

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND CONSERVATION AT THE RIVIERA AND COSTA MAYA, MEXICO

WWF, TOI, and MARTI Pilot Project

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Tour Operators' Initiative for Sustainable Tourism Development (TOI) signed in October 2006 a cooperation agreement to encourage sustainable tourism development.

Riviera and Costa Maya, in Mexico, was the first selected destination by WWF and TOI, which receives approximately 170.000 tourists per year. Nowadays, this region is the number one tourism destination in Latin America and an important holiday gateway for millions of North American and European tourists. However, the unprecedented tourism growth has changed dramatically this region in less than 30 years.

Coastal habitat destruction caused by the exponential expansion of tourism infrastructure such as hotels or resorts, and water pollution from hotels, resort complexes and tourism-dependent local communities are the two principal threats to the Riviera and Costa Maya. However, tourism is a key economic sector for the whole region. The coastal habitat destruction through the overdevelopment and the water pollution, lead to a loss of biodiversity and water availability for the tourism industry and local communities.

The Mesoamerican Reef Tourism Initiative (MARTI), a joint initiative of Conservation International and Amigos de Sian Ka'an, was identified as a key local project partner. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization / World Heritage Centre (UNESCO-WHC), supporting members of the TOI, committed to provide technical advice to help link tourism business opportunities and conservation issues and reduce threats to ecologically-sensitive and marine protected areas.



OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

1 - The WWF-TOI-MARTI partnership has worked successfully and measurably for the integration and adoption of the CI/IBLF Hotel Siting, Design and Construction (SDC) guidelines and practices in federal regulations. The SDC guidelines seek that new hotel developments are in harmony with their surroundings, use minimal natural resources and create less waste, respect and protect their cultural and natural environment, and benefit and involve the neighboring community.

The partnership acts as a strong policy and advocacy force for the adoption of sustainable tourism planning, development and its promotion through economic incentives and subsidies including the potential designation of new federal protected areas.

2 - The Partnership works towards adoption of Good Environmental Practices by TOI hotel suppliers at Riviera and Costa Maya.

TOI has influenced successfully their hotel suppliers to adopt and implement Good Environmental Practices (GEP) for significant measurable reductions in potable water consumption, waste water generation and solid waste generation.



RESULTS

Up to now, the project has achieved:

- A positive dialogue with local, state and national authorities on the future of the destination.
- Directly comments on and open the channels for the consideration of a synthesis from the Mexican conservation community to strengthen the draft of the National Tourism Law, specifically in the aspects related to sustainable coastal conservation incentives and responsible tourism within protected areas.
- Development of a Mexican Official Norm, in partnership with the Mexican Ministry of Environment, on requirements and specifications for siting, construction and operation of coastal tourism developments at the Yucatán Peninsula. The text of the norm was approved by the National Technical Committee on Normalization in February 2009. This is a normative guideline with concrete specifications that consider the biodiversity particularities of the area.

These regulations represent a corner stone for the maintenance of the destination into the future and the conservation of its still remaining biological attributes. They could also be used as international policy blueprints.

These results have been largely made possible thanks to the clear and joint articulation of concerns from a partnership formed by powerful private and non-profit actors.

In a constructive up-to-date evaluation of the project, the partnership has been very successful in opening-up political channels and avenues for key policy improvements. The process of strengthening the adoption of good environmental practices of hotels still requires further efforts from the partnership to reach improvement in the long run.

WHAT COMES NEXT

The coastal area of the Andaman Sea Eco-region, in Thailand, is the other selected destination where hotel managers already recognized the key importance of training their staff to help optimize the efficiency of material and natural resources use (particularly energy and water consumption). They also agree on the need for creating awareness among the employees and guests to conserve these resources.

At the Andaman Sea Ecoregion, particularly in Phuket, Khao Lak and Krabi, TOI and WWF will work for:

- Improving waste water treatment
- Training hotels' staff
- Implementing the necessary infrastructure at a very early stage of further tourism development to avoid negative impacts to the natural environment, i.e. tourism development should take place according to Masterplans

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