

WORLD TOURISM DAY

27 September 2012

Tourism and Sustainable Energy: Powering Sustainable Development



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Towards Sustainability

His Excellency Ahmed Al Mahrizi,
Minister of Tourism

We welcome this year's World Tourism Day theme, which carries through to September 2013 as a reminder of our shared responsibility to achieve a sustainable future for Oman tourism.

The concept of sustainable development is that social, economic and environmental issues are inseparable and that our future depends on how well we make decisions on these 'pillars'. From Oman's perspective, we have a responsibility to ensure that the tourism sector develops sustainability so that our rich cultural and natural resources are not jeopardized, and continue as icons of our tourism strategy.

Energy is a key consideration because it influences every aspect of our lives and well being. Over time, improvements in energy generation and reliability have enabled vast technological advancements on a global scale and allowed the development of new economic activities such as tourism. The Sultanate of Oman exemplifies this; its energy resources have been pivotal in national development and cultural progress.

This year's World Tourism Day focus reminds us that tourism development need not be tied to the depletion of finite energy resources or to power generation systems that involve environmental costs. Instead, well considered planning, development, operations and renewable energy can make a significant contribution to making Oman's tourism sustainable.

In addition, consumer research tells us that nature-based tourism accounts for around 15% to 20% of global travel, and that environmental issues are increasingly important in travel planning. This is a signal to our sector that issues relating to sustainability are important for our future, and that we need to work proactively in this regard.

The Sultanate of Oman is blessed with hydrocarbon, as well as with solar, wind, geothermal and wave energy sources. Oman is also building a research capability in renewable energy that will make a valuable contribution to harnessing these energy sources.



UNWTO Secretary-General

Taleb Rifai

As part of UNWTO's ongoing efforts to forge tourism's contribution to sustainable development, World Tourism Day 2012 will be celebrated around the theme of Tourism & Sustainable Energy: Powering Sustainable Development.

Tourism is leading the way in some of the world's most innovative sustainable energy initiatives. Energy efficient upgrades to aircrafts, the shift to renewable fuel for aviation and cruise liners, energy technology solutions in hotels, as well as countless other initiatives are placing tourism at the forefront of the clean energy transformation.

These initiatives not only help to protect the environment, they also play a part in ending 'energy poverty', an ill being addressed by the 2012 United Nations International Year of Sustainable Energy for All, which aims to ensure universal energy access, significantly improve rates of energy efficiency and double the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix by 2030.

Sustainable energy initiatives in tourism are creating economic opportunities and jobs for millions, whether in tourism, energy or other sectors. As UNWTO findings show, the return on investment in sustainable energy can be enormous, enabling tourism businesses to grow and create jobs. At the same time, tourism infrastructure in developing countries is helping to bring modern energy services to some of the world's most vulnerable communities.

With international tourist arrivals reaching one billion in 2012, more must be done to guarantee a brighter energy future. Destinations and companies must accelerate their transition to low-emission technologies and embrace existing opportunities to leapfrog conventional options in favor of more sustainable energy solutions.

As we celebrate World Tourism Day 2012, I urge all tourism stakeholders – governments, businesses and tourists themselves – to play their part in reaching the UN goal of achieving Sustainable Energy for all by 2030 and position tourism at the center of the clean energy economies of the future.



A Sustainable Centre for Oman's Tourism Sector

Her Excellency Maitha Al Mahrouqi,
Undersecretary, Ministry of Tourism

Oman has an enviable profile in global tourism. For a small country and niche destination, it has won wide recognition with recent examples being Oman and Muscat's nomination by The National Geographic and Lonely Planet as 'must see' destinations in 2012.

At the same time, it comes as a great surprise to many people to learn that the Ministry of Tourism is not even a decade old. It says a lot about the rate of Oman's progress and the priority given to tourism as an emerging economic pillar. In late 2012, the Ministry will take possession of its head office building in the AL Khuwair Ministry precinct – an event that, for many reasons, heralds a new era for the sector as a whole.

The Ministry's 24,000m² building is an expression of Oman. It incorporates energy saving systems including heat-recovery air conditioning, insulated wall and ceiling spaces, low energy interior and exterior lighting, and energy saving office systems. Two central court yards provide natural light throughout the entire building, with natural ventilation assisted by ground floor gardens and an Omani falaj. Local materials have been used as much as possible in the construction and recycled water is used to irrigate the garden and plants.

The building's strong Omani identity, leading design and energy systems intentionally define the pathway for a new era of tourism. The building is also an investment in our human capital – we now have a facility that allows for quality work and collaboration.

Looking more broadly, the Ministry believes that the industry has reached a point where there must be a greater focus on quality and sustainability in all our work. This will ensure that we safeguard the natural and cultural values that make Oman a unique destination on the global stage.



OMRAN Developing Sustainably

Engineer Wael Al Lawati, Chief Executive Officer

As the Sultanate's leading tourism development, investment and asset management company, OMRAN manages a large and diverse portfolio of properties and projects – from existing hotels to new projects that will become the platform for the next phase of Oman's tourism growth.

Our aim is to create memorable destinations and experiences, which provide long-term benefits to local communities and the national economy, always in harmony with Oman's environment and natural resources. These goals are backed by a track record of working proactively to gain International Standards Organisation operations certification, to adopt Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification for projects like the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), as well as support for innovative CSR programs like Intajee, which is aimed at empowering local communities and incubating small businesses with sustainable business models to create markets and sell local produce.

Our largest project, the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (opens 2016) will position Oman as an exciting new destination in the international meetings market. The fact that the Centre is Oman's first major LEED certified project sends a strong signal to the business and tourism markets that Oman takes sustainability seriously. This is a timely message not only for the business and tourism markets as they look for new and interesting destinations, but also for Oman's stakeholders who need to include sustainability as a development benchmark. This is very much a win-win outcome. This will follow two current projects already under construction that are on track for LEED certification and this pioneering work is encouraging other developers to seriously consider their impact and responsibility.

The same message is conveyed in our projects and operations. Priority has been given to retrofitting hotels for energy and cost efficiencies, while energy saving light and utility systems feature in our new projects. These might seem small actions in the bigger scheme of things, but these improvements and a management approach leave a consistent and positive lasting impression.

Both as an organization and as an individual, my belief is that the facilities we develop and manage will make a positive contribution to influencing sustainable outcomes for tourism and the wider community.

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Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC)

Oman and Sustainable Energy

The concept and use of sustainable energy is at the heart of Oman's cultural heritage, which has harnessed natural energy for thousands of years. Examples are:

- The design of complex Aflaj systems that channeled water from remote springs to cultivate desert oases and irrigate open fields. Several Aflaj are World Heritage Sites listed for their engineering ingenuity and scale.
- The innovative design of forts and castles that included natural cooling and ventilations systems to make living comfortable year-round.
- The re-use and recycling of water and waste for agriculture.
- Sun drying and preserving of fruits, grain and seafood.
- The design and construction of large sailing boats (dhows) that sailed the maritime silk route and carried trade along Africa's east coast.

Sustainable energy is also important for Oman's future, with investment in renewable energy gaining pace in the fields of petroleum development, telecommunications and service industries, all of which have significant energy needs in remote localities.

The Ministry of Housing and Oman's Supreme Committee for Town Planning have sponsored a range of studies that confirm the potential of solar and wind energy generation for Oman's regional towns and cities. Building on this research, the Public Authority for Electricity and Water has plans for major solar energy farms near Adam and Manah.



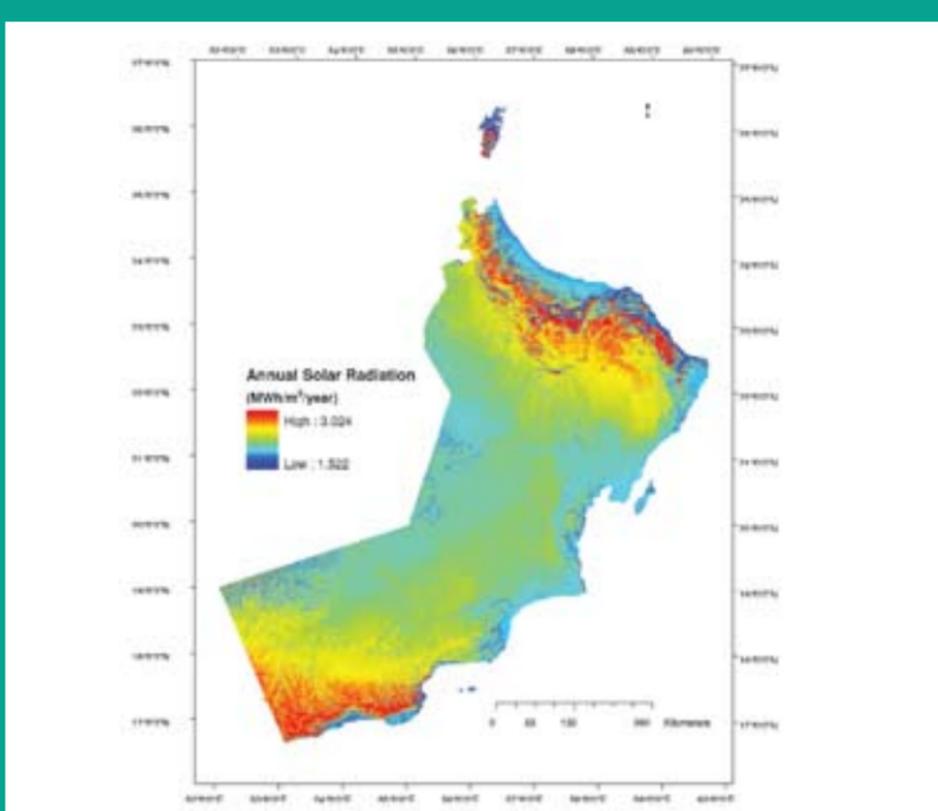
While the use of home solar energy and hot water systems is relatively low, the expectation is that this will increase as the community realizes the reduced cost of renewable energy over time, as well as the wider environmental benefits. Likewise, in the tourism sector, more companies are realizing the commercial and environmental benefits of using renewable energy.

Meanwhile Oman's renewable future looks bright, assisted by research projects sponsored by The Research Council of Oman and the Renewable and Sustainable Energies Research Group at the Sultan Qaboos University.

Sustainable Energy Sources

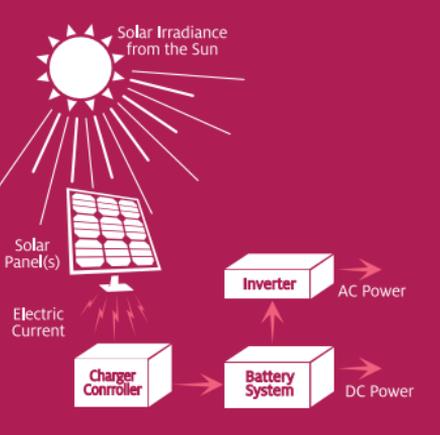
Oman is well placed to benefit from sustainable energy sources:

- Oman receives abundant solar radiation and this can be harnessed for electrical and steam generation.
- Wind mapping has confirmed areas of high wind generating capacity, including sites associated with remote communities.
- The high tidal variation along Oman's coast and waterways, with a number of waterways having potential for tidal energy generation.



The distribution of solar radiation in Oman

Sustainable and Emerging Energy Sources are Attractive



While Oman's energy regime is firmly based on hydrocarbon resources, and the level of renewable energy use is relatively low, there is still an increasing case to consider alternate energy sources in national energy planning. For example:

- Greater use of sustainable energy will conserve finite hydrocarbon reserves.
- Sustainable energy reduces green house gases (and smog in congested cities).

- New technologies create employment and research opportunities.
- For remote communities, renewable energy can deliver lower cost energy.
- Renewable energy generation is scalable, allowing the homeowner or industrial company to become their own power producer in many cases.
- Sustainable energy is mostly non-polluting and involves far lower noise emissions compared to conventional power generation systems.

In addition, the attractiveness of sustainable energy is increasing as a result of:

- Market forces - the cost advantages associated with traditional power generation are eroding. Many countries are introducing carbon taxes, while the cost for extracting resources and operating power plants is rapidly increasing. This makes higher energy costs inevitable.

At the same time, costs of solar photovoltaic technologies have dropped significantly as a result of greater production levels and technological advances. Thus, the differences in the cost of generating conventional and sustainable energy are expected to reduce.

- Advances in technology – the last few years have seen major advances in solar, wind and wave energy generation systems and efficiencies. Gains are also being made in the efficiencies of day-to-day appliances.

Technology advances in the production of photovoltaic cells enables them to capture a wider light spectrum, while micro technologies make it possible to incorporate solar cells in coating plastics that could be applied to roofing and windows. These advances are aimed at equipping homes with their own energy production capability.

- Community and environmental responsibility and poverty reduction – there is wide recognition that energy availability and reliability is essential to eliminate global poverty, improve health standards and for environmental protections. This recognition is leading to significant investment in research in a sustainable energy producing systems, especially stand-alone wind, solar and biogas systems for remote communities. These systems reduce the demand for wood collection and tree clearing for cooking and heating.

These factors will play an important role in changing community, regional and national energy perceptions and futures.



Planning and Design

The planning and design stage of any project is critical – get it right and you are building for tomorrow, get it wrong and you will pay for past mistakes that can be expensive to rectify. Issues of function, design, configuration, scale and aspect are vitally important from commercial and environmental perspectives.

Energy use is an important consideration in all these matters, with many green building design codes advocating that an indicative energy audit be considered in project evaluation.

Green building codes operate in many countries with the best known being the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED, USA) and Green Star systems operating in several countries. These codes work as important design and measurement tools for all building types.

Oman's tourism projects are looking keenly at these issues with hotels voluntarily undergoing LEED and International Standards Organization (ISO) certification, as appropriate.



Business Practices

There is a growing body of tailor-made resources available to educate and assist the tourism sector in understanding the value of energy planning and conservation (see Resources section). These include websites on building design, energy systems and conservation and day-to-day operating practices.

A useful tool kit is provided by the UNWTO and Hotel Energy Solutions that analyses almost every aspect of a hotel's design and operation to provide a guide to energy conservation measures. These and other websites give tips and ideas on:

- Energy efficient lights as well as remote and movement detecting switches.
- The use of plug and play devices instead of continuously powered devices.
- Better use of thermostats for temperature regulation and optimal use of energy intense equipment such as air conditioners.
- The wise use of window shades for insulation.
- Water conservation measures, including valves and shower timers for energy conscious guests.
- Guests, not house cleaners, deciding when they want bed linen and towels changed.



HOTEL ENERGY SOLUTIONS



Consumer Behaviour



Nature-based travel accounts for 15% to 25% of total global travel, with environmental issues an increasingly important consideration in travel planning.

Increasing numbers of travelers do not want their actions to contribute to or cause irreversible environmental damages, so they actively look for destinations and travel providers that have proven environmental credentials and practices.

A world leader in sustainable tourism is Tui Travel PLC whose environmental code and actions across its travel planning and airline operations are considered to be an industry benchmark. The company sponsors many community and environmental projects.

Oman's tourism operators are responding accordingly and there is an increasing number of companies adopting environmental policies and business practices. These actions add significantly to the company's 'brand positioning'.

The Ministry encourages tourism operators to use the year ahead to look at ways and means of accelerating their use of sustainable principles and practices.

Resources

(Australia) Bureau of Resources and Energy Economics (BREE) www.bree.gov.au

Hotel Energy Solutions www.hotelenergysolutions.net

Muscat 2012 www.muscat2012.om

OMRAN www.omran.om

Sultanate of Oman, Ministry of Tourism www.omantourism.gov.om

The Renewable & Sustainable Energies Research Group, Sultan Qaboos

University www.squ.ed.om

The Research Council of Oman www.trc.om

Tui Travel PLC www.tuitraveljobs.co.uk/content/14/tui-and-the-environment.aspx

United Nations World Tourism Organisation www.unwto.org

UNWTO Sustainable Development of Tourism Program www.sdt.unwto.org