

TCR STRATEGIC ALLIANCE TOURISM-CONSERVATION-RESEARCH

A Report from the Conference on

“HERITAGE TOURISM FOR THE NEXT MILLENNIUM”

And its Symposium on

**“THE CHALLENGE OF EXPERIENCE-MANAGEMENT:
LINKING QUALITY WITH SUSTAINABILITY”**

Panama City, Panama
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Conference Coordinator:
Dr. Hana Ayala

Co-organizers:
Panama Tourism Bureau
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American Association for the Advancement of Science
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Edited by:
Marina S. Ratchford, AAAS

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PREFACE

Dr. Hana Ayala*

Conference Coordinator and Consultant to the Government of Panama

International tourism and international ecotourism are merging, with profound implications for engaging major hospitality corporations with advancing sustainable development worldwide. The quality of a destination's natural and cultural attractions and the quality of the experience of these attractions are now the key factors that motivate international leisure travel and define the competitive strength of the tourism product. This megatrend supplies powerful business reasons for the international tourism and hotel industry to become a strong proponent of conservation worldwide, by developing "ecotourism" opportunities and experiences that comprise both environmental and cultural aspects of a destination. In turn, each country that embraces the economic potential of heritage tourism is courting an unprecedented opportunity for harnessing the business interests of this large industry to transform conservation and scientific research into pivotal economic forces that both protect and stimulate investment. But only if sustainable resource management is brought as a financial incentive and an employment opportunity into the tourist trade can the selling of heritage experiences meet the highest standards of product quality while catalyzing economies that will prosper on sustainability. Developing all heritage-focused tourism as ecotourism is hard-nosed economics, which treats visitor volume as a resource for sustainable development and which conforms as much to the interests of investors as to those of destinations. *Sustainable heritage tourism* may well be the most momentous and globally meaningful economic opportunity to arise at the threshold of the new millennium.

* Hana Ayala, Ph.D., is president of EcoResorts International—Research & Development, based in Irvine, California

INTRODUCTION

Marina Sansostri Ratchford
Latin America and the Caribbean Project
American Association for the Advancement of Science

This report is a compilation of the keynote presentations at and working group results from the conference on “Heritage Tourism for the Next Millennium” and its symposium on “The Challenge of Experience-Management: Linking Quality with Sustainability,” seeking to highlight both the theoretical and practical aspects of the conference and symposium. These events took place December 2-4, 1998, at the Miramar Inter-Continental Hotel in Panama City, Republic of Panama, launching the flagship Tourism-Conservation-Research (TCR) strategic alliance for the Republic of Panama. The TCR alliance will seek to integrate these key sectors of the economy in a way that can provide sustainable development benefits for the whole country. New development strategies such as the TCR alliance are of timely importance for Panama as the country seeks to identify alternative sources of income that will compensate for the estimated \$300 million in annual economic impact that will be lost as a result of the withdrawal of US civilians and military forces at the end of 1999. The TCR initiative could also potentially become a model for the development strategies of other countries of the region and other parts of the world for the 21st century.

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) produced this report in collaboration with conference co-organizers, chairs and rapporteurs. The report has been structured in three sections. Section 1 is comprised of the presentations of the first day of the conference, including a description of the components of the TCR formula and several speeches by the President of the Republic of Panama, Dr. Ernesto Perez Balladares, and Panamanian entrepreneurs who expressed their concrete commitment to develop and implement the TCR concept. Although simultaneous translation was provided throughout the conference, all presentations in this report are included in the original language in which they were delivered, with exceptions noted. Section 1 closes with the introduction of the Executive Decree No. 327 that creates the Tourism-Conservation-Research Strategic Alliance Committee as an organism ascribed to the National Council for Sustainable Development.

Sections 2 and 3 of this report deal specifically with the proceedings of the symposium. This symposium was structured around three working groups: “Engaging Experience-Management with Natural and Cultural Resource Management”; “Infrastructure as a Tool for Invigorating the Value of Natural and Cultural Heritage”; and “The Art of Heritage Interpretation”. Each of these groups was composed of participants with a wide range of specialties and backgrounds, which led

to very productive sessions, some expected differences in opinions, and the discussion of sensible recommendations. It is important to note that a diverse collection of scientists, conservationists, architects, planners, and tourism industry representatives in the three working groups independently stressed the need to involve local communities in the TCR process from the very beginning and to ensure that benefits flow back to local communities.

Section 2 of this document includes keynote presentations from each of the TCR sectors, a presentation on global efforts to incorporate knowledge into sustainable tourism, a presentation on the economic aspects of the TCR alliance, and a summary of the discussions and recommendations that emanated from each working group. These discussions were guided by a series of thematic and general questions posed to each group.

Section 3 summarizes the final outcome of the symposium's three objectives. These objectives sought to identify priorities for scientific research and conservation activities that will boost sustainable tourism in Panama; develop policy guidelines to maximize the sustainability of the TCR concept; and establish transfer mechanisms of sustainable tourism benefits among relevant sectors of the economy. Following Section 3, some concluding notes are offered.

As the integration of tourism, conservation and scientific research continues to provide reciprocal benefits in Panama, it is hoped that Latin American and Caribbean countries, as well as other regions of the world whose economies heavily depend on the tourism industry, can use the recommendations and findings of this report to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development goals for the 21st century.