

Travel Report : Participation in the Global Ecotourism Conference 2007, Oslo

First of all, we would like to thank the *Danish Development Research Network* (DDRN) for the opportunity to participate in the first major global conference on ecotourism. Ecotourism has been an area of our professional interest for years and now it proves to be ever more significant for nature conservation, cultural heritage and sustainable development.

The conference brought together some 450 ecotourism professionals and practitioners from 73 countries, including: officers of national and regional ecotourism associations, NGOs, ecotourism business owners, national and local governments, park and protected area services, academics, host communities and indigenous people' groups.

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), *Ecotourism Norway*, and *UNEP* have hosted this landmark conference in partnership with other UN agencies, the Norwegian government, leading environmental organizations, and selected corporate sponsors.

In 2002 the United Nations declared the International Year of Ecotourism, whose peak event was the World Ecotourism Summit, held in Quebec, Canada in May of that year. The Global Ecotourism Conference held in Oslo in May 2007, marked the fifth anniversary of the Quebec Summit. Speakers and participants have assessed progress over the past five years, examined the latest trends, and urged for building commitment to policies and actions to strengthen the contribution of ecotourism to conservation and sustainable development.

The conference has produced the *Oslo Statement on Ecotourism*, which builds on the *Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism* (2002) and reaffirms and develops key questions, challenges and recommendations, reflecting on the four themes of the Conference:

- 1) Ecotourism and Local Sustainable Development;
- 2) Ecotourism and Nature Conservation;

- 3) Communication, Education and Global Branding for Ecotourism;
- 4) Critical Issues and Current Trends in Ecotourism.

With regards to our contribution, two posters have been presented at the conference: one of our thesis research “Struggling for the Golden Egg: Conservation Politics in the Galapagos”, and the other – of the DDRN. The posters have been put up on two sides of one stand, which was placed in the middle of the Exhibition hall of the conference venue along with other poster stands. Eight niches of the Exhibition hall accommodated presentation tables and stands, and tables with refreshments. We have managed to attend to our stand in a variety of ways, especially during coffee and lunch breaks, as well as during the time assigned for networking.

We attended theme sessions through out the conference. However, coffee and lunch breaks have provided enough time for being around our stand as well as for networking. We were there every morning at least half an hour before the first session (08.30-09.00), for two hours during lunch break (11.00-13.00), for a short break around 15.00 and at least half an hour after the last session, which ended at 17.15.

During those breaks we stayed in a short distance from the stand and approached people that stopped to read our posters offering to tell more about them and to answer any questions. If a person was reading only one poster, we have invited him or her to talk about the other one too. Reactions have been various.

With regards to the thesis poster, it attracted people that have some link to the Galapagos, have studied there, would study or work there, mainly marine biologists. Being different from the mainstream discourse of the Galapagos problematique, the conclusions of our research have stirred curiosity and interest in reading the thesis. The message we put forward in our presentation was about the controversial ‘ecotourism’ practice in the Galapagos, that had questionable ecological quality and was rather a mass luxury tourism with hardly any links to the local communities. The common discussion was about the

main conflicts we have discovered, validity of our data, validity of the bio-physical data used for environmental impact assessment in the Galapagos, etc.

With regards to the DDRN poster, we have been giving a general introduction to the network, similarly to the content of the poster and also using statements of the power-point presentation. Handout material has been lying on the floor beneath the stand and we have been distributing it while answering questions next to the stand as well as offering them to participants at other stands. The common questions were about the main purpose of the network, areas of interest, its sources of funding and project activities. We have invited all those interested to come back with more questions or to read the web-site of the network, as well as to become a member.

We do not regard the time limitations of the breaks as limitations, since there has been enough 'free' time from the sessions. Besides, most of the other participants have been in sessions as well.

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