

**exodus**  
The Different Holiday

## 1.1 Exodus: Development of a Responsible Tourism Policy

### Description of Good Practice

Recognising the increasing awareness of sustainability issues within the travel industry, Exodus, a UK-based adventure tour operator, developed a Responsible Tourism Policy in 2000. The policy, which formalises the company's commitment to environmental, social and economic sustainability, applies to all offices, including those in the field. Central to the policy is Exodus' commitment to develop socially, economically and ecologically sound trips in which:

- Local communities play a fair role in the operations and obtain a fair share of the benefits;
- Destinations receive long-term investments and commitments from the company, thus providing economic stability to both; and
- The company contributes to conserving the natural resources on which this type of tourism depends.

The key elements of the Responsible Tourism Policy are a Mission Statement, which describes the company's aspirations for responsible tourism and sets out commitments and goals, and a Code of Practice, which outlines the management practices necessary for implementation of the policy (see Box 1). The policy is implemented in three key areas: the company's own operations, customer awareness of the issues and destination sustainability.

Exodus carefully planned the development of its Responsible Tourism Policy, convinced that the development process itself could greatly contribute to the successful implementation of the policy in everyday business. The International Centre for Responsible Tourism, based in the UK, was also brought in to assist in the process.

The company created a Responsible Tourism Manager position, requiring expertise in both tourism and conservation, to send a clear signal to all levels of the company that the issue of sustainability was becoming an integral part of the company's business.

Responsible Tourism seminars for Exodus' entire UK-based staff, from operations, marketing, sales and finance departments, were organised to give employees an opportunity to contribute to the development of the policy, hence increasing the level of ownership and the effective identification of roles and responsibilities in the implementation phase. Participants in the two-day seminars helped determine action areas for the company's Responsible Tourism Policy and the business areas that would play a key role in the

implementation. In addition, the participants offered feedback on an earlier draft of the Code of Practice.



NEPAL. NAMANG TREE NURSERY FUNDED, SUPPORTED AND VISITED BY EXODUS GROUPS

### Implementation

To ensure effective communication among staff and implementation of the policy, the company has instituted the following measures:

- New staff are given training in the policy, and there are training sessions and intranet updates at regular intervals for all staff;
- Co-ordination among staff in charge of policy implementation, reporting on initiatives and general updates, when relevant, occur at weekly

departmental meetings, attended by the Responsible Travel Manager;

- Client feedback forms and operator and leader feedback are used to monitor results; and
- The policy and actions taken to implement it are regularly reviewed.

The Responsible Tourism Policy is implemented in all business areas of the company. For example, at headquarters, Exodus has implemented recycling and energy management programmes.

To ensure that existing and new trips maximise benefits to local communities and the environment, Exodus' policy includes:

- Hiring of more local guides to provide better interpretative experiences and support to the local communities;
- Purchasing of local products and services, where appropriate, for all trips;
- Working with local operators to implement the policy; and
- Limiting group size based on the local situation, with a maximum of 22 people in appropriate circumstances.

The policy also aims at promoting and raising awareness of responsible travel practices among customers. For example, tour leaders are trained in responsible tourism principles and the importance of local issues and encouraged to be proactive on sustainability issues. In Morocco and Nepal, training seminars have been offered to local tour leaders, including information on the main environmental and social threats of tourism, particularly trekking trips. The leaders are introduced to best practices that they can promote and recommend when leading tours in environmentally and socially sensitive areas.

To further promote customer awareness, much of the company's literature, including brochures, trip notes, pre-departure information packets, feedback forms and web pages, include references to the policy and



PERU. PORTER BAGS BEING WEIGHED. EXODUS PROACTIVELY SUPPORTS PORTER WELFARE INITIATIVES AROUND THE WORLD

### BOX 1: Exodus' Responsible Tourism Policy

#### Mission Statement

Exodus operates tourism that fosters understanding, appreciation and conservation of the culture and environments we visit. We operate in a socially and environmentally responsible manner. We are committed to working with our clients and the people of our host destinations to ensure direct economic benefits at a community level, and to contribute to cultural and environmental conservation. With the continual monitoring of our operations, we aim to operate beyond best practice guidelines, endeavouring to set world-wide industry benchmarks for responsible tourism operations.

#### Code of Practice

We aim at all times to adhere to the following code in our operations:

- We will promote tourism that is economically productive, socially responsible and environmentally friendly.
- We will encourage considerate, culturally and environmentally conscious habits amongst those who travel with us.
- We will bear in mind the rights of the local population and respect local laws and customs.
- We will attempt to involve the host population in all tourism projects that we may instigate
- We will provide regular and ongoing training to our staff in the principles and practices of responsible tourism.
- We will ensure that our leaders and guides pass on to our clients an insight and understanding of the host destination.
- We will insist that our business partners in the host destinations meet our own high environmental and social standards, and that, where necessary, they receive training to improve their understanding of the issues.

responsible tourism principles. In addition, key sales and marketing decisions have been made to ensure that responsible tourism is a core element of Exodus' business, for example:

- The responsible travel section of the company's website is directly accessible from the home page;
- The Exodus newsletter includes a section on responsible travel; and
- Sales personnel have been encouraged to raise the issue when appropriate.

Finally, Exodus also implements its policy by contributing directly to conservation and development projects. Trip leaders are encouraged to inform the UK headquarters about any specific situation where an Exodus contribution could make a difference. The following are several of the projects that Exodus has been involved in so far:

- Providing financial and technical support to two tree nurseries at Manang in the Anapurna region in Nepal, to respond to deforestation and ensure that trekking practices do not worsen the problem;
- Supporting the Baobab Community Project in Tanzania, by staying at the site and encouraging clients to get actively involved;
- Providing financial support to a small-scale project to build a reliable water source for a village in the Atlas mountains, in Morocco;
- Supporting the Carpathian Large Carnivore Project in Romania, by including the community in its itinerary and donating an amount per passenger to the project;
- Supporting, in co-operation with Tourism Concern, the work of the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG) and particularly the Porters' Rights Campaign.



ROMANIA, CARPATHIAN LARGE CARNIVORE PROJECT. SUPPORTED AND VISITED BY EXODUS GROUPS.

## Benefits

Since the Responsible Tourism Policy was implemented, Exodus has seen a number of benefits, including:

- Publicity surrounding the policy has encouraged bookings by a small but growing number of clients who cite responsible tourism practices as a reason for choosing Exodus over other operators.
- The policy has led to positive publicity in the media and industry recognition, helping to raise the profile of sustainable tourism in this sector of the travel industry. Exodus was highly commended in the British Airways Tourism for Tomorrow Awards for its operations.
- The policy has enhanced human and intellectual capital at Exodus. Involvement of the staff from the beginning has led to a feeling of ownership of the issues and policy, and employees feel good about being involved with a responsible company. The company found its staff readily willing to accept and apply responsible tourism principles; all they needed was direction in how to do so.
- Working with authorities in destinations to identify their problems and desires has helped to overcome some of the problems associated with tourism.

## Comments

A Responsible Tourism Policy should be at the heart of any action or decision that a company takes, to ensure that sustainability will be at the core of the company's business strategy and decisions. Clients will see responsible tourism as an integral part of their holiday; where companies have no policy, it will be seen as a negative factor, leading clients to book with companies that do have a such a policy.

Furthermore, as more companies implement responsible (or sustainable) tourism principles as their core values, more clients will recognise these values as an industry standard and become aware of the impacts of their travel choices.