



Community conservation of the great Papua wilderness

Executive summary

Established as a limited partnership in 2005, Papua Expeditions offers professionally guided birding, wildlife, hiking and trekking expeditions that are led by indigenous locals in the wild frontier of western Papua. In order to promote biodiversity protection, Papua Expeditions arranges and signs conservation agreements with landowners covering the areas where tourists are allowed to visit.

The enterprise employs indigenous locals from villages surrounding these protected areas exclusively and guarantees fair remuneration for their services. This case study provides insights into how to include marginalised groups in conservation efforts.



COUNTRY
Indonesia

NAME
Papua Expeditions
(CV. Ekonexion)

TYPE
High-end adventure
tour provider

FIELDS OF INCLUSION
Activities,
natural conservation



How the business model works

West Papua is one of the last great tropical wilderness areas left in the world. As a native of this wild region, Like Wijaya has travelled extensively throughout her homeland and has seen an enormous variety of endemic birds. In 2005, she established Papua Expeditions under a limited partnership framework specialising in bird watching and began offering natural history tours throughout Papua. Together with her husband, Iwein Mauro, an acclaimed birder with extensive experience across Asia, Like Wijaya has succeeded in attracting tourists to enjoy Papua's great wilderness areas.

A high-quality tourism experience

Papua Expeditions generates revenue from five different tour packages, including birding walks, birding breaks, outdoors breaks, birding expeditions and outdoors expeditions. The shortest tour, the birding walk, lasts from one-half to a full day, at a cost of approximately USD 150 per person. The birding and outdoors breaks last from five to six days, at a cost of about USD 2,000 per person. The longest and most popular packages, the birding and outdoors expeditions, range from nine to 19 days and cost anywhere from USD 4,000 to USD 8,000 per person. These all-inclusive fees are based on a maximum of six participants.

Tourists have learned about Papua Expeditions from various sources, including Internet advertising, Lonely Planet, through an episode on birds in the BBC's "Natural History" series, as well as through articles featuring Iwein Mauro. Papua Expeditions mainly attracts tourists from Europe, USA, Australia, China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.



Conservation agreements with indigenous landowners

To protect the precious ecosystems it depends upon, Papua Expeditions arranges conservation agreements with customary landowners in its three primary destination areas: Waigeo, Jayapura, and Manokwari. Agreements range from paying a daily "respectful usage" fee per visiting tourist without restricting the traditional usage of the land to a formalised leasing agreement in form of a Community Conservation and Ecotourism Agreement. Landowners or land-holding groups receive payments in return for carefully defined and monitored conservation outcomes, whereby compensation is provided for any restrictions on traditional usage practices.

On the island of Waigeo, for example, a group of customary landowners belonging to two different clans with 92 km² of forested land under their custody signed an agreement with Papua Expeditions under which their clans and communities have agreed to new limitations on activities that might threaten wildlife in the area. The agreement bans logging and mining, and stops or otherwise restricts traditional usage throughout an uninhabited river catchment. Subsistence gardening is being discontinued over a period of natural soil replenishment; the use of traps and ground snares is absolutely forbidden, and pig-hunting is restricted.

Creating job opportunities for locals

Today, Papua Expeditions has four full-time and one part-time staff member in its head office in Sorong, and employs up to 80 daily workers per month, all of whom are entitled to ancestral land rights and/or reside at the destinations within the enterprise's portfolio. They serve as guides, porters and cooks on the tours. Since most staff members join Papua Expeditions without formal training, the enterprise provides on-the-job training in birding, wildlife biology and English. Although the tours operate primarily during the high season (June-November), Papua Expeditions pays its staff members a monthly salary regardless of tourist volume.

Guests and guides enjoy the bird-watching opportunities in the Papua wilderness together.

Challenges and solution strategies

CHALLENGES

Negotiating conservation agreements: In some areas in which Papua Expeditions operates, the enterprise and indigenous landowners have struggled to agree on terms for a conservation agreement. Indigenous landowners have often demanded high prices and been wary of providing exclusive access.

Gaining support from local community members: Community members have hunted large-bodied animals and birds in the forest for generations and are used to selling rare animals in the nearby markets. Depending on the type of agreement, the monetary benefits of the conservation agreements are not necessarily shared with the local communities; thus, many community members have felt excluded from the conservation-ecotourism deal.

Breaking conservation agreements: Some individual landowners break their conservation agreement with Papua Expeditions by cutting timber, levelling terrain, or clearing land for agricultural use. In contrast to companies, the local community members tend to view the agreements as starting points for further negotiations rather than as final arrangements. In a recent case, three landowners even burnt down forests to clear land for agriculture in an attempt to negotiate higher compensation fees.

English skills: Papua Expeditions provides its staff with on-the-job training in English, birding and wildlife biology. While indigenous people whom the company engages are generally familiar with the flora and fauna of the area, they often struggle with learning English in order to communicate with international travellers.

Productivity of indigenous workers: Besides the low level of formal education, which can be resolved over time through focused on-the-job-training, there are also very serious issues with regard to working ethics and professionalism in the indigenous communities. With notable exceptions, community members tend to deliver below-par standards in terms of work quality and quantity, and require constant motivation and supervision. Younger community members are particularly susceptible to alcoholism, violence and a high degree of lethargy caused by generational conflicts and dysfunctional community relations.

SOLUTION STRATEGIES

Ability to compromise: In the Waigeo case, Papua Expeditions compromised after several rounds of deliberative negotiation in order to reach an agreement.

Providing income opportunities: Papua Expeditions employs up to 80 daily workers per month from the communities surrounding the protected areas. All of them receive wages which range between 1.6 and 9.5 times the provincial minimum wage. This financial inclusion of many community members has helped transform the community's perception of tourism. No longer viewed as exploiters of the land, tourists are now acknowledged as a stable source of income.

Monitoring and awareness-raising: During the tourism high season, Papua Expeditions can easily monitor community activities since tours take place frequently. During the low season, villagers and landowners committed to protecting the environment monitor developments. In addition, Papua Expeditions dedicates much time and resources to resolving any problems that arise through open and careful deliberation and consultation. The company also offers increasingly attractive financial compensation over long periods of time for landowners in exchange for their commitment to the environmental cause.

On-the-job learning: Like Wijaya, head of Papua Expeditions, leads all trips and trains new staff members in offering high-quality services to guests. Longer trips allow new staff members to immerse themselves in an English-speaking environment. The average orientation period consists of three trips. After this, staff members can take on additional tasks and improve their English skills. Like Wikaya reviews each staff member's performance after each trip.

Motivation and development opportunities: Besides offering competitive salaries that far exceed all legal requirements, Papua Expeditions covers all costs of meals and drinks in the field and pays for job-related transportation and health costs. The enterprise also facilitates "Inter-Cultural Exchanges" between motivated daily workers in the various destinations, thus enabling employees to learn from culturally different Papuans. This cultural exchange has proven very beneficial in the areas of character and leadership building. Yet despite such a significant and fair benefits package, instilling positive and regular work attitudes among the young community members remains difficult.

Mutual benefits

Business benefits

Papua Expeditions was established in 2005, but the enterprise began operating tours in 2007. Demand has grown steadily, as the company has built a reputation for providing access to protected areas. Many tourists, whose first trip exceeded their expectations, have returned. Papua Expeditions broke even after three years of operations, and today operates up to two trips per month. The enterprise's profitability has steadily increased, achieving USD 25,000 in net profits for 2012.

Papua Expeditions enjoys advantages in arranging transportation and logistics because it employs indigenous locals who know the right people and can easily find solutions to security or operational issues. Led by local staff who are intimately familiar with the forest and its wildlife, the tours provide visitors with a genuine wildness adventure. Local staff can tell traditional stories about their homeland and ancestors, and share forest trekking techniques. Hiring indigenous locals as guides, promoters and protectors of their own forests also protects the basis of Papua Expeditions' business, as the enterprise needs well-preserved forests if it is to continue attracting visitors and generating revenue from ecotourism. The conservation agreements allow Papua Expeditions to offer a unique experience and exclusive access to protected biodiversity.

Development benefits

Papua Expeditions' staff members receive a monthly salary exceeding the West Papuan minimum wage (USD 175) as well as an end-of-the-year bonus. They receive their salary throughout the low season (December–May), and therefore enjoy a steady source of income year-round. Before working with Papua Expeditions, these individuals were mostly unemployed or engaged in farming and hunting activities to support their families. In addition, Papua Expeditions offers on-the-job training in English, birding and wildlife biology.

The enterprise also employs up to 80 daily workers per month, all from the communities surrounding the visited destinations. They are hired as guides, porters, cooks and assistants on an as-needed basis. All of them receive daily wages which, depending on workload and responsibilities, range from 1.6 to 9.5 times the provincial minimum wage, and also receive basic on-the-job training.

Since the earliest days of its operations, Papua Expeditions has established its own internal company fund, the Cenderawasih Fund for Community Development. At the end of each financial year, the company transfers 10% of its net profit into this fund to be disbursed to concrete, small-scale projects, most of them in the area of conflict-resolution, health care or education.

Outlook

While the business model itself has the potential to be scaled up within Papua and replicated to other parts of the country, Papua Expeditions intends to retain its current scale and list of services. Key to the enterprise's future business growth will be the continuous social advancement and entrepreneurial autonomy of the indigenous communities within its destinations. The

management team would like to focus on sustaining sound relationships with its partner landowners. The enterprise's unique model gives it a significant advantage over its competitors. Given the financial barriers and substantial investment in building relationships required for such a model, Papua Expeditions will likely maintain its niche position.

INTERVIEWS

Like Wijaya, Managing Director at Papua Expeditions
John Siahaya, staff member at Papua Expeditions

CONTACT

Like Wijaya, Managing Director
Tel: +629513102740
Email: manager@ekonexion.com
www.PapuaExpeditions.com
www.ekonexion.com

AUTHORS

Prita Raditiarini and Tomohiro Hamakawa, Kopernik

DATE

Research for the case study was conducted in May and June of 2014

PHOTOS

Courtesy of Papua Expeditions (CV. Ekonexion)