



METROPOLITAN TOURING, ECUADOR & GLOBAL GLOBAL TOURISM BUSINESS AWARD FINALIST 2009

CASE STUDY

Metropolitan Touring, a fully owned Ecuadorian company founded in 1953, is the largest travel corporation in Ecuador, with its headquarters in Quito and its own operations in neighboring Peru. It handles approximately 12,000 clients/guests annually, with the Galapagos as their biggest destination, where they operate three ships, the *M/V Santa Cruz* (90 passengers), *Yacht Isabela II* (40 passengers), *Yacht La Pinta* (32 passengers), and the Finch Bay Hotel on Santa Cruz Island (42 guests). In addition, it operates tours throughout Ecuador, where it also has a historic Chiva Train programme in the central Andes of Ecuador, designed for just 34 guests.

Metropolitan's commitment to sustainability can be seen in three corporate fields: international best practice sustainability certifications for its ships and hotel in the Galápagos Islands; a corporate environmental policy for the entire



company; and Fundación Galápagos, the NGO it launched to support Galápagos conservation and community benefit projects. These initiatives are financed from its headquarters through budgeted resources committed to preservation and conservation, as well as from partner grants and guest donations.

Metropolitan's operating mission includes: "the relationship between human beings and their natural and cultural surroundings. It is everything around us, where we walk, what we see, what we breathe, where we live, and where we work." Thus, its development of existing and new products is based on sustainability principles, preservation efforts, and social welfare support. It continuously measures its environmental performance, and also communicates results to its employees and guests.

These also include:

- Promoting among employees a culture of learning and commitment to environmental issues that will also transcend to their daily lives
- Reducing the use of non-renewable resources in all operations, including solid waste
- Actively supporting projects that advance social development and environmental protection where it operates
- Educating suppliers to develop sustainable environmental practices aligned to Metropolitan's environmental policy
- Investing in specialised technology to assure the lowest levels of environmental impact.

In 1998, Metropolitan established the Fundación Galápagos, the first initiative by tourism's private sector in Ecuador to help the islands preserve their fragile ecosystems. Its core mission is minimising human impact and maximising waste management, particularly on Santa Cruz Island, where most local inhabitants live.

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The Foundation focuses on four key programmes:

- **Environmental Education:** including a door-to-door campaign that teaches locals the benefits of recycling garbage; local radio and TV campaigns promoting environmental awareness; and sponsoring local student 'expedition voyages' for a better understanding of the islands' complex ecosystems.
- **Solid-waste Recycling:** In co-operation with the Municipality of Santa Cruz Island and the Galápagos National Park, development of the Fabricio Valverde Center for managing solid waste – the only recycling center in the Galapagos islands. Plastics and cardboard are compacted and shipped by Metropolitan back to the mainland for reprocessing and re-manufacturing. Glass is milled and then becomes material for making patio blocks that now cover parks and sidewalks where locals live on Santa Cruz. Over 2.5 million pounds of solid waste have been recycled to date.
- **Coastal Clean-Up:** The shores of the fragile islands become the ending place for tons of floating debris discarded in the ocean hundreds of miles away. Sponsoring local fishermen and volunteers to collect this litter, it is then processed at the recycling facility. So far, 130,000 pounds of solid debris have been collected from the islands' shores as part of Metropolitan's initiative to help clean up the Galapagos. As part of the project, fishermen are paid, allowing them a periodic alternative to fishing activities, and engaging them more in supporting and understanding natural resources protection.
- **Galápagos Community Social Projects:** FUN Galapagos, involving a local women's cooperative: Manos Mágicas. Women with sewing skills, and motivated to improve their own quality of life, make Galapagos-related rag souvenirs filled with milled recycled plastics from the recycling centre. Sales to tourists support the project and provide needed income for local women; the 'Bread for the Future' project, launched by the Association of Galápagos Tour Operators, including Metropolitan, which involves a bakery belonging to community women producing local bread. Metropolitan purchases all of bread needs from them to serve on board its ships.

As one of the first Ecuadorean tour operators, Metropolitan, together with the first wardens of the Galápagos National Park, developed a system of interpretative trails, led by trained Naturalists, and with groups divided by languages. These trails are still in use today.

Metropolitan has both 9001 and 14001 ISO certifications – among the most rigorous environmental standards in the industry. These levels of certification bring with them discipline in relation to reporting and quality control and are highly credible and independently audited systems. Beyond this, Metropolitan also has Smart Voyager certification for all its ships and its hotel, established by the Rainforest Alliance as a best practice standard in sustainability.