country as they are a prominent medium for foreign exchange revenue, require low capital investments, and offer employment opportunities. In addition, handicraft items are perceived as a symbol of status owing to their uniqueness, quality, usage of natural materials, and the essence of vibrant art and culture." (Business Wire reporting for [ResearchandMarkets.com](#), February 2022)

UNESCO offers [Cultural Tourism Policy Guidelines](#) to help direct cultural tourism development and management in and around World Heritage sites. These policies are sound recommendations for any destination seeking to retain its cultural identity, integrity, and its unique personality of place.

Efforts must be made to preserve as well as promote its authentic cultural resources. Through my years of international work with place-centric destinations, I've observed several strategies that foster greater cultural resource stewardship - and promote opportunities for more authentic visitor engagement.

SEVEN STRATEGIES FOR CULTURAL RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP

1. Recognize and value the role of artists and tradition bearers. Add a representative from the cultural community to your Destination/CVB board, invite them to strategic planning retreats, include them in visitor guides, and promote them on your website. The artistic voice often provides a different perspective to the more traditional tourism industry and business development deliberations.

2. Conduct market research on retail purchases by visitors. If shopping is a visitor's number one activity, shouldn't we know more about the types of items they are inclined to buy and what they purchase? Doesn't this information help identify the cultural assets to preserve and promote? Drilling down to the specific types of purchases unique to each destination validates the importance of cultural resources. For instance, sweetgrass baskets in Charleston and turquoise in New Mexico are signature souvenirs for these destinations; their purchase also helps support the local artists and the entire community. The Blue Ridge National Heritage Area tracks the impact of their [Craft Trails](#) in Western North Carolina. Sales can be directly attributed to the product and its promotion.

3. Distinguish locally made items from imports. Presenting a certificate of authenticity when an original piece of art is purchased is another way to convey provenance. For instance, the [Made in Alaska](#) program certifies and recognizes the work of both native and non-Native craftspersons through a permitting process that awards the use of an official emblem. This recognition also serves as an opportunity to educate visitors on what is involved in the artistic process. Hence, they understand and value the time and talent required to create an original work.

4. Offer different types of cultural experiences. Art helps tell your destination story. Murals, sculptures, and architecture are three ways residents and visitors visually capture the essence of a place. More interactive activities – artist demonstrations, guest lectures, language classes, instructional workshops, and special exhibitions at galleries – will draw visitors and residents at other times of the year and for various reasons. These activities offer artists additional opportunities to generate revenue and may extend visitors' stay – or encourage them to visit the destination during low or shoulder seasons. The

[Golden Isles Convention & Visitors Bureau](#) (on the coast of Georgia) partners with [Glynn Visual Arts](#) to display paintings from local artists in their visitors center. Along with branded merchandise, they also sell handmade jewelry, cards, pottery, and other items in their gift shop.

5. Reduce barriers to purchase. Finding locally made and sustainable shopping options can be difficult. [Booking.com's 2023 Sustainable Travel Report](#) cites some challenges: "Despite good intentions, 44% of travelers don't know where to find more sustainable options." For example, 75% seek authentic experiences representative of the local culture. Yet, in stark contrast, 40% don't know how or where to find these tours and activities that will ensure they give back to the local community." There is also a "buy local" consensus among travelers, with 43% favoring small, independent stores. Shipping large items—such as artwork, rugs, or baskets—may be a deterrent to purchase, especially if the visitor travels by plane, on a group tour, or cruise. Promoting locally made items and arranging for shipping can help stimulate sales. For instance, Turkish rug merchants waive or include the cost of shipping and customs in the purchase price for the customer's convenience.



Old Town Rhodes, illuminated for shopping at night. [Photo courtesy of Cheryl M. Hargrove]

6. Recruit legacy owners to retain local businesses. Many long-time retail businesses close when owners decide to retire without a succession plan in place. As these retail businesses are often magnets for residents and repeat travelers, finding entrepreneurs or apprentices willing to continue operations is vital to the cultural legacy of a destination. [Mitchell's Fine Chocolates](#) in Cleveland, Ohio, has been family-owned since 1939. When the second-generation Mitchell decided to retire in 2016 but had no heirs, local customers Jason & Emily Hallaman purchased the business to maintain the recipes and traditions of Mitchell's Fine Chocolates for the enjoyment of future generations.

7. Grow the cultural entrepreneurial ecosystem. Governments and economic development authorities often incentivize large corporations to relocate to the area and bring jobs. Perhaps a similar strategy should be extended to artists, craftspeople, and long-standing retail establishments to help retain local jobs and contribute to the destination's brand. A [Main Street America research study](#) indicates that 70% of small businesses in commercial districts are launched by people who live in the local community.

This validates the importance of investing in local capacity building to grow and sustain healthy small businesses, including artists, craftspeople, and retail shop owners.

THINKING BEYOND RETAIL

Retail is just one aspect of a destination's tourism product, but its sameness can lead to a decline in cultural identity. Applying these seven strategies to other local businesses, such as food establishments (favoring independently-owned restaurants and eateries over national chains) and music venues (promoting local musicians and other performing artists) can retain and stimulate other cultural engagement opportunities.

My Rhodes visit helped me understand how important creative and cultural resources are to the destination story and experience. When embarking on destination stewardship, be sure to engage all human and physical assets of the community - historical, cultural, and natural - and recognize the important contributions of each in defining the essence of the place.

travelers doesn't mean just showing the gay club, for example, it means recognizing that gay men are travelers with diverse interests such as golfing, dining, and relaxing by the pool – just like other travelers. Bush also understands that marketing the destination to LGBTQ+ travelers solely in June is insufficient from a DEI perspective if the destination is not welcoming year-round. To bridge this gap and ensure alignment, VLC has, with guidance from Travel Unity, developed a comprehensive DEI Plan, serving as a blueprint for their goals in the coming years. Some specific action items from the plan include reviewing the employee lifecycle through a DEI lens, conducting an analysis of internal documents to emphasize welcoming and belonging within the team, and planning constant communication with employees about DEI topics at team meetings.



The Visit Lake Charles team. Diverse backgrounds and diverse perspectives support strategic and effective management. [Photo courtesy of Travel Unity]

VLC currently has a team of 23, with an intentional representation of different races and ethnicities, sexual orientations, ages, and gender expressions. "We have a very good diversity of staff, and what that diversity should do for us is give us the real perspective to be able to make thoughtful decisions about how we're doing what we're doing," explains Bush. Their marketing reflects this diversity, by showing people of various skin colors, family statuses, abilities, and sexual orientations. VLC is also intentional about featuring Black, Latino, and LGBTQ+ businesses in its marketing collateral and deliberate about representation in its media, as evident on [VLC's Instagram account](#). Crucially, there is no explicit messaging in marketing copy, but representation alone speaks volumes.

UNCOMFORTABLE CONVERSATIONS: THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

These creatives are done in tandem with the community through conversations with Lake Charles

residents from underrepresented groups such as the LGBTQ+ community and the accessibility community. This continued engagement through activities such as quarterly hotel meetings, resident sentiment studies, and industry surveys allows VLC to uncover weaknesses and opportunities, and foster connection, awareness, and community, helping VLC build sustainable practices and communication.

Ongoing stakeholder engagement has uncovered workforce issues and staffing shortages, which has led to the creation of a Hospitality Career Fair hosted by VLC in partnership with the City of Lake Charles, the Southwest Louisiana Economic Development Alliance, the Southwestern Louisiana Community College, and Louisiana's regional Workforce Development Office, run by the Louisiana Department of Labor. This was a successful event, with more than 50 partners and 75 participants, 21 of whom left with new job offers, and another 10 with second interviews scheduled.

According to Bush, "Everybody has a place to start within their own communities." He suggests understanding the experiences of wheelchair users by promoting local accessible restaurants where they feel comfortable, or supporting LGBTQ+ frequented places and understanding why they



Timothy Bush, Chief Marketing Officer for Visit Lake Charles. [Photo courtesy of Travel Unity]

visit. He elaborates, "If you are a person of the LGBTQ+ community, where do you feel comfortable going where you can be yourself? Tell us the places you are going, and tell us why, and let's build messaging and support those places that are already doing these things." VLC believes it all begins with local community conversations.

VLC has also incorporated accessibility into its DEI and stakeholder engagement strategies. While Lake Charles currently lacks accessible beaches for wheelchair users, the destination is working to showcase other accessible attractions and raise awareness among other industry partners such as the new [children's museum](#) currently under construction. Bush acknowledges that there is a lot of work to be done and they won't be able to challenge everything, but, he says, "We will take it in blocks and move the needle on as many of those things as we can to build a better community. We're focused on talking to our partners and understanding where our accessibility challenges are." He adds, "I'm still learning like everybody else is."

NOT JUST FOR SHOW: PROMOTING DEI INTERNALLY

Bush not only leads VLC's internal DEI committee, but also co-chairs the EDI committee for Destinations International, and the DEI committee for the Louisiana Travel Association. His passion stems from his own qualifications and lived experiences as a Black, gay man. He has learned to speak up and create awareness because people don't always consider the many challenges visitors may experience in their destination. His advice to other destinations? Open the dialogue, and get comfortable having uncomfortable conversations. He adds, "That is the only path forward with this work. You have to be willing to do the work; you have to be able to have the conversations; you cannot be afraid of those things."



Local live music at the Rendezvous South event in Lake Charles.
[Photo by Kathryn Shea Duncan]

He adds, "We have to put resources toward our priorities. For organizations that believe DEI is a priority, then how do we get that done?" This may mean reallocating budgets, hiring external consultants, or bringing on a Chief Diversity Officer, whatever it takes to realize those DEI priorities.

What Bush most wants people to know and understand is that DEI, when done with real intention and heart, is a continuous effort to build better, stronger, and more thoughtful communities. He says, "When people are able to see themselves in that, then you've created not just a place people want to visit, but also a place where people want to live."

AND THAT IS WHY DEI MATTERS TO DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP.

For more insights about Visit Lake Charles' approach to DEI and more tips about building DEI in a DMO, read VLC's blog article, "[Creating Welcoming & Belonging Through DEI](#)," written by Angie Manning, VP of Communications at Visit Lake Charles.



INDIGENOUS TOURISM eLIBRARY OFFERS GUIDANCE FOR DESTINATIONS

BY ELLEN RUGH-ESTRADA
DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP REPORT CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 3

A remarkable, easy-to-use online resource provides a wealth of information that goes well beyond its topic to present an ethical approach for all. Ellen Rugh-Estrada reviews the Indigenous Tourism eLibrary, including tips on how to use it.

WORKING OUT A RESPONSIBLE DESTINATION STRATEGY FOR INDIGENOUS TOURISM JUST GOT EASIER

For tourism leaders of diverse backgrounds, the task of accurately and ethically representing Indigenous tourism in a destination requires tact and thoughtful strategy.

Luckily for them, understanding a responsible destination strategy for Indigenous tourism just got easier.

Ethical considerations apply in all cases - whether the destination has a thriving and vibrant Indigenous community at present or tourism offerings reflecting a sorrowful history of indigenous forebears.

The [Indigenous Tourism Collaborative of the Americas \(ITCA\)](#) new [eLibrary](#) consolidates hundreds of useful resources to help destination leaders plan for, manage, promote, and monitor sustainable and resilient indigenous tourism. Created as the group's inaugural project, the eLibrary demonstrates that ITCA leads the charge as a robust network of indigenous tourism leaders, tourism industry leaders, government agencies, universities,

and nonprofits, all working together to develop Indigenous tourism sustainably and respectfully.

When investigating the eLibrary's user experience and catalog of resources, we came away with a few step-by-step tips to maximize your time and find the right resources for you.

BEGINNING YOUR SEARCH

With so many resources available, it's important to first understand the core information for which you're looking.

Step 1: Write out your research topic as a statement or question.

Example: How can I responsibly market indigenous tourism attractions in Canada?

Step 2: Pull out the main concepts from your sentence.

Example: Responsibility, marketing, attractions, Canada

Step 3: List out synonyms your concept.

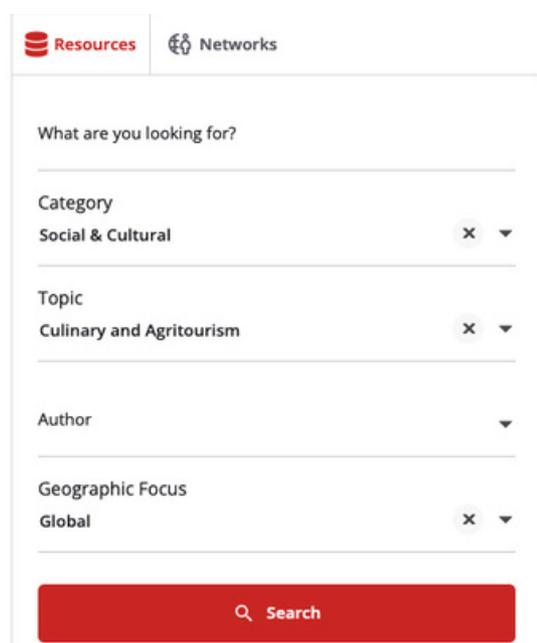
Example: Ethics, best practices, First Nations, native, sites, excursions, tours, advertising

ENTER YOUR SEARCH PARAMETERS

Use these keywords as guidance for narrowing your search. (Unfortunately, unlike other advanced catalogs, only one search word or term can be input at a time.)

Step 4: Determine your filters, beginning with categories, topics, and geographic area.

Try leaving out specific authors and “what are you looking for?” in your search filters for now, as not to overly confine your results.



The screenshot shows a search interface with two tabs: "Resources" (selected) and "Networks". Below the tabs is a search bar labeled "What are you looking for?". Underneath are four filter sections: "Category" with "Social & Cultural" selected, "Topic" with "Culinary and Agritourism" selected, "Author" (empty), and "Geographic Focus" with "Global" selected. Each filter has a red "x" and a dropdown arrow. At the bottom is a red "Search" button with a magnifying glass icon.

Step 5: Evaluate your results and adjust accordingly.

If your results are too limited, try expanding to a broader concept - for example, “global” instead of “regional geography”. If too broad, add in a specific keyword under “Topic(s)” - author(s), language parameters, or parse down your selected subcategories.

While the eLibrary does not provide an end-all-be-all solution to exchanging indigenous knowledge and tools with diverse users, it marks a monumental milestone of large-scale coordination and unified efforts among these often-siloed groups.

“The first goal [ITCA] set was the eLibrary, but beyond that we have had many important discussions about education, capacity building, and research so that together we can assist indigenous communities to create a tourism industry that they control and manage, informed by indigenous guidance and leadership.” says Edward Hall, Indigenous Economic Development and Tourism Executive in Residence at George Washington University.

Lean on these resources for ethical guidance and applaud the major lift this network has provided. In the future, there is still much we can look forward to from them.

For more information, check out this webinar about the eLibrary: <https://indigenoustourismamericas.org/indigenous-tourism-elibrary-now-open-to-the-world/>

CHAPTER 4

DISTINCTIVE APPROACHES TO COLLABORATION AND CONSERVATION





DJURGÅRDEN SHOWS HOW TO COLLABORATE

BY CAMILLA ZEDENDAHL & KARIN SALLANDER
ROYAL DJURGÅRDEN SOCIETY

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 3

When it came to planning for destination sustainability, the 60-plus businesses of Stockholm's centuries-old Djurgården park posed a cooperation challenge. Camilla Zedendahl and Karin Sallander of the Royal Djurgården Society explain what it takes to help their park's independent tourism enterprises think long-term together and act accordingly.

AT SWEDEN'S ROYAL DJURGÅRDEN, DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP BEGAN BY IDENTIFYING SHARED VALUES

Djurgården, one of the 14 islands that Stockholm is built upon, has served as Stockholmers' entertainment oasis for hundreds of years. As far back as the 15th century, it was a royal playground, housing the Queen's lions and royal hunting grounds, while common folk were drawn to its taverns and inns. Over time, it has grown to include 22 museums, a variety of theaters, music venues, and dance halls, an amusement park, several gardens, some thirty restaurants, as well as vast green areas rich with wildlife. Today, it draws 15 million visitors a year.

Those centuries have left their mark, shaped the destination, and provided us operating here with a long-term perspective. Now, as we think 400 years ahead, we know our way of managing and developing Djurgården must be done sustainably.

But how to get more than 60 individual attractions to work more closely together?



Royal Djurgården, a destination within the capital city of Stockholm, is visited by 15 million people a year.

FINDING A MODEL FOR DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP

Taking on the responsibility of stewardship for Royal Djurgården are the destination management organization - the Royal Djurgården Society (in Swedish, *Kungliga Djurgårdens Intressenter*) - and the Royal Djurgården Administration (*Kungliga Djurgårdens förvaltning*).

Despite the Royal Djurgården Society having no direct power and limited resources, our challenge was to help the individual attractions find ways to grow and develop, while keeping with the historical values and traditions we are responsible for protecting for

future generations, all sustainably.

The core of the collaboration at Djurgården was finding the starting point in shared values. By disregarding traditional marketing and addressing specific target groups, and instead focusing on cooperation, opportunities were created to work towards a stronger destination – and towards acting collectively based on shared values. Notably, this was done without fear of overshadowing individual brands.

AGREEING ON A COMMON DESTINATION IDENTITY

In 2016, the attractions at Djurgården started working on a common identity, asking questions like: What is Djurgården? What do we stand for? What does it mean to be part of Djurgården? And what does collaboration mean to us operating here? Agreeing on five shared values has been central:

- Open, accessible, welcoming
- Constantly evolving
- Thinking long-term
- Protecting our cultural heritage and looking ahead
- Working and evolving together

Together, we have determined that the responsibility for Djurgården is shared collectively, and collaboration is our driving force for development. We all face significant challenges, and the future is determined by how we act today. Therefore, we must continually develop our work and our shared narrative together.

*“A lighthouse for sustainable destinations worldwide”
–Djurgården auditor review*

The agreement set up is never to work together for the sake of it, but always to create or solve something that we can do better together than individually. Sustainable development fits into this category.

THE WHOLE IS GREATER THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS

The attractions at Royal Djurgården are very diverse – from Scandinavia’s most visited museums to small niche museums, and from the Michelin fine-dining restaurant to the one-man hot dog stand. Nonetheless, there are benefits for all in working together when focusing on issues where action by the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.



Royal Djurgården Society member meeting in 2022, gathering the 60 attractions in discussions on the set common goals.

With the wide range of attractions, it is natural that the knowledge and practice in sustainability are on different levels. Some are champions and some are beginners. In working together and sharing knowledge, attractions can take turns pulling the work forward. With clear leadership from the Royal Djurgården Society, setting strategies, and keeping the destination together, there are no thresholds for joining the work. All are welcome.

GATHERING THE DESTINATION'S SUSTAINABILITY CHAMPIONS

In 2018, the Royal Djurgården Society, supported by the Royal Djurgården Administration, created a dedicated sustainability team. It consists of representatives with leading positions within sustainability from the different attractions. The team is instrumental to the joint work. The dedicated sustainability team’s work includes initial visions and ideas, the development of strategies and concrete action plans, as well as planning and implementing initiatives. The sustainability team has consciously shared the work with all colleagues within the destination.

Taking valuable time out of their ordinary work to contribute to the common good gives the destination a unique and broad spectrum of knowledge. The commitment from the destination’s major players gives the mandate needed to drive the work forward – all for the benefit of Djurgården as a whole, as well as of the individual attractions.

AIMING FOR COMMON SUSTAINABILITY GOALS

Working on our common identity, we found we needed facts about the destination’s sustainability impact. The first step was to map it out by measuring through an inventory and analyzing our impact from the results. With that knowledge, we could make



The four sustainability teams take shape.

informed decisions about how to reduce negative and increase positive impacts.

The next step was to identify focus areas to work within:

- Fossil-free and traffic-smart Djurgården
- A sustainable food culture
- Open, accessible, and welcoming Djurgården
- A world exhibition on sustainability

Then we set short and long-term goals (targeting 2020, 2025, and 2027) for topics within each of those areas. This process took several years, partly due to the pandemic. The goals were adopted in 2022, and it is now mandatory for the 60-plus members of the Royal Djurgården Society to strive to achieve them. Our set goals are today the foundation for our destination sustainability work, and serve as the main strategic document going forward.

SUSTAINABLE FOOD CULTURE		
GOALS 2027	GOALS 2025	GOALS 2022
Challenges is established as a driver for sustainable food culture and good food – for guests, staff, the Baltic Sea and the planet.	We inspire others for a more sustainable food culture. We inform about the impact of food and can reduce the carbon footprint of our operations.	We have created a common around sustainable food culture and together we carry out activities that strengthen it.
We promote food production that benefits leadership both locally and globally.	The most fish and vegetables we serve meet WWF's criteria for green. Our food comes from animals that are grassed or pastured. The proportion of eco-labelled or home-grown vegetables we sell has increased by 20% compared to 2021. We set individual targets for 2022. We participate in initiatives that support leadership.	We present organic and other food in a way that contributes to increased consumption of sustainable protein sources and sustainable choices. The most fish and vegetables we serve meet WWF's criteria for yellow and green. We measure the proportion of eco-labelled or home-grown produce that we use and also home-grown.
Our food waste is measured.	Our food waste per portion served is halved compared to 2021.	We measure and report our food waste, and calculate recycling and protein waste. Our food waste is collected for biogas or compost.

Sample excerpt from the Sustainable Food Goals.

MAKING THE MOST OF A CRISIS

The pandemic challenged the work plan. When the attractions were fighting for survival, the Royal Djurgården Society still had to ensure that the work continued, and no work was lost. The solution was not to pressure the struggling attractions, but rather get back to our core and prepare for re-opening.

For inspiration in tough times, we built a [sustainability website](#) with Djurgården's attractions and other actors in the industry sharing good

examples. It reports on the sustainability work at Djurgården (done, ongoing, and planned), whether jointly or by individual attractions. Good examples are shared to build pride, offer inspiration, and highlight how much work is being done. It contains a [toolbox with templates](#) to create a code of conduct and sustainability policy, common documents on commitments, sustainable events policy, and much more.

We are also highlighting other Swedish destinations' sustainability work linking to inspiring examples where they generously share knowledge. The site launched in May 2021. We constantly renew the content. The sustainability site is now a valuable resource in the ongoing work.

EMBRACING THE GSTC CRITERIA

Another way to use the sustainability work momentum during the pandemic was to seek a way to a wider view of what we do. We asked ourselves: How well does our work compare to the UN's sustainability goals? How does our work compare to that of other destinations - nationally and globally?

In October 2021, we decided to explore this by joining the [non-profit organization Green Destinations' Award and Certification Program](#). As it is a program that reflects destinations' sustainability work based on the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals and the criteria presented by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) for sustainable tourism and destination stewardship, we would be able to view our efforts from a new, global angle.

Using the program's digital tool, we have systematically reviewed and reported our sustainability work for more than 100 criteria and indicators. The resulting report covered just over 200 pages. In a review by the independent auditor in the summer of 2022, Emil Selse pointed to our common work as "a lighthouse for sustainable destinations worldwide where a destination included in a capital city can focus on all necessary issues in a structured way."

Based on the findings of the revision, the Green Destinations Certification Committee awarded our efforts 9.4 out of 10 possible points, granting the Royal Djurgården Society the Green Destinations Platinum Award. In early 2023 the Royal Djurgården Society was awarded the Green Destinations Story Awards for strategic coworking methods and sustainable leadership.

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Sharing some key success factors and lessons learned for Royal Djurgården Society

- **Identity.** We gathered around our strong brand as a destination, stating that long-term sustainable thinking is a part of our history and identity.
- **Leadership through shared values and common goals.** With limited resources and no official power the Royal Djurgården Society and the Royal Djurgården Administration get a mandate through consistency, clear, and attractive common goals.
- **Structure and transparency, strict agendas, and scheduled meetings.** Monthly meetings are held for members with sustainability as a standing item on the agenda.
- **Role models.** Building a team with champions of sustainability among the attractions.
- **Generosity and courage.** Building trust by creating a positive culture of generous knowledge-sharing within the destination and having the courage to act.
- **Engagement, recognizing everyone's views as important,** and understanding that conditions are different among the attractions.
- **Strong collaboration with organizations outside the destination** for inspiration and practical tools.
- **Flexibility.** The ability to change focus in troubled times to keep the work going.
- **Good cooperation** with representatives and decision-makers from the City and Region of Stockholm.

ROYAL DJURGÅRDEN AND BEYOND

With “working together” as a core value, cooperation naturally extends beyond our island's shores, leveraging the power of collaboration both locally and globally. This includes forging partnerships with

international and national organizations, as well as our counterparts in Stockholm. Through strong ties with Stockholm Business Region, the city's tourism organization, we promote close collaboration and knowledge sharing. As Stockholm has committed to becoming one of the 100 EU Climate Neutral Cities by 2030, one of our contributions involves showcasing sustainable solutions to over 15 million visitors from Stockholm, Sweden, as well as every corner of the world. By actively contributing to the city's strategies, we aspire to set an example for collaborative sustainability initiatives.

Thus, by agreeing on a new way of working with our shared place - through “co-creation” - we have a well-anchored and stable foundation; a clear direction in the collaborative work carried out together; and visitors have been provided with a destination they can relate to. The work continues on the journey we have embarked on together.

ADDENDA

- Our sustainability site illustrates our work on all levels.
- See also our sustainability film narrated by Björn Ulvaeus, known as a member of the musical group ABBA.
- Sample set of common goals:

FOSSIL-FREE AND TRAFFIC SMART DJURGÅRDEN		
GOALS 2022	GOALS 2023	GOALS 2024
All transport of goods and people on the island is fossil-free and climate neutral.	Contracts and agreements on fossil-free with transport operators are in place for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • commercial public transport • private vehicles (except taxis) • street cleaning and refuse collection 	A car-free Djurgården is defined. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear plan and implementation on public transport
Djurgården is fossil-free by 2030.	Spikes are implemented from car traffic to pedestrian and bicycle traffic.	Plan is in place for conversion to fossil-free of special vehicles. All new vehicles are fossil-free.
A new pedestrian & bicycle bridge connects Djurgården and Södra Djurgården.	Investigation and design for the city's Traffic Office.	Budget assignment for new bridge to the city's Traffic Office.
Djurgården has been closed for one hour for car traffic.	Increased measures to improve traffic safety are implemented.	Temporary traffic safety measures are tested in accordance with traffic rules.
A local studio is established and public participation for local work and back to responsibility.	Final of design for the transportation of physical objects.	Investigation with the city's Traffic Office for restriction of car traffic.
Public systems have been tested for digitalization, aimed for users to spend less time in queues.	Strategic study by the region's Transport Administration in cooperation with private actors.	Implement a restriction in the city and on Djurgården about public transport and road routes, street layout and urban environments in transit.
Car sharing use is fossil-free and partly locally produced.	Reduction of 20% parking spaces.	Test of sharing parking spaces.
Charter energy use has been reduced by 20% compared to 2021.	Charter energy use has been reduced by 20% compared to 2021.	We examine the conditions for the establishment of a local energy grid.
Charter energy use has been reduced by 20% compared to 2021.	Charter energy use has been reduced by 20% compared to 2021.	We identify our remaining fossil energy use and plan to phase it out.
Shared spaces across from fossil-free transport.	Shared spaces and design-use materials are reported with an action plan for reduction.	We all have renewable energy electricity contracts.
We have procedures for both purchase and projects with consideration of fossil-free.	We have implemented a sustainability policy that shows forward-reduced fossil use in the supply chain.	We have started to replace fossil-based plastics.

Common sustainability goals set for the Fossil-Free/Smart Traffic focus area.

- An exemplary collaboration for more sustainable tourism, of which we are immensely proud, involved Visit Sweden, Stockholm Business Region, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, and us. Together, we welcomed changemakers from around the world to the GSTC2024 Sweden Global Sustainable Tourism Conference at Royal Djurgården in April 2024.



RAPA NUI: MEMORIES OF THE FUTURE

BY KAREN LUZ CÓRDOVA
CO-FOUNDER, CUIDADORES DE DESTINOS

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 3

Children see the world from an even fresher standpoint than first-time tourists. Can that wide-open perspective be helpful in destination planning and generational future-proofing? Karen Luz Córdova, Co-Founder of Chile-based [Cuidadores de Destinos](#), answers with a resounding yes. Here's how it worked on remote, heavily touristed Rapa Nui (Easter Island).

IN CHILE, A NEW APPROACH: CHILDREN AS STAKEHOLDERS

In life, particularly in adulthood, human beings tend to overlook that which collectively benefits them. For instance, something as essential as breathing air places them in a community of 'breathers' yet they often fail to recognize it. It's this very omission that excludes them from the most beautiful actions, where collectivity with others can transpire into something extraordinarily wonderful.

In tourism, interacting with others is as evident as breathing air; it involves people, nature, and territories. And it is precisely people who hold the greatest potential for change.

WHAT HAPPENS IF WE LISTEN TO THE VOICES OF CHILDREN?

Aimed at creating a shared narrative for a wonderful future, forging meaningful partnerships among residents, defining the purpose of tourism as a tool to help make real those possible futures and defining new ways to measure the success of tourism activities,

Memories of the Future was born.

Memories of the Future is a playful methodology that our organization, Cuidadores de Destinos - Destination Stewards or Caretakers - employs to incorporate the voices of children in tourism destination planning and management. This process helps bring young dreams to reality; it leverages tourism as a mechanism to creatively and innovatively drive sustainable development, and also protect what youth value most: their traditions, identities, biodiversity, and their future ambitions.

Memories of the Future transforms tourism into a tool that can be used in various ways, adaptive to the desires and intentions of the destinations where it is deployed.

It's refreshing how youthful energy can breathe life into a space by awakening creativity and increasing the power of the collective imagination, which in turn integrates young aspirations for a better future into the territories and places they inhabit.

Memories of the Future is a journey that converts into

a powerful tool for strengthening citizen participation from the outset, while eliminating special interests. The methodology also allows us to delve deeper and more meaningfully explore what makes destinations unique.

From the perspective of Cuidadores de Destinos, incorporating the voices of children in destination management only brings benefits, such as:

- **A Unique Perspective:** Children perceive the world differently, and they think and dream as a collective. Their visions are organic and they are less judgmental than adults, characteristics that foster the development of innovative and creative ideas that adults might overlook.
- **Learning and Active Participation:** Involving children in tourism destination management provides opportunities to educate them about the importance of sustainable tourism, respect for the environment, and the preservation of the cultural heritage in their territory. This promotes a sense of responsibility towards their environment and community.
- **Inclusion and Empowerment:** Opening a space for children to participate in decision-making related to tourism in their community creates a sense of belonging and empowerment. It teaches, but more importantly shows them that their opinions are valued and that they play an important role in building a tourism destination, where care for place is at the forefront.

RAPA NUI STEWARDS

With this innovative methodology, we traveled to Rapa Nui (Easter Island) in the South Pacific Ocean, recognized as one of the most isolated and fascinating places in the world. Today, Rapa Nui is experiencing a challenging reality where the climate crisis has emerged as a latent threat, as it has in many fragile destinations, and younger generations do not feel indifferent about this threat.

The challenge, and goal, was to reach each of the grade schools on the island, understand their reality(ies) and, from the voice of these young residents, co-develop a Tourism Development Plan for the commune.

The result was as incredible as the landscapes of the place they inhabit. We met with a diverse collective spanning numerous age groups and life circumstances. Through this engagement, we found, without a doubt, that the most important common thread to drive the future for the island in 2030 was

the protection of their ecosystems and traditions.

Four workshops were conducted where the results reflected the high sensitivity that the children and youth of the island have towards themes such as:

- Environment
- Climate crisis
- Care and preservation of both material and non-material heritage
- Education
- Infrastructure Improvement
- Care and protection of the sea
- Community work and collaboration
- Tourism awareness focused on visitors and residents

From the results obtained in the work sessions, we concluded, without a single doubt, that it is absolutely essential to continue incorporating the younger generations in the destination management of Rapa Nui.

Collectively, we identified four key dimensions for the sustainable development of the territory.

- 1.Environmental and cultural education
- 2.Participation in conservation projects
- 3.Promotion of responsible tourism
- 4.Participation in community planning

As a result, we believe that involving children in planning and decision-making can enhance a sense of responsibility and connection with their home, as well as promote greater transmission of knowledge and cultural traditions to those visiting the territory. The participation of children in destination management in Rapa Nui is key to the sustainable development and preservation of the island.

Now, with the results from Memories of the Future developed with the children of Rapa Nui, it is expected that they will be incorporated into the island's Tourism Development Plan. The project, driven by the Municipality, considers various programs to be developed by the year 2030, and undoubtedly the profound vision of the new generations is a concrete contribution to a successful outcome.

The aspiration of Cuidadores de Destinos is that the work with children remains sustained over time; their perspective is clear, well-founded, and realistic. Similarly, they navigate without prejudice, embracing dreams that include others; their participation and ideas are a valuable addition to any project that envisions wonderful futures for the territory they inhabit.



THE SURPRISING VALUE OF GEOPARKS

BY JONATHAN TOURTELLOT
CEO, DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP CENTER

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 2

All around Canada's northern Georgian Bay, an intriguing proposal is stirring both local and international interest. Tony Pigott, a retired J. Walter Thompson executive, is leading an effort called then "Aspiring Georgian Bay Geopark," aiming for the coveted UNESCO geopark designation. But what is a geopark and how can it promote destination stewardship? Jonathan Tourtelot, CEO of the Destination Stewardship Center, explains.

THE PRESTIGIOUS UNESCO DESIGNATION IS NOT WHAT YOU THINK.

"Grand Dad, will you tell us again about the Giant's Tomb?" So recounted Tony Pigott to show how geological formations can hold important stories, and how those stories can engage tourists in what might otherwise seem like an arcane subject, if not downright boring.

Rocks.

He's addressing a meeting in Killarney, Ontario, Canada, convened to present the idea of an "Aspiring Georgian Bay Geopark" to interested citizens. His audience lives around the northern part of that Bay, the vast, island-studded body of water attached to Lake Huron.

Pigott, a retired J Walter Thompson executive, is spearheading the Geopark bid. The proposition is that a UNESCO Geopark designation could improve tourism in a region that needs it, especially for the numerous indigenous communities around the Bay.



The pink-colored zone represents the proposed geopark around Georgian Bay, Ontario. [Photo courtesy of Dobbin International]

To a geologist, Giant's Tomb Island is a drumlin. It lies out in the Bay, an oval mound of glacial drift deposited thousands of years ago under flowing ice. But to the local Anishinabek people, it is the sacred resting place for the giant god Kitchikewana, who was big enough to guard the whole Bay. (More of his story shortly.) Geopark advocates call this dual point of view "two-eyed seeing." It's essential here for assuring equal time for both Western scientific and local traditional perspectives.

WHAT ARE GEOPARKS?

The first time I heard of geoparks, I pictured some



The profile of Giant's Tomb Island resembles the shrouded body of the great god Ketchekewana. [Photo by Mike Robbins]

kind of interesting rock formation, perhaps a few hectares in area, protected by a fence.

Wrong.

For one thing, they aren't usually parks at all, although some form of protection is necessary for the UNESCO nod. A geopark is a geographical designation that might cover a large area. The entire Azores archipelago is a geopark (main feature: volcanoes). And while some geological attribute of significance is required, the mandate steers closely to the holistic concept underlying good destination stewardship. According to the UNESCO website:

UNESCO Global Geoparks are single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed with a *holistic concept of protection, education and sustainable development*. Their bottom-up approach of combining conservation with sustainable development while *involving local communities is becoming increasingly popular*. [My italics.] And:

While a UNESCO Global Geopark must demonstrate geological heritage of international significance, the purpose of a UNESCO Global Geopark is to explore, develop and celebrate the links between that geological heritage and *all other aspects of the area's natural, cultural and intangible heritages*. [My italics.]

The links between geology and all the other sides of a destination reveal themselves in stories - the terroirs that flavor different wines, the strategic mountain pass that determined a battle, certain cultural predictions for bathing in hot springs, tales of evolution recorded in the fossils within limestone, ancient sunlight captured and transformed into seams of coal, the histories of people who mined it, and perhaps most important, the story of Earth itself, of the jostling continents that could fold granite like soft putty into the ribbons of rock we see beneath our feet today here in Killarney. All is connected.

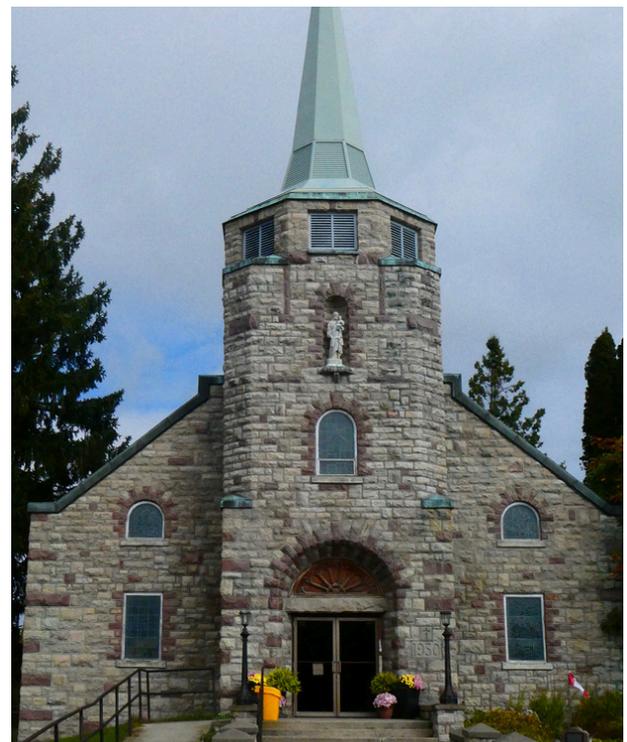
BACKGROUND

The geopark movement grew from a 1991 symposium of Earth scientists concerned about growing risks to important sites. Europe hosted the first geoparks. In 2004 the 17 existing European geoparks joined with 8 new Chinese geoparks to form a Global Geopark Network under the auspices of UNESCO. It grew to a membership of more than 100 geoparks around the world and prompted creation of a Global Geoparks Council, appointed by the UNESCO director-general, to vote yay or nay on new applications, starting in 2016.

The initial impetus for these types of UNESCO programs has been the goal of protecting and celebrating their stated *raison d'être*. Just as Biosphere reserves focus on biodiversity, World Heritage sites on history and nature, and Intangible Heritage on cultural practices, so do Geoparks focus on geological heritage - "the memory of the Earth," as geologists call it.

For many if not most of these programs, preservation for its own sake doesn't secure sufficient political support, so advocates achieve success by dangling the carrot of tourism in front of government bodies.

Rarely does the carrot come with instructions. That may result in overtourism in affluent accessible places, undertourism in needy remote ones, or simply missed



Killarney's St. Bonaventure church is built of gneiss, quartzite, and feldspar, each with a story from deep time, eons before Ontario existed. [Photo by Jonathan Tourtellot]

opportunities. So UNESCO now requires a geopark to have a holistic, national-government mandated management body in order to win its stamp of approval. (Oddly, the geopark movement has yet to gain traction in the United States, possibly due to lingering right-wing suspicion of anything beginning with "UN.")

HOW TO BECOME A GEOPARK

The process for gaining the UNESCO designation is not simple. The agency offers [detailed instructions](#) for "Aspiring Geoparks" and lays out numerous requirements that include:

- Management by a body with legal recognition under national legislation;
- Participation in the management body by all relevant stakeholders, including partners and scientific, local, and Indigenous (if any) communities;
- Means of connecting the area's geological heritage with its cultural and natural heritage;
- Engagement in appropriate branding, visibility, and communication efforts extended to both visitors and local people;
- And more.

Approval by the Global Geoparks Council is known as receiving a "green card," good for four years. Then the Council requires revalidation. If conditions have deteriorated, the geopark receives a "yellow card," requiring that it take remedial steps within two years. If there's inadequate improvement, it loses its UNESCO status - the "red card."

"UNESCO Global Geoparks are living, working landscapes where science and local communities engage in a mutually beneficial way." - UNESCO

The Aspiring Georgian Bay Geopark still has a long way to go for its green card, especially given its size



A volcanic vineyard: Stonewalls made of lava protect grape vines from Pico Island winds, Azores Geopark. [Photo by Jonathan Tourtellot]

and the 40+ Indigenous communities (First Nations and Métis Councils) scattered around it. Organizers were disappointed that only one Indigenous person showed up for the Killarney meeting. Still, the project leadership seems smart, dedicated, and in it for the long haul.

INDIGENOUS HERITAGE

Their daunting task seems suitable for, well, a giant god. The story of Kitchikewana, however, does not end well.

Rebuffed in love, so goes the tale, Kitchikewana grew so angry that he grabbed up great gobs of earth and rocks, casting them across Georgian Bay and so creating its 30,000 islands. He then died of a broken heart, and the profile of his body can still be seen today: **Giant's Tomb Island.**

Hmm. If you substitute "glacier" for the rampaging Kitchikewana in that story, you've got a pretty good characterization of what the melting ice sheet left behind.

Seems a lot like two-eyed seeing.

CHAPTER 5

NAVIGATING CHALLENGES WITH RESILIENCE





ARCHITECTURAL TACTICS FOR DISPERSING TOURISM: LESSONS FROM AUSTRALIA'S GREAT OCEAN ROAD

BY CLARA COPIGLIA

ARCHITECTURAL AND URBAN DESIGNER, MSC IN ARCHITECTURE FROM ETH ZÜRICH

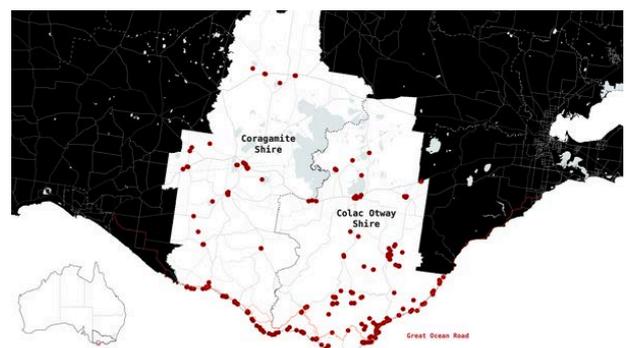
VOLUME 4, ISSUE 2

In the idyllic landscapes along Australia's famed Great Ocean Road, the economic and social impact of architectural interventions has become a focal point, addressing the dearth of accommodations in the inland regions. The challenge of attracting tourists to these areas while strengthening the local communities unveils compelling success stories in three distinct domains: the towns, the hinterlands, and a thematic trail. Amidst this exploration lies a crucial lesson: the renovation of small town centers and innovative repurposing of buildings can revitalize these regions, preserving their heritage and bolstering local economies. Clara Copiglia tells us more.

INSPIRATION ALONG THE GREAT OCEAN ROAD

Back in September 2018, I embarked on a weekend trip to the renowned Great Ocean Road, a scenic drive along the south coast of Victoria, Australia. Due to our modest budget, my partner and I opted for an overnight stay away from the seashore. As night descended, we journeyed an hour north from the coastline and found the inviting glow of the Mount Noorat Hotel, the sole source of warmth and light in the tranquil rural darkness. We were the only tourists staying in the hotel that night, and during our short visit, we learned from the hotel's owner that it was the only place left in the area for local inhabitants to meet and for tourists to sleep.

From that day on, I was determined to understand the economic and social impact of places like this hotel. Were there others?



A map of the research area. The red dots represent points of interest for visitors such as hotels, restaurants, lookouts, and recreational areas. [Map courtesy of Clara Copiglia]

The Great Ocean Road is the most visited destination in Victoria. While it attracts around 6 million visitors per year, half of them being day-trippers, the inland region lacks much accommodation for visitors and has been losing population. How could architectural actions increase tourism appeal and strengthen the local community?

At the beginning of 2023, two years after completing my architectural degree, I returned to this area to study renovated buildings located inland that impact visitor numbers. You can download the complete report [as a pdf](#).

Here are examples from the research, focusing on success stories and organized in three parts: The towns, the hinterland, and a thematic trail.

THE INLAND TOWNS

As most visitors travel by car or tourist coach, they will likely pass through many regional towns and see their streetscapes, usually composed of storefronts and hotels. Originally, storefronts were food shops, blacksmith shops, bakeries, etc., while hotels provided accommodations for visitors and a pub. Today, many storefronts are abandoned or have been converted into private houses, and many hotels are closed.

In Noorat, I found that the previous owner of the [Mount Noorat Hotel](#) had decided to sell during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Blain Family, a couple and their parents, bought the place to save it from closing down or being converted to housing. They took over the hotel while running a dairy business at the same time. The hotel is a place of meeting for the community, where locals and tourists encounter and sometimes gather, during bushfires, a place of refuge.

The Mount Noorat Hotel had been renovated first by the previous owner, who I met back in 2018. He took off the fake ceiling and repainted the interior, giving it a warm atmosphere. On the second floor, the hotel has a few well-renovated rooms that bring travelers to Noorat who discover the area or visit relatives. Aided by some local-government funding from Corangamite Shire, the Blain family has taken over the renovation and plans an outdoor seating area.

Lesson learned: In small regional communities, there is often a space that can both serve as a gathering



The historic Mount Noorat Hotel, built in 1909. [Photo courtesy of Clara Copiglia]

place for locals and host visitors. It is essential to identify these types of buildings and care for them. In the case of Noorat, the hotel is kept open thanks to devoted locals and government help.

In other towns in the area, in addition to hotels, these buildings might include converted churches, storefronts, halls, etc. There are many simple ways to upgrade those spaces like adding openings, creating an outdoor covered space, which would transform it into a welcoming place for both community and visitors. Storefront establishments, for instance, can gain appeal by sprucing up the façade and adding skylights or a back terrace.

THE HINTERLANDS

In between the towns inland from the Great Ocean Road, the landscape varies from tropical forest to plains punctuated by extinct volcanoes, lakes, and farms. But relatively few visitors come compared to the seashore.

I found one demonstration project that does bring tourism inland. Innovative accommodations such as tiny houses are a great way to promote these regional areas, as they bring visitors to the doorsteps of the locals wanting their business. Ample, an Australian company specializing in transportable living spaces, was approached by Visit Victoria - the state's primary tourism and event company - to propose a touristic off-grid tiny house called '[Stella the Stargazer](#)'.



The remarkable tiny house, 'Stella the Stargazer', with its clever design and unique amenities. [Photos courtesy of Brook James and Greta Punch]

Stella was moved every eight weeks to different locations in Victoria, including the Great Ocean Road region. The tiny house is placed on farm properties to highlight the natural landscape, and a chef collaborates with locals to provide visitors with food products from the area. The farmers get paid rent and don't have to manage the bookings.

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Stella was mostly built with reclaimed materials; its truss and cladding come from an old local farm shed that Ample dismantled. Stella is entirely off-grid with solar panels; it can harvest rainwater, and the grey water goes into holding tanks. Nothing is left on-site.

Lessons learned: Having the tiny house as an accommodation for tourists is a great opportunity for a second revenue stream for locals by bringing visitors to areas outside towns. It offers visitors a chance to stay in a natural landscape while connecting with local residents with products to share.

THEMATIC TRAIL

To connect town centers on the coast with businesses in the hinterlands, the 'Gourmet Trail' grew from adaptive re-use of an old building.

Two local dairy farmers, Caroline and Tim Marwood, converted an abandoned railway shed in the town of Timboon into a distillery. They created an extension, added large windows and an outdoor seating space.

This new attraction brought many new visitors, and Caroline and Tim opened an Ice Creamery and accommodations in Timboon. They received \$200,000 from the Victorian Government to fund the renovation of the Distillery. The Distillery and Ice Creamery generated a visitor hub within the community, encouraging visitors to explore the streets of Timboon. The two establishments have around 70,000 visitors per year and employ between 25 and 30 local people each.



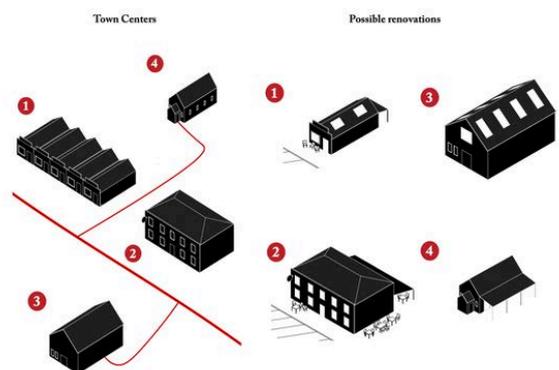
Family-owned Timboon Distillery specializes in single malt whisky. [Photo courtesy of Clara Copiglia]

After the renovation of the railway shed, local producers started formalizing an itinerary between the Distillery and other production places, such as a cheesery and a winery. The idea was to promote each other's products, make visitors stay longer, and disseminate visitation in the area. The main support for extending visitor reach is a map distributed in visitor centers and all gourmet trail businesses.

Today, the trail is comprised of nine members, located within a radius of 30 km, all producers from the Corangamite Shire. They created a membership system with a monetary contribution to fund the branding, and they meet regularly to enhance the trail and evaluate new memberships.

The businesses in rural areas on the Gourmet Trail repurpose commonly found types of buildings on farms, such as metal sheds, converting them for tourism activity. For example, the latest member of the Gourmet Trail is Keayang Maar Vineyard, located between Cobden and Teerang. The building has one part for storage and another for wine tasting. You can see this dual use in the shape of the building, which shows a large and high space on one side, and the form of the roof adapt its shape to create a covered outdoor area for visitors.

Lesson learned: The Gourmet trail works well because creative renovation of old buildings combined with local products helps entice tourists to detour inland from the popular Great Ocean Road. Some of these businesses also provide new meeting spaces for locals.



A diagram mapping the buildings in the Hinterlands area and possible renovations. [Photo courtesy of Clara Copiglia]

CONCLUSION

My research area covered two shires. I found that renovating buildings in small town centers, such as hotels, storefronts, and standalone buildings, is crucial for attracting tourism and combating depopulation. This investment can help create a more vibrant

atmosphere, preserve historic landmarks, and boost the local economy.

In the rural hinterlands farmers and entrepreneurs can introduce new buildings, such as tiny houses for tourists, or work with the existing metal shed landscape by introducing new purposes for this common building.

While working on this project, I stayed at the Mount Noorat Hotel - one of the first guests to book a room for a longer stay. While talking with some of the locals in the Hotel's pub one evening, I heard the rumor that the abandoned butter factory near the center had found a new owner. I wonder what the plan is for this building and if it will bring more visitors to Noorat? Will it serve the community? An opportunity awaits.



Photo from National Geographic

TOURISM AND NATURAL DISASTER RECOVERY: KEYS TO SUCCESS

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VOLUME 4, ISSUE 2

What is the impact of natural disasters on tourism and how can the tourism industry itself promote recovery for the destination? Examining Nepal's recovery following the Gorkha Earthquake in 2015, Jacqueline Harper shares insights into the role of tourism in disaster recovery, emphasizing the significance of swift recovery, effective destination marketing, strategic partnerships, and the opportunity to build back better through sustainable and community-focused approaches.

HOW TOURISM CAN HELP A TOURIST DESTINATION RECOVER AFTER A NATURAL DISASTER

In the wake of the Maui fires, earthquakes in Morocco, a new 2023 quake in remote western Nepal, and other recent natural and manmade disasters, tourism officials have been contemplating when to resume their tourism operations. This dilemma is not uncommon. Re-opening too soon can endanger tourists' safety; add pressure to already taxed infrastructure, accommodations, and resources; and re-traumatize residents when tourists ask how they were affected by the disaster. On the other hand, tourism and the resumption of business activities is urgently needed to fuel the speedy recovery and rebuilding of the devastated local economy.

The Gorkha Earthquake in Nepal is a case study of how tourism can aid in disaster recovery. On April 25th, 2015, the Gorkha region of Nepal was the epicenter of a 7.8 magnitude earthquake. Hundreds of aftershocks occurred for months afterward, leaving

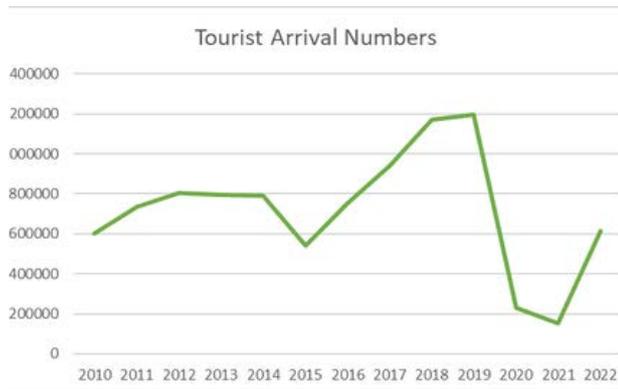
a serious impact on the country's infrastructure, including many heritage sites that double as tourist sites. Thousands of people were injured and died. Damages cost approximately \$7 billion USD, and impacted about one-third of the population. In terms of tourist arrivals, after 6 months, visitor numbers had declined by 42%.

I spent 3 months in the Kathmandu Valley researching how tourism can help a tourist destination recover after a natural disaster and gained four key insights:

1. There was a quick time frame for tourism to return to normal levels.

As shown in Figure 2 below, there was initially a decline in tourist arrivals following the earthquake. However, starting in 2016, tourist arrivals bounced back and continued to grow. In 2017, Nepal hit over one million international arrivals - a goal they set before the earthquake - and achieved a few years ahead of schedule. By 2018, Nepal was the third fastest-growing country in Asia based on tourist

arrivals. Like many countries around the world, COVID-19 hit tourism in Nepal hard in 2020 and 2021; however, the number of arrivals is now back on the incline.



Tourist Arrival Numbers from 2010 to 2022. [Tourist Arrival Numbers received from the Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation]

2. Destination marketing played a critical role in the post-disaster tourism recovery.

One of the keys to getting tourism started again after the earthquake was marketing and the media. Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), the country's destination marketing organization, worked diligently to restore the country's image following the earthquake. In the media, Nepal was being shown as being destroyed - places in ruins; collapsed temples; people in hardship - an unappealing image for travelers selecting their next destination. However, this narrative was not completely true. The earthquake impacted a few regions; only 31 of 75 districts were hard hit. The earthquake did not impact popular tourist destinations like Pokhara and Chitwan. This is where marketing and the media were key to bringing tourism back.

NTB invited celebrities in key market groups to come to Nepal and highlight its tourism offerings: Jackie Chan, David Beckham, and Prince Harry, to name a



Prince Harry visiting Patan Durbar Square to view ongoing efforts to restore one of Nepal's cultural treasures. [Photo courtesy of Jacqueline Harper]

few. This sparked conversation in the international news and demonstrated to international markets that

Nepal was once again open for tourism. Additionally, representatives from NTB were sent on international roadshows to promote Nepal to tourism agencies, who would then promote traveling to Nepal within their own countries.

Unfortunately, NTB had limited funding, so one strategy they employed was user-generated content. By doing so, they could receive maximum impact with little resources. The few tourists who were visiting at the end of 2015 and 2016 would photograph their travels and pose with a sign saying, "I am in Nepal Now" and then post it on their social media feeds. This demonstrated to their followers that it was both possible and safe to travel to Nepal after the earthquake.



Norie Quintos, a communications and content consultant, posing in front of an "I am in Nepal Now" sign in June 2019, while visiting the Himalayan Travel Mart conference. [Photo courtesy of Jacqueline Harper]

Between 2017 and 2019, NTB organized travel conferences inviting international press and journalists to come to Nepal and experience a location, such as Pokhara. In turn, they would write about it, and promote Nepal to foreign audiences.

These different methods allowed the NTB to rewrite the narrative of the country post-disaster and promote tourism once again.

3. Partnerships are key to disaster and tourism recovery.

The success of Nepal's disaster recovery was also due to partnerships. NTB worked with news outlets like

BBC, CNN, and TripAdvisor to get the message out that one could safely travel to Nepal. They also had financial and technical support from other countries like Japan International Cooperation Agency, China Aid, USAID to rebuild heritage sites. International Knowledge of tourism recovery came from PATA, the World Bank, and UNWTO to help with the tourism recovery. International partnerships were key for rebuilding and financing the recovery, but also marketing the country to foreign markets.

4. Disasters are an opportunity to build back better within the tourism industry.

Based on my observations, tourism is being promoted heavily post-earthquake and COVID-19 to attract as many visitors as possible. My main criticism of this process is that the NTB government is adopting the “heads in beds” strategy, in which they try to maximize growth by bringing in as many tourists as possible. Immediately following a disaster, this may be important to restarting an economy; however, once tourism has returned, it should not be the long-term strategy. Natural disasters are an opportunity to build tourism more responsibly. The NTB (and many DMOs around the world) should be incorporating sustainability and accessibility principles into their national and regional tourism strategies. As they are rebuilding the brand image of a destination post-disaster, there is an opportunity to make tourism better for the community in which it operates.

For example, New Zealand’s response to the Christchurch earthquake, with its focus on sustainability and community involvement, is a prime example of (1) sustainable rebuilding, (2) community engagement, (3) promotion of local businesses, and (4) resilience and adaptation.



Tourists and locals make their way around the Bouddha Stupa in Kathmandu, Nepal. [Photo courtesy of Jacqueline Harper]

1. After the devastating earthquakes in 2010 and 2011, Christchurch embarked on a journey of sustainable rebuilding. This involved not just reconstructing damaged infrastructure but doing so with an emphasis on eco-friendly and resilient designs. Many buildings incorporated modern earthquake-resistant features and energy-efficient technologies.

2. A critical aspect of the recovery was the involvement of the local community. Residents were encouraged to participate in the decision-making process, allowing them to have a say in how their city would be reimaged. This engagement ensured that the rebuilt city reflected the desires and needs of the people who call it home.

3. In the aftermath of the disaster, there was a concerted effort to support and promote local businesses. The “Shop the Sirens” campaign encouraged residents and visitors to shop at local stores, helping these businesses recover and thrive.

4. The earthquake catalyzed Christchurch to become more resilient in the face of future disasters. The city implemented comprehensive disaster preparedness and risk reduction strategies to mitigate the impact of any future seismic events. By following the path of building back better, destinations can not only recover but emerge stronger, ensuring that the benefits of tourism extend to all and that they are better prepared to face any future challenges that come their way.

In conclusion, the case of Nepal’s recovery after the Gorkha Earthquake serves as a valuable lesson for destinations worldwide facing the aftermath of natural disasters. As we’ve seen, quick recovery in the tourism sector is possible with effective destination marketing, partnerships, and a clear message of safety and opportunity. Yet, it’s equally important for destinations to look beyond short-term recovery and use post-disaster periods to “build back better” by embracing a sustainable, community-centered approach. That means investing in eco-friendly infrastructure, supporting local businesses, engaging the community in decision-making, and integrating sustainability and accessibility principles into their tourism strategies.

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