

Riviera Maya, Mexico: Best Practices and Lessons Learned from the “Early Adopter Program” Assessment



**ACS Workshop on Best Practices and Lessons Learned in
Sustainable Tourism**

Antigua, Guatemala, 22 May 2014

Destination Riviera Maya

México

SECTUR
SECRETARÍA DE TURISMO



- The Riviera Maya is located on Mexico's Caribbean coast to the south of Cancun, in the state of Quintana Roo.
- It is a world-famous sun and sand destination which also offers the best of Mayan culture, including iconic archaeological sites such as Tulum and Coba.
- There are a number of eco-parks such as Xel-Ha and Xcaret, as well as the Sian Ka'an Biosphere reserve, the largest protected area in the Mexican Caribbean (approx 526,000 ha.).
- The State of Quintana Roo has worked to develop the area of the Riviera Maya as an overall destination, and the work done by the towns which make up the area, as well as the efforts co-ordinatted with state and federal governments to achieve environmental, economic and socio-cultural sustainability are worthy of note.



Destination Riviera Maya



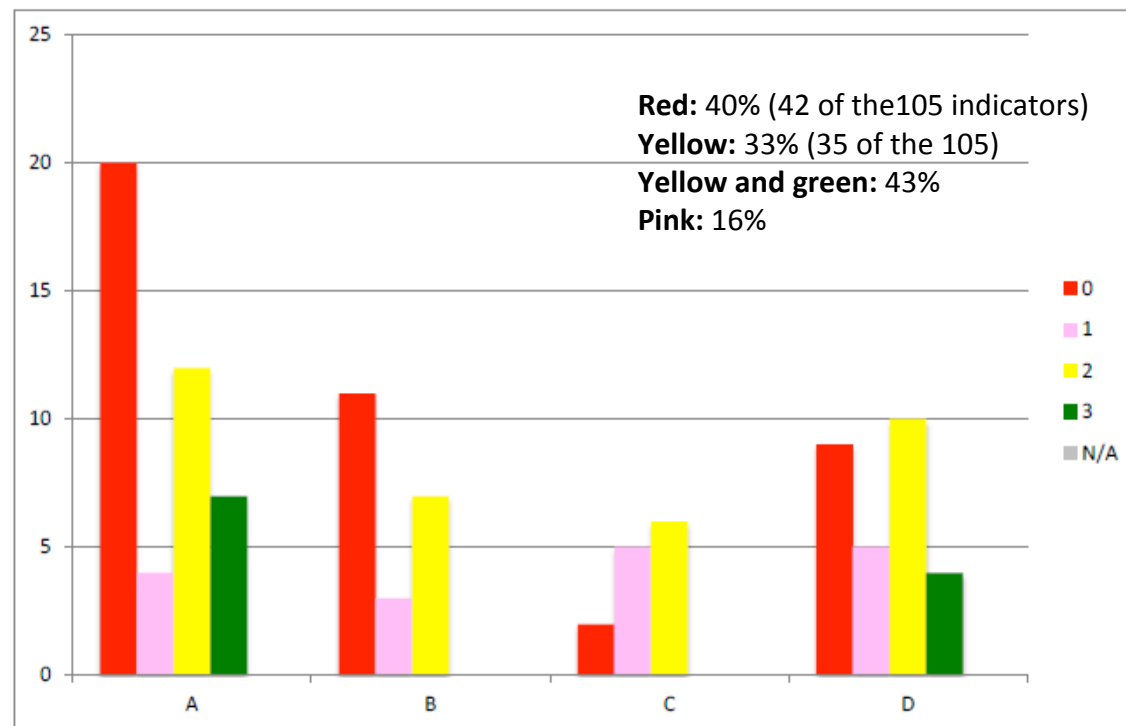
- There are more than 700 km of underground submerged caves, including two of the longest underwater cave systems in the world.
- The Riviera Maya attracts some 4 million tourists each year, providing \$2.2 billion in economic benefits (2012). Tourism-derived economic income account for 95% of its GDP.
- The rapid growth of tourism development and of the population have had a significant impact on the area's natural environment, and threaten the health of its ecosystems.



“Early Adopter Program” Initiative

- This is an initiative of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council - GSTC, implemented in February 2014.
- It is a participatory planning exercise involving various public, private and organized civil society stakeholders: The Quintana Roo Tourism Secretariat - *Secretaría de Turismo de Quintana Roo* (SEDETUR), the Riviera Maya Hotel Association - *Asociación de Hoteles de la Riviera Maya* (AHRM), non-profit organizations, entrepreneurs and tourism service providers, among others.
- Sustainable Travel International (STI) conducted an on-site assessment of the Riviera Maya Destination from 16 to 23 February 2014.
- STI consulted more than 45 local tourism organizations and leaders, and carried out an extensive review of the legal framework and policies relevant to the study.
- STI presented the preliminary results and recommendations to the Destination Committee, made up of SEDETUR, the Municipal Chairpersons of Solidaridad and Tulum, Sustainable Riviera Maya, AHRM, the Office for the Promotion of the Riviera Maya Destination - *Oficina de Promoción del Destino Riviera Maya*, and Friends of Sian Ka'an – *Amigos de Sian Ka'an*, among others.

Results



Criterios: A-Destination management; B-social and economic benefits; C-Cultural heritage; D-Environment

Indicators:

Red: There are no documents or evidence of implementation.

Yellow: There is evidence and documentation of implementation.

Green: There is evidence and documentation of implementation and the destination has shown improvement.

Pink: There are documents.

The results indicate that although the Riviera Maya Destination has made significant progress in key areas of sustainability, there remains a lot of work to do.

Best practices and lessons learned

Best practices: Areas successfully addressed

1.Planning regulations. - In each town, the Local Programme of Participatory Ecological Land Use Management –POEL must be followed.

1.Sustainability standards.- voluntary certification programme “Environmental Leadership for Competitiveness”, to adopt sustainable practices.

1.Protection of tourism sites.- Riviera Maya has a high level of management and monitoring of tourism sites (for example: Xel-Ha, Xcaret and Sian Ka’an).

Areas successfully addressed

4.Emergency and crisis management.- robust, functional emergency and natural disaster management system (for example hurricanes) involving federal, state and municipal governments and the private sector.

4.Greenhouse gas emissions.- “Low Carbon Tourism Initiative” – Inventory of the greenhouse gas emissions in the sector and recommendations for their mitigation.

4.Prevention of child exploitation.- adoption of the Code for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in the Tourism Sector. 130 hotels have adopted and are implementing this Code.

Lessons learned: Areas needing attention

- 1.Co-ordination and vision.-** limited co-ordination between sectors for the management and planning of the destination. There is no system for monitoring the sector and following up the economic impact and social and environmental indicators.
- 2.Sustainability standards.-** the large-scale programme of best sustainability practices implemented by the AHRM needs greater penetration in the sector.
- 3.Promotion and dissemination of sustainable development.-** There is limited information on the impact of the adoption of the sustainability programme in the hotels.
- 4.Adaptation to climate change.-** Riviera Maya is highly vulnerable to changes in sea level, temperature and extreme weather caused by climate change. In local government (municipal authorities) and the private sector discussion on this subject is limited.
- 5.Assistance to local entrepreneurs.**
- 6.Public participation and community opinion.**
- 7.Protection of tourism sites.**

Recommendations

- 1. Destination management.-** There must be stronger co-ordination of destination management, and better co-operation for planning and management; there should be a shared vision and a sustainable tourism action plan agreed to by the government, the private sector and civil society.
- 2. Promotion and spread of information on sustainable tourism.-** Seek to utilize marketing and information dissemination to encourage visitor support, involve the community and ensure that sustainability is a competitive advantage for the Riviera Maya.
- 3. Widespread adoption of sustainability standards.-** Sustainability standards already implemented by hotels must broaden the spectrum to include other sectors such as tour operators.
- 4. Linking communities to the tourism value chain.-** By implementing a pilot programme to identify common priority needs for goods and services, providing advice, technical assistance and training for communities.

THANK YOU!

Mtra. Daniela Garza Ríos Eychenne
Directora de Organismos Internacionales
Unidad de Asuntos y Cooperación Internacionales
Secretaría de Turismo de México