
Responsible Tourism Policy for The Gambia



*Creating Better Places for
People to Live in and for People
to Visit*





RESPONSIBLE TOURISM PARTNERSHIP

Welcome

This Responsible Tourism Policy has been prepared by the Responsible Tourism Partnership¹ and has been produced and agreed through a multi-stakeholder process

Tourism is important in The Gambia. The government's policy is to promote tourism and its contribution to economic growth. Our objective is to increase the contribution of tourism to our economy and to raise the living standards of Gambians. The government is continuing its efforts to broaden the tourism market, improve quality standards, and ensure rational use of the Tourism Development Area.

We recognise that in order to achieve this objective it is in our interest to work together with those who bring tourists and with the industry here in The Gambia. We share the aspirations of the Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism. It is the responsibility of all stakeholders to join with us to create better places for people to live in and for people to visit.

We are committed to the realisation of Responsible Tourism in The Gambia.

Consistent with the principles of responsible tourism we, the Responsible Tourism Partnership, seek to maximise positive impacts and to minimise the negative ones. Legislation plays a significant role in creating the framework for tourism and for achieving responsible tourism.

We recognise that much can be achieved through partnerships to achieve a more balanced relationship between hosts and guests in The Gambia, and to create better places for local communities to live in. It is the responsibility of government, local communities and Gambian and originating market businesses to co-operate in practical joint initiatives to realise responsible tourism.

¹ Draft prepared by Dr Harold Goodwin and Masters students at the International Centre for Responsible Tourism www.icrtourism.org, subsequently agreed by the RTP.

The Gambia is its people. The diverse peoples of The Gambia are what distinguishes our country from the many other “winter sun” and “sun, sand and sea destinations”. The cultural heritage of our people is our primary tourism asset.

Executive Summary

This policy is a call to action in order to combat some of the inequalities and negative impacts of tourism. It comes at a time when The Gambia has a desperate need to re-launch its image of being a cheap winter sun destination that is dominated by the mass tourist market. At the same time elements such as sex tourism, hassle and environmental degradation need to be tackled. This policy is addressed to the whole of the tourism industry, government and the Gambia Tourism Authority. It identifies objectives to achieve responsible marketing of the destination and to deal with issues of economic, social and environmental responsibility.

It is envisaged that implementation of this policy will come through the Responsible Tourism Partnership which is a multi stakeholder action group that represents all interested parties working in the tourism arena. In terms of implementation, working documents are already in existence that include 5 year targets and an annual work plan.

Principles

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM:

- *MINIMISES NEGATIVE ECONOMIC, ENVIRONMENTAL, AND SOCIAL IMPACTS;*
- *GENERATES GREATER ECONOMIC BENEFITS FOR LOCAL PEOPLE AND ENHANCES THE WELL-BEING OF HOST COMMUNITIES, IMPROVES WORKING CONDITIONS AND ACCESS TO THE INDUSTRY;*
- *INVOLVES LOCAL PEOPLE IN DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THEIR LIVES AND LIFE CHANCES;*
- *MAKES POSITIVE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CONSERVATION OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE, TO THE MAINTENANCE OF THE WORLD'S DIVERSITY;*
- *PROVIDES MORE ENJOYABLE EXPERIENCES FOR TOURISTS THROUGH MORE MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS WITH LOCAL PEOPLE, AND A GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF LOCAL CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES;*
- *PROVIDES ACCESS FOR PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED PEOPLE; AND*
- *IS CULTURALLY SENSITIVE, ENGENDERS RESPECT BETWEEN TOURISTS AND HOSTS, AND BUILDS LOCAL PRIDE AND CONFIDENCE.*

Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism in Destinations 2002

Our Vision

To make The Gambia a better place to visit and a better place to live in – recognising that it is the interaction between guests and hosts in a secure and enjoyable environment that is the experience of The Gambia and which encourages people to return.

Our vision will be realised by addressing the triple bottom line of economic, social and environmental responsibility and by engaging with product development and marketing. The Responsible Tourism Partnership is a national partnership between different government ministries, NGOs, the private and public sectors and communities formed to promote our shared vision for tourism in The Gambia.

We propose to agree an annual programme for change and development and to agree targets for each year. These targets will be used to enable us to monitor and report progress.

Introduction

We recognise that tourism is of considerable importance to The Gambian economy and to the lives of people in The Gambia. Tourism has the potential to bring jobs and livelihoods to Gambians and to make The Gambia a better place to live in. We recognise that the safety and security of visitors and the community is important if tourism is to contribute to raising the living standards of communities in The Gambia.

We need to develop a more diverse product in order to continue to attract people from our established markets and from new ones – we are aware that tourists seek a variety of experiences and that the traditional sun, sand and sea holiday market is increasingly competitive and in decline. The Gambia and its people have much to offer international visitors and the Responsible Tourism Partnership works with all stakeholders in the industry – Gambian and international – to grow the industry in ways which maximise the benefits (economic, social and environmental) to The Gambia.

The Gambia has a rich cultural diversity with several different ethnic groups including the Mandinka (42% of the population), Fula (18%), Wolof (16%), Jola (10%), and Serahuli (9%). The people of The Gambia are one of our major tourism assets – it is important that along with our colleagues in the originating markets we develop tourism products which enable our visitors to enjoy the cultural diversity and to have positive interactions with our communities, sharing something of our local living culture. We recognise that we need to work with colleagues in the originating markets and in The Gambia to enhance the quality of the interaction between our communities and visitors – to improve the experience for hosts and guests.

Tourism in The Gambia has developed in the coastal strip. Whilst we recognise that it is largely our beaches and climate that will continue to attract tourists to this destination, there is increasing interest in the inland area along the river and that over the next decade tourism will develop in the rural areas, the bird watching sector will grow, as will other opportunities to experience the countryside and to interact with rural communities. The Responsible Tourism Partnership will encourage the development of tourism in the rural areas and along the river and will work to create a framework within which capital can be raised for small-scale investments. We will encourage this development in ways which meet the objectives of ecotourism. We will encourage the development of tourism initiatives which bring supplementary livelihood opportunities to local communities; help to fund the conservation of our natural and cultural heritage; and provide visitors with enjoyable and high quality experiences. It is important that in The Gambia these new products, often locally owned and small scale, are marketed to tourists in the Tourism Development Area. Our objective is that all forms of tourism should contribute to these objectives – all our visitors should have the opportunity to experience more of The Gambia. The Tourism Development Area is a very small part of what we have to offer.

The remainder of this policy document is in four sections dealing with the issue of marketing and the triple bottom line of economic, social and environmental sustainability.

1. Marketing The Gambia to Achieve Our Vision

The way in which The Gambia is marketed is a central part of the process of implementing responsible tourism principles in The Gambia. We seek to grow the industry by attracting market segments which value the natural and cultural heritage assets of The Gambia. We seek to differentiate The Gambia from other sun, sand and sea destinations – we enjoy high levels of repeat business and we seek to build on those elements of the product which encourage repeat visiting. We recognise that the further development of the industry in The Gambia, and investment in it, is dependent upon planning and product development which meet the requirements of the evolving market. We also recognise that we can influence the kinds of tourists that we attract by the way in which we develop and present The Gambia as a tourism product.

We will achieve this by:

- *competing on product richness and quality, not just on price.*
- *choosing to attract market segments which are attracted by the diversity of our natural and cultural heritage and the strength and diversity of our living cultures.*
- *encouraging the development and marketing of complementary products.*
- *building local capacity to enrich the product offer by providing a diversity of high quality tourism products and services through SMMEs and community organisations generally in partnership with established national and international businesses.*
- *recognising that marketing plays a critical role in educating tourists about the local cultures; and by ensuring that they get the most out of their holiday by enjoying positive interactions with local communities. Pre-arrival education plays a key role in achieving responsible tourism in any destination.*
- *ensuring the health, safety and security of visitors, recognising that this is critical to the success of tourism; and that health, safety and security are also important to our communities who also benefit from initiatives in this area.*
- *using the concept of responsibility to connect our products and services in The Gambia to the European market trend towards more experiential and responsible products.*
- *ensuring that our tourism product is accessible to all – including disabled visitors.*
- *working with the national and international industry to ensure that the images we use to promote The Gambia are socially inclusive and do not give cause for offence to communities in The Gambia.*
- *identifying and promoting best practice and building on our successes*

2. Economic Responsibility

We recognise that it is important that local communities are involved in and benefit from tourism and that this has the potential to enrich The Gambia as a destination and will increase both national and local community earnings from tourism.

There are three major objectives to be achieved over the next five years:

a. Assess economic impacts as a pre-requisite to developing tourism.

- *Extend the season to create better employment conditions and to provide a stronger base for local economic development.*
- *Increase the contribution from tourism to the maintenance of our cultural heritage, traditional ways of life and wildlife and habitats.*
- *Encourage business relationships between originating market companies and local and emerging entrepreneurs.*
- *Consider the opportunity costs of tourism for the local communities and their livelihoods, and be prepared to accept that there may be more appropriate economic opportunities for people in their area.*
- *Maintain and encourage economic diversity, avoiding over-dependency on tourism.*
- *Ensure that tourism initiatives and investments contribute to local economic development strategy and avoid developments which negatively impact on local communities.*
- *Ensure that market and financial feasibility assessments are competently completed before raising expectations and exposing the community or local entrepreneurs to risk.*

b. Maximise local economic benefits – by increasing linkages and reducing leakages.

- *Encourage and strengthen the informal sector to become part of the formal sector, through partnership and other business linkages by encouraging local purchasing.*
- *Encourage accommodation and tour operating businesses to co-operate in order to enrich the product; increase average length of stay and visitor spend; assist local smmes to establish themselves and market new products and services; and grow, creating additional jobs and other livelihood opportunities, by developing complementary products.*
- *Maximise economic benefits for local communities by encouraging tourists to purchase locally produced crafts and curios.*
- *Encourage formal sector businesses, individually and together, to source goods and services from the local community; and to assist with the development of the local capacity to supply tourism goods and services consistently, at appropriate price and quality and on a sufficient scale to meet the requirements of the industry. We shall work with the industry to achieve these objectives and encourage them to provide visitor feedback on their products and provide marketing, training and managerial support.*
- *Encourage tour operators be more innovative in their itineraries, by for example including markets, local museums, heritage sites, arts and crafts and local restaurants in their tour itineraries, and by doing so encourage visitor spend.*
- *Recognises that excessive competition in the informal sector contributes to hassling and undermines both quality and livelihood opportunities. We will work with the formal and informal sectors to diversify provision and to match supply and demand.*

c. Implementation

We will work in a spirit of partnership with all stakeholders to achieve our responsible tourism objectives. We will

- *work with the formal and informal sectors to identify partnerships and joint initiatives which can assist in the development of the tourism industry in the gambia.*
- *seek to establish targets for improving the quality of the tourism experience in the gambia and for improving revenues to the national economy and in particular to local communities.*
- *report annually on the progress made towards achieving our objectives. transparency is essential in ensuring accountability and developing trust. we will encourage self regulation but this is only possible within a framework of transparent reporting.*

3. Social Responsibility

Tourism provides opportunities for human interaction; at its best these relationships can take the form, traditional in African culture of those between hosts and guests, (traditions which are still strong in The Gambia). However, tourism can also bring social problems and we will work with the formal and informal sectors, government and local communities to address the issues which arise.

There are two major tasks:

a. Involve local communities in planning and decision making.

- *Encourage participation by all stakeholders, the formal and informal sectors, government and communities. .*
- *Involve the local community by creating opportunities for them to engage with the process of planning for tourism development in the gambia.*
- *Develop awareness of the positive aspects of tourism and of ways of mitigating negative impacts, through education within the school curriculum, and public education initiatives with communities,*
- *Pay particular attention to practical strategies involving all stakeholders to prevent the sexual exploitation of children.*
- *Assess social impacts in the tourism development process, and planning, to maximise positive impacts and minimise negative ones.*

b. Maintain and encourage social and cultural diversity.

- *Tourism development should not compromise respect for social, cultural and religious rights.*
- *Be sensitive to the host cultures of The Gambia and encourage recognition of their richness.*
- *Use local guides (and encourage them to continually improve their quality) to ensure that the community speaks for itself and to increase the revenues going into the local community*
- *Encourage opportunities for visitors to interact with locals as equals in a structured and guided manner.*
- *Develop a local social contract with participation and contributions from the community for interactions and behaviour between the local community and tourists.*
- *Negative social and cultural impacts associated with tourism (such as increased crime, drug and alcohol abuse, prostitution and child sex abuse) should be monitored and action should be taken with local communities to minimise negative impacts and enhance positive ones.*

4. Environmental Responsibility

The natural environment of The Gambia is an important resource for the tourism industry; it is in the interest of the industry that it is conserved. The tourism industry is also a major consumer of natural resources and its environmental impacts need to be managed, particularly where its impacts adversely affect other stakeholders.

a. Tourism planning policy

We will work with government and environmental agencies to:

- *ensure that tourism planning policy recognises that the natural environment is a vital resource for the livelihoods of communities as well as being a major tourism asset.*
- *identify areas which should stay free of development.*
- *identify land ownership and resource use conflicts and mitigate them .*

b. Tourism should be developed and managed so as to ensure that it has minimal environmental impacts.

We will

- *encourage the use of environmental assessment tools to mitigate the adverse environmental impacts of tourism development.*
- *raise awareness among all stakeholders about the importance of adopting an environmentally sustainable approach and ensure the management of waste through reducing, reusing and recycling.*
- *encourage tourists to use recycling and other waste reduction methods.*
- *provide education about the importance of the natural environment, both intrinsically and for tourism.*
- *identify best practice through a consultation process*
- *establish an environmental code of conduct and a code of practice*
- *explore ways of using legislation, incentives, tax concessions and technical assistance to ensure that tourism in the gambia has fewer negative environmental impacts.*
- *maintain and encourage natural diversity by encouraging enterprises to invest a percentage of profit or turnover in species conservation and habitat restoration and management; and by encouraging the development of natural heritage attractions which can also ensure conservation of habitats and species.*

Implementation of This Policy

The multi-stakeholder participants of the Responsible Tourism Partnership have agreed a series of five year targets in order to meet the objectives of this policy. Additionally, an annual work plan and monitoring tool has been worked up.

Some of the objectives are more appropriate to other bodies and organisations and to sub-committees of the Gambia Tourism Authority. These organisations, in collaboration with the Responsible Tourism Partnership, have been asked to implement those aspects of this policy for which they are responsible

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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