

# Boosting Sustainability Skills, Expanding Business Opportunities



September/October 2017

## Sustainable Tourism Training and Human Capital Development in the Asia Pacific region

### WHY TRAINING IN SUSTAINABILITY SKILLS?

#### ■ HCD and Sustainable Tourism Goals

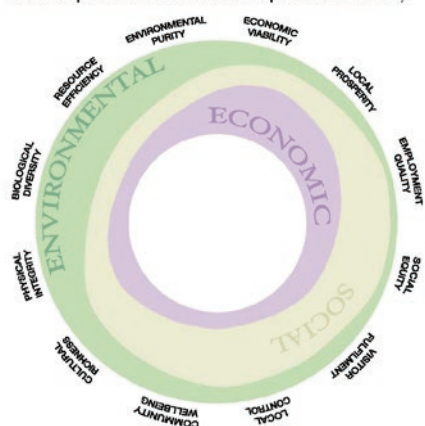
Training and human capital development (HCD) are critical elements to ensuring a sustainable future for the global tourism industry and its roles in contributing to the sustainable development of destinations and communities around the world.

According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment) and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), sustainable tourism fulfills key aims in 12 areas, covering socio-economic, cultural and environmental concerns.



Of these 12 Aims of Sustainable Tourism (Source: UN Environment and UNWTO, [Making Tourism More Sustainable – A Guide for Policy Makers](#)), below are those particularly relevant to HCD:

Relationship between the 12 aims and the pillars of sustainability



- ◆ **Economic viability:** To ensure the viability and competitiveness of tourism destinations and enterprises, so that they are able to continue to prosper and deliver benefits in the long term.
- ◆ **Local prosperity:** To maximise the contribution of tourism to the economic prosperity of the host destination, including the proportion of visitor spending that is retained locally.
- ◆ **Employment quality:** To strengthen the number and quality of local jobs created and supported by tourism, including the level of pay, conditions of service and availability to all without discrimination by gender, race, disability or in other ways.
- ◆ **Social equity:** To seek a widespread and fair distribution of economic and social benefits from tourism throughout the recipient community, including improving opportunities, income and services available to the poor.

## ■ Sustainable Tourism for Development

The United Nations 70th General Assembly designated 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development (IY2017) with the goal of promoting and raising awareness of the contribution of sustainable tourism to development in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The 2030 Agenda supports 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and tourism is specifically featured in the Goals 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and 14 (Life Below Water) of the SDGs.

However, travel and tourism-related activities are relevant to all areas identified by the SDGs.

**“Tourism has the potential to contribute to all SDGs in view of its cross-cutting nature.”**

– *Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General, UNWTO*

Training and capacity building are specifically relevant to [Goals 8 \(Decent Work and Economic Growth\)](#), which emphasises the need to ‘promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all’ as well as the following targets and indicators:

- ◆ 8.9: By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products
  - ◆ 8.9.1: Tourism direct GDP as a proportion of total GDP and in growth rate
  - ◆ 8.9.2: Number of jobs in tourism industries as a proportion of total jobs and growth rate of jobs, by gender



Ultimately, strengthening the quality of the tourism workforce is also about making the industry more resilient, and better equipping destinations and communities with the knowledge and skills necessary to face various risks and threats posed by changes in socioeconomic, environmental and geopolitical conditions.

**“When we talk about policies for reducing vulnerability and building resilience, culturally appropriate, environmentally responsible and economically viable tourism can contribute to preventing shocks, promoting capabilities and protecting choices.”**

*– Steve Noakes, Director, Pacific Asia Tourism, Adjunct Professor, Griffith University, Australia*

## INVESTING IN PEOPLE: SUSTAINABILITY SKILLS AND BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

### ■ Sustainability and Competitiveness

In addition to supporting and contributing to sustainable development goals, HCD in tourism is an integral part of the viability and competitiveness of the sector.

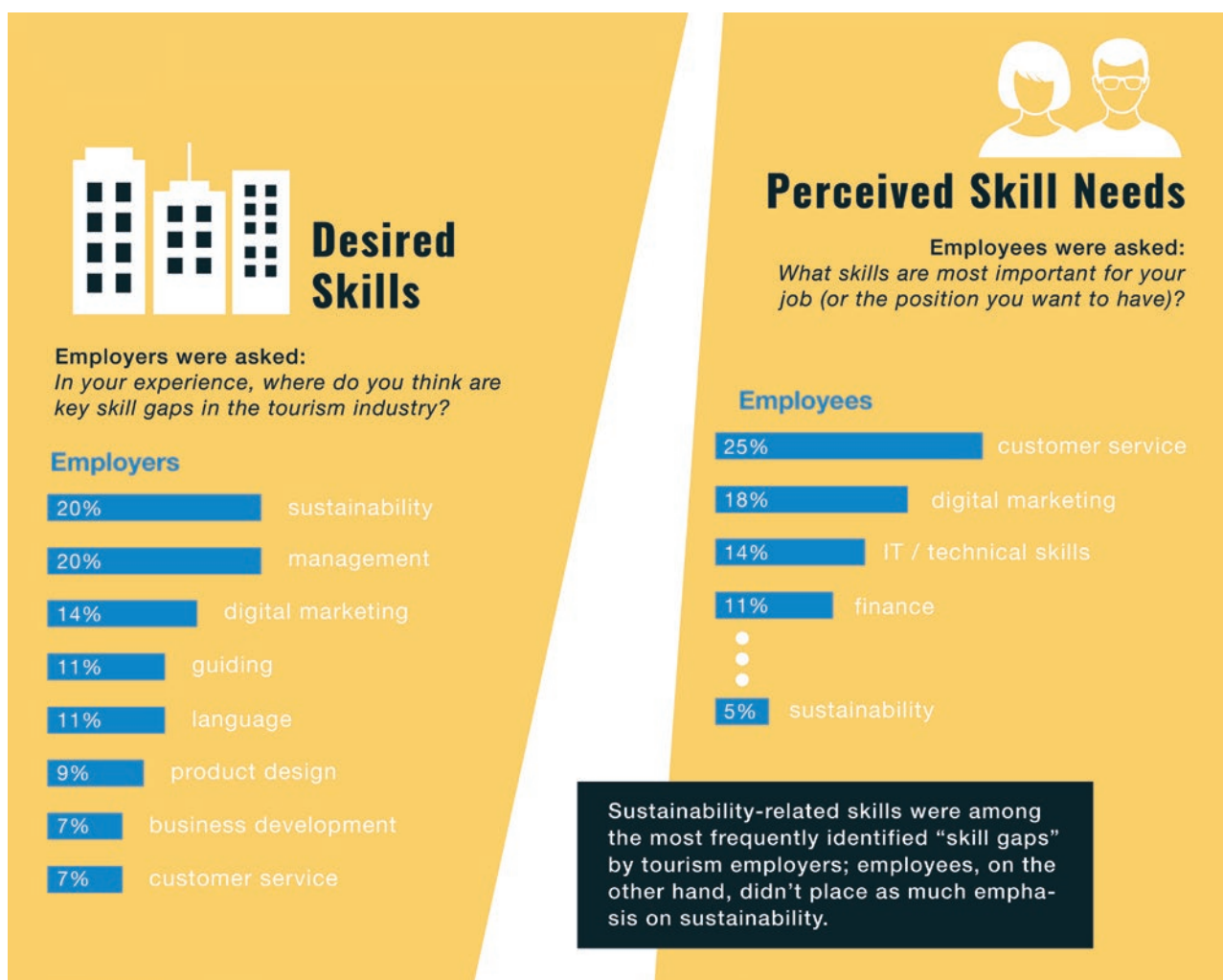
**“People are a unique source of value and competitive advantage, driving innovation, delivering quality tourism services and supporting sustainable tourism development.”**

*– Jane Stacey, OECD France*

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTTC), in its 2015 report [Global Talent Trends & Issues](#), discusses talent gaps and deficiencies in the industry that are expected to lead to negative consequences such as ‘inferior customer service and quality standards’ when positions are filled by under-qualified and under-experienced staff due to skills gaps, and negative impacts on various business factors including ‘costs, bottom-line profitability, competitiveness, ... brand, investment and ultimately future growth’.

IY2017 and other efforts to shine a global spotlight on sustainable tourism have contributed to the continued trend in increasing awareness of sustainability issues in the travel and tourism sector - as evidenced by this [New York Times article](#) focussed upon sustainable travel, and [Sustainable Travel Report](#) by Booking.com. When it comes to training and HCD in tourism, however, the reality is that the tourism industry still faces a skills gap as well as a lack of awareness for the need for HCD in sustainability-related areas.

This is confirmed by the [Tourism Skills and Jobs](#) report by TrainingAid (2016) which indicates that many tourism industry employers see sustainability skills as among the most important professional competencies both for staff and management positions while, on the other hand, employees often either lack awareness or access to opportunities to build sustainability skills.



Investing in training and capacity building in sustainability-related areas is an important consideration for tourism organisations – not only to improve their sustainability practices but also in order to remain competitive.

According to the [PwC Corporate Responsibility Report \(2014\)](#), professionals seek more from their jobs than just pay cheques and are looking for opportunities to 'grow in ways that connect them to something larger than themselves'. In this sense, HCD is a key ingredient in business success as it helps to create an environment in which employees and team members are more engaged and motivated.

The survey of industry stakeholders in *Tourism Skills and Jobs* also shows that many tourism industry employers identify key benefits of proactive approaches to employee training and skills development, such as 'improved employee satisfaction and engagement', followed by 'gaining competitive edge through skilled employees' and 'increased productivity'.

In its 2016 sustainability strategy, TUI Group made employee engagement and HR strategy one of the four core priority areas, recognising that employees play a fundamental role in implementing sustainability goals.



**“We know from our annual employees’ survey that our environmental performance interests and motivates our employees.”**

*– Dr. Elke Eller, HR and Labour Director, TUI Group*

Part of TUI Group’s efforts to invest in people and strengthen skills is to integrate sustainability into employee training – for example through a custom-developed game-based learning programme featuring the core areas of the sustainability strategy, and targeted training content focussed upon such sustainability issues as compliance, child protection and animal welfare (Source: TUI Group, “Better Holidays, Better World,” 2016).

## **PUBLIC-PRIVATE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP**

Training and HCD in sustainable tourism is an area ripe for multi-stakeholder collaboration. Through local training workshops, vocational school programmes and educational initiatives, tourism industry organisations may identify HCD needs and opportunities, and implement appropriate programmes to help prepare residents, students and others seeking employment opportunities.

For example, tourism destination organisations, government entities and private businesses may work together to effectively invest in professional development and skills building opportunities for those in need (e.g. youth, women, and disadvantaged groups), by engaging with community organisations and NGOs that work with such target groups.

**“Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (Public Organisation) or DASTA in Thailand has been promoting community-based tourism as a critical instrument for sustainable destination development. In addition to financial support, a key aspect of this work is training and capacity building, which is best delivered in close collaboration with the private sector and community members in order to achieve a win-win situation for all involved.”**

*– Panate Manomaivibool, Lecturer, Mae Fah Luang University*

On the other hand HCD efforts by tourism organisations may also address the knowledge and skills gaps to ensure proper implementation of sustainability practices. Tourism businesses, in partnership with local authorities and community organisations, could support training to help qualify local guides who would otherwise lack funds or access to such opportunities, and also ensure that guides are properly trained in sustainability practices (e.g. responsible visitor behaviour).

## GSTC SUSTAINABLE TOURISM TRAINING PROGRAMME

**“The GSTC training programme is a critical part of the GSTC’s mission of increasing sustainable tourism knowledge and practices among tourism industry stakeholders”**

*– Randy Durband, Chief Executive Officer, GSTC*

With the aim of strengthening awareness of sustainable tourism in destinations around the world the [Sustainable Tourism Training Programme \(STTP\)](#) by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) covers global trends in sustainable tourism and sustainability best practices for businesses and destinations. It also offers an opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of the GSTC Criteria – the global baseline standards for sustainability in travel and tourism.



*GSTC Sustainable Tourism Training class in Bangkok, Thailand (co-hosted by PATA), February 13-15, 2017*

The GSTC works with the following Training Partners in various regions and destinations that support the GSTC’s mission to increase sustainable tourism knowledge and practice and offer the official GSTC Sustainable Tourism Training classes on behalf of the GSTC.

- ◆ Asian Ecotourism Network – Asia Pacific
- ◆ Botswana Tourism Organization (BTO) – Botswana
- ◆ DASTA (Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration) – Thailand
- ◆ Green Evolution, SA - Southeast Europe
- ◆ Indonesia Ecotourism Network (Indecon) – Indonesia
- ◆ Infinity (Int’l) Travel Holdings Inc. / Globe Ecotourism Training Centre / Hong Kong Ecotourism & Travels Professional Training Centre – Greater China Region

## EXAMPLES OF GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM TRAINING AND HCD

Through the STTP the GSTC has engaged many national governments and tourism bodies in the development of sustainable tourism destination strategies and practices, including the following examples from across the Asia Pacific region that demonstrate high levels of commitment to HCD and sustainable tourism:

**The Republic of Korea:** With the support of the Ministry of the Environment of South Korea, the GSTC offered a training class focussed upon destinations working on ecotourism development. The training – attended by representatives of destination organisations such as Suncheon Wetland Ecotourism Association, Changnyeong Upo Ecotourism Association and Jeju Tourism Organization – highlighted local and global best practices by certified destinations and encouraged regional dialogue about further developing sustainable tourism initiatives at the destination level.

**Lao PDR:** In January 2017, the GSTC in collaboration with the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism (MICT) of Lao PDR and GIZ (German Corporation for International Cooperation) conducted a sustainable tourism training class for destination representatives from 17 provinces. As a result of this training and the GSTC's continued partnership with participating organisations, plans for further work supporting the sustainable development of destinations (both at the municipality and regional levels) in Lao PRD and in southeast Asia are underway.

**Indonesia:** In partnership with the Ministry of Tourism of Indonesia the GSTC conducted two multi-day training sessions in Jakarta for key tourism officials and industry leaders in 2015. As a result of the training partnership the Ministry of Tourism has agreed to collaborate with the GSTC in the development of sustainable tourism policies and practices in Indonesia, skills development for tourism industry stakeholders, and the development of a national certification scheme for destinations. In September 2016, the Sustainable Tourism Destination Standard for Indonesia has achieved GSTC-Recognised status, affirming Indonesia's commitment to promote sustainable tourism products and services across the nation.

The GSTC is working with the Ministry of Tourism and Indecon (Indonesian Ecotourism Network) to deliver a two-day workshop (2–3 November 2017) that focusses upon the sustainable development and management of emerging tourism destinations in Indonesia and in ASEAN countries. The workshop, following the International Conference on Sustainable Tourism (31 October–1 November), aims to enhance capacity of destination managers of emerging tourism destinations for the sustainable development of the destination and to create stronger market linkages between the destinations and sellers of travel.

## HCD AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: OPPORTUNITIES FOR BUSINESSES AND DESTINATIONS

HCD in sustainable tourism represents important opportunities for tourism industry businesses, government organisations and destinations, including:

- ◆ the need for increasing awareness of sustainable tourism and its contributions to global sustainable development goals
- ◆ the importance of investing in skills of workers that support the future of the tourism industry
- ◆ the benefits of being proactively engaging in professional development and skills building programmes

Revamping sustainability training efforts and strengthening skills building opportunities is an excellent way for all tourism organisations to be part of the global IY2017 initiatives in a way that also supports business performance goals and priorities.





## About the Author

Ayako Ezaki is the Training Director of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), in charge of developing, managing and marketing the GSTC Sustainable Tourism Training Program (STTP). She is also the Co-Founder and Managing Partner of TrainingAid, an international tourism e-learning company offering online training courses and skills development opportunities for tourism professionals, and the training program partner for the GSTC.

## About GSTC

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) is the global expert in standards for sustainable tourism. Founded in 2008 through collaborative efforts by sustainability leaders from UNEP, UNWTO, the UN Foundation and the Rainforest Alliance, the GSTC is an independent not-for-profit organisation (registered in the USA as a 501(c)3 non-profit organisation) pursuing the goals of:

- ◆ Promoting sustainable tourism knowledge and practices
- ◆ Facilitating the adoption of universal sustainable tourism principles; and
- ◆ Building demand for sustainable travel

At the core of this work is the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria, a framework to ensure the sustainability of tourism businesses and destinations across the globe.

**Visitor Economy Bulletin** is published ten times per year online and is made available in hard copy at supported events.

September/October 2017 Edition  
Writer **Global Sustainable Tourism Council**  
Design & Layout **Thanaporn Sae-Lee, PATA**

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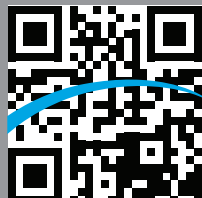
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