

Eco-resort Management

For most of us who can afford them, holidays are the most important thing in our lives. As more and more places open up to tourists, people are looking beyond the traditional sun, sea and sand experience. Ecotourism, a form of tourism that takes you to unusual and rather fragile areas, is the tourism industry's fastest growing sector. But as Ecotourism expands beyond the jungle and moves into the mainstream so do Eco-resorts and hotels. Now more and more properties are selling themselves as "green" and "eco". This "Eco-transformation" of leisure resorts is due to a number of reasons; the maturing of the "sun and fun" holidaying segment, the general public's increasing environmental awareness, and the doubling concern with physical fitness and health.

An eco-resort protects the environment, benefits local communities, and helps guests learn about the local surroundings while they explore them. Eco-resorts are not just for leisure but offer the tourist a complete eco-experience. A true Eco-resort not only offers eco-friendly sightseeing, but the accommodation, transport and cooking methods are also eco-friendly. Using solar heating, bio-toilets, and using transport systems more efficiently are all eco-friendly examples put to use to reduce the effect of people on the environment

The standard criteria for the certification of an eco-resort are the following:

- Design and construction
- Water conservation
- Liquid waste management
- Solid waste management
- Energy production and conservation
- Natural areas and conservation
- Lawn and gardens
- Protection of flora and fauna
- Contamination of air, water and soil

- Environmental education
- Quality standards

Designing for sustainable eco-resorts should by nature, follow the basic principles of sustainable development. It should be responsive to the constraints of the natural and cultural environment. Since some environments are more unique and fragile than others, there is no one single formula to manage the impacts of eco-resort construction. The design should provide an opportunity to bring visitors physically closer to the natural and cultural values of a site.

The framework for the design should lay emphasises on gathering information and knowledge that can be used to better understand the impacts of a development. The first essential steps in this process are climate analysis, locality analysis and site analysis.

Climate

Climate has a major influence on:

- Building materials, construction and orientation
- Energy consumption
- The nature of the land, e.g., topography, soils, hydrology, vegetation and fauna
- The feel, character and qualities of a place
- Comfort and convenience of users.

The basic information that needs to be gathered to design for specific climate types includes:

- The path (vertical and horizontal angle) of the sun during the year
- The temperature range
- The annual rainfall amount and annual distribution
- The wind intensity, direction and occurrence
- The most likely direction of storms, cold or strong winds
- The most common directions of good breezes.

Locality Analysis

A locality can be seen as the catchment of a site. It might also be considered as an extension of the site. Potential impacts of the development should be considered at this broader scale. Locality analysis should be carried out to consider issues such as:

- Identifying an appropriate site and the scale or type of development that might suit
- Access to local resources and services e.g. food, building materials, fuel, labour, water sources and infrastructure
- Access to quality environmental values eg natural ecosystems, local culture and history
- Climatic factors eg prevailing winds, rainfall
- The tourism appeal of the area.

Site Analysis

There are some general principles to be followed when deciding upon the specific site for a structure:

- Build on the least sensitive areas, or areas that have already been subject to human disturbance
- Site the development in an area with natural values that can be used to interpret the environment in a wider context
- Consider the type of tenure and rights of access and use
- Optimise the best available views without building on prominent points or ridgelines.

Site Evaluation

The type and detail of information to be prepared as part of the site analysis will depend upon factors such as the type, scale and intensity of the development and the nature of site conditions. Therefore, the evaluation of the carrying capacity of the site will take into account:

- fragility or resilience of the site
- availability of water and power resources

- type of development
- maximum number of visitors, and
- connections to different parts of the site eg trails or swimming at a nearby beach

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

The community of a resort refers to is the company staff or internal community, which in a resort situation will be a varied assembly of people and talents. However, for resorts there is also the external community that includes the neighbouring communities or surrounding metropolis, plus regional or national relationships. The external communities supply its labour force, provisions, complementary attractions and activities and the essential goodwill.

Community relations are taking on a larger role for resorts as the investment process becomes more complex, the sustainable development objectives more political and the competition more fierce. Huffadine observes 'the construction project, financing of infrastructure, and later the supply and staffing of the resort will depend on local goodwill and labour'. If the resort and local community are to survive in the competitive global tourism market, Rogers feels the 'Triple Bottom Line audit concept (needs to be) recast for application to community development'. In Rogers' view, to produce a competitive resort within a sustainable community framework would call for a business partnership between the two that:

- utilises nature's ability to provide for human needs, without undermining its ability to function over time;
- ensures the well-being of its members: offering and encouraging tolerance, creativity, participation and safety;
- empowers people with shared responsibility, equal opportunity, access to expertise and knowledge and the capacity to affect decisions which affect them;
- consists of businesses, industries and institutions which collaborate as well as compete, are environmentally sound, financially viable and socially responsible, and which invest in the local community in a variety of ways.

This is the type of community relationships addressed here, and a prime concern should be that tourism is an agent of change for a community. Change occurs in the community power base by creating new 'winners' and 'losers', by bringing it into contact with new ideas and priorities, it can restructure local society and by developing new market conditions it will place new demands on the local resource base.

When resorts bring large numbers of guests to a destination they become inverse factories, bringing customers to their product which has been pre-assembled and resourced for their enjoyment rather than shipping the product out to customers around the world. Said customers were at one time visualised as being benign, taking photographs and leaving only footprints; but as the reality of mass tourism has revealed even tourists with the finest of intentions create significant local impacts. The reality has often been different from earlier naive expectations. The physical impacts have included stress and erosion of the environment; social impacts have included a westernisation of local cultures; economically certain sectors have benefited such as entrepreneurs and the young and female workforce, while others have lost labour to the bright lights of resorts or lost access to their traditional resource base; and all have suffered from a dramatic rise in local housing costs if the resort destination becomes a popular second home or retirement community. Many of the above issues have been linked to successful resort development and the general growth in tourism because of their visibility and apparent direct correlations.

It is widely accepted that there have been changes in the lifestyle, traditions, social behaviour and moral standards, especially of the younger generation. In many cases young Cypriots have adopted values about sex, dress and morality quite different from traditional ones. But one of the reasons residents make such correlations is that tourism is highly visible and as a result receives the blame for change by association, without sufficient acknowledgement that the world itself is changing. To use the example cited by Saveriades, the youth of Cyprus would also be influenced in their attitudes to sex, dress

and morality by the general media revolution (television, music and tabloid press), the freer global exchange of information (Internet) and worldwide decline in traditional values and morals, regardless of whether they had resorts and tourists in their home regions or not.

STAFF MANAGEMENT

In terms of a resort's talents, staff and management require the appropriate motivation and training to provide the levels of quality service. With respect to the special issues of working in a resort, a major difference from regular employment situations is that many resort employees live and play at their place of work in isolated resorts; so it is often impossible for them to get that break or down time that most of us take for granted.

Resorts need to achieve high levels of service excellence in a competitive workplace, where there is a shrinking traditional labour pool and rising expectations on the part of many employees. We will see that resort management is attempting to raise the quality of service as part of its strategy to remain competitive with other forms of tourism and leisure in the world market. It is doing this by trying to develop more flexible and rewarding work opportunities within human relations and service management strategies.

The traditional labour market for resorts has been the local labour pool of surrounding communities, with an emphasis on young and female workers for the front-line positions in developed economies. This works well for both management and employees in many labour market situations outside of the big cities, where the prior employment opportunities have been largely for males. However, as more national economies have experienced significant growth in their service sectors while manufacturing and primary industries have declined in relative and sometimes absolute importance, the competition for female employees has increased and the young have many more attractive options available to them.

At the same time the number of young people (16-24 age range), that tourism and hospitality businesses have historically relied on for their entry level positions, has been decreasing.

Meier observes this age group in the US 'accounts for 42 per cent of the employees in travel-related firms and 60 per cent of the food service workforce. However this same group accounts for only 20 per cent of all employees nationwide and (was) expected to account for only 12.2 per cent by the year 2000, according to the (U.S.) Bureau of the Census'. What has been happening in the US has been happening elsewhere in the developed world, as the birthrate has shrunk since the post-World War II baby boom. A more recent study of employees in Cyprus resort destinations reports a similar dependency on young workers, where 37.7 per cent of the sample of Northern Cyprus hotels were 18-27 years of age, and a further 38.4 per cent were 28-37 years old.

This labour shortage has been a fact of life for the tourism industry for 20 years or more and various strategies have been adopted to solve the problem. The most prominent solution has been to hire migrant labour, both legal and illegal immigrants, to fill the gap, especially for the less popular positions back of house and general maintenance. This has been a natural and rational solution in the eyes of economists, with the global transfer of unemployed people to countries where there are jobs waiting to be filled. However, for management it is not that simple. Such migrants usually need to learn the local language and before they can start training and become fully proficient and then for some there are cultural differences to the western way of life that may require considerable adjustment on their part.

Another solution that has been mooted widely and tried by some companies is the employment of retirees. 'Older workers often bring experience, a strong work ethic, maturity, and reliability to a job. They also provide good role models for younger workers within the organisation' claims Meier who was in hotel management at the time. In contrast to the shrinking pool of young workers there is a growing number of retirees as the baby boomers enter retirement. Some of these retirees will either want to try something new or will need to extend their working lives if their pensions fail to provide adequate support. However, despite this logical solution it has not been the success to date that many had hoped. In part this has been due to management thinking more about the problems

of hiring seniors than their benefits, and governments placing roadblocks in the way of earning extra income to supplement a pension rather than offering encouragement. It is also due to the stress involved with many resort positions, that many seniors did not appreciate until they looked closely at the situation or tried it for a while.

Many frontline resort positions require people to be on their feet all day, are physically demanding due to lifting and carrying, can involve odd hours, and face-to-face customer service that can be challenging at times. Another group that could assist with the labour shortage are the disabled. Studies have consistently shown that the work performance of disabled employees is as good or better than non-disabled employees.

RISK MANAGEMENT

While some may think risk management is a recent phenomenon, a result of global warming and terrorism, it has been associated with resort management for a long time and in a variety of ways. In normal business, financial risk is a regular occurrence that should be recognised and managed like other factors of demand and supply. However, with the taking-in of guests comes an extra responsibility, known as 'duty of care', where management is obliged to protect their guests from harm to the best of their ability.

On the demand side guests are often looking for excitement and the spectacular, which can put them at risk. Those who seek excitement in adventure tourism, when they challenge themselves or look for an adrenalin rush, purposely place themselves at risk and it is up to resorts to ensure the real risk is minimalised by managing the situation. Even those who have not come to a resort to exert or excite themselves regularly demand spectacular views and sunsets that often require building on risky sites and in nonconformist style. The sounds of the sea and uninterrupted tropical sunsets attract resorts to the water's edge in areas where hurricanes and cyclones occur with regularity. In the mountains, similar demands for spectacular views place buildings at crests or on steep slopes where local climatic conditions are at their extreme and avalanches can occur.

On the supply side risk is present at the very start, requiring a correct interpretation of market research and feasibility studies over the 30-50-year life span of many resort investments. Risk is present in the location of many resorts on the 'edge of civilisation', well removed from regular infrastructure and services that are the basis of quality service experiences. It is present in the operation of resorts where guests come to participate in challenging activities, regular sports or simply to unwind, a process that inevitably leads some of them to leave natural caution and common sense behind at home.

It is not surprising that 'risk management is not just good for business, but is absolutely necessary in order for tourism and related organisations to remain competitive, to be sustainable, and to be responsible for their collective future'. Resort management risk not only involves both demand and supply considerations, it can range in scale from minor yet important internal issues like a lack of staff in crucial situations and places to overwhelming natural disasters or human external interventions like terrorism or financial crises. Whatever form it takes the element of risk is ever present for resort management and some type of management structure needs to be in place to minimise its impact on the business.

If no event or business decision within resort management is risk free, a risk management framework needs to take on a statistical probability structure. Tarlow has suggested a useful framework would be one that considers the probability of an event and its likely consequences. Figure 2 provides some examples, using Tarlow's suggested framework, but it should be noted that the consequences will vary according to each incident's severity and relevance to the resort product offerings.

Food Poisoning

Food poisoning is a serious occurrence for a resort because it means one duty of care has failed, ruining the visit of some guests and possibly closing a restaurant; but in the overall scheme of things, it has a low probability of occurrence and low consequences in a well-run establishment. The consequences are

generally limited to some temporary bad publicity, financial compensation, a revision of safety procedures and possibly new equipment.

Accidents

Accidents are presented in the form of personal injury, where the probability of occurrence can be high when a resort is associated with adventure tourism or dangerous locations. Duty of care is still a major consideration, but if a guest chooses to undertake a risky activity they are expected to assume some of that risk. Under these circumstances resorts are expected to minimise the level of risk by preparing the site properly, instructing the guest where appropriate, and providing warning signs or professional help where warranted. This level of risk has been assigned a low consequences ranking in that it usually applies to individuals or small groups and through the implementation of 'Risk Management' these consequences can be minimised, but not eliminated.

Natural Disasters

Natural disasters have been a fact of life for the resort industry since its inception. The risk of a natural disaster may vary from one resort to another, depending on the location of the resort and the general safety and warning systems in the area. Resorts that are situated right on the sea shores may face the risk of a cyclone or hurricane, especially if the region is recognised as a disaster prone area. Some resorts located on very high hills may face the risk of landslides or cloud bursts. Some other resorts may be situated near volcanic or seismically vulnerable areas. Therefore, the degree of risk varies from one resort to another. Resorts located in plains or urban settings may be less exposed to the risk of natural disasters.

If the resort as well as the surrounding areas have suffered heavy damage that will take a long time to restore, renting a timeshare may get difficult during such period. However, if the resort has not been affected directly, but the surrounding area attractions and activities have been suspended due to damage, the rentals may be partially affected. If the resort is self-

Skills Needed

If you are a young aspirant and you are planning to enter into beauty therapy industry, a career in spa and resort management would be nothing short of wonder. Awareness about various beauty and relaxation therapies has increased much over the past few years. Beauty therapy has taken the shape of an industry now. New experiments in the field have opened numerous academic as well as professional options.

Several universities and private institutes across North America, Europe and Asia Pacific are now offering major academic options and specialised programs in spa and resort management. These programs are meant for career-oriented people who want their profession to be full of fun and highly rewarding.

Ideal Qualifications

A spa and resort management professional should ideally possess college or university program in this discipline. If a candidate owns a degree in liberal arts which is further consolidated by previous work experience, he or she can be eligible for the job. Serious-minded students who are determined to explore the filed of spa and resort management has the options of pursuing associate, bachelor or graduate courses. They can earn associate degree from a community or junior college. Graduate and bachelor degrees can be obtained from colleges and universities that generally offer 4-year programs.

Additional Skills

Knowledge of foreign languages may enhance your professional prospects. There are several spas and resorts which largely depend on foreign tourists. These relaxation centers require spa professionals who are familiar with major foreign languages. Besides these professional skills, a candidate should have excellent communication ability as well as vibrant grooming. These features are known to boost up career possibilities in spa and resort management to great level.

Career Possibilities

If you are a graduate in spa and resort management, you can bag managerial or leadership positions in health and recreation centers of hotels, resorts and other leisure facilities which offer spa services. However, much depends on the area of your specialisation. Besides being salaried professionals, you can also start your own relaxation and recreation business with a management degree in the field.

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