Testimonial from a certified ECO Destination

Why did Douglas Shire decide to join the ECO Destination Certification program?

The process provided a valuable opportunity to identify and consolidate many of the government, not for profit, commercial actions and initiatives that were in place and bring them together in a structured way. The process importantly allowed us to identify future opportunities to pursue on our process of continuous improvement in sustainable tourism and living.

How did you find the application process?

Since the fight to protect the Daintree Rainforest in the mid 1980s, the Douglas Shire has a proud history of conservation of our natural assets. The World Heritage Listing of the Daintree Rainforest in 1988 set the tone for a community who takes their role as custodians of the natural environment seriously. The Douglas Shire identified ECO Destination Certification as a way of recognising the efforts of the council, tourism industry and community groups in a meaningful way as well as providing a platform to share our story.

How has the program benefitted your processes/destination management?

The framework that was developed for the program has assisted in destination management practices and ongoing monitoring. The content developed for the program helps us align future activities with the aspirations of ECO Destination Certification.

We sat down with Tara Bennett, Chief Executive Officer from Tourism Port Douglas Daintree and asked her what it was like for the Douglas Shire Region to undertake the ECO Destination Certification program.
The Douglas Shire community has been very supportive and proud of the region's participation in the program. The benefit of the program is it acknowledges the individual efforts of the community, businesses and local government helping to unify everyone on a common goal. There were some in the community who questioned the authenticity of the program when there are some aspects that don’t appear to be ‘sustainable’ however this helped everyone realise it’s a process of continuous improvement where we are introducing extra measures and support tools to try and bring all businesses along on the journey.

Our certification journey began with the private sector where the tourism industry has been involved for decades. The first level for a destination is Nature which we always viewed as step one, next up work begins on final criteria to achieve Ecotourism level. Beyond certification we also hope to bring businesses outside tourism along with us to see activities throughout the Shire aligned on a pathway of economic, environmental and social sustainability.

What has the response been from your community and visitors now that you have achieved Nature level certification?

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Would you recommend the program to other destinations (and why)?

Absolutely! From a tourism point of view the program brings together so much more than environmental practices with sections on visitor management, cultural inclusion, waste and water management and impacts on community. This holistic approach provides a roadmap for progressing the destination and tourism in a manner that will meet the needs of all stakeholders.