

Good for the Planet. Good for Business.

# SOST

Spotlight on Sustainable Tourism

Issue 4 | December 2012

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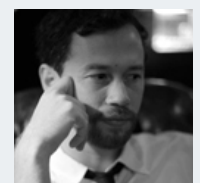
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### ABOUT SOST

Spotlight on Sustainable Tourism (SOST) is a complimentary journal published by Market Vision, for internal circulation and to our clients and subscribers.

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# Welcome to the fourth and last issue in 2012 of Spotlight on Sustainable Tourism, a journal for stakeholders in the travel and tourism industry.

SOST's mission is to motivate stakeholders in the travel & tourism industry to adopt sustainable business practices with the message that sustainable tourism is 'Good for the Planet and Good for Business'.

SOST showcases destinations and travel companies which are making a conscious difference to the Planet with their sustainable business practices. In the first three issues, we travelled, physically and virtually, to India, Nepal, Thailand, Tunisia, Philippines and Sri Lanka to share best practices in sustainable tourism from three eco-resorts, an eco-lodge, a dive resort and a tour operator.

In this current issue, we continue our journey to showcase a carbon-neutral hotel in Shanghai (the first in China) and EcoTravel Turkey, a tour operator promoting eco-tourism to Turkey. In 'Green Showcase' we highlight the Ginkgo Society, a Sino-American Conservation Group based in Yunnan, China.

Organized annually by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), the Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism Conference (ESTC) brings together tourism industry professionals from around the world with the goal of sharing ideas, opportunities and solutions for a more sustainable future of global tourism. Our lead feature provides a summary of the proceedings of the 2012 conference held in Monterey, California.

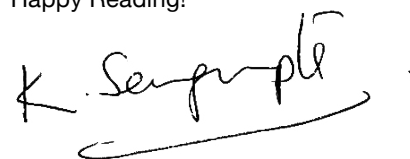
The World Travel Market London's World Responsible Tourism Day (WRTD) was launched in association with the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), with the objective of unifying the tourism industry to together help build a solid, sustainable future for travel and tourism. We highlight the main events held this year on WRTD (November 7, 2012) including the winners of the Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards.

Pete Milne, teacher and environmental education trainer based in Dubai writes about the need for developing environment education and eco-tourism programs for schools in his article *The World beyond the Classroom*, for the column *Point of View*. In the research section, we bring you key findings from a survey among students in Philippines - "Assessing Eco-Tourism Potential: A Domestic Market Profile of Students in Iloilo City" -conducted by the Canadian Urban Institute (CUI). We hope you enjoy this issue.

We hope to inspire, educate and guide small, medium and large companies every step of the way on their journey towards responsible, sustainable and successful businesses.

As always, we look forward to your comments and feedback. Let us know what else you would like to read about.

Happy Reading!



Kumud Sengupta

Managing Editor

Certified Assessor & Consultant for Sustainable Tourism

Founder-Director, Market Vision

# Feedback



SOST was launched in March 2012. This is the fourth issue. We are pleased with the response we have been receiving from around the world. Professionals across the tourism value chain and members of the academic and student community from different parts of the world have written to us with their feedback and suggestions. Thank you so much.

- *SOST Team*

*Thank you; I particularly like the piece on green ratings, very relevant given ITP's HCMI new tool.*

**Holly Tuppen, Communications Manager**  
International Tourism Partnership  
London, United Kingdom

*Thank you very much for sharing the latest issue of SOST. I particularly liked the article on the Tunisian eco-resort.*

**Emili Budell, Programme Coordinator, ITP & YCI**  
International Business Leaders Forum  
London, United Kingdom

*The best practices highlighted in SOST are very inspiring. This is a great publication.*

**Amy Gordon, Freelance Writer**  
Dubai, UAE

*I find SOST very inspirational and resourceful. As I start my organic foods business, I look forward to following SOST more closely.*

**Kayan Motasha, Management Graduate**  
SP Jain Institute of Management, Mumbai, India

*It's good to see examples such as the Sri Lanka eco-lodge finding place in SOST. Please give more coverage to small business owners.*

**Ali Mustafa,**  
Cairo, Egypt

*It was a pleasure and an honour to collaborate with you in the SOST journal. I also want to thank you for the opportunity you gave me to spread the word about sustainable tourism!*

**Vicente Bento, Environmental Engineer & QHSE Consultant**  
Coimbra Area, Portugal

*This is a very good initiative - congratulations. I have passed it around within UNWTO.*

**Sandra Carvao, Coordinator - Communications**  
World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Spain

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## Sponsorship and Advertising

SOST is read by a diverse audience consisting of professionals in the tourism industry, tourism business owners, destination marketers and academia. It has particularly found favour with those interested in sustainable and responsible tourism. SOST is promoted to (a) an internal database of over 9,800 travel and tourism industry professionals, and (b) online business networks with membership exceeding 90,000.

Launched in March 2012, four issues of SOST were published in the year. From 2013, we aim to increase the frequency to make SOST a bimonthly publication (six issues per year). For sponsorship and advertising details, please contact: [SOSTsales@market-vision.com](mailto:SOSTsales@market-vision.com)





*Uniting Conservation, Communities  
and Sustainable Travel*

# ESTC12: Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism Conference, 2012

Organized annually by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), the Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism Conference (ESTC) brings together tourism industry professionals from around the world with the goal of sharing ideas, opportunities and solutions for a more sustainable future of global tourism. The 2012 conference was held in Monterey, California, USA, in partnerships with Visit California and the Monterey County Convention and Visitor Bureau, and was attended by 300+ delegates from over 35 countries. SOST was represented at TIES by Managing Editor Kumud Sengupta.

Underscoring the importance of multi-stakeholder approaches to sustainability, the ESTC delegates represented a diverse range of professional fields and industry segments, from government agencies to NGOs, from international tour operators to local community enterprises, from journalists to students. It is through the connections made and partnerships built during the conference - between sustainable tourism experts and budding entrepreneurs, between destination representatives and community development veterans, between green technology providers and conservation managers (and the list goes on) - that the ESTC seeks to inspire positive changes in the tourism industry worldwide.

## Lessons Learned and Shared

Throughout the conference, ecotourism

and sustainable tourism professionals shared best practice examples and success stories from around the world - from the coastal marine sanctuaries of California to Maasai-owned community conservancies in Kenya; to the "Polar Bear Capital" that is Churchill, in Manitoba, Canada; remote and pristine rainforests of Guyana; breathtaking reefs and marine life in Mozambique's Quirimbas National Park; and the community-driven birding hotspot and emerging ecotourism destination in the Philippines, among many, many more inspiring examples of sustainability at work.

The ESTC presenters and expert speakers focused not only on inspiring ideas and innovative opportunities, but also on practical solutions for industry leaders to implement.

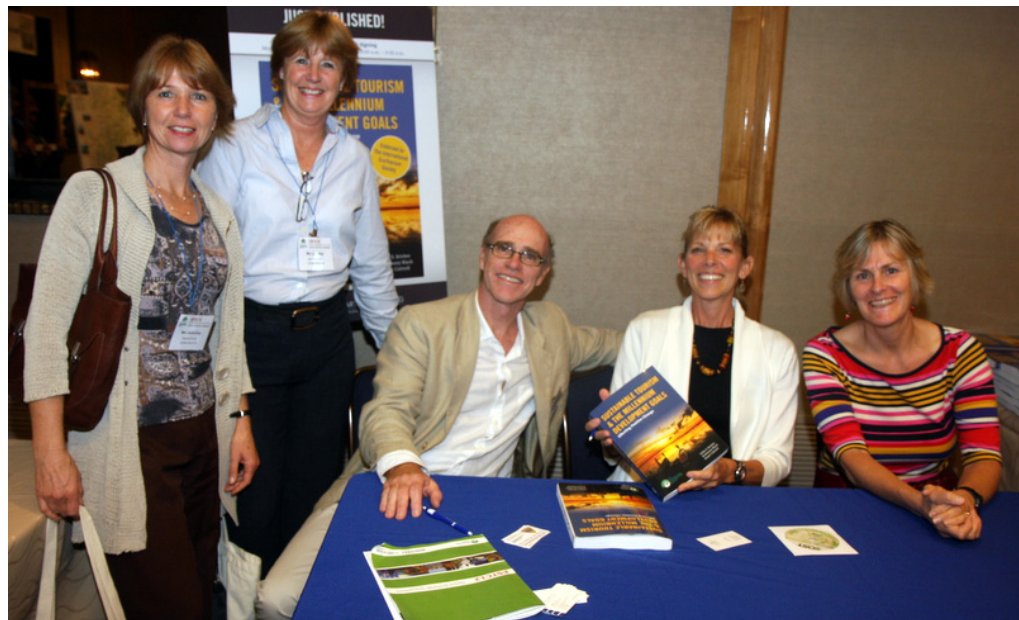
The ESTC presenters and expert speakers focused not only on inspiring ideas and innovative opportunities, but also on practical solutions for industry leaders to implement.



### Sustainable Tourism and the Millennium Development Goals

At the ESTC12, TIES' new publication, "Sustainable Tourism and the Millennium Development Goals: Effecting Positive Change" (Jones & Bartlett Learning, 2012) was launched, with the editors and some of the contributing authors sharing key case studies from the book. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are the world's time-bound and quantified targets for addressing extreme poverty in its many dimensions - income poverty, hunger, disease, lack of adequate shelter, and exclusion-while promoting gender equality, education, and environmental sustainability.

The book highlights best practices in sustainable tourism businesses, and projects that contribute in a tangible manner to these goals. The case studies presented at the ESTC12 include: climate impact assessment of safari tourism in Namibia; wildlife conservation and volunteer travel projects by SEE Turtles, a non-profit ecotourism project supporting community-based conservation through tourism; and tourism's



impact on community health and well-being, through the eyes of host community members in Fiji.

### International Voluntourism Guidelines

At the ESTC12, TIES also announced the

launch of the new e-publication "The International Voluntourism Guidelines for Commercial Tour Operators", which was developed in partnership with the Planeterra Foundation and an international advisory committee comprised of voluntourism industry practitioners and experts.





**The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are the world's time-bound and quantified targets for addressing extreme poverty in its many dimensions – income poverty, hunger, disease, lack of adequate shelter, and exclusion—while promoting gender equality, education, and environmental sustainability.**

The Guidelines aim to positively contribute to the growing field of voluntourism by offering a practical tool for international voluntourism providers to plan and manage their programs in a responsible and sustainable manner. In addition to information about relevant guidelines, codes of conduct and resources related to volunteer travel and sustainable tourism, the Guidelines include important insights into key challenges and opportunities for tour operators, through examples of voluntourism operators including Global Vision International (GVI), Calabash Tours (South Africa), Voluntario Global (Argentina) and G Adventures.

Among the most important points that have been raised by the Voluntourism Guidelines is the recognition that voluntourism projects need to be developed to effectively address the needs of local people and their environments, collaborating with and led by the local community members. The key to ensuring that voluntourism projects are achieving tangible benefits for the local

people is the ongoing process of community needs assessment, and thus the Voluntourism Guidelines offer valuable insights into how to incorporate this important process into the planning, development and management of voluntourism programs.

### ESTC12 Keynote Addresses

Each year, the ESTC features sustainability pioneers and leaders sharing stories and lessons that engage communities, inspire action, and promote change. This year's conference program included special presentations by Mr. Sydney Allicock, Indigenous community ecotourism pioneer from Guyana; Mr. Trip Van Noppen, President of the leading environmental justice organization Earthjustice; and Ms Amy Carter-James, Co-Founder of the multi-award-winning Guludo Beach Lodge and Nema Foundation, which offer an international model on using tourism to relieve poverty and empower communities.

In addition, the conference offered the

opportunity for the delegates to learn first-hand from some of the foremost female leaders of our industry, who have made significant contributions to the fields of sustainable destination development, community empowerment and environmental conservation, including: Ms Judy Kepher-Gona, Chief Executive Officer of the Basecamp Foundation in Kenya; Ms Julie Packard, Executive Director of Monterey Bay Aquarium and Ms Megan Epler Wood, TIES Founder and Principal of EplerWood International.

### ESTC13 – Nairobi, Kenya

The Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism Conference 2013 (ESTC13) will be held in Nairobi, Kenya in September 2013, co-hosted by Ecotourism Kenya and the Kenya Tourist Board. The conference, as part of its focus on sustainable community development and tourism's contributions to the MDGs, will celebrate the World Tourism Day (September 27th) and its theme "Tourism and Water – Protecting our Common Future".

The book: Sustainable Tourism and the Millennium Development Goals: Effecting Positive Change:  
<http://www.ecotourism.org/tourism-and-millennium-development-goals>.

The e-book: The International Voluntourism Guidelines for Commercial Tour Operators:  
<http://www.ecotourism.org/voluntourism-guidelines>

Information on the ESTC13 and conference program updates: <http://www.ecotourismconference.org>



# WTM World Responsible Tourism Day

**wtm** world  
responsible  
tourism day  
7 Nov 2012



supported by UNWTO

The World Travel Market London's World Responsible Tourism Day (WRTD), was launched five years ago, in association with the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The primary purpose is to unify the tourism industry to together help build a solid, sustainable future for travel and tourism.

Since then, an increasing number of travel companies, organisations and individuals have been signing up each year to the WRTD, which has become like a universal movement bringing together the different stakeholders in the tourism industry towards a common goal.

7 November was the WTM World Responsible Tourism Day 2012, which marked not only at the World Travel Market, but around the world with special events, communications and consumer promotions, demonstrating the industry's determination to make a real difference.

SOST was represented at WTM WRTD by Managing Editor Kumud Sengupta and Associate Arvy Priatmadi.



Activity tourism is fast becoming an important source of income to many nations. The industry has responded to demand by helping holidaymakers to travel to remote parts of the world, for example, to ski, dive and climb – often in areas where these activities are relatively unmanaged.



### WTM World Responsible Tourism Day Objectives

The WTM has four realistic objectives for this day of action. WTM WRTD, with support from the UNWTO wants the industry to work together to:

- help drive change by educating more responsible behaviour with the travel and tourism industry and travelling public
- explore the issues of how countries and destinations are made more sustainable including case studies of best practices
- educate the marketplace and debate key environmental related issues to push the agenda and be a catalyst for change
- harness the influence of World Travel Market as an international business forum to encourage the industry to drive the responsible tourism agenda forward

### What is Responsible Tourism?

Responsible Tourism was defined in Cape Town in 2002 alongside the World Summit on Sustainable Development. This definition, known as the Cape Town Declaration, is the one that has been adopted by the World Travel Market for the World Responsible Tourism Day.

Having the following characteristics, Responsible Tourism:

- minimises negative economic, environmental and social impacts;
- generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the wellbeing of host communities, improves working conditions and access to the industry;
- involves local people in decisions that affect their lives and life changes;
- makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, to the maintenance of the world's diversity;
- provides more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people, and a greater understanding of local cultural, social and environmental issues;
- provides access for physically challenged people;
- is culturally sensitive, engenders respect between tourists and hosts, and builds local pride and confidence.

### The World Responsible Tourism Day Program

The WRTD program is well established with a series of panel discussions, seminars and discussions on the social, environmental and

economic aspects of Responsible Tourism. Key debates and workshops on crucial responsible tourism issues facing the industry today are also held, which are both challenging and provocative.

Some of the events at the WRTD 2012 were as follows:

### Activity Tourism

Activity tourism is fast becoming an important source of income to many nations. The industry has responded to demand by helping holidaymakers to travel to remote parts of the world, for example, to ski, dive and climb - often in areas where these activities are relatively unmanaged.

What responsibility do tour operators and activity providers have to ensure the safety of travellers and or the protection of the environments they use? Speakers for the session addressed the issue of responsible mountaineering, trekking, skiing and diving.



## Tourism and Child Protection

Child protection has long been a major concern of many people working within the industry. Disquiet continues to grow as travel and tourism unwittingly contributes to internal child trafficking. Unscrupulous orphanages are recruiting or purchasing children to 'earn' money from tourists.

What must the industry do take responsibility for children and young people - whether in the destination or amongst the holidaymakers? A panel discussion was held with speakers exploring how the industry can more effectively address the challenge of protecting children.

## Wildlife Tourism

The trend of millions of travellers who like to watch animals in their natural habitat is growing every year and has become a significant source of employment and income for developing countries.

But rapid development also brings numerous environmental concerns that could endanger wildlife. In this session, speakers from Kenya, Scotland and South Africa shared their views on how the industry can positively contribute, educating visitors, helping to fund conservation and creating wildlife dependent livelihoods for local people.

## Maximising Local Economic Development

Tourism claims to be the world's largest

industry and employs 1 in 12 people.

A panel discussion was held that looked at how tourism can increase its contribution to the local communities in destinations through employment, local sourcing of goods and services and by encouraging tourists to buy local.

H.E. Kamallesh Sharma, Secretary General of the Commonwealth, chaired the panel with speakers from Gambia, India and the UK.

## The Debate: Is the travel and tourism industry taking responsibility for reducing its greenhouse gas emissions?

Two teams participated in the debate on whether the industry is doing enough to reduce the carbon pollution caused by transport and accommodation or if it is necessary for government to regulate the world's largest industry.

The session was chaired by Professor Harold Goodwin, Responsible Tourism Management at Leeds Metropolitan University and advisor to the World Travel Market on World Responsible Tourism Day.

There were several other talks as well as a Speakers Corner, where delegates talked about their own responsible tourism activity, explored new ideas and introduced opinions on ethical trends. The official opening of the 6th

WTM WRTD was followed by the announcement of the Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards which recognize and felicitate some of the tourism companies that exemplify responsible tourism business philosophy and practices.

## Responsible Tourism Awards

The Responsible Tourism Awards are organised by founder responsibletravel.com, with support from media partners Metro Newspaper, Geographical Magazine (the magazine of the Royal Geographical Society), and the World Travel Market.

The judging process is designed and organised in partnership with the International Centre for Responsible Tourism at Leeds Metropolitan University, and Virgin Holidays have supported the Awards as headline sponsor since 2007.

Since they were founded in 2004, the Awards have attracted over 10,000 nominations from members of the public, leading to 201 unique organisations as recipients from 51 countries around the world.

The Responsible Tourism Awards are divided into 13 categories, each one focusing on a unique area of responsible tourism. For each category, the judges look for organisations conserving cultural heritage, preserving local environments, and contributing to the sustainable livelihoods of local people.



## Responsible Tourism Awards - 2012 winners

Overall winner: Reality Tours and Travel, India [www.realitytoursandtravel.com](http://www.realitytoursandtravel.com)

Best accommodation for local communities: Soria Moria Boutique Hotel, Cambodia [www.thesoriamoria.com](http://www.thesoriamoria.com)

Best accommodation for the environment: Song Saa Private Island, Cambodia [www.songsaa.com](http://www.songsaa.com)

Best carbon reduction initiative: Sawadee Reizen, Holland [www.sawadee.nl](http://www.sawadee.nl)

Best destination for conserving architectural heritage: St Kilda, Scotland [www.kilda.org.uk](http://www.kilda.org.uk)

Best engagement with people and cultures: South Nottingham College in Partnership with The Institute of Travel and Tourism of The Gambia [www.snc.ac.uk/gambia](http://www.snc.ac.uk/gambia)

Best for conservation of wildlife and habitats: Huilo Huilo Biological Reserve, Chile [www.huilohuilo.com](http://www.huilohuilo.com)

Best for poverty reduction: Reality Tours and Travel, India

Best in a marine environment: Moonraker Dolphin Swims, Australia [www.moonrakercharters.com.au](http://www.moonrakercharters.com.au)

Best in a mountain environment: 3 Sisters Adventure Trekking [www.3sistersadventure.com](http://www.3sistersadventure.com)

Best in responsible tourism writing: At home with the Himba by Emma Thomson

Best in responsible transport: Joint winners, Big Lemon Bus Company, UK and Green Tomato Cars, UK and Australia [www.thebiglemon.com](http://www.thebiglemon.com); [www.greentomatocars.com](http://www.greentomatocars.com)

Best innovation: The Nature Observatorio Amazing Treehouse, Costa Rica <http://natureobservatorio.com>

Best tour operator for promoting responsible tourism: Explore, UK [www.explore.co.uk](http://www.explore.co.uk)

Best volunteering organisation: Elephant Human Relations Aid, Namibia [www.desertelephant.org](http://www.desertelephant.org)

As Fiona Jeffery, OBE, Chairman, WTM, said "WTM World Responsible Tourism Day is a 'melting pot' for ideas, often confronting controversy and making everyone think a little more deeply about the future sustainability of our industry."

She further stated, "Every year, more people jump aboard the responsible tourism 'wagon',

but the challenge for the industry is to ensure that those companies and destinations who claim to be responsible - are just that. As an industry, we need honest, transparent information about what they're doing and what they've achieved - and so do customers."

That is the challenge that the tourism industry faces!



# In the Spotlight

## Urbn Hotel, Shanghai, China

*China's first carbon-neutral hotel*



Victoria Hajjar, Operations Director, URBN Hotels

**URBN Hotel Shanghai** is a boutique hotel located in Jing'an District in Shanghai, China, built by the Shanghai-based hotel chain URBN Hotels & Resorts whose mission is to develop and operate innovative, stylish hotels that combine locally sourced and recycled materials with modern architecture and design to create contemporary spaces inspired by China's past, present and future. URBN Hotel Shanghai, the first property of the hotel chain, is a renovated factory warehouse which features 26 design and earth friendly rooms – a destination hotel where contemporary design meets Asian style. It has the distinction of being China's first carbon neutral hotel and Shanghai's most awarded boutique hotel. In this interview, Victoria Hajjar, Operations Director, Urbn Hotels, provides insights into best practices adopted by the hotel for sustainable tourism.

**SOST:** URBN has the distinction of being the first carbon neutral hotel in China. Please explain.

**Victoria Hajjar:** Just as airlines allow passengers to purchase carbon credits equivalent to their share of carbon usage for the flight, hotels are also moving from eco-friendly green hotels to completely carbon neutral hotels.

URBN works with South Pole, an international intermediary offering bespoke solutions for companies and industries to reduce and offset greenhouse gas emissions.

The total amount of energy the hotel consumes, including staff commutes, food and beverage delivery, and the energy used by each guest, is tracked to calculate the carbon footprint.

URBN then purchases credits to neutralize its footprint by investing in a "green" energy development and emission reduction project in China.

Hotel guests can also choose to purchase carbon credits from the program to offset their flights. All credits are verified and approved by the United Nations.

This voluntary action by URBN Hotels & Resorts is significant, considering China is the fastest growing emitter of greenhouse gases and is central to the success or failure of the global response to climate change.

URBN has been a carbon neutral hotel since its launch in 2007, and we remain dedicated to our carbon neutral initiative.

Our offsetting projects make URBN the first of its kind in China and allow hotel guests to enjoy their stay in our hotels with neutral CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.









Our mission is to do well by doing good through creating sustainable lifestyle experiences for our guests, employees, the community and our investors. We live and operate by our core values: to sustain, enrich, inspire and connect people, places and the planet.

SOST: What are URBN's guiding principles on sustainability?

Victoria Hajjar: I would like to quote our Managing Director Scott Barrack who says that, "Carbon neutrality is only one part of URBN's sustainable philosophy and CSR program. We fully engage ourselves in sustainable building practices, sustainable management practices and community and charity sponsorship. We hope to inspire other companies and communities to adopt sustainable practices as part of their core beliefs."

URBN is a truly sustainable project developed from a renovated factory warehouse. The interiors are made with 100% locally sourced and recycled materials.

Our mission is to do well by doing good

through creating sustainable lifestyle experiences for our guests, employees, the community and our investors. We live and operate by our core values: to sustain, enrich, inspire and connect people, places and the planet.

SOST: What are some of the other key features of your property?

Victoria Hajjar: Apart from offering guests the ability to offset their flights, thereby making their trip to Shanghai "carbon neutral", URBN is also committed to developing and operating a green property. By renovating an existing structure, focusing on using recycled and locally sourced materials such as reclaimed hardwoods and old Shanghai bricks, and introducing eco-friendly solutions like passive solar shades and a water based AC system, URBN hopes to set an example for other Chinese businesses and industries.



**Embrace sustainability! Don't think short term costs, think long term growth. More importantly, realize that sustainability is no longer a choice, but increasingly a matter of competitive survival.**

URBN's signature restaurant, "Downstairs with David Laris" offers organic and natural, healthy, farm-fresh cuisine which keeps in line with the hotel's core concept of sustainability. Reusable, recyclable and natural materials have been incorporated in all elements of the space design. Unique to Downstairs is the water recycling purification system that allows the restaurant to clear the water we use in the kitchen from all the metals and bacteria. Downstairs is China's only environmental and carbon-neutral restaurant of Shanghai.

In addition, the staff uniforms are made by marginalized members of the community, like unemployed single mothers, handicapped, homeless, and orphans out of vintage fabrics sourced from the villages around the city of Shanghai.

**SOST: URBN embraces a leadership role in sustainability initiatives in Shanghai. What are some of these initiatives?**

**Victoria Hajjar:** In partnership with the Jane Goodall Institute's (an international NGO with offices in Shanghai and Beijing) Roots & Shoots program, we have engaged in the One Million Tree project. This project allows us to purchase trees for reforestation in the severely desertified areas of Inner Mongolia, in order to offset carbon emissions. Through encouraging friends, partners and guests to purchase trees, we hope to grow our very own URBN forest of 2,000 trees.



## Urbn Hotel, Shanghai - Key Features and Facilities:

- Offer 6 square meters of green space per hotel guest
- Renovated an existing structure and reused many of its elements
- Focused on using recycled and locally sourced materials
- Reclaimed shanghai hardwood floors and old shanghai brick
- Introduced passive solar shading
- Added extensive green wall over south facade
- Fitted double pane windows
- Installed energy efficient water based AC system with heat recovery ventilators
- Utilized low VOC paints
- Installed low wattage lighting throughout the hotel
- Provide energy saving light setting for all rooms
- Ensure use of environmentally safe cleaning products
- Upscale bath amenities by environmentally friendly lifestyle partner (eco&more)

Last year, we hosted an event in partnership with WildAid, wildlife conservation NGO, to call for a ban on shark's fin soup in China, which could save tens of millions of sharks annually. China's most celebrated basketball star Yao Ming and British magnate and founder of Virgin Group Sir Richard Branson joined forces to help drive WildAid's strong, but simple message: when the buying stops, the killing can too.

Green Drinks China (GDC) is a regular networking event based on the idea that real links, connections and projects can start over something as simple as a drink. GDC events feature speakers on green-related topics and are forums for anyone interested in sustainable development. URBN hosts their film screening events, which are geared to invoke environmentalism.

At a recent movie night, we showed Meat the Truth, a documentary that talks about one of the most important causes of climate change, namely: intensive livestock production. The movie ended with a discussion with Annie Taylor, a vegan expert, vegetarian chef and advocate of vegetarianism in China.

On our website [www.urbnhotels.com](http://www.urbnhotels.com), every page carries an URBN Green Tip for our website visitors and hotel guests. We also have a blog that talks about environment and related issues.

**SOST: What positive impact has being a responsible tourism company had on your business?**

**Victoria Hajjar:** We believe that our hotel guests are inspired by our focus on sustainability, and reward us with their loyalty. They also recommend us to others. URBN has won numerous accolades for its commitment to environmentally-friendly operational practices, use of recycled and reclaimed materials in construction, and support of the green movement through events such as the annual Eco Design Fair in Shanghai. URBN has recently been named one of the world's top ten eco-friendly hotels



of 2012 by international booking website Agoda, an online booking engine.

**SOST: What's next on the cards for URBN?**

**Victoria Hajjar:** Two more hotels are being developed - one in the Pudong area and the other in Lu Xiang Yuan district. URBN Hotel Pudong will be China's first positive-impact hotel in Pudong. In addition to eco-friendly features such as energy efficiency, water recycling and carbon neutrality, the facility will actually enhance the site's biodiversity and generate water cleaner than the water provided by the city.

**SOST: What's your sustainability message to the travel trade?**

**Victoria Hajjar:** Embrace sustainability! Don't think short term costs, think long term growth. More importantly, realize that sustainability is no longer a choice, but increasingly a matter of competitive survival.

There is huge development happening in the hospitality sector in China, with international hotel brands investing in the country, and bringing in some of the best global practices in sustainability. I think you cannot be a global brand or compete with global brands without a sustainable edge to your business.

So, I'd say once again - embrace sustainability.

## SOST Assessment



- URBN Hotel Shanghai demonstrates compliance with most indicators under the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC).
- A Sustainability Management Plan, documentation of sustainability practices and evidence of performance measurement and tracking systems are some of the areas that need to be worked upon, in order that the hotel may be certified as a GSTC-aligned sustainable tourism business.

*SOST Assessment is based on the business's response (self-reporting) to a series of questions on sustainability policies and practices in line with GSTC-complaint criteria. It is undertaken by SOST's Managing Editor - a certified auditor for sustainable tourism. It does not purport to be a 'verified' third-party assessment.*

**Editor's Note:** This interview was conducted on-site at URBN Hotel, Shanghai.



# In the Spotlight

*EcoTurkey Travel,  
London, UK*



Ali Keskin, Founder-Director, EcoTurkey Travel

EcoTurkey Travel is an independent, fully licensed, UK based tour operator. EcoTurkey is a business with ambitions to change tourism for the long-term benefit of the local people, tourists, the environment and the tourism industry in Turkey. As such, it promotes ethical holidays to Turkey.

In this interview, Ali Keskin, Founder-Director, EcoTurkey Travel shares with us his motivation behind setting up the company, the underlying company philosophy that guides its efforts, and the sustainable business practices the company follows.

**SOST:** You are a fairly new business. What motivated you to focus on ecotourism?

**Ali Keskin:** I consider myself a World Traveller who believes in human rights, equality and respect for other cultures. It's always the small things that make the big difference. Our hope is to change tourism for the long-term benefit of local people, tourists, the environment and the tourism industry in Turkey.

EcoTurkey's website is a guide to the country, up to date travel advice and details of ethically and ecologically sound holiday packages and accommodation. The business works with environmental organisations, human rights groups and local community groups in order to promote sustainable tourism and ethical holidays in Turkey.

**SOST:** What is your guiding philosophy on sustainable tourism?

**Ali Keskin:** Respect for local people, their cultures, traditions, religions and the environment are essential to our philosophy

and our tours, and we work hard to ensure our groups have a positive impact on the places and people visited.

As a principle, EcoTurkey Travel recognises and supports the 2002 Cape Town Declaration.

In the destinations we visit, we use licensed local guides, with proper national accreditation where demanded by law. As well as contributing to the local economy, this practice ensures that our guests learn about the region that they are visiting firsthand from someone who knows the area(s) intimately, and it also promotes local employment.

EcoTurkey supports Climate Care, an NGO that runs some of the world's largest corporate carbon offsetting programmes. Though we do not impose a requirement on our customers, we do encourage them to 'carbon neutralize' their flight at the time of booking their tour with us.

Respect for local people, their cultures, traditions, religions and the environment are essential to our philosophy and our tours.



**SOST:** EcoTurkey Travel provides travellers holidays in Turkey that are economically, socially and environmentally responsible. Could you tell us more about this?

**Ali Keskin:** All of our holiday options are meticulously vetted by a group of experienced travellers. EcoTurkey Travel insists that all collaborators are ethical and eco-friendly businesses which benefit the local economy, promote ethical labour practices and work in line with conservation and sustainable environmental policies.

To accommodate our guests, we primarily use small family run guesthouses, lodges, historical boutique hotels that employ local workers. In the case of larger hotels, we only collaborate with non-chain locally owned establishments.

In terms of tour activities, all of our guests can get involved in work on the farm, go fishing or take part in workshops based on local culture and handicrafts like kilim (flat-woven carpets) weaving, simple clay pottery making, basket making or producing a range of traditional preserves such as jams and pickles. Many of these activities continue to be performed by

women and have social, practical and economic dimensions. You would be interested to know that only women weave carpets and kilims; male carpet weavers are not accepted in Turkish culture.

**SOST:** Can you tell us about the different kind of ecotourism travel opportunities/tours you offer your customers?

**Ali Keskin:** Our tours and holidays are somewhat similar to educational travel, but are much more active. In other words, the educational aspect of our holidays may teach others about how they can better serve their world, but the responsible aspect of ecotourism ensures that what they are being taught is actually done. That includes the promotion of water and energy conservation and recycling tactics.

We offer a range of eco-travel holidays in Turkey such as Adventure Holidays which include Trekking and Hiking, Mountain and Rock Climbing, Kayaking and White-water Rafting, Paragliding, Cycling Tours, Scuba Diving Holidays and Wildlife and Birding Holidays, Cultural Tours, Culinary Tours and Organic Farmstays, Volunteer Holidays etc.





I endorse SOST's by-line: Good for the Planet and Good for Business. As tour operators, we have an ethical and moral responsibility to ensure that we minimize the negative impact of our tours to the destinations we choose to take our clients to.

**SOST:** In what ways do you/your business provide individuals with a chance to make a contribution for the sustainable development of Turkey?

**Ali Keskin:** We support the local economy and small business initiatives by visiting locally-owned small shops, restaurants, and local farmers markets on our tours.

As I mentioned earlier, we primarily use small family run accommodations that employ local workers. As an example, for our Cappadocia Eco Holiday (7 days) in Central Anatolia, the accommodation we use is a family-owned eco friendly cave hotel. It is situated in a listed historical building right in the heart of Cappadocia - a region classed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Historical Site. This hotel is a unique establishment with internationally recognized pioneering activities in the areas of ecotourism and bio tourism. Its restaurant serves authentic Anatolian cuisine made with fresh, locally-sourced ingredients.

Our Organic Farmstays and Culinary Tours (cooking classes with village women using traditional recipes) provide ample opportunities to support the local people, and to help preserve the local culture and heritage of Turkish villages and small towns.

**SOST:** What trends do you see for the travel and tourism industry in the future? Is responsible tourism or sustainable tourism gaining ground among holiday goers?

**Ali Keskin:** Responsible Tourism is certainly gaining popularity; more and more people are travelling responsibly now. Just as the demand of environmentally-friendly products has grown over the years, demand for eco-friendly holiday travel will also rise.

On the supply side too, sustainability is slowly but surely gaining ground among travel industry stakeholders across the tourism value chain.

**SOST:** What are the long term benefits tour operators can expect from being involved in sustainable tourism? What message would you like to give them?

**Ali Keskin:** I think the answer lies within each one of us. We know that sustainable tourism makes business sense. I endorse SOST's by-line: Good for the Planet and Good for Business.

As tour operators, we have an ethical and moral responsibility to ensure that we minimize the negative impact of our tours to the destinations we choose to take our clients to.





**SOST:** Finally, what are your organization's plans for the future? Any special initiatives planned?

**Ali Keskin:** In 2013, we have set out to find more tour operators and hoteliers committed to responsible tourism in Turkey and other Mediterranean countries – tourism that helps to support local communities and conservation. We are also focussing on child friendly eco-holidays in Turkey: we offer activity-based tours with workshops for children where they can make spinning tops, kites, model aeroplanes or try their hand at learning to bake Turkish bread (Borek). Their creations will become memorable souvenirs of their stay in Turkey.

## SOST Assessment

→ EcoTurkey Travel demonstrates compliance with many indicators under the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC).

→ A Sustainability Management Plan, documentation of sustainability practices and evidence of performance measurement systems are some of the areas that need to be worked upon, in order that the hotel may be certified as a GSTC-aligned sustainable tourism business.

*SOST Assessment is based on the business's response (self-reporting) to a series of questions on sustainability policies and practices in line with GSTC-complaint criteria. It is undertaken by SOST's Managing Editor - a certified auditor for sustainable tourism. It does not purport to be a 'verified' third-party assessment.*



# The World beyond the Classroom

Our contributing writer for the column Point of View is **Pete Milne**, environmental education trainer based in Dubai. Pete is a strong advocate of instilling environmental awareness among school children through learning and experience, and is actively developing ecotourism programs for schools.



Environmental education plays a crucial role in making children more aware of the issues we face today and the responsibility of present and future generations to provide solutions to the problems that we have created. It is important that schools take a leading role in using environmental education to prepare students for the choices they ultimately need to make to safeguard a more sustainable future.

Environmental education must not be restricted to the classroom alone. Every school's mission should be to help children develop a connection to the environment, through both learning and experience. This experience can be initiated in the school with after-school eco clubs and school wide sustainability projects, going on to initiatives and field trips within the local community, and the world beyond.

With travel comes better understanding of other cultures, which helps students to value the planet and fosters greater understanding towards other people. By combining economic, social and environmental related elements in a trip, students will not only establish a deeper connection with the destination they are visiting, they will learn more about how they can make a more positive impact on the world. The key is to see the world as one, and as one combined responsibility.



Planting a Ghaf Tree

Are there enough opportunities for children to learn beyond the classroom? And crucially, are schools aware of and making sustainable choices in the tour programs they choose and the travel companies they go with?

When planning field trips for schools,

there has to be a consistent process which starts from the way the school itself promotes good environmental practice. The travel program needs to have relevant curriculum links and teachers need to be provided appropriate pre-trip training and made aware of their responsibilities on tour.



Wadi Wurayah



Mangroves

I have been working collaboratively with a travel company on a program of overseas educational tours for students and family groups called The World beyond the Classroom. The Tour Programme has subject links but also a strong environmental focus, connected to a specific environmental project or issue in each country.

One of the tour programs, for example, is a trekking trip to Nepal, where the focus is on understanding water, waste and energy management in the villages of the country. As part of the preparation stage, students and teachers or family members will be shown a presentation that will not only enhance their understanding of the environmental issues and challenges in Nepal, but it will also impart knowledge about the importance of energy management, water conservation, waste management etc.

Similarly, an overseas field trip to Borneo, where Orangutans are an endangered species, incorporates educational activities aimed at providing school children with information about wildlife and conservation, while stimulating thinking and action for the rescue and rehabilitation of the animals. The program takes teaching out of the classroom and encompasses various activities, including tours, camps and workshops.

Other environmentally focused trips will concentrate on aspects such as sustainable transport, green building design, climate change, nature studies and biodiversity.

Instilling environmental values in our children from a young age, and providing them with the knowledge and tools to confront and address global environmental issues should prove to be the best investment in protecting our natural resources for future generations.

*Pete Milne is an environmental education trainer, with 20 years of teaching experience especially within environmental, science and primary education. Throughout his time as a teacher, Pete coordinated Environmental Education and Residential Trip Programmes in UK, Malaysia and UAE and his role as Environmental Education Coordinator at Raffles World Academy in Dubai, UAE was a pioneering one in the region, achieving the prestigious Green Flag award for environmental excellence.*

*Pete also served as the Education Advisor on Adrian Hayes' (well-known adventurer, speaker, corporate coach and sustainability ambassador) record breaking Greenland Quest Expedition in 2009. He is a strong advocate of instilling environmental awareness among school children through learning and experience, and is actively developing ecotourism programs for schools. He also runs Target Green workshops – A Whole School Environmental Action Programme involving teachers and school children.*



# More info on eco-tourism, students say

By: *Elsa S. Subong*

IT IS NOT a lack of interest but lack of awareness and information on eco-tourism sites that prevent young people from engaging in eco-tourism trips in their communities.

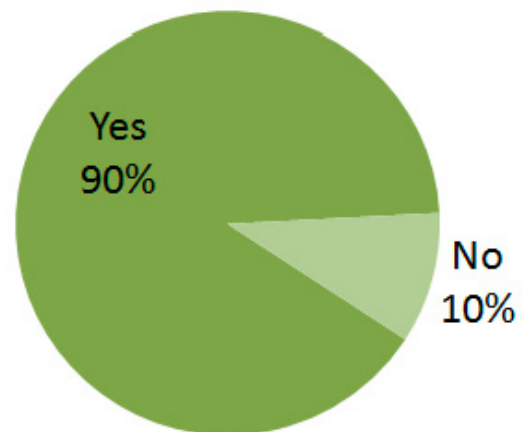
Some 400 students from the public and private schools participated in a recent survey on "Assessing Eco-Tourism Potential: A Domestic Market Profile of Students in Iloilo City (a highly urbanized city in the Philippines and the capital city of the province of Iloilo) conducted by the Canadian Urban Institute (CUI).

The survey revealed that about 90 percent of the students were willing to learn more about eco-tourism, as they considered eco-tourism to be significantly important for the future of Iloilo City. Their preferred way of learning more about eco-tourism is through a day tour (82%), from the internet (60%), and from school lectures (53%).

Only about 37 percent of the respondents said they have experienced eco-tourism trips, such as trekking, tree planting activities, swimming/snorkelling, island hopping, caving etc. More than half of the respondents (56%) said Ilonggos (ethnic group, residents of Iloilo) in general appreciate the potentials of eco-tourism in Iloilo, but this is affected to some extent by limited marketing and promotional activities. Nearly one-half of the respondents said there was no information at all while 40 percent said there were no suitable eco-tourism sites in the area. More than half of the respondents (56%) said there was limited accessibility to eco-tourism areas.

The CUI said that targeting schools as potential clients for ecotourism tours in the province will not only make them aware of the existence of such sites, but help the local communities earn a living, as schools have the captive population for eco-tourism trips.

## Willing to learn about eco-tourism



### Preferred way of learning about eco-tourism

Through day tour	82%
From the Internet	60%
From school lectures	53%

Source: <http://www.thedailyguardian.net/index.php/iloilo-business-news/17033-more-info-on-eco-tourism-students-say>



# Green Showcase

The Ginkgo Society, Yunnan, China



*Shaxi Valley, Yunnan, China*





Pear Orchard Temple – before restoration



Pear Orchard Temple – restoration in progress

Sino-American Conservation Group, the Ginkgo Society was established to create a sustainable tourism development strategy together with the people and government of Shaxi, China. Its current projects include restoring the 300 years old Pear Orchard Temple (Ci Yin An) and creating a Visitor's Center inside that will also feature a vegetarian restaurant and tea garden.

Founded by local teacher Wu Yunxin and American designer Chris Barclay, the Ginkgo Society welcomes collaboration in all areas of sustainable travel. Chris Barclay says, "Our goal is to protect Shaxi Valley and its unique cultural heritage, by establishing green-themed activities and preventing the kind of mass-scale Chinese tourism that has over-commercialized neighbouring cities Lijiang and Dali in the Yunnan province."

The town of Shaxi is one of the last surviving market towns of the Tea Horse Caravans from Tibet and listed with the World Heritage Foundation as an endangered place. In 2011, the Ginkgo Society also renovated and re-branded the former Dragonfly Guesthouse as the Old Theatre Inn, the top-rated Shaxi guesthouse on TripAdvisor. It has also partnered with other Shaxi hotels to promote its sustainable tourism ideas throughout the Shaxi Valley.

SOST asked Chris Barclay to share some more details about these sustainability projects.

**SOST: What sustainable tourism practices have you followed in the restoration of the temple and the guesthouse? What are the key sustainability features of these two properties?**

**Chris Barclay:** We only hire local workers who have a lifetime of experience building in the traditional style on which the temple construction is based. We have added solar hot water to the guesthouse and don't use any disposable items on the property. There are stainless steel thermos flasks and drinking water bottles in the guest rooms for guests to re-fill from our ceramic urn in the

lobby. No single-use chopsticks or plastic ware of any kind is used. Instead of power-hungry air conditioners, we offer electric blankets and down comforters.

**SOST: How have you ensured that the local culture and heritage been preserved, while modernizing and refurbishing them?**

**Chris Barclay:** We stick to the original designs as required by our supervisory body, the Cultural Bureau and the Heritage Bureau. They are very strict about what we can change, as both the Old Theatre Inn and Pear Orchard Temple are over 300 years old. We have updated electric cables using fire-preventive PVC conduits, added fire suppression equipment and hired local artists to re-paint the original temple artwork.

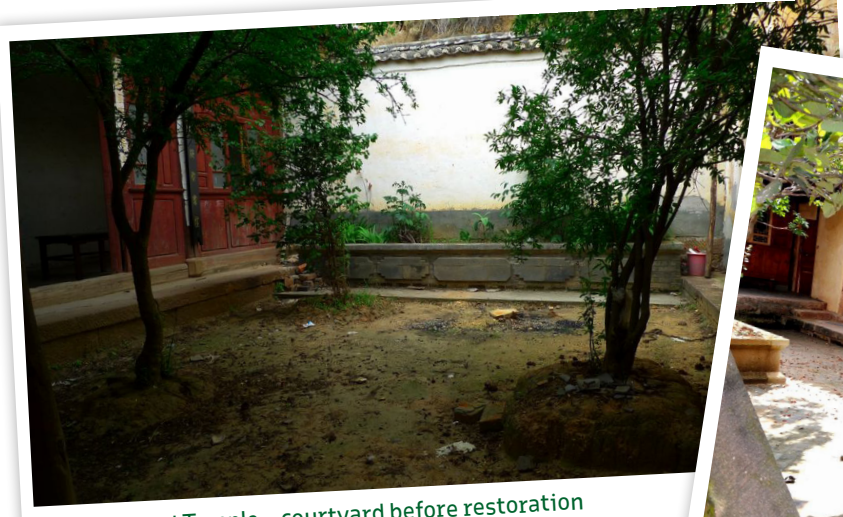
**SOST: What activities do you encourage that provide ownership opportunities for local families?**

**Chris Barclay:** We have opened our first homestay, the Li Family Courtyard in which we offer dormitory-style accommodation with a local family and have trained them in hospitality services, so they can operate their courtyard home as a bed and breakfast when we don't have groups there. Our goal is to replicate this among other families in the Shaxi Valley, to create a network of authentic homestay experiences for visitors.

**SOST: What green-themed activities have been established, or are planned?**

**Chris Barclay:** Ginkgo has initiated the Shaxi Temple Zipline Tour, which will allow tourists to visit UNESCO grottoes in the hills above Shaxi without driving the 7km between these mountain temples, significantly reducing traffic and environmental impact. This project is still in the approval process. We also offer horseback riding (Shaxi is the nexus of the ancient tea horse caravan road).





Pear Orchard Temple – courtyard before restoration



Pear Orchard Temple – courtyard after restoration



Old Theatre Inn – before renovation



Old Theatre Inn – after renovation



Old Theatre Inn – interior before renovation



Old Theatre Inn – interior after renovation



# Sustainable Travel Development – Advisory Services

**SUSTAINABLE TOURISM** development embraces the triple bottom line of environmental protection, social responsibility, and economic health. Simply put, business practices that protect and enhance the environment and support community development are more profitable and competitive in the long-term.

Market Vision, along with its strategic partners, provides strategic planning, technical assistance, and implementation support to destination management companies and travel and tourism businesses of all sizes.

We start with a single focus: to improve your triple bottom line and help you achieve substantial resource savings by

leveraging untapped opportunities and implementing a sustainable path to profitability through immediate and long-term return on investment.

By staying focused on high priority areas and improving your organization's positive impacts, you'll quickly discover that sustainability equates to profitability.

Our team includes accredited auditors and consultants who will help you prepare for and achieve GSTC-recognized independently-verified eco-certification.

Contact us to find out how we can help you gain competitive advantage and increase profits through the more productive use of resources. ●

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