

MIECF 2013

Eco-tourism: to protect nature for not just tourists but the whole community

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TOURISM can bring significant economic returns and, well managed, it doesn't only generate financial rewards but also avoids the environmental impacts brought by multitudes of tourists. This kind of sustainable tourism, or eco-tourism, has to be the new form of tourism, which is attainable when stakeholders and industry players join hands in the green initiative, according to tourism experts.

During a 2013 Macao International Environmental Co-operation Forum & Exhibition (MIECF) panel discussion, entitled "Fostering Sustainable Practices into Tourism", experts explored how to preserve ecosystems. Investing wisely in natural capital can provide an opportunity to generate tourism, and they elaborated on how the hospitality sector has gone green through sustainable purcha-

sing, and heavily investing in energy efficiency, which has impressively impacted their bottom line.

"We're talking about resorts and how to make resorts eco, but the developers are always busy with securing investments, getting the license from the government, getting the loans from the bank, and selling properties to their clients," said Eduardo Netto de Almeida, Director of CESL Asia. "Let's say eco-development is not at a very high position on their priority list. So it's important that we find a way to bring those concerns higher in their priorities. We have to protect nature and minimize the [carbon] footprint."

In his speech "Eco-Tourism & Eco-Resorts - Nature Vs. Footprint" he said environmental conservation is for mankind as a whole and tourism is just part of the wider initiative. "It's not just nature without man, we have to put

man inside nature. So when you protect nature you also protect the culture and the traditions, and protect them for the whole community instead of for the tourists only."

"If you want to protect nature, you can't adopt nature to tourist demands. Instead we really


Developing sustainable tourism can effectively address conservation, climate change and poverty alleviation

ERIKA HARMS

have to start from what you have, start from the community and the environment that you have, and build your tourist offer on it and find your buyer."

He said the industry, the government and developers need to define and understand their key roles in order to forge ahead with essential policies that will make destinations eco-friendly.

During the event, held at the Venetian Macao, Ms. Erika Harms, former Executive Director of Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), presented the three key components for building a sustainable tourist destination. They include establishing the necessary baseline principles; implementing sustainable practices at destination and business level; and promoting/marketing sustainable destinations and businesses.

"Tourism is the largest and fastest growing industry, but it is not a neutral one, and

its impacts are clearly visible in many destinations. On the other hand, developing sustainable tourism can effectively address conservation, climate change and poverty alleviation," she said.

Speaking at the same occasion in the capacity of Chairman of Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), João Manuel Costa Antunes, the former head of the Macau Government Tourist Office and now the Coordinator of the Macau Grand Prix Committee, said sustainability is a system that can maintain its own viability with techniques that allow continual reuse.

Grant Horsfield, founder of an eco-resort in Moganshan near Shanghai, briefed the floor on his successful experience operating a resort hidden in a mountain covered by forest, and making use of the natural environment to run the man-made facility in an environmentally friendly way.