Title of the Story:  Your Stay Keeps the Forest Standing

Destination Name:  (include any state, province or region)

Cardamom Tented Camp

Country:  Cambodia

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Position:  Communications Support, YAANA Ventures

Nomination Category:  (Nature & Ecotourism)

Please find detailed information for the categories below in the Top 100 training module ‘Good Practice Story’.

☐  Localizing the destination supply chain
☐  Decarbonizing the destination supply chain
☐  Culture & Communities
☐  Environment & Climate
☒  Nature & Ecotourism
☐  Tourism Reset & Recovery
☐  Other

Find detailed instructions for submitting good practices in the Top 100 training module “Good Practice Story”.

Should you have any questions on your submission please refer to our FAQ page or contact top100@greendestinations.org
DESCRIBE YOUR GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Address each aspect of your good practice story in the different sections being specific including relevant quantitative and qualitative information.

Issues faced
What was the problem/issue solved with the good practice? Click to add your text

In 2013 the Minor Group acquired the lease on a concession of 180km2 of lowland forest in Botum Sakor National Park to protect it from rampant logging, encroachment and wildlife poaching that was devastating much of Cambodia’s forest reserves elsewhere.

Minor Group and its Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation (GTAEF) partnered with Wildlife Alliance, a conservation NGO, which installed two ranger stations and 12 Ministry of Environment forest rangers complimented by Wildlife Alliance coordinators. However, as a condition of that lease issued by the Cambodian Government, activity had to take place to ensure economic benefits for the community.

As for Minor/GTAEF and Wildlife Alliance the only goal of the concession was the conservation of the forest and protection of wildlife. YAANA Ventures was therefore approached to propose a suitable conservation tourism project. YAANA Ventures joined Minor and Wildlife Alliance and conceived and built the tented camp, which it now operates. This conservation tourism project that protects the forest habitat aspires to act as a role model that can be emulated in other forest reserves under pressure in Asia.

Cardamom Tented Camp ecolodge therefore opened in November 2017 with the tagline ‘Your Stay Keeps the Forest Standing’. In cooperation with Wildlife Alliance, the camp now delivers conservation tourism experiences to international visitors, trains local staff and generates vital income for forest rangers protecting surrounding wildlife and forest. The rangers also act as forest guides for camp guests who go hiking. In summary:

* The camp leads by example in the fight against illegal wildlife trade through sustainable tourism development including logistical and financial support for 12 forest rangers.
* The camp demonstrates an innovative commitment to eliminating illegal trade in wildlife.
* The camp is collaborative, founded on the principle of partnership between private business and NGOs to satisfy terms of a government concession.
* The camp is based on the principles of people, planet and profit. Due to its design and guest experience, it is a model for other lodge developments in fragile environments.
* The camp integrates the role of forest rangers into the guests ‘tourism experience [the camp contributes US$50 towards each of the forest rangers salaries each month - pre-Covid.]
Methods, steps and tools applied

Accessible only by small riverboat, the camp is constructed on a natural grassland opening adjacent to the Preak Tachan River, surrounded by 180km² of mixed indigenous lowland forest and mangrove. The 9-unit tented camp, with restaurant pavilion, staff dormitory, ecotourism equipment and boat pier, uses solar power to run all lodge amenities, with on-site waste water treatment and drinking water filtration systems. Reducing, reusing and recycling are key operational principles. Composting is an example in practice.

Pre-Covid, the camp employed 13 local people full time in low season and an additional two in high season, plus two on a part-time basis in high season. The full-time staff all enjoy an excellent package, including health and accident insurance, paid holidays and sick leave, free food and accommodation, and a share of the tips.

Profits help sustain the work of 12 rangers, employed full time in keeping the 180km² concession free from animal poachers, loggers and riverbank sand mining.

All the camp’s consumable produce such as meat, fish and vegetables are purchased either at Trapeang Rung village or in the provincial capital of Koh Kong. In addition, our sustainably grown rice comes from a conservation project (ibisrice.com) that is working to save the critically endangered Cambodian national bird, the Giant Ibis.

Ongoing hardware requirements are also sourced as much as possible from within Koh Kong province.

Key success factors

What helped you tackle the issues?

To tackle the issues we needed tourists to stay at the lodge, which is, in essence, not-for-profit. Income from camp guests is paid to the forest rangers, who protect the forest. Happily, since opening, the camp has attracted a solid number of ecotourists to make the project viable. In 2018-19 the camp sold approximately 1450 packages and was therefore able to increase ranger payments from US$25 to US$50 per month. Pre-Covid, the camp was successful by promoting non-motorised activities such as hiking, kayaking, cross-river zip wire rides, river swimming, tubing and wildlife spotting. Lodge manager, Allan Michaud, is an acclaimed wildlife photographer and conservationist in his own right.

On TripAdvisor as of 16 July 2021, Cardamom Tented Camp had a 5.0 “Excellent” guest review rating based on 58 reviews. It has earned a TripAdvisor Travellers’ Choice Award for its consistently excellent reviews.

Physical, financial and moral support helped the 12 forest rangers do their job well. Cardamom Tented Camp provided solar power to the ranger stations, removing the dependence on diesel generators. Accordingly, Wildlife Alliance and GTAEF reported that the number of wildlife traps and mesh used to trap animals decreased consistently between 2015 and 2020, from over 3,000 cases to less than 200. Logging has all-but been eradicated. This is proof that the ecotourism model is working.
Lessons learned
While implementing the Good Practice what challenges were faced, and how were they overcome?

Seasonality of the tourism season is a challenge. Rainy season (May to October) means a reduced number of visitors (and therefore income), plus the operational challenge of long days of heavy rain and high humidity which affects materials, even morale in an isolated forest location. We strive to overcome challenges by doing year-round marketing and encouraging visitors from the Cambodian domestic market in low season – which has proven a success in 2020/21, a time of closed borders for international travel. Even in periods of low demand due to Covid or seasonal weather, we retain all our staff. They are Cambodian, with the majority hailing from the local community.

When we meet or visit local villagers, we emphasise the need to not hunt local animals or do any logging. We also have a How You Can Help page (https://cardamomtentedcamp.com/how-you-can-help/) to make it easy for people online who haven’t visited the camp to support it by purchasing goods to aid conservation or make donations.

Results, achievements and recognitions
What were the qualitative and quantitative results of the good practice? Has it received any rewards?

In terms of results, the Cardamom Tented Camp conservation tourism example is a success. Aerial images (see resources section below) shows forest cover in our JW concession compared to the disappearing forest cover (and therefore wildlife) in the neighbouring concessions. Camera traps show the existence of previously rare or absent wildlife such as clouded leopard, dhole (Asiatic wild dog), sun bear, sunda pangolin and a regionally significant population of hog badgers. Anecdotally, the lodge manager and forest rangers see wildlife such as otters, macaques, hornbills, painted and milky storks and green peafowl. They report and photograph track marks and scat from larger mammals such as leopard & sambar deer.

The ecotourism-supporting-nature model at the camp was shortlisted as one of three global finalists in the “Changemaker” category in the 2019 Tourism For Tomorrow Awards run by the World Travel & Tourism Council. Cardamom Tented Camp also won the 2019 PATA Gold Award for Ecotourism. It was also listed by National Geographic Traveller [UK] as one of 36 eco-friendly hotels in the world leading by example in ecotourism.

Transferability: As operators of Cardamom Tented Camp, YAANA Ventures aims to transfer the operational model at Botum Sakor and emulate the project in a wildlife sanctuary in eastern Cambodia. It also has plans for developments further afield in Asia. YAANA Ventures continues to spread the word on how to emulate the project in other settings at various travel, hospitality and eco tourism forums, such as the Global Eco Conference in Australia, the PATA Adventure Conference, the WTM Responsible Travel Day, and in lectures at universities.

Additional references
Provide links to further information. Pictures and videos should be available for download either from Youtube, Vimeo or other Cloud-based (Google/ One Drive) download URL.

Useful Links:
Aerial images (proof) that Cardamom Tented Camp (JW) concession keeps forest standing compared to neighbouring concessions.

Cardamom Tented Camp website
Video interviews from Cardamom Tented camp with Randy Durband of Global Sustainable Tourism Council; John Roberts of Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation; and Allan Michaud Cardamom Tented Camp Lodge Manager

Cardamom Tented Camp. Its successful story in press releases

Media coverage for Cardamom Tented Camp.

Images of Cardamom Tented Camp for anyone to use

Map of Cardamom Tented Camp location within Cambodia

Ends