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## **TOUR OPERATORS AND TRAVEL AGENT BEST PRACTICE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Best practice is now widely accepted and promoted in manufacturing industry as a means of achieving quality management. When linked to environmental performance, the broader concept of best practice environmental management is of direct relevance to tourism. There is growing evidence that the tourism industry is prepared to foster environmental excellence through the adoption of best practice environmental management, and the implementation of self-regulatory auditing procedures to monitor compliance with environmental standards. This trend, which is strongest at the international corporate level of the tourism industry, is being reflected in the 'greening' of major elements of Australian tourism. The challenge is to raise concern for the environment among the many smaller, disparate tourism operations, and to promote best practice environmental management at all levels of the tourism industry.*

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### **Introduction**

Tourism sector according to David Diaz Benavides (2001) is probably the only services sector that provides concrete and qualified trading opportunities for all nations, regardless of their level of development. According to him, the sector also provides an uneven distribution of benefits, which is threatening the social, economic and environmental sustainability of tourism in some developing countries (Benavides 2001). Tourism has become a major source of economic development and diversification for many developing countries. Tourism for Nigeria is yet to become a channel of employment creation, income generation and revenue mobilization for a country with over 170 million people. Although, the developed countries account for a higher proportion of global tourism, and

many developing countries are beginning to take advantage of the huge opportunities offered by tourism. (Ayeni & Ebohon 2012)

However, the country has decided to join the trial to diversify her economy from the production of crude oil in other to create more employment opportunities and to generate more foreign income. (Ayeni & Ebohon 2012). Nigeria is a rich country when it comes to tourism because, the country is blessed with all it takes to be a tourists' destination. Sustainable tourism concept is used to harmonize and reconcile issues of intergenerational equity, the goals of economic growth, environmental protection, and justice.

According to the United Nation World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) forecasts, it is stated that international tourist arrivals will experience an increase of 3% to 4% in 2013, this forecast is so much in line with its 2030 long term forecast: +3.8% a year on average between 2010 and 2020. This report is confirmed by the UNWTO Confidence Index.

Which in turns implies that by region, prospects for 2013 are much more stronger than that of 2012, for Asia and the Pacific +5% to +6%, followed by Africa +4% to +6%, the Americas +3% to +4%, Europe +2% to +3% and the Middle East 0% to +5% (UNWTO 2013).

International tourism, measured by the number of arrivals of foreign tourists in a country, grew by 4%. United Nations World Tourism Organization.



Figure 1: Growth in international tourism arrivals. (Quartz 2013)

However, in the figure above Africa region showed a growth rate of (+6%) in the number of international arrivals, it is observed that there is high

concentration of international tourist arrivals in both the north and south of the continent. These two regions recovered well from their setback in 2011 when arrivals decreased by 1% as a result of the negative return from North Africa. International arrivals reached a new record (52 million) as a result of rebound in North Africa (+9% as compared to a 9% decrease in 2011) while Sub-Saharan destinations continue their growth (+5%). Results in the Middle East show (-5%) which implies there is an improvement after a 7% decrease in 2011, still the region recorded approximately 3 million international tourist arrivals less in 2012 in spite of the clear recovery in Egypt. (UNWTO 2013).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### International Regulation and Codes of Conduct (COCs)

International Regulation and COCs International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN) were established in 2000 under the United Nations Foundation (UNF). 'A Practical Guide of Good Practice' booklet and 'Marine Recreation Checklist' serve as guidance to assist businesses on environmental practices. In addition, the guideline offers the rationale and recommendations for essential practices in mitigating the effects on the marine ecosystem (ICRAN, 2012). Furthermore, UNEP and Reef-World expand the best practices in Asia by establishing a programme known as Green Fins. The programme aims to promote environmentally friendly practices in the marine park for tour operators and visitors, particularly in Asian regions. In addition, the programme allows tour operators to participate in coral reef monitoring, conservation and management (Hunt *et al.*, 2013).

### Environmental Practices

Environmental management emphasises resolving practical issues that arise when humans coexist with nature, resource exploitation and waste production (National Environment Commission, 2011). Environmental management includes enforcing carrying capacity and restricting hazardous activities in protected and zoning areas for specific user activities. As outlined by Orams (1999), management guidelines can be categorized into four strategies: (1) physical, (2) regulatory, (3) economic and (4) education. Physical management strategies include infrastructure for sustainable operation in the coastal area. The regulation emphasizes education management strategies to control any misconduct by human activities in the marine park and encourage voluntary

behaviour change. Therefore, educational management strategies provide a beneficial situation for marine park management and tourists. Hunt et al. (2013) noted that enhanced knowledge amongst dive guides, recreational divers and snorkelers is a critical element in ensuring environmental sustainability for diving operations. Ordoñez and Serrat (2017) stated that the dissemination of information is the distribution of conveying knowledge to intended audiences to effect change. In addition, dive guides play an essential role in advising misconduct behaviour amongst divers to minimize contact on the reef (Hunt *et al.*, 2013; Roche *et al.*, 2016). Regulations and enforcement aim to manage visitors' activities in a destination, specifically in protected areas. For example, in MPAs, respective authorities regulate visitor activities, such as collecting sea life, stepping on corals, fish feeding, littering and fishing within designated areas. Amongst other marine activities that may contribute to corals' degradation is the usage of fins by snorkelers. Corals and other reef species are usually damaged by inexperienced snorkelers using fins, tools or body contact (ICRAN, 2012).

One of the approaches is public and private partnerships by promoting best practices in MPA for better sustainable on-site management and operations. For example, the Green Fins programme suggests engaging the dive tourism industry and other related stakeholders to educate facilitate and improve mutual efforts concerning coral reef sustainability (Hunt et al., 2013). For example, in Hawaii, several public volunteers and paid project activities are available for tourists and tour operators, such as whale monitoring, fish counts, beach clean-ups and charitable donations (Wiener, 2009).

## **METHODOLOGY**

Secondary data were used for the studies which were extracted from annual final reports, textbooks, internet publications, and journals. This study was carried out by reviewing the literature gathered JRC Scientific and Policy Report on Best Environmental Management Practice (David et al., 2013). A thorough study of the most recent selected literature from academic publications as well as relevant internet news portals and online platforms to extract the most current state-of-the-art knowledge. This strategy allowed for a better understanding of current challenges and a better response to Destination Management.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Tour operator best practice guidance

The Travelife Initiative (Travelife, 2011) offers guidance to tour operators on implementation of sustainability management systems, with a focus on training and dissemination and implementation of best practices across tour operators and their suppliers (Table 4.1). The initiative has been introduced to over 450 European tour operators via associations including ANVR (NL), FTO and ABTA (UK), FAR (DE), ABTO, BTOV, VVR, BFNO and FBAA (BE), and intends to assist with the process of EMAS registration. A training manual has recently been published (Travelife, 2011) in which tour operators are provided guidance across eight modules based upon TOI methodology (listed below). Readers will be referred to these modules where relevant through this chapter on BEMPs for tour operators. Travelife modules comprise: Sustainability management, internal management, Sustainable supply-chain management, Transport, Accommodations, Sustainable excursions, Destinations, Customer communication.

**Table 4.1: A summary of the objectives and methods of the Travelife initiative, and instruments and tools provided to help tour operators achieve them**

Objectives	Methods	Instruments and tools provided
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improve the sustainability of travel products.</li> <li>- Improve customer satisfaction.</li> <li>- Improve the quality of life in destinations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stimulate cooperation between tour operators and their suppliers.</li> <li>- Stimulate cooperation between tour operators and the people in the destinations.</li> <li>- Collate and disseminate collective knowledge of tour operators and their associations.</li> <li>- Generate a critical mass to achieve a standardised approach and 'level playing field'.</li> <li>- Contribute to the use of common standards in order to avoid 'standard proliferation'.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Management system: an international management standard for the implementation of sustainable tourism by tour operators.</li> <li>- Training: a state of the art course including industry best practices.</li> <li>- Action Planning: setting and monitoring company commitments through an 'action planning system'.</li> <li>- Suppliers Assessment: best practice standards, advice and support, and assessment for tourism suppliers and destinations by means of the Travelife Sustainability System.</li> <li>- Market place: informing tour operators about best practice suppliers and initiatives worldwide.</li> </ul>

The Tour Operators Initiative for sustainable tourism development (TOI, 2010) was launched in 2000 by a group of tour operators with the support of the UNWTO, which hosts the TOI Secretariat, the UNEP and the UNESCO, to assist and encourage social and environmental responsibility across tour operators. In 2010, 16 tour operators were members of the initiative, including some of the largest tour operators in Europe. TOI (2010) provides detailed guidance and case studies on best practice classified according to five key areas of action:

- Research and information exchange to explore and share ideas and practices on key environmental, socio-economic and cultural topics;
- Capacity building to assist members of the Initiative and other tour operators in putting into practice sustainable development and management principles through publications, workshops, conferences and training;
- Technical support for members of the Initiative to further their commitment to the sustainable development of tourism;
- Communication to increase awareness on sustainability issues of key players in the tourism industry such as tourists, local communities and people, tourism trade associations, and local and national authorities with the main aim of improving the quality of the tourism experience at the local level;
- Outreach to open direct dialogues with other tour operators and stakeholders.

In addition, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) is an organization composed of a diverse global membership including UN agencies, leading travel companies, hotels, country tourism boards and tour operators. The GSTC promotes knowledge sharing and the adoption of sustainable tourism practices by both tourism service providers and tourists. Underpinning this work is a list of Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria, representing the minimum requirements that any tourism business should achieve to protect the world's natural and cultural resources while ensuring tourism meets its potential as a tool for conservation and poverty alleviation.

### **Reduce and mitigate the environmental impact of transport operations**

Data from Eurostat (2009) indicate that the dominant mode of passenger transport within the EU-27 is car, accounting for 4 602 billion pkm in 2006,

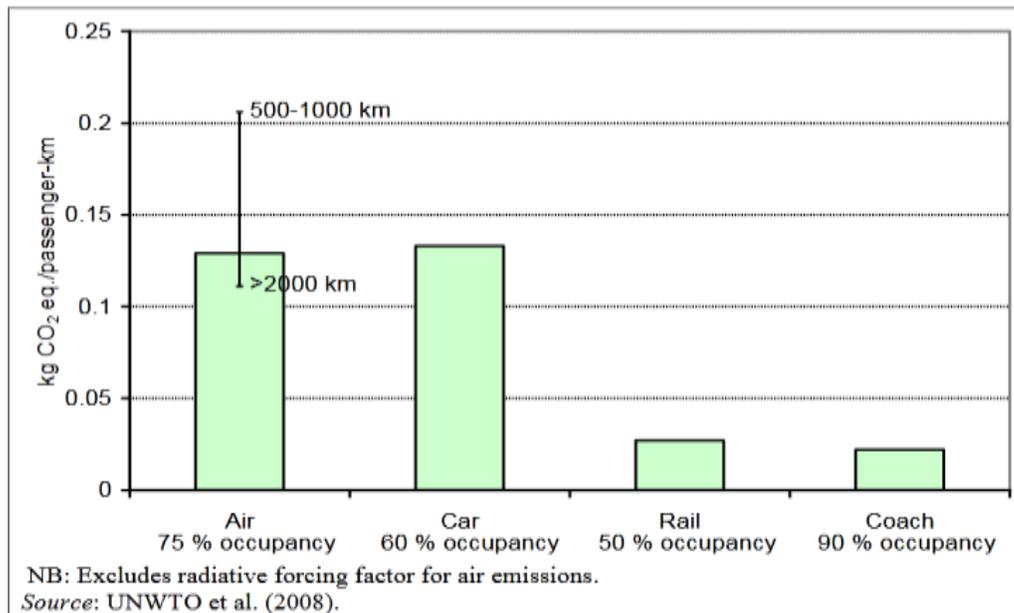
followed by bus/coach, train, air and sea transport (Table 4.2). The growth trends are highest for air transport (4.6 %) and car transport (1.6 %).

**Table 4.2: Passenger transport in the EU-27 between 1995 and 2006**

Mode	Billion passenger km		Annualised growth rate
	1995	2006	%
Car	3 855	4 602	1.6
Bus/coach	501	523	0.4
Train	348	374	0.9
Air	335	547	4.6
Sea	44	40	-1.0

NB: Air and sea data include only domestic and intra-EU-27 transport.  
Source: Eurostat (2009).

However, the modal distribution of transport for tourism is considerably different, being dominated by air transport that accounts for the emission of over 500 million tonnes CO<sub>2</sub> eq. annually. Specific emissions, expressed per pkm travelled, are high for air transport compared with other modes, though vary considerably depending on the distance (Figure 4.4) and load factors of different transport modes. Although total emissions are higher from long-haul flights, emissions per km are considerably lower.



**Figure 4.4: Specific GHG emissions, expressed per passenger km, for different transport modes according to occupancy factors and, for air transport, distance**

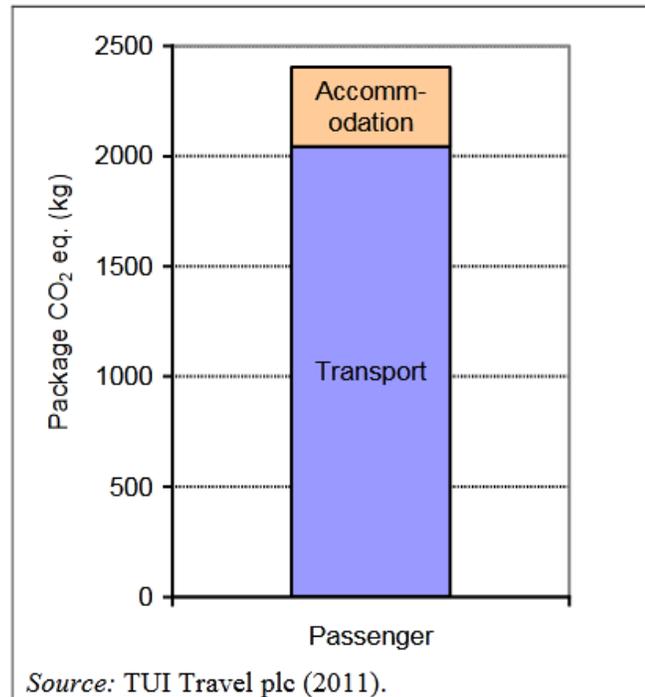
An extensive assessment of global data from ten years of commercial airline operations found that the efficiency of air transport, expressed as CO<sub>2</sub> per pkm, has improved by 20 % since 2000, but varies by a factor of 10 across the industry (Brighter planet, 2011). Efficiency was found to be dominated by five factors, listed in Table 4.3.

**Table 4.3: Factors found to determine the efficiency of commercial air transport**

Factor	Passenger-weighted correlation coefficient
Aircraft fuel efficiency (model, retrofits)	0.76
Load factor (operational)	0.52
Flight distance (operational)	0.35
Freight share (operational)	0.25
Seating density (cabin configuration)	0.11
<i>Source: Brighter Planet (2011).</i>	

### **Transport contribution to the environmental burden of tourism**

A study undertaken by Breda University found that the average carbon footprint per passenger on tours sold by Sawadee in 2010 was 2 403 kg of CO<sub>2</sub> eq., with transport accounting for 85% and accommodation 15 % (Figure 4.5). Although the total carbon footprint and transport portion may be elevated in this example owing to a high proportion of long-haul flights associated with this specialist adventure tourism tour operator, it emphasizes the importance of air transport with respect to tour operator package energy and GHG burdens. Figure 4.3 in the introduction to this chapter indicates that air transport accounts for approximately half of the overall environmental impact of all-inclusive package holidays (including food and drink supply chains, waste management, etc.).



**Figure 4.5: The average carbon footprint of a Sawadee passenger**

Tour operators have considerable influence over the environmental burden of transport operations. Firstly, they can promote closer destinations and more efficient modes, especially for distances up to approximately 1500 km where trains may conveniently substitute flying. Reducing the share of energy intensive transport modes such as flying and driving is an important aspect of best practice that overlaps with measures to promote more sustainable tourism packages and encouraging more sustainable tourist behavior. In addition, tour operators have strong direct influence over transport suppliers, and large tour operators such as Thomson Travel operate their own aircraft fleets. This control and influence can be used to increase the efficiency of transport operations.

## **APPROPRIATE ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATOR**

### **Appropriate environmental indicator**

Various indicators may be used to determine transport impacts, normalized per passenger km or per 100 passenger km travelled. Two basic indicators are recommended for universal reporting:

- Fuel consumption, expressed as litres per 100 pkm travelled;

- Direct CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, expressed as kg CO<sub>2</sub> per pkm travelled.

Other environmentally important direct emissions arising from transport include particulate matter (PM), SO<sub>x</sub>, NO<sub>x</sub> and non-methane volatile organic compounds (NMVOCs). Some of these can be calculated from fuel consumption according to fixed emission factors. Indirect emissions arising from fuel extraction, processing and supply are also important, and significantly increase the lifecycle environmental burden of transport. Furthermore, aircraft emissions at high altitudes give rise to additional radiative forcing effects, increasing their global warming potential relative to emissions at ground level. Best practice is for tour operators to refer to aircraft-specific emission factors when selecting aircraft or transport providers, and to multiple aircraft emissions by a relevant radiative forcing index (RFI) when comparing mode options and when calculating quantities of carbon to be offset.

**Table 4.6: Direct and indirect emissions attributable to fuel consumption for the main fuel types**

Fuel	Direct effects			Indirect effects					
	Energy MJ/L	CO <sub>2</sub> Kg/L	CO <sub>2</sub> eq. Kg/L	CO <sub>2</sub> kg/L	Energy MJ/L	NO <sub>x</sub> g/L	SO <sub>2</sub> g/L	NMVOC g/L	PM g/L
Gasoline	32.1	2.24	2.25	0.48	8.03	1.52	4.18	1.52	0.21
Diesel	36.0	2.55	2.57	0.39	7.92	1.49	3.64	1.26	0.19
Biodiesel	38.1	0	0.015	0.73	15.24	5.25	1.36	0.95	0.60
Kerosene	35.3	2.52	2.55	0.36	7.41	1.41	3.44	1.21	0.18

Source: IFEU (2010) and DEFRA (2011).

**Table 4.7: Variation in direct emissions per km for a 747-400 type aircraft with journey distance**

Distance	CO <sub>2</sub>	NO <sub>x</sub>	NMVOC	PM
kg/km				
232	86.2	0.513	0.0246	0.0039
926	45.4	0.245	0.0119	0.0025
2 778	34.9	0.161	0.0049	0.0021
10 186	35.7	0.166	0.0025	0.0022

Source: IFEU (2010).

For coaches, EURO emission standards (tiers EURO I to EURO VI) define limits for the major polluting emissions, and are a useful reference for coach performance and for green procurement of new or used coaches and transport providers (Table 4.8).

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providers.

**Table 4.8:** Emission limit values for heavy duty diesel engines associated with various EURO standards, expressed per kWh engine output, and year of introduction

Tier	Date	Test	CO	HC	NOx	PM	Smoke
			g/kWh				m <sup>-1</sup>
EURO I	1992	ECE	4.5	1.1	8.0	0.36	
EURO II	1998	R-49	4.0	1.1	7.0	0.15	
EURO III	2000	ESC	2.1	0.66	5.0	0.1	0.8
EURO IV	2005	+	1.5	0.46	3.5	0.02	0.5
EURO V	2013	ELR	1.5	0.46	2.0	0.02	0.5
EURO VI	2013		1.5	0.13	0.4	0.01	

NB: Values are for steady-state testing (ECE R-49), European Stationary Cycle (ESC) and European Load Response (ELR).  
Source: DieselNet (2009).

TUI Nordic provide an example of best practice with respect to transport performance benchmarking, also collating data from external transport providers (Table 4.9).

**Table 4.9:** Basic data related to environmental performance reported by TUI Nordic (2011)

	Customers	GHG emissions	Fuel efficiency	Specific emissions(*)
	Number	Tonnes CO <sub>2</sub>	L/100 pkm	kg CO <sub>2</sub> /pkm
TUIfly Nordic	680 264	361 201	2.66	0.067
Contracted airlines	591 462	427 219	2.70	0.068

(\*)Calculated based on 2.522 kg CO<sub>2</sub> eq./L kerosene.

**Table 4.4:** Best practice measures to mitigate the environmental impact of transport operations based on different approaches listed in order of priority (highest on top)

Approach	Measure	Examples
Benchmark transport efficiency and improvement options	Monitor and report transport GHG emissions	TUI Travel plc (2011) report average emissions of 0.076 kg CO <sub>2</sub> pkm, and aim to reduce total direct carbon emissions by 6 % by 2013/14 (relative to 2007/08). Thomson Travel and TUI Nordic airlines implement ISO 14001 certified EMSs.
Choice editing	Do not offer flight packages where convenient alternatives exist	In order to be member of the Forum Anders Reisen association in Germany, tour operators must comply with a set of mandatory criteria: no flights offered up to 700 km, between 700 km to 2 000 km only if the client stays in the destination more than 8 days (Travelife, 2011).
Green procurement	Select the most efficient aircraft/vehicles	TUIfly Nordic removed inefficient Boeing 747s from its fleet, and is buying more efficient Boeing 787 Dreamliner aircraft. Rabbie's Travel operate minicoaches with Euro 5 engines
	Select efficient and environmentally responsible providers	TUI Nordic external carrier contracts require disclosure of average fuel consumption. Carriers with low fuel consumption and certified EMS are prioritised. All coach and bus companies contracted by TUI NL and OAD must be certified by the Dutch label 'Keurmerk Touringcarbedrijf' that includes safety, quality and environmental criteria (Travelife, 2011).

Retrofit aircraft/vehicles	Fit winglets (aircraft)	76 % of TUI Travel's aircraft are fitted with winglets. TUIfly is retro-fitting Boeing 767 aircraft
	Minimise weight	Thomas Cook have stripped aircrafts to the essential parts to remove unnecessary weight
	Adapt fuel systems to run on sustainable biofuels	Thomson Airways is trialling the use of a 50/50 blend of used cooking oil and kerosene on commercial flights between Birmingham and Palma. KLM is trialling the use of 50/50 blend of camelina-derived fuel and kerosene.
	Optimise engine management systems (coaches)	Rabbie's Travel operate mini-coaches with remapped engines tuned to use fuel more efficiently when combined with eco driving techniques
	Fit speed limiters (coaches)	No specific example provided
	Fit low rolling resistance tyres (coaches)	No specific example provided
Optimise operational efficiency (liaise with airport operators)	Maximise occupancy rates	Tuifly Nordic (2011) report a load factor of 94.1 % for 2009/10. Also important for buses/coaches (e.g. sending correct size mini-bus/coach for airport pickups, etc.)
	Driver training	Studiosus has begun to require coach and bus transport

Approach	Measure	Examples
	(coaches)	providers to install notices reminding drivers to stop the engine when waiting for passengers to board and leave the coach/bus (Travelife, 2011).
	Operate continuous decent approaches (aircraft)	98 % Thomson Airways flights achieved continuous descent approaches in 2009/10(*)
	Periodic cleaning of jets engines	Thomson Travel ensures jet engines are cleaned using closed-loop high pressure water twice per year
	Minimise engine use for ground operations	Assisted taxiing and connections to airport electricity
	Minimise impact of inflight services	Thomson Travel avoids plastic packaging for blankets, has reduced the weight of magazines, and recycles all drinks cans on inbound flights
Other measures	Promote public transport to departure points	Rabbie's Travel offices and departure points are all in city centres. TUI Deutschland provide all air package holiday customers with a second class rail ticket for travel to and from airports in Germany that includes the use of all public transport in twelve major German public transport associations. Bensbus offers low cost transfers from Grenoble airport to many major resorts in the French Alps by grouping everyone together and putting them all on one big bus (Travelife, 2011).
	Carbon offsetting (for emissions that cannot be avoided)	TUI Travel, in partnership with ClimateCare, has invested in five renewable energy projects in destinations, scheduled to offset in excess of 483 000 t CO <sub>2</sub> by 2013.
(*)excluding Air Traffic Control instructed or safety related deviations.		

### **Educate Visitors on Environmental Awareness**

The operators should practice and encourage environmentally friendly diving and snorkeling practices. Previous research revealed that pre-dive briefing is one of the environmental managements that significantly reduce damage in corals (Hunt et al., 2013; Mendes, 2008). During the observation, all the tour operators implemented best practices in a pre-briefing on environmental awareness. The contents of the pre-briefing are also relatively consistent to all tour operators. The briefing focused on COCs in the protected areas, no-touch policy, no-fish feeding, and others related to environmental awareness. Pre-briefing will create awareness and eventually leads the tourists to be more responsible to engage in marine activities. The tour operators' crews (R5, R8 & R15) conducted their briefing on environmental awareness, such as discouraging the selling and buying of shells and other aquatic species and touching and stepping corals. The crews will provide oral guidance to tourists if they violate the rules in ensuring that tourists adhere to the COC. A tour operator manager (R3) states that 'tourists want the guidance; they feel self-conscious about destroying the reef, but do not know how to avoid bad behavior unless they are told'. Constant observation and reprimands by the crews will ensure that tourists adhere to the guidelines throughout the activity. Information dissemination is the collaborative process of conveying knowledge to intended audiences to effect changes and create awareness in protected areas (Ordoñez & Serrat, 2017). Wiener (2009) mentioned that a few companies offered pamphlets, photo identification books or other materials onboard the boats for the tourist to read to have initial ideas on the dos and don'ts of activities engaged in the marine environment.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the tour operators are fully aware of environmental practices and COCs. The findings showed that the tour operators play an essential role in educating the tourists and acting as role models to protect the environment. The roles of tour operators are essential in ensuring the implementation of COC as they deal directly with visitors and the marine environment. As shown in this study, tour operators adhere to the COC responsibly and comply with International regulations in sustaining the environment. However, some tour operators are not aware of the importance of the mission statement and agreement that may increase the awareness amongst the tourists.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Collaboration and partnership amongst key stakeholders, namely, Marine Park Department, Fisheries Department, tour operators and visitors, will benefit the sustainability of the environment and resources for the tourism industry.

- Travel and tourism industry needs to take holistic approach that embraces human wholeness and the natural environment in which people live. There is a need to have full integration in society and the economy, and advocates environmental protection as well as travel and tourism sustainable development. CSR is one tool for tourism development in developing countries.
- Travel and tourism firms should make effort to increase their commitment to social responsibility practices such as community projects and environmental protection in order to enhance peaceful and cordial relationship with the inhabitants.
- Management of travel and tourism firms should try as much as possible to be proactive in their approach to social responsibility issues then being reactive in order to avoid business distraction from their host communities.

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