

## **VISION 21: TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN SEYCHELLES 2001 – 2010**

### **4. PROMOTING ECO-TOURISM AND COMMUNITY BENEFITS**

#### **4.1 The Growth Potential of the Eco-Tourism Market**

The long-term economic sustainability of Seychelles' tourism industry is closely linked to the continued health of the natural eco-systems upon which it depends. VISION 21 therefore places great importance on promoting tourism development that takes account of the need to protect and conserve the natural environment. One aspect of this approach is to promote eco-tourism, a nature-based form of specialty travel defined by the International Ecotourism Society as "Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well being of local people". Eco-tourism also encompasses a respect for local and traditional cultures.

While this definition has been widely accepted, it does not provide a functional definition for accurately estimating the size of the global eco-tourism market. For this reason, eco-tourism is best considered as a specialty segment of the larger nature tourism or "eco-travel" market, which covers a variety of travel industry segments, including adventure, heritage, culture, educational and sports, all linked together by an emphasis on fun, environmental sensitivity and social responsibility.

The eco-travel market is today recognized as the fastest growing segment of the travel industry. While it is a relatively small but growing niche market internationally, eco-tourists are typically willing and able to pay a relatively high cost to travel to the ideal destination. It is therefore a market that will be of great importance to Seychelles, in view of the wide international appreciation of our natural environment, and our firm commitment to the protection and conservation of the environment.

**"Eco-tourism accommodates and entertains visitors in a way that is minimally intrusive or destructive to the environment and sustains and supports the native cultures in the locations it is operating "**

## **4.2 Development of Eco-tourism Activities Related to the Natural Environment,**

Seychelles has always paid careful attention to the preservation and conservation of the environment, to the extent that it is the country with the highest ratio of protected areas to total land area. While the process of social and economic development, including tourism development, inevitably presents major environmental challenges, the tourism industry can promote development models that are in harmony with the natural environment.

Vision 21 aims to exploit the comparative advantages of Seychelles as an eco-tourism destination in the broadest sense, through promoting a wide range of nature-based attractions and activities, including activities related to Seychelles' rich cultural heritage. In doing so, close attention will be given to ensuring this is done within a framework that increases public awareness of the environment, maximizes economic benefits for local communities, fosters cultural sensitivity and minimizes negative impacts on the natural environment.

Seychelles has several places suitable for eco-tourism including the Vallee de Mai and Fond Ferdinand in Praslin, the Morne Seychellois National Park, Curieuse, Aldabra, Cousin, Bird Island, La Digue, Silhouette and eventually some of the other islands. Some of these places should only allow eco-tourism activities, while others can also have eco-lodges. These should be small, typically not more than 20 beds, designed for natural ventilation and not air conditioned, use local or natural building materials, and apply energy conservation (and renewable energy sources) and non-polluting waste management techniques.

Eco-tourism activities include hiking, bird watching and observation of other fauna, flora and ecosystems and learning about local conservation practices. In some cases, the eco-tourists could actually assist local environmental personnel in conservation management. Eco-tourism could also include the underwater environment with eco-tourists engaging in snorkelling and diving and learning about marine ecosystems.

The Ministry of Tourism and Transport will work together with the Ministry of Environment to develop nature walks and other visitor facilities in the existing national parks on Mahé and Praslin, as well as the development of visitor facilities on some of the other islands.

The development of more, well-maintained, scenic viewpoints alongside roads and trails, where appropriate, will be undertaken as a relatively inexpensive addition to the attractions of the islands, particularly on Mahé.

Where there are local communities in the area, they should be involved in owning and operating the eco-tourism facilities and services so that they receive direct benefits from eco-tourism and in turn will support conservation of the local environment. Eco-tourism must provide detailed and accurate information about the area, and highly qualified guides should be available, to meet the expectations of eco-tourists. Eco-tourists as well as other types of tourists should be given

environmental codes of conduct relating to both general environmental conduct in the Seychelles and codes for the particular area that they are visiting.

A detailed eco-tourism development strategy will be prepared and a few pilot projects undertaken as prototypes. Based on the experience with these pilot projects, the eco-tourism strategy and standards can be refined and applied for future expansion of eco-tourism. There are good examples of eco-tourism development internationally which can be reviewed to formulate approaches that are suitable for the Seychelles.

The incorporation of environmental activities into all new development projects will be encouraged, in order to provide more activities, and to inform tourists about the conservation of the Seychelles environment. Hotels will be encouraged to organise special presentations (lectures and video shows) on aspects of the Seychelles natural environment and ongoing conservation programmes. Environmental codes of conduct will be prepared for distribution to hotel guests.

### **4.3 Expansion and Improvement of Marine-Related Activities**

The expansion and improvement of marine-related activities will be another priority in the diversification of eco-tourism attractions. This will include measures to encourage a more professional approach on the part of marine activity operators. The possibility of providing incentives to upgrade diving product and services to international standards will be explored, so that Seychelles can be more effectively promoted as an exclusive diving destination. For safety reasons, and to encourage more diving tourists, the existing decompression chamber on Mahé will be maintained in continuous operative condition.

Attention will be given to expanding sport fishing, while encouragement will also be given to the further development of yachting, which will include the provision of adequate mooring facilities on the outer islands and adequate waste disposal systems. Food and other supplies should be made more readily available at certain shore stops, and medical evacuation services provided (to be paid for by the users).

Efforts will be made to improve and expand the provision of water sports activities in the Beau Vallon Bay, including the possible development of a water sports centre. Water sports centres could also be developed for South Mahé, possibly at Anse Royale or Anse La Mouche, and on Praslin, in the Cote D'Or area. All water sports centres should be carefully managed and monitored to ensure the safety of tourists.

### **4.4 Promotion of Community-Based Tourism**

It is now widely recognised that if local communities are not involved in tourism projects from the beginning of the design stage through to implementation and management, community residents often will not support the project nor be in a position to benefit from it. The development of community-based tourism is thus an important objective of VISION 21, and is an integral part of the effort to promote eco-tourism activities.

Emphasis will therefore be placed involving local communities in tourism development. District administrations will have a particular responsibility in encouraging and supporting this involvement, in conjunction with tourism project developers and managers.

One aspect of this policy will be the promotion of village tours, which might include visits to schools and churches, or tours offering insights into traditional agricultural and fishing activities, demonstration of traditional craft making and description of traditional life styles and music and dance performances by villagers. The Craft Centre at Au Cap could be expanded into a cultural centre with a performance stage.

#### **4.5 Promoting Cultural Heritage**

The desire to experience different cultures and lifestyles has always been a major consideration of the international traveller in selecting a holiday destination. Although Seychelles may lack the long social and cultural history of many classical destinations, its vibrant Creole culture derived from the heritage of three continents, is particularly appealing.

Vision 21 seeks to promote this unique Creole heritage and make it more accessible to visitors, through giving support to existing cultural events, such as the annual Festival Kreol, and by encouraging the organisation of new cultural manifestations at both the national and district levels. This will be achieved through promoting close partnership between all stakeholders in the tourism industry, including local artists and musicians associations.

The conservation of historic monuments and provision of visitor facilities related to the historical and cultural heritage of Seychelles will also be actively promoted. Besides adding to the physical attractiveness of the overall environment, such monuments could also be included on tour itineraries (including self-guided tours) of the islands. The National Monument Board will prepare a historic preservation plan, and legislation and tax incentives adopted to facilitate implementation of the plan.

Efforts will be made to continually upgrade and improve the marketing of existing museums. In particular, the exhibit techniques and explanatory material at the National Museum of History and the Museum of Natural History will be improved, and facilities added for video presentations on the history, flora and fauna of Seychelles. The development of the National Biodiversity Centre at Barbarons will also be an important additional attraction.

Accurate and interesting interpretation of features related to the natural environment and cultural heritage will add to the satisfaction of visitors. Interpretation techniques that could be employed include qualified guides, information brochures and books, descriptive signs and labelling, audio-visual presentations and demonstrations.

Another aspect of national culture that will be actively promoted is the Creole cuisine. Hotels and restaurants will be encouraged to utilise more local products and to include a wider range of traditional dishes on menus, and to provide information about the national cuisine and its preparation.

#### **4.6 Development of Handicrafts**

The expansion of the range and quality of craft products will be an objective of VISION 21. Although locally made craft products, including paintings and photographs by local artists, are widely available, particularly in Victoria, at the craft centre at Anse aux Pins and in hotel shops, there is considerable scope for expanding the craft sector.

The main issues to be addressed are related to the quality and cost of local craft products, which are considered rather high by tourists. Among the policy measures that will be explored are the provision of government incentives through soft loans, tax and fiscal concessions for the importation of raw materials and equipment, and improving opportunities for technical and entrepreneurial training. The promotion of local craft products could also be promoted through the adoption of a "Genuine Seychelles Product" label.

#### **4.7 Redevelopment of Central Victoria**

Seychelles boasts one of the world's smallest capital cities, and in recent years much effort has been made to enhance Victoria's physical attractiveness, particularly through the extensive planting of trees and shrubs. This programme will be continued, with the aim of developing Victoria into a model "garden city".

At the same time, vehicular traffic has increased considerably, leading to some degree of congestion at certain times of the day. During the plan period, attention will be given to alleviating congestion, by diverting major traffic flows around the central area, developing car parks on the periphery of the city, and designating more pedestrian streets. Consideration will be given to making the existing pedestrian area of Market Street more interesting with landscaping, fountains, sitting areas, outdoor cafés and landscaping. Outdoor cafés could also be developed in other places in the central area. An integrated plan will be prepared to guide redevelopment in Central Victoria, which may include improvement of the business area. This will require identification of sources of revenue and sustainable financing mechanisms. Overall, the improvements proposed for Victoria aim at creating a more dynamic and lively city, in which tourists and residents alike will find more opportunities for leisure and entertainment, and which will in turn provide more business opportunities for the local community.

#### **4.8 Public Beach Parks**

There are no public beach parks in the country and beaches are used on an *ad hoc* basis for recreation purposes. As tourism develops, beaches will become less accessible even though the beach areas below the high tide line are for public use. Some good quality and accessible beaches should be designated as public beach parks and developed with visitor facilities and services such as picnicking and barbecuing facilities, changing rooms and toilets as well as providing life guards and emergency medical assistance.