



# Serena Hotels, Gilgit-Baltistan Collection

## Responsible Tourism Policy

Last updated 6<sup>th</sup> July 2012

Our four hotels are located in some of the most spectacular mountainous regions of Pakistan which are rich in culture and heritage. Despite this the local communities in which we operate all have a range of issues such as poverty, education and health issues, the gradual disappearance of culture and heritage and all communities suffer from the impacts of climate change and environmental disasters.

We realize that we have a responsibility to play in assisting the local communities address these issues. We also realize that although tourism can act as a positive tool for poverty reduction & economic development it can also negatively impact local communities (economically, socially & environmentally) unless it is managed responsibly.

Our philosophy is to protect and promote the culture and heritage of Gilgit-Baltistan, whilst making a positive contribution to the economic development of local communities in an environmentally sensitive manner.

We are committed to monitoring and reducing the negative environmental and social impacts of our Hotel's operations while at the same time maximizing the positive impacts.

We have a dedicated Responsible Tourism Manager at each of our hotels as well as a voluntary Green Team who are responsible for implementing and promoting the hotels commitment to responsible tourism with guests, suppliers, staff and the local communities. We also work in partnership with other Aga Khan Development (AKDN) agencies such as the Aga Khan Cultural Services, Pakistan (AKCSP) and Aga Khan Rural Support, Pakistan (AKRSP) to leverage the work they have done in Khaplu and create positive synergies.

For us this is a journey and we welcome suggestions and feedback from our local communities, guests, suppliers and our staff along the way.

We invite you to become involved - and to travel responsibly - respecting the unique culture and environment, and supporting local businesses and initiatives in this spectacular region.

### **Our Economic Responsibility to our Local Communities**

#### **Contributing to the Economic Development**

- We work with local suppliers to maximize the sourcing of local products which benefits the local community. There are a number of goods and services that we cannot get from the local community so we obtain these from Gilgit, Islamabad or Karachi.
- 95% of our staff are employed from the local areas.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Except Gilgit Serena Hotel where 95% come from the Hunza area.

- We provide training to local producers, service providers and artisans to improve their products & services. Examples include: training transport providers on how to improve their product & service, training underprivileged women in cooking, training local chefs & cooks on cleanliness and improved cooking techniques.
- We continually work with local businesses and the local community to develop & improve authentic guest experiences ensuring positive interaction between the community and our guests. E.g. Guided village walks, local home visits, transport providers, meeting Royal families etc.
- We encourage our guests to give charitable donations responsibly – irresponsible donations have huge negative impacts including encouraging children to beg for money, pens and sweets.
- At Shigar Fort Residence and Khaplu Palace & Residence we contribute 20% of our overall hotel's net profit & 10% of our transport net profit back into the local communities via the Town Management Development Societies for use in social development projects.

## **Our Social Responsibility to our Local Communities**

### **Contributing to Community Development**

- We are actively involved in the local communities in which we operate, liaising with key groups continually gaining an understanding of their needs as well as educating groups on both the positive and negative impacts of tourism.
- We actively encourage all of our staff to volunteer on many community initiatives, and in some cases it is compulsory.
- We donate excess food, old newspapers, magazines, old sheets, towels and uniforms to the underprivileged in each community.
- We are currently developing a number of environmental initiatives to engage with the local schools raising awareness of the key environmental issues that exist and providing basic solutions. To do this we will work with local and development agencies in each local area.
- In 2012 we are focused on educating our suppliers on implementing sustainable business practices.

### **Contributing to the Preservation of Culture & Heritage**

- We actively promote the preservation of local culture and heritage by engaging with the community to provide guests with authentic local experiences.
- In partnership with the Aga Khan Cultural Services, Pakistan we preserve historical monuments such as Shigar Fort and Khaplu Place.
- We support the conservation of other historical monuments for the use of the community as well as for tourism. E.g. Shigar Fort, Khaplu Palace, Baltit Fort, Altit Fort and many other Khanqa's and Astana's.
- We ensure that the local community also has access to restored historical monuments and therefore encourage them to take pride.
- We promote local food at each of our hotels and cafes.
- We support traditional musical groups for entertainment at the hotel.
- We encourage guests to purchase locally made handicrafts
- We provide guests with literature to increase their awareness and knowledge of the history and culture of the community / area and to encourage them to learn a few words of the local language.
- We offer historical walking tours to our guests.

## **Sustainable Employment Practices**

- We ensure equal opportunities for employees of different genders, cultures, ethnicities and ages.
- We encourage local women to pursue a career as well.
- We are dedicated to creating a work environment which is supportive, educational, friendly, empowering and fun.
- 95% of our staff are employed from local areas (except in Gilgit).
- We offer English classes to staff during the less busy times of the year
- Our responsible tourism policy (will be) translated into Urdu and distributed to all staff
- We hold Responsible Tourism workshops for staff members
- In 2012/13 we will run a campaign to encourage our staff to live responsibly at home and within the community adopting the 3 R's – Reduce, Recycle and Re-use.

## **Nurturing our Guests**

- We provide our guests with literature (pre arrival and in room) on the local culture, language, food and authentic experiences to assist them gain a better understanding of the individual areas they are visiting plus the entire Gilgit-Baltistan area
- We encourage guests to explore inside and outside of our hotels; walking, cycling, horse riding or on Jeep safaris
- We provide guests with information on our recommended initiatives that they can offer long term support to and encourage responsible charitable giving.
- In 2013 we will provide guests with information to raise awareness of local and environmental issues and we encourage feedback from our guests with regards to our responsible tourism practices

## **Our Environmental Responsibility to our Local Communities**

### **Energy Consumption & Saving**

- Unfortunately due to frequent power cuts (load shedding) the hotels use diesel run generators. We are in the process of looking at how to offset our carbon emissions.
- We are developing tree planting initiatives to encourage guests to offset their carbon emissions created from their travel to Gilgit-Baltistan.
- We encourage all staff to limit the use of vehicles and motorbikes to and from work via car pooling, walking or cycling.
- We are currently researching and trialing converting all green waste into biogas to be used to cook all staff meals. Additionally we are trialing the composting all green waste and paper materials for use as fertilizer.

### **Solid Waste Management**

- As hotel operations we recognize that we are one of the largest generators of solid waste in the communities in which we operate. Additionally some of our locations / communities are not supported with efficient and effective solid waste management systems.
- In 2012 we will implement at each hotel a solid waste management programme that focuses on reducing the amount of waste produced and reusing & recycling waste where ever possible. Our objective is to reduce solid waste by 20% from 2011.
- We will work with our key suppliers to reduce the amount of packaging of all goods purchased.
- We have identified charities, schools and the under privileged who can re-use some of our solid waste.

- We aim for all of our hotels to be plastic bag free by September 2012.
- We are currently researching converting our kitchen waste into biogas and/or compost for our gardens.
- Long term we will work with development agencies and local government to implement improved solid waste management systems for the communities.
- We will nominate staff members to volunteer in schools educating children on the benefits of reducing, recycling & reusing.

### **Water Management**

- Water is one of the most precious commodities on this planet. Despite water in our communities being available at no cost we realize that our hotels are a large consumer of the local community's water supply thus it is our responsibility to ensure we monitor and minimize our water usage using water saving techniques wherever possible.
- By March 2013 we aim to have water meters at each of our hotel's so that we can measure the total amount of water used by each department in each hotel. Once we have monitored 6 months of water usage we will set reduction goals and objectives.
- We have identified key areas where water usage can be reduced using industry standards as a benchmark and have started to implement water saving measures in toilets, showers & all water basins.
  - We aim to save by September 2012
    - 4 litres per flush in every toilet in all of our hotels
    - 6 litres per minute in every shower of all of our hotels
    - 6 litres per minute in every water basin of all of our hotels.
- During the summer months we will ensure our gardens are watered in the cooler times of the day to avoid excess water evaporation.
- In August 2012 we will run a water saving communication programme amongst all of our staff and departments.

### **Waste Water Management**

- Our hotels produce many different types of waste water (grey water, sewage, irrigation water & environmental run off) which we are currently monitoring to assess areas for improvement.
- By March 2013 all of our hotels will have a comprehensive waste water management plan to improve our treatment and disposal methods including looking at recycling. Some of our hotels are already recycling the sewerage for garden fertilizer.

### **Active Participation in Nature Conservation and Biodiversity**

- We recognize that the areas in which we operate are under threat from the effects of climate change, deforestation and the lack of land use planning.
- By September 2012 each of our hotels will have identified the key environmental issues that exist in each location and develop relationships with existing environmental groups and projects to support the community on reducing the impact of these issues. We will communicate these issues to our guests and staff and get them involved in reducing the impacts.
- In 2012 we will develop environmental awareness training programs & project for schools in the local community. E.g. how to recycle plastic bottles, why throwing your rubbish in the street is bad etc.