

## Keynote Address

### Developing a National Sustainable Tourism Strategy: Going Beyond Ecotourism to Protect the Planet's Resources

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#### ABSTRACT

Ecotourism has been promoted as a significant contributor to resource conservation and environmental protection. However, the typical ecotourism trip usually includes a number of transportation, accommodation, and food service components that are not necessarily environmentally responsible, but which promote sustainable tourism. Nevertheless, the tourism industry is possibly one of the only industry sectors that can arrest the constant environmental destruction caused by such phenomena as global warming. A concerted effort by all stakeholders in tourism to adopt sustainable tourism policies and practices at the national and international levels could achieve substantial results over the next generation. The Bahamas Government in cooperation with the Organization of American States commissioned the most comprehensive set of Sustainable Tourism Policies yet prepared. The model presented below reflects on the initiative taken in the Bahamas and outlines in detail the responsibility of government agencies, travel trade, NGOs, and the public in achieving a sustainable tourism industry.

Because of the size of the travel industry, sustainable tourism at the operator, national, and international level provides one of the few options available to reverse the ongoing destruction of the planet's resources and life support systems. To some, this role may seem like a complete contradiction. Tourism has traditionally polluted pristine water bodies, irreversibly altered indigenous cultures, and decimated untold acres of forest to produce billions of brochures, newsletters, and fliers that have been used to market travel.

There have, however, been significant changes in the past ten years. The 90s are now frequently called the "decade of the environment." Consumers have consistently rated environmental concerns among the top priorities over the past seven or eight years<sup>1</sup>. The consumer interest, at least in North America, also supports increased travel industry responsibility. For instance, a USTTA survey (March, 1995) as reported in *Travel Weekly*, indicated that 83 per cent of consumers expected their travel supplier to act in an environmentally responsible manner.

The new tourism markets are also interested in experiencing the environment and participating in nature-related travel. Ecoplan:net Ltd. has recently participated in a large consumer survey of travelers in five U.S. and two Canadian cities, representing approximately 13.2 million consumers<sup>2</sup>. Virtually all of those surveyed plan to take

<sup>1</sup> A 1996 Survey of British Columbia residents by the University of British Columbia, which showed environmental concerns as the number two issue after job creation.

<sup>2</sup> *Ecotourism-Nature/Adventure/Culture: Alberta and British Columbia Market Demand Assessment*; HLA and ARA Consultants, 1995.

a nature-based trip in the next two years. This represents a level of interest in nature travel that exceeds even the impressive results of the 1994 USTTA study on “Tourism and the Environment,”<sup>3</sup> which indicated that there were approximately 43 million American nature-oriented tourists. Virtually all components of tourism must therefore become active and committed proponents of sustainable tourism if resources are to be protected for future generations. Ecotourism is an important shift in the marketplace, but will contribute little to environmental protection and restoration. A complete change in attitude and information throughout the travel sector is required.

### THE LIMITATIONS OF ECOTOURISM

When asked to prepare this keynote address to the Yale Ecotourism Conference, I wanted to focus on how this emerging market segment could contribute to substantive environmental protection. However, in assessing the activities and product of the more than 200 ecotourism operators from our files, I found that their overall impact on resource conservation and cultural heritage protection was almost irrelevant in the face of the major environmental issues of the next generation. Whatever ecotourism contributes to the slowing of desertification, global warming, pollution of ground water, and unbridled population growth, passes unnoticed. In fact, the ten major international hotel chains that have embraced green management practices are contributing much more to resource protection than the hundreds of eco (and not-so-eco) tourism operators promoting ecotours to the last of the undisturbed areas of the planet. Energy reduction schemes at Ramada Hotels, water conservation initiatives at the Hilton chain, or even food composting at a major hotel like the Royal York in Toronto can have a very significant influence compared to the well-intentioned efforts of an ecotourism operator delivering a few hundred tourists annually.

Perhaps much of the reason for the relatively minor impact of ecotourism lies in the limitations of its definition. The term ‘ecotourism’ was first used by Hector Ceballos-Lascurain, who, in 1991, defined it as:

travel in undisturbed, natural areas with the objective of admiring, studying, and enjoying the scenery and its wild animals and plants and culture.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to notice that this definition *only* applies to the experience once the traveler is “in” the undisturbed, natural area.

<sup>3</sup> *Tourism and the Environment*, US Travel Data Center and Travel Industry Association of America; Washington, DC, 1994.

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<sup>4</sup> The Australian Ecotourism Strategy, Ministry of Tourism, Canberra, Australia, 1994.

In other words, ecotourists could take an older generation, fuel-consuming charter aircraft (B727, L1011) to the destination country, stay in a standard hotel that has not incorporated energy conservation practices, eat meals made from imported foods, travel to the ecotourism site in a gasoline vehicle, and still believe they were on a responsible ecotourism trip. This arrangement unfortunately describes a typical ecotourism trip.

The definition of ecotourism has, nevertheless, matured over the past five years. The Australian definition in their Ecotourism Strategy adds “travel which avoids damage or deterioration to the experience of others.”<sup>5</sup> The Ecotourism Society also suggests that the traveler should contribute to the well being of local communities, and the 1996 Brazilian Ecotourism Strategic Plan includes the notion of the businesses being sustainable.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

While the latter may assume that an operation can only be sustainable if acting in an environmentally responsible manner, it is not clear. In any case, even if one small component (e.g., lodge or tour operators) is operating with environmental awareness, it does not mean that the rest of the industry components are being responsible. In fact, ecotourism operators may provide such a small part of an overall 10-day itinerary that their influence on an environmentally responsible tour product may be insignificant.

Our efforts at ecoplan.net to expand the influence of ecotourism as a tool for environmental “right action” have been the result of a broader definition that encompasses the concept of sustainable tourism. It states that ecotourism is:

travel for the purpose of learning about the natural and cultural environments, while contributing to local community development, and the conservation and restoration of resources, while using only those operators and suppliers that are making a significant effort to practice sustainable tourism and green management.

If “sustainable tourism practices by each component of the ecotourism product” is considered a legitimate definition, then few if any countries can offer ecotourism.

### THE IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION ON THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

Despite the abundant warning signs of significant environmental change that will effect our travel industry, there has been relatively little movement toward environmental responsibility. On the other hand, both the size of the industry in terms of revenues and employ-

ment as well as its political influence in many countries, suggests that tourism could be a major leader in promoting and defining sustainable development policies and practices. Tourism requires healthy consumers and a relatively intact and authentic environment. Both these conditions will be under even greater stress in the next fifty years. If we do not move collectively as an industry toward implementing significant changes in the way we do business, then the sustainability of tourism, as we know it, is highly questionable.

Ecotourism as presently conceived, with its focus on site-specific or even local community activities, will not have a substantial influence on national policies, industry practices, or consumer shifts toward environmentally responsible action. However, a concerted and comprehensive partnership among all tourism stakeholders could potentially reverse or at least contain the level of environmental destruction that is being forecast for the next few generations.

#### TOURISM AND GLOBAL WARMING

One area of environmental change where tourism could play a significant role is in arresting the increased warming of the planet. In fact, tourism may be the only legitimate force that could significantly reverse what appears to be an almost irreversible change to the earth's atmosphere. Within our generation, the energy industries have become the most significant enterprise on the planet. With annual sales in excess of \$1 trillion dollars and daily revenues exceeding \$2 billion, oil alone supports the economies of many countries including Mexico, Russia, Great Britain, Venezuela, and the nations of the Middle East. These countries want, and indeed promote, increased levels of fossil fuel burning, which contributes to global warming. We have become so dependent on fuel sources that if we were to experience a rapid decrease in the burning of fossil fuels, it would result in unprecedented unemployment, worldwide economic depression, and probably a war.

Part of the reason for lack of action from the tourism sector is ignorance and a refusal to look at the facts concerning global warming projections. Let's look at some of these facts:

We have been receiving warnings for the past twenty years that we have now officially moved into an era of global warming. In fact, ten of the hottest years on record have been recorded within the last twenty years.

- London, which is of course a major world tourism destination, has reported that 1995 was the driest summer since 1727 and the hottest since 1659. In that same year, 500 people died in the U.S. midwest from an unexpected heat

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wave that followed the second 100-year flood in just three years. The list of climatic aberrations goes on with the subsequent influence on the movement of travelers and the sustainability of travel destinations.

- Rising sea levels will eliminate the Maldives as a nation within the next 75 years, and similar levels of coastal dislocations will effect many of the prime beach front properties in the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean Regions, especially those in low lying coastal zones.
- Last year, researchers discovered a 70 per cent decline in the population of zoo plankton, off the coast of California. This has been linked to an increase between one and two degrees in surface water temperature over the last fifty years. This and other environmental changes are all but destroying the sport fishing industry in some regions of North America.
- For the summer of 1996, record rains in Eastern Quebec virtually destroyed the season's industry. Dams overflowed, destroying access roads, dislocating 12,000 people, killing twelve people and laying waste to several tourism oriented communities. Scientists have blamed global warming for this unprecedented deluge of rain.
- There is evidence that the hurricane season is expanding and this year Bertha arrived in early July—approximately two months before the season usually begins.
- The mosquito responsible for dengue and yellow fevers has traditionally not been able to survive at altitudes greater than 1,000 meters. This insect is now being reported at 1,200 meters in Costa Rica and 2,200 meters in Colombia. More areas will become unsafe for travel.

It does not take a doctoral degree in climatology to appreciate the fact that by pumping 6 billion tons of carbon dioxide into the 12-mile atmosphere around this fragile planet, change will occur. If we require still more proof from the scientific community, then no source is more “chilling” than the opinion of the 2,500 climate scientists who make up the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Last year this group issued an unequivocal state-

ment on the prospect of a forthcoming catastrophe caused by global warming. The panel flatly announced that the earth had entered a period of climatic instability likely to cause “widespread economic, social, and environmental destruction over the next century. Continued emission of green house gases would create protracted crop destroying droughts and a host of new and recurring diseases, hurricanes of extraordinary malevolence, and rising sea levels that will inundate island nations.”<sup>6</sup> This does not sound like the conditions for a successful and sustainable tourism industry.

The projections for increased hurricane activity alone could play havoc with Caribbean Region tourism. When combined with rising sea water and the corresponding destruction of coral reefs, wave action will potentially eliminate many of the existing destination resorts. Loss of beaches due to this wave action will also curtail future development options.

These impending problems are one of the reasons why the Government of the Bahamas with its 700 islands and thousands of kilometers of low lying coastal regions is the first nation to prepare a comprehensive Sustainable Tourism Policy and Practices. And although the Bahamas may be demonstrating responsible leadership as a country, it alone cannot significantly contribute to reduction in global emissions and environmental destruction.

#### AN INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The Bahamas must be joined by a coalition of countries that collectively work together to incorporate widespread, planet-wide sustainable tourism practices. What better force to counteract the annual \$1 trillion in revenues from oil than a \$4 trillion tourism and travel industry? The clout of the world’s largest industry in shifting consumer attitudes and government policy from the hell-bent production and sales orientation of the energy sector can only be accomplished by the economic power, broad employee base, and consumer connections of the travel industry.

The obstacles are significant. The National Coal Association spends about \$700,000 annually on projecting its position on global climate issues. In 1993 alone, the American Petroleum Institute paid approximately \$2 million to the public relations firm of Burson-Marsteller to defeat proposed green taxes on fossil fuels. While the transportation segment of tourism may also agree with that position, the other 80 per cent of the travel sector has much to lose by such short term and irresponsible thinking.

One of the most aggressive challenges to the reduction of global warming comes from the \$400 million consortium of coal suppliers

<sup>6</sup> The Global Crisis," *National Review*, June 1996.

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and coal-fired utilities called the Western Fuel Association. They were very successful in influencing the Bush Administration with promises of a new era of agriculture based on reclaimed desert lands with carbon dioxide-forced growth of grasslands. Their influence is obviously still felt in the existing Republican Congress. The combined efforts of those environmental groups concerned about global warming, including the Environmental Defense Fund, the Sierra Club, the Union of Concerned Scientists, and the World Wildlife Fund, must be joined by travel sector components. As stakeholders who are deeply concerned about the future of the environment, we should stand behind these groups with financial and corporate support.

While we can all agree that more scientific data on the rate of global change and its link to global warming could be done, as a travel industry consultant, I would rather accept the expert opinion of the 3,000 to 4,000 scientists over the self-serving interests of the fossil fuel trade associations and their highly paid scientific consultants. Do you remember the arguments by industry in the 1970s and 1980s discrediting the negative impact of CFCs? Well, the scientific community was right, and fortunately, governments responded with the elimination of these ozone depleting chemicals. A similar change in fossil fuel-related policy will not be as easy. For instance, serious reductions in fossil fuel use will be rejected by the United States, Japan, and the OPEC nations. As the economies of China and India become stronger, they too will resist policy changes at least until they have seen significant reductions from the U.S. The voices then of those small island nations and even the stronger European countries will not significantly shift the existing trends. However, the multi-trillion dollar tourism industry, with its connections to many other industrial sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, transportation, food processing, and construction could generate the type of partnerships that would make government reconsider. A comprehensive national sustainable tourism initiative from dozens of countries could perhaps be the most significant improvement we have seen in the planet's environment in the past 1,000 years.

I believe that this change is possible. In the past five years, ecoplan:net ltd. has provided sustainable tourism and green management information to thousands of delegates in workshops, seminars, and conferences. I have been very impressed to see hotel managers who upon entering the workshop knowing nothing of environmental action or green management, make substantial changes in their properties.

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## THE BAHAMAS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MODEL

In 1994, the Minister of Tourism at the time announced that a major ecotourism initiative was being prepared for the Out Islands. The rationale was simple:

- a need to create jobs in the islands
- a combination of land and marine resources and Bahamian culture that appeals to ecotourists
- a desire to broaden the market segments to the Bahamas from the traditional mass markets associated with beach tourism, gambling, and cruise ship visitors

Rather than bring a number of products to the market that were neither operating on sustainable principles or reflecting basic ecotourism standards, it was decided to create a foundation for responsible tourism to be delivered by an environmentally friendly industry. Ecoplan:net was subsequently hired, and over ten months, worked closely with Ministry of Tourism officials, the OAS (who paid for the study) representative, Michael King, and most significantly, officials from numerous other government departments (agriculture, fisheries, planning, etc.), NGOs, and, of course, the travel trade.

This collaboration and involvement from all the players—from the Cabinet ministers of the various departments to conservation organizations to small resort operators—proved to be the only way these policies and guidelines could be implemented.

Following are some of the initiatives which the process in the Bahamas has started:

- Priority policies have been selected for Cabinet approval.
- A Sustainable Tourism Unit has been formed and is initially responsible to the Permanent Secretary, who in turn has the direct support of the Minister, The Honorable Harold Watson.
- Ecoplan:net is now preparing an Implementation Strategy.
- The Commonwealth Secretariat has reviewed the policies and is considering funding a model project for the Caribbean.

Because I believe that the Bahamas Sustainable Tourism Model is the most progressive and comprehensive to be developed to date, I would like to present it as a method for a country, state, or province to embrace sustainable tourism. It will make up the first block in developing an international coalition of nations prepared to make a

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stand for the environment in order to assure the long term sustainability of tourism resources. Certainly the Bahamas and their Caribbean neighbors may have the most to lose in the short term because of global warming and other environmental issues. But then so do the thousands of tour operators and their employees working in tourism generating countries throughout Europe, North America, and Asia.

Perhaps we can consider the Bahamas as an “indicator species,” having recognized that it may be the first of many countries to experience the loss of its primary industry if it does not take action at the national and global level. The Bahamas, which has had little previous history of planned environmental protection has recently become a signatory to many international conventions on environmental management. The Bahamas, in fact, hosted the follow-up Meeting of the Parties to the Rio Convention. And it has embraced thirty-one tough policies that will effectively touch all aspects of its society.

As author of their Bahamian Sustainable Tourism Policies as well as an adamant supporter of the initiatives of the Bahamian government and its travel industry, I am pleased to present this model of sincere effort to establish environmental responsibility at a national level.

I hope that each of you find some opportunity within your job or particular role to contribute to environmental restoration and the prevention of continued environmental destruction. Perhaps this model can be a catalyst to your actions as a responsible tourism representative and a resident of planet earth.

#### A PARTNERSHIP FOR NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The Bahamas can also serve as a model for creating a national sustainable tourism policy. I have prepared an outline of the possible—indeed necessary—activities that you can undertake in both your professional and personal lives. If you are not *personally* committed to sustainability, then you will be limited in your potential to contribute at the professional level.

Commitment—while desirable—is not essential in the first phases of sustainable tourism development. I have seen participants leave our Green Management Workshops and make visible changes to their resorts the next day. However, I cannot say that they “saw the light” and instantly became converted and committed. But change did take place. . . and that is what this conference is about: discussing the impacts of ecotourism, how to measure them, and how to mitigate with sustainable practices.

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As I have stated, these goals can only be achieved through a partnership of all individuals within the travel industry and its associated sectors (agriculture, transportation, environmental associations, etc.).

The following actions, therefore—presented on an organization-by-organization basis—can provide you with a sense of what you and your colleagues may do to advance sustainable tourism when you leave this conference.

#### NATIONAL OR STATE DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM

- identify urgent environmental and ecotourism issues
- prepare Sustainable Tourism Policies & Implementation Strategies
- provide training programs in sustainable development, green management, sustainable ecotourism product development
- create community awareness of the value of tourism and the importance of environmental protection and restoration
- support environmental impact assessments of all tourism development
- work with other agencies to assure the protection of natural and cultural resources
- prepare regional/community Sustainable Tourism Master Plans
- prepare Site Development and Architectural Guidelines
- contribute to heritage protection guidelines and criteria
- coordinate the environmental activities of the travel trade

*Tourism could be a major leader in influencing national sustainable development policies and practices.*

#### DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

- prepare guidelines for sustainable agriculture and organic farming
- promote local agricultural products to tourism industry
- prepare recipes requiring local agricultural products
- eliminate toxic herbicides, pesticides, and fungicides
- encourage local market gardening (e.g., fruits and vegetables)
- provide financial incentives to small farms

#### DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

- identify and inventory all areas of unique natural resources
  - endangered species
  - rare birds and plants
  - nesting areas

- unique geological features
- intact ecosystems
- designate and plan conservation areas for tourism (e.g., viewing areas, circulation)
- prepare network of integrated resource protection areas, including wildlife travel corridors, wildlife reproduction (i.e., calving), feeding
- in collaboration with travel trade, identify user fees and visitation levels
- provide green management training for staff

#### DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT

- prepare and enforce guidelines for environmental impact assessments
- train staff to prepare and review EIAs
- establish regulations for site development
- define standards for waste management, especially dumping stations, incinerators, tile beds, etc.
- undertake public environmental education campaign in collaboration with hotels and restaurants

#### PLANNING DEPARTMENTS

- support legislation and regulations that protect threatened or unique resources
- create or contribute to Roundtables on the Environment
- ensure that sustainable development practices and guide lines are integral to all planning processes
- identify carrying capacity for all proposed site developments
- ensure tourism is an integral part of all economic development plans
- consider all linkages between travel trade and other industrial sectors (e.g., agricultural, fisheries, transportation)

#### DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

- prepare guidelines for greater use of ethanol and recyclable fuels
- promote alternative energy vehicles in tourism transportation
- ensure optional green management practices in fuel handling
- use travel transportation as a model for environmentally responsible activities in other sectors of transportation

## DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY

- promote sustainable forestry practices in all tourism destination regions
- promote greater use of local wood products in tourism construction
- discourage use of high energy concrete, aluminum, steel, and plastics in tourism facility construction
- prepare prototypes of wood-built accommodation and food services facilities
- identify opportunities for use of recycled wood products

## DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

- prepare national or state Waste Management Strategies
- identify opportunities for waste reduction and recycling
- finance recycling demonstration products for hotel industry
- ensure green management practices in all government buildings
- introduce alternative waste treatment systems (e.g., composting toilets, kitchen waste composting for hotels and restaurants)

## UTILITIES CORPORATIONS

- introduce Power Smart Programs for energy conservation
- bulk-buy energy efficient bulbs, low flow faucets, water dams, etc.
- encourage conservation initiatives with billing mail outs (i.e., recycling, reducing, etc.)
- create SWAT teams to work with hotel and restaurant management on water and power reduction
- prepare Energy and Water Audit Guidelines for hotel and restaurant sector
- provide awards for energy efficient hotels, resorts, restaurants, tour operations

## HOTELS, MOTELS, AND RESORTS

Prepare Corporate Green Strategy including:

- environmental goals and objectives
- commitment by management

## 22 THE ECOTOURISM EQUATION: MEASURING THE IMPACTS

- participation by shareholders and investors
- creation of 'green team'
- staff training
- community conservation projects
- monitoring and reporting

### Water Energy Conservation and Solid Waste Management

- assess current use
- identify losses and leakages
- retrofit electrical and water systems
- verify output with operation manuals
- compost kitchen waste
- use of grey water for landscape irrigation

### Purchasing Procedures

- institute bulk buying
- eliminate excessive packaging
- research environmentally friendly products
- eliminate all hazardous chemicals (e.g., housekeeping)
- prepare environmentally responsible purchasing guidelines
- educate suppliers
- purchase durable products
- consider second hand equipment

## TOUR OPERATORS

- prepare guidelines for supplier selection
- identify environmentally responsible hotels and resorts, attractions, restaurants, transportation companies
- prepare green marketing plan
- use co-op advertising with eco-friendly manufacturers/agencies
- contribute to conservation projects
- prepare Tourist Code of Conduct
- create education programs

## PROTECTED AREAS AND NATIONAL PARKS AGENCIES

- prepare Green Management Strategy
- undertake comprehensive environmental audit
- identify responsible tour operators

- offer environmental education programs
- create a sustainable tourism demonstration project

#### ENVIRONMENTAL AND CULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS AND NGOS

- identify conservation-based tourism projects
- collaborate with environmentally responsible tour operators
- create environmental education program
- co-venture with 'green' resort
- partner with educational institution (e.g., Smithsonian Native American Museum)
- promote conservation/corporation cooperation

Following are professional groups that can be directly involved in promoting sustainability:

#### PROFESSIONALS AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Tourism Planners  
Park Planners  
Architects  
Foresters  
Recreation Specialists  
Resource Managers  
Hotel Operators/Managers  
Guides & Wardens  
Engineers

In the space allotted, it is not possible to give specific activities that can be carried out by all the above professional groups. So I have chosen to highlight three to provide examples:

#### ARCHITECTS

- learn sustainable design and construction
- source 'green' materials
- prepare Sustainable Architecture Guidelines
- educate investors and developers
- educate architectural materials suppliers
- collaborate with environmentally responsible landscape architects and engineers

#### TOURISM PLANNERS

- promote Sustainable Tourism Development Strategies
- study sustainable tourism policies / initiatives
- learn green management practices

- determine sustainable tourism partnerships
- promote Sustainable Tourism Policy Guidelines
- ensure all plans consider:
  - local benefits
  - inter-generation equity
  - economic impacts
  - identification of protected areas
  - preparation of EIAs

#### FORESTERS AND FOREST ENGINEERS

- prepare and review environmental impacts of forestry
- promote sustainable forestry practices
- prepare comprehensive forest management plans
  - identifying
    - areas for ecotourism
    - environmental education
    - resource protection
    - wildlife corridors and production areas
- construct ecolodges and huts adjacent to visitor activity zones
- collaborate with local groups and associations

#### STUDENTS

- conduct informal environmental audit of your school
- select sustainable development class projects
- conduct consumer surveys
- study sustainable forestry practices
- study buyers' environmental policies (e.g., the Kimberly Clark Corporation will not buy paper products from non-sustainable forestry companies.)

#### RESIDENT OF PLANET EARTH

##### Householder

- compost immediately
- promote recycling among friends
- car care
- consider the environment in all purchases
- recycle everything

##### Employee

- promote sustainable activities in work place
- read of techniques and savings for business

#### Parent

- listen to your children
- think of your grandchildren with each decision

#### Conference Participant

- consider the impact of your decisions on your grandchildren

### CONCLUSION

If we accept the definition that ecotourism must operate on sustainable tourism principles, then ecotourism makes up a very small segment of tourism and is probably not growing at a very significant rate—unlike the demand for nature tourism or for casinos on Native reserves. If, however, we are committed to creating environmentally responsible tourism for the purpose of environmental education, distribution of revenues, and contributing to conservation, then we can potentially be involved in the most significant transition in the travel industry since Thomas Cooke printed travelers checks. But our focus then has to be on:

- identifying how each tourist impacts the environment;
- understanding sustainable tourism principles, products, and procedures and how they can be implemented;
- identifying our role in supporting sustainable tourism;
- monitoring and measuring the results;
- teaching others, especially those committed to a quality ecotourism product;
- continually researching and studying sustainable “best practices.”

As students, you have a remarkable opportunity to identify an area of interest and explore it from a sustainable perspective. Take the time to:

- select the best available technology
- determine the most appropriate measures and operational criteria
- prepare new measurement standards based on your definition of ‘sustainability’

This knowledge *will* be valuable when you enter the job market. As members of the travel trade, we too must be students and follow each of the above steps. . . except we must be responsible for *imple-*

menting the standards and practices. If not, there will be little left to measure and nothing left to mitigate. The well-known physicist Stephen Hawkins has given the planet about 100 years before it is destroyed—taking with it ecotourists and all others who further contribute to the loss of the planet's resources. With all due respect, we must prove Mr. Hawkins wrong by working immediately toward our own professional and personal practice of sustainability.

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James MacGregor has more than 26 years experience in planning in the areas of tourism, protected areas, native cultural tourism, and sustainable tourism. He has been project manager on more than 300 tourism related projects. His company, ecoplan:net Ltd. (Ecological Planning for the Environment and Tourism), currently offers international training programs in ecotourism planning and product development, sustainable tourism, protected area planning, and green management. He has been a Special Advisor to the Canadian Museum of Nature and is presently preparing a business plan for a sustainable tourism attraction focusing on Native American use of traditional medicinal plants.

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