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Media Conference: World's First Fair Trade Travel Packages

Interview with Heinz Hirter, Owner of Reise Service Imagine, Berne

Why did Reise Service Imagine get involved in the pilot project to develop Fair Trade Travel?

Our company has since 2001 been in contact with Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa (FTTSA). From the beginning, we have been giving priority to selling all FTTSA certified products – out of conviction, since in South Africa good jobs, good training and fair wages cannot be taken for granted.

For us, our participation in the pilot project for Fair Trade Travel was only a logical continuation of our work to date. Our long-year experience has convinced us that Fair Trade helps to support disadvantaged people in South Africa. We want to be the first in Switzerland to actively support this development.

What do you hope to achieve?

For us as a tour operator, the development of Fair Trade Travel packages is part of a whole qualification process of our own business. Prior to this project, we have assessed our own sustainability through the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme of TourCert and have reviewed and improved our own internal operations, standards and our environmental performance. The CSR report, which led to the certification by TourCert, can be found on our homepage www.reiseberatung.ch.

For us as a small tour operator, it was also an opportunity to directly work with larger tour operators, with the certification organisation FTTSA and with tourism organisations and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO). This enables us to advance, and above all to draw attention to our quality products.

How do you see the future for the development of Fair Trade Travel?

Sustainable tourism and sustainability are buzzwords that we get to hear more and more frequently in tourism. In several countries, there are approaches to implement similar projects as the ones by FTTSA. I just returned from Laos, where I visited good community-

based projects and small local initiatives. For us it will be important to have good quality labels that verify compliance with Fair Trade standards in tourism in a reliable manner.

In South Africa, Imagine only sells customized tours. Our customers select their accommodation and excursions individually. 60 percent of the products which tourists to South Africa booked through us last year had a sustainability label. According to my experience, customers who have the choice among two to three different products in the same price segment will be happy to give preference to an FTTSA certified product.

How fast Fair Trade Travel will develop also depends on the will and the marketing budget of large tour operators. By imposing conditions like a minimum turnover, they force travel agents to do the bulk of their business with them. The large operators are able to bring about decisive changes in market trends – by advertising specific products to their customers and by organising workshops and study trips for travel agents. Therefore, I am glad that Kuoni as one of the large tour operators is involved in the Fair Trade pilot project.

In any case: The quality of FTTSA certified products in South Africa is very good. Customers must now simply be given the opportunity to experience and enjoy it.



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