



TIAM: You're passionate about the environment and this is reflected in how you operate your business. Do you think growing up in Africa played any part in this?

Steve: I've been lucky to have travelled extensively and operated a diving and sailing business around Zanzibar for 11 years. I've had the joy of the observing wildlife in Kenya's national parks and believe that the more you interact with the environment, the more an appreciation develops.

You live and work in one of the world's most fragile environments; the Great Barrier Reef. Why is it so special, and what actions does your company take to help preserve this World Heritage-listed area?

Sailaway visits the unspoilt Low Isles where the first coral research was undertaken back in 1928. The lagoon is home to a large number of turtles that have little fear of snorkellers, as they know it's a safe area.

The protection of surrounding waters has changed the resident turtles' behaviour and now close-up, passive encounters occur daily. We gain great satisfaction from witnessing an increasing level of guest appreciation of the value of the reef and encourage this through first-hand encounters and education.

We've also invested in a new Lagoon 500 luxury catamaran, which was chosen because it has the highest-quality equipment and meets the desired standard of our environmental values.

Are the marketing benefits of going green really that profound?

We've noticed that inbound markets are becoming more eco-savvy and that ECO Tourism Australia credentials really do influence purchasing behaviour. My view is that the "emerging market" is really the growing number of travellers seeking environmentally sensitive nature experience, and that has no geographic bounds.

What makes the Low Isles one of the unique sites to visit on the Great Barrier Reef?

Firstly, the Low Isles are really close at just 8.5 nautical miles off the Queensland coast, allowing visitors maximum time there. Second, the Low Isles have a unique history and are a natural iconic landmark.

This highly protected and unspoilt environment has recently achieved carbon-neutral status. This is done thanks to investment in a reworked solar-power system, battery banks and use of BioDiesel.

You feel strongly that interpretive experiences are the best way to change visitor behaviour. How do they set Sailaway apart from its competition?

Sailaway employs qualified marine biologists and makes daily records that are sent back to GBRMPA to help with a program called "Eye on the reef". Our tourism experience has credibility; accurate interpretation from the crew is imperative to guest interaction. This expertise helps us pass on a better level of knowledge to guests who may be experiencing the underwater environment for the first time, and even for those who consider themselves to be knowledgeable already.

Many large tourism operators are still struggling to justify the costs of going green. You've invested in things such as on-board wastewater treatment systems even before legislation required it. Why?

As an owner/operator, I'm in a privileged position to be innovative and proactive when it comes to climate change action. Being green and smart is a successful path for the future as before legislation requires it, we can initiate bigger changes in thinking if we are prepared to absorb increased investment and risk.

We're proud to be one of the first operators to install waste water treatment onboard, and have switched to recycled Bio Diesel and low-emission outboards.

It's vitally important to preserve our natural assets for future generations and encourage more environmental ambassadors. The goal is for around 2million visitors to the GBR annually to take up their own climate change action and reduce their individual impacts.

Three of Port Douglas's most respected dive and snorkel vessels, a beautiful family and a successful business... I find it hard to imagine you'll stop there. What's next?

We have plans to continue with carbon offsetting and will do this through the revegetation of an ex-cane paddock, neighbouring World Heritage rainforest, which we recently purchased.

I hope that the continual development of carbon trading and offset schemes will create incentives for more businesses to think and act green. I believe that allowing renewable forestation and carbon offsetting is the smart way forward as the environment can be a sound investment and benefit the future security of our children. ■■



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