

## Practitioner Papers

# Ethical and responsible tourism: Consumer trends in the UK

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### ABSTRACT

**KEYWORDS:** *responsible tourism, ethical consumers, tour operators, market trends*

*Responsible tourism is emerging as a significant market trend in the UK as wider consumer market trends towards lifestyle marketing and ethical consumption spread to tourism. This paper reviews recent survey evidence about consumer attitudes towards the responsible and ethical aspects of the tourism they consume, and places this in the*

*context of campaigns by Voluntary Service Overseas and Tearfund. Between 1999 and 2001 the percentage of UK holidaymakers aspiring to be willing to pay more for an ethical holiday increased by 7 per cent from 45 per cent to 52 per cent. The evidence for increasing consumer demand for responsible tourism is reported and the paper concludes with a discussion of the implications.*



### INTRODUCTION

There is increasing recognition of the significant shift away from the predominance of the traditional sun, sand and sea holiday towards more experiential vacations: holidaymakers are seeking holidays which provide them with more than two weeks on the beach and a tan. John King argued in this journal in March 2002 that 'successful destination marketers will need to engage the customer as never before, to be able to provide them with the type of information and experience they are increasingly able to demand'. He went on to argue that travel is increasingly 'about experiences, fulfilment and rejuvenation' rather than about 'places and things'; and that the lifestyle market is of increasing importance. King argues that tourism and travel are more about lifestyle



and personal enhancement than many other lifestyle products. 'Lifestyle marketing tends to focus on and confirm more of what the customer would like to see in and of themselves rather than on any physical properties of the product or service being promoted', King stated, concluding that this will require that destination marketing organisations (DMOs) reinvent themselves and the emphasis needs to shift towards 'creating holiday experiences and connecting them with the customer'.<sup>1</sup>

This paper considers recent survey evidence of changes in consumer attitudes in the context of wider market trends towards more ethical consumption in the UK. Campaigns by Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) and Tearfund contributed to the development of ethical and responsible tourism as a market segment — those campaigns are reported and the implications of these trends are considered.

King is not alone in identifying these trends towards more experiential vacations. Fifteen years ago Krippendorf placed his argument for responsible tourism in the context of Maslow's pyramid of needs, arguing that we would increasingly see 'emancipated tourists', and that once their needs for physical recreation (sleeping, eating and drinking) were satisfied tourists would seek 'emotional recreation', pursuing activities and experiences which were not available to them in everyday life. Tourists would increasingly seek 'the satisfaction of social needs: contact with other people and self-realization through creative activities, knowledge and exploration'. He envisaged a movement towards a new holidaymaker, 'an independent and emancipated tourist, a critical consumer not only at home but also when travelling'.<sup>2</sup> While in Krippendorf's terms passive and uncritical tourists still outnumber active and enlightened ones, there is mounting evidence of the pursuit of 'self-realization and fulfilment in all spheres of life'.<sup>3</sup>

This market trend towards less passive holidaymaking and towards more active and experiential vacationing affects DMOs, tour operators and travel agents — all distribution

agencies need to link the holiday experiences they sell to the aspirations and needs of customers.<sup>4</sup> This trend is widely based. It is a specific example of the consumer trend towards the purchase of more ethically traded products and increasing pressure across most sectors for evidence of corporate social responsibility.

### WIDER CONSUMER TRENDS

Work by the Co-operative Bank and the New Economics Foundation established the Ethical Purchasing Index, which is designed to measure the growth in the ethical marketplace. With a base of 100 in 1999, they calculated the index at 115 in 2000, suggesting an increase of 15 per cent in the ethical consumption market between 1999 and 2000. In selected sectors — those where there is an ethical alternative — ethical consumer purchases increased 18.2 per cent between 1999 and 2000 compared with a total market growth in the same sectors of only 2.8 per cent, suggesting that (in those sectors) ethical purchasing is growing six times faster than the overall market. But, the overall ethical market share in these selected sectors is only 1.6 per cent, up from 1.3 per cent in 1999. Ethical investment and banking is also growing at a rate of 20 per cent per year. Doane concluded that health, environmentalism and concern for human rights are the main driving forces behind ethical consumerism and that globalisation and concerns about corporate power provide the backdrop.<sup>5</sup>

Traidcraft was founded in 1979 and has grown into the largest 'fair trade' company in the UK, joined by Oxfam and Café Direct among others; the range of products now includes food, clothing, furniture, carpets and toys. Datamonitor reported in October 2002 that the sector had grown 40 per cent in the previous 12 months and opined that 'paradoxically, the Fair Trade phenomenon surfs a wave of egocentrism. What has catapulted Fair Trade products into the mainstream are not the altruistic principles of those with whom the idea originated but the more widespread desire among consumers to

make themselves feel good'.<sup>6</sup> The aspiration to feel good is one of the main drivers of responsible tourism.

### CAMPAIGNING FOR CHANGE

Krippendorff called for 'rebellious tourists and rebellious locals'.<sup>7</sup> A number of UK NGOs have campaigned on the issue of tourism in the 1990s. Tourism Concern ran a long 'our holidays, their homes' campaign calling for just, participatory and sustainable tourism. Action for Southern Africa (ACTSA) ran a campaign for 'people first' tourism which called upon British companies operating to South Africa to sign up to core labour standards, commitments to a living wage and racial and gender equity and sourcing goods locally wherever possible.

In 1995, following a survey of its volunteers working in developing countries who were asked about the pressing problems confronting the communities with which it worked, VSO launched a campaign on ethical tourism.

'Many communities VSO works with have felt the sharp end of tourism and are desperate for change. Volunteers report that losing land, water and access to public places are common complaints, and tourism has very clearly been associated with serious social abuses such as child sex tourism and the eviction of people from their land.'<sup>8</sup>

VSO's WorldWise campaign focused on the 'hidden extras' of holidays, echoing the concerns that holidaymakers have about the small print in the brochures. The campaign videos, postcards and leaflets raised the issues of cultural and environmental impacts dealing with photography, behaviour and dress codes, and encouraged visitors to spend time and money in the local community. The WorldWise campaign encouraged holidaymakers to make an informed choice. The campaign pointed out that 'Every travel brochure says "meet our friendly local people, they are the warmth of our welcome". But will you actually meet any? Will you go beyond just ordering a meal or a drink?' The

WorldWise campaign aimed to show tourists how they could get more out of their holiday. Pointing out that 'many people travel to the most distant locations on earth and never eat, drink or shop outside the hotel', the campaign encouraged tourists to get more out of their holiday: 'there's probably a market just down the road — you can buy direct from the crafts people and see local traditions come alive. An experience for you. A livelihood for local people'. VSO pointed out to holidaymakers that their choice of holiday and the way they visit could make a difference.

'We found the real country beyond the beaten tourist track. You have to make some effort to get there and to make contact with local people. But the welcome we found and the kindness we were shown, I'll never forget.' Alex Knight, WorldWise tourist, Pakistan.<sup>9</sup>

VSO WorldWise advice to the tourism industry can be summarised as follows.<sup>10</sup>

- **Travel agents:** stock VSO's WorldWise leaflet, a print version of VSO's online Travel Advice Centre information, in the agency. Insert the leaflet into ticket wallets or flight confirmation envelopes for tourists travelling to the developing world.
- **Tour operators:** give customers more information about the people and the places they will be visiting in brochures, including advice on how they can visit locally owned facilities and resorts. Develop a policy for the business on how the holidays it provides could be of more benefit to people living in the destinations it visits.
- **Hotels:** start buying more goods and services locally and reducing imports. Start an environment management programme within the hotel.

VSO's WorldWise campaign encouraged consumers to demand holidays where more of the money tourists spend benefited local communities. VSO sought change from the industry. In order to engage more directly with individual tour operators, VSO con-

ducted a survey of the travel advice provided by 50 operators which carried tourists to Kenya, Tanzania, the Gambia, India and Thailand, all developing countries in which VSO had volunteers. Companies were then given a star rating for the quality of the advice on respecting local people, respecting local communities, interacting with the local economy and respecting the local environment — the themes of the WorldWise campaign. VSO adopted a consumer rights approach, arguing that holiday-makers are entitled to ‘basic information about the country or people we are visiting’.

‘We want to interact with local people and to enjoy a new environment when we visit a developing country, but all too often we don’t have the guidance we need to get the most out of our holiday without undermining local customs and culture . . . Without the added confidence good information provides many holiday makers won’t venture beyond the confines of the hotel, depriving local markets, restaurants and other businesses of essential income.’<sup>11</sup>

VSO argued that for small steps there was potentially a big return: ‘Tour operators have a lot to gain in terms of the good-will both of their customers and people who live and work in the resorts they use.’ Richard Bowden Doyle, Managing Director of Thomson Holidays, endorsed this approach ‘Our customers trust Thomson to provide them with enjoyable trouble-free holidays. We believe that providing good information and advice is essential to keeping that confidence.’<sup>12</sup>

VSO subsequently worked with the Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO), which formed an ethical tourism committee to respond to the issues raised by the WorldWise campaign and the concerns of its own members about the impacts of tourism in destinations. The AITO represents about 150 independently owned UK tour operators and it has formally adopted responsible tourism guidelines (Figure 1), which are now part of its membership criteria backed by a rating system and an awards contest.<sup>13</sup> In January 2003 it announced its first responsible tourism awards.


In 2000 Tearfund<sup>14</sup> published ‘Don’t Forget Your Ethics’,<sup>15</sup> asserting that tourism is an ethical issue — that the way one travels to another country and comes into contact with people raises ethical issues about working conditions, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities; about who benefits; about the environmental consequences; and about whether or not travelling to a particular place supports democracy and human rights or undermines them. Most radically, Tearfund posed the question ‘Do local people want tourists visiting them?’<sup>16</sup> Tearfund argued that holidays are a consumer item and that ‘our choice of holiday, just like any other consumer choice, affects other people’. The principles of responsible consumption applied to tea and coffee can be applied to tourism.<sup>17</sup>

Tearfund pressed operators to move beyond the environmental agenda and to address the social and economic agenda. They suggested that operators could ensure good working conditions, fair prices and that a greater share of tourism revenues go to local communities. Tourists, they argued, could use local services and stay in ‘locally run guest houses, treating all those we meet with respect, learning about and honouring local customs and looking after the environment’.<sup>18</sup> Tearfund published a ten-point list of things which tour operators could do to make a difference (Figure 2).

## CONSUMER ATTITUDES TOWARDS RESPONSIBLE TOURISM IN THE UK

In November 1999 Tearfund commissioned a survey of consumer attitudes towards ethical issues in tourism amongst a nationally and regionally representative sample of adults (15+).<sup>19</sup> Twenty-seven per cent of the respondents had never been on an overseas holiday; they were excluded from the data presented in the report. Twelve per cent reported that they regularly buy fairly traded goods or use an ethical bank or investment fund, and 8 per cent that they are members of an environmental, development or human rights group.

## Responsible Tourism Guidelines



As members of AITO we recognise that in carrying out our work as tour operators we have a responsibility to respect other people's places and ways of life. We acknowledge that wherever a tour operator does business or sends clients it has a potential to do both good and harm, and we are aware that all too often in the past the harm has outweighed the good.

All tourism potentially has an **environmental, social and economic** impact on the destination involved. We accept, therefore, that we as tour operators should aim to be responsible in all our dealings on each of these three levels. To help us to do so we have proposed a set of guidelines intended to help companies, customers and local suppliers recognise their common responsibilities to:

- **protect the environment** — *its flora, fauna and landscapes*
- **respect local cultures** — *traditions, religions and built heritage*
- **benefit local communities** — *both economically and socially*
- **conserve natural resources** — *from office to destination*
- **minimise pollution** — *through noise, waste disposal and congestion.*

We are an association of individual, independent companies, each with our own distinctive style and field of operation. As such, we each have our own ways of fulfilling the details of these responsibilities by:

- **establishing** *our own policies and involving our staff*
- **informing** *our clients about responsible tourism and, where appropriate,*
- **encouraging** *them to participate*
- **working** *with our suppliers and partners to achieve responsible goals and practices*
- **publicising** *good practice to encourage and spread responsible tourism.*

As might be expected cost, weather and the quality of facilities were judged by respondents to be of most importance when choosing a holiday (Table 1<sup>20</sup>), but the quality of local social, economic and political information (42 per cent), opportunities to interact with local people (37 per cent) and environmental impact (32 per cent) were all judged more important than the ethical policy commitments of the company (27 per cent). But all of these concerns were regarded by this representative sample of travellers as more important than whether or not they had travelled with the company

before (26 per cent). This last point was not lost on many operators.

Tearfund argued that 'Taken with the fact that there is little loyalty shown by tourists to tour operators, this shows that a company could gain a competitive advantage by adopting ethical policies.'<sup>21</sup> Sixty-three per cent of respondents reported that they wanted information about at least one ethical issue, and nearly half wanted information about local customs and appropriate dress and behaviour for tourists (Table 2<sup>22</sup>). Respondents were permitted to tick as many or as few items as they liked.

Figure 2 Tearfund advice to tour operators

### Ten actions that tour operators can take now!

Not everything can be done at once, but all operators can start to look at their own operations and determine priority areas for change. Here is a suggested ten-point checklist towards becoming a responsible tourism company.

- 1 Establish a clear policy for responsible tourism** and ensure that it covers operations both in the UK and in overseas destinations, right through the supply chain. Ensure that any charitable giving is integrated into the business process and is focused on improving the situation in the destinations.
- 2 Appoint a responsible tourism staff member** who will oversee the development and integration of these issues throughout the organisation. Ensure that there is also support for this at board level.
- 3 Commit funds to becoming a more responsible operator** in the areas of charitable giving, developing local business partnerships, training and giving advice to clients.
- 4 Write down best practice and seek to learn from it**, publicise it to clients and share it with others.
- 5 Produce and disseminate a code for tourists** to help them travel in a more informed and responsible way. Include advice on how they can support local charities.
- 6 Take time to research destinations** and speak to local development and environment groups and tourism associations, not just to the hotels. Find out which local businesses you could possibly use, and with whom you may be able to develop a partnership. This will enable you to provide better-quality holidays.
- 7 Work throughout your supply chain** to develop and implement policies that use local labour, local foods and local crafts. Make your policies available to your suppliers.
- 8 Build on health and safety guidelines for hotels** to include social and environmental issues such as labour standards, minimum wage levels and good recycling and waste disposal systems.
- 9 Set clear targets for year-on-year improvement** in terms of building partnerships, using local suppliers and improving social and environmental conditions in hotels. Evaluate your activities regularly so that you can learn from them.
- 10 Use your annual report** to publicise what you have been doing to promote responsible tourism, and to gain support from your key stakeholders.



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**Table 1: For the last overseas holiday that you booked (whether via a tour company or independently), how important were the following criteria in determining your choice?**

	<i>Importance rating %</i>			
	<i>High</i>	<i>Mid</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>None</i>
Affordable cost	82	12	3	3
Good weather	78	14	5	3
Guaranteed a good hotel with facilities	71	15	8	4
Good information is available on the social, economic and political situation of the country and local area to be visited	42	30	23	3
There is a significant opportunity for interaction with the local people	37	37	23	3
Trip has been specifically designed to cause as little damage as possible to the environment	32	34	27	5
Company has ethical policies	27	34	30	7
Used the company before	26	30	38	5

**Table 2: If you were on an overseas holiday, what type of information would you want to have concerning your holiday?**

<i>Information</i>	<i>%</i>
Local customs and appropriate dress and behaviour for tourists	46
Ways for tourists to support the local economy and meet the local people	26
Political background to the country and specific region	26
Local religious beliefs	23
Sheet with ten tips for ethically responsible travellers	20
How to protect the local environment and reduce waste while overseas	18
The wages and working conditions of local people working in tourism	16
None of these	37

Respondents identified ‘tour operators including tour guides’ (54 per cent) and travel agents (52 per cent) as primarily responsible for providing them with this information.<sup>23</sup>

Tearfund asked some specific questions about the willingness of travellers — package and independent travellers alike — to pay more money for holidays which had the ethical characteristics they aspired to. Fifty-nine per cent of respondents said that they would be willing to pay more for their holiday if money went to guarantee good wages and working conditions for workers in the destination, to preserve the environment and

reverse some negative environmental effects or directly to a local charity. This means that 41 per cent would not be prepared to pay more for any of these reasons (Table 3). Respondents could tick as many items as they wished.

Only 45 per cent of respondents were prepared to admit that they were not willing to pay more for the guarantees in Table 3; 43 per cent were prepared to pay at least 2 per cent more (Table 4).

These figures are clearly aspirational — they record the views of respondents about how they would like to behave, and do not

**Table 3: Which of the following activities would you be willing to pay more money for if they were guaranteed as part of your holiday?**

<i>Item</i>	<i>%</i>
Money goes towards preservation of the local environment and reversal of some of the negative environmental effects associated with tourism	35
Workers in the destination are guaranteed good wages and working conditions	29
Money goes to support a local charity	21
None of these	41

**Table 4: How much more money would package holidaymakers be prepared to pay?**

<i>% cost increase</i>		<i>%</i>
2	Which would be £10 on a holiday of £500	22
5	Which would be £25 on a holiday of £500	21
10	Which would be £50 on a holiday of £500	10
20	Which would be £100 on a holiday of £500	1
Nothing		45

necessarily accurately forecast how consumers will actually behave when booking holidays. But, consumers provided with comparable holidays at similar prices where one operator meets the ethical agenda to some degree and the other does not can reasonably be expected to exercise their preference for a holiday that meets their ethical consumption aspirations.

Tearfund asked the same question in 1999 and 2001,<sup>24</sup> and over the two years the percentage aspiring to be willing to pay more for an ethical holiday increased by 7 per cent from 45 per cent to 52 per cent.

By the end of 2001 52 per cent said that they would be more likely to book a holiday with a company with an ethical commitment (Table 5). This aspiration is one that companies are increasingly responding to.

The Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) has surveyed package holidaymakers consistently for many years, and in September 2000 and September 2002 it included some questions, which addressed the ethical and responsible agenda.<sup>25</sup> As part of their regular annual survey ABTA asked a series of questions about tourism and the environ-

**Table 5: Would you be more likely to book a holiday with a company if they had a written code to guarantee good working conditions, protect the environment and support local charities in the tourist destinations?**

	<i>1999</i>	<i>2001</i>
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	45	52
Would make no difference	42	33
Don't know	13	15

ment. The results provide firm evidence that environmental issues are important to many package holidaymakers when they choose or recommend particular destinations. More than half the respondents said that the issue of food or water shortages for local residents mattered a great deal to them in choosing or recommending destinations, and there was an increase of 8 per cent in those saying that it mattered a great deal to them between 2000 and 2002. The number saying that air pollution and the aesthetics of hotels mat-



tered a great deal to them also increased by 5 per cent and 7 per cent respectively. Concern about crime also increased (Table 6).

ABTA also asked about the importance of a range of factors in determining the respondent's choice of holiday company. In September 2000, 78 per cent of package holiday respondents said that the provision of social and environmental information in tour operators' brochures is important; and 70 per cent said that the reputation of the holiday company on environmental issues is either very or fairly important in affecting their

choice of holiday company. In the repeat survey in 2002 both figures had fallen slightly by 3 and 5 per cent respectively (Table 7). This may reflect either a slight reduction in the level of importance attached to the issues or recognition that the industry has made some progress in this area, or of course both.

In 2000, 52 per cent of respondents said that they were interested in finding out more about local social and environmental issues in the resort before booking a holiday, in 2002 this had increased by 7 per cent to 59

**Table 6: To what extent would each of the following factors influence your choice about going to or recommending a particular destination?**

	2000 %		2002 %	
	<i>A great deal</i>	<i>A fair amount</i>	<i>A great deal</i>	<i>A fair amount</i>
Dirty beach	83	14	82	12
Polluted sea	83	14	81	14
Crime	74	21	80	14
Local illness	62	28	65	25
Food or water shortages for local residents	51	34	59	32
Too much noise	48	31	50	33
Air pollution	45	39	50	33
Litter in public places	43	45	43	43
Hotels and other buildings out of character with the local environment	24	40	31	40

**Table 7: Importance of range of factors in choice of holiday company**

	2000 %			2002 %		
	<i>Very important</i>	<i>Fairly important</i>	<i>Combined</i>	<i>Very important</i>	<i>Fairly important</i>	<i>Combined</i>
Quality of accommodation in the hotel/apartment	73	24	97	74	23	97
Reputation of the holiday company to resolve your problems overseas	71	23	94	74	21	95
Quality of the reps in resort	45	36	81	44	35	79
Provision of social and environmental information in tour operator's brochures	33	45	78	35	40	75
Reputation of the holiday company on environmental issues	29	41	70	27	38	65

per cent. Asked in September 2000 the aspirational question ‘How important is it to you that your holiday should ...’, 71 per cent of the sample said that it was either very important (27 per cent) or fairly important (44 per cent) to them that their holiday benefited the people of the destination they are travelling to through creating jobs and business opportunities; 85 per cent said that it was important to them that their holiday did not damage the environment; and 77 per cent said that they wanted their holiday to include visits to experience local culture and foods. By September 2002 greater importance was being attached to all three aspirations, up by 5 per cent, 2 per cent and 4 per cent respectively (Table 8).

Through MORI, ABTA then asked in 2000 whether the respondents would be prepared to pay more money for various social and environmental elements to be guaranteed as part of the package holiday. Fifty-three per cent said that they were prepared to pay more for their package holiday in order that workers in the destination could be guaranteed good wages and working conditions, and 45 per cent were prepared to pay more to assist in preserving the local environment and reversing some negative environmental effects of tourism. In 2002 the same questions elicited more support and the aspiration to see local sourcing

increased by 5 per cent; but the aspiration that workers in the destinations should be guaranteed good wages and working conditions declined by 4 points (Table 9).

ABTA then went on to ask how much extra package holiday travellers would be willing to pay for the guarantees each respondent had identified. Accepting that these statements are aspirational and that there is a significant difference between what is said in response to a survey question and a decision to book a particular holiday at a particular price, there is a clear trend. While 94 per cent of respondents aspire to be willing to pay 1 per cent more in both 2000 and 2002, the proportion aspiring to pay 5 per cent more increased by 12 per cent and those willing to pay 10 per cent more by 6 per cent (Table 10).

### ATTITUDES TO RESPONSIBLE TOURISM AMONG UK TOUR OPERATORS

In 2001 Tearfund published ‘Tourism Putting Ethics into Practice’.<sup>26</sup> This report reviews practice in the UK industry and reports on benefits to local communities, charitable giving by companies in the destinations, the development of local partner-

**Table 8: How important is it to you that your holiday should have these features?**

	2000			2002		
	<i>Very important</i>	<i>Fairly important</i>	<i>Combined</i>	<i>Very important</i>	<i>Fairly important</i>	<i>Combined</i>
Holiday should benefit the people of the destination (for example, through jobs and business opportunities)	27	44	71	30	46	76
Holiday should not damage the environment	40	45	85	45	42	87
Holiday should include visits to experience local culture and foods	36	41	77	42	39	81

**Table 9: Declared willingness to pay more money to guarantee environmental and socio-economic benefits**

	2000 %	2002 %
Workers in the destination are guaranteed good wages and working conditions	53	49
Money goes towards preservation of the local environment and reversing some negative environmental effects of tourism	45	47
Hotels serve food produced locally	31	36
Money goes to support a local charity	21	22
None/don't know	19	20

**Table 10: How much extra would you be willing to pay for the guarantees you chose in the previous question?**

% cost increase	2000	2000	2002	2002
	%	cumulative %	%	cumulative %
1 (which would be £5 on a holiday of £500)	18	94	13	94
2 (which would be £10 on a holiday of £500)	31	77	23	81
5 (which would be £25 on a holiday of £500)	33	46	39	58
10 (which would be £50 on a holiday of £500)	12	13	18	19
More than that	1	1	1	1
Nothing/less than that/don't know	6		6	

ships and the responsible tourism policies of companies.

UK tour operators are beginning to respond to these campaigns and to changing consumer attitudes, although only about 30 per cent of Tearfund's good practice review respondents said that their clients were asking more about some of the social, environmental and economic issues in tourism. Tearfund conducted research into the responsible tourism policies of UK tour operators late in 2000.<sup>27</sup> They surveyed 65 UK tour operators looking for examples of good practice, and their sample was skewed towards those companies thought most likely to be adopting responsible practices.

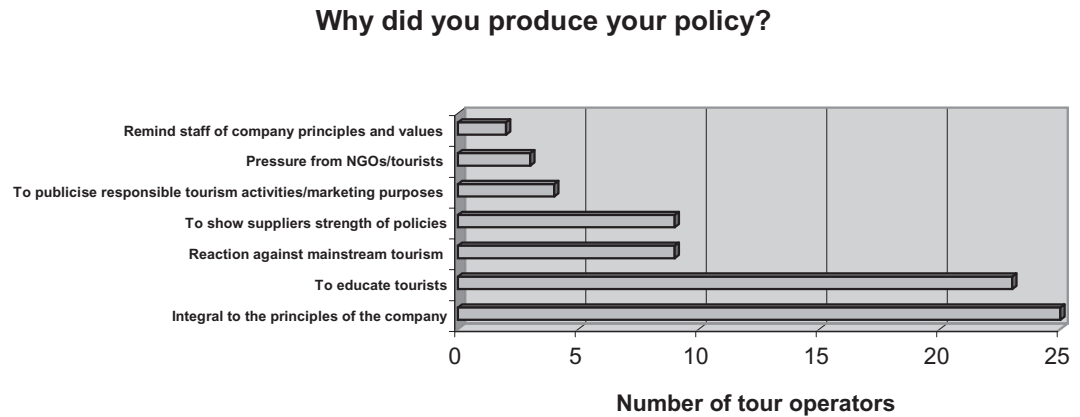
In Tearfund's survey the medium-sized companies (carrying between 5,000 and 100,000 holidaymakers per year) estimated that about 35 per cent of the costs of their trips remained in the local economy (excluding the cost of the flight). The smaller, more

specialist operators estimated the equivalent figure at 70 per cent, while the larger mass operators were not able to estimate.

Tearfund identified 46 tour-operating companies (71 per cent of its survey) which gave money to charities: 33 gave money directly to charities in the destination, half gave money to UK charities working overseas and six operators (mainly the larger ones) gave money to charities working in the UK. Thirty-two of the operators Tearfund surveyed looking for good practice said that they had a responsible tourism policy, and over half of the remainder were planning to develop a policy (Figure 3).

Those companies which had adopted responsible tourism policies said that they had adopted them because the principles were integral to the company (the majority of the companies with policies were independent and owner-managed) or to educate their travellers. Less than one-third of companies

Figure 3 Tearfund data on why operators chose to develop responsible tourism policies



said that they produced a responsible tourism policy as part of the process of differentiating themselves from mainstream tourism, and none overtly said that it was for commercial advantage.

### IMPLICATIONS

As Weeden has argued, ethical tourism ‘can allow companies to compete on more than just price’.<sup>28</sup> Krippendorf, too, argued that in a competitive market sales often dependent upon a unique selling proposition (USP), and a responsible tourism commitment is an ‘added value’ which may secure additional bookings.<sup>29</sup> Where there is little to choose between competing holidays and trips, the responsible tourism aspects of a particular trip may provide competitive advantage.

Research by Francis<sup>30</sup> into attitudes towards responsible tourism among a range of large, medium and small operators concluded that while destination, price, services and departure date remain, in the view of tour operators, the tourist’s key decision-making criteria, those operators practising responsible tourism stated that given broad parity on these criteria, their responsible tourism practices make the difference ‘nearly every time’. All were endeavouring to create points of difference, USPs between their products and those of their competitors, and

acknowledged that this was a key component in their product differentiation.

Weeden argues that existing research in psychological studies highlights the problem of discrepancy between the conscience of the consumer and their actual purchasing behaviour.<sup>31</sup> This is not unique to tourism. Consumers purchase holidays for a range of reasons and these coalesce at the moment of decision. Consumer choice is constrained by price and availability, and the responsible elements of a tourism product are only a part of the motivation to purchase, but for an increasing number of operators a significant part.

Rebellious consumers will expect the suppliers they purchase from to provide products, which are economically, socially and environmentally responsible. But they will not be prepared to pay any price for responsible ethically traded products. They will pay a greater or lesser premium according to what they can afford and the priority which they accord to the ethical dimension for their purchasing as against more traditional criteria. The smaller the premium for a more responsible product, the more likely consumers are to purchase it.

Noel Josephides, managing director of Sunvil Holidays, argued in the *Travel Trade Gazette* that British tourists have ‘absolutely no interest in supporting a host country’s economy, respecting local customs or acting

responsibly while on holiday'.<sup>32</sup> But, he reported in the same article that 8 per cent of Sunvil clients said that Sunvil's environmental initiative encouraged them to book with the company. In the highly competitive UK tourism market few operators can ignore the preferences and ethics of 8 per cent of their clients. It is also true that they cannot pay any price to satisfy their clients, as operators cannot be sustainable without making profits. There is a trade-off between economics and aspirations for operators as well as tourists.

Where the responsible tourism elements make for a superior product it will attract consumers predisposed to purchase. The responsible tourism product has one particular advantage over many other ethical products — the consumer will often experience the difference. A cup of fairly traded coffee or tea will not taste significantly different from other teas and coffees — it can taste as good but not better. Responsible tourism holidays which bring particularly high-quality engagement with local communities and their environments can provide a superior product, the life-enhancing experience which a growing sector of the market craves.<sup>33</sup>

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