



31 January 2005

Final Report

Minimizing visitors' impacts on coral reefs in Palau through tour guide training ()

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The purpose of the project *Minimizing visitors' impacts on coral reefs in Palau through tour guide training* is to implement a training program in coral reef ecology for tour guides. The primary goal of the training program is to provide basic information to the tour guides about coral reef ecology and the ways to minimize the impacts of visitors in the marine environment. The aim of the first year of this program is to raise the awareness of the working tour guides in Palau about the importance of their role in protecting the marine environment. Palau Conservation Society, in partnership with Koror State Department of Conservation and Law Enforcement, will take the lead in the first year's implementation of the training program.

Proposed Activities vs. Actual Results

1. Develop a strategy for offering an environmental training course to existing tour guides and dive shop employees.

A local coordinator was hired to oversee the program. A core working group composed of staff of Palau Conservation Society, Koror State Department of Conservation and Law Enforcement and The Nature Conservancy was formed to implement the activities and to develop the course.

The core working group identified the key issues associated with implementing a tour guide training program in Palau. These issues are (1) the high annual turn over of guides, (2) the different levels of language proficiency (guides speak English, Palauan, Mandarin or Japanese), (3) the challenge of attracting those guides most in need of the training (usually representatives of the most responsible dive shops are the only ones to attend such trainings), (4) the need to teach existing guides as well as students studying tourism at the Palau Community College, and (5) the need for a short course that is not overly expensive or time-consuming to people with busy schedules. The group decided to follow the example of PADI instructor's courses in order to deal with these challenges. That would entail creating companion videos and a set of questions to complement a training manual that had been drafted earlier by Community Centered Conservation (C3).

2. Develop a plan to continue to train new guides over the long term, considering language barriers.

The core working group meets monthly and has been working on the content of the course material including the manual, video narrative, companion booklet and certification exam. The material in the draft manual was compressed into narratives that are being developed into script for the video. The final video will consist of three modules: 1) culture and history, 2) the marine environment, and 3) safety. The videos will be produced in English and translated into Palauan, Mandarin and Japanese.

The video is being produced by Roll'Em Productions, in association with Palau Conservation Society and Koror State. A contract was signed by all parties on December 20, 2005. A script has been under development since the signing of the contract and will be ready for review the last week of January.

Once the videos are produced, the first workshop would be offered free of charge. The coordinator, with assistance from the core working group, will present the video package to the tour guides. The package would include the three videos and a CD that includes the reference manual, companion video booklet and supplemental materials. The coordinator will review and explain each module, one module each evening, over a 3-night period. The trial run of this workshop is scheduled for May 2005.

A certification test was developed and distributed for comments. A practice exam will be part of the companion video guide booklet, the complete manual and other reference material. The test will be administered at the end of the each workshop to ensure that guides have mastered the material. Currently this workshop is not mandatory for guides working in Koror State. However, the state hopes to make this course the basis for a tour guide certification program in the future.

After the first free course, subsequent workshops will entail a fee to cover the costs of an instructor who will show and explain each video, print and administer a newly designed test each year, and administer a certification identification badge. Once a guide has been trained, that person will be able to conduct trainings at their own tour operation using the video and supplemental education material. However, the certification test will be administered at Palau Community College.

In addition, the Assistant Professor for Tourism and Hospitality, Education and Training Department at the Palau Community College has been working with the core group since October. The Dean of Continuing Education at the College has also committed to the long term sustainability of this program. The core team has been meeting regularly at the training center at PCC.

Instructors of different nationalities will be requested to attend the first workshop. Once they have successfully completed the training, They will be asked to assist in updating training material in their native language, through Palau Community College. Bilingual training instructors will be identified who can assist in presenting the training material. The details of this will be further discussed with the core group and guide industry.

3. Revise Training Manual produced by C3.

Final revisions of the training manual have been completed by PCS, Koror State Department of Conservation and Law Enforcement, The Nature Conservancy, Palau Community College and affiliates. A final edition will be ready at the end of January. Permission has been granted for the use of copyrighted material.

4. Present program training materials and long term strategy to all partners.

The core working group has presented the course strategy and training materials to tour guides and tour operators through meetings of the Belau Tourism Association, the Belau Tourism Association (Japan) and the Palau Visitors Authority. The members of the Palau Marine Resources Pacific Consortium (MAREPAC) were briefed about the program in October. In addition, some of the members of these organizations offered feedback on the training materials.

The Coral Reef Alliance, an NGO based in the United States, visited Palau in June and September to conduct coral reef related workshops for tour guides. The first workshop focused on basic coral reef biology and threats to reefs. The second workshop focused at developing particular projects to address some of the threats and problems identified in the first workshop. These workshops helped to engage the tour guides and their companies in coral reef protection. They provided an excellent means of identifying some of the needs and difficulties associated with conducting training sessions for tour guides in Palau. They also helped serve as a mechanism to engage the tour guides in specific activities to protect and manage coral reefs. They offer a strong complement to the long-term strategy of developing a sustainable tour guide training program in Palau.

5. Develop an outreach program with materials to inform tour guides of the program.

A series of meetings was held in which tour guide associations and other stakeholders were invited to discuss the training program. The Palau Visitors Authority, Red Cross Society, National Emergency Management Organization and Palau Community College sent representatives to these meetings. The core working group plans to engage the tour guides of different nationalities in the actual production of the video as part of the outreach strategy. Once the video is ready, the core working group will present progress to the BTA and tourism associations.

6. Develop capacity at Palau Community College to ensure course is offered.

Ms. Vicki Maui, Assistant Professor for Tourism and Hospitality at the Palau Community College has been working with the core group since October. Ms. Maui has assisted with final edits of the manual, the narrative and has taken a very active role in this project. Vicki and other PCC staff will be trained as instructors of this program. In addition the Dean of Continuing Education has given his support to the program and is working to ensure it is part of the continuing education program at the College.

7. Work with instructors and Koror State Department of Conservation and Law Enforcement to create proficiency exam and course completion documentation.

A set of questions has been completed with the core team and is based upon the contents of the narrative for the video and the manual. The exam has been distributed and feedback has been incorporated into several drafts. An evaluation form will be developed for the certification session. The coordinator is working with Vicky Maui at the College to help with examination and evaluation forms. Dean Wally is willing to assist in implementing this evaluation.

8. Ensure the certification program is delivered once with full attendance (15 to 20 guides) during the first year.

The consultant with support from the core team will present the educational materials through PCC's continuing education program. This will occur when the video is completed. Based upon the contract schedule with Roll'Em Productions, the video will be finalized on April 20, 2005, at the earliest. The videos may be delayed slightly if weather conditions prevent shooting of footage or if the necessary approvals are not granted in a timely fashion. There will be a trial run of the program two weeks after completion of the video. This trial is tentatively scheduled for mid May 2005. The first certification course is tentatively scheduled for the end of May 2005.

Lessons Learned

There were several difficulties that were encountered during this project that needed additional time to work out. Although these difficulties were often frustrating, and resulted in the delay of the presentation of the first tour guide training course, the core working group and staff at PCS believe that the overall project is much stronger than originally envisioned. Specifically, there were three issues that needed to be resolved in order to proceed with this project:

1. The reference manual originally produced needed substantially more revision than was anticipated, especially once the decision was made to base the course on a series of videos.
2. The decision to base the course on a series of videos was made after the original proposal to NOAA was accepted. This substantially altered the work that needed to be done, and resulted in the reallocation of some of the funding. However, the video format offers much more flexibility in terms of where and when the course can be presented and increases the program's ability to reach tour guides who do not speak English. In addition, the dedication of Koror State and the Palau Community College to carry out the program, especially to administer the certifying examination (if and when the course becomes mandatory for tour guides in Koror State) ensures its long term sustainability. This would have been much harder to obtain if the course was solely dependent upon presentation by instructors.
3. There was a delay finalizing the contract for the video production because of some legal issues about ownership of the materials. This set the program back by several months. However, once the details were worked out, all contracting parties (Palau Conservation Society, Koror State Department of Conservation and Law Enforcement and Roll'Em Productions) were satisfied with the agreement.

Financial Report

	<i>Amount requested</i>	<i>Actual expenditures</i>
Personnel		
Program Coordinator	\$ 22,000	\$ 22,000.00
Administrative Assistant (15%)	1,800	1,814.22
Fringe Benefits (6% of salaries)	1,428	1428.00
Travel		
gas allocation for local travel	500	510.40
Equipment	0	0
Supplies		
computer, software, general office supplies and meeting supplies	4,800	3,825.05
Contractual	0	0
Construction	0	0
Other		
outreach and advertisements	2,050	3,000.00
Indirect Costs (7% of salaries plus fringe benefits)	1,766	1,766
TOTAL	\$ 34,344.00	\$ 34,343.67