Module # 2 – Component # 3

Discover the Wilderness Safari Projects - Namibia

Introduction

Much has been written about Ecotourism, and what travel companies do (or do not do) for the environment and wildlife. It appears that many travel organisations, however remotely involved (if at all), use the eco-tourism concept as a marketing tool.

As a result, the term has become just another buzz-word and has lost its true and potentially noble meaning. Wilderness Safaris take their contribution to sustainable conservation extremely seriously and have this Component will detail some of the specific projects that they are proud to be involved with.

The conservation ethic in Southern Africa has changed dramatically since its first Reserve, the Sabi Sands Game Reserve that was proclaimed in 1898. Then, the guiding principle was to preserve and conserve the animals and their environment, frequently to the cost of the local communities.

Essentially, large areas of land were fenced in, stocked with game and the local communities relocated. This had the very beneficial effect of reaching the core objective of conservation, but the very detrimental effect of displacing the indigenous population (without compensation) and removing any benefit of conservation from them. Species were saved from extinction, but at a tremendous cost.

Today the hard lesson learnt is that you must integrate local people into the conservation effort. Wilderness Safaris do just this.
Ecotourism

The following extract is from the WildlifeCampus Game Ranging Course Component on the Introduction to Ecotourism. It is included here to re-define this special term.

Although touted as a new term, it was in fact first coined by Hector Sevelos Loscorane in the early 1960’s. Now, ecotourism has became a buzz-word of the tourism industry in the 1990’s, as people become more environmentally aware.

As a result of inaccurate definitions of what ecotourism means, and what responsibilities are required of those that are involved in the industry, the industry (and the concept) runs the risk of losing credibility. This is mostly the result of profit-seeking organisations cashing in on the new acceptance of ecotourism by the public and using the environment of tourism destinations in a non-sustainable way.

The term ‘ecotourism’ has been used interchangeably with a host of other terms, not all of which accurately reflect its true meaning. Ecotourism has variously been described as a product, a destination and as an experience, and has also been used to reduce the feelings of guilt associated with some forms of tourism and travel.

Words and phrases such as environmentally sensitive, quality, green, responsible, low impact, ecologically or environmentally responsible, nature based, appropriate, alternative, soft, environmentally friendly and others have all been used (often incorrectly) to promote the image of travel companies and of their products (Hattingh 1994).

It is impossible to define accurately what ecotourism is, but it generally refers to:

Any aspirational form of tourism which simultaneously conveys value to natural resources, resident communities in visited destinations and the visitors themselves, without any of the negative and damaging implications inevitably associated with poorly managed mass tourism.” (Bennett)

In order to determine more accurately what may be classified as ecotourism and what is simply tourism with an “eco” flavour, various definitions have been applied

The Ecotourism Society defines it thus:

“ It includes purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the cultural and natural history of the environment taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem while producing economic opportunities that make conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people.”

The University of Pretoria Centre for Ecotourism defines it as:

“An enlightening participatory travel experience in environments natural or cultural or both that contributes to the conserving of these environments by generating sustainable economic opportunities of direct benefit to the local people and maximises use of environmentally sound infrastructure.”

In light of how the term is used, those who have completed the WildlifeCampus Ecology Modules will remember that ‘eco’ was derived from the Greek work ‘Oikos’ meaning ‘home’ or ‘place where you live’. How much meaning does the term ‘ecotourism’ have now?
The Wilderness Trust

African safari companies are privileged to be based and work in some of the planet’s most pristine, delicate and valuable countryside. We have a moral duty to ensure that our activities protect the land and its fauna and flora to ensure long-term sustainability.

We also need to ensure that skills and material benefits accrue to the communities who live adjacent to these reserves to make sure that these people have the incentive to nurture the land. Wilderness are driven to ensure that whatever they do never compromises the integrity of the reserves ~ and that all our actions add value, enhance and protect these wonderful parks.

One of our core beliefs is that rural villagers and communities who live in, or border on, wildlife areas have key conservation roles and undeniable rights. These communities in the next fifty years will control the destiny of wild places and wildlife. It is therefore critical that these people are brought into the mainstream of conservation and tourism now, to ensure that the future of their communities and the region’s fauna and flora is sustainable. One of the challenges they face is to ensure that their interactions with the local people help instil an ethic of land stewardship and conservation practice for present and future generations.

Wherever possible, they have involved the neighbouring communities in:

- wealth generation through tourism
- through ownership
- in training processes
- through the transfer of skills, and in the
decision-making processes.

Bringing a potential poacher into the mainstream of tourism’s income flow can make him/her the world’s best gamekeeper. A win-win situation is attainable when communities are directly involved in the benefits from wildlife and in the protection of their environment. This is where a huge amount of their time and efforts go. Much of this work is tough and unglamorous and does not hit the headlines, especially when compared to the conservation efforts of the "big furry" predators! But this is the critical conservation work that will ensure that all the species in their own habitats have protection for generations to come while communities prosper. Below is a selection of some of the conservation efforts currently in progress at Wilderness Safaris:

A portion of each guest’s fare is allocated to the "Wilderness Safaris Wildlife Trust". Being at the "coalface" of environmental and wildlife needs in many areas, they have found that quick access to funds is essential to solve wildlife dilemmas as they arise. 100% of the funds raised within Wilderness is allocated to the approved projects. No fees are charged by Wilderness Safaris (nor the trustees) for managing the fund.
**ECO-FRIENDLY SYSTEMS**

Going back in their history, Wilderness were one of the first safari companies to install eco-friendly systems in their camps, long before it became fashionable or law. These systems helped to ensure that the camps would have as little negative impact on the environment as possible. Solar hot water systems for heating hot water; solar lighting; Calcemite tanks for safe sewage processing; can crushers; trucking or flying rubbish out of the camps to towns for safe disposal - all these were some of the practices we were among the first to voluntarily install in our camps, often at considerable cost to ourselves.

Some of these projects they are involved in are large, expensive and audacious. They do need financial help to keep the projects going or to accelerate the programmes. They have started a website giving more details on these projects at [www.wildernesstrust.com](http://www.wildernesstrust.com).

If you would like to know more on these projects and if you are able to assist they would welcome your suggestions and help.
Project: Damaraland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Damaraland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Namibia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project</td>
<td>Damaraland Camp is one of our most successful conservation projects and has resulted in an 80,000 hectare conservancy being proclaimed in what was hostile countryside. The rare desert elephants, black rhino and plains game are flourishing again and poaching has stopped! The community and ourselves have come together in a wonderful partnership ~ and they are now our landlord. Revenues flow from the camp to the local community through significant bed night levies, the provision of services, secondary businesses, and salaries. The community earns 10% of the camp's bed night revenue and their trust is one of the few community trusts in Namibia that has money in the bank! We have our past guests to thank, as they were instrumental in the camp being a success. This partnership has resulted in the Torra community being one of the first in Namibia to have their area proclaimed a Community Wildlife Conservancy, now known as the Torra Wildlife Conservancy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Project: Ongava**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ongava</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Namibia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project</td>
<td>In 1991, Ongava converted four unproductive ranches into a 30,000 hectare private game reserve that now forms the buffer zone between Etosha and the farmers to the south. Animals that used to be shot on sight as they left Etosha now have this buffer to protect them. Lion, Leopard, Cheetah, Black and White Rhino and all the plains game now have a safe haven in Ongava. The game concentrations on Ongava are so good that many guests prefer not to game view in Etosha and elect to stay entirely within the private reserve on their drives and walks. The Namibian parks are using Ongava as one of its black rhino breeding reserves. This is a successful initiative that aims to spread Namibia's black rhino throughout the country in safe havens that will allow the rhino to breed up quickly. Plans are in place to create an educational and conservation centre on Ongava that will allow young Namibians to be trained up in conservation and wildlife matters.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Project: Sossusvlei

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sossusvlei</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Namibia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prior to our animals at Sossusvlei the land was 46,000 acres of commercial goat farms that harboured very little indigenous wildlife. There were many hundred of kilometres of fences erected throughout the farms and very little wildlife. We bought the two properties, built the Kulala and Sossuvlei Camps and have created the Kulala Wilderness Reserve by removing fencing, previous farming structures, as well as all the goats and other exotic animals.

Today the wildlife moves freely through the reserve and we now have good concentrations of Gemsbok (oryx), springbok, ostrich and all the Namib Desert species. The smaller nocturnal predators have thrived and we have recently set up the Small Carnivore Research Project that focuses on populations of:

- Aardwolf
- Bat-eared fox
- Cape fox
- Black backed jackal
- African wild cat.
**Project: Skeleton Coast**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Skeleton Coast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Namibia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Skeleton Coast Camp provides funds to the local Purros communities outside of the park and also helps the local Himba people to trade their wares with our guests in a win-win for all. Due to the fragility of the Skeleton Coast Park, we have dedicated a great deal of time setting up programmes to preserve and monitor the area.

Presently we have wildlife monitoring programmes, a water conservation programme, as well as a track rehabilitation and maintenance programme.

This is in addition to setting up a permanent research camp that will be used as a base for research on lichens (a vital component of the coastal Namib Desert ecosystem), desert giraffe, and desert elephant. We also reimburse the community who live outside of the Skeleton Coast Park for their losses when the park’s lions stray out of the park into community land and eat their cattle.
GUIDE AND MANAGEMENT TRAINING.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>TRAINING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Botswana</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Training is an important part of the Wilderness Safaris operation and we take it extremely seriously. We have one of the finest guide and management training programmes in Africa, where our commitment is to take local rural people and teach them the skills to be amongst the best guides and tourism managers in Africa.

We are already beginning to see results, as guides in Botswana are rapidly progressing from being the worst in Africa a mere ten or fifteen years ago to being amongst the best!

This guide and management training programme is entirely self-funded and takes up huge amounts of time and money, coupled with enormous inputs and energy from our dedicated guides, naturalists and managers who share their knowledge with the next generation of staff.

The programme takes place at Kaparota Camp in the Okavango, Botswana, which is closed off from November to March each year and used exclusively for training our guides and managers during this period. Each course runs intensively for ten days for ten guides at a time. After that period, they go back into the field to study further. Over time, once they have passed through Level 1, they return for further courses and training and gradually rise through the ranks. Brian Worsley, one of the top guides in Zimbabwe, has evaluated the courses and has stated that this is one of the best guide training courses he has seen.