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Step Up Travel at IIPT 4th African Conference

Step Up Travel would like to participate in panel discussions or workshops for any of following topics: Tourism Contribution to Poverty Reduction; Micro-Enterprise and SME Tourism Development; Internet, Peace, and Responsible Tourism (proposed topic). In this proposal I will discuss various aspects of Step Up Travel and its development, however, I would like to point out that we are most interested in participating with others in broader discussions (panels/workshops) of the topics mentioned above. However, if you would prefer, we would certainly be willing to do a case presentation about how Step Up Travel uses the internet to promote peace and responsible travel.

Step Up Travel's Mission and Vision

- To provide a premier, online marketing tool for small tourism providers in developing countries in order to increase their visibility and revenue.
- To build a trusted network for travelers and local people to meet one another, share experiences, and promote responsible travel providers, particularly in developing countries.

Step Up Travel's vision is to empower local people, organizations, and travelers to work together to promote quality responsible travel experiences and to emphasize the importance of personal exchanges, deeper cultural understanding, genuine benefit to local people and their communities, preservation of the environment, and ultimately a more peaceful and equitable world.

What is Step Up Travel:

Step Up Travel is an online, responsible-travel community that provides a free, easily-accessible marketing tool for local individuals, small businesses, and organizations and a network for socially-minded travelers and local people to grow to know one another, exchange ideas and recommendations, advocate for responsible travel practices, and seek meaningful interactions with people through travel.

The Research Came First:

The project was inspired by the World Tourism Organization's ST-EP initiative (Sustainable Tourism-Eliminating Poverty) as well as work in sustainable tourism by other organizations and scholars. Our library shows all the documents that we studied and applied in the development of Step Up Travel. We have used some of the most important and informative documents in sustainable tourism in the creation of a practical, internet application for micro-enterprise and SME tourism development. Through the development of tourism micro-enterprises by local people, the goal is to contribute to poverty reduction. <http://www.stepuptravel.org/library.php>

The Interactive, Internet Model of Step Up Travel:

Step Up Travel was founded to help empower local people, tourism providers, and organizations enterprises gain visibility in an industry dominated by intermediary tourism agencies. Step Up Travel, through its free and interactive nature, serves as a tool for local people and tourism providers to establish and/or further develop credible, visible micro-enterprises in tourism. The internet has created a major arena for users (in our case, responsible travelers and local providers) to participate

in implementing ideas, contributing reliable content, and establishing quality control so people grow to trust one another. Trust begins through direct communication that is facilitated by the website and credibility builds with feedback/recommendations from travelers or organizations that serve as endorsements. Platforms such as Craigslist and Ebay are two of many examples that stand as testament to the power of the internet and user-generated content that leads to the sale of goods and services, feedback ratings that build credibility for providers, and promote unique personal exchanges.

Step Up Travel has combined features from these models and applied them to create a travel classifieds (free, robust, long-term ads)¹ and responsible travel community to help reshape the travel industry into one that is more community-based, locally-empowering, sincere and responsible.

The Need for an Online Responsible Travel Community

In a recent TravelMole sustainable tourism article by Totem Marketing, the number of people choosing sustainable tourism is forecasted to be 250 million by 2010.² With this in mind, there is enormous potential for these travelers to be active in the growth of and advocacy for responsible travel. Step Up Travel was built so that travelers and local people can participate in responsible tourism together in an online community where local people can reach travelers, where travelers can help promote local people, and where socially-minded travelers/local people can meet one another. There are many successful travel communities, but none with a vision or functionality like Step Up Travel's.

Online travel communities³ are generally traveler-centric and similar in that they emphasize the destination itself and the traveler-to-traveler connection for advice, travel buddies, discussions, and stories. Step Up Travel was designed to help create a movement in travel that emphasizes the traveler-local relationship in the destination and connecting travelers based on the common interests to meet, empower, and respect local people, and to get "off the beaten path" and experience the more personal, local paths.

In many other online travel communities there is little involvement by local people who are not travelers, but who are interested in cultural exchange; and, commercial postings by local service providers are often prohibited. Step Up Travel, on the other hand, welcomes local people and service providers to offer their culturally-rich talents, activities, and even services, as freelance employment. Travelers can immerse themselves more authentically in a culture with the local people and then empower them, rather than feeding the commercial tourism industry, by leaving feedback that recommends them to future travelers, which allows locals to grow their small business.

Conclusion:

We would like to share our perspective and knowledge about tourism and poverty reduction, tourism micro-enterprise development, and the role of the internet in both of these areas. We thank you for your consideration.

I would like to share with you our press kit which has more information about Step Up Travel. Press Kit URL : <http://www.stepuptravel.org/press/index.org> Username: press Password: presskit

¹ http://www.stepuptravel.org/stepupadvert.php?cat=enterprises&id_p=19#reviews

² <http://www.travelmole.com/stories/1115910.php>

³ www.igougo.com , www.tripup.com , www.travellerspoint.com , www.wayn.com

