



Ministry of Tourism & Transport

SEYCHELLES ECO-TOURISM STRATEGY
FOR THE 21ST CENTURY (SETS-21)

1. WHY SEYCHELLES NEEDS AN ECOTOURISM STRATEGY – A “JUSTIFICATION”

Ecotourism is an important and rapidly growing “niche market” within the global tourism industry, which offers an opportunity to develop products that can contribute to national socio-economic and cultural objectives by providing livelihoods for local communities and giving value to the maintenance of local traditions and culture. Ecotourism can also directly generate revenues for environmental conservation and management. However, while ecotourism has the potential to contribute towards sustainability of the tourism industry, it can unfortunately be as damaging as mass tourism if not properly managed and regulated.

Until now the Seychelles ecotourism products and attractions have generally been developed through the initiatives of various actors from the public, private and NGO sectors, and there has been no coordinated attempt at regulating such ventures other than through the application of general policies and legal frameworks relating to the protection and conservation of the environment. However, Vision 21 recognises to further develop genuinely sustainable ecotourism, there is a need to establish a framework to guide, and where necessary regulate, such development, so as to ensure that real benefits accrue to local communities, and that environmental impacts are mitigated and minimized, and revenues are generated for environmental conservation and protection.

2. COMPONENTS/ACTIVITIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY

This document is intended to serve as a starting point for the initiation and development of a process leading towards an ecotourism strategy for Seychelles that has the broad support of all stakeholders.

The process for the development of the strategy will consist of two overlapping components. The first component includes a “policy process” and the “management process”. The second component is the identification, formulation and implementation of pilot projects.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT PROCESS

3.1 The “Policy Process”

Seychelles Ecotourism Strategy for the 21st Century (SETS-21) will be an integral part of the national tourism policy, as outlined “Vision 21: Tourism Development in Seychelles 2001-2010”, which was formally launched in December 2001. The “vision” is that

“Tourism in Seychelles shall continue to be developed to the highest standards for the optimum social and economic benefit of the Seychellois people while maintaining a commitment to the protection and conservation of the natural environment and biodiversity”.

The long-term economic sustainability of Seychelles' tourism industry is closely linked to the continued health of the natural eco-systems upon which it depends. VISION 21 therefore places great importance on promoting tourism development that takes account of the need to protect and conserve the natural environment. One aspect of this approach is to promote eco-tourism, a nature-based form of specialty travel defined by the International Ecotourism Society as "Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well being of local people". Eco-tourism also encompasses a respect for local and traditional cultures.

While this definition has been widely accepted internationally, Seychelles' multi-stakeholder *National Ecotourism Committee (NEC)*, which was created in May 2000, has adopted a more functional definition that takes into consideration the specific nature and character of our tourism industry in relation to the global ecotourism market. For this reason, Vision 21 views eco-tourism as:-

“.....a speciality segment of the larger nature tourism or “eco-travel” market, which covers a variety of travel industry segments, including adventure, heritage, culture, educational and sports, all linked together by an emphasis on fun, environmental sensitivity and social responsibility”.

This definition is the result of an extensive process of consultation that has taken place over the past two years, involving representatives from public and private sector agencies, NGOs and civil society. During this period, a number of sensitization activities were undertaken under the aegis of the NEC, including:-

- A series of workshops and seminars at national, district and industry levels, some of which were conducted by international experts;
- A systematic media campaign to sensitize the general public on the importance of ecotourism for the Seychelles tourism industry;
- Participation in the preparatory activities for the International Year of Ecotourism (2002) including hosting the International Conference on the Sustainable Development of Ecotourism in Small Island Developing States and other Small Islands, in December 2001.
- Participation in the World Ecotourism Summit held in Quebec City, Canada, in May 2002.

4. The Policy/Vision Statement for Ecotourism Development in Seychelles

The process of drafting Vision 21 represented the first step towards development of a general policy **for eco-tourism development**, which includes a general outline of **goals and objectives**. These can be summarized as follows:-

4.1 Eco-tourism Activities Related to the Natural Environment

Seychelles has always paid careful attention to the preservation and conservation of the environment, to the extent that it is the country with probably the highest ratio of protected areas to total land area. While the process of social and economic development, including tourism development, inevitably presents major environmental challenges, the tourism industry can promote development models that are in harmony with the natural environment.

The aim of Vision 21 therefore is to exploit the comparative advantages of Seychelles as an eco-tourism destination in the broadest sense, through promoting a wide range of nature-based attractions and activities, including activities related to Seychelles' rich cultural heritage. In doing so, close attention will be given to ensuring this is done within a framework that increases public awareness of and responsibility towards the environment, maximizes economic benefits for local communities, fosters cultural sensitivity and minimizes negative impacts on the natural environment.

4.2 Marine-Related Activities

The expansion and improvement of marine-related activities is a priority of Vision 21. At the same time it is known that certain marine related activities have an impact on the natural environment, such as impact of anchors on corals, marine litter, etc.

SETS-21 will include measures aimed at establishing best practices, sets of standards, and incentives aimed at reducing and mitigating the impacts.

Encouragement will also be given to the further development of responsible yachting, which will include the provision of adequate mooring facilities on the outer islands and adequate waste disposal systems.

4.3 Community-Based Tourism

It is now widely recognised that if local communities are not involved in tourism projects from the beginning of the design stage through to implementation and management, community residents often will not support the project nor be in a position to benefit from it. The development of community-based tourism is thus an important objective of VISION 21, and is an integral part of the effort to promote eco-tourism activities.

Emphasis will therefore be placed involving local communities in ecotourism development. District administrations will have a particular responsibility in encouraging and supporting this involvement, in conjunction with tourism project developers and managers. One aspect of this policy might be the promotion of village tours, which will be conducted in a culturally sensitive manner which will at the same time expose the visitors to different facets of Creole culture and to add value to traditional activities, some of which may be disappearing. Other tours could provide insights into traditional agricultural and fishing activities, demonstration of traditional craft making and description of traditional life styles and music and dance performances by villagers.

The concept of “Chez l’Habitant” will be promoted in order to provide visitors with an opportunity to interact directly with local communities. At the same time, efforts will be made to examine the potential role of the U-First Programme in sensitising members of the public, as well as those working directly within the industry, on the need to portray positive images about the country.

4.4 Cultural Heritage

Vision 21 seeks to promote Seychelles’ vibrant and youthful Creole cultural heritage and make it more accessible to visitors, through giving support to existing cultural events, such as the annual Festival Kreol, and by encouraging the organisation of new cultural manifestations at both the national and district levels. This will be achieved through promoting close partnership between all stakeholders in the tourism industry, including local artists and musicians associations. Hotels and restaurants will be encouraged to utilise more local and environmentally friendly products and to include a wider range of traditional dishes on menus, and to provide information about the national cuisine and its preparation.

SETS-21 will support the conservation of historic monuments and sites and provision of visitor facilities related to the historical and cultural heritage of Seychelles. This is in line with Vision 21, which recognises the need for the National Monument Board to prepare historic preservation plan, and the adoption of incentives to facilitate urgent implementation of the plan. Efforts will be extended to ensure the preservation of the built traditional architectural environment, which reflects physically the traditional way of life. In addition, perimeters of protection around historic buildings and sites will be established so as to guide the promotion of a high quality architecture and urbanism harmoniously integrated with the physical or natural environment.

Efforts will be made to upgrade and improve the marketing of existing museums, as well as the development of new attractions such as the National Biodiversity Centre at Barbarons. In addition, SETS-21 will explore other innovative mechanisms to promote and encourage the preservation of other important sites that are not currently listed as National Monuments.

4.5 Handicrafts

The expansion of the range and quality of craft products is an important objective of VISION 21. At the same, the utilisation of rare and/or endangered species in the production of handicrafts will be regulated in accordance with relevant national and international legislation.

Amongst the issues to be addressed will be the phasing out of such craft products, as well as improving the quality and value-for-money of sustainable local crafts. This will in turn improve the market share of locally produced craft products. The promotion of local craft products could also be promoted through the adoption of a “genuine” Made in Seychelles” label.

4.6 Public Beach Parks

At the present time most beaches in Seychelles are accessible to the general public. However, as tourism develops there is the possibility that conflicts will arise over access, even though the area below the high-tide line is for public use. Some good quality and accessible beaches should be designated and managed as public beach parks and developed with visitor facilities and services. This is an increasingly critical issue that needs to be addressed as a matter of priority.

4.7 Redevelopment of Central Victoria

Victoria is one of the world's smallest capital cities, and in recent years much effort has been made to enhance the physical attractiveness and appeal of the city, particularly through the extensive landscaping works, with the aim of developing Victoria into a model "garden city". Solid waste management has also been significantly improved.

Vision 21 proposes the preparation of an integrated plan to guide redevelopment in Central Victoria, which will include identification of sources of revenue and sustainable financing mechanisms. SETS-21 will promote the principles of ecological landscaping and management in the continuing redevelopment of central Victoria. In addition, a high quality traditional style architecture and urbanism will be promoted, and an emphasis placed on developing Victoria as a pedestrian-friendly city.

Overall, the improvements proposed aim at creating a greener, more culturally dynamic and environmentally friendly city, in which tourists and residents alike will find more opportunities for leisure and entertainment, and which will in turn provide more business opportunities for the local community.

5. ACTIVITIES

In order to achieve the goals and objectives outlined in Vision 21, the National Ecotourism Committee (NEC) will initially focus on the following activities:-

5.1. POLICY PROCESS

5.1.1. Compilation of Baseline Information and Review (inventory)

This review process is a necessary first step, and will involve the identification of existing ecotourism products, sites and activities, which are presently mainly nature-based, and an analysis of their positive and negative environmental, social and economic impacts. In addition, the review will seek to identify sites for future ecotourism development, including both nature **and** cultural/heritage sites. One possible output might be the publication of an "Ecotourism Guide to Seychelles".

5.1.2. Compilation of Legislation and Review of Regulatory Framework

Seychelles has an extensive body of legislation relating generally to the protection and conservation of the marine and terrestrial environment. However, as ecotourism is invariably centred on sites that are sensitive and of particular ecological and/or cultural significance, the exercise will focus on identifying and reviewing the key legislation that is of relevance to ecotourism, including legislation and regulatory mechanisms, such as land use planning, environmental assessment, building regulations, and environmentally and culturally sustainable standards for ecotourism. A compilation of legislation and the regulatory framework will be made and assessed in order to identify any shortcomings with regards to compliance with appropriate international conventions. Based on this review, recommendations will be made to improve legislative and regulatory frameworks, where appropriate, with a view to ensuring that the development of ecotourism is encouraged, promoted and sustained.

5.2 MANAGEMENT PROCESS

In order to ensure that future ecotourism development is well planned, managed and regulated, it is necessary to put in place an appropriate and effective “management process” involving all stakeholders from the public, private and NGO sectors, to ensure that both environmental and cultural/heritage concerns are represented. To this end, SETS-21 provides for the creation of a National Ecotourism Committee to undertake the following steps for the establishment of a multi-stakeholder management process for ecotourism development.

5.2.1. Fostering Partnerships

Various stakeholders including private, non-governmental and parastatal sectors are currently involved in ecotourism and some of them have established “showcase sites”. The NEC will identify and actively involve these stakeholders in the management process, and build stronger partnerships in which the various stakeholders can perceive real benefits from participation in the entire process. The NEC will explore avenues for mobilizing technical and other forms of assistance and financing mechanisms to the efforts of genuine stakeholders. The overall aim is to create a platform to exchange experience and find solutions pertaining to ecotourism development.

5.2.2. Preparation of Detailed Project Appraisal and Approval Procedure

The NEC will prepare guideline procedures for the appraisal, approval, notification and implementation of ecotourism project proposals. These guidelines will take account of, and where necessary supplement, existing procedures for project planning, appraisal, approval and implementation. In particular, these procedures must involve the relevant ecotourism stakeholders. The role of the various regulatory bodies in the preparation of project appraisal and approval procedures will also be reviewed.

5.2.3. Establishment of monitoring structure and certification scheme

The NEC will establish a structure that will monitor implementation of ecotourism projects, and ensure compliance with the conditions attached when approval was granted, which will include monitoring impacts on biodiversity and ecosystems, and local communities.

Various levels and types of ecotourism product are possible. However, the strategy will be to promote quality as a benchmark for ecotourism related activities and establishments.

The NEC will also propose the modalities for the establishment of an “Ecotourism Certification Scheme”. This ecotourism certification (ECS) will differ from the proposed “eco-certification” and “eco-labeling” schemes applied to the tourism industry as a whole (i.e. including non-ecotourism establishments).ⁱ

5.2.4. Continuation of public awareness programme

Over the past two years, the National Ecotourism Committee has undertaken a comprehensive sensitization programme at the national and district levels, including seminars and workshops, and media presentations.

The NEC will build upon and strengthen the ongoing sensitization programme in order to achieve the objectives envisaged in **SETS-21**. The programme will be targeted at all stakeholders, including officials at all levels of government (local and national), NGOs, local communities, tourism operators and visitors. In addition, schools will be targeted, and the formal educational aspect will be strengthened, for example, by including the principles of ecotourism within the relevant subjects in the school curriculum. In addition, **the existing Environmental Clubs** in schools and districts will be well supported so as to foster the concept of ecotourism. Consideration will also be given to utilizing the U-First Programme and other appropriate means to target the general public and not just those working directly in the industry.

5.2.5. Organise a national and regional training programme

The NEC will propose a medium to long-term training programme, to further consolidate and enhance national and local capacities. The objective of the training programme, will be to strengthen national and local capacities of government agencies and other stakeholders in issues related to ecotourism development, including biodiversity, impact assessment and management techniques focusing on guiding, health, safety and other issues.

6. IDENTIFICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PILOT PROJECTS

It is estimated that the first phase of the strategy will be implemented over a two-year period. During this time the NEC will work with other stakeholders to identify suitable sites and/or activities for ecotourism development, which will then be implemented as

model pilot projects of different categories, which may also include the strengthening of existing sites/activities. This approach will ensure the widest possible stakeholder participation at all stages from identification and design to implementation.

While the development of ecotourism products will be driven by the private and NGO sector, Government will contribute by providing an appropriate enabling environment through the introduction of new innovative policy and legislative mechanisms to facilitate the private and NGO sectors to engage in the continual improvement of existing products as well as the development of new products and services. This may include the provision of incentives, such as tax concessions, to encourage and facilitate the development of financially as well as environmentally sustainable ecotourism.

The implementation of pilot projects may also require access to adequate financial resources, including external funding and expertise. It is anticipated that such resources may eventually be made available by bilateral and multilateral agencies that have already expressed an interest in being involved with the promotion of ecotourism as a means of contributing towards social and economic development targets. In this connection SETS-21 recognises the importance of the further enhancement of both “environmental and tourism diplomacy” through ecotourism, in contributing towards the achievement of national development goals.

7. BUDGET

In order to effectively develop and implement all the components of SETS-21, as outlined above, the NEC will require an operational budget, to cover the costs associated with implementing the policy and management processes. It is also recognised that a full-time technically competent coordinator with a secretariat would ideally be necessary for the effective development and implementation of the process. Funds will also be required for the organization of national training/capacity building workshops, as well as to support attendance at relevant regional and international workshops and seminars and study/training visits.

External funding will be sought to support the implementation of the project. Additionally, the private sector will also play a major role in the development of ecotourism projects. On its part, Government will seek to create an appropriate enabling environment, in order to catalyze implementation by the different partners.

In addition to the operational budget for the NEC, a budget will be established to support the implementation of pilot projects. The NEC will propose appropriate mechanisms for the operation of this Fund, which should only assist projects that are financially viable and with a reasonable prospect of sustainability. It is anticipated that external partners may be interested in contributing towards the establishment of this Fund.

Eco-certification – A scheme that aims at promoting improved environmental management systems (EMS) in hotels and other tourism related establishments. This includes improved energy usage, water conservation, improved waste management, re-cycling, environmental site management (i.e. landscaping), etc. An eco-certification may be awarded to any class, type or size of hotel in any location, provided it meets the required set of criteria.

Eco-Label – is awarded to a hotel or other tourism establishment that has met the requirements for eco-certification. The label can be at different levels depending on performance (i.e. as is the case with “star” ratings). International examples of eco-label schemes include “Green Globe”, “Blue Flag”, etc..

Eco-tourism Certification – will be awarded to an “eco-tourism” product or entity (including accommodation or other establishments, or environment, community or cultural based activities) that meets the standards and other criteria required to be designated as a genuine “eco-tourism product”.