

SECTION 3

Summary of
Outcomes and Recommendations
from the Symposium

Identification of priorities for scientific research and conservation activities that will boost the quality and sustainability of tourism activities.

Scientific research

The activities of conducting research, gathering information, creating focus groups, examining national market trends, etc., while also beginning the task of trying to package tourism products, should be a simultaneous rather than sequential process. Although final products cannot be produced before the necessary information is gathered, constant collaborative feedback among researchers, information gatherers and market specialists will speed up the process and enhance the quality of the final product.

Specific research activities include:

- Conduct research that will make the sites attractive for tourists, e.g. archaeological excavations, work on interesting and endangered species, etc. The initial focus of this research should be the TCR heritage routes. Because this kind of research does not always coincide with researchers' priorities, the research activities must be made attractive to both the researchers and the tourists.
- Carry out frequent site- and time-specific research to determine environmental and cultural impact and monitor carrying capacity.
- Create a geographic information system (GIS) database with information regarding where the infrastructure, resources and hotels should be, taking into account the carrying capacity of each specific area.
- Conduct site-specific benchmark studies of the current status of natural and cultural resources and the trends driving projected changes in the existing systems. These studies should provide the baseline data upon which any changes are measured through monitoring activities.
- Quantify the economic and environmental impact of existing and projected tourism activities in a variety of settings (urban, rural, large and small cities, increase in cruise ships, etc.)
- Establish a monitoring program (Panamanian Monitoring Group) to measure impact of tourism activities on the country's nature, culture and health, and recommend corrective actions, mitigating processes and mitigating technologies as needed. The need for monitoring and assessment should be internalized while the TCR plan is being developed.
- Conduct research on emerging diseases and protection of tourists' health (Gorgas Memorial Hospital is currently conducting some research in this area).

- Standardize and index available databases containing biological and cultural information about different sites, and have these databases available on the Internet.
- Provide for active research and a national academic structure for archeology. Legal aspects of protection of archeological sites need to be enhanced. Panama's archeological tourist potential can be assessed by gathering a group of collaborators in the cultural field (a university, a country with a well-established program).
- Create links with foreign colleagues (Australia, US, Canada) to conduct out-of-country business research on the tourism appeal of Panama. Business research is also required to monitor local and national visitor flows to determine the impact of tourism.
- Conduct marketing research in a broad sense, to find out about the socio-economic levels of tourists who are likely to come, where people are likely to go (which routes they would chose), what impacts they are likely to have, etc.
- Collect information pertaining to the feasibility of the TCR heritage routes, such as access, potable water, sanitary facilities, food service, etc.
- Train a cadre of high-quality interpreters or experts capable of digesting and transmitting the scientific information to the tourist. Additional investments in professional training and technical / business education are also integral.
- Develop a database on the relationship between the natural environment and the urban environment that will take place as a result of the TCR initiative.
- Conduct research activities and organize contests to examine the role of the Canal in the 21st Century, engaging local and international experts, as well as the hotel industry.

Conservation activities

- Create a tourist fee-based trust for the conservation of protected areas, to provide funds to government agencies responsible for natural resources management, conservation NGOs and other community development bodies, and communities living in or around protected areas.
- Include protected area managers and local people in shaping the goals and projects and in creating simple, effective and realistic indicators which they will be empowered to monitor. Local councils could participate in this effort.
- Develop or strengthen environmental education activities to make Panamanians more aware of their natural heritage and the need for protection of their natural resources.
- Establish / strengthen watershed management programs in the Panama Canal area.
- Establish more effective programs of sewage treatment, garbage collection, recycling and waste disposal.
- Set up a financial mechanism to compensate local communities for opportunities that will be lost by the change in the use of natural resources. Incentives need to be provided to motivate communities to preserve rather than to poach. For sustainability to occur, people must experience an improvement in the quality of their lives.
- Make monitoring, closely linked to protection of archaeological or natural sites, a top priority. This is very expensive and requires trained personnel. Panama must make alliances with

academic and research institutions, and in cases where the country does not have the professional infrastructure or funding, partnerships with international institutions will be required. Integration of local and international organizations needs to be planned from outset. City of Knowledge could play a role.

Development of short-term and long-term policy guidelines to maximize the sustainable use of natural and cultural resources for social and economic purposes through sustainable heritage tourism that emphasizes excellence of experience-management.

Policy guidelines are needed to correct any market failures in the area of sustainable heritage tourism and natural resources management, and to lead the TCR plan towards activities that are compatible with both private and social interests.

- Integrate the TCR Alliance with IPAT's mission and future plans, so as to make them compatible and not competing efforts for the sustainable heritage tourism of Panama. IPAT's current restructuring and revision of its organic law represents a big opportunity in this respect.
- Broaden IPAT's Board to reflect all sectors of the TCR initiative, including indigenous communities, conservation and research representatives, as well as industry and government stakeholders.
- Give tourism a cabinet-level post. If tourism is to become the largest industry, then tourism representation should be upgraded in the government's decision-making structure.
- Incorporate the TCR concept into the regulation of the national law on the environment, particularly into the composition of its councils.
- Integrate TCR principles with ANAM's environmental impact assessment process to ensure that hotels that have signed on to the process will set the standards for others.
- Involve local communities from the beginning in feasibility studies and design stages of tourism activities, and not once the project is ready to be implemented.
- Develop a code of ethics or standard of practices that guard the privacy and autonomy of local communities. Organizations must commit to standards to receive economic incentives.
- Provide incentives for hotels and tour operators to comply with carrying capacity regulations (accreditation, special designation).
- Include the participation of key stakeholders by coordinating communication across levels. Foster an environment where all professional groups can share their views and values.
- Create, involve and pay for the changes required in Panama's intellectual infrastructure (training of guides and other needed professionals i.e. archaeologists). Universities and City of Knowledge could play an active role in this.

- Establish comprehensible and transparent mechanisms for monitoring, accountability, and compliance.
- Follow the principles of adaptive management, the notion that every perturbation is an experiment for which scientific principles of research should be applied, frequently collecting data and requesting feedback from scientists and the conservation community that will be incorporated by managers.
- Focus consistently and relentlessly on quality. Heritage tourism products must attract and capture attention and create a memorable experience that is enjoyable and entertaining, relevant to participants' lives, organized, logical and comprehensible. This type of experience must also be a dynamic process, incorporating the future as well as the past.
- Establish milestones to be achieved, in all areas of the TCR alliance. Particularly at the level of infrastructure, a master plan and strategic thinking are needed, making the appropriate distinctions between urban and rural development strategies.
- Initiate a signature infrastructure project in Panama, utilizing the concept of public science to integrate signature architectural projects with ecological tourism and sustainability.
- Integrate infrastructure needs with the interests of the Panamanian citizenry and the interests of the tourism industry. The establishment of an international multidisciplinary team of experts to synthesize these interests is recommended.
- Embrace the Canal as the country's major infrastructure investment, both as a tourist facility and as a port and cargo industrial facility.
- Improve and develop decentralized accommodations along the Canal, utilizing a high degree of local involvement.
- Explore the possibility of collaboration with Costa Rica to market these two countries' tourism products together, given current globalization and integration trends. La Amistad National Park could provide a good starting point in this respect.

**Establishment of transfer mechanisms
for research results and economic benefits among scientific
and conservation institutions, the tourism and hotel industry,
local communities and other relevant sectors
of the host country's economy.**

The establishment of these transfer mechanisms will assist in transforming heritage tourism into an alternative pivotal force that will drive Panamanian development.

- Distribute the conference Report to representatives of all Panamanian sectors involved or interested in the TCR Plan, particularly those who were unable to attend the conference.
- Include information on sustainable tourism, conservation of natural and cultural resources, and the value of scientific research in education programs at all levels in order to generate receptive attitudes from an early age. Education can become the driver that will shape the process of transfer of information.
- Produce publications in Spanish for lay audiences that communicate research results and enable people to understand and appreciate the value of research and conservation.
- Develop a national public relations campaign on TCR and strengthen the local market, so that Panamanians get involved and learn to appreciate their own resources and architecture.
- Get products out immediately, including brochures, media products and web sites, recognizing the leveraging of the year 2000 media event and its power to promote a strong and positive image of Panama. Be pro-active with the press: lead them, do not let them lead you.
- Establish bilateral relationships that operationalize the TCR alliance, among the three TCR sectors and the local and indigenous communities, utilizing a bottom-up approach.
- Establish an entity that will provide stability and continuity for the process of transferring research results among sectors, such as a sustainable tourism research council, along the lines of the CRC in Australia. This council would encompass the academic community, government, the private sector and local communities, and would focus on both content and method research. City of Knowledge could play a role, as well as various Panamanian universities.
- Create local assemblies with governments and communities, where work and investment opportunities in the areas of sustainable tourism could be discussed, facilitating coordination and management among different entities. Through these assemblies, community leaders could then understand the costs and benefits of tourism and can play an active role.
- Establish within universities, advisory boards comprised of industry representatives, who will have input into how the research agendas are set.

- Create a national ecotourism association to frequently gather hotel owners and managers, other members of the private sector, local communities, government natural resources agencies, government tourism agencies, and academics/scientists.
- Provide training to young Panamanians (research assistants, guides) that have a keen interest in natural history so that they can communicate the research results to hotel managers or groups of tourists. A number of these guides should be ready to interact with visitors by the time of the Canal turnover. Establish a system that provides licenses to guides. Senior scientists should also participate in the transfer process.
- Provide multiple language training, so that Panamanians can communicate their information to a variety of tourists.
- Create a setting for the public review/assessment of the data generated by the monitoring activities, such as an annual conference on “The State of the Panamanian Environment” to review, reassess and advise on research monitoring items. Those people in charge of the monitoring process would review what they have learned and re-assess the program of action for the coming year, while generating a valuable collection of data available to a general audience.
- Use interpretive centers to showcase monitoring activities. Monitoring can be highlighted as one aspect of environmental interpretation. Tourist audiences can thereby be made to feel they are participating as part of a solution. Being open about monitoring helps to keep the process transparent. City of Knowledge could create and/or manage some of the interpretive centers.

CONCLUDING NOTES

The time frame for implementing the TCR plan is highly ambitious. While there is no doubt that a long time will be needed to develop the plan as it has been discussed and recommended throughout the conference, it is also important to realize that the Canal turnover is an enormous opportunity to seize a historic momentum in Panama. Major events are opportunities that should not be missed. At the end of 1999, there will be thousands of people from cable and network channels all over the world covering this event, and of course the TCR plan will not be completed by then. Thus, it is advisable to identify some of the short-term recommendations for development provided in this report which could be advanced within the next year and highlighted by the time of the Canal turnover.

At the end of the conference, it was clear that the TCR plan is about synergy and reciprocity of benefits among the tourism, conservation and research sectors of Panama. In the first day of the conference, Panama La Vieja had been mentioned with an emotional appeal to investors to commit themselves to preserving this jewel of Panama's heritage for future generations and revitalizing this point of entry to one of the major heritage routes of Panama, Camino Real. By the last day of the conference, Panama La Vieja had found a sponsor in Bristol Hotel, which embraced the TCR platform by joining efforts with the Government of Panama to conserve the historical ruins of the first Spanish city built on the Pacific shore of the Americas. Bristol Hotel, part of the Rosewood Hotels and Resorts Company, will support archeological programs to document the rich history of the area for many years and will pursue Panama La Vieja's designation as an UNESCO World Heritage site. The city of Panama was the gate to a new world for past explorers. Now, it will be the gate for future tourists to Panama.

The TCR philosophy for the development of Panama's leisure tourism industry seeks to make this country the first in the world to achieve a tourism concept in a broad sense, providing and stimulating development, catalyzing policy at the national and local levels, and aligning tourism to an active promotion of conservation that will leave many benefits for Panama. One of the benefits left in Panama from this the conference was an outstanding team of mostly young architects from Panama, Europe, and the US, lead by architect Frank Gehry. This team will work together to design new projects and promote infrastructure works particularly in the areas that will be reverted with the reflagging of the Canal. These activities will be needed as the next step in transforming Panama into an important destination for leisure tourism.

From his many trips to Panama, Gehry was very conscious of the need to connect Panamanian architects to the international architectural scene. Thus, with the creation of the group ASAP, "The

Architects' Strategic Alliance for Panama”, a dialogue will be established that will enrich both the Panamanian and foreign architects. Although in most cases where progress is strongly in motion architecture inevitably takes a back seat to development, Panama wants to change that perception. ASAP will help, as needed, to make the TCR vision become a reality.

Dr. Nicolas Ardito Barletta, head of the Interoceanic Region Authority (ARI), made the final major announcement of the conference. Panama would like to promote the San Lorenzo/Fort Sherman project as a blueprint for future TCR partnerships. A US military base used for military training for many decades, Fort Sherman will revert to Panama in June of 1999. ARI will ask the assistance of the newly formed alliance of architects to develop a master plan that would transform Fort Sherman into a heritage tourism destination, within the broad context of the World Heritage cultural site (*Fuerte San Lorenzo*) and the new protected area of San Lorenzo. The project's strategic proximity to the Canal and the city of Colon greatly enhances its promise to deliver a high profile model of how tourism, conservation and research can work together to the benefit of both the Panamanian people and the international community.