

Paper 3: Partnerships for Developing Tourism and Protecting the Environment in East Timor

An address by

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Abstract

Tourism has the potential to be the focus for the reconstruction of East Timor. If East Timor is not to be an aid dependent nation in the future, it must develop sustainable industries such as tourism. Tourism draws on many economic sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing and has the potential to employ many East Timorese. What is needed is to develop a tourism industry that draws on international best practice to create an industry that is truly sustainable both environmentally and culturally.

Tourism in East Timor is seen as a partnership between communities, investors, foreign specialists and of course international visitors. East Timor is unlike many other Asian tourism destinations. It has spectacular mountains and rainforests, wide clean unspoilt beaches, surf, reefs and a rich culture. Most importantly, it does not have large populations that so often spoil many destinations in Asia. The objective for the future government is to ensure that the benefits of tourism are received without the negatives.

In planning for the future development of tourism in East Timor there are three primary goals:

- *to develop true partnership between investors, international tourists and the East Timorese community at all levels;*
- *to deliver significant benefits to the local community such as employment and ownership;*
- *to base tourism on the sustainability of East Timor's environment and culture.*

Therefore, environmental protection is seen as an essential element of the tourism effort. This ranges from conservation and presentation of natural and culturally significant sites through to responding to the challenges of land degradation, waste disposal and pollution of the air and waterways. While East Timor's environmental quality is currently high; it is recognised that complacency may result in significant problems in the future.

The East Timorese community recognises their limited capacity and technical expertise to respond to these developmental challenges and invites the international community to become partners in reconstructing the nation, sustainably for mutual benefit.

Introduction

From the start, CNRT has seen tourism as being an integral part of East Timor's future. I am pleased to say that the East Timorese community also shares this vision. We see tourism as:

- a rationale for protecting our natural environments;
- a rationale for reinvigorating our traditions;
- a major source of employment;
- a source of foreign exchange;
- a source of investment funds to aid with the development of our nation; and most importantly
- a focus for sustainable development in all industry sectors.

We see tourism as one of the few areas of economic activity that can result in East Timor not remaining an aid-dependent nation. Above all else, this is our objective.

However, we are well aware of the challenges that tourism presents. We know that there exists fierce competition, that unplanned tourism development can bring unwanted impacts and that a vibrant tourism industry relies on a modern, dynamic and co-ordinated range of industry sectors. We are under no illusion that we can do it alone. We need partnerships to develop tourism and make it sustainable. These partnerships are needed between governments, between tourism sectors, between communities and between entrepreneurs, horizontally and vertically

Our tourism strengths and weaknesses

The twenty-five years of Indonesian rule and events of 1999 have placed East Timor in a position of tourism weakness, yet with unique opportunities. We are short on business acumen, we lack necessary tourism infrastructure, we lack investment capital, and we lack experience with tourism generally.

But we do have sun and surf, quality reefs and other marine resources and rainforests that stretch from mountains to the coast. We have clean sandy beaches. We have spectacular mountain scenery. We have traditional rural landscapes. We have a distinctive cultural heritage that blends indigenous elements and Portuguese components, also touched by Japanese and Indonesian influences.

We are also central to south-east Asian markets, and we are known, but of course, not as a tourism destination.

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Already, backpackers are arriving and there is the existing international, but local market, of the United Nations transition authority. We have an established road network and existing flights from Darwin and Singapore. International car hire agencies exist along with simple accommodation and it is safe to visit.

What remains lacking is a major hotel establishment and locations to cater for a significant influx of tourists. We seek to plan for these in a progressive fashion, but recognise that we can not put the planning and implementation off.

What I am saying is that tourism in East Timor is beginning to happen. My country has the natural, cultural and positional advantages to develop a successful tourism sector, with help. What we offer the world and investors is an almost clean slate in terms of specific tourism infrastructure, but we do have untapped natural and cultural resources, and a people who are prepared to invest their time, labour and expertise in developing a sustainable tourism future.

A vision for tourism

I invite this audience to shed their perceptions of East Timor as it is today and think what it might be. Imagine a tourism destination in south east Asia that is clean and green; a destination that is not over-populated; a destination where the local community plays a significant part in providing services and managing tourism infrastructure and assets. A destination where overseas investment and expertise is balanced, so that all stakeholders benefit. Imagine a destination that is unlike any other in the region, a destination that does not compete with existing areas, but offers an alternative. We believe this is possible.

The key aspect of this vision is that tourism in East Timor must be sustainable. I mean by this, that tourism must protect and enhance its natural and cultural assets. It must respect the environment and provide economic rewards to investors and real benefits to local communities and the nation as a whole. It must provide experiences to clients that are enjoyable and value for money.

We imagine this can be achieved by developing quality, community-based product in locations around the country, supported by more capital intensive development in our major centres. In this sense, we envisage a dual approach to tourism investment and development. Tourism attractions, the places where tourists will visit, will be strongly influenced by local community aspirations, planning and investment. Necessarily, the feeder locations, the major towns of East Timor, will be, at least initially, more influenced by an overseas investor presence. Clearly, these two areas of tourism activity will need to merge. It is here that we seek partnerships at all levels.

What we need

To achieve this vision for tourism we need policies to give confidence to investors and our communities that tourism will be sustainable. Planning is needed from the national level through to the community. Institutions need to be established and developed to manage the tourism effort. The capacity of the East Timorese community to respond to tourism challenges needs to be increased, and of course we need investment capital. However, most importantly, we need to begin the journey towards a sustainable tourism future, **now**.

We see these elements as not being one off events, but rather a cyclical process as tourism develops. Policies,

plans, investment and development will need to be reconsidered as our partners and we learn from our successes and hopefully only a few failures. We invite the world to be part of this vision.

The environmental link

Planning for tourism needs to fulfill two purposes:

1. to ensure the effective and efficient development of tourism product and related support services, and
2. to ensure economic, social and environmental goals are achieved, sustainably.

This second purpose means minimizing detrimental impacts and maximizing the benefits. It is partly for this reason that the CNRT has initially placed the environment, with tourism. Our vision for tourism relies on quality environments, both natural and constructed. While we recognize that environmental protection is an area of community concern and for government co-ordination in its own right, we consider that in the initial stage of East Timor's reconstruction that environmental protection will benefit from being linked with an area of economic activity.

Conservation and presentation

This leads naturally to the protection of our valuable natural and cultural environments. We envisage that a series of national parks will be established with community support and involvement. These, we would seek to be listed as world heritage areas to gain immediate international recognition and support for the conservation initiative. However, in the last 25 years we have fallen well behind our neighbours in even taking stock of what constitutes our native forests and other natural environments. Our biological and geophysical expertise and capability is limited. We will need assistance to inventory our resources and plan for their effective management and presentation to residents and visitors.

Equally, we have a rich cultural and social heritage to preserve and present. This commences well before Portuguese colonization and expressed in rock art. The Portuguese occupied East Timor for 450 years and left stately buildings and forts. The Indonesian time was one of armed and social resistance, evidence of these and more recent events unfortunately exist, along with a rich oral history to be recorded as part of our emergence as a nation. We will need anthropologists, archaeologists and historians to reconstruct the history of East Timor and ensure that remaining evidence of times past are protected. Of course, we are a living culture, but our occupation by foreigners and our focus on subsistence and survival has meant that many of our traditions have suffered a lapse in practice. We will need programs to achieve cultural enrichment.

Environmental protection

The achievement of the objectives inferred by these comments will of course contribute to tourism. What is equally important for our people and visitors is the quality of our environment generally. Maintaining the quality of our air, marine and fresh water resources is vital. This leads to consideration of waste disposal, land use and all of the other areas addressed by environmental protection agencies.

Again, our technical expertise in these areas is limited and our systems to handle pollution, in all its forms, from human waste and solid waste to hazardous waste and effluent material are non-existent or poorly developed. Yes, we need help in this area as well.

Just managing our, and UNTAETs, current domestic garbage output is a problem right now. Liquid waste is being generated! How do we dispose of it? Reconstruction of East Timor requires pole timbers. The hills around Dilli are being rapidly cleared. How do we mobilise reforestation for timber and firewood? Indonesia's policy of consolidating rural populations has resulted in clearing of native forests and intensive farming of extreme slopes. How do we redirect agriculture practice to avoid watching valuable topsoil ending in the ocean to destroy our marine resources? Issues such as these exemplify the changes that have occurred over the past decades and are now being expressed in degrading landscapes, waterways and ocean systems.

A healthy environment is essential to the health of our community, and equally important to a tourism industry. I fear that unless such issues are addressed now, many of our resources will be spent on reactionary works to remedy past excesses and those of today. Clearly, we will need to employ the experience of many government and industry sectors to address these matters.

Conclusion

I opened this address by talking about partnerships. We see our immediate future as being reliant on them. I see partnerships as being equitable, where partners rely on each other, and share the risks and rewards of the partnership. In many areas of the partnership, contribution may not be equal, but collectively, there is equality. In the case of East Timor, we see Governments, industry, investors and communities forming partnerships, vertically and laterally, to develop sustainable tourism and to address environmental concerns. I look forward to being part of formalising partnerships with members of this audience in the future.

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