

Belize Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations 19th to 23rd October, 2009, University of Belize, Belmopan

Two hundred and fifty participants from 19 countries met together in the Third International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations convened by the International Centre for Responsible Tourism, Belize. The Conference was Co-Chaired by The Hon. Manuel Heredia Jr. Minister, Ministry Of Tourism, Belize and Professor Harold Goodwin of the International Centre for Responsible Tourism, UK

In common with the Cape Town Declaration of 2002 and the Kerala Declaration of 2008, this Belize Declaration presents the views of the conference about what needs to be done to make tourism more responsible. This Declaration is not a policy for Belize, nor does it bind Belize in any way. This Belize Declaration presents the results of discussion about how, through Responsible Tourism, to address a number of concerns which arise in many destinations around the world.

This Belize Conference accepts the injunction of the Cape Town Declaration “to take responsibility for achieving sustainable tourism, and to create better places for people to live in and for people to visit.”

The Cape Town Declaration (2002) defined Responsible Tourism as having the following characteristics:

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

The Belize Conference applauds the decision of Belize to adopt a national Responsible Tourism policy and invites the Minister of Tourism to present the policy in Oman at the 4th International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations in 2010 and to report on progress in its implementation.

The Conference recognises that to achieve the aspirations of Responsible Tourism in Destinations a large group of stakeholders, often with divergent views, need to work together to achieve change. This requires a willingness to identify and develop a common vision and for each part of government, NGOs, the industry and local communities to take responsibility for realising the shared vision, to ask themselves the question “what can we do to realise this shared goal?” and to do it.

Responsible Tourism will only be achieved where all of the stakeholders share the broad objectives of the movement and where people across government and the private sector

both accept the responsibility and act accordingly. Individuals make tourism more responsible.

To this end we urge that government supports an independent initiative by the private sector and the ICRT Belize to instigate national Responsible Tourism Awards to recognise those who are taking responsibility and using tourism to make Belize a better place for its people to live in. By rewarding better practice those who are doing most, those who are taking responsibility, are differentiated from those doing little or nothing and responsible behaviour is encouraged.

This Belize Declaration presents the recommendations of this conference about what can be done to make tourism more responsible in five areas of current concern:

- A. Tourism & Local Economic Development
- B. Tourism's Impacts on Marine and Coastal Areas
- C. Cruise Tourism Impacts in Belize and the World
- D. Impact of Second Homes Tourism and Condominiums on Local Communities
- E. Tourism Impacts on Climate Change

The Belize Conference considered presentations from academics, NGOs, governments and consultants about these issues and discussed what can be done to address these issues in destinations around the world. The recommendations for action which follow were formulated by working groups during the conference and agreed by the conference as whole.

Mindful that it is more likely that action will be taken on short lists, rather than long ones, we have focussed and endeavoured to produce short lists of recommendations.

Aware that effective implementation and enforcement is essential to achieving Responsible Tourism we urge governments to review mechanisms for enforcement and the rigour and coherence with which policy is enforced. An Environmental Impact Assessment is only a tool – it is effective only when competently applied and where the process is rigorously enforced.

A. Tourism & Local Economic Development

1. there is potential to develop many different opportunities along the major transfer routes in Belize for tourists to engage with rural communities to visit cacao growers, chocolate producers, small farms, crafts people, bars and cafes etc
2. land use planning and tenure needs to be used to ensure continued access to natural livelihood resources for sustainable livelihoods, tourism restrictions on access has restricted local growth. In the near future access to fresh water is likely to become a more significant issue and the maintenance of access rights to fresh water needs urgently to be addressed as does the loss of beach access for livelihood and recreational activity
3. in the tourism clusters work needs to be undertaken with groups of hotels and local communities to develop local tourism industry supply chains so that the benefits of tourism are more widely spread in the local economy.
4. Belize has remarkable cultural diversity with nine distinct cultural groups – there is scope to develop their material crafts culture and their performance cultures and to enhance its value with appropriate interpretation

5. it is important to broaden the participation of Belizeans in tourism both as consumers and as producers and owners of businesses in the tourism industry and to provide educational experiences for Belizeans about what can be done to bring sustainable development to their communities – to bring additional livelihoods and protect their environment

B. Tourism's Impacts on Marine and Coastal Areas

1. the maintenance of a healthy marine ecosystem along Belize's coast through zoning and regulation of development and habitat maintenance and enhancement is the priority. Tourism and other exploitation of the coast is secondary to the maintenance of a healthy coastal zone.
2. a review of jurisdiction, management and enforcement to ensure effective protection of the coastal zone is an urgent priority. Penalties must reflect the seriousness of the damage to the coastal zone.
3. coastal zone management needs to include the imperative to ensure that there are adequate resources in the coastal zone for housing local people and their sustainable use of marine resources for livelihoods
4. the government needs to identify and prohibit unsuitable forms of tourism development in the coastal zone
5. identify and encourage local community engagement in coastal zone tourism for example mangroves and river experiences

C. Cruise Tourism Impacts in Belize and the World

1. in negotiating agreements with cruise ship operators governments in Central America and the Caribbean need to negotiate effectively to maximise the local economic development impacts and to increase the benefits which go to local communities through the sale of crafts and employment. More focus needs to be placed on yield rather than landing numbers.
2. the carrying capacity needs to be managed to avoid the commodification of culture and the negative effects of tourism
3. there needs to be regional collaboration in negotiating with the cruise lines on landing fees, activities and the regulation of operational practices
4. cruise ship arrival numbers need to be capped at a sustainable level determined by national government in order to ensure the environmental, social and economic sustainability of Belize.

D. Impact of Second Homes Tourism and Condominiums on Local Communities

1. second home developments should not be permitted to restrict access to beaches and other livelihood assets.
2. there needs to be stricter regulation and enforcement of the license conditions on water, waste management and sewage
3. condominium sales and ownership need to be taxed within Belize. Tax should be applied whether the property is occupied or unoccupied
4. tax incentives to encourage the development of second homes in Belize should be curbed until such time as the benefit to the national economy can be demonstrated.
5. a government agency or NGO should work with communities when the developers begin to arrive to raise awareness of the issues which arise and to ensure that they are aware of the real value of their land.

E. Tourism Impacts on Climate Change

1. Ministers of Tourism and Aviation need to work with their colleagues in developing countries and Small Island Developing States to press for aviation

- taxes on carbon emissions which encourage airlines to improve their carbon efficiency and so that those that fly meet the full costs of the pollution they cause. The funds should be hypothecated for adaptation projects in developing countries.
2. accepting that climate change will have significant negative impacts on Belize the Ministry of Tourism, Civil Aviation and Culture should work with other responsible government agencies to ensure the enforcement of stricter coastal zone regulations
 3. the Caribbean Centre for Climate Change based in Belize and the Belize National Climate Change Committee should be pressed to identify adaptation initiatives in Belize and the industry and its clients should be encouraged to donate to those adaptation projects.
 4. local community guides should be trained to interpret the mangroves and the coastal zone for tourists and to include in the tourism experience, on the coast and inland, information about the impacts of climate change and adaptation to it. These same tours should be made available to the local community and in particular school children.
 5. all new licenses for tourism development should include alternative energy and carbon efficiency standards and compliance with best practise in coastal zone management should be rigorously enforced. Existing properties should be encouraged to undertaken remediation measures through tax incentives and conditions attached to licenses to build additional rooms.

This Belize Declaration is signed by the co-chairs as a record of what was decided at the conference and as a call for action on 23rd October 2009. In no way does this declaration seek to determine Belize's tourism development strategy.