

# PACIFIC AREA TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

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13th ANNUAL WORKSHOP

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Kyoto

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### Tourism Builds a Better Environment

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PACIFIC AREA TRAVEL ASSOCIATION  
13th ANNUAL WORKSHOP  
TOURISM BUILDS A BETTER ENVIRONMENT  
Kyoto, Japan, February 22, 1973

"TOURISM -- A WAY TO CLEAN UP THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT"

By

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Water, water, everywhere and not a drop to drink . . . or swim in, admire, sail over, dive under, snorkel in -- or even flush with! Is this where we are headed? How ironic that one of the most basic ingredients of life, one of the most universal factors in any vocation or vacation involving a beach, a boat, a fish, an island or even a hotel -- water -- should be a subject of concern. How anachronistic to have a "water quality problem" in an era of such technological achievements in hydrology as the Aswan Dam, reverse osmosis, flash vacuum desalination, closed system sewage recycling, river basin modeling and pollution monitoring by remote sensing.

But water IS becoming a serious problem in many areas -- in some a badly managed, expensive resource -- in places foul and evil, bearing dead and dying organisms, silt, pesticides, oil, chemical wastes and the cast-off plastic, wood, metal, paper and glass floatables of an ever burgeoning, ever more careless, more affluent, urbanized society with a "throwaway", "out of sight, out of mind" attitude.

Water is still everywhere, but its quality is truly threatened, not just in older, industrialized, urbanized areas served by overworked, over-polluted rivers and harbors, but even in idyllic, isolated islands, remote

exotic places, and rural developing nations as well. Worldwide, the pressure mounts from modern chemistry, population, political oversight, bad planning, environmental mismanagement, administrative neglect, and misapplied technology.

Few geographical areas are exempt -- some locations and ecosystems are more susceptible to permanent damage -- some industries are especially careless and deserve censure and control -- some are especially vulnerable and need to organize and fight back. Tourism, as an industry, is in this latter category -- it is highly vulnerable and is beginning to realize its dependency on a quality environment, including water.

Resort development, travel, leisure time activity, all aspects of the tourism industry are especially dependent upon living, functioning natural environmental systems -- a fundamental ingredient of which is water, whether viewed as an amenity, a habitat, a commodity, or a medium of energy and nutrient exchange within a "system" and between systems. These functioning natural related systems, within which man has built his farms, cities, hotels, industries and marinas, are flexible only to a degree. Only experience and research can reveal what types of environmental stresses and pollution pressures are tolerable, or intolerable, in terms of their prejudicial effect upon other parts of the natural system, e. g., upon bird life, beaches, coral reefs, or even weather. Only experience and research can tell us what the stresses are doing to that part of the several related systems involving you -- beaches, marinas, sport fishing grounds, wilderness areas, wildlife and even

the social systems within which you carry on business. Remember water is a medium which links biological systems together.

What can experience and research tell us about this now - today? What do we know now about the specific types of pollution stresses which adversely affect the water quality and the travel-leisure time industry? Certainly, if we understand the typology and pathology of the growing pollution disease, as it affects the travel industry, we will be better able to devise plans and action programs leading to a cure and, even better, be able to optimize tourism as a way to clean up and, I would add, maintain the environment quality at a level compatible with industry requirements which are, or should be, very high.

There are four identifiable, nearly universal activities derived from the growth and development process of the 1970s which impinge upon and affect water quality -- especially coastal water quality -- and all are directly susceptible to influence by the tourism industry. All four (siltation, chemical and organic waste disposal and habitat destruction) produce stress factors which overload the aquatic environment like overbooking a hotel or an airplane -- at low levels only efficiency and quality drop, at high levels the margin of safety narrows. What are these sources of environmental stress that reduce water quality? (lights out)

First, there is the slow insidious pressure upon living marine organisms from silt and sediment caused by soil erosion and coastal dredging. We continue to strip increasing amounts of vegetation from hillsides, building condominiums, housing projects, and paving more and more

roads, causing spectacular increases in the volume of runoff which, with its sediment load, ends up in our coastal waters creating murky conditions, killing plants and organisms, and unbalancing the systems. Likewise, fine sediments from excessive and improper hydraulic dredging have a similar effect -- killing reefs, cutting off sunlight from marine plants which then die, leaving coastal areas cloudy, murky, lifeless zones. The combined result is a kind of aquatic "smog", unpleasant to visit and deadly for living organisms.

Second, there is a growing tendency to use the sea for urban and industrial waste disposal -- for untreated sewage and solid waste and by heavy industry, and the net effect thoroughly overloads the biological systems of small bays and harbors to the point where they are obnoxious to sight and smell, suffer from reduced biological diversity, algae infestation and are totally out of balance. Similarly, whole coastal areas near heavy industry sites have become tortured toxic wastelands representing lost assets to their rightful owners, the general public, which only recently has begun to realize what was happening in the name of progress. Even the vast ocean system itself appears to show signs of strain from serving as the industrial sewer and cesspool of the world.

Thirdly, dredge and fill operations in estuaries, causeway construction to nearby islands, coastal land fill projects and especially all the backfilling of mangrove lagoons, mangrove swamps and mangrove

cays contribute to an invidious destruction of vital habitats and key segments of aquatic systems, breaking links in food chains, eliminating nursery areas for fish, lobsters, shrimp, sea birds and other marine life, and further reducing water quality by inhibiting the natural recovery process.

Fourth and last, there is oil -- increasingly sought after from offshore drilling platforms, sometimes carefully with chokes and blowout preventors and sometimes carelessly with undesirable results. We spill asphalt and crude oil in harbors, on reefs, and since tankers continue to pump oil laden bilge and ballast water into the ocean, oil ends up on beaches. Oil spill contingency plans are still primitive and inadequate.

All of these things are unnecessary for we know how to reduce, if not eliminate, every stress factor just cited. We know how to control runoff, reforest hillsides, to regulate drainage, to treat sewage, recycle wastes, to prevent or contain oil spills.

We also know that the tourism-travel-leisure time industry, in many destinations, is currently losing out -- watching its two most valuable non-liquid assets -- cultural and environmental integrity deteriorate before its very eyes.

What can be done? And how can tourism as a process and as an industry insure itself against a degraded aquatic environment? Here are a few recommendations for discussion:

1. Develop professional expertise within the industry in ecology, land use planning and environmental conservation. These special skills are needed as part of your operational and management staff if you are to manage your exploitable resources properly and further influence what goes on about you -- you would not send your engineer to negotiate a mortgage loan, nor would you use your best salesman to edit advertising copy. If you have a stake in environmental matters -- hire a specialist, or at least support with dollars one you believe in. Some firms have done this already, but it is only an isolated few.
2. Join forces with the conservation movement in redefining the relationship, along the clear lines of mutual interest. Develop a cooperative strategy and joint programs for environmental improvement at various levels, perhaps along the lines of the recently organized Travel Industry for the Environment group known as TIE, based in San Francisco, and headed by Robert Bates, of Olympia, Washington. TIE involves a blend of industry, government and conservation leadership and perspective.
3. Set aside a line item in your budget as environmental insurance in the same way you buy fire and liability insurance, support local, national and international conservation projects, environmental education programs, clean-up campaigns, environmental research activities, and monitoring.

4. Consider drafting a model set of operational guidelines or a "pact with nature", appropriate to each sector of the tourism-travel industry, setting a high norm for corporate responsibility in development and management in an environmental sense and providing standards to newcomers and backsliders designed to inject a stronger environmental ethic into the market place of travel, tourism promotion, and airport, shipping, packaged marketing, hotel and resort development.
5. Encourage more effective, more extensive independent water quality monitoring. The tools are readily available and methods can be simple -- only initiative and support are needed. Why wait for government? Join with local conservation, diving and environmental groups, and launch it yourself as an industry responsibility to its future and to the future of all of us. The example set by American Airlines in sponsoring the pollution survey of Acapulco is an excellent case of responsible corporate environmental concern accomplished in cooperation with government.
6. Develop an environmental information program for all clients using the various media already at hand. Review your handouts, brochures, in-flight magazines, posters, etc. Ask the conservationist and environmental specialist for assistance and plan a program. Frankly, your message can be improved upon, can be updated, can point up environmental do's and don'ts, unique natural features

and attractions, encourage local conservation projects, help raise funds and generally lend support.

### Conclusion

The environment has for too long been principally the concern of conservationists with shoe-string budgets and volunteer staffs. What a tragedy of misplaced human values and resources that some of the most beautiful places on the earth, idyllic islands, coasts, beaches, and the ever present water environment in each case, should be defended basically by marginally funded volunteers. Yet, these places represent valuable assets to the travel industry if properly protected.

As the sun makes its apparent arc across the world ocean, beginning each day with sunrise, it is always in touch with water, a common bond among islands, as among peoples, and among biological systems and even time.

Let us find ways to feel pride, a sense of accomplishment, a touch of honor in this matter of our use of the earth's resources, including water, which we exploit and enjoy. We all must make a living, but to live, we need water, in its diverse forms. Let us acknowledge the relationship -- and the responsibility, leading for once, instead of following. The quality of our tomorrow depends on you and, in part, on us. Let's work together.

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