

Sustainable tourism in The Galapagos

February 28, 2013 | Filed under: Americas | Posted by: Holly Tuppen



San Cristobal Beach

At Miami's last International Boat Show Dr. Guy Harvey, Chairman of Guy Harvey Outpost Resorts, announced the company's entry into in the Galapagos Islands.

The growing Outpost Resorts company has teamed with two separate Ecuadorian owner groups to plant Outpost flags on the islands of San Cristobal and Isabela in the Galapagos archipelago, located 600 miles off the coast of Ecuador.

Company co-founder and president Mark Ellert, who recently returned from meetings with the Galapagos Park director and location municipal officials, commented:

"I know of no other tourism company operating in the Galapagos that has a scientist and conservation authority as its chairman, and a research institute as a brand partner. For these reason the park sees our interest in Galapagos as a game changer."

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On San Cristobal, the easternmost island, the company will open a new 30-unit eco-lodge on a highlands site with panoramic vistas of the Pacific Ocean and a foreground of open fields through which giant Galapagos turtles roam. It will be branded the 'Guy Harvey Outpost Lodge, Galapagos Islands' and is expected to open in early 2016.

Arturo Hidalgo Keyser and Jose Antonio Juez Jairala, both of Ecuador and Miami, are co-developers of the project. Keyser comments, "My lifelong dream to create a truly special tourism project in the Galapagos is becoming a reality with the involvement of Guy Harvey." Adds Jairala, "Outpost's commitment to science and sustainable tourism will make this the first truly authentic eco-lodge experience in the Galapagos." The project team includes Hitesh Mehta, one of the world's leading authorities on ecotourism planning and both the landscape and architectural design of eco-lodges.

The Galapagos archipelago consists of approximately 120 islands and rock outcroppings spread over 17,000 square miles of water. Designated a national park in 1959, the Galapagos today has a current population of approximately 25,000. Strictly regulated and limited by the Ecuadorian government, development is restricted to four islands. Cruise and dive live-aboard ships are limited to 100 passengers and visitation is restricted to 116 designated visitor sites, of which 54 are land and 62 are Scuba/snorkel sites.

The Galapagos and surrounding waters are one of the world's foremost eco-tourism destinations, and the inspiration for Charles Darwin's Theory of Natural Selection. In making the announcement, Ellert noted, "It is truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to associate Guy's brand of conservation advocacy with the Galapagos Islands as a bucket-list destination for travellers to experience truly unique wildlife interaction. Working closely with the Ecuadorean national parks department, we intend to showcase scientific research and sustainability practices that will protect this important yet fragile wildlife ecosystem."

In keeping with its mission of supporting sustainable tourism, The Guy Harvey Outpost Resorts is working with the Parks department to develop a program to improve sustainable fishing skills of the island's many artisanal fisherman, while simultaneously working with tourism officials to develop hospitality service training programs for aspiring recreational sport-fishing and diving operators.

“GUY'S SCIENTIFIC AND CONSERVATION WORK IS WELL KNOWN AND RESPECTED LOCALLY”, NOTED ELLERT, “SO WE COME TO THE GALAPAGOS AS A KNOWN COMMODITY WITH CREDIBILITY MOST DEVELOPERS LACK.”

Green Hotelier recently spoke with Mark Ellert, president of Guy Harvey Outpost to find out why sustainability will be at the heart of the new development:

What is the motivation behind the resort?

Beyond the sheer enthusiasm to work in such a renowned and truly magical destination, motivations are threefold:

1) As a company committed to sustainable tourism, and a hotel company with a marine scientist and conservation authority as its chairman, it's a unique opportunity to imagine Guy Harvey Outpost doing business in the Galapagos, undeniably one of the world's most unique eco-tourism destinations. This opportunity gives us a platform to conduct scientific research and "bring science alive" through our intended "Guy Harvey Discovery Center and Theater", which will be an integral part of the hotel project. At the same time, we intend to bring a "safari camp to the water" design and operating mentality to the project where we celebrate the environment, the wildlife therein, and the remarkable memories a visit should create.

2) The Ecuador government and the Galapagos National Park are looking to very selectively identify and promote land based tourism opportunities in order to bring ashore some of the tourism monies that circulate offshore aboard the various cruise ships that principally serve Galapagos tourist.

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This is a bold initiative and requires a thoughtful and delicate balance in order to protect and preserve not only the land resources but the Galapagos brand as it is known and respected world-wide. Among various goals, this initiative is to promote migration away from commercial fishing, which is a major employment generator, into tourism services so as to relieve increasing fishing pressure on the marine resource, and;

3) The developer is looking to create a unique project that the Parks department can embrace, and one that offers a point of distinction to the more traditional hotel product. This partnership sees the marriage of an internationally renowned science and conservation authority and his hotel product with foremost eco-tourism consultants as a uniquely distinctive and novel hospitality product for the customer that hopes to visit the Galapagos.



Future Site of Guy Harvey Eco-Lodge on San Cristobal

Why is sustainability such a vital and key part of the resort's development?

For a variety of reasons:

1) The entire archipelago is a study in sustainability implementation. As the lodge will be a member of this eco-system it must by definition be mindful of how it supports overall sustainability practices in the Galapagos.

2) The physical resources are limited, so it behoves the project to embrace conservation and sustainable practices where possible and feasible, appreciating however the expectation of likely older, affluent and educated customers for services and amenities typical of a traditional hotel.

3) The cultural resources, e.g. the local population, should be positively impacted by the project in the form of employment and education/training opportunities. For example, we have agreed with the Parks Dept and Tourism Ministry to initiate a program to train interested local captains in how to practice sustainable fishing while improving their "social" skills important for interacting with prospective fishing customers. In so doing they are then endorsed by our project, and improve their business prospects through referral of customers.

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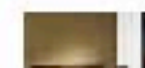
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4) Sustainability and eco-awareness are increasingly important aspects of successful marketing and operation in the hotel industry. As a practical matter, prospective guests are evaluating hotel companies on their sustainability and eco-centric practices. This is all the more important in the Galapagos and for GHO, if we wish to be true to our brand, and meet our customers' expectations.

What are the challenges of implementing sustainable practices in The Galapagos?

Some of this is addressed above. Generally speaking, sustainability is a practical response to the physical and cultural resource limitations imposed on a collection of remote islands laying on the Equator. To support the livelihood of its citizens the challenge is to identify high value products with low or no impact cost on the resource. Tourism can offer such a solution, but the mere decision to foster additional infrastructure and facility development has impacts that require a corresponding incremental benefit to the population.

Those benefits minimally must include better health and well-being, and ideally include a rise in education and opportunity. With limited resources, the principal challenge is the allocation of existing resources and investment in these resources so as to create the foregoing benefits. That challenge is first political, and second financial and third operational. The political issues must be debated and decided upon. That is dynamic, requiring leadership and vision.

The financial backing must be sourced, either publicly or privately, or in joint venture. Finally, some group of individuals must coalesce to form a workforce with a common goal to deliver a product or service. As for tourism, these cornerstones of success seem to be in place for a vibrant future promoting and enhancing sustainable tourism development.

How will the resort be sustainable?

In a variety of ways, as we contemplate at this time:

- 1) Food products will be sourced locally to the greatest extent possible. This will benefit local farmers and related service providers
- 2) Guest room water will be heated through solar tank systems
- 3) Buildings will be designed to maximize natural heat and cooling dynamics
- 4) Buildings will be sited and engineer to minimize any disturbance to the land.
- 5) Building materials will be sourced from sustainable resources such as bamboo and lava stone

Our principal designer is Hitesh Mehta, one of the world's foremost authorities in eco-tourism and eco-lodge design. He is guiding our development planning. We have some seventeen criteria that we aspire to meet in order to achieve the highest standards of sustainable design.

For more information see www.guyharveyoutpost.com. We'd love to hear from other sustainable tourism initiatives in the Galapagos or in similarly fragile eco-systems. If you have a relevant story please get in touch through [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#)



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