

Coral Reef Ecosystems and Sustainable Tourism in Small Island States: Areas for Synergy in Action and Development

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Objective: To develop guidelines, supportive materials and models for accreditation or certification that can provide a basis for using good coral reef ecosystem science, including both the most up-to-date modern and traditional hard and social science, as a basis for making tourism more ecologically, economically and culturally sustainable in the Pacific Islands.

Rationale and Issues:

- Tourism is already the major and most sustainable form of income generation in many Pacific Island
- Most Pacific Island tourism depends on a healthy marine environment as one of its major selling points
- Most detrimental changes in coral reef health have been linked to human activities, including tourism among many others
- Academic and scientific institutions have gained an increased understanding of the factors affecting coral reef ecosystem health over the past 20 years
- There is an urgent need to put this knowledge into practical application within the tourism industry

Sustainable tourism and ecotourism certification programmes are already in place around the world. (E.g. Costa Rica). Standards for sustainable diving and snorkelling tourism are more recent, but also in place, (E.g. Australian Great Barrier Reef Marine Park). Many of these rely on a well-educated general population.

For Fiji and the South Pacific region, a combination of sustainable practices needs to be supported by suitable education and awareness, and PRACTICAL application of programmes to coral reef-friendly tourism.

In response to this we are developing and testing an education and certification programme for tourism operatives and tourism operators.:



BlueStar Coral Reef Tourism

An education and recognition programme with a sliding scale that can be awarded as tourism operations attain improved levels of sustainability. Recognition will be on a "Five-Star Scale" of Blue Starfish

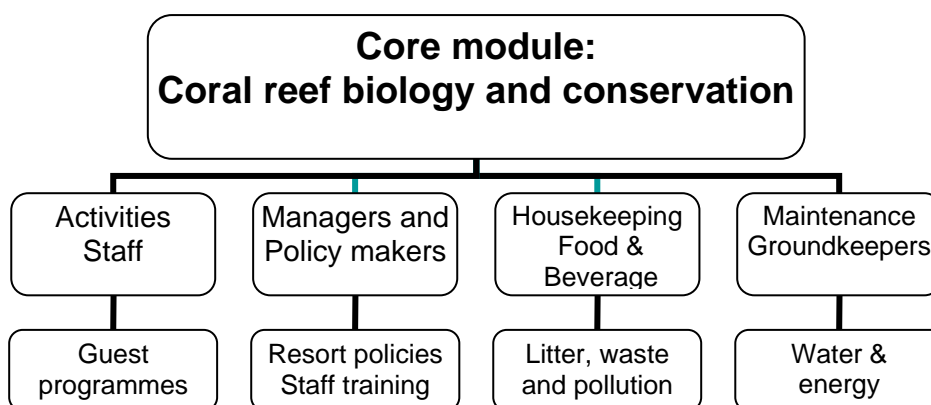
5-point Focus

1. Non-Destructive use of Coral Reefs as attractions
2. Protection and restoration of Coral Reefs
3. Addressing the main threats to unsustainable use of Coral Reefs
4. Promotion of Coral Reef Education and Awareness
5. Promotion of Stakeholder Wellbeing and Poverty Alleviation

5 elements for BlueStar Certification

1. Staff training
 - Initial Staff Training completed using the BlueStar Reef Tourism Course
 - Annual Staff Training committed to
2. Environment Committee formed:
 - To consist of one representative from each department who have undergone BlueStar training, plus representatives from the local community where applicable.
 - To meet once a month to review training of staff, implementation of environmental management plan, and to raise any environmental issues occurring.
3. Environmental Management Plan written
 - Specific activities to be undertaken by each operation, with timeframe
 - An outline of this will be developed during the staff training
4. Guest Interpretive Activities put in place:
 - Information on the marine environment to be available to guests
 - Information on how to take part in reef-based activities without causing damage to be available to guests
 - Interpretive and actively conservation-minded components to be built into all marine-based guest activities.
5. Form active partnerships with education and conservation based organisations and reef rehabilitation projects:
 - Take part in active rehabilitation programmes
 - Provide reef health data to central networks
 - Take part in continuing education

Outline of BlueStar Coral Reef Tourism Course



In order to earn a Blue SeaStar rating, an operation will have to demonstrate it has fulfilled the criteria to earn stars in each category:

1. Waste minimisation and litter
2. Boating and reef use
3. Marine life protection
4. Snorkeling and SCUBA diving
5. Guest programmes and conservation partnerships

Progress and Action plans:

ACTIVITY	TIME FRAME
Review existing materials on REEF tourism and relevant knowledge on coral reef ecosystems to identify relevant material and gaps that need to be filled	✓ Nov /Dec 2005
Develop Relevant Draft Coral Reef Ecosystem Tourism Education Course	✓ March 2006
Review of Draft Coral Reef Ecosystem Tourism Education and Certification Course Modules	✓ March- April 2006
Identify and approach tourism operations willing to serve as test cases for course	✓ March 2006
Finalise initial partners and establish a E-group among CRISP members and other relevant person to identify and establish partnerships between projects	✓ April 2006
Develop Relevant Draft Certification Criteria	✓ April – May 2006
Production of Coral Reef Ecosystem Tourism Education and Certification Course Modules	May-June 2006
Workshop/Trial Training Using Draft Modules.	July-August 2006
Presentation to Ministry of Tourism, Fiji Visitors Bureau, Fiji Hoteliers Association and other relevant tourism bodies	August 2006
Production of Coral Reef Ecosystem Tourism Education and Certification Guidelines and Course Modules	Sept 2006
Distribution and Implementation	Oct 2006 – 2007
Train/involve postgraduate in the entire certification/training and evaluation process	Feb. 2006 – Feb. 2007 and possibly do thesis on the Accreditation Process.