Greetings!

Ecotourism best practices: A case study of Serena Beach Hotel & Spa

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines ecotourism as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education. Accommodation facilities have the responsibility of ensuring that the tourism activities that are carried out within its premises are sustainable. This can be achieved through effective implementation and monitoring of “green operations” within a facility.

This week’s Eco-byte shares an informative case study on Serena Beach Hotel & Spa (SBHS) on their ecotourism best practices, in particular, their two flagship projects on conservation which contribute in protecting the sensitive marine habitat. Just recently, the hotel was awarded a Gold Eco-rating by Ecotourism Kenya, joining a growing number of notable facilities with excellent and replicable best practices in responsible tourism.

Serena Beach Hotel & Spa (SBHS) is located on Shanzu Beach in the Coast region approximately 30 kilometers from Mombasa City. The facility is guided by the Serena Hotels corporate environmental statement which is committed to protecting the environment, monitoring the interests of the local population, practicing a responsible attitude towards resource use and conservation of protected areas. Guests and staff are engaged in various conservation projects including; tree planting, beach clean-up, turtle and butterfly conservation. For this article, the focus will be on the turtle and butterfly conservation projects.

SBHS runs a turtle conservation project which was launched back in 1993. This initiative was established as a turtle nest protection program where turtle eggs on the North end of the beach front of SBHS are protected and hatched. In addition, exposed nest sites found within these habitats are brought to the hotel for conservation. In order to protect the turtle eggs from threats and predators such as crabs, cats, birds, mongoose and humans, hatching cages made of wood and encased with light-gauge mesh are placed on the beach lawn within the SBHS property. It is
monitored 24 hours in order to protect the eggs, detect early hatching and proper maintenance of these cages.

Image 1: Turtle hatcheries

The hotel has engaged a conservation naturalist who monitors and spearheads the initiative. Since inception of this project; 408 turtle nests have been protected. This has resulted in the protection of various species of turtles including Green turtles, Hawksbills, and Olive Ridley. Approximately 52,524 eggs have been secured and 43,691 turtle hatchlings released with a 95% success rate.

Turtles face serious threats from human activities such as construction of walls along beaches and trampling on the ground as a result of mass tourism. To enhance turtle conservation, the hotel runs a community participatory program. Through this program, locals are rewarded with cash for nests reporting and protection. The facility also buys turtle eggs from the locals at KSh. 50 and also encourages them to conserve turtles. Further, SBHS runs an educational and awareness program on turtle and butterfly conservation for its guests through weekly lectures. In addition, it forms part of the Kenya Wildlife Service Turtle Protection Coordination Committee.

Guests and staff are engaged during the turtle incubation process under the supervision of the naturalist. They are notified in advance of hatchings and hatching ceremonies are held for the guests to experience baby turtles release to the ocean hence providing an opportunity to understand more about the species.
Another conservation initiative run by SBHS is the Butterfly Conservation Park project which serves as an environmental information and sensitization hub for visitors. Since establishment in 2003, over 7000 butterflies have been hatched. This park is mainly visited by students, particularly from higher learning institutions for awareness creation and to learn more about the different species of butterflies, their threats and conservation. It also provides acts as a research hub for both local and international students. Currently, there are 67 butterfly species recorded at the park.
Aside from the butterfly and turtle conservation projects, SBHS also engages in other notable initiatives. The facility participates in daily in-house beach clean-up exercises. Regular beach clean-up activities are also conducted in partnership with different stakeholders within the County and Kenya Wildlife Service on a monthly basis. Notably, the hotel is in partnership with Ocean Sole - a flip flop recycling company that transforms discarded flip flops found on the beach coastline into animal artefacts as a waste management practice. The partnership is in sea turtle & butterfly conservation project, beach clean ups and in training on conservation in local schools. In addition, there is an information booth set up by the company at the hotel where they create conservation awareness to guests and showcase their recycled products for sale.

SBHS is working on involving as many stakeholders as possible to raise awareness and increase impact on marine conservation. Ecotourism Kenya highly commends their efforts and congratulates the SBHS team on attaining Gold Eco-rating Certification!