

CASE STUDY 17.1W

Visitor payback schemes

The term 'visitor payback' is defined by The Tourism Company (1998: 3) as 'the process of visitors choosing to give money (or other help) to assist the conservation or management of places they visit'. Rather than being compulsory, like a tourist tax, this works on a voluntary basis. From January 1996 to June 1997 a project, run by the Tourism Company (UK-based consultancy) with funding from the EU, set out to monitor the operational aspects and effectiveness of five practical initiatives in visitor payback. Most visitor payback schemes are established to raise funds for conservation work. Examples of this include The Tarka Project in Devon, UK, a sustainable rural tourism initiative established in 1989, incorporating the following visitor payback methods:

- a 5 per cent levy on merchandise sold by members of the Tarka Country Tourism Association
- voluntary levies on accommodation and visitor services – for example, one hotel applied a 25p per person per night voluntary levy and most tourists were content to pay
- donation boxes
- a 'Friends of Tarka' membership scheme.

Visitors are more likely to donate money if they know where their gift is being used. In the example of the Tarka Project (a region promoted on the strength of connections with Henry Williamson's novel *Tarka the Otter* – so, an existing wildlife/conservation ethos may underlie visitor motivation), visitors were informed that the conservation fund would be used for work such as pond clearing, rights of way upkeep, habitat restoration and monitoring of otter populations in the area.

Visitor payback methods include:

- donation
- sponsorship
- membership
- supplements
- merchandising
- voluntary charges
- participation.

The amount of money raised will depend on:

- the number of visitors
- the level of visitor appreciation of the environment
- the willingness of tourism operators to be involved
- the type of payback method in operation.

Amounts can be quite substantial, however, if the mix of these factors is right. Visitors to the Yosemite National Park (one of the most popular recreation areas in the USA) donate an annual sum of US\$1 million for example to the high-profile Yosemite Fund, through merchandising, individual and corporate donations, legacies and 'Friends' scheme. Funds are used directly for habitat restoration, trail maintenance, visitor management, cultural/historic conservation research.

References

The Tourism Company (1998) *Visitor Payback. Encouraging Tourists to Give Money Voluntarily to Conserve the Places they Visit*. Ledbury: The Tourism Company.