



The title of a book about Welsh coal mining in the 1930s, *How Green Was My Valley*, might be a question worth asking about SA now that the thousands of foreign fans and network cameras that poured into SA for the 2010 Fifa World Cup have left. Just how green are our valleys? How sustainable is our tourism? Are tourists interested? Who's cheating and does anybody care?

These questions are difficult to answer, because SA has no official guidelines or statistics on responsible tourism practices. Evidence is often circumstantial or relies on untested statements by establishments labelling themselves sustainable. Whether tourists are making green choices is even harder to discover.

Part of the problem is public understanding of what sustainable travel means. There are a handful of similar terms used to describe this type of travel, with tags such as 'eco', 'responsible', 'adventure' or 'green' often misused. A walk through a forest is not ecotourism unless it also benefits the plant life, creatures or people who live there. And in the same vein, a safari trip is only ecotourism if it raises awareness and funds to help protect wildlife.

To confuse things further, there are companies that market themselves as ecotourism establishments, when in fact they aren't. Often the term is merely used as a marketing tool to promote nature-related tourism.

Placing a splendid hotel in the midst of a fragile ecosystem and calling it ecotourism is what can be termed 'greenwashing', which

the Oxford Dictionary defines as 'disinformation disseminated by an organisation so as to present an environmentally responsible public image'.

It's also the phenomenon of socially and environmentally destructive corporations pretending to be just the opposite in an attempt to preserve and expand their markets, posing as friends of the environment and leaders in the struggle to eradicate poverty. When it began in the late 1960s, former Madison Avenue advertising executive Jerry Mander termed it 'ecopornography'.

According to the World Tourism Organisation, sustainable tourism leads to the management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life-support systems. Questions that need to be asked about eco-friendly travel include:

- Is the environment being looked after?
- Is the local community being protected and uplifted?
- Does it build environmental awareness?
- Are resources remaining for future generations?
- Does it respect local culture?

European and Western visitors are a lot more aware of sustainable travel and carbon-neutral issues than South Africans, and their presence here may be a wake-up call for local institutions. A survey in the UK by Fairtrade found that 87% of travellers felt their holiday should not damage the environment and 76% wanted

A fat carbon footprint

Most municipalities in which the 2010 Fifa World Cup stadiums have been built said that their aim for the projects was to be carbon neutral, or at least 'climate neutral'. They cited the use of special water sources, efficient waste management, the recycling of grey water and the use of local products. But there's simply no way they were even remotely able to achieve this goal of carbon neutrality.

A report by the Department of Environmental Affairs has estimated this year's World Cup carbon footprint to be 896 661 tons of CO₂ in stadium construction and a whopping 1 856 589 tons in long-haul flights. This is more than eight times the estimated footprint of the 2006 World Cup in Germany. Cement production alone worldwide is responsible for around 5% of greenhouse gas emissions. And the stadiums used an awful lot of cement.



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their holiday to benefit the people of the destination to which they were travelling. Just under half said they were willing to pay more if the money went towards preservation of the environment and to reversing negative environmental effects of tourism.

'The proportion of consumers who want to ensure that their holiday makes a positive contribution to destinations is growing,' says Lolla Meyer of Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa (FTTSA). 'This is a market trend no business can afford to ignore.'

Locally though, without solid statistics or official monitoring, that proportion remains a guesstimate. 'I don't know whether tourists are really bothered about these issues,' says Bill Mitchell, of Oudrif, a green destination in Clanwilliam with cottages built of straw bales and recycled wood, which has rehabilitated its grounds by using and training local labour. 'After all, if they were, they wouldn't be flying to a long-haul destination like SA. Most of them are happy we're a green resort, but they'd probably visit us anyway, even if we weren't.' Nevertheless, he points out that: 'Our aim is to show that it is possible to decrease our negative impact on the earth without sacrificing comfort.'

According to Will Fox, who runs Paperbark Bush Retreat in Lydenburg, Mpumalanga, there's a definite distinction between local and foreign guests. 'Europeans in general have no problem with paraffin lamps and candles rather than electric lights,' he says. 'On the other hand, local guests want hairdryers and electric lights and no excuses.'

On a recent trip to the Kruger Park, New Zealand tourist Alan Saunders asked the manager of the local tour company he was using whether they would expand the company's focus from the Big Five to birds, reptiles, plants or geology. 'He told me it was unlikely,' says Saunders. 'He said among local visitors awareness of wider environmental issues actually seem to be declining. They simply want to be entertained.'

Most of the sustainable tourism initiatives in SA seem to derive their impetus from the personal passion of destination owners or those with an eye on discerning overseas travellers.

These are urged on by organisations such as FTTSA, the Southern Africa Tourism Services Association and the Imvelo Responsible Tourism Awards. But whether these organisations are impartial endorsing bodies is another matter. All the 2009

winners of Imvelo, for instance, were Southern Sun or Sun International hotels, an achievement tarnished somewhat by the fact that these two Sun groups are among the award sponsors.

Given rising concern internationally about the environment, it's hardly surprising that some corporations have been quick to cast themselves in a green light. It's a way to avoid being too closely scrutinised for often questionable environmental practices and can be profitable.

According to Mitchell: 'Many companies put in low-energy light bulbs and have community outreach programmes, but otherwise it's pretty much business as usual. Unfortunately they're put forward by the media and tourist organisations as setting the industry standards. Most people see this as a good start, but I believe the bar is being set much too low and it's disheartening for those who are really trying.'

The real heroes are those people and teams who pursue sustainability because they believe in it, regardless of whether it's profitable or not. An example is iKhayalamafu at Monk's Cowl in the Drakensberg, owned by Paul and Ricky Brogan. It's entirely off-grid, generating its own power with solar energy and a hydrogenerator. They have eradicated all alien vegetation from the property and use mountain water from the nearby stream. They've taken down all fences between themselves and the Drakensberg, welcoming antelope, bush pigs, caracals and leopards as guests.

'I doubt whether more than a few guests stay with us specifically because of our efforts to be earth friendly,' says Brogan. 'But I'm sure that if we didn't make an effort to maintain our property in pristine environmental condition, many would be disappointed.'

Another example is the Peech Hotel in Melrose, Johannesburg. Under the guiding hand of James Peech, it uses solar water heating, recycles grey water to the gardens, uses no harmful detergents, has double-layer insulation to keep down heating and cooling costs, grows its own vegetables and herbs, processes its own water to cut out plastic bottles and recycles waste. It also keeps a carbon balance of 90m² of green space per hotel guest.

Establishments truly committed to sustainability will either gain or lose after the World Cup dust has settled. Only then will we find out how conscious visitors are about green travel and how supportive government will be of green initiatives in the future. 