

CASE STUDY 10.2W

Ecotourism in Thailand and Kenya

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Thailand: Lisu Lodge, northern Thailand

The government in Thailand has realized the potential that ecotourism has for conserving the natural environment and has promoted ecotourism as a 'tool for biodiversity conservation and rural development' (Hvenegaard and Dearden 2002). The principal objective of the Thai national parks is to safeguard the land in a natural condition, while offer the potential for education and leisure.

Lisu Lodge, which opened in 1992, is located 50 kilometers (30 miles) north of the city of Chiang Mai, in northern Thailand. The land has been leased from the village and is part of the Asian Oasis Collection, owned and managed by East West. The lodge resembles a typical hilltribe village home of the Lisu, one of Thailand's ethnic minorities, and consists of only six guest rooms, built in close collaboration with the Lisu villagers (Anonymous 2002a).

The management team of Lisu Lodge works in close collaboration with the village elders to ensure the visitor experience is as authentic as possible. Seven Lisu tribe members are employed by the lodge, including the manager. Fact sheets educate guests and trained local people are engaged to act as guides in the village. Interaction between villagers and visitors is encouraged, for example, by family visits. Traditions are preserved and offered proudly to the visitors who come to stay at the lodge (Anonymous 2002a).

The lodge provides not only employment and income to the families of the village but also serves as a role model for sustainable tourism. This is evident by the fact that Lisu Lodge has received several awards, for example, from Conservation International – Ecotourism Excellence Award 2000 for making extraordinary contributions towards preservation, social and cultural safe-guarding and continuation. In 2001 Lisu Lodge received the prestigious Condé Nast *Traveler* magazine's (USA) Ecotourism Award. According to Condé Nast *Traveler*: 'This is the 5th international award for Lisu Lodge in the past 3 years. This again proves the natural world and the business world can indeed coexist and can, under the right management, even work to mutual benefit' (Karantzavelou 2001; Anonymous 2001).

The guests gain insights into several local diverse cultures by visiting different tribal villages. Tours and treks ranging from one to four days can be arranged elephant safaris, guided hikes, four-wheel-drive tours, mountain bike trips as well as white-water rafting are other activities offered to the visitors of Lisu Lodge. A handicraft centre and a shop, where villagers can display their proficiency in weaving, embroidery, silverware, jewellery and woodwork, have also been established (Anonymous 2002a).

Management's belief is that by working closely with the hilltribes of northern Thailand this will help promote their distinctive and dynamic cultures. Also authentic ecotourism

ventures like this can contribute towards the preservation of customs and traditions that might otherwise fade away as time goes by (Karantzavelou 2001; Anonymous 2001; Anonymous 2002a).

Kenya: Il Ngwesi Tourism Lodge, Laikipia District

Kenya is considered one of the global leaders in community-based ecotourism, working closely with local tribes to develop novel ways to safeguard the environment and local culture (Anonymous 2002b).

In December 1996 Il Ngwesi Lodge opened its doors to the public, being Kenya's first community-owned and managed lodge. It is located nearby the Ngare Ndare river on the edge of the Mukogodo Hills and displays impressive panoramic views across northern Kenya (Anonymous 2002c).

Il Ngwesi Lodge is a communally owned group ranch. A board of directors, consisting mostly of village elders representing over 6000 people, carries out the day-to-day management of the lodge and the surrounding community conservation area. This committee is elected once a year at an annual general meeting when matters such as revenue distribution, management policies and registration of new members are discussed (Anonymous 2002d).

The lodge is constructed according to local building traditions and includes four individual double or family *bandas* (huts), accommodating up to 11 people all together. Practically all building material apart from the water pipes and showerheads comes from the land itself (Anonymous 2000c).

The lodge employs 28 people from the local community, with 14 working in the lodge and the rest making up Il Ngwesi's ranger force, which provides security for the animals and people in the region. Profits are divided among the local community and help to support nearly 500 households as well as other group ranch operations, water supplies and cattle dips. Other improvements that have been made with the profits arising from the lodge include building schools, improving roads to attract more visitors and funding children of the community to attend university. The establishment of Il Ngwesi Lodge has meant that the prior dependence on livestock has been reduced (Anonymous 2002e).

Visitors coming to the lodge are able to engage in a number of activities, for example, game drives, bush walks and camel rides along the river. Visits to a nearby Il Ngwesi Maasai boma (village) provide a special opportunity for visitors to gain an understanding of the history and traditions of the Maasai and to witness their cultural practices and daily living, including traditional hunting skills, rituals, rites and dances (Anonymous 2002d).

In 1997, just one year after the opening of the lodge, it was awarded the British Airways' prestigious Tourism for Tomorrow Award (Anonymous 2000d).

The community of Il Ngwesi have come to understand that wildlife is equal to tourism. A realization has set in that the local community is the key to conservation, unless wildlife can be turned into a profitable commodity the survival of the traditional lifestyle will face difficulties (Johnstone 2001; Anonymous 2002c; Anonymous 2002d; Anonymous 2002e; Anonymous 2002f; Anonymous 2002g).

Source: Johansson and Diamantis (2004) *Ecotourism*. London: Thomson Learning, pp. 299–301.

References

- Anonymous (2001)
- Anonymous (2002a)
- Anonymous (2002b)
- Anonymous (2002c)
- Anonymous (2002d)
- Anonymous (2002e)
- Anonymous (2002f)
- Anonymous (2002g)
- Hvenegaard and Dearden (2002)
- Johnstone (2001)
- Karantzavelou (2001)