



The walkways and structures at Maho Bay Resort on St. John in the US Virgin Islands were built on stilts so that the natural vegetation was not disturbed.

GO GREEN – MAKE GREEN

PADI Dive Centers and Resorts are making environmental awareness work for them.

BY ETHAN GORDON, PADI MSDT 42714



When a dive business steps up its conservation efforts, it's good news for the environment and the company's bottom line.



One of the biggest misconceptions in the dive industry is that “going green” costs money, but you may discover the opposite.

Many dive centers and resorts have been taking steps to protect the environment for a while, including installing moorings at dive sites to protect reefs from boat anchors, developing education and outreach programs, hosting beach and dive site cleanups and recycling, among others. Then, there are those who elevate their conservation efforts, integrating them into the core of their brands. What they’re doing is good for the planet *and* their bottom lines. Here are some inspiring stories.

WALK THE WALK

“You not only have to ‘talk the talk,’ you have to ‘walk the walk,’” says Erik Stein,

owner of Extended Horizons in Maui, Hawaii, USA. He’s at the forefront of conservation in a conservation-minded region. “Maui has some of the best, classiest dive operators in the world. We’ve been raising the bar out here for a long time,” he says. Stein has built his brand around being “Maui’s Top Green Dive Operator.” In 2006, he backed up this statement by converting his boat to become Maui’s only dive boat to run entirely on biodiesel. “I wanted to do something more to give back to the environment,” says Stein. “Switching to 100 percent biodiesel was the least I could do.”

The switch to this locally made, environ-

mentally friendly fuel wasn’t a trivial task. They made some necessary infrastructure improvements, such as installing an on-site 1900 litre/500-gallon storage tank with filtration system and replacing the boat’s rubber fuel lines with stainless steel. Although the average cost of biodiesel is typically more per unit than petrodiesel, switching has had its upside too.

Because Extended Horizons has its own storage tank, fueling up at the end of the day has become a 10-minute job instead of the hour-long ordeal it was when they fueled up in Lahaina Harbor every third day or so. This saves both time and labor expenses.

There are also mechanical benefits that translate to savings. Biodiesel lacks sulfur, a component of petrodiesel. The sulfur in petrodiesel forms acids when burned. These acids cause premature breakdown of engine components and a smell that cus-

Above left: Erik Stein, owner of Extended Horizons and “Maui’s Top Green Dive Operator,” aboard his biodiesel boat. At right: Thanks to strong conservation efforts, Maui’s reefs and marine life, like this hairy hermit crab, will continue to thrive.

tomers don’t like. Since biodiesel burns much cleaner, Stein has found that they only need to change engine oil every 300 hours as compared to every 100 hours with petrodiesel. In addition, without the harmful acids formed by sulfur, engine parts don’t break down as fast. The boat’s current set of engines currently has only run on biodiesel and, while Stein isn’t sure how long they’ll last, it looks like they’ll significantly outlast previous petrodiesel engines.

Stein admits that if you look only at the monthly costs, biofuel appears to cost a bit more than traditional fuel. The higher cost, however, is more than offset by the



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: ERIK STEIN; KEVIN PANIZZA; ERIK STEIN

added business from customers selecting them specifically because they use this green fuel. "At the end of the day, you can't just save the planet," he says. "You have to make enough money to survive too." Using a unique marketing angle, he has taken something he wanted to do for the environment and leveraged it into additional business.

OUTREACH IS GOOD FOR BUSINESS

Located on Costa Rica's Pacific coast in the small town of Quepos, Oceans

Unlimited has made its mark through its outreach efforts. As part of its PADI Dive-master course, Oceans Unlimited requires that divemaster candidates produce a talk on any subject that promotes conservation and awareness – sharks, mangroves, a particular creature, etc. Then, candidates present their work to local kids at nearby schools. The program has become so popular that divemaster candidates average two presentations per month. "The schools love it and so do our students," says Katharine Evans. "We didn't start this program

with the intention of it becoming a marketing tool, but it certainly has turned out that way."

Oceans Unlimited has gained about 25 percent more Divemaster candidates through the increased popularity of the divemaster program. "We attract a dive-master/backpacker crowd. If they can do their divemaster training and perform community service at the same time – well, that's icing on the cake to them. Quite a few divemaster candidates choose us because they love the idea of going into local schools and promoting awareness."

Evans points out that dive centers should exercise care when promoting awareness. "Conservation can be a politically sensitive subject, so you have to be careful not to ruffle the wrong feathers. It's no secret that we try to promote marine conservation, and though we can't just go and check local fishing boats for things like shark fins, we can educate the youth. If you can get your message out there in a peaceful manner, things will eventually improve." The benefit: Oceans Unlimited is succeeding in its conservation efforts – and this has led to business success.

Another dive center making outreach



Clockwise from top: At Costa Rica's Oceans Unlimited, divemaster candidates participate in local school outreach efforts; a healthy reef; in Spain, divers collect data on *Posidonia* sea grass for the SILMR Project, thanks to Kenna Eco Diving.

INTHE SPOTLIGHT: ENVIRONMENTAL DIVE LEADERS TO FOLLOW

PADI PROFESSIONALS FIND INNOVATIVE AND PROACTIVE SOLUTIONS BY TIFFANY LEITE

There's no question that, for the first time in history, the world is facing myriad global environmental issues including oil spills, climate change, overfishing and more — all at the same time. While that news can be depressing, rather than being discouraged, environmental dive leaders are leaning in, leading the charge and finding innovative and proactive solutions to environmental challenges in their communities.

Brendon Sing "Shark Guardian," PADI Course Director #609564



Over the past four years, Brendon Sing has traveled throughout Thailand and Indonesia, delivering his "Shark Guardian" presentation to hundreds of people. The free seminar focuses on shark evolution, anatomy and reproduction, shark behavior and attacks, sharks in danger and conservation.

"My presentation explores many emotions of fear, excitement, curiosity, humor, amazement, dread and deep sadness," says Sing. "But it's not all doom and gloom; there is hope at the end of the tunnel. The audience leaves with a changed perspective of sharks, an inspiration to care and a duty to protect through education, conservation and action."

He believes PADI Professionals have a responsibility to inspire divers. "We serve as role models and mentors," says Sing. "We have not just a duty, but a responsibility to the environment that we depend on. We have a great deal of influence on our students and customers to make positive and influential changes. Act on views that you feel deeply passionate about and share that with everyone you can."

Visit sharkguardian.org for a list of upcoming seminars. Sing is supported and funded by Project AWARE Foundation.

Katharine Evans, PADI Master Instructor #625983



Eight years ago, PADI Master Instructor and biologist Katharine Evans helped establish PADI Five Star Instructor Development Center Oceans Unlimited in Quepos, Costa Rica. Evans is passionate about the ocean and protecting it — which is why she made it a priority for both herself and the dive center.

"Since moving to Costa Rica eight years ago and helping set up Oceans Unlimited, I wanted to make a difference on a local level and improve the environment while increasing awareness of these wonderful, but fragile, natural habitats. Costa Rica is renowned as a 'green' country, but we still see trash dropped in the street or on the beach," says Evans.

"We run many local conservation projects, including regular underwater and beach cleanups with Oceans Unlimited staff and divers. But, most important, we involve members of the community and youth groups, welcoming anyone who will get

involved," adds Evans.

Evans also regularly visits local schools and youth groups to talk about important environmental issues such as shark finning, sustainable fishing, local marine environments and their protection. She proactively pursues local changes that can make a difference – including saving energy and trash management. She has even helped establish recycling programs in local schools.

"I think that all these efforts really have made a difference in our community. It is rewarding when local teachers ask for more information and ideas. I get a buzz from schools doing their own trash collections – especially when I see local kids telling adults to pick up their trash," says Evans.

"At Oceans Unlimited, we have made teaching in the local community part of our divemaster training program, because as PADI Professionals, we need to promote awareness of local and marine environments to our future dive generations. It's a rewarding and fun experience too!"

Kim Langridge, PADI Master Instructor #641705



Since its inception on the Isle of Wight five years ago, PADI Five Star Instructor Development Center Island Divers has become a Project AWARE official partner and expanded its conservation involvement and fundraising year by year.

"Project AWARE is integrated into our business planning. First, because we are all passionate about diving and second, as a dive business, we want as many people as possible to experience our seas. If they are polluted and devoid of marine life, why would anyone want to dive them?" says Langridge.

"Our social activities (and we have quite a few) are all linked to Project AWARE, both in raising awareness and funds — over \$2500 US to date! All our special events, such as pub quiz, fancy dress barbeque, underwater pumpkin carving and Christmas dinner, mean that our divers can have fun and make a difference."

Langridge and Island Divers incorporate sustainable business practices wherever possible and are always looking at ways — from recycling to sharing automobile trips whenever possible — they can reduce the effect of their business on the environment. They also host marine protection meetings at the dive center, bringing together all the dive clubs on the island. "This not only promotes awareness, but firmly places us in the center of our dive community. This makes good environmental sense and very good business sense," says Langridge.

To read about more Environmental Dive Leaders to Follow, head to the PADI Pros' Site and look for *The Undersea Journal* Bonus Coverage.

To learn how you can help protect the aquatic environment in your area, visit projectaware.org.

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OCEANS UNLIMITED SCUBA DIVING; PINOSUB; COURTESY SILMR PROJECT



and education part of its core brand is Kenna Eco Diving located on the Mediterranean Sea in L'Escala, Spain. Kenna Eco Diving attracts about half of its customers by offering inexpensive dive holidays to people wanting to make a difference. Its dive vacations are inexpensive because they're subsidized. Divers volunteer their time to collect data for the SILMAR Project – a large-scale national project that collects vital data on local marine environments.

Kenna's co-owner Gaynor Rosier has turned her passion for preserving the delicate marine ecosystem revolving around a certain species of sea grass, *Posidonia oceanica*, into a steady stream of business. Volunteers from across Europe and the United States flock to this beautiful corner of Spain on the Costa Brava to participate in the program. The minimal cost of the trip covers unlimited diving, accommodations in a bunkhouse, transfers, etc.

In exchange, divers immerse themselves in a program about the ecology of coastal Spain that teaches them how to count and measure all kinds of marine species. Specifically, they are responsible for recording data around one of the SILMAR Project's transects – a 100-meter long, five-meter wide by five-meter tall/328-foot long, 16-foot wide, 16-foot tall plot of ocean. Volunteers then spend countless hours in the water recording their findings. It's a win-win-win. The divers get a holiday that they can feel good about, the dive center gets customers and the SILMAR Project gets its data.

Armed with this data, Rosier has also supported other causes like Ocean2012 – a nonprofit organization whose mission it is “to ensure that the 2012 reform of the European Union Common Fisheries Policy stops overfishing, ends destructive fishing practices and delivers fair and equitable use of healthy fish stocks.” Rosier is yet another



Clockwise from top left: Beautiful glassware made from recycled glass at Maho Bay Resort on St. John in the US Virgin Islands; the eco-friendly garden at Matava resort in Kadavu, Fiji; Fiji's reefs benefit from conservation measures.

example of someone who doesn't just “talk the talk.” She “walks the walk.”

OFF THE GRID

Another approach that turns considerable conservation efforts into a solid business plan is the eco resort. There are a few select dive resorts around the world that ‘walk this particular walk,’ and, as a result, they experience some of the highest year-round occupancy rates. A certain clientele seeks out eco-minded resorts and it seems once they experience it, they keep coming back. Two examples are the Maho Bay Camps on the United States Virgin Island of St. John and Matava, Fiji's premier eco-adventure resort.

Stanley Selengut founded Maho Bay about 34 years ago. He was ahead of his time when he constructed a resort that minimally affected the property's beautiful natural scenery. Building on one of St. John's pristine hillsides and surrounded by national park, Selengut refused to clear-cut the vegetation. Instead, he built everything on stilts – walkways and rooms alike. By leaving the hillside vegetation intact, he eliminated the byproduct of most construction – runoff

from soil erosion that can kill coral reefs while ruining topside habitat. The original site – with glorified tent structures – has grown to more than 114 tents and is overseen by a dozen eco-friendly studios on the hillside above.

Conservation of resources is practiced all around the resort. For example, glass waste is recycled on the premises – both in the glass-blowing studio that turns out beautiful ocean-inspired art and glass tiles, but also results in crushed glass and concrete countertops used at its newer sister resort, Estate Concordia Studios. One thousand recycled bottles go into the production of each studio.

Selengut has experimented with many eco-friendly practices and materials over the years. Although many of these practices were ahead of their time, others didn't work out too well. “This one time Mr. Selengut invested in a sun oven for baking,” recounts George Kramer, owner of the dive concession that services Maho Bay. “The thing would take all day to bake a pan of cookies. Maybe if you lived in a desert the thing would work. Here, it was a total flop, but hey, he tried it! That's what kind of a guy he is.”

Kramer has been at Maho since the beginning and has witnessed its incredible evolution. He has also seen his share of changes within the dive industry. “Thirty-five years ago, when I started in this business, I used to throw my anchor on the sand, but then the boat next to me would drop an anchor with 9 metres/30 feet of chain right on the coral. You don't see that too much any more – people have been educated. PADI has been a big part in promoting these common-sense practices through programs like Project AWARE,” says Kramer. Healthier reefs make for healthier dive businesses.

Nearly a world away on the island of Kadavu, Fiji, Matava blazes its own path as an eco-friendly resort. “We're entirely off the grid,” says resort co-owner Stuart Gow. “We have a couple of small generators onsite in case of an emergency, but we never have a need to use them. Our solar panel arrays generate all of the electricity the resort needs. We even run power tools off of our solar, but the rooms don't have air conditioning, refrigerators or hair dryers in them. That said, those kinds of amenities aren't what our clientele are looking for. They come to us because of the kind of resort we are.”

When asked if it costs more to run such an eco-friendly resort, Gow answers categorically, “We can actually document that it *doesn't* cost us more to run our resort. It takes more effort from the staff, especially training them to do things differently, but economically it definitely saves money.” For example, 30 percent of the resort's produce is grown organically on site and another 30 percent is grown in the local villages. It's not only ‘greener’ to grow produce locally, it's cheaper.

Teaching the local villages how to farm organically is just one of Matava's many outreach efforts. Working with neighboring villages, they have helped establish two marine reserves. “We do a lot of work organizing beach cleanups and teaching local children about the underwater world. This is a long-term, generational project – generations down the line will make the difference,” says Gow.

Among other efforts, Gow cites that switching to four-stroke engines on their dive boats not only saves the environment, but also saves a small fortune. “They don't leave an oil slick on the water, they're far more fuel efficient, and they're quieter,” states Gow. “In fuel savings alone, the four-strokes pay for themselves in just nine months of operation. That's not just green, that makes perfect business sense.”

Learn more about the eco practices at both resorts by visiting www.maho.org and www.matava.com.

HELP RAISE THE BAR

There's no doubt that it takes some effort to go green. It may take capital, elbow grease, someone with the unwavering determination to make a difference or any combination of the above. Despite any hurdles, these dive businesses have proven that it's not just good for the planet, it's also good for the bottom line.

“People are finally starting to think about real consequences to the environment,” says Gow, “Beyond doom and gloom, the world is changing its views on conservation. Businesses are starting to make decisions based not just on the bottom line, but what's also good for the environment.”

So what are you waiting for? Follow the example set by these environmental dive leaders, help raise the bar and you may find your bottom line will follow. 