

SNP Talk Feb 08 Richard Beatty, African Environments Ltd.

Grooming the Goose (that lays the Golden Eggs)

The role of the private sector tourism industry in sustaining its core resource

In preparing this presentation I polled a cross section of about 30 tour operators in Arusha – large and small, mass market and up market, locally owned, joint ventures and foreign owned and feel that the presentation represents a consensus of their views

The Serengeti – a world heritage site - is both a Huge resource AND a huge responsibility for everyone in Tanzania to preserve it for future generations but as part of this equation we also need to find the best way to utilize the resource – to maximise our returns – to do this we need to devise more effective and creative ways of increasing the revenue that the park generates - with the minimum of impact on the resource.....

The KEY to this is for us all to work at increasing the levels of VISITOR SATISFACTION!!!!

SNP is already a world renowned namebut we all need to turn our attention to the issue of examining what we can do to make the destination become even more desirable even more amazing by turning it into the premiere MUST SEE holiday destination of the world we need not compete on price but on quality – we can control numbers and impact but still get the benefits

But at the same time we must ensure that Visitors feel they are getting VALUE FOR MONEY and that their trip to the Serengeti is truly fantastic even life changing!!!! we need to be so much more than just another holiday destination!.....

What is needed for this marketing strategy to succeed??

Tour operators will put in a huge amount of effort needed to market BUT they need to be able to promise an amazing destination with a wide variety of experiences on offer and to be able to deliver what they promise!!

WHATS NEEDED for this to happen??

Tour Operators need a stable environment

This encompasses all sorts of economic factors like licensing, taxation etc but if we focus on the SNP... It needs to be remembered that most marketing is projected 2 years ahead

Need to know - The products they can offer. That these products they are selling will still be there in 2 years.. That the Prices won't change unexpectedly

A **KEY** pointThat they can provide the level / quality of service/experience they have sold. The Park, the Nation and the tour operators need to have a common theme in promoting this exceptional place! We also need to look around for all the help we can get in promoting the Park and keeping it in the public consciousness.

One of these areas that should receive more attention is Film crewsIt's getting Harder & Harder for wildlife Film crews to arrange all their permission - price is NOT the issue with them - they don't mind paying more ... there needs to be a more streamline procedure for film permits and customs waivers to make Tz & SNP THE premiere destination for wildlife filmers ..BUT they need permission etc for better access - off road/ night etc - all can be supervised controlled but park management -..... This is like FREE advertising for the park !!!!!!! AND for the tour operators!!!

This brings us to the Questions Who should be able to Access the Serengeti Tourism is a Great employer - many Tz and foreign owned companies - incredible trickle down effect felt in the economy of Arusha and other northern towns. Tourism plays a huge role in Poverty reduction in Northern Tanzania and care must be taken that any changes protect the livelihoods of the literally hundreds or thousands of people who rely directly or indirectly on tourism for their livelihood. There is a proposal to section off parts of the Park and turn them into leased concessions. Whilst I am sure this ideas has its own merits but to a man the tour operators I spoke to in Arusha were against it. They felt that by calving off some of the prime areas of the park

it will seriously impact on their ability to market the uniqueness and seasonality of the area

It will further focus tourists in the already congested high use areas - further degrading the experience that these Tanzanian based operators can offer

Concessions will inevitably be sold for an awful lot of money and will be out of the financial reach of virtually all the locally owned and most of the joint venture and foreign tour operators.

Revenue from these foreign owned and managed concessions will tend to flow out of the country rather than remaining here to contribute towards poverty alleviation.

These concessions will inevitably be the prime areas – the Mara River – Barafu Kopjes etc

As one of the operators but it – it would be great for the environment to have only 50 tourists a year each paying a million dollars – but it would take the livelihood of 250,000 people in Northern Tanzania!!!!

By keeping the park whole – as a national resource

you allow the opportunity for smaller locally owned and joint venture companies to grow and play a significant role in shaping the future –

you put more tourist dollars into the pockets of the local population – artisans, farmers, retailers, managers, secretaries, booking clerks, mechanics and so on

Many small competing companies will inevitably employ more people

Each operators will seek their own niche and create a more diverse market- this variety will make it more resistant to world economic trends

The park will continue the great contribution towards poverty reduction that it and tourism as a whole is making Tanzania

Our contention is that Everyone should have the right to visit the vast Serengeti – and all tour operators should have the opportunity to market this resourceit should not be reserved for millionaires or huge foreign owned travel corporations ! – BUT to take the advertising slogan of a major UK High Street bank ...perhaps, there is another way!!

But if this is going to succeed then EVERYONE in the sector is going to have to be committed and it's going to be hard work!!!

We are going to need to change many of the fundamental values and preconceptions of all the players Central Government, National Parks and the Tour Operators all this with the single aim of

..... improving the quality of the visitor experience

According to some international agents The Mara currently offers a better visitor experience!!!!!! – they have a fraction of the resources of the Serengeti yet are more adept at giving the client – the holiday maker – what they want! – we need to be doing it better not resting on our laurels

and to continue doing everything the way it has been done for the past 40 years!

Whilst we don't want the free for all and environmental degradation that we see in the Mara the SNP is currently far too restrictive to offer high end tourism and is even loosing out on the mid range market.

What we need is to offer a far greater variety of experiences – In the day and age of universal 24 hour TV of Animal Planet and National Geographic people want MORE than to just sit passively in a car and watch the wildlife moving by – this is just like widescreen TV! They want more senses challenged! – they want to feel they are PART of the ecosystem, they want to feel their hearts beat (a little!) faster to smell, to touch, to feelTHESE are the things that they will go back home and rave about to next year's potential tourist!!!!. We need to get this year's Tourist so charged that they are our salesmen!

We need to overcome our inertia to step up and embrace new ideas to get away from the knee jerk reaction that anything new is bad! – to consider everything and to reject only those that we can prove not just feel but actually PROVEwill have a negative impact here are a few examples of areas that should be looked at but remember there is so much more potential it will need consultation between Tour Operators and the Parks to brainstorm more ideas ;

There are actually already many great ideas in the park GMP – we need to provide the resources and organisational infrastructure for the CPW to be able to make this GMP more than a paper document

Better track network in the high use areas.It's currently overcrowded and needs to be far more expansive – to offer more opportunities for being the only people at a wildlife encounter!! THIS is what the 'Serengeti Experience' should be all about and what will ultimately sets it far far ahead of the likes of the Massai Mara
We need to be thinking about offering Night game drives, game viewing in open vehicles and off road driving to name a few

One of the key points in the GMP was the creation of literally hundreds of Tourist Sink Points in the high use areas
These Sink points MUST be developed as visitor numbers grow – and they will!!! –
by taking vehicles off the road these sink points offer the twin benefits of.....

increasing the sense of solitude by reducing the number of vehicles driving around at any one moment and

by offering more variety and richness to the product.

BUT They are also an incredible opportunity to educate the tourists about the ecosystem – and the threats to it.

There are so many opportunities and options – many of them requiring little or no expense or infrastructural development just some energy and commitment..... a few examples:

Cultural Sites Develop the Rock Paintings at Moru

Natural Rock Shelters are found though out the park – show them to people and tell them how people travelled through this area thousands of years ago

Historical Sites The Gold Mines!! – everyone loves the allure of gold ... turn the old mines in the park into attractions with information about the mine, its operations, output, conditions etc.

The formation of the park – perhaps from a hill top from which you can gaze towards Lake Victoria or Kilimanjaro – information about the geology of the area, the formation of the park There are many other opportunities from viewpoints with information to a simple shady tree with a log under it they all help!

Walking should be offered from a half hour stroll from a lodge through a half day bird or wildlife walk to full blown multi day walking safaris. Get people out of their damm cars! And let them really experience the sights and smells of the Serengeti.

Viewpoints should be developed – whether it's a hippo pool, steps up the back of a kopje or a hill top with an incredible view.

Retima Hippo Pool is an example of a great little attraction that has been allowed to develop with no planning – it could be developed and improved with a shaded viewing area with information on the hippos & crocs – efforts like this would significantly improve the visitor experience.

We need to utilize far far more of the park – to spread the load and impact of tourism – we should develop specialist areas bird watching walks, kopjes you can climb for the view or platforms for the enthusiast – perhaps even a raised platform where you can spend the night – I did this once in a Rain Forest National Park in Malaysia – we saw nothing!!!! But it was an incredible experience!!!!

We need to really get creative and to try and break up the day not just have people sat in their car all day long !

- Visitor centre is good

- Naabi gate interpretation is good
- BUT we need to be doing MORE!!!!
- Tiered experience & cost

Now the challenge of how to control these hoards of tourist who will want to surge into our re-energised park!

To follow the middle road of modest expansion of accommodation facilities – of high value / low impact tourism that Paul Milton demonstrated to us earlier

We have stated that EVERYONE should be able to access the park but they need to choose (with our help!) the experience that most suits their expectations, desires and their pocket!

This brings us to the concept of tiered pricing within the park – Tourists would pay a different amount depending on what kind of experience they chose

This would allow

The park to use fees as a management tool to monitor and control access to different areas of the park through price rather than through regulations.

As a way for more upmarket operators to be able to guarantee exclusivity
To not deny the opportunity for lower ticket tourists to experience the wonder of SNP

The HIGH USE areas will be available at a lower cost and will offer a more 'spoon fed' experience with far more information boards, viewing platforms overlooking rivers, visitor centres etc

Whilst the LOW USE and WILDERNESS areas will be progressively more expensive and offer more solitude and less infrastructure – and allow the grandeur and vastness of this amazing park to speak for itself.

That lack of infrastructure and solitude is not for everyone – your average Italian tourist would get acrophobia and freak out !!! but there are others out there who would revel in the same solitude – and who would be willing to pay significantly more for it!

However there is more to it than moving a few boundaries and allowing a few new activities for it to really work it's going to need a total shift in attitudes of everyone involved in the sector – let's take Parks first

A key part of the plan to develop and improve the productivity of the SNP must be to continue to train and educate the rangers but more than training there has to be a fundamental Change in the ROLE and ATTITUDE of the ranger force from enforcement / policeman to

protector & educatorthey need to work WITH the tour operators
.....they should be AMBASADORS for the park

A little story a tour operator told me recently he was game driving in the triangle area to the south of Naabi when he saw a pride of lions about 50m off the road he knew he shouldn't but he drove off road to get a little closer just then a parks car hove into view and drove up next to him he was immediately contrite knowing he had done wrong – the warden didn't acknowledge him – just demanded his permit checking that it was valid he turned it over and pointed at the back asking the driver if he had read the rules the driver – again contritely said he had ... the warden said brusquely 'go to naabi' and took the permit and zoomed off into the distance. This entire 30 second exchange had been in Swahili – at no stage had the warden even acknowledged the presence of the 5 tourists in the vehicle let alone addressed them – he missed a HUGE opportunity to educate them – to explain WHY they shouldn't go off road to get that great picture.

The story demonstrates the fundamental change in attitudes needed from unbending and arrogant authoritarian to teacher and educator. TANAPA should Consider establishing – with the assistance of external consultants and trainers – more effective curriculum, training and assessment protocols for park wardens – highlighting customer relations and their key role as ambassadors for the park

This will help them to develop a core cadre of skilled, eloquent, professional rangers and wardens who will be the standard bearers - shaping a new culture of service and care within the organization. But in order for this to happen the CPW must be given the budget, manpower and resources to efficiently manage the park

Another story demonstrating that there are already great people within the system – I was recently in one of the wilderness areas with a walking safari when we came upon a large number of newly set snares – we collected all that we could find but there seemed to be a lot. We called in the position and details of the find to Park HQ and within 24 hours 3 pick-ups full of rangers were deployed. The leader – a sergeant – was fantastic, enquiring about details of where we had found the snares and the routes we had followed in an incredibly professional manner then setting off to sweep the area.

Of course with an ever expanding diversity of activities within the Park there will be a growing need to recruit and train a number of skilled rangers who will walk with clients and interpret for them the park. These

rangers will need to be a new breed – multi lingual and trained not only in the wildlife but in people skills to ensure they can guide effectively and safely – and to give the tourists the experience of a lifetime!.

Now the flip side of the coin!Drivers, Guides and Other Park Users For this plan to work the drivers and guides will need to have a shift in perception, to take on more responsibility for maintenance of the park in a nut shell to become more professional !

Huge efforts need to be made to educate all park users – to change the 'game' from driver guides and rangers playing cat and mouse over the enforcement and breaking of park regulations – to bringing them together in a joint effort to conserve the resource for future generations – and for their own future employment

This will be far far harder than simple enforcing the rules
Now to engender this shift in perceptions is going to require the use of both the carrot AND the stick and a fair bit of creativity! But It's not impossible !!!!! -

About 10 days ago I was driving down from Ngorongoro towards the Serengeti following one of those huge coaches (which is another issue!) when suddenly he screeched to a halt forcing me to slam on my brakesthe driver leapt out and walked back level with my car and retrieved a banana skin that had been thrown out of one of the bus windows. He proceeded to march up and down haranguing the passengers and demanding to know who had thrown it and explaining to them why it was unacceptable. I don't know if it was his love of the pristine environment or fear of being finedbut it had the desired result – he collected his rubbish and 'educated' his passengers as to why it was unacceptable to throw things of the window!

There is already an EU funded project to map out a guide accreditation scheme for the Nation – this project should be given everyone's full support but care needs to be taken that it is not hijacked by partisan interests or becomes mired in petty politics and personal empire building. It should be a professional body representing a real cross-section of guides. Tour operators and TANPA and should form the basis of building a more qualified and professional guiding capacity.

CONCLUSION

So to conclude – I see the way forwards – to protect this special place for future generations AND to allow all those involved to continue to earn a

living from it – is to offer the opportunity for ALL the players in the Tourism trade to access the whole resource at the level that suits them.

But also to tailor the fee structure in such a way as to maximise revenue and allow management to control and monitor access.
We all need to develop the desirability of the Serengeti NP – to avoid the cut price mass market and to all focus on raising the quality.

However the key lies in the radical change in perceptions and a movement away from the entrenched ideas of the past years and to embrace the unlimited new opportunities and activities that the expansion of tourism will offer.

Nothing will change overnight but if everyone is trying to move the same directions – with the help of that carrot and the stick !! - then it is surprising how far we can travel BUT the key is EVERYONE working together and that is going to take a shift in preconceptions from all sides.

The Serengeti National Park IS the goose that lays the golden egg for Tanzanian Tourism – lets all make sure we don't kill the goose!!!!!!