Biotechnology: Harnessing Wealth

TNT Malaysia: Moving Up
EMC²: Banking on Storage
Health: The Power Within
Ecotourism products and services represent a significant component of Malaysia's tourism industry. The continued development of ecotourism offers Malaysia the opportunity to capitalise on increasing international and domestic consumer demand for quality experiences in natural and cultural environments.

Malaysia does not have to reinvent the wheel. There are many countries with successful ecotourism business models that can be adapted to local conditions. Australia is one good example of a nation that is serious in its sustainable management approach in ensuring the success of its ecotourism business ventures.

"Grow Your Ecotourism Business – A Support Kit for Operators" is a two-volume Australian publication produced to assist existing operators to further develop their businesses and, importantly, to provide guidance for individuals, groups and organisations seeking to develop new ecotourism products.

The kit is the only publication of its type in Australia, presenting user friendly information and suggestions on the status of ecotourism and nature-based tourism in Queensland, best practice techniques across a range of operational areas, business planning, permitting and approval processes, interpretation, conservation, marketing and sustainable design.

The kit also contains practical case studies to illustrate the issues discussed, and offers a list of references to assist with more detailed investigations.

With the kit as a guide, the government can reposition Malaysia as Asia's premier ecotourism destination for a start. Based on the Malaysian Ecotourism Plan prepared for the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism by World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Malaysia, there are a total of 426 potential or existing ecotourism sites in Malaysia. The breakdown of the number of sites according to the states in Malaysia is shown in Chart 1.

The Australian ecotourism kit draws on some experiences to show how businesses can be ecologically, socially, culturally and economically sustainable. The kit is ideal for those currently operating an ecotourism business or planning to start one. It is designed to help you avoid pitfalls and demonstrate how others have created new business opportunities locally. Part of this article would review the kit to suit the local conditions.

| POTENTIAL & EXISTING ECOTOURISM SITES IN MALAYSIA |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                 | Potential Sites | Existing Sites  |
| FT              | 0               | 12              |
| Terengganu      | 6               | 18              |
| Selangor        | 4               | 19              |
| Sarawak         | 16              | 31              |
| Sabah           | 13              | 35              |
| Penang          | 2               | 9               |
| Perak           | 9               | 28              |
| Pahang          | 0               | 40              |
| N.Sembilan      | 5               | 12              |
| Melaka          | 8               | 8               |
| Kelantan        | 8               | 11              |
| Kedah           | 15              | 27              |
| Johor           | 0               | 17              |

Viable Business Footing for Ecotourism Enterprise

The kit guides you through some basic but important business aspects of ecotourism. It answers questions that you might have, including:

- What makes ecotourism different from mainstream tourism?
- How many ecotourism operators are there in your region?
- What's happening in other regions that could be adapted to your local conditions?

It tells you how to identify threats and opportunities, and create a solid foundation for your venture. The kit also guides you to research the market, and the viability of your ideas is analysed. In addition, the kit manages potential risks to your staff and clients and also on ways to improve energy and waste management. In short, the kit guides you to prepare a business plan and achieve and maintain best practice.
1. What is Ecotourism?
2. What is Nature-Based Tourism?
3. What Makes Ecotourism Different From Mainstream Tourism?
4. Industry Overview – Malaysia
5. Ecotourism Consumer Research – A National Domestic Survey
6. National Ecotourism Accreditation Programme
7. Business Support For Ecotourism
8. Information Sources
9. Best Practice Management

Australia leads the world in accreditation of best practice ecotourism management. Best practice management in ecotourism means that your business activities make a contribution to preserving the environment and improving the understanding and appreciation of its many qualities.

There are ranges of legal and operational obligations applicable to ecotourism operators. What statutory codes apply to you? What is an environmental audit, and do you need to bring in an environmental consultant?

Malaysian case studies should be used to demonstrate how best practice management theory could be translated into a business operation.

The following aspects of management should be included when studying the ecotourism business:
1. Best Practice Environmental Management
2. Interpretation (guiding, signage, and visitor information)
3. Visitor Management
4. Energy Management
5. Waste Management
6. Product Maintenance
7. Visitor Safety/Risk Management
8. Business Planning

At the end of the day it is YOUR business. Make it your business to find out how to make it succeed. The kit includes guidelines on the following:
1. Sustainable Design
2. Basic Concepts in Sustainable Design
3. Climate Analysis
4. Locality Analysis
5. Site Analysis
6. Case Examples by Climatic Zone
Building new structures or renovating existing structures for an ecotourism venture requires considerable thought and planning. The nation can be divided into suitable climatic regions and the issues, which affect structural suitability in each region anlysed.

It is encouraged that you consider the restrictions and opportunities presented by the general location and your specific proposed building site(s). What forms should the buildings take and what materials are most appropriate? This is backed up with actual case studies of how the issues have been successfully addressed in Malaysia (see Chart 2).

MARKETING AND MAINTAINING THE QUALITY OF YOUR OPERATION

Making a good impression on your clients is paramount. If they enjoy the experience, they are more likely to return and recommend you to other people. Presenting your enterprise in a professional and credible manner, and doing it at a reasonable cost, is a challenge for every business.

Some of the topics discussed in the kit included in the brochure design and publications are:
1. Printing a brochure
2. What to put in your brochure
3. Design and artwork
4. Production process

With today's desktop publishing technology, it is not hard to put together quickly a brochure on your computer. The more common desktop publishing software includes Publisher, CorelDraw, PageMaker, QuarkXPress, Photoshop, Illustrator and Freehand, to name a few. Remember though that your brochure may be the first contact a potential client has with your business. If it is substandard, it may also be the last.

As a mechanism of communication and persuasion, a marketing brochure says more about you than what you do. It would look hurried or amateurish when you say something about your business only. Equally, if it looked professional, considered and inviting, that is the first impression your potential clients will have of your business.

(continues on pg 74)
people began to regard all things spiritual as something superstitious and, as such, Kundalini was practically forgotten.

Fortunately, one man in India, whilst searching for spiritual knowledge and enlightenment, discovered a unique, simple and safe way to awaken the Kundalini energy in people. This was during the 1930s and the man was His Holiness Gnanavallal Paranjothi Mahan. He has, since then, initiated thousands of people in India and all over the world into Kundalini Yoga, using his special technique.

Before Gnanavallal Paranjothi Mahan passed away in 1980, he appointed several gurus to undertake the task of initiating people into Kundalini Yoga, and one such person was Swamiji Sitarasu. "I was 25 when I first met Mahan. He initiated me and much later, I became a guru," recounts Swamiji Sitarasu, 50, who has a centre in Ampang, Kuala Lumpur, to initiate people into Kundalini Yoga and conduct weekly group meditation sessions.

**NEw AGE GURU**

Swamiji Sitarasu, with his short cropped hair and garbed in jeans most of the time, may not look anything like the typical saffron-robed, grey-bearded Swamijis that people are accustomed to, but as far as knowledge of Kundalini is concerned, he is a force to reckon with. In fact, his disciples look to him as a "new age" guru, one who is equally at home with meditation and worldly affairs.

"That's the beauty of Kundalini meditation. You need not renounce your family, give up your job and go into seclusion to meditate. You can meditate anywhere you want, continue being a loving father, mother, husband or wife and continue with your materialistic pursuits and you'll still reap the benefits," he points out.

Swamiji Sitarasu, who has a website at www.kundalini.net/my, is prepared to explain Kundalini Yoga to anyone who wants to learn more about this form of meditation. He can be reached at 603 - 4280 4903 or 013 - 342 4515 or sita - mind@tm.net.my.

(from pg 71)

**MAKING ECOTOURISM PAY**

A brochure can represent a significant part of your marketing strategy and budget, so it pays to get it right. Avoid the pitfalls incurred by so many people.

**PLANNING AND OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES**

The great attraction of ecotourism for local, national and international visitors is that natural and cultural sites are sensitively managed and presented for their enjoyment. Responsibility for managing these resources lies with a range of stakeholders, including the local, state and the federal governments, private owners, trustees and user groups.

The kit also puts the statutory obligations of operators into perspective. It provides practical examples of how the responsibilities of each authority relate to a project, and guidance for seeking approvals for your enterprise. The possible approvals for the development and operation of ecotourism and nature-based tourism operations across a range of tenures are detailed in this section. The section also contains information on how to navigate the Integrated Planning Act.

Knowing what is required of you, both in the application and operation stages, will help you ensure that your enterprise complies with requirements and makes the most of the ecotourism opportunities in your area.

Topics in this section include:
1. Types of Operation
2. Types of Land and Water Tenure
3. Private (Freehold) Land and Water
4. Local Government
5. State Government
6. Commonwealth Government
7. A Typical Approval Process
8. Relevant Management Agencies
9. Interpretation and Environmental Education
10. Interpretation and Environmental Education
11. The Elements of Interpretation
12. Implementing the Theory
14. References

Why would people want to visit a special area when they can get a good deal of information about it from books, television and the Internet? First and foremost, they are looking for an experience. How you interpret the landscape, the wildlife, the culture or the history of a location for your clients can make all the difference to how they experience it.

Word-of-mouth recommendation is the most valuable (and inexpensive) way to promote your enterprise. A quality experience with you can make the difference between being a "must-see" attraction and being just another tourist business.

**CONTRIBUTING TO CONSERVATION**

Your company can benefit through your direct involvement with the conservation of natural and cultural resources and sites.

There are many practical examples of how this can be done, by large and small companies. These include things like supporting research projects, getting involved in the rehabilitation of degraded areas and helping to control exotic, rare and endemic species.

This kind of involvement not only has the potential to contribute to the viability and sustainability of your enterprise, it will impress your clients. It becomes a selling point and enhances your credentials as an environmentally responsible business.

In next issue: Checklist to Establish Ecotourism Business in Malaysia

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