

# Tour Operators do it too!

## SNAPSHOT

Go West Tours began operations in September 2000, taking day tours from Melbourne to the Great Ocean Road and have recently expanded the tours to Phillip Island.

With the environment's natural assets at the core of their business' success, Go West Tour's proprietors Terry & Fiona Smit have developed leading edge environmental practices that are resulting in a boom with business.

Today, the company employs over 15 staff and operates sight seeing tours daily throughout the year.

Go West Tours aims to offer great value day tours that are accessible to everyone. They also maintain the status of Melbourne's most sustainable day tour.

## KEY SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES

The key to Go West Tour's success and their main drawcard is the access they provide to Victoria's natural assets. Their business will only remain viable as long as these attractions are preserved.

With years of domestic and international tourism industry experience, Terry and Fiona Smit decided that Go West Tour's must protect the environment and also rejuvenate wherever possible.

Terry and Fiona recognised the opportunity to make a positive contribution to the environment, minimise their impact on the areas they operate in and educate their customers to follow suit!

By taking positive steps towards solutions on these issues they sought to;

- *Promote positive environment messages*; to customers and staff during and after their tour;



- *Retain EcoTourism Accreditation* – a difficult feat considering the high amount of tour operators operating on the same route; and
- *Endeavor to make their fuel emissions carbon neutral.*

## APPROACH

Go West Tours have a high level of commentary and communication with their customers. This afforded them the opportunity to raise environmental awareness and appreciation as part of the tour program.

Their short-term aim was to prevent any damage to the areas the tours came in direct contact with which would maintain the site for future tours.

Conducting over 20 trips per week with a fleet of vehicles using diesel fuel, Go West Tours trained their staff in fuel-efficient driving techniques and make sure the vehicle's engines are kept in good condition.

Wanting to make a greater commitment, they contacted Greenfleet Australia, a carbon offsetting company that rejuvenates the environment in the area you operate in. It was calculated the total diesel fuel usage for the twelve months from 1 June 2005 – 30 May 2006 would have produced 123.47 tons of Carbon Dioxide. To offset this, Go West sponsored the planting of 461 trees to offset their entire fleet's carbon emission.

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In 2005, Go West Tours became the first Australian tourism business to be accredited with ButtsOut Australia. The 'No Butts' Campaign encourages smokers to use personal portable ash trays. Signs are displayed on buses and personal ashtrays are distributed free of charge.

When Go West Tours converted their Head Office to low-energy light bulbs they took it one step further and distributed free bulbs for their staff to use in their homes too.

The Head Office operations were also addressed. Reducing waste, recycling supplies and managing water and power use are all tackled:

- All paper in the office is printed on both sides and then reused as note paper.
- Plastic drinking containers from the tour bus bin are removed and recycled.
- Office Computer Monitors are set to low power use; and
- Rain water is collected at the depot to clean the vehicles.

## RESULTS

The environmental initiatives Go West Tours have implemented have resulted in;

- o Reduced cost of fuel and vehicle repairs;
- o 100% of cigarette litter disposed of properly, not on the ground;
- o Reduced power and water bills; and
- o Increased word of mouth referrals and subsequently enjoy near full capacity tours.

Owner Terry Smit said "Smokers are really enthusiastic about the No Butts initiative. We often receive feedback that it makes them more aware of where they dispose cigarette butts both during and after the tour."



## COST AND BENEFITS ANALYSIS

Terry and Fiona estimate they save around 25% per year on reduced use of fuel, water, power and supplies. The initial cost of converting to low energy light bulbs has been covered by the savings in the power bill.

The use of rain water to clean vehicles minimises water bills and ensures they stay within the law on current water-use restrictions.

The cost of planting trees to offset the carbon emissions from the vehicle usage was high. However, a survey of customers found that overwhelmingly, the strongest message they received was 'appreciation and conservation of the environment.' This cost can be viewed as a marketing cost and an investment in site's preservation.

Go West Tour continues to review its environmental impact and the positive steps it can take to minimise its impact in the environment it operates in.

For example, Go West Tours:

- o survey customers and staff on suggestions and improvements to their environmental practices
- o Updates its brochures online,
- o Recently introduced iPod translation services, as opposed to paper guide booklets for international visitors.

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## MOTIVATION

Every environmental initiative Go West Tours introduces has been extremely well received by staff and customers. As a result of the positive feedback, Terry and Fiona have been experiencing near capacity tours on most days of operation.

“It’s been important for us to take care of the environment we operate; and the feedback we receive is incredibly positive,” explained Terry.

Go West Tours want to ensure their staff and customers feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for their impact on the environment.

“We are keen to involve everyone so they are aware of the positive environmental influence they are making while enjoying Victoria’s beautiful natural assets. “

## INSIGHTS

While leading the environmental way for Tour companies, Go West Tours has some obstacles to address:

For example, Go West Tours need to overcome obstacles in order to ensure the environment they operate in is maintained;

- a) A large number of tour companies operate in the same areas and this could affect the preservation of the natural beauty; and
- b) The large increase in the number of passengers means more vehicles making a larger carbon emission.

Terry and Fiona Smit are confident that customer and staff- led ideas will continue to be highly effective mechanisms for environmental practices at Go West Tours.

## THE FUTURE

Go West Tours plan to recalculate their carbon emissions every year, to ensure they are accurately offsetting their vehicle’s emissions.

## CONTACT DETAILS

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Winner, 2006 Victorian Tourism Award - Significant Tour & Transport Operator

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Highly Commended, 2005 Australian Tourism Awards - Significant Tour & Transport Operator

Go West Tours is a member of the Backpacker Operators Alliance of Victoria (BOAV), is the peak body for backpacker industry operators in Victoria, with the twin objectives to create a professional and cohesive industry in Victoria, and to promote Victoria as an international backpacker destination of choice.

BOAV is a dynamic organisation whose main aim is to protect and advance the interests of its members at local, state and federal government level. BOAV also supports members in areas relating to the operational needs, profitability and the sustainability of the backpacking industry.

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