

Case Study in Sustainable Tourism



Daintree Discovery Centre - Daintree Rainforest

The multi-award winning Daintree Discovery Centre has been Advanced Ecotourism certified since 1999. Located 10kms north of the Daintree River Ferry, the Centre allows visitors to enjoy the rainforest via the spectacular 23m high Canopy Tower, Aerial Walkway, elevated boardwalks and large indoor interpretive display area with interactive technology. Self Guided Audio Tours are available in six languages.

At the Centre, everything is built off the ground, producing a small footprint, minimal impact, and no heavy machinery used. It maintains the ecological and aesthetic integrity of the environment and we ensure its sustainability through efficient water, power, waste and resource management, recycling, reusing, minimizing and removing of all waste.

ROLE OF CERTIFICATION

Opening in 1989, the Daintree Discovery Centre has long been recognised as a leader in sustainable ecotourism, however, gaining national certification was a way of not only legitimising our achievements but also validating our operational procedures. The initial application was somewhat time-consuming because we were not sure what to expect. But the second time around was 'a breeze'. If you have a thorough understanding of your aims, objectives, policies and operational procedures then the whole process is relatively quick and rewarding.

The greatest benefit of Ecotourism Australia's certification process is probably that it provides tourism operators with an external form of quality control. Having to analyse every aspect of your operation, critically review your aims and objectives and measure outcomes and achievements against nationally accredited standards is an invaluable evaluation exercise – one we would encourage all small businesses to embrace.

Being able to boast that we have Advanced Ecotourism certification is a great motivator for staff. And being selected as one Ecotourism Australia's 'Green Leaders' is a great marketing tool – and the icing on the cake.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

We are principally an environmental interpretive facility that aims to raise public awareness about the conservation and preservation of the natural environment. We have won awards for our ecologically responsible design and our dedicated team are great ambassadors for ecotourism and sustainable lifestyles.

Our Carbon Offset Bio-Sequestration Project aims to protect the ancient rainforest, working on the revegetation of degraded land with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), Rainforest Rescue, locals and volunteers. In 2008, we decided with QPWS to revegetate an 8 hectare block; with 9,700 trees planted, it is estimated that this block will soon be fully planted. This project has increased bio-diversity, flora and fauna protection, habitat recovery, salinity and erosion control, and has allowed other native species to regenerate. Our staff are also assisting in long term rainforest research to assess carbon content, and based on an independent audit of our carbon footprint, we have now well exceeded the quota of trees needed to ensure our 'carbon conscious' status. We are also working on a research project with James Cook University to help gain a better understanding of the evolution of the carbon balance and the water/energy balance in the rainforest. This data will be compared to information collected from the other research stations around the world.



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