



# Practical Steps in Sustainable Tourism

## Examples of action from around the world

### Developing & Marketing a Sustainable Maasai Village Tourism Experience in Kenya

August 2007

#### The Issue & the Opportunity

The project aimed to transform the unsustainable 'Kipas (Enkereri) Maasai Village Tourism Experience', located to the western end of the Masai Mara Game Reserve, into a sustainable, responsible, marketable, tourism experience by:

**Objective 1** - Significantly increasing the economic benefits from tourism to the local community (the driver guides in Kenya, unbeknown to visitors, take 96% of visitor fees for Maasai cultural tours from the villagers).

**Objective 2** – Improving the quality of the village tourism experience so that it encourages genuine cultural exchange between hosts and visitors (currently limited cultural exchange occurs – the tours around the villages are used as an opportunity to sell curios, as the villagers do not benefit from the visitor entry fees).

**Objective 3** – Providing UK outbound and destination tour operators and suppliers with a sustainable cultural tourism excursion to market responsibly to their clients.

**Objective 4** – Disseminating good practice and lessons learnt from the project to enable other community tourism ventures to improve the sustainability of their businesses.

#### The Action

1. Worked with the Maasai community in the Mara Triangle to improve the quality and sustainability of their village tourism enterprises.
2. Capacity building within the community to enable them to manage their businesses effectively.
3. Raised awareness of the issues (and causes thereof) concerning the current lack of sustainability of Maasai cultural manyatta businesses in Kenya with UK outbound and Kenyan tour operators and ground handlers.
4. Facilitated dialogue between the local community and destination tour operators.
5. Explored sustainable solutions with destination tour operators and the local community.
6. Negotiated formal supply agreements between the local community and destination tour operators and suppliers.
7. Implemented a transparent payment system for the collection of visitor tour fees.
8. Formulated a Responsible Code of Visitor Conduct for visitors to the villages to reduce negative impacts.

#### The Outcome

All project objectives have been met. The Maasai in the Mara Triangle are for the first time in over 30 years now receiving equitable benefits from their tourism enterprises. Formal supply chain agreements have been successfully negotiated, a transparent fee collection system implemented, and the quality of the existing cultural tours improved. Additionally, new cultural product (evening excursions to the village) has been developed. Through KATO (Kenya Association of Tour Operators) these sustainable excursions are now being marketed to all tour operators in Kenya, and many have begun marketing these responsibly to their clients. Additionally, all safari camps and lodges in the Mara Triangle promote these excursions to their own clients. Visitor satisfaction with the tours has increased as evidenced by a visitor survey carried out in the villages. The lessons learnt are currently being disseminated to other Maasai tourism villages in Kenya.

## Taking Action

Project activities from May 2006 – July 2007 included:

- Desk research to provide a background and history of community-based tourism development in Kenya.
- Production of a briefing paper on why Kipas (Enkereri village) has failed.
- Initial exploratory workshop and interviews with local community at Enkereri village, plus meetings and workshops with the 4 other tourism villages operating in the same area (Hardrock, Olonana, Enkutoto, Ilkinye).
- Face-to-face meetings with key stakeholders in Kenya including:
  - Managers of all 6 safari lodges/camps in the project area (Mara Triangle)
  - CEO of the Mara Conservancy
  - Maasai landlords who 'officially' own the land that several of the villages are situated upon in the Mara Triangle
  - MD's and tour managers of the leading tour operators and ground handlers in Kenya
  - CEO and Chairperson of KATO (Kenya Association of Tour Operators)
  - Managers of First Choice Kenya and their ground handler Somak
  - A&K in the UK
  - Serena Hotels Group in Kenya
  - Senior Deputy Director of Tourism, Ministry of Tourism & Wildlife
  - Ecotourism Kenya
  - SEMADEP (Maasai community development organisation)
  - Network Co-ordinator of KECOBAT (Kenya Community Based Tourism Network)
  - KWS (Kenya Wildlife Services)
  - 4 driver/guides from Kenya's leading tour operator/ground handler - Somak
  - Divisional Officer, Divisional Office of the President (Lolgorian Division) – local government office in the project area
- A series of seminars and workshops with in-destination tour operators and ground handlers in both Mombasa and Nairobi organised for the project by First Choice Kenya and their ground handler Somak.
- Community meetings with all 5 villages collectively.
- Presentations (jointly with Maasai representatives from each of the 5 villages) at 3 Mara Conservancy Lodge Managers' Meeting organised by the Mara Conservancy.
- Numerous community capacity-building workshops and training sessions, including:
  - **Understanding the tourism industry**
  - **Business record keeping**
  - **Business structures**
  - **Accounts / book keeping**
  - **Banking systems**
  - **Marketing**
  - **Revenue distribution**
  - **Community development projects identification & planning**
  - **Customer service**
  - **Health, hygiene and sanitation**
  - **Long drop toilet construction**
  - **Cultural tours development**
  - **New crafts development**
  - **New cultural product development**
- Media coverage in the UK and Kenya.
- Production of interim report.
- Survey with visitors to the 5 villages.
- Physical product development in villages (curio market and cultural tours, along with development of new curios and cultural product).
- Disseminating lessons learnt from project via SEMADEP, KWS, Ecotourism Kenya, tour operators (in both UK and Kenya), KATO, and Maasai cultural tourism villages in the Maasai Mara on the Narok side (Sekanani).

## Problems Encountered

- a) It became apparent after the initial exploratory meetings with the villages, that the key issue influencing economic benefits from tourism accruing to the local community was the overt exploitation of the Maasai villagers by the tour operators' driver/guides. The initial project plan to focus predominantly on Kipas Village was hence abandoned, and all 5 villages in the area were included in the project. This meant a dramatically increased workload within the same project resources!! Formation of the Mara Triangle Maasai Villages Association, bringing all villages in the area together, helped to overcome this.
- b) The hostility of the driver guides towards the initiative was evident, as the driver guides are 'losing' a great deal of money. This has gradually been overcome by discussions with driver guide representatives, through the support of tour operators and the travel industry at large, the disciplining of disruptive driver guides by their employers, media exposure of the issue, and in awarding them 10% commission on the sale of tickets through KATO.
- c) Some tour operators and lodges being less supportive than others. Trying to encourage some operators to embrace the new scheme was difficult, and a 'carrot and stick' approach had to be adopted with these including in one case media 'name and shame' tactics. In the main, however, the overwhelming majority of operators have been incredibly supportive, and by promoting the 'leading stars', this has encouraged others to follow.
- d) Land right issues – some of the villages occupy land owned by Maasai landlord elites, who as soon as the money started flowing to the villages tried to become the new 'driver guides'! The strength of the Village Association in staying united has to a large extent overcome this issue, along with keeping one step ahead in terms of strategy (ensuring signatories on bank accounts are the right ones i.e. non corruptible), and in one case going to the courts to get the land re-designated to the local community, the rightful, ancestral owner before the government gazetted the land and awarded to Maasai elites in the run up to elections. This issue is still live and is being fought with the aid of a Land Rights NGO in Kenya.

## Successes Achieved

1. Significantly increased benefits from tourism accruing to the local community (800% increase on the same period last year) and more equitable sharing of benefits (community now receives 100% of tour fees from lodge-generated business, and 75% of tour operator-generated business through KATO). In the 8-month period from Sept 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007 4 villages participating in the initiative secured \$30,000 from visitor entry fees to their villages for cultural tours.
2. Increased visitor satisfaction with excursions (100% of clients surveyed via the visitor survey said that the excursions met or exceeded their expectations), and increased cultural exchange (as evidenced by visitor survey results and format of newly developed, participatory cultural tours in the villages).
3. All lodges now brief their clients on the do's and don'ts when visiting the villages to minimise their impacts, along with these being published on the back of visitor entry tickets. Along with the new equitable fee and payment structures, these excursions are hence now being marketed responsibly.
4. Other communities (Maasai villages on the Narok side of the Mara) and community tourism development organisations (SEMADEP, Ecotourism Kenya) have already taken on board the lessons learnt from this pilot project and have adopted them in their own work with communities.
5. The current cultural tourism product has been enhanced and new product developed that gives these villages a marketing edge and increased visitor satisfaction at the same time.
6. Villagers are empowered and have the skills, tools and knowledge to operate their tourism businesses on a sustainable basis into the future.
7. The excursions are now marketed by the lodges and tour operators in Nairobi and Mombasa, with formal supply agreements now in place.
8. Villagers now, for the first time in over 30 years of running tourism businesses, feel that they are part of the tourism industry in Kenya.
9. The villages are already seeing the fruits of the increased benefits from tourism – Enkereri village has expanded its community school to 2 classrooms and has now employed 3 teachers, it has started adult education classes, has built long drop toilets, has constructed a rain water harvesting system, commissioned a survey to assess the potential for the construction of a borehole in the village, and has sent 2 of its bright young stars to college for further education.
10. The project is already being well disseminated both in the UK and Kenya through the media, tour operators and NGOs.

# Best Practice and Lessons Learned

## Lessons Learned

- The need to tackle the issue from both sides of the coin; (1) adopting a 'bottom up approach', working practically, 'hands on', with the community on the ground to raise their awareness and understanding of the tourism industry and their role as a supplier within it, and (2) working with the in country tour operators (and their membership associations) to raise their awareness of the issue, their employees (the driver guides) exploitation of the community, and the part they can play in addressing the issue.
- The need for capacity building within the community to equip them with the skills, knowledge and confidence to run sustainable tourism businesses.
- The need to negotiate formal supply agreements between the community tourism enterprises and lodges/tour operators based on equitable returns to the community, quality product assurances, an effective and transparent payment system, and appropriate commissions to tour operators.
- The need to agree and set up transparent, tourism revenue distribution systems within each tourism village community.
- The need to open up and facilitate dialogue between marginalized tourism village communities and the tourism industry.
- The power of different village tourism businesses coming together to form a Tourism Association - to give them a stronger, united voice and to give them credibility with the tour operators.
- The need to stay one step ahead of the game – that when money starts flowing to communities, that new potential extractors of that money may appear.
- That communities are complex entities, and conflicts exist within different community members, which can at times undermine the success of community tourism enterprises, unless steps are taken to get all 'internal' issues out into the open through facilitating open dialogue in community meetings.

## Key Success Factors

1. Empowerment of the local community through awareness raising and capacity building.
2. The coming together of the different village tourism businesses in the area to form a Tourism Association – of uniting on implementing the solutions to the issues and speaking with one strong voice.
3. Project management by an individual/organisation with BOTH practical, hands on community development AND tourism industry experience (as an operator/supplier).
4. Linking the community tourism businesses into the formal supply chain.
5. The formulation of a transparent payment system for the collection of visitor tour fees.
6. That the project was supported by the outbound tourism industry in the UK (via the Travel Foundation) was powerful in securing support to tackle the issues with the destination tour operators/ground handlers, as their businesses depended on on-going good relations with the UK tourism industry.

## Project Risks

- New potential extractors of tourism revenues from the community surface e.g. the Maasai landlords.
- Risk that not spreading the lessons learnt to the other Maasai cultural manyattas in Kenya may create a loophole for driver guides to exploit.

## Relevance to other destinations

There are tremendous opportunities to replicate this project in other areas of Maasailand in both Kenya and Tanzania, along with Samburu, where the same issues are present. The key lessons learnt are also relevant to other destinations where community tourism enterprises are failing to secure equitable returns from tourism.

## Useful Resources

[www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk](http://www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk) (Kenya Maasai Project)

[www.ecotourismkenya.org](http://www.ecotourismkenya.org)

[www.tribal-voice.co.uk](http://www.tribal-voice.co.uk)

[www.katokenya.org](http://www.katokenya.org)

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