

Responsible Tourism Policy & Implementation

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge fully supports and practices the policy of responsible conservation tourism. Operating in the middle hills of Nepal where the surrounding area is under diverse pressure, there is a need for sound and sensitive management. As well as being committed to the protection and enhancement of the natural environment, the people and communities in which Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge is privileged to operate are partners, stakeholders, and vital resources in our business.

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge endeavours to develop and improve its commitment to the environment, guests, employees, and the local community. To provide quantifiable implementation of the policy, periodic independent audits are undertaken.

1.1 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge strives to ensure that all its operations have the smallest negative environmental impact possible. To achieve this goal the Lodge aims to reduce consumption of fuel and water, reduce generation of waste (particularly non-recyclable), and minimise the use of chemicals.

Energy Management

The main source of energy supplying the lodge is mains electricity. This was chosen, as opposed to having an independent renewable source, as the majority of electricity supplied by the Nepal Electricity Board is generated by hydropower thus a clean, green solution. However, due to regular power cuts, the Lodge is forced to run a backup diesel generator to maintain the high standards of operation required. The generator is regularly serviced to ensure maximum efficiency and is only used for minimum designated periods of time or in exceptional circumstances. A separate meter is installed to log power generated.

A low-energy light bulb replacement scheme has been initiated and currently over 90% have been replaced by compact fluorescent lighting. This was reintroduced once the previous lack of durable low-energy lighting available in Nepal was resolved. For the future, replacement of CFL with LED lights will be considered and evaluated.

Lights and all other machinery are switched off whenever not in use. Computers are set with energy saving options and switched off when not in use for longer periods. All fridges are energy efficient models.

Solar power is used to heat hot water for the staff and 2 out of the 19 guest rooms. This is a medium which will be used to heat more water in the future; however not all rooms will be able to have solar heated water due to extenuating factors, such as site topography.

Currently all pathways are lit by kerosene lanterns. The Lodge is looking into more environmentally benign options but, until a suitable alternative has been found, the use of the lanterns is minimised by placing guests in the same area and extinguishing the lanterns the moment the last guest retires.

Heating in the guest rooms is by kerosene heating. This is also kept to a minimum by use of an 'on request only' policy.

Due to the lack of local briquette manufacturers all fuel for the lodge's fires are off-cuts supplied by the local timber mill. The lighting of the fires is kept to a bare minimum.

All vehicles are regularly serviced to minimise emissions and all activities are structured to minimise usage. Staff are encouraged to use public transport where possible.

Water Management

All toilets have a shortened flush option and the majority of taps are fitted with aerators. We have initiated a retro-fitting scheme for the remainder. Flow rates of all taps, showers and toilets are measured enabling us to work towards international best practice in water management.

Due to the lodge's water having to be pumped up over 300m (1,000ft), conservation of water is of utmost importance to us. All leaks are fixed as soon as possible. Irrigation of the gardens happens mainly after sunset however in the hot weather this maybe topped up early in the morning. Watering during the heat of the day is not done to avoid evaporation. Water meters are installed at the well and mid-station to log water used.

Work is in hand to install to constructed wetland (CW) reed-bed natural filtration plants – one for the laundry

and one for the swimming pool – this will reduce water consumption in two priority areas. These should be operation in 2014 or early 2015.

Waste Management

All waste is managed in an environmentally sound manner. Glass is sold to local kawarris (recycling agents) who then sell this on to India for grinding and re-processing into glass items (a process that is unavailable in Nepal). Beer and soft drink bottles are returned to local breweries or bottlers. Aluminium, copper and brass are melted down locally and reused. Iron and steel are sold to Hulas Industries who melt the scrap metal to form reinforcement rods for concrete in the construction industry. Plastics where possible, are sold to recycling agents who sell it on to companies re-using for manufacture of bags and plastic pipe. All money earned from recycling is divided equally among the staff to give an incentive to recycle as much as possible.

All guests are provided with sterilised water mitigating the need to purchase mineral water that generates waste plastic.

Waste food is composted when suitable, eaten by neighbours' cattle or devoured by staff members if it tickles their fancy! Cloth is reused until it is unusable then along with paper it is burnt and the ash is composted.

Cloth bags and vegetable crates are used to carry shopping, in order to minimise the use of plastic bags. Wind up torches have been introduced in all guest rooms, reducing the need for batteries. The Lodge's office administration is run as paperless as feasibly possible. When printing is required the Lodge endeavours to use traditional handmade Nepalese paper and to use both sides. All incoming paper is re-used for printing or notes.

Chemicals

All guest soap is natural and environmentally bio-degradable. Chemical cleaners are kept to a minimum for hygiene specific use. No aerosols such as air-fresheners and no chemical furniture polish is used.

Laundry soap is currently detergent based due to non-availability of effective alternates in Nepal. However, laundry staff make every effort to minimise use of soap consistent with effective cleaning. All laundry is hand washed and sun dried minimising energy usage. Replacement of the detergent soap is a priority and regular checks for suitable alternatives are made. The Lodge is in process of converting from occasional use of hypochlorite bleach for whites to sodium percarbonate – an eco-friendly natural compound.

In the vegetable gardens, preference is given to deterrent measures using vegetable compounds. Where essential, only natural biocides such as Neem and Bordeaux Mixture (limited application on citrus trees) are used. Only compost, animal manure, and organic fertilisers are used.

The lodge is maintained, where possible, using products that have no detrimental effect on the environment. Rendered exteriors are traditionally plastered with a mud and cow-dung mixture. All exterior wood is maintained with a natural turpentine and mustard oil mix, furniture is protected using traditional chopra and walls are painted with traditional red emulsion consisting of all natural ingredients. Unfortunately, Nepal is yet to have environmentally friendly paint so the Lodge is compelled to use standard white emulsion but is investigating new eco-friendly versions just appearing on the local market.

The swimming pool is maintained with minimum chemical levels for hygiene currently using chlorine. A solar powered electrolytic sanitizer has been purchased and is installed – as concentration of copper ions increases, chlorine use has been reduced.

1.2 LANDSCAPE & ARCHITECTURE

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge ensures that the physical infrastructure is in keeping with local architectural styles and that buildings blend into the landscape. All construction complies with local and national regulations. The needs of the disabled are taken into account. The Lodge also aims to maximise positive environmental impacts. Gardens and woodland areas are kept natural with minimal exotic planting. The local community is consulted wherever Lodge activities may have an impact. Local visitors are always encouraged.

The Lodge

The lodge has been constructed in a manner that respects traditional architectural design. The majority of the staff working in the lodge today formed part of the 350 local male and female labourers, craftsmen and overseers who built the buildings from raw local stone quarried from the community quarry, government approved rich Sal timber from the Nepal Terai plains, and pine from the western hills. Traditional mud mortar is used where practicable and cement mortar only where load or other engineering need makes it necessary.

The buildings all comply with local and national regulations.

Dedicated staff are allocated to handle the needs of the physically disabled and visually impaired, as far as the natural topography permits.

The Grounds

Our grounds are natural and only planted with indigenous and naturalised shrubbery, in keeping with the area's natural biodiversity. The hilltop between the swimming pool and the main lodge is set aside as a natural Khar Bari (*Themeda sp*), a field for traditional thatch grass. This retains natural land use patterns and is beneficial for bio-diversity. The wooded areas are managed with only occasional and minimal selective thinning.

Public rights of way are respected and access is provided to local families to cut grass for fodder and, subject to our own requirements, thatching. Local villagers are permitted to use the swimming pool during off-season and are encouraged to participate in guided tours of the lodge and grounds in order to build awareness within the community on our responsible tourism activities.

Those who sold land for the construction of the lodge were fully paid for the land by mutual agreement and also provided with private water taps. Most of those families selling land have at least one person employed at the lodge.

The village permitted the lodge to use a spring some 1000 feet below the lodge and we ensured that the public benefit from this otherwise inaccessible source through provision of water supply from this spring via two public taps.

The planting of the grounds with locally appropriate and non-exotic species of vegetation coupled with regular monitoring of the property ensures that everything possible is done to mitigate human-induced potential erosion risks. All storm-water run-off is controlled for the same reason.

Most of the salads, herbs, and some of the vegetables needed are grown organically in the lodge's gardens. We use the gardens to experiment with vegetable growing with a view to encouraging local farms to grow for us. This will expand the economic benefits of the lodge in the community beyond direct employment – a key policy objective.

1.3 GOVERNANCE & SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge maintains the highest ethical and professional standards in the internal administration and accounting of the business. Specific ethical, employment, administration, accounting and health and safety policies are in place. There are comprehensive employment benefits and career development opportunities. The recruitment of women and individuals from disadvantaged groups is actively encouraged, however the Lodge prioritises all appointments for applicants from the immediate community. The Lodge has a "zero tolerance" approach to all forms of sexual abuse and discrimination. The Lodge does not employ child labour and follows the regulations in the Nepal Labour Act with regard to employment of young people on work training / experience placements.

Purchasing policy prioritises local small producer suppliers with time-bound payment of occasional creditors.

Corporate Affairs

The company's administration and accounting is transparent, accessible to stakeholders and compliant with all local regulations and legislation. The company adopts a zero tolerance approach to bribery and other inappropriate behaviour. No government officials are entertained at company expense for business advantage. All taxes are paid on time and in full.

Terms of employment are transparent, fair and all grievances are reconciled quickly and openly. Staff remuneration is always disbursed on time with advance payment made to those in need and during festivals.

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge works in close partnership with all stakeholders in its operations – local communities, local and central government, local and national charities, staff and guests to ensure that Lodge operations contribute to the collective aspirations of the local community and support community initiatives for local, environmentally responsible, socio-economic development.

Employees

The provision of in-house and out-sourced training is provided to enhance both employee job-specific skills and for skill enhancement in the wider community. Periodic familiarisation tours are arranged to sister companies and other places of interest in Nepal. All employees are encouraged to take up training opportunities and to develop their own training plans irrespective of seniority or position. Free help and information is provided to support career development.

In addition to statutory requirements regarding minimum wages, 10% company profit bonus, accident insurance, etc., the company provides a full medical cost compensation scheme for the employee, spouse and children (for unmarried employees, parents are covered). An education allowance is provided to subsidise costs of up to two children from kindergarten to School Leaving Certificate (approximately age 17). Accident insurance is covered to above the statutory level. Free board and lodging is provided to staff requiring it and a free meal scheme is available for staff family members when visiting. Further meals are at minimal cost of Rs.20 (approx. US\$0.25) per meal. All routine leave is fully paid and additional travelling time is given for those living further away from the lodge. A travel allowance is paid for all non-local staff going on annual leave. Leave for special rituals is available – marriages, death, paternity and maternity leave, etc. Special leave (paid or unpaid) is available for exceptional situations. A provident fund scheme is operated depositing 20% (10% employer and 10% employee contribution) of monthly basic pay in the government provident fund. A Dasain Bonus of one-month's pay is given at Dasain, the major festival in Nepal. Service charges are remitted to staff monthly (the requirement is 6 monthly in arrears). Tips from guests paid by credit card have no commission deducted. Uniform and all safety equipment is provided free of cost and replacement is free, based on a fair-wear-and-tear basis.

Suppliers

The Lodge aims to purchase as much of its local food needs as possible from within the village and immediate area and buy such goods at a fair price. Lunches are usually traditional Nepalese dishes and Nepalese options are also available for dinner.

Almost all supplier payments are on a cash basis and those few occasions where credit is taken, payment is made at the month-end or generally within 15-30 days whichever is the shorter period.

The use of local suppliers and service providers by guests is encouraged – for example, provision of adventure activities, restaurants, shops and complementary therapists.

1.4 EDUCATION & AWARENESS

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge believes that the ultimate goal of responsible tourism – an enhanced and sustainable natural and social environment – can only be achieved effectively if all stakeholders are fully informed and aware of the issues. Through such education and awareness, individuals can make a personal commitment to the policy, which is inherently more sustainable than the mechanical implementation of company rules.

Community

As well as having a responsibility to show respect and support to the local community, the company believes that the channel of communication should not be one-way, but a two-way flow of mutual support, understanding and awareness. As such, the Lodge raises understanding of responsible tourism within the community through its local staff. The Lodge encourages the local and wider community to visit the lodge where we inform them of our approach to sustainability via a lead-by-example approach. The Lodge's Sustainable Action Group pilots projects with the local community, for example in litter and refuse management.

Employees

The lodge runs a 'Sustainable Action Group' forum where any member of staff is encouraged to participate and voice their ideas on how the company can become more sustainable. This encourages a bottom up approach and by involving the staff increases awareness and a sense of ownership by the staff, a key stakeholder group. This forum has already generated some positive ideas and is tasked with monitoring the implementation of the company's responsible tourism policy. A senior level employee has the responsibility to oversee all aspects of implementation of this policy.

Guests

Guests are informed about our approach of minimising fuel and water consumption, reducing waste and minimising use of chemicals through the welcome briefing and the room information pack. Guests are encouraged to provide feedback, comments and suggestions which are considered by the Sustainable Action

Group and recommended for implementation if thought feasible and beneficial. Staff are similarly informed about minimising consumption through regular reminders on a departmental level and through the Sustainable Action Group.

The Lodge acts as an interface between the community and guests. Guests are encouraged to give responsibly and prevent begging and other socially inappropriate activities. Guests are also encouraged to see, participate (where appropriate), and learn about the local community. The company has a policy of absolute zero tolerance to all forms of abusive and exploitative behaviour by guests and staff alike towards other staff, guests and the local community.

Tour Leaders

Local and foreign tour leaders escorting groups are briefed, where applicable, about our responsible tourism policy and explanations given as to the impact of this on their groups.

Suppliers

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge aims to raise awareness of responsible tourism within the industry. A similar effort is made to raise awareness where possible with our suppliers of goods and services.

1.5 CONSERVATION & COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge works closely with local partners, national, and international charities. We prioritise community-based and lead organisations to develop and support local environmental enhancement projects. Emphasis in all projects is given to ensure that the ownership is with the community. The lodge undertakes a range of biodiversity monitoring projects and supports various social development and welfare activities on an ad-hoc and ongoing basis. There are designated Community Support Partnership staff to liaise and encourage community participation.

Conservation

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge works closely with the International Trust for Nature Conservation (ITNC), the Group's affiliate charity. We jointly support the Shillinge Community Forestry Project. Under this project, we have assisted the Community Forest User Group in the development of non-timber forest products for planting on the open land on Shillinge Chaur (below 'Prince Charles' Tree) and other areas. Plantings of broom grass (Amrisu), bamboo, banana, and some shade trees have been made to provide a cash crop to complement the timber resources of the main forest. ITNC has also supported the development of a forest nursery to grow timber and non-timber seedlings. The User Group is also fencing and planting other open areas with timber or non-timber mixes with support from ITNC. Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge funds the wages of a forest ranger who patrols the community forest to prevent poaching and illicit felling.

A joint project, under the auspices of ITNC, between Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge and Tiger Tops Tharu Lodge is recording sightings of vultures and other major raptors. This data is collated and available online. Vultures have declined catastrophically in recent years. The cause has been identified as the use of the veterinary drug, Diclofenac, and our monitoring project is designed to assimilate basic data to plot trends so as to be able to see if efforts to manage the use of this drug are having a positive impact.

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge coordinates the Annual Asian Waterfowl Census every January. This is a joint effort of Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, ITNC, Bird Conservation Nepal, and other local charities. The data goes to Bird Conservation Nepal and thence to Birdlife International.

Butterflies spotted around the lodge are monitored as they are good indicators of bio-diversity – the range of species and their relative abundance is a sign of a healthy environment. All monitoring data is available on the Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge website.

Local Community

Staff and guests regularly support local families in difficulty. An example of this is Jibhakala Ranabhat, a single mother, whose house was uninhabitable, was built a new home with donations from staff and guests who also sponsor her two girls at school and nursing college.

Rural Health

Although located close to the regional facilities in Pokhara, self reliance for simple medical conditions and first aid issues are essential if the city hospitals are not to become over-burdened. The Nepal Red Cross local branch has constructed a meeting hall with our financial support for use as a training and disaster preparedness centre. Similarly, a first aid facility is provided at the lodge itself, in addition to an ambulance

service for emergency cases.

Additional support is provided for health education, family planning, immunisation campaigns, etc. on an ad hoc basis. Our guests have also provided support for medical cases in the village where families have not been able to afford treatment. In these instances, Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge provides logistic and management support at no cost to help the families' access the best available medical treatment.

In the past, we supplied two public water taps and four private taps to ensure that a reasonable water supply is available. This has health and education benefits, freeing girls' time for school that would otherwise be demanded for the fetching of water from a muddy spring some five hundred feet below the lodge. Since this original supply scheme, a new water supply system is in place and our public taps remain functional to provide a backup in case of failure of the new system. The private taps benefit 28 people directly and are in routine use.

Education

Improved primary education is essential for national development and growth. Nepal has improved basic literacy rates significantly over the past two decades. Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge supports local schools, including the salary of one teacher – as the government budget cannot provide sufficient teachers – and provision of teaching materials, books, paper, posters, etc. Lodge guests have been most generous over the years and this has built a rapport between the lodge and the schools. The Lodge also manages the sponsorship funded by guests of various children from disadvantaged backgrounds who would otherwise not go to school. The expansion of the infrastructure at the local secondary school has also been supported by the Lodge. This has enabled them to provide classes through to School Leaving Certificate level, a particular benefit for girl students as they can complete their education within the community.

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge has hosted various study groups, including the Eco-Tourism faculty from Tribhuvan University, Pokhara Campus and an "Aama Samua" (Mother's Group) from near Tiger Tops Tharu Lodge as well as government and non-government tours from Afghanistan, Mongolia, Tibet and Cambodia. All visited to learn about our efforts to develop a sustainable tourism model at Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge.

In partnership with People & Places, a leading responsible volunteer-placement agency (Winner of the Responsible Tourism Award 2009), the Lodge has operated a programme in Amar Jyoti Secondary & Primary School. This project aimed at enhancing the school's teachers in their English language skills and then their teaching in English skills.

1.6 PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge endorses and actively implements the sustainable tourism policies and approaches of our partner organisations:

- The International Eco-Tourism Society
- Sustainable Tourism Network
- Sustainable Travel International
- The International Centre for Responsible Tourism (ICRT)
- Tourism Concern UK

The Lodge also works closely with the following organisations:

- Bird Conservation Nepal
- International Trust for Nature Conservation
- ICIMOD
- Birdlife International
- National Trust for Nature Conservation
- Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF)
- Nepal Red Cross
- Local Mothers' Groups
- Institute of Forestry, Pokhara