The aim of the workshop was to introduce nature/heritage interpretation to a group of small ecotourism operators and other small-scale conservation organizations with an interest in ecotourism.

The objectives – and the outcomes – were 3 fold:

1. To develop a basic understanding of contemporary heritage interpretation theory and practice with a focus on current developments and good practice.

2. Provide and opportunity to work collaboratively to produce an interpretation product based on the experience of a field trip to Sinharajah Forest, a World Heritage site.

3. Provide an opportunity for participants to consider and establish a network or forum for kindred ecotourism businesses and organizations where interpretation practices can be shared.

Workshop Processes and Outcomes

Day 1: GETTING STARTED - MAPPING VISITOR PROFILES

Who are our visitors to natural environments?
What can we say about tourists who do eco-tours?
How would we describe our visitors/tourists?

Prompts:
Age? Levels of education? Occupations? Gender?
Domestic? Locals? Internationals? Where are the international tourists from? Size of groups?
How long do they stay? What is a typical itinerary for eco-tourists? Why do they choose a nature tour?
Outcomes:

The participants suggested the following characteristics of the domestic market – middle-income earners, small groups and family groups, motivation was leisure and fun, they were well educated. International tourists were characterized as – highly motivated, elderly, highly educated, knowledge oriented and had made a conscious choice to have an ecotourism experience. Children were considered a distinct market with different interests and perceptions and where parental interests and concerns needed to be taken into account.

Day 1: THE EXPERIENCE OF NATURE

From your various experiences:

What are all the ways people experience nature (positive & negative)?
What other ways are there for people to connect to the natural world?
What are all the activities people do in natural settings?
What are the reasons people attach to and associate with natural heritage sites like national parks?
What is the role of the mass media in the nature experience?
What role does the tourism industry play?

The aim is to reflect on:
• The emotional and cognitive connections people make with ‘nature’ in all its many forms.
• The many meanings we make about the natural environment (including of course ‘nature’ being the fundamental resource for life on the planet and thus the conservation reasons for protecting biodiversity).
• The role of affective/emotional, spiritual, cultural and aesthetic connections and associations we make.

Outcomes from Small Group Discussion:

Experiences of Nature: connections – associations – perceptions


A resource for all life – a source of moral law – learning the law of giving – learning respect – conserving for the future – consciousness of things we take for granted – a place for intergenerational knowledge transfer – a sacred place.

Lessons Learnt: the visitor is at the centre of both the tourism experience and interpretation. Interpretation should draw on the total experience of the visitor and on the total range of associations, connections & perceptions people make with the natural environment. The total experience will always be greater and more powerfully remembered than the interpretation provided.

Day 1: THE OTHODOX DEFINITIONS OF INTERPRETATION

An illustration and visual survey of traditional methods of nature interpretation:

- Signage
- Guiding
- Brochures, Guide Books, Maps etc.
- Interpretation Centres
- Audio Tours
- Story Telling, Performances & Activities for Visitors

A Simple Diagram Of Interpretation

Interpretation is at the heart of all tourism

- The ‘making of meaning’ is a fundamental dynamic of the tourism experience for the individual tourist. Tourists collect stories, they make stories, they tell stories, they take photos, they write letters/emails/postcards, they keep diaries, they collect guide books, brochures, they reflect, they compare & contrast ‘home’ & ‘away’, they learn formally & informally about their destinations, they evaluate experiences and they determine the significance of the experience for themselves.
• The ‘making of meaning’ varies little whether the activity is leisure tourism, ecotourism, cultural tourism, adventure tourism, heritage tourism, rural tourism,... and so forth.

• The provision of materials and presentations to explain the tourist experience to the tourist is enormous in its scope and depth. It includes brochures, guide books, newspapers, the internet, videotapes, audiotapes, travel literature, travel magazines, lifestyle TV programs, site lectures, audio-visual presentations, signage, guided tours, visitor centres, websites, interpretation centres etc. All of these are part of what I would want to call the “interpretation environment”.

• Interpretation is much more than information. It is information that has been shaped or sculptured by the selection process, by the presentation process, by the context within which it is enunciated, by the discourse of which it is a part, by the visitors who experience it, by the socio-cultural codes embedded within the information and so forth.

Traditional Definitions of Interpretation

• An educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by first-hand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information. (Tilden, 1977)

• Interpretation is an educational activity that aims to reveal meanings about our cultural and natural resources. Through various media... interpretation enhances our understanding, appreciation, and, therefore, protection of historic sites and natural wonders. Interpretation is an informational and inspirational process... (Beck and Cable, 1998)

• The educative role of interpretation is not simply to reinforce the familiar or provide the ‘facts’ or ‘truth’ about the past, but to provide a[n] opportunity to encourage the questioning and critical scrutiny of both the past and present. (Nixon etal, 1995 quoted in Hall & McArthur, 1996)

• The process of stimulating and encouraging an appreciation of our natural and cultural heritage and of communicating conservation ideals and practices. (Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service quoted by McArthur, in Ecotourism, vol.2, 1998)

• A means of communicating ideas and feelings which helps people enrich their understanding and appreciation of their world, and their role within it. (Interpretation Australia Association, 1995)

• Interpretation is not information. It’s not a visitor centre, a sign or a brochure... These are merely techniques by which interpretation can be delivered... It goes beyond telling people the name of a plant species or the age
of a building. Interpretation is a co-ordinated, creative and inspiring form of learning. It provides a means of discovering the many complexities of the world and our role within it. It leaves people moved, their assumptions challenged and their interest in learning stimulated. (McArthur, in Ecotourism, vol.2, 1998)

• Interpretation... describes the process of helping people in the discovery and appreciation of their natural and cultural heritage. Effective interpretation requires the combination of information (about why the place is special), education, entertainment and inspiration. It deals in stories, ideas and experiences which explain, guide, reveal, arrange, question, share and provoke. Interpretation uses a wide range of media as is appropriate to the setting and audience needs... Properly conducted interpretation will not only enrich the visitor experience but can help achieve other important management objectives, for example, minimising human impact on natural resources and facilities and promoting better public perception of the management agencies and their objectives. (Australian Heritage Commission, Successful Tourism at Heritage Places, 2001)

The Aims of Interpretation at Heritage Sites

The fundamental aim of interpretation is to bridge the gap between form and content.

The ‘form’ is any material object or physical site whether it be a rainforest or an archaeological site or an historical building or a painting or a piece of technology and so forth.

The ‘content’ is any information that pertains to that material object or physical site that has been designed or shaped for a visitor viewing the object or visiting the site. Equally, the ‘content’ is any information or memories or experiences the visitor has accumulated and uses to make sense of their viewing of an object or the experience of a heritage site.

Why is there a gap between ‘form’ and ‘content’?

The reasons are many and include:

• The enormous variations in the formal education which visitors have had.

• The impact of international tourism. Many visitors have a different cultural background to that of the managers and custodians of heritage sites.

• The impact of migration. Many communities are multicultural. Therefore there are many different conceptions & views about ‘nature’.

• The democratisation of tourism and visitation to heritage sites has meant that managers can no longer assume a highly educated and wealthy clientele.
• Visitors are not empty vessels to be ‘filled’ with the knowledge of the custodians of heritage sites. Visitors bring their own perspectives, their own stories and their own experiences into play when they visit and experience a heritage site.

The aims of interpretation have been further articulated by McArthur and Hall (1996) (p.88)

• To enrich the visitors’ experience.

• To assist visitors in developing a keener awareness, appreciation & understanding of the place being visited.

• To accomplish management objectives through encouraging the thoughtful use of resources by visitors (for example, the distribution of visitor pressure at a site and/or minimising environmental impacts on fragile natural and cultural sites).

• To promote public understanding of heritage managers and related heritage programs: fostering an attachment to heritage & to heritage conservation and building a heritage constituency.

A Model of Interpretation

A Model Of Interpretation

A Model Of Interpretation

INTERPRETATION ENVIRONMENT

Dimension 1:
- Media (TV, WWW, magazines, cinema, radio, newspaper, etc.)
- Education (formal and informal)
- Guidebooks etc.
- Research and Knowledge formation
- Memory, myth, history, stories etc.

**Tourist**

Or

Visitor **

INTERPS

Knowledge
- Semiotic Theory

Content

Communication
- Cognitive Learning Theory

Media Theory

Dimension 2:
- Layout or design of site/attraction
- Display of objects (natural or made)
- Ambience / atmosphere of site (i.e. the setting)

* See the Barrie ‘Model of Material Culture’ and the Stuff / Bundle Model for Material Culture and Interpretation.

** See the Hooper – Greenhill Diagram (Adapted by Staff) of ‘Interpretation and Communication’.

* Needs to be considered in relation to a ‘Model of a Tourist Attraction’ (MacCannell) and Urban. Adapted by Staff
Day 1: RATIONAL FOR NATURE INTERPRETATION: STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES

What’s the rationale for doing interpretation from the perspective of

(1) the tourist/visitor
(2) natural resource managers or site custodians
(3) tourism operators?

Divide into 3 groups, each group tackling a different stakeholder.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes from Small Group Discussion:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Tourist</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases enjoyment – enhances the experience – provides information – orientation of the site – makes the experience a shared one – tourists want to understand – makes the experience distinctive – makes them aware of many issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Natural Resource Management/Custodians</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Tourism Operator</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product value adding – distinction in the market place – customer service and increasing enjoyment (so good client feedback and word of mouth) – income – provides internal cohesion &amp; direction for the tour business – customer satisfaction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Day 2: REVIEWING DAY 1 – WHAT’S MISSING FROM THE DEFINITIONS?

Looking at the outcomes of the activities from Day 1 ('Mapping Visitor Profiles’ & ‘The Experience of Nature’) compare them with the standard definitions of interpretation & the discussion of the rationale for doing interpretation. What is missing in the definitions?

Whole group discussion.

Outcomes from Group Discussion:

The definitions emphasize education but often people relate to nature through emotions and spirituality – appreciation and the value of something can arise from experience not just learning about the forest – people like activities not just reading signs or listening to guides – is meditation in the forest/being alone in the forest/feeling nature interpretation? – are the rules of being in a protected area (no rubbish, no taking of plants out of the forest, no feeding birds or animals, wearing dark clothes, only photographs, only footprints) interpretation?

Day 2: WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS OF GOOD INTERPRETATION?

Is it about good communication? (And what is ‘good communication’?)
Is it about dialogue & conversations rather than lectures?
Does it treat visitation as a social activity?
Does it require good planning?
Does it employ a variety of media? Does it rely more on visuals rather than language?
Is it about being experiential, focusing more on doing than passive reception?
Does it put the visitor at the centre of the interpretation experience?
Is it best achieved through guides? Or not?
Is it about emphasizing storytelling & narrative more than exposition?
Is it best achieved through interpretation centres?
Is it about capitalizing on sensory exploration?
Is it about engaging aesthetics and a sense of the spiritual?
Should it be fun, entertaining, creative and engage the imagination?

A small group activity. Make a list of all the elements of interpretation using the above questions as prompts.
Check your ideas/discussions against the handout Some Criteria for Interpretation Good Practice.

Some Criteria for Interpretation Good Practice
(Based on the UK Good Practice Guidance, 2013.)

- Does it grab attention; is it stimulating; does it stir the imagination?
- Does it connect to the visitor’s life experiences?
- Is it interesting, engaging, pleasurable, meaningful?
• Does it engage all the senses?
• Is the use of media appropriate and effective?
• Is it well planned?
• Is it user friendly?
• Does it cater for the needs of a variety of visitors?
• Is it safe?
• Does it help people appreciate and learn about nature?
• Does it enhance or value-add to the visit?
• Does it encourage and enable local community participation and foster a sense of ownership or stewardship of the natural environment?
• Does it promote a conservation ethos? Does it encourage ethical and responsible tourism behaviour?
• Does it encourage repeat visitation? Does it stand out in the market? Does it set standards or benchmarks?
• Is equal access ensured (physical, intellectual, cultural & financial?)
• Is it evaluated and is the evaluation acted upon?

Criteria are all well and good but how would you assess these criteria?
What would you need to know to answer the questions?
How would you obtain this information?
Does each criterion need its own set of criteria for measurement?

A reflection on Good Nature/Heritage Interpretation:

Has it touched heart, soul and mind?
Good interpretation requires all three.

Day 2: THE CHALLENGE OF DIGITAL MEDIA – DOES DIGITAL MEDIA CHANGE EVERYTHING?

Technology, Interpretation & the Present

• Smart Phones, iPods, iPads and Apps (examples from Zion National Park, Arches National Park and Yellowstone National Park in USA)
• Trails, information, maps, activities, interpretation & links. Downloads, GPS activated guiding/audio-visual tours (examples from USA and Australia).
• Material available on-site to visitors via the web using smart phones (for example, video clips from YouTube: ‘What is an Ecosystem?’; Animal Atlas – what is that in the rainforest? (for children); ‘Deforestation and the extinction of species in rainforests’; ‘Rainforest Natural Sounds’).
• Social Media - visitor participation & meaning making though blogs, personal websites, Face Book & other media sharing sites.
• Augmented reality – iPad tracking system. Multi-user systems (for example, innovations being trialled by City University of Hong Kong at the Megao Caves in China).

What are the critical features of these developments?

• It makes heritage/nature interpretation visual as opposed to language based interpretation.
• It makes heritage interpretation an immersive and embodied experience (transcending the information-drenched approaches of traditional interpretation).
• Within limits, they respond to visitor interests rather than the agendas of heritage custodians & managers.
• Paradoxically, it enhances the original over the reproduction and potentially amplifies the heritage values of the site.
• It facilitates user-generated content & user-sharing on social media.
• The system is digital, so can be continuously adapted, supplemented and extended as new technologies are created. It has a “life” beyond the site.

Mapping Future Trends in the Technology/Heritage Interpretation Nexus

The Present (1-3 years)
• Mobile apps
• Social Media

The Near Future (3-5 years)
• Augmented reality
• Open Content

The Further Future (4-8 years)
• The internet of things – ‘smart objects’ with unique digital identifiers.
• Natural user interfaces (eg Google glasses); ‘learning by doing’; seamless interface between visitor, cultural site & technology

Modelling Technology and Heritage Sites: 3 Spheres of Natural Heritage Sites

PHYSICAL SITE ON-LINE SITE MOBILE PLATFORMS
The model acknowledges that most heritage sites and national parks have a physical and a digital dimension/reality, that they exist on 2 distinct levels – the physical place and on the internet. What links the 3 spheres is digital technology: the aim should be a seamless & connected experience of the three spheres.

**Future Gazing and Critical Issues**

3D Mapping, Virtual Reality, Interactive Platforms, Immersive Environments, Enhanced Experiences

(1) Content. Authorized and unauthorized content. Whose voices are being heard? The demand for participation & visitor generated content, visitors making their own meanings/interpretations and then communicating these via social media.

(2) Nature/Heritage visitation is a social experience & digital media can enhance this or it can circumscribe it by having individual visitors plugged into their digital device. The latter should be avoided and the former should be encouraged.

(3) Online gaming platforms. Increasingly being used by museums – interactive educational games.

(4) Visual versus verbal communication – interpretation through visuals avoids the issue of language translations and showing/illustrating is more powerful and more memorable than being told or reading the information.

(5) Storytelling and multiple stories. Digital technology amplifies the narrative possibilities of heritage sites: visual stories, verbal stores, performed stories, multiple stories, different types of stories (mythical, historical, archaeological, scientific, imagined), contested stories. With digital technology, visitors can choose the type of narrative they want to experience before, during and after the visit.

(6) Intangible Heritage. Bringing music, videos (of performances, religious rituals, celebrations, festivals, crafts people at work), literature/poetry and local languages, storytelling and mythology into the experience of heritage environments. At Kakadu National Park, Australia listening to the stories, the music and the poetry of the Indigenous custodians of the site while traversing the landscape.

Remember, 10 years ago...

- There was no Web 2.0 (2004)
- There were no iPhones (2006)
- There were no iPads (2010)

And G3 networks had just been commercially introduced.

Is the future of heritage/nature interpretation a digital future?
Day 2: DIGITAL MEDIA & ORTHODOX INTERPRETATION – A SWOT ANALYSIS

Compare and contrast digital media with traditional forms of communication (for example, websites, on-line gaming, pod-casts, YouTube, GPS activated audio-visual tours versus signage, interpretation centres & brochures/guidebooks etc. Compare digital media and guiding – is there a future for guiding?

(Small group activity - a SWOT analysis. Use SWOT matrix provided. Also refer to handout Why Use A Guide in the Digital Age. Plenary discussion.)

[See appendix for SWOT Analysis Matrix.]

Why Use a Guide in the Digital Age?

[This was written for a guide working in northwest India. He wanted me to write a text for his website.]

With so much information available on the Web – everything from Wikipedia to ipod audio tours, to GPS activated interpretation with maps pictures and commentary, YouTube video tours, reconstructions of historical and archaeological sites and virtual reality tours and explanations of ecosystems – what can a guide offer the visitor that the digital world cannot when the digital world is at your finger tips on your smart phone or tablet?

Here are 5 answers to this question.

1. The most obvious and the most important is the person-to-person interaction. Digital presentations are generally not so interactive and rather rely on the visitor's passive reception of the material. Even highly interactive Web applications cocoon the visitor into a particular interaction that is quite solitary. Guides, however, can converse with visitors and conversations are always two-way. They add to the sociality of visiting a site.

2. Guides are invariably locals and so their local knowledge and wisdom will always extend beyond the particular sites you are visiting. They can answer questions about a host of things that come to mind while visiting a heritage site.

3. The huge volume of digital material is always available to you. You can enjoy it before the visit and after the visit, a day later, a year later. But the guided experience is an interaction that (a) cannot be repeated; it's a "once off" and (b) cannot be taken home with you. It is a type of performance on site, a conversation on site. It will thus be an essential part of the way you interact with the site and how you'll remember your visit.

4. On-line material like all mass produced media assumes a visitor profile and, in general, its delivery takes little account of who you are, where you have come from, what your interests are in relation to historical sites, your educational background, your occupation, your gender, your age. A
A good guide will tailor their presentations to the particular visitors they are interacting with.

5. Supporting local guides supports the local economy. Paying for on-line downloadable tours generally sends your money elsewhere and local communities often don’t benefit from your visit.

So here are 5 good reasons to use a local guide even when so much is now available on line, all of the time.

Day 2: CURRENT ISSUES IN INTERPRETATION

There are a vast number of issues related to contemporary interpretation practice. Here are some.

- Verbal versus visual interpretation – which works best?
- Imagination/somatic engagement/affect/emotions/aesthetics/creativity
- Should interpretation have a moral agenda to ‘save the planet’?
- Didacticism/teaching or conversations? Preach, teach or converse?
- Activities as a form of interpretation
- Cross-cultural dialogue/communications/translations
- Interpretation and local communities – outreach programs, school programs etc.

[This session consisted of a combination of stimulus inputs – an illustrated 5+ minute prompt – followed by a small group discussion of each issue.]

Outcomes from Discussion.

- Visual interpretation works best. It is not reliant on language. Visual includes diagrams, models, charts, pictures, video-clips.
- The whole person is important in interpretation, not just the mind. Imagination, engagement of the senses, emotional responses and creativity are sometimes undervalued in interpretation – these bodily responses are in fact crucial to interpretation. Interpretation without emotional force, without engaging the senses and without creativity is arid or sterile.
- Interpretation with messages and a moral agenda – to save the planet – is controversial. Many believe that strong conservation messages do not work well because people are having a leisure/social experience. Others believe the opportunity is such a good chance to get people to think about the natural environment and about conservation of biodiversity. In actual fact most interpretation has elements of preaching, teaching and conversation. It is a matter of finding a balance and knowing the visitor well enough to know what balance works with what tourist types.
- Activities as a type of interpretation is increasingly employed world-wide. Doing something is far superior to passive listening or passively reading a sign. However, the activities must be appropriate to the type of visitor.
Some types of ecotourism like white water rafting, diving, hiking (etc.) have activities at the centre of their product.

- Cross-cultural communication is sometimes an issue. There are different cultural ideas about nature. One cannot assume that all visitors share perceptions of nature. This provides for an opportunity to converse with tourists about different cultural perspectives. For example, there is an enormous difference between nature in a Buddhist society and nature as understood by the Indigenous peoples of Central Australia.
- One of the responsibilities for interpreters is inter-generational transfer: teaching the next generation why biodiversity conservation is so important. Do ecotourism companies have a responsibility to work with local communities and with school children? The answer is ‘yes’!

Day 2: PLANNING INTERPRETATION – SOME ISSUES

Elements of Interpretation Planning

- A rationale for doing interpretation. The aims and objectives of the interpretation.
- Define the target market/visitors/tourists – who is the interpretation for?
- What resources do you have? What are the costs? Can you make money?
- Develop the interpretation ‘product’ – themes, content, stories, texts, graphics, media to be used, delivery concept, activities and so on.
- Plan orientation & visitor safety: maps, safety, equipment, clothing requirements & visitor comfort issues. Are there legal issues to be resolved or permissions required?
- Develop a plan for implementation: where, when, who, how?
- Implementation including marketing/promotion.
- Monitor, evaluate, review and develop (in terms of all of the above)

There have been several attempts to express these as flow charts.
PLANNING AN ECOTOUR PROGRAM OF INTERPRETIVE ACTIVITIES

WHY?

AIM
OBJECTIVES/INPUTS

WHAT?

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS/OUTCOMES

ANALYSIS

AUDIENCE
SITES
STORIES

TOPICS THEMES/MESSAGES

HOW?

ACTIVITY DESIGN TECHNIQUES

WHERE?

ROUTE/SEQUENCE OF ACTIVITIES/PACING/PRESENTATION

WHEN?

TIMING (SEASON/TIMES OF DAY/NIGHT/MEALS)

OPERATION
PROMOTION
ACCOUNTING

PRESENTATION
EVALUATION

DEVELOPING ECOTOURS AND OTHER INTERPRETIVE ACTIVITY PROGRAMS
Figure 14.1: The themes-markets-resources model

Output benefits:
- Profitability
- Employment potential
- Social and cultural benefits for the local community
- Environmental benefits
- Tourism generation benefits
- Catalyst for further development
- Public relations and image promotion
- Community pride
- Educational benefits for schools and colleges

Hall & McArthur, 1996.
Small group activity.

What are the steps in planning interpretation?
How can I use the handbook for my organization?
What planning issues do I need to attend to in my organization?  
What is my organization already doing?  
Is targeted interpretation worthwhile?  
What are the implications of targeted interpretation?  
Why is evaluation so important?  
What evaluation techniques should I employ?

Lessons Learnt: There is no one way to do planning or to do interpretation but good interpretation is planned. The visitor is at the centre of planning: the more we know about our visitors the better we can plan appropriate interpretation activities. Visitors increasingly require choice. Understanding different tourist markets an ecotourism business handles results in different types of interpretation for different types of visitors. There are enormous differences between international visitors, local visitors, domestic visitors, school children visitors and within the international market there are big differences between say, European and East Asian visitors.

Day 2: INTRODUCTION TO THE FIELD TRIP TO SINHARAJA FOREST

1. Introduction & Organizational Details

2. The aim of the field trip is to (1) hear from experts and (2) to apply the learning from yesterday & today and (3) to stretch your thinking and your imaginations.

3. The Program

- A reflective journal. You will each be asked to make notes of your observations and thoughts as the day progresses with regards to interpretation. These can be in the form of reflections, mind-maps, notes, sketches etc.
- Group tasks/activities to complete a small project including preparation of a short presentation for Day 4.

**Group Projects.** Each group will be given a problem and associated task to consider.

A: The forest as a story-telling place.
B: Interpretation and community outreach programs.
C: Planning for the digital present/ future.
D: Activities as interpretation (including conservation activities, aesthetic appreciation, spirituality etc).

All the projects should consider interpretation for a variety of markets: local communities; domestic tourists; international tourists; children/ schools etc.
**Field Trip: Sinharaja Forest**

**GROUP PROJECTS**

**Group A: The Forest as a Story Telling Place**

Consider the forest as a story-telling place. What does this mean for a place like Sinharaja? Is it just stories about species? What other stories are to be told? What about the ecosystem as a whole? What about conservation? What about the heritage and conservation values of the forest? What about non-scientific stories?

More importantly, how should the stories be (1) constructed and (2) told?

Design interpretation activities that are in the form of stories.

- Hint – a story is not the communication of facts and figures. All good stories have a beginning, middle and end. Stories must engage.

**Group B: Interpretation and Community Outreach Programs**

Consider the forest as a community resource. Explore the connections between local communities and the forest. Explore the connections between the forest and other interest groups in Sri Lanka that champion conservation. How do we use the forest to create interpretation for those who never visit the forest?

Using interpretation as a tool, design an action plan and activities that can deepen the relationship between communities, groups and the forest with a particular emphasis on attracting people to nature sites who never visit national parks or enjoy nature-based tourism.

**Group C: Planning for the Digital Present/Future**

Consider how the forest might utilize digital media now and into the future. Produce a “map” of the possibilities for the interpretation of the forest using digital media as the platform. Consider, also, how digital interpretation can be used on-site and off-site. Your map should indicate short-term goals and long-term goals. The map should be as detailed as possible with regards to different digital approaches: websites, apps, mobile devices, social media.

**Group D: Activities as Interpretation**

Consider activities and active participation as a mode of interpretation. Take into consideration leisure activities, conservation activities, aesthetic appreciation (eg photography), and spirituality.

Design activities that interpret the forest where the emphasis is on participation and doing things.

ALL THE PROJECTS SHOULD CONSIDER INTERPRETATION FOR A VARIETY OF MARKETS: LOCAL COMMUNITIES; DOMESTIC TOURISTS; INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS; CHILDREN/SCHOOLS ETC.
Day 3: THE FIELD TRIP TO SINHARAJA FOREST

The day began by boarding the buses at 5:30am. The participants arrived back at Laya Resort at 7:00pm.

The field trip was broken up into two main stages.

1. A guided tour of part of the forest including the buffer zone, the World Heritage core and one section of elevated primary forest. This activity took up the whole of the morning. At the morning tea break the project groups met and brainstormed ideas. During the morning session, the guided tour was conducted by Uditha Hettige and Aloy Diaz in the normal way of doing guided tours. The guides did not at this stage provide a commentary about how they do their guiding. Participants were asked to closely monitor how professional tour guides perform their normal tours. Participants had a chance to asked any questions or seek clarification about how to “perform guided tour” by professional tour guides.

2. After lunch at the Blue Magpie Resort a review of the field trip was undertaken. The two professional guides were “interviewed” by the workshop leader. There was a significant Q and A about guiding in Sinhalese.

Presentations by Guides

Some of the issues in keeping with the aims of the workshop that the guides may like to address:

- What preparations do you make before doing a guided tour?
- What are your methods of guiding?
- What do you think makes for a good guided experience from the perspective of the visitor/tourist?
- What qualities are required to be a good guide?
- How important is the safety of the tourist in your work? How do you deal with visitor safety?
- How do you deal with different types of visitors (international tourists, domestic tourists, different education levels, different age-groups)?
- What is more important: high levels of knowledge about a place or excellent communication skills?
- Can guides be trained?
- How do you use the world around you in your guiding?
- Do you use visual aids?
- How do you involve the visitor in the experience?
Day 4: GROUP WORK & GROUP PRESENTATIONS

The groups were given 1 hour to formulate their ideas as per the tasks set and to take ONE idea and turn it into an interpretation PRODUCT. The product was presented as a poster.

Poster presentations by each group followed by feedback from the workshop leader and discussion.

Lessons Learnt.
Group A: The power of a story – the story of the blue magpie – compared to just facts and figures about a particular species. The importance of having a particular visitor type in mind when creating interpretation product. The difference between primary interpretation where the visitor is being told about what they are looking at as they are looking; secondary interpretation where contextual information is provided but this information cannot be seen by looking at the object; and tertiary interpretation, how this object/place/issue relates to the visitor's experiences and the relevance of the nature tour to their lives back at home. Interpretation activities normally are most successful when they begin with primary interpretation.

Group B: The importance of ecotourism enterprises trying to reach out to new constituencies, new clients, new visitors and the responsibility to try to bring people to nature experiences that do not normally experience nature. In other words, going beyond “preaching to the converted” to those that need to be “converted” through outreach programs. The power of visual scenario setting for high school students: graphic illustrations of the natural environment before modernity/development; during modernization/development/industrialization/urbanization and in the future after advanced modernization/development/industrialization/urbanization. The importance of children in eco-tourism programs – the future of the planet rests on the next generation, so the significance of inter-generational interpretation. Variety is especially important for children – stories, animated films; team work activities, drama, painting (etc.)

Group C: The almost endless and creative possibilities of an app designed for a place like Sinharaja. The importance of tourist involvement in digital media – they can instantly post their photographs on FaceBook (and so on). The importance of an easily followed menu and the way each major part of the app opens out to other choices and activities. They can be all-inclusive and not just related to interpretation – eg accommodation, trail information, equipment information, weather information, community links (homestay, local products etc.). The trail can be GPS activated or individually activated. At particular points on the trail pictorial and language based interpretation can be supplemented by links to YouTube clips related to rainforests and to video-clips that reveal what can't be seen in the forest – shy animals, nocturnal animals and so on. Digital media inspires passionate debate about the pros and cons of using it in nature based interpretation.

Group D: One of the most powerful ways to interpret nature is through activities, engaging eco-tourists in purposefully planned activities that interpret through experiential learning and through leisure activities that produce strong sensory
engagement, strong emotional engagement and strong aesthetic responses. Whatever activities are designed, the target market is crucial: who are the activities for and what are the reasons for them? What is appropriate for Sri Lankan domestic tourists may not be successful with international clients and children require very different approaches. Actions speak louder than words! Conservation activities are always worth considering where appropriate. In nature based tourism intangible heritage should not be overlooked, especially cuisine, local food production, local foods, cooking activities and so forth.

Day 4: CONCLUSION

1. A Question and Answer session where questions were submitted to the workshop leader.

   Issues raised:

   (1) Interpretation and strategic planning within an eco-tourism enterprise. Using interpretation-planning guidelines. Using interpretation planning as a capacity building exercise within enterprises. Using interpretation planning to create a particular culture within an organisation.

   (2) The conundrums and deep issues related to digital media and digital technologies. On the one hand the excitement about the possibilities of digital media and on the other a deep scepticism about firstly, what sort of society is being shaped by digital media and, secondly, digital media’s ultimate impact on the natural environment.

   (3) The relationship between guiding and interpretation. Guiding is a method of interpretation. Guiding is a mode of communication. Guiding is a sub-set of nature interpretation. The importance of good communication no matter what the media and the importance of effective communication.

   (4) Getting the first client through the door. Offering something unique in competitive environments. Doing market research: Who is my target market? What do eco-tourists want? The importance of having a website that is well designed and is constantly updated.

   (5) Sometimes the best interpretation is no interpretation.

2. Forming an interpretation network created the workshop participants so there is a forum for good practice, for ideas, for initiatives, for linkages between eco-tourism operations, for mutual support and so on. Such a network should be created and maintained from within the group. In the future there may be the need for a national interpretation association like those elsewhere that bring together all professional interpreters (ecotourism, museums, cultural tourism, guides etc.)

   Interpretation Australia Association (IAA):
   www.interpretationaustralia.asn.au

   Association of Heritage Interpretation – UK
   www.ahi.org.uk/

   National Association of Interpretation – USA
3. Group Discussion: how will you use the ideas and the skills learnt during the workshop in your organization? Please see the Annex 02 for summary table of discussion.

4. Summing up by Naalin Perera. Basically Naalin covered the main points of the workshop in Sinhalese and highlight any missing things. Further it was explained that this is the end of the current project except for a few ecotourism product support programmes for selected organizations. But, it was mentioned that there is a possibility to work with IUCN on future projects related to ecotourism or biodiversity conservation and natural resource management, all of which comes under IUCN Sri Lanka programme.