



Feature No. 35: EcoMantra Nature Awareness and Travel



Ravi Goel stresses that he and his colleague, Mahrukh Bulsara, have come a long way since their first difficult experience attempting to obtain a loan for their eco-tourism business. The two entrepreneurs had the necessary accounting information and collateral in place for their company, EcoMantra Nature Awareness and Travel, yet they found that banks were reluctant to provide finance for small enterprises regardless of their financial stability. Eco-tourism entrepreneurs still face many barriers to entry and growth in India, but Ravi and Marukh have worked tirelessly to build EcoMantra's reputation as a superior eco-tourism destination. They believe strongly in the power of eco-tourism to spread sustainability values and they have become pioneers in innovative initiatives for the sector.

Listening to Ravi speak about the philosophy behind eco-tourism, it is easy to understand his passion. He speaks about the importance of conserving natural resources for the future of all business, and the necessity of preventing green-washing in his field so that eco-tourism sites can make a genuine contribution to conservation efforts. For him, eco-tourism is the most effective means to preserve nature because revenue generated must be invested in the community in order to maintain the site's appeal. In addition, staff members who are necessarily employed in the local region need little motivation to exceed expectations because they are effectively beautifying their own home.

People living in the area also receive the social benefits of EcoMantra's presence. A full quarter of the founders' initial \$150,000 investment went to local carpenters and masons and he continues to employ these craftspeople on an ongoing basis. EcoMantra also spends 15 percent of its revenue on local produce, making the company the biggest customer of the local agricultural community. More importantly, Ravi and Marukh regularly witness EcoMantra's visitors disprove their own stereotypical views of rural community life upon meeting the people who live there. Ravi sees the company's biggest accomplishments as bringing an understanding of rural people to a broader clientele and cultivating a deep appreciation for conservation efforts within each traveler.

EcoMantra operates under the principle that every individual trip to the eco-camp is a special one and with each season comes a new host of experiences. The 70 percent of the company's customer base that are return-visitors can confirm this fact. Demand for visits to EcoMantra is so high that the founders have hardly had to expend any capital on marketing efforts, instead relying largely on ample word-of-mouth advertising.



The company's convenient location between two of India's largest metropolises attracts numerous vacationers as well as corporations seeking a team-building experience. Large clients such as Tata Consultancy, HSBC, and Citigroup have all given high marks to the program. Ravi and Marukh have plans to open 20 other eco-tourism sites by 2011. Domestic Indian travel grows 25 percent annually, and considering the company's already substantial success, EcoMantra is sure to grow exponentially in coming years.

For more information about EcoMantra Nature Awareness and Travel, visit www.ecomantra.org.

Written by Rajya Karipineni, World Resources Institute ©2007 – The Rising Ventures Series features articles, announcements and profiles of investors and entrepreneurs related to the theme of innovative small and medium businesses (SMEs) in emerging markets that deliver social and/or environmental benefits. These business models have been identified through the New Ventures (www.new-ventures.org) and Development through Enterprise (www.nextbillion.net) projects. To view other Features in the Series, visit <http://www.new-ventures.org/risingventures>.