

Honors Thesis

Eco-Tourism Resorts:

A Case Study of Best Practices at the Hamanasi Resort in Belize

Part II Findings

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## **Forward**

Thanks to Dana and Dave Krauskopf for allowing me to conduct my research at the Hamanasi Resort. Thanks also to the Hamanasi management and associate members for their assistance. The hospitality of everyone at Hamanasi made my research on the best practices of sustainability a truly enjoyable and educational experience. And finally, special thanks to my mentor Udo Schlenrich. Without his help and guidance, none of this would have been possible.

## **Objectives**

The purpose of this thesis is to serve as a follow-up report to the investigation of best practice initiatives of sustainability at the Hamanasi Adventure and Dive Resort in Belize. The first part of this thesis, completed in spring 2011, provides a background of research and critical definitions concerning tourism, eco-tourism, and sustainability. The four phases of research at Hamanasi as originally proposed, found in thesis part one, are outlined as follows: Phase one includes hands-on research through shadowing in different hotel departments, observation of management practices in Hamanasi, interviews conducted with employees, and questionnaires administered to guests; Phase two begins a study of the business and organizational model of Hamanasi along with an examination of the critical issues encountered during the start-up phases; Phase three is a SWOT analysis of Hamanasi and a market analysis of other properties that compete with the eco-resort; Phase four investigates eco-tourism promotions and policies in Belize and Hamanasi, and examines the different eco-certification practices.

Part two of the thesis reports on the research findings as conducted at the Hamanasi eco-resort during summer 2011. This research was made possible through funding from an International Research Opportunities Program (IROP) grant, which funded nine weeks of

research examining the best practices of sustainability at Hamanasi. Additional background information is provided concerning green practices and a review of critical definitions. The results of the four phases are then examined with emphasis placed on important findings. Finally, an overview of the findings in the four phases is used to examine the future of eco-tourism.

### **International Research Opportunity Program (IROP)**

The Hamel Center for Undergraduate Research encourages students to design and carry out scholarly research, facilitated by a variety of research grants and fellowships (IROP, 2011). One such program is the International Research Opportunities Program (IROP), which is a competitive grant awarded to qualified projects in diverse settings. The research is completed in collaboration with both a UNH mentor and foreign mentor. The funding for the research contained in this thesis, conducted at the Hamanasi Adventure and Dive Resort in Belize, was provided by several generous donors: Mr. Dana Hamel, Mr. and Mrs. Frank R. Noonan, and Mr. Carlton W. Allen, President for the Class of 1952.

### **Review of Critical Definitions**

Many critical definitions are outlined and discussed in Part I of this thesis. The following section serves to review these key terms and introduce a few new ideas pertinent to the research conducted.

### **i. Eco-tourism**

As defined by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), eco-tourism is “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of the local people” (TIES, 2011). Promoted by the Belize Tourism Board (BTB) as “Mother Nature’s Best Kept Secret”, tourism is an extremely important industry in the country and is the number one foreign exchange earner. The service sector represents 54.1% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and also provides 71.7% of jobs in the country (CIA, 2011). TIES further expounds upon the key aspects of eco-tourism, the principles of which are to (TIES, 2011):

1. Minimize impact.
2. Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect.
3. Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.
4. Provide direct financial benefits for conservation.
5. Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people.
6. Raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climate.

All businesses involved in the eco-tourism business, including hotels, restaurants, tour providers, tourist suppliers, etc., should make these principles a key component of good business practices.

### **ii. Eco-tourist**

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines a tourist as a person "traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes". Most every traveler meets the requirements of a tourist when traveling away from home. The significant difference between a tourist and an eco-tourist, is that eco-tourists travel responsibly to natural areas. Eco-tourists are rated on a hard to soft scale

with resorts targeting a specific demographic based on the properties offerings. At the Hamanasi Adventure and Dive Resort in Belize, the target is soft eco-tourists with the following characteristics (Weaver, D., 2001):

1. Anthropocentric;
2. possessing a shallow commitment to environmental issues and a steady state attitude;
3. desirous of only passive engagement with nature;
4. preferring large groups and numerous amenities;
5. essentially a mass tourist enjoying tangible contact with nature.

These tourists enjoy light and numerous adventures in nature that end each day in time for dinner and a comfortable stay at an eco-resort or upscale eco-lodge. According to Worldwide Ecolodges, an eco-lodge is located in a pristine location with a building design meeting green standards. The property employs a local, well-trained staff and has a strong conservation program. The differentiating factor of an eco-resort is that it is often based near the ocean and offers more recreational activities and personal services (Worldwide Ecolodges, 2011).

### **iii. Sustainability**

In 1983 the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), convened by the United Nations (UN), published *Our Common Future*. This report was also commonly known as “The Brundtland Report”, named after the Chair and former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland. The WCED was created to address the growing global concern over the accelerating deterioration of natural resources and the human environment. In the report, sustainability is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without

compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987). This report placed environmental issues firmly on the UN’s political agenda.

The report concluded that long-term economic growth could only be achieved with the sustainable use of environmental resources; hence, the term “sustainable development” was coined (WCED, 1987). The report offers five basic principles of sustainability according to (Bramwell & Lane, 1993):

1. Holistic planning and strategy making.
2. Preservation of essential ecological processes.
3. Protection of human heritage and biodiversity.
4. Development that fosters long-term productivity sustainable for future generations.
5. The goal of achieving a better balance of equity among nations.

Ecotourism is a niche form of tourism that follows sustainable development principles. This means that ecotourism is a type of tourism and sustainability is the approach that drives this form of tourism. All true forms of ecotourism are sustainable but not all forms of tourism that follow sustainable practices are considered ecotourism. Ecotourism is the exemplary niche of tourism that follows the practices of sustainability.

### **Governing the Commons**

The governance of common-pool resources (CPR) is a central aspect involved with the sustainability of natural resources. A common issue explored by all stakeholders concerned with preserving CPR’s is how best to limit the use of natural resources to ensure their long-term economic viability (Ostrom, 1990). Some groups argue for state and government control while

others argue for privatization. Either approach is aimed at reducing the negative externalities that occur due to these CPR's

An externality is an effect on the consumption of an individual or firm of a transaction to which that individual or firm was not a party (Reece, 2010). The reason CPR's are susceptible to externalities is because these resources are non-excludable, meaning anyone can enjoy them, and rival, meaning that people's use of the resource diminishes other people's enjoyment. This is a market failure in which the market fails to allocate the resources effectively. Garrett Hardin, influential writer of *The Tragedy of the Commons* wrote that "ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons" (Hardin, 1978). This is the true tragedy – the greed of man results in the ruin of all, while simple moderation allows for the success of all. Given a pasture, each cow herder will seek to maximize his benefit from the field, a motivation to add more cows beyond the field's capacity. The end result is that all herders suffer the costs when the CPR deteriorates from overgrazing. Unable to achieve a socially desirable level of output, a third-party needs to intercede to correct the imbalance in demand for the CPR. Elinor Ostrom, a Nobel Prize winning professor from Indiana University, has dedicated her life's work to determining who should intercede and how.

Elinor Ostrom was the first woman in 2009 to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences. The award honored her lifetime achievement of groundbreaking research, teaching, and scholarship, especially her analysis of economic governance associated with the commons. She shares the award with Oliver Williamson, Edgar F. Kaiser Professor Emeritus of Business, Economics, and Law at the University of California, Berkeley. According to the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, she has "challenged the conventional wisdom that common property is



poorly managed and should be either regulated by central authorities or privatized” (IU, 2009). The conclusion Ostrom reached was that successful solutions to CPR problems are rarely either pure private or public. Instead, “many successful CPR institutions are rich mixtures of ‘private-like’ and ‘public-like’ institutions defying classification in a sterile dichotomy” (Ostrom, 1990). According to Ostrom, the best solution is a combination of the two parties which utilize the three most influential models for determining what CPR needs. These three models are the tragedy of the commons, the prisoner’s dilemma game, and logic of collective action.

Eco-lodges are an example of privatized entities that work in conjunction with public entities to protect natural resources. On the private side, eco-lodges often purchase large amounts of land, placing a specific portion aside for wildlife preservation, choosing only to develop a certain amount. On these properties, the lodge can work to preserve and rehabilitate the land, educate guests and employees, and create a natural environment for flora and fauna to flourish. On the public side, many eco-lodges work with public wildlife parks preserves or donate money to these organizations. Often guests from the resort seek to visit these natural areas, paying entrance fees that also assist the preservation efforts.

## **Belize**

Belize is a small Central American country bordering Mexico, Guatemala, and the Caribbean Sea. Approximately the same size as Massachusetts with 8,867 square miles, the country lays parallel with the second largest barrier reef in the world. The region is tropical, hot, and humid, with a mean average temperature of 79 degrees Fahrenheit (CIA, 2011). The country boasts a rich cultural heritage influenced by the Mayans, Creole, Mestizo, and Garifuna. Belize was originally named British Honduras as part of the British Commonwealth until gaining

independence in 1981. The official language of Belize is English, although most prefer Spanish, Creole, or other local dialects.

### **i. Hopkins**

Hopkins is a small fishing village located directly on the Caribbean Ocean and adjacent to the Mayan Mountains. The majority culture of the 2,000 residents is Garifuna. The village boasts seven resorts, ten bed and breakfasts, and two hostels. There are at least ten small restaurants in town with several others opening or closing based on seasonality, profitability, and the daily whims of the owner. These restaurants do not include the restaurants that are available at the resorts and hotels. The infrastructure is poorly maintained, as dirt roads full of pot holes and half-finished construction projects plague the village. These issues act as deterrents to some tourists interested in visiting the village.

### **ii. Hamanasi**

The Hamanasi Adventure and Dive Resort, located in Hopkins, Belize includes 23 rooms, a restaurant and bar, a freshwater infinity pool, beach access, lush gardens, full service snorkel and dive center, a gift shop of local and regional artists, rainforest and reef adventure packages, and Garifuna dancers and drummers. An eco-resort, Hamanasi manages the property following guidelines for best practices of sustainability. Some of these practices include the trio of reduce, reuse, recycle, the completion of eco-certification programs, constructing the property to preserve trees, composting food scraps, donating to local charities, and educating guests about preserving the environment.

## **Phase One Findings:**

Phase one includes hands-on research through shadowing in different hotel departments, observation of management practices in Hamanasi, interviews conducted with employees, and questionnaires administered to guests.

Shadowing in several different departments within Hamanasi allowed for direct examination of how Hamanasi is run and managed. The main purpose of this activity was to observe how the departments operate within the entire organization of Hamanasi. It was also an opportunity to learn how integrated green practices are into the daily management decisions. The departments shadowed in were front office, housekeeping, and maintenance. Other observations were made for the kitchen, dining room, and adventure center from an initial property tour and participation in Hamanasi led adventures. Interviews and meetings with General Manager also provided insight into the operations of the resort and implementation of green practices.

The results of the shadowing provided a solid background and introduction to the property and people at Hamanasi. From this initial introduction, employee interviews were conducted on a more personal basis and support for further research projects was attained. The initial findings from these observations are that Hamanasi is a well-run business with a big investment into green practices. However, these practices are mostly implemented at a managerial level and do not have wide-spread buy in from entry level employees. There is still freshness to many of these practices which has not completely permeated the surface into the everyday culture of the resort. This view is also perpetuated by the owners, who believe the resort can always be doing something better. A main component of best practice, constantly changing to most up-to-date standards of green practices, it may take several more years before green practices are integrated part of Hamanasi's culture for all employees.

**i. Employee Questionnaire:**

The purpose of the employee questionnaire was to collect demographic data on Hamanasi employees and to learn the extent they understand green practices as performed at Hamanasi. The content of the questionnaire allowed for collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. The employee questionnaire was conducted during the first three weeks on property. Each employee was met with individually and the questionnaire took on average fifteen minutes to complete. A total of 47 employees were interviewed from the various positions of housekeeping, front office, restaurant server, cook, reef guide, rainforest guide, grounds, maintenance, and security. The demographic information collected helps to provide a background story in hopes of better explaining the extent to which employees understand green practices. Below are some key data points for the demographic section concerning employees interviewed:

1. Gender: 22 males; 25 females
2. Age: 62% were between the ages of 30-49; 34% were between the ages of 18-29.
3. Education: 38% of employees interviewed never entered High School and over 50% do not have a High School degree.
4. Ethnicity: 64% of the employees interviewed are of Garifuna decent. The other cultures were Mestizo, Creole, Maya, or other.
5. Language: 100% of employees are bi-lingual; 89% are tri-lingual. The three primary languages spoken are Garifuna, English, and Creole.
6. Living: 86% of employees either live or rent housing in Hopkins.
7. Turn-over: 5.5 years is the average time most employees have worked at Hamanasi. Several have worked with the resort since the opening 11 years ago.

8. 62% of employees have family that work at Hamanasi; 66% have family working in the tourism industry in Belize.
9. 87% of employees said that working at Hamanasi has improved their standard of living.
10. 81% said that working at Hamanasi did not change the connection they felt for their culture. The other 19% felt the change was a positive one in which they became more aware of their cultural background.

Lack of education is a key component behind employee's lacking knowledge concerning green practices. While a third of employees are below the age of 30 and generally have advanced further in the education system, almost two-thirds of employees are middle-aged with almost no high school education. The advancement of learning and inclusion of green education to young students has increased awareness among the younger generations, most of whom are still in school and not yet in the work-force. Hamanasi is helping to educate both its employees and their children, awarding scholarship money for further education and school fees on a yearly basis. While improving education at a young age improves the future, at present Hamanasi struggles to implement green practices on property.

Cultural preservation is another key component of eco-tourism in which Hamanasi has succeeded. Every employee interviewed either felt a strong connection to their culture which was unchanged by working at Hamanasi or became re-connected with their culture from opportunities to explore their cultural background. Socio-cultural development, while not a green practice specifically, is key to sustainable practices by eco-resorts.

A third accomplishment by Hamanasi is low employee turnover in an industry known for high turnover. High turnover is costly for properties since this requires time and money for

training new employees. This usually results in a lower level of service before the employee is fully trained. Without the need to constantly retrain employees, Hamanasi can focus on implementing extra training for green practices which builds on the foundations already established.

Below are some key data points for the green section concerning employees interviewed:

1. 40% of employees interviewed could hazard a guess at the mission statement.
2. 74% could name some of Hamanasi's goals (GKLAA training).
3. 83% could name what Hamanasi valued (training and overall treatment and working conditions allowed employees to conjecture accurate answers).
4. 45% of interview employees reported receiving green training. (mention Green Team and stating that it was not their job to learn green practices.).
5. 0% know the green statement of Hamanasi. 45% stated they might have known it once but did not remember. (give green statement. Hamanasi needs short and simple green statement that is memorable for employees and means something to them.)
6. 60% of employees felt their involvement was a big role in helping Hamanasi to stay green.

Overall Hamanasi employees are well trained and understand the strong cultural values perpetuated by the owners and management. The high numbers of employees able to name the property's goals and values reflect this account. Feeling that they have a big role in helping Hamanasi to stay green is also a reflection of the value placed upon employees. Valued and made to feel important, employees at Hamanasi are productive and loyal to the resort.

Despite the employee loyalty, most do not understand or know the green concepts practiced at Hamanasi. Less than half of employees mentioned receiving green training and

many insinuated that this was not their job. They felt that the Green Team was in charge of green practices, not the regular employees. Another alarming figure is that not a single employee interviewed could remember any part of the green mission statement of Hamanasi. A partial reason for this failure may be due to the length of the statement which is as follows:

*“Hamanasi believes in responsible, nature and cultural based eco-tourism. We understand the importance of preserving our environment and indigenous communities. Hamanasi is committed to protecting our ecosystems and their biodiversity by taking continual steps to be more environmentally friendly and aware. We actively encourage all employees and visitors to participate in these endeavors. Together, we can make a difference!”*

It is important for a green mission statements to cover a broad spectrum of ideas that the business champions; however, the statement should also be understood by the employees. Rather than change the mission statement which effectively communicates Hamanasi’s green mission, a shorter equivalence could be created for employees and explained in terms that are relevant to everyday work practices.

## **ii. Guest Questionnaire:**

The purpose of the guest questionnaire, similar to the employee questionnaire, was to collect demographic data on guests staying at Hamanasi and to learn the extent of the guest’s green knowledge. The content of the questionnaire allowed for collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. The guest questionnaire was conducted for the first five weeks on property. Questionnaires were placed in the guest rooms, allowing guests to complete them at their leisure.

A total of 34 guests returned a questionnaire. The demographic information is less of an indicator of the guest's green knowledge. Rather the collected data in this section helps to determine if these guests typify as an eco-tourist. Below are some key data points for the demographic section of guests that returned questionnaires:

1. Gender: 50% female; 34% male; 15% both.
2. Age: 47% of responders were between the ages of 30-49.
3. Education: 94% have a college education; 41% have advanced degrees.
4. Language: 100% speak English; 42% speak are bi-lingual.
5. Income: 50% make \$100k-\$149k annually; 35% make over \$150k per year.
6. Nationality: 100% American (not total representation, just responses).
7. Party composition: 54% traveling with a spouse or significant other; 31% traveling with family.
8. Trip duration: 59% staying in Belize for 4-7 days; 32% staying for 8-14 days.

According to Wight, the “typical” eco-tourist tends to be female, have a higher-than-average income and education, originate from a more developed country, be younger if a less experienced eco-tourist, and to take longer than average trips (Wight, 2001). While a large proportion of eco-tourists examined by researches appear to empty-nesters or childless, the family vacation is becoming increasingly popular. The guests at Hamanasi fit all of these factors except one. Most of the guests are inexperienced eco-tourists however the average age was older, indicating more experienced eco-tourists according to most studies. The approach of soft eco-tourism pursued by Hamanasi is a likely reason for the older, less experienced eco-tourists staying at the property.



Other findings from guests that returned surveys include:

1. Reason for choosing Hamanasi: 56% location; 53% tour offerings; 41% eco-offerings; 41% amenities; 29% honeymoon.
2. How guests found Hamanasi: 56% internet; 33% Trip Advisor
3. 40% of guests said they would definitely return and 53% said they would like to return to Hamanasi.
4. 97% of guests would recommend Hamanasi to friends or family.
5. 100% of guests were very satisfied with their trip.

The first two questions can be utilized by Hamanasi as a marketing tool. The first are reasons that guests choose Hamanasi, which can be highlighted in marketing material. The second provides the medium through which Hamanasi should work to promote the resort to best reach potential guests. The last three questions indicate the overall satisfaction of guests, which reveals the high success at which Hamanasi is able to make guests enjoy their stay. Since 97% of guests would recommend Hamanasi to friends or family, Hamanasi should find a way to harness this free PR for the property. Perhaps a small incentive can be offered to guests who recommend the resort and have friends or family actually make a booking.

Guests were asked “how interested are you about participating in the following activities?”.

Table 1 provides the results from this question from a total sample size of 33 responses from guests which returned questionnaires.

*Table 1*

| n=33                            | Great Interest | Some Interest | Indifferent | Little Interest | No Interest |
|---------------------------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Observing flora/fauna/landscape | 18             | 9             | 2           | 3               | 0           |
| Visiting historical sites       | 24             | 8             | 0           | 1               | 0           |
| Hiking                          | 16             | 11            | 0           | 3               | 0           |
| Boat trips                      | 14             | 14            | 3           | 0               | 0           |
| Snorkeling                      | 18             | 11            | 2           | 0               | 1           |
| Scuba diving                    | 19             | 1             | 3           | 5               | 4           |
| Fishing                         | 5              | 11            | 6           | 6               | 3           |
| Relaxing on the beach           | 19             | 11            | 1           | 1               | 1           |
| Photography                     | 15             | 10            | 6           | 0               | 1           |
| Day trips                       | 21             | 11            | 0           | 0               | 0           |
| Local activities                | 13             | 16            | 2           | 0               | 0           |
| Bicycle riding                  | 6              | 19            | 6           | 1               | 0           |
| Swimming                        | 18             | 12            | 1           | 1               | 0           |
| Night life                      | 2              | 11            | 8           | 6               | 5           |
| Birding                         | 6              | 10            | 7           | 7               | 2           |
| Kayaking                        | 4              | 19            | 5           | 3               | 0           |
| Drumming                        | 10             | 12            | 4           | 3               | 4           |
| Tasting local cuisine           | 22             | 8             | 1           | 2               | 0           |

The results from this question provide insight into the type of activities tourists seek when traveling to Hamanasi. With this knowledge, the resort can gear activities to meet these desires to better please guests.

A key discovery was made through the guest questionnaires which highlights the state of green awareness in most travelers. When asked, “Do you prefer resorts that use sustainable practices?”, over 88% of respondents report yes, they do prefer resorts that use sustainable practices. Another question asks, “How many eco-resorts have you stayed at before?”. Only 41% of responders have ever stayed at an eco-resort previously and only 21% have ever stayed at an eco-resort two or more times. These responses seem to indicate the tourists are environmentally aware of a responsibility towards green practices; however, this awareness does not actually influence the decision making process.

Other green questions addressed on the questionnaire include what factors would influence guests to choose an eco-resort over a less sustainable resort. 50% of guests mentioned green practices, 41% mentioned cost, and 26% mentioned amenities. A follow-up question asked if guests were willing to pay more to stay at an eco-resort. 70% of responders said yes, they are willing to pay more, however many added that they are only willing to pay marginally more. These findings seem to indicate that, while guests are aware of green practices at resorts, these are not a priority when picking a destination. Instead, resorts must offer the right mix of location and amenities at the right cost to be a viable option. Any green practices are an ancillary reason that provides a feel-good boost for the guest.

Despite guest’s previous lack of experience staying at eco-resorts, basic green practices are still considered important to these travelers. According to the questionnaire:

1. 94% of respondents felt that it is of some importance of very important for hotels to recycle.
2. 82% of respondents felt that it is of some importance or very important for hotels they stay at to use alternative energy.
3. Over 91% of respondents felt that it is of some importance or very important for hotels they stay at to use green waste management practices.

*Table 2*

*n=34*

| How important is it that hotels you stay at...? | Very Important | Some Importance | Indifferent | Little Importance | No Importance |
|---|----------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Recycling                                       | 18             | 13              | 1           | 1                 | 0             |
| Use Alternative NRG                             | 8              | 20              | 3           | 3                 | 0             |
| Use Green Waste Management                      | 14             | 17              | 2           | 1                 | 0             |

Even though guests' value green practices, this researcher does not believe the absence of any of these programs is a main deciding factor that prevents guest from choosing a resort. This means there will be few conscientious objectors to properties lacking certain basic green practices.

Another green aspect addressed in the questionnaire is cultural education. An important part of eco-tourism is education guests about the local cultures, customs, and environment. The importance of these issues to the responders is as follows:

1. 74% of respondents had a great interest in learning about the local culture while the remaining 26% had some interest.
2. 60% of respondents had a great interest in learning about the history of Belize and Hopkins while the remaining 40% had some interest.
3. 47% of respondents had a great interest in learning about social and environmental issues facing Belize while the remaining 53% had some interest.

*Table 3*

*n=34*

| Are you interested in learning about...?  | Great Interest | Some Interest | Indifferent | Little Interest | No Interest |
|---|----------------|---------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Local culture                             | 25             | 9             | 0           | 0               | 0           |
| The history of Belize/Hopkins             | 20             | 13            | 0           | 0               | 0           |
| The social/environmental issues of Belize | 16             | 18            | 0           | 0               | 0           |

**Phase Two Findings:**

Interviews with the owners Dana and Dave Krauskopf along with several meetings with the general manager Andrew Usher were conducted during the first two weeks of research at Hamanasi. The key idea pursued during these interviews was to learn about the business and organizational model of Hamanasi. Some of the issues addressed were critical issues encountered

during the start-up of Hamanasi, property construction, resource management, strategy plans, and the organizational structure.

#### **i. Critical Issues Encountered During Start-Up**

The start-up of any business venture is one of the most difficult phases. At Hamanasi, the Krauskopf's wrote a business plan over the course of five years, devoting the most extensive effort to the last two years. Funding for the venture was comprised entirely of self-made money and investments made from friends and family. The plan for Hamanasi was too small for venture capital (VC) funding, but almost too big for funding entirely from family. The owners explored several other funding options, including looking for loans from banks. Due to the high risk involved with building a small resort in a third world country, no US or Belize bank was willing to provide a loan. As a result, everything was cash financed.

Initially, one critical issue encountered during start-up was not reaching the original investment goal. The Krauskopf's had to scale back construction plans and grow the property organically. The original business plan called for 30 rooms; the property started with 12 rooms. The slow, incremental growth actually served as a benefit to the owners, who had no previous experience in the hotel industry. This allowed them to grow into the business and learn from decisions made in the early stages of construction. As a result, they were able to make better future construction decisions which better facilitated management of the property and also better followed green practices. Despite these set-backs, the Krauskopf's were able to implement most of what they planned, if not all at once.

The development of the Hamanasi Resort follows a general theme of most resorts that have established a successful business in Belize. Starting small and growing incrementally

allows for reduced growing pains and reduces the chance of bankrupting the business before a profit can be made. The Krauskopf's initially had a great success which allowed for early profits. The first year they under-forecasted expenses but fortunately exceeded revenue goals, making more per occupied room than expected. This revenue is represented by the average daily rate (ADR) which equals room revenue divided by the number of occupied rooms. Examining these issues faced in the starting stages, money was the biggest issue which challenged the success of Hamanasi. Given an opportunity to go back and do it over again, the Krauskopf's said they would make sure they were better financed before beginning the venture.

## **ii. Construction**

Once the Krauskopf's established a strong business plan and secured funding, the next step was construction of the property. From the beginning, the plan was to build a property that adhered to green construction principles. Rather than clear cut the land, as is common practice for real estate agents seeking to sell plots of land in Belize, the plans for Hamanasi worked to build as naturally as possible within the constructs of the space. Vegetation was kept as much as possible and buildings were arranged around the trees to preserve the natural state of the property.

The architectural plans for the property were taken from books the Krauskopf's studied on Caribbean style architecture and ideas gained from the structural renderings of two different architects. The actual construction of the property was completed by a local Mennonite builder. A key decision made that reflects green design is the construction of the property's tree houses. These structures are built around and among the trees, strategically placed to allow natural light, air flow, and tree shade. All of these features help to reduce the need for artificial lighting and

A/C or fan usage. The decision to keep the trees is also critical to minimizing soil erosion, maintaining soil nourishment, and providing a home to birds, bats, lizards, and orchids. The property boasts a littoral forest, one of the most threatened types in the world, and is relied upon by many birds as resting places during migration.

Another key decision the owners made was to include A/C in the front office and all of the guest rooms. The reasoning behind this decision is that the Krauskopf's did not believe the rooms would be comfortable for sleeping without the A/C. They also examined the target demographic group, which is upper-middle class and generally older, and determined that these guests would want the additional comfort A/C could provide. This decision goes against one of the key principles of eco-resorts that seek to reduce excess emissions, A/C units serving as a large draw on power sources.

Solar was another key decision that the owners considered for the property. After an extensive examination of the costs and benefits, they decided that the initial cost of purchasing solar panels would not be a good investment. This is one of the many challenges faced by the owners as they constantly seek to balance the demands of managing a profitable business with the desire to operate as a green business. Between the two, the owners have decided that operating profitably is the first priority. Despite the initial decision not to install solar panels, technology continues to advance, allowing the cost of solar panels to fall. At a future date, the owners plan on again examining the possibility of installing solar at Hamanasi.

Future construction plans for the property are not in motion, however several plans are in consideration and one is near completion. A major plan the resort would like to implement is the addition of a second floor to the main building, which would allow for increased common area, restaurant and kitchen capacity, and a larger bar area. Another addition in consideration is the



construction of three new buildings for guest rooms. If built, these buildings could serve as test models for green practices the owners hope to implement throughout the rest of the property. Another small idea under consideration is the placement of a viewing platform near the on property pond. This would give guests an opportunity to safely watch birds, turtles, crocodiles and other animals without disturbing or harming the wildlife. One project that is near completion is the expansion of the organic garden on property. A small test garden is already planted on property, supplying the kitchen with a few ingredients and acting as a local source of organic food. When planted, the expanded garden hopes to better provide for the kitchen.

### **iii. Environmental management**

Resource management is a key aspect focused upon by eco-resorts seeking to maintain green standards. At Hamanasi, an environmental management policy focuses on water, waste, and energy management with an emphasis also placed on green purchasing practices. Managing all of these resources allows the resort to reduce the amount of resources used, reuse certain resources, and recycle resources that can no longer be utilized.

Guest participation is a key aspect of Hamanasi's resource management. Energy is reduced by asking guests to turn off lights, fans, A/C, and any other power sources in the room when not in use. They are also asked to participate in the sheet and towel reuse program, washing these items only every three days. By reducing the number of times these items need to be washed, energy and water usage are both reduced. Guests are encouraged to recycle with recycle bins located in the main building. At check-in, each guest is provided with a reusable steel water bottle than can be re-filled at water stations in the room, lobby, and from water

brought on tour. This helps to significantly reduce the waste that would be produced from the use of plastic water bottles.

## **Water**

Water management at Hamanasi is generally not an issue, according to the Krauskopf's, since Hopkins Village receives 130 inches of water yearly and only has a three month dry season. Native plants found around the property never need to be watered with this abundance of rainfall and the organic garden is easily irrigated with rain water that collects in the property's pond. Waste water and sewage on the property is set up as a soak away, in which the sand cleans and filters the water. The owners feel this is not the best system but the high water table makes other options a challenge.

At present, Hamanasi purchases water from the village. The current system is poorly managed in Hopkins, as village houses are charged only a flat fee for water, not a charge based on actual usage. This lack of measurement provides no incentive for consumers to reduce water consumption. Hamanasi itself is guilty of a lack of awareness of water consumption. The property needs to install water meters to measure the amount of water used each month. Measuring water consumption is an important tool for setting goals and decreasing usage. Recording measurements for energy and waste is also important for reducing usage.

Looking for additional ways to reduce water consumption, the owners are researching the possibility of installing individual grey water units for each tree house. However this is an extremely expensive investment which requires lots of maintenance. Currently, the new tree houses have eco-smart toilets which require half the normal water usage. These same tree houses also have on-demand water heaters.

## **Waste**

Waste management is a challenge at Hamanasi due to the poor infrastructure of Belize. The local dump burns all of its garbage and many locals in the village burn trash in their yard. There is no recycling facility and construction of a local recycling facility is too expensive. The nearest facility is in Belize City, 133 km and almost two hours away.

At Hamanasi, a slab of concrete on property serves as a storage facility for garbage and sorted recyclables, which are trucked up to Belize City once a month. Glass is crushed on property and recycled back into the making of concrete slabs used as footpaths around property. Food scraps are also recycled, composted into the organic garden as fertilizer. A woodshop located in the service village on property allows Hamanasi to reuse and repair many items on property, including windows, furniture, and service vehicles. In the guest rooms, guests are provided with biodegradable soap and shampoos and conditioners in reusable containers, which allows for bulk purchasing and no plastic bottles. Chemical waste is reduced with the green chemicals in housekeeping and in other areas on property. Effective Microorganisms (EM) are used by Hamanasi as an insect repellent against sand fleas, to facilitate the grease trap, degrade recycled plastic, and to aid decomposition in the organic garden. These microorganism, too small to be seen by naked eye, maintain the ecological balance and are a non-toxic beneficial means to deal with waste management issues (TNAU, 2011).

## **Energy**

Energy management is the weakest of Hamanasi's resource management practices. The resort buys energy from the grid and does not utilize any alternative energy resources. Most of the green practices for energy are focused on reducing the amount of energy used. The tree

houses feature louvered windows, allowing natural light to enter the rooms. Compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFL's) are installed throughout the property when artificial lighting is needed. According to Energy Star, using CFL bulbs use about 75% less energy than the traditional incandescent bulb and can last at least six times longer (Energy Star, 2011). Everyday, housekeeping turns off the A/C in guests rooms when the guests are out on tours for the day. Despite the high costs, Hamanasi continues to explore the possibility of solar power. The possible uses for this energy source would be the pathway lights, water heaters, or the new tree house units planned for construction in the next year. Solar panels could be placed on the roofs of the buildings for optimal sun exposure or on the ground for a more protected position. A key aspect under consideration is the possibility of the solar panels sustaining damage due to a hurricane. If this occurs, the entire investment is lost.

## **Purchasing**

Supply management is an important way to reduce waste and control costs. At Hamanasi, the focus is on purchasing local to support the local economy. 100% of local produce and fish is bought locally in Hopkins and Dangriga. When the organic garden is fully planted, the kitchen hopes to receive 40% of produce from this source. Any supplies that cannot be purchased in the local cities are bought in Belize City once a month, a trip that is combined with the hauling of recycling and trash to the city.

Purchasing local is not always possible in Belize, which has a strong service economy and does not produce a lot. Hamanasi often has difficulties sourcing materials such as certain fixtures and even employee uniforms. Often local suppliers that provide these items go out of business or are required to import from Mexico or the US, which leads to large import duties.

Another challenge Hamanasi faces with local purchasing is high prices and low quality. While buying local is a priority, it is not always the best choice. The high-end resort cannot compromise on quality when serving guests but also cannot spend exorbitant amounts of money for certain food items. A third challenge is market fluctuations which cause shortages, making certain foods extremely expensive or impossible to find. An example is the citrus shortage recently experienced in Belize as a result of better selling prices overseas.

In order to minimize the impact of the resort, Hamanasi works with its suppliers to reduce trash produced from purchases. Suppliers are asked to reduce or eliminate packaging and to never use non-recyclable materials such as plastic bags. If Hamanasi does receive any plastic bags, these are kept on property and used for other purposes.

#### **iv. Strategy**

The most important aspect of Hamanasi's strategy for success is that the operation of the resort is a priority over any eco initiatives. The business must first be economically viable; a bankrupt business can have no positive impact with green practices if it cannot stay open. Second, Hamanasi considers the world its main competition, for which the marketing strategy for the resort must focus first on convincing guests to visit Belize. Once this is accomplished, Hamanasi looks to differentiate itself by offering the best of sea and land to guests. The resort markets at trade shows, in dive magazines, and through search engine optimization to attract guests. Most people only visit Belize once, so the property needs to get the first or not at all.

Selling rooms at Hamanasi, originally the property relied on wholesalers and online intermediaries to sell the majority of the rooms. After becoming successfully established, the owners now estimate 75% of bookings are direct, a strategic shift that cuts out the middle man,

allowing all of the profit to flow direct to Hamanasi. The property also heavily promotes all-inclusive packages, which bundles the product making it easier for the guest and more profitable for the resort.

Another strategy the owners contribute to the success of Hamanasi is the decision to never lay off employees during the slow season. This allows Hamanasi to operate fully functional at all times, providing the best service possible without any lapse in re-training periods for employees. This is better for the resort and the employees who can rely on full time employment.

#### **v. Organizational Structure**

The organizational structure upon which Hamanasi is built is one of employee respect and empowerment. This policy is extremely successful at the resort which boast low turn-over and well-trained staff. Over 80 full time workers are employed at Hamanasi, 95% of which are locals. The high staff numbers are a requirement for the property which must employ its own mechanics, electricians, repairmen, furniture workers, etc. due to the unavailability of outside workers. The focus on local hiring is also an advent of eco-tourism, which requires local hiring as a way to create a multiplier effect of money getting reinvested into the community from employee wages and salaries.

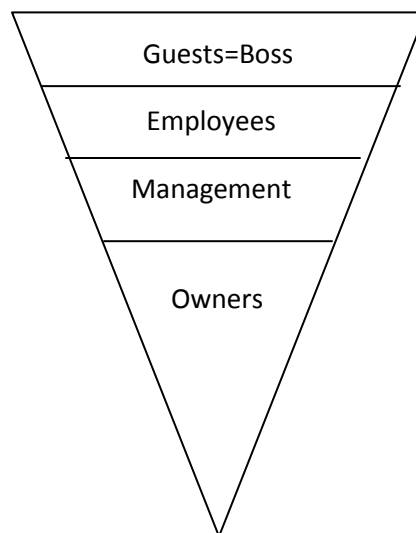
Dave Krauskopf is adamant about on-going staff training. GKLAA is a program developed by the Krauskopf's to teach their employees how to provide the best possible guest experience. The acronym of GKLAA stands for Greet, Know, Listen, Anticipate, Act and all front line employees are trained on these principles once a year. According to Mr. Krauskopf, in order to make the training more effective, managers need to begin incorporating the vocabulary

from the training every day. Employees also need better consistency employing these practices for continued high levels of service.

This yearly training also incorporates other components of Hamanasi's organizational structure philosophy. The owners emphasize an inverted triangle (Figure 1), in which the guests are at the top, representing the boss. The employees serve the guests, the management serves the employees, and the owners serve the management, all working from the bottom up to exceed the guest's expectations.

*(Figure 1)*

*Inverted Triangle*



Hamanasi also espouses three core values: guest, employee, community. Guests are extremely important because, without them, there is no business. Employees are equally important because they serve the guests, allowing resorts to earn a profit. Hamanasi invests in its employees by providing additional training opportunities for staff. The owners want the employees to be skilled enough to get work anywhere but choose to stay at Hamanasi.

Community is also important in that the resort employs from the local area and can have a large impact on the villages. Hamanasi is part of community involvement with fund raising and volunteer efforts with the Humane Society, Back-to-School Programs, and an Education Fund.

The organizational chart for Hamanasi is typical of a small resort. The owners receive direct reporting from the General Manager and Accounting. The GM receives reports from the Food and Beverage Manager, Guest Relations Manager, Adventure Center Manager, Security Manager, Maintenance & Grounds Manager, and from Accounting. The organizational chart details the remaining order of reporting for all managers but does not include the entry level employees on the chart.

### **Phase Three Findings:**

#### **i. Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat (SWOT) Analysis**

A SWOT Analysis is a marketing tool used to identify the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats that surround a business. After the analysis, goals and objectives can be set. **Strengths** focus on the internal characteristics of the eco-resort that give it a competitive advantage over others in the competitive set. **Weaknesses** are internal characteristics that place the eco-resort at a disadvantage to others in the competitive set. **Opportunities** are external chances to improve the business through greater sales or profit. **Threats** are external factors in the environment that could harm the business. In the first Thesis paper, an initial SWOT analysis was conducted from an outsider's perspective. Below is the follow-up analysis created after the completion of the research at Hamanasi.

**Strengths** of the Hamanasi eco-resort are as follows: The employees are the strongest asset of the resort, providing superb service to guests. Another extremely strong asset is the



resorts presence on social media, specifically Trip Advisor and Facebook. Travelers increasingly utilize these sites to determine vacation destinations and Hamanasi's good reputation benefits the property tremendously. The strength and ability of the General Manager, a native Belizean, is another invaluable asset to the property; the value of this increased when the owners decided to move back to the US, leaving the GM to manage daily operations. The quality of service exceeds almost all guest expectations. Tour offerings, location, and amenities all provided at the small and intimate eco-resort are also strengths.

Most of these items were identified in the previous strength analysis, however the most important items of employees, social media, and the GM were not addressed. It was previously stated that the location and amenities were one of the most important strengths of the property and, while still a strength, certainly were not the most important. Green certification programs were also mentioned as a strength. While not a weakness, the importance of these items to guests was severely over-estimated. Green certification actually has more importance to the hotel industry and on a business level, for money saving purposes and personal beliefs about environmental protection.

**Weaknesses** of the Hamanasi eco-resort are as follows: Written policy and procedures for green practices and other business management practices. While the resort implements a strong program, there are no written standards available for reference or to measure progress against. The green team at Hamanasi is also a weakness, meeting only sporadically and without a true leader. Most employees lack a strong understanding of green practices as implemented at the resort and why the green practices they perform are important. Another lacking green item is meters and measurements used to measure waste, water, and energy creation and usage. These items need to be measured in order for the resort to set goals and make improvements. Old

equipment is also an issue, as items in the dive shop are outdated and the boat engines occasionally break down. The proximity to salt water causes faster than normal deterioration which means equipment should be kept up-to-date to prevent breakage from halting tours. The remote location of Hamanasi is also a weakness, posing a challenge to most guests who must travel over rutted roads to reach the resort.

In the original analysis of Hamanasi's weaknesses, location was listed as one of the most major issues. In fact, while the poor infrastructure does pose an issue, Hamanasi has minimized the negative effect of this weakness by helping guests to plan transportation. The resort also offers free transportation to and from the airport, minimizing guests' discomfort. It was also presumed that Hamanasi would suffer from occupancy swings based on seasonality. This however is not the case, as the resort boasts over 90% yearly occupancy and only closes for three weeks during September for property maintenance and employee training. Hamanasi is the exception in Belize, as most other resorts close for months during the low season or lay off half of their employees.

**Opportunities** of the Hamanasi eco-resort are as follows: The Philip S. W. Goldson International Airport constructed an extended runway, opening up Belize to direct flights from the EU and creating a new market potential for Hamanasi. The property at Hamanasi has space to expand, with available areas for additional rooms and an addition to the second story of the main building. Land across from the property could also be utilized to create nature trails. Built on raised platforms to preserve the environment, these trails would give guests a chance to walk in a natural setting while placards along the trail provide educational material. If the owners ever decide to open a second property, their understanding of how to manage a successful resort in

Belize gives them good standing with the banks, providing them the opportunity to take out a loan.

The original opportunity analysis of Hamanasi addresses all of the same items and assigns them the same importance as the follow-up analysis. The airport opening up a new market, property expansion, and the possibility of opening another eco-resort were all addressed. It was however suggested that Hamanasi could utilize a third-party intermediary to gain market share on the internet. After learning about Hamanasi's high yearly occupancy, this would not be a beneficial move. Third-party intermediaries take large commissions from every booking and also take away some control from the properties as rooms are sold. To date, Hamanasi has been extremely successful marketing and booking the property's rooms.

**Threats** to the Hamanasi eco-resort are as follows: Real estate development of other plots of land in Hopkins. Overdevelopment of Hopkins and the natural environment in Belize diminished the value of the resort which relies heavily on the remote natural areas as a selling point. Overdevelopment such as happened in Cancun and other locations is a serious threat. A hurricane creating a natural disaster could completely destroy the business, an external threat over which Hamanasi has no control. Poor infrastructure of roads, garbage disposal, and recycling facilities also threaten the resort's success. The village people's disregard for throwing trash in the streets also diminishes the value of Hamanasi's location. The bad economy prevents travelers from taking vacations and crime can act as a deterrent as well.

The threat of overdevelopment, hurricanes, and the depressed world economy were all addressed in the original analysis of threats to Hamanasi. Again however, the importance of green certification programs to guests and was overestimated, the presumption made that more resorts would earn green certification, reducing the importance of Hamanasi's certification. In

fact, most guests do not actively look for green certified resorts and most other properties in Belize find the certification process too expensive. Also, the nearby drug trade problem in Mexico was thought to pose a threat, however Hamanasi is far enough south that no direct violence or ramifications are projected to affect the area.

## **ii. Competition Set**

The competition set for Hamanasi can be examined on a local, national, and international scale. During the research phase, a competition set will be collected from management as well as the creation of one while on-site. Possible local competitors of Hamanasi are Almond Beach Resort, Hopkins Bay Villas, Belizean Dream, and the Jaguar Reef Lodge and Spa. There are other B&B properties located in Belize but represent less competition than the initial group of hotels. Eco-resorts located in Belize that may form Hamanasi's competition set include Chaa Creek, Lamanai Outpost Lodge, Casa del Caballo. Internationally Hamanasi and Belize as a tourist destination face competition from Mexico and the Caribbean Islands.

The competition set for Hamanasi is not an exact set of resorts or properties found in Hopkins or even Belize. According to the owners, the true competition set for Hamanasi is the world, as the location is an extreme destination. Most guests must first choose Belize over the Caribbean and other similar locales before they can choose Hamanasi. During this phase, the most likely competition set was compiled of properties found in Hopkins. Another competition set of eco-lodges found in the Cayo District was also compiled. However, in this second set only one of these properties most likely competes with Hamanasi for the same demographic base, while the other three provide a comparative basis between the different types of eco-lodges.

In Hopkins Village, five properties meet the requirements of a resort and offer similar standards as found at Hamanasi:

1. Belizean Dreams: Located directly along the beach next to Hamanasi and has nine villas that can be rented whole or broken down into three units, making for a total of 27 bedrooms. The property has a pool, restaurant, spa, beach access and adventures that include water and land options. The property is a fractional ownership; all villas, owned by the homeowners association, are placed into a rental pool. Profit from this arrangement is divided 60% for management and 40% for the homeowners. Some green practices are implemented at the property with the intention of putting into operation more and an emphasis is placed on hiring local.
2. Jaguar Reef Lodge 3. Almond Beach 4. Colonial Beach: These three properties are located further down the beach past Belizean Dreams and all have different owners but have the same management under Jaguar Reef. These properties have several pools, a shared spa, beach access, several restaurants, and arranged adventures for land and sea activities. Jaguar Reef has 18 rooms, Almond Beach has 14 rooms, and Colonial Beach has 10 rooms. The GM says the property is working towards Green Globe certification; however the constant changing of ownership makes long-term projects a challenge.
5. Hopkins Bay Villas: Designed by the same architect as Belizean Dreams and built in the same design, this property boasts 19 villas with a total of 57 bedrooms. This property has the distinction of a location on the other side of the village, away from the other properties. These units are also owned by homeowners and put into a rental pool. Unlike Belizean Dreams, there is no management company and after total expenses and payroll are taken care of, the remaining profit goes to the owners. The property has a pool,

restaurant, beach access, a spa (only open during high season), and offers land and sea adventures. The property emphasizes hiring locals but does not employ any real green practices.

In the Cayo District, only one property truly meets the requirements to compete against Hamanasi. The other properties serve as a comparison to the variety of eco-lodges available to guests visiting Belize. Below is a summary of the four properties visited:

1. The Lodge at Chaa Creek: The biggest competition Hamanasi faces in Belize from another eco-resort, the Lodge at Chaa Creek has 23 guest rooms. A Green Globe Certified resort, the property has a restaurant, pool, spa, land based tours, hiking trails, a natural history center, and blue morpho butterfly farm. The property has cultivated a successful business which implements green practices throughout the property, hires locals, guest education, and volunteer work with the community.
2. Black Rock Lodge: Located overlooking the Macal River, the 13 guest rooms of Black Rock Lodge provides a refined, eco-lodge experience. The lodge has a restaurant, offers land tours to various Mayan ruins, has a yoga platform, and has on-site hiking, tubing, horseback riding, and bird watching. The focus of this eco-resort is closely tied to green practices, local hiring, guest education and providing the guest with a true eco-tourist experience.
3. Table Rock Lodge: Located on an abandoned farm, Table Rock Lodge preserved the natural surroundings while offering five guest rooms for visitors. The lodge has a restaurant, on-site hiking, kayaking, and tubing along with land adventures to Mayan ruins and other activities. The small property allows guests to intimately know the

owners, who invest great efforts into sustainable practices, local hiring, and Mahogany reforestation.

4. **Macaw Bank:** The most rustic of all the locations, Macaw bank is a small mom and pop operation with five guest rooms located in the jungle. The lodge offers a restaurant, access to inland tour guides for local Mayan ruins, and on-site hiking. The lodge has a strong sustainability policy, operating completely off the grid through solar power. The property also has strong water and waste policies, hires locally, and works to preserve the 50 acres of land found on property.

While it was not possible to visit every property that poses a competition to Hamanasi, a few other properties are worth mentioning. Xanadu Island Resort, only the third Green Globe Certified Resort in Belize, is a full service resort on the Island of San Pedro that mixes exceptional services and amenities with green practices. Victoria House, also located on San Pedro, is a high end luxury resort that Hamanasi recommends to guests looking for a less adventurous vacation. Cotton Tree Lodge, located in the southern town of Punta Gorda, provides a comfortable, yet rustic eco-resort experience in 11 thatched cabanas.

#### **Phase Four Findings:**

This phase changed the most from the original proposal of investigating eco-tourism promotions and policies in Belize and Hamanasi, and the examination of the different eco-certification practices. These changes came about as new opportunities became available to examine the Belize Tourism Board (BTB) and to examine the STEPs green certification program from Sustainable Travel International (STI).

**i. Belize Tourism Board (BTB)**

During the final phase of research, I attended a Belize Tourism Board (BTB) meeting in Hopkins to learn about the National Sustainable Tourism Master Plan for Belize in 2030. The BTB is a statutory body within the Ministry of Tourism which represents a strategic partnership between the private sector and government. The vision of the BTB is to foster responsible development of the tourism industry for the socio-economic growth of Belize (belizetourism.org). The Master Plan for Belize was created in conjunction with the Sustainable Tourism Program (STP) through US\$15 million in funding (STP, 2011).

STP was created to grow Belize's tourism sector in a manner that is economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable. A key component of the program is investment in overnight tourism capacity at key destinations in Belize. A major part of the Master Plan is the strengthening and capacity building for policy, destination planning, and management at these destinations. Diversifying tourism products in emerging destinations for the overnight market segment is also a focus (STP, 2011).

At present, overnight tourists in Belize number 245,000 arrivals per year, bringing in US\$ 248 million in tourist expenditure. The goal for 2030 is to increase arrivals to 556,168 per year; increase average expenditure from \$133 per day to \$231 per day; increase the average length of stay; double cruise ship arrivals; and to increase the number of by 6,869 to a total of 13,754 rooms in Belize. All of these changes need to have a high value, low impact on the economy and environment. The timeline for the plan is to improve current hotels from 2012-2020 before beginning to build new hotels from 2020-2030.

According to the master plan, the drivers for market growth are specific target markets that already visit Belize. The United States, Canada, and European Unions are strong source



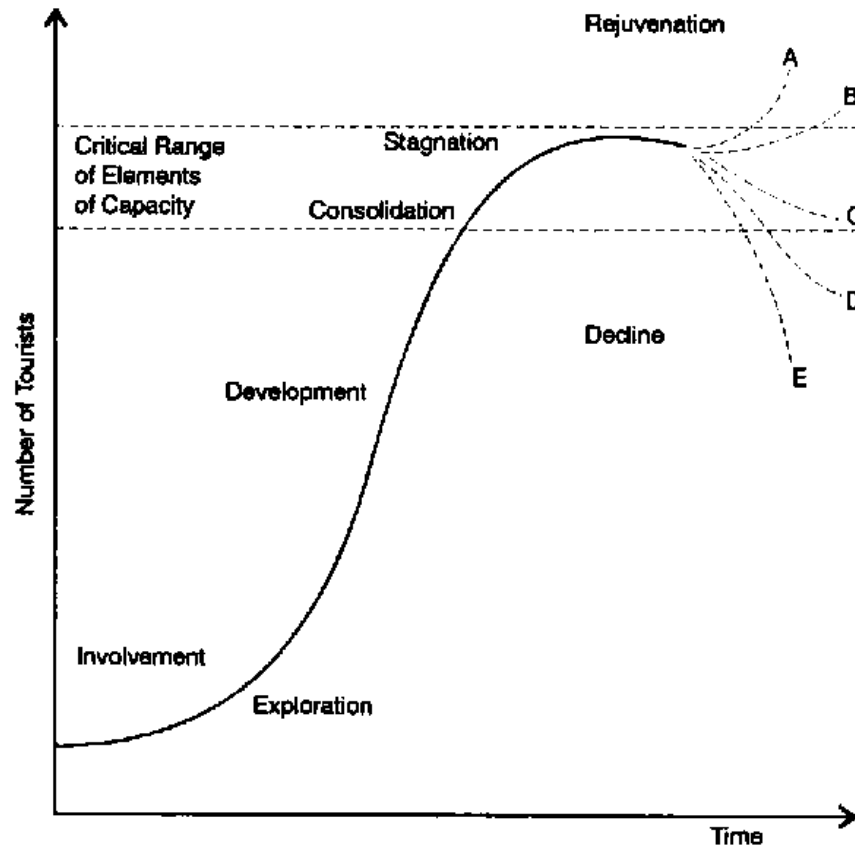
markets for visitors to Belize. Within these source markets are several niche markets, including cavers, divers, adventure seekers, and sailors. Cross-border movement is also a market, as tourists visit Belize as long-haul travelers on regional itineraries visiting from regional markets. Finally, domestic travel also provides a source of tourist revenue as Belizeans travel to visit friends and family or to enjoy retirement.

The types of tourism enjoyed by these markets are as multi-faceted as the visitors to Belize. Tourists travel for reasons ranging from cultural, nature-based, sun and beach, cruise, nautical, leisure, entertainment, etc. While these types of tourism are not available in all areas of Belize, specific regions offer different activities. The diversity of offerings available in Belize is a key reason that the Master Plan is divided among the different districts. Each district has a different focus for tourism development leading up to the year 2030.

Examining the bell curve of tourism, Belize is believed to still exist on the upward side of growth and development. The Master Plan hopes to guide tourism in Belize towards reaching a peak before entering a phase of sustainability and stability. In Figure 2, the goal is to enter into the B curve which represents a small amount of sustainable growth. The problem with the bell curve of tourism is that without successful master planning, tourism destinations will often peak and then decline.

(Figure 2)

*Tourism Life Cycle Model*



*Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Management Options, 2011*

In order to achieve this sustainable stage, the Master Plan outlines five steps:

1. Product Development
2. Integrated Site Development
3. Quality of Service Experience
4. Empowerment of Stakeholders
5. Proactive Solution to Funding Sources

A key aspect associated with achieving the sustainable stage is through nature based tourism. Eco-tourism and adventure centers are an integral part of sustainable tourism services that address the five steps above.

The development of the infrastructure is a key component of Belize's tourism development. Tourism standards and quality management need to be implemented. Besides policy and procedures that are implemented on the governmental level, training tourism suppliers also needs to occur. One proposal is to develop a hotel school to educate the tourism providers. As discussed above, sustainable tourism development will add to the strength of the basic infrastructure.

The plans specific to Hopkins address some of the most pertinent issues affecting tourism in the village. The most immediate need is in help and planning of the infrastructure. Poor roads are a key deterrent for tourists seeking to visit. Funding needs to be achieved before any major changes can be made. According to the Master Plan committee, Hopkins is at a pivotal point in its development. If immediate interference is not taken, the village will be lost to commercialized tourism by 2030. In order to maintain the character and heritage of this small village, development needs to be controlled. A key issue is Real Estate agents selling plots of land to whomever they choose. A governing body needs to install sanctions such as who can buy the land or what the land can be used for. For example, land purchases may be limited to locals or Belizeans and only be utilized for projects that will not create serious degradation to the environment or community.

## **ii. Green Globe**

Green Globe is an organization that provides certification, training, education and marketing services in 83 countries worldwide. In 2010 Hamanasi became the second eco-resort to become Green Globe Certified and today is one of only three resorts in Belize with the certification; the other two properties are The Lodge at Chaa Creek (the first to earn certification) and Xanadu Resort. Hamanasi underwent an extensive certification process to meet Green Globe Standards, which included a collection of 337 compliance indicators applied to 41 individual sustainability criteria (Green Globe, 20110).

According to the owners, the basis for Green Globe is for Hamanasi to start with a baseline of sustainable standards from which they must improve upon every year. Beyond this, the organization is extremely marketing orientated, providing resorts with numerous opportunities to market their property. Ad campaigns include a client marketing campaign which utilizes e-mail broadcasting, press releases, media work to consumers, travel industry, meeting planners, wedding planners, and media in US, Canada, UK, Central Europe, Middle East. Green Globe claims this marketing campaign reaches over 1 billion consumers. Another option is to purchase banner ads for display on the Green Globe website for two weeks. The owners found the benefits of these marketing choices to be limited. Instead they sought a green certification program that would provide more in-depth guidelines for implementing green practices. For this reason, Hamanasi chose to pursue a second certification with Sustainable Travel International.

Despite the owners' interest in utilizing Green Globe's marketing option, they plan to maintain the certification by continuing to improve from their green baseline standards. Since Hamanasi and other successful resorts have gained the Green Globe certification, the owners hope that other properties will want to follow their lead. Despite this wish, many of the owners

and GM's interviewed at other eco-lodges and resorts in Belize expressed reservations at pursuing the certification. Many properties find the certification process too expensive. This is especially so for the small mom and pop operations, which are small by the nature of maintaining a sustainable, green property. One general manager described Green Globe as an "impressive product but too expensive". This GM believes that this product does not increase occupancy because guests do not care about certification. It makes no big difference for the property. Instead, he suggests that travelers just want to see the efforts of sustainability.

### **iii. Sustainable Travel International (STI)**

Sustainable Travel International (STI) is a global leader in sustainable tourism development. The organization is committed to promoting responsible travel and ecotourism, supporting sustainable development, and helping travelers and travel providers protect the cultures and environments they visit (STI, 2011).

STI's green certification program is called the Sustainable Tourism Eco-Certification Program (STEP), a program which walks properties through step-by-step of the standards expected for green certification. Never satisfied, and always looking for the next phase, the Hamanasi owners turned to STI's program to help them implement green practices and policies as outlined in the STEP levels.

Arriving on property, management had already completed the Required Step of the self-assessment, which consisted of 27 practices the resort needed to implement or already have in practice. I was given the opportunity to assist Hamanasi complete the Intermediate Step, which consisted of 60 practices. Helping Hamanasi to write the policies and procedures was a great

experience which allowed me to learn further the green practices implemented at Hamanasi. It also gave me experience writing green policy and procedure as well as exposing me to the standards expected of eco-resorts by green certification programs. Over two weeks I wrote the Intermediate Steps, meeting frequently with the GM to learn about specific practices as carried out at Hamanasi.

### **Overview of Findings**

Based on the findings of this research, Hamanasi rates highly as an eco-resort. However, this can only be maintained so long as the owners and management continue to pursue best practice policies of sustainability. While the impressive accomplishments of Hamanasi can serve as an example for other start-up eco-resorts, the property itself is still in its infancy, with much room to grow. The different phases of research each highlight what the resort does well and what requires improvement.

Phase I reveals Hamanasi's commitment to educating employees and guests. A key initiative of eco-tourism is the improvement of the socio-economic well-being of the local people. Hamanasi embodies this initiative by hiring local and providing funding for additional schooling. The Hamanasi website, Facebook, informational readings, and other media outlets are utilized to educate guests about green practices before, during, and after their stay. Improvements are needed for better implementation of green practices in the daily management of the property. Employees and guests both require continued and better green education while employees need to be taught the green mission statement by which Hamanasi stands. A consistent meeting of the Green Team with strong leadership and purpose may help this cause.

Phase II highlights Hamanasi's success of implementing green practices, beginning in the start-up and construction phase of the property. Other programs that implement reduce, reuse, and recycle principles help to preserve resources such as energy and water, and work to reduce waste. Improvements should focus on the needs for better resource management, especially the establishment of meters in order to measure energy, water, and waste. Measurements are necessary to setting goals and making improvements.

Phase III provides a detailed SWOT analysis that Hamanasi can use to continue with its strengths, improve its weaknesses, and to examine opportunities and threats when considering future plans. The strengths of the property center on the successful business model of the resort, which focuses on the employee and the guest as important factors for the resort to flourish. This model also prioritizes the business first, green practices second to ensure profitability. Weaknesses center on green practices and the need for measurements for better resource management. The resort also needs to continually invest in equipment to provide the best services available to guests.

Phase IV successes center around Hamanasi's commitment to green certification programs as steps towards continual improvement. While not always recognized by the guests, these programs are important tools helping eco-resorts to work towards continual improvement of green practices. Continued participation with green certification programs as a guideline towards improvement of green practices is part of best practice. Also, involvement with the BTB towards a successful 30 year master plan for Hopkins and Belize will promote sustainable tourism, making the industry viable for future generations while preserving the environment, the very resource upon which the Belize tourism industry is dependent. Above all else, Hamanasi needs to continue improving, building from the established green practices while new ones are

implemented. It may not be easy, but pursuing strong eco-tourism policy makes a positive difference and is the right thing to do, both from a business and a sustainability stand point.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

There are some limitations associated with this research as it applies to the best practices of sustainability practiced at the Hamanasi Adventure and Dive Resort. This is a case study, which focuses solely on one property, which provides only one perspective and approach. Further research on this topic would benefit from studies conducted at other eco-resorts to provide a comparative basis of study. Another limitation is the small sample size of employees interviewed and guest questionnaire's returned. While successful in providing a candid look at demographic data and green knowledge or beliefs, a larger sample size provides a more complete picture and reduces the effect of outliers in the data.

Future research on the best practices of eco-tourism and sustainability should seek to implement these changes to prevent future limitations. A follow-up study at Hamanasi ten years from now would provide researchers interesting insight into the evolution of eco-tourism. This could be the start of a longitudinal study following the start-up, growth, and sustainable development of an eco-resort.



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