**Maldives: Ecotourism Tourism**

**How Environmental Impacts Are Minimised**



Tourism groups are trying to promote eco tourism to sustain the environmental attractions of the Maldives. The coral reefs are a big part of what the tourism companies want to protect because it is one of the biggest attractions of the Maldives. For example, Naturetrek Wildlife Holidays only takes a maximum of 16 people on a small chartered ship and is led by a marine biologist and naturalist Dr Chas Anderson. They’re focus is only on whale watching and wildlife and smaller tour groups can greatly minimise their impact on the environment and on the coral reefs.  Their plan for minimizing environmental impacts while still giving a unique tourist opportunity is described by this “All tourism has an impact on local communities, wildlife and habitats of the host country. To maximise the positive effects of Naturetrek tours, where possible we take small groups, use locally owned accommodation and provide employment for local people. We also commit to long-term plans, which help local communities protect their environment.”

The Government is also very strict in saying that for each island developed into a resort, one island must be left as a reserve. Currently, 88 of the 1190 islands are resorts, but it is expected that within 20 years, resort islands will grow to about 20% of the Maldivian islands. The Tourism Ministry has also tried to reduce the number of people on a resort island by only allowing 2 storey high resorts and limiting the building space to 20% of the land area.

Resorts are also trying to reduce their footprint, such as the Taj Exotica Resort & Spa on Emboodhu Finolhu Island. The resort itself has said “We’ve started the process by accessing its energy efficiency, water management, air quality and handling of chemicals.” Things they’ve done so far include a hot water system that reduces the use of electricity and diesel fuel and they say “This is expected to save 109,500 litres of diesel every year.” A rain harvesting system which collects 896,000 litres per year has also been installed and recycling of metals and other materials is also being done. To furthermore reduce the damage, they’ve also started planting endemic species like Jade Tree, Sea Hibiscus and Malikuruva Rose so that no watering is needed. This will save them a further 10,000 litres of water per day so that all of this all reduces their damage on the environment.

The Maldives have also been given money for aiding them in becoming more sustainable and protecting their coral reefs. The World Bank has given US$13.5 million to help the Government of Maldives to “effectively manage environmental risks to fragile coral reefs and other marine habitats.” The Environmental Management Project has been set up to help the government control the damage to reefs and marine life from the increasing amount of waste and climate change. Richard Damania, the senior environmental economist and task leader for the project says “The Maldives faces daunting environmental risks that threaten to undermine its economic achievements.  The country’s coral reefs which protect it from storm surges and serve as the main asset of the tourism-driven economy are in danger of being damaged or destroyed from poorly handled waste disposal methods. The project aims to counter these risks by improving solid waste management and building capacity to strengthen incentives for better environmental administration.”

The Maldives already have very big plans for the future in term of sustainability as they plan to be carbon neutral by 2020. The president Mohamed Nasheed has said “Creating a carbon neutral economy helps combat climate change, enhances our energy security and safeguards our future development and prosperity. If the Maldives becomes carbon neutral, we believe other countries will want to do the same.” This helps sustain many aspects of the attraction of the Maldives which will help sustain its tourism based economy and many environmentally friendly people may want to visit the Maldives for a holiday because the Maldives being carbon neutral will sound very attractive.