



Tourism Scan

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This is a communiqué of the Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism

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“The Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism is a Chiang Mai, Thailand based coalition of Regional Ecumenical Organisations and over seventy secular and faith-based groups. It seeks to unite people around collective efforts that negate the undesirable effects of modern tourism and, in its place, institute socially responsible and ethically oriented tourism. It believes that tourism must be based on justice and sustainability for host communities and that, therefore, tourism planning and practice must be democratised. ECOT advocates respect for the protection and dignity of the human rights of women, children, indigenous peoples and workers in the tourist trade. It opposes tourism projects that create environmental devastation.”

Editorial Comment

Tourism is only getting more complex with each passing day. And, as the industry grows, one can only expect worse from the industry. We have over and over again that the greed for profits over and above values of human justice, and ecological conservation seems to be the guiding principle which drives the industry.

But its still not dooms day, and it is unlikely that doomsday will come about anytime- ever! The protests are also growing and the alternatives keep emerging from the minds of fertile innovators never satisfied with the status quo. In a sense, it can be said, that the tourism industry had better know that people are watching its actions. Also, that the watchdog approach means that people will not let things that are blatant violations of elementary principles of justice go uncontested.

In this issue of Tourism Scan, we highlight a variety of issues that must be taken note of. We begin with a comment on Macau from Paul Street, a tourism researcher-activist who is specializing in heritage issues. He sounds out warning bells that implore us to act- before it is too late. We then move on to several environmental issues and actions that are frightful as well as signs of hope in the form of pro-active conservationists ruling the roost even under odds! These stories warn us especially to be even more alert to the 'neo-eco tourism' peddlers who are converting tours they claim are targeted at environmental consciousness and preservation into opportunities for bio-piracy and land grabbing.

We feature two protests from respected groups – one in London (Friends of Maldives) and the other from EQUATIONS, India. The first of these is a solidarity campaign from London-based activists who argue that while tourism is okay to allow in the Maldives, the traveller must also choose facilities that are not associated with the oppressive regime that rules the Maldives. Readers are encouraged to join this protest and make it widely known. As well, the message we are sending out is that countries with a high dependence on tourism revenues must be willing to face scrutiny of the way they do their tourism business activities. This becomes even more crucial when tourism enterprises in these countries are linked to the government. The least we can do is to boycott these enterprises and make known to the world that 'we disagree'. The Maldives is a typical example of a tourism dependent economy where political oppression including human rights abuse and torture are rife.

The EQUATIONS protest is in a special category- one which demonstrates how alert activism, rooted in well researched work, can expose how governments give impressions of good practice while all along the truth is that they indulge in unsustainable and undemocratic tourism practices. The protest itself relates to a prestigious international award which the Kerala government, India is on the verge of winning. EQUATIONS argues that the grounds on which the award is being given is insufficiently explored and that the Kerala government does not deserve to be recognised with the award until it improves its policies and practices.

We urge our readers to send in comments and also contribute items of news for forthcoming issues of Tourism Scan.

Ranjan Solomon
Editor
3 March 2006

The new colonization of Macau

Macau, the only legalised gambling city in China, has a population of nearly 450,000. It comprises an area of 27.3 sq. km, made up of the Macau Peninsula (connected to mainland China) and the islands of Taipa and Coloane.

Tourist arrivals in Macau have more than doubled in the last ten years: from some 8 million visitors in 1995 to 18 million in 2005. Most of the increase has occurred because of the greater freedom Chinese nationals have had in travelling out of the mainland. The majority come to gamble whilst others combine their trip intending to see some of the sights. There are 25 official sites which all fall under the recently established (2005) UNESCO World Heritage Historic Centre of Macau.

Macau was euphoric over its designation. Newspapers ran headlines proclaiming “We’ve got it” and “Very proud”. Many residents agreed that gaming had produced a rather skewed international image of Macau. Heritage status, however, has given the area a priceless boost to its global image. “I can now tell people that I am from a world heritage city and not just a gambling city” said one restaurant owner who frequently travels abroad.

Macau contains a surreal fusion of new and old, east and west, real and fake. A Greek-mythology themed casino stands only a short way from 400 year old stonework forming part of the Ruins of St Paul. Macau is often dubbed the “Las Vegas of Asia”. It has attracted gambling visitors since legalization in 1962. Gambling laws were reviewed in 1989 and decided that revenue would be taxed at 35%. Today there are 17 casinos, horse and greyhound races, numerous slot machines, parlours and lotteries. A staggering 34.1 billion Patacas (4.44 billion US Dollars) was generated in tax for the first nine months of 2005.

Macau has seen a dramatic rise in investment in gambling outlets since 2002 when overseas companies were first granted licences. However some *experts* see the construction of the Cotai Project as one licence too many. The Cotai project promises new casinos, shopping centres, a convention centre and 60,000 new hotel rooms. Difficulties have been expressed over filling the 30,000 to 50,000 vacancies. The likelihood is that the majority of these rooms will be filled by migrants from mainland China. If (say) 40,000 workers moved from the mainland to Macau and brought their families with them this could total around 160,000 immigrants – around a third of the current population. This would cause not only demographic changes but such overcrowding would probably reduce the quality of life.

The strain on Macau’s infrastructure also brings further social and environmental concerns. This Special Administrative Region has only two hospitals and lacks space for the predicted increase in waste and landfill sites.

“There is little contact between the heritage groups and gambling groups” said one tour guide. She was worried that Macau had the potential to become a good tourist destination but needed to exercise greater control over inward investment otherwise the government and Macanese population risked losing out in the future. There is also a need for expert advice over the changes happening in the region. Referring to the new Cotai project, the guide said “the local population remains uninformed of these changes and the implications for their future”.

Largo Do Senado Square, along with the Ruins of St Paul, is an icon of Macau and both feature in the UNESCO World Heritage Historic Centre of Macau. *McDonalds* and *Starbucks* both have prime positions on Largo Do Senado Square and the worry is that an increase in investment in the gambling sector may influence the growth in services to accommodate the new types of visitors. One Macanese recalled that he was out with his sister one day when she met a friend that she hadn't seen for some years. The first thing the friend said to his sister was "Do you still have that house in Taipa?". The sister replied, "No, we sold it three years ago". The friend followed this with "Oh! That house would

be worth a lot of money now". Only then did the conversation proceed to the more usual formalities of "How are you?"

Surveys have shown that the majority of tourists come to Macau to gamble, followed by eating out and site-seeing. Its world heritage designation means that it is expected that visitors will stay longer than the current average of 1.2 days. This further raises the issues of crowd control and congestion. The Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Fernando Chui Sai On, says the government has no plans to sell entry tickets to Macau World Heritage Site for the purpose of crowd control, although it is recognised that some method is needed to control the flow of visitors and protect its UNESCO listing. The authorities plan to incorporate the subject of world heritage into the education curriculum of local schools.

Coaches are needed to transport tour groups between sites because of the distances involved in particular between Ama Temple and the Ruins of St Paul. Hilary du Cros of the Institute For Tourism Studies has highlighted growing concerns over air and noise pollution from the coaches. She has told me, "There is very limited parking space in Macau which has resulted in coaches continuing to drive around the centre of Macau whilst waiting for the tour group to visit the site".

The majority of sites listed by the UNESCO World Heritage Historic Centre of Macau were influenced by Western society primarily through Portuguese colonization. This includes five churches, two cathedrals (one in ruins), a protestant cemetery, a chapel and a lighthouse. Today a new type of Western influence is evident with few long term benefits for the local population. To some globalization is but the latest form of colonization - an influx of western shops in the centre, the residents fearful of the threats to the communities and livelihoods of Macau.

(Summary of a study by Paul Street who volunteered with the Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism for as researcher for four months in 200. Pal Street specialises in heritage issues in tourism.)

Seychelles bans cutting of shark fins

VICTORIA — The Seychelles has banned the cutting off of sharks' fins by foreign fishermen to curb a flourishing global trade that is threatening the survival of the sea predator and marine ecosystems. The United Nations estimates that 100 million sharks are killed every year world-wide, mostly for their fins which are a delicacy in East Asia where a bowl of shark fin soup can command high prices.

Dozens of countries have banned the practice of slicing off of sharks' fins in the last few years.

The Seychelles Fishing Authority (SFA) ban took effect this week and covers all foreign vessels fishing in the territorial waters of the Indian Ocean archipelago. The ban does not include domestic vessels, which the government says are few and controlled, or shark fishing where the whole shark is caught. "Shark finning is the wasteful and cruel practice of slicing off the highly valuable fins, often from living sharks, and dumping the rest of the creatures back into the sea to face a slow and certain death," SFA said in a statement. "Shark finning ... threatens ... the stability of marine ecosystems, sustainable traditional fisheries, food security, dive and ecotourism," SFA said.

The World Conservation Union says 65 out of 373 known shark species are globally threatened, largely owing to the shark finning trade. Some experts think the number is higher.

Fins from Hammerhead, Mako and Blue Sharks command the highest prices while cheaper shark fins are usually taken from smaller species.

Source: ENN

Tanzania: Pastoralists 'invade Usangu Game Reserve'

By ANDnetwork .com

The management of Usangu Game Reserve in Tanzania has accused Mbarali District authorities of abetting the invasion of the reserve by pastoralists.

In an interview with The Guardian, the manager of the wildlife sanctuary, Roman Masawe, said law enforcers and top district officials were protecting the people who have invaded the reserve with their livestock. He said due to rampant corruption, the livestock keepers were deliberately grazing in the reserved areas. The manager regretted that as a result, the situation had incited hostile relationship between the game reserve management and livestock keepers. "This wetland area (Ihefu) is here for national interest. It is the source of Ruaha River, which drains its water into Mtera dam used for power generation. But it is surprising to see that the district government authorities and law enforcers have been in the frontline to protect livestock keepers' complained the Game Reserve manager. A survey conducted by The Guardian in Mbarali District revealed that the invasion of the Wetland areas such as Usangu by the livestock keepers had the blessing of some politicians from the region. When interviewed the Member of Parliament for Mbarali constituency, Asterina Kilasi, apparently credited the move by the livestock keepers' to graze in the wetland.

"These livestock keepers are Tanzanians, they have the right to graze anywhere in this country. In Shinyanga, where they come from, there is no pasture because of the long period of drought.

If they are to be evicted from this place then the government must give them an equally good alternative,' she stressed. At the same time the MP also defended paddy growers who, to a large extent, have diverted a lot of water to their farms while making little effort to ensure that the amount that has not been used is returned to its original course. 'We are experiencing a severe drought. I think it is proper for the farmers to irrigate their farms so that they can later earn some income from the crop, but the government should work on improving the farming methods and infrastructures that will be environmental friendly,' she was emphatic.

Source: Guardian

Saving paradise: Protected areas! Lessons for the eco-tourism enthusiast?

Although highly under-reported, bio-piracy in the name of eco-tourism is beginning to destroy indigenous cultures, patterns of living, and eroding peoples livelihoods.

In the remote Paradise Forests of Papua New Guinea, illegal and destructive logging continues to threaten both the local communities and the fragile ecosystem. So we have launched a major initiative to help indigenous communities establish their rights to the land they have called home for generations.

At the invitation of the local communities, we have established the Global Forest Rescue Station (GFRS) on the western edge of Lake Murray, deep in the Paradise Forests. From the GFRS, our activists from around the world will help members of the Kuni, Begwa and Pari tribes mark out the boundaries of their lands to protect it from loggers. Although in Papua New Guinean law, 97 percent of the land is recognised as being owned by the customary landowners who live there, many tribal boundaries have never been officially recorded. Until this is done the land is effectively up for grabs.

With large-scale industrial logging, the local communities see very little of the huge profits generated by the logging and the forest cannot sustain the level of destruction. For each tree felled for timber at least seventeen others are destroyed, not to mention the impact on the diverse wildlife that the forest support.

But there is a solution. Boundary marking, also known as demarcation, is the first step in allowing the local communities to use the forest in ecologically sustainable ways that doesn't destroy the forest. The GFRS will be used as a base camp to help the local communities mark out around 300,000 hectares of their lands in the Lake Murray region. The Station isn't just about mapping out land boundaries. Part of the work done there will be to promote small-scale community enterprises that help maintain the forest and bring greater benefits to the communities that live there such as eco-forestry.

Instead of wholesale destruction of the forest with large machines to extract the timber, portable equipment is used to minimise the impact. Trees are milled where they fall and are carried along bush trails and floated out along rivers, and then strict guidelines and monitoring allow the forest to regenerate itself. The profits from this method of forestry for local communities are also much more than those that trickle down from the logging companies, between four to 10 times greater, all of which is shared among the local communities. So with community-based solutions the Global Rescue Forest Station will help protect the unique biodiversity of Papua New Guinea. With only one percent of the forests under any kind of protection, there is still a long way to go.

Source: Greenpeace international

Venezuela threatening to limit U.S. airline flights

By Fabiola Sanchez

CARACAS (AP) -- Venezuela says it will prohibit flights by most U.S. airlines to this South American nation starting this week in response to a similar prohibition on Venezuelan carriers. The ban announced late Thursday affects travel on Continental Airlines and Delta Air Lines, while flights by the other major U.S. passenger carrier serving Venezuela, American Airlines, will be restricted.

The ban comes amid rising U.S.-Venezuelan tension, with U.S. officials criticizing President Hugo Chavez, who has threatened to cut off oil exports to the United States. Francisco Paz, president of the National Aviation Institute, said the action was taken because the United States had placed a similar ban 10 years ago on some Venezuelan carriers because of safety violations. Venezuela said the United States has not recognized the improvements it has made since then.

The FAA said Friday that it has been working with Venezuelan aviation officials to improve the country's safety performance. The ban will take effect Wednesday, Paz said. In Washington, State Department spokesman Adam Ereli said the decision was unjustified and violated a 1953 aviation agreement between the United States and Venezuela. He said the United States urged Venezuela to respect the agreement.

Relations between Chavez and the Bush administration hit new lows in recent days after Washington expelled a Venezuelan diplomat in response to Chavez's expulsion of a U.S. Embassy official for alleged spying. Delta operates a daily route from Atlanta to Venezuela. Continental has a daily round trip to Caracas from Houston and a weekly round trip to Caracas from Newark, N.J.

American Airlines operates up to seven flights a day to Venezuela, mostly from Miami but also from Dallas-Fort Worth, New York and San Juan, Puerto Rico. Venezuela is threatening to eliminate all but three daily flights between Miami and Caracas, American officials said.

Source: eTurboNews 27 Feb 2006

Dubai to get first Islamic hotel

By Aftab H. Kola | eTN Middle East

A Saudi real estate development firm has announced its plan to build an Islamic hotel in Dubai.

What we mean by Islamic hotel is that our project will be without a bar, a disco or a nightclub. Our food will be based on halal meat and beverages will be without alcohol, Tariq Al-Jassmi, the Dubai-based real estate consultant of the Alderea for Real Estate Development & Investment Company (Al Dereea), told reporters. The 70 million UAE dirham hotel will have 120 rooms with a basement and eight floors including the ground floor. Located on the Khalid Bin Al-Waleed Street, the hotels construction is set to commence in April and will be completed within 14 months, Al-Jassmi added.

The Jeddah-based Al Dereea is involved in a number of projects across the Kingdom since its establishment in 2003. They include Al-Dayri Mall in Riyadh, Nukhbat Al-Rahma Villas and Nukhbat Al-Bandar Villas in Jeddah. Currently, the company is studying some other real estate investment opportunities including Nukhbat Al-Hamra villas project in Qasim and a commercial center on Al-Malik Avenue in Jeddah.

Source: eTurboNews 27 Feb 2006

Friends of Maldives launch boycott of selected resorts

On World Human Rights Day, 10th of December 2005, Friends of Maldives (FOM) launched a campaign to boycott specific named resorts in the Maldives which are linked to leading members of the Gayoom regime.

Maumoon Abdul Gayoom has been ruling the Maldives as a dictatorship for 28 years and is guilty of gross human rights violations and political repression. The recent arrests of hundreds of pro- democracy activists and fabricated charges of terrorism and sedition against leading pro-democracy figures have received fierce condemnation by governments and human rights organisations.

2005 has witnessed increased opposition to the Gayoom regime's domination of politics. The emergence of rival political parties earlier this year forced President Gayoom to announce sweeping reforms to the Maldives system of Government and judiciary. Gayoom however has failed to deliver on these reforms. He has employed the services of international PR firm Hill and Knowlton (London) in an attempt to reduce the damage created by negative publicity of human rights violations and political repression in the Maldives.

The recent arrest of Mohamed Nasheed, the chairperson of the Maldivian Democratic Party, and the jailing for 10 years of leading human rights activist Jennifer Latheef has drawn the condemnation of international human rights organisations.

The concept of a boycott of specific resorts in the Maldives has been developed by Maldivians who feel that tourism to these specific resorts have enabled President Gayoom to maintain his power base and stranglehold over the Maldivian people.

FOM recognises the unique nature of the tourism industry in the Maldives; it is the most important source of income to the economy. The current negative publicity regarding human rights violations in the Maldives has deterred people from visiting the Maldives. FOM do not wish to affect the economy of the Maldives nor the fragile economic state of individual Maldivians.

FOM are not calling for a travel boycott to the Maldives, rather FOM aims to encourage the informed tourist to choose a resort that is not associated with the regime and free from association with repression, human rights abuse and torture.

The objectives of the selective boycott are as follows:

- >Restrict the flow of funds to key members of the regime forcing them to take notice of international concerns regarding human rights abuses and political repression
- >Create awareness in the international community for travellers to avoid resorts associated with a regime based on fear, repression and torture rather encouraging them to choose a resort based on ethical awareness
- >Improve awareness for tour operators, investors and funding institutions of the dangers and stigma attached to developing links with resorts and businesses closely associated with the regime.
- >Foster greater support and solidarity for Maldivians in conditions of hardship or distress who require the assistance of the international community
- >Improve awareness of the nature of President Gayoom's brutal, corrupt and repressive regime and that all is not paradise in these troubled islands.

List of resorts to boycott:

Bandos Island Resort, Cocoa Island, Tulhagiri Island, Dhonveli Beach Resort, Hakuraa Club, Alidhoo, Paradise Island, Olhuveli Beach Resort, Vilu Reef and Spa Resort , Kandooma Tourist Resort , Sun Island, Fun Island, Holiday Island, Royal Island Resort and Spa, Dhoni Mighili Resort, Vakarufalhi Resort, Biyadhoo island Resort, Kalhufahalafushi Resort , Maavelaavaru Resort, Funamadua Resort, Coco Palm Resort and Spa, Makunudu Island Resort, Reethi Beach Resort

[Readers who feel that the listing of any of the above resorts is unjustified, or that other resorts should be added please outline your reasons, and contact FOM, <http://www.friendsofmaldives.org/>]

Source: TIM TEAM Clearing House

EQUATIONS protests WTTC selection of Kerala for award

Bangalore-based, EQUATIONS as an organisation keenly monitoring tourism trends and developments in the state of Kerala contests the rationale by which Kerala has been selected as one of the three finalists for the Tourism for Tomorrow Awards 2006. In essence, EQUATIONS argues that the WTTC has focused on one side of the Karal success story and not taken into account the unsustainable and undemocratic tourism practices in the Indian State.

EQUATIONS has now written an open letter to Mr. Mandip Singh Soin (Member of the Finalist Selection Committee) who visited Kerala to undertake the onsite verification to ensure that the high standards outlined in the award applications are being met in practice. Copies have also been sent to other members of the Finalist's Selection Committee for the Award highlighting brief vignettes of the "other side" of tourism practiced in the State. The Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism supports the stance taken by EQUATIONS and their network partners in India.

The protest from EQUATIONS is based on long years of solid on-the-ground research and action in Kerala. We hope that by a strong show of solidarity with EQUATIONS strong and credible protest, we can make a difference. (The text of the letter from EQUATIONS to the selection committee is available on the ECOT website www.ecotonline.org) and is titled 'Protest letter to the WTTC)

United Front for Children: Global Efforts to Combat Sexual Trafficking of Children in Travel and Tourism

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world. One of the consequences of easy and cheap global travel is an increase in the reported sexual exploitation of children in tourist destinations.

On April 21, 2006, the Human Rights Program of the University of Minnesota will host a conference to explore the relationship between tourism and child sex trafficking and to address the human rights implications of this nexus. The conference, entitled "United Front for Children: Global Efforts to Combat Sexual Trafficking of Children in Travel and Tourism" will engage four sectors that have critical roles in preventing sexual exploitation of children: nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), academia, government agencies and corporations. Among the concrete outcomes we hope to achieve at this conference are a critical look at existing norms, a commitment from new business partners to make the issue a priority through implementation of Codes of Conduct and other means, identification of research priorities and the support of student initiatives in U.S. colleges and universities.

Featured presenters include national and international experts, including Professor Vitit Muntarbhorn (Former UN Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography), Ambassador John Miller of the U.S. State Department Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, Marilyn Carlson Nelson, Chairman and CEO of the Carlson Companies, as well as leaders of many well-respected NGOs in the field.

The conference is sponsored by the Human Rights Program and the Human Rights Center at the University of Minnesota, along with representatives of academia, NGOs, and businesses, in an effort to strengthen partnerships and norms on prevention, protection and prosecution regarding sexual trafficking and exploitation of children

Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa (FTTSA) research Assistant (Internship)

FTTSA, one of ECOT's network partners announces a new position of Research Assistant in the Sustainable Tourism sector based in Pretoria, South Africa for a one-year, extendable up to two year period commencing 15 May 2006. The Research Assistant will be part of the FTTSA team and will participate in various staff meetings and joint planning activities. Under the supervision of the FTTSA Executive Director, the Research Assistant will drive the further development and ongoing implementation of the FTTSA certification programme. Specific duties and responsibilities include support to the FTTSA Trademark Panel, improvement of internal tools and systems, and participating in Internal Business of FTTSA.

The successful candidate must have post-graduate qualification in tourism or business management and possess a minimum of two years experience working in tourism or related industry – previous experience with certification and/or business development is preferable but not a must. She/He must have the ability to communicate effectively in written and spoken English. She/He must also have proficiency in word processing, spreadsheets, Internet. Strong research and analytical skills are important as are good report writing skills. Other qualifications include knowledge about current debates concerning sustainable tourism and fair trade. The person must be self-motivated and able to work under pressure whether independently or as part of a team and have a passion for issues of sustainable development. Jennifer Sein, FTTSA's Executive Director is a recognized leader in the field of sustainable tourism, and will directly supervise the incumbent's professional and personal development.

FTTSA is implementing a pioneering and ambitious initiative to improve the sustainability of the South African tourism industry, and increase market access for disadvantaged, predominantly rural communities. The plan is to facilitate, evaluate and monitor new initiatives that are designed to provide new tools and knowledge towards the establishment of sustainable livelihoods in South Africa, with important implications for developing countries more widely.

More details about the internship can be had from Jennifer Seif Executive Director Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa (FTTSA) at jennifer@fairtourismsa.org.za. Also check www.fairtourismsa.org.za for information about FTTSA.

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