



2022 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title of the Story: Protection of the Natural and Scenic Views of the Iwokrama Forest through Conservation and Rigorous Monitoring Plan and Activities.

Destination Name: Iwokrama River Lodge (Kurupukari Crossing, Essequibo River – Region #8)

Country: Cooperative Republic of Guyana

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Submission category: *(Please check one of the boxes that indicates the focus of your story)*

Please find detailed information for the categories below in the Top 100 training module 'Good Practice Story'.

- Governance, Reset & Recovery
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing

Find detailed instructions for submitting good practices in the Top 100 training module "Good Practice Story".

Should you have any questions on your submission please refer to our FAQ page or contact top100@greendestinations.org





DESCRIBE YOUR GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Address each aspect of your good practice story in the different sections being specific including relevant quantitative and qualitative information.

Issues faced

What was the problem/issue solved with the good practice?

The Iwokrama River Lodge is an eco-tourism gem that falls under the management of the Iwokrama International Centre for Rainforest Conservation and Development and is primarily responsible for 371,681 hectares of Guyana's pristine rainforest.

Since its conception in 1997, the centre has had its fair deal of issues/challenges which was addressed through the implementation of various policies. Some of the issues faced by Iwokrama included:

1. *Maintaining a Low Ecological Footprint*
2. *Minimising Illegal Activities*

Maintaining a Low Ecological Footprint

The lodge hosted its first guest in 1997, since then, the goal has been to accommodate between 1000-1500 visitors annually, this is monitored monthly by recording visitor's arrivals and their mode of arrivals. In order to maintain its low footprint, the lodge offers accommodation in individual naturally-ventilated cabins, powered by renewable energy. Additionally, Iwokrama mainly hires residents from the surrounding communities and ensures that all meals offered at the Lodge is either locally or regionally sourced as much as possible. Further, this lodge offers a number of carbon free or low carbon tours including nature walks and birdwatching.

Minimising Illegal activities

Iwokrama has developed and implemented a monitoring system to protect the rainforest from all forms of illegal activities such as logging and mining. Monitoring activities includes: controlled gated checkpoints, recording of all vehicles passing through the forest, weekly road and river monitoring patrols. Additionally, signs are also placed at strategic locations indicating "no unauthorized activities". All of which helps to minimise this challenge.





Methods, steps and tools applied

How was the good practice implemented?

Addressing the challenges faced by the Iwokrama River Lodge, the following methods were implemented as part of their good practice:

Collaborate with Neighbouring Communities from the NRDD Board

The Iwokrama River Lodge works closely with twenty (20) neighbouring communities who are also members of the North Rupununi District Development Board (NRDDDB).

These partnering communities assist with the monitoring efforts of the protected forest of Iwokrama which was mainly forged through the signing of co-monitoring agreements. This step allowed Iwokrama and local residents to foster a closer working relationship in protecting the 371,681 hectares of forest lands through specific monitoring activities.

Implemented a Zoning Process

The Iwokrama Rainforest has been equally divided (for experimental purposes) into two zones, namely: (i) a wilderness preserve (WP) and (ii) a sustainable utilisation area (SUA). There have been for the last 12 years intensive baseline studies of the forest and the development of models for sustainable forest management in close co-operation with the local communities. This zoning process has been a key tool for the management of the Iwokrama Forest. The division ensures that large areas of the forest can be managed for conservation and sustainable use, while at the same time, being carefully monitored.

Key requirements of the zoning process include the need for transparency and consideration of opinions from Iwokrama's stakeholders (communities within the zone and neighbouring the reserve (NRDDDB), national partners and also international ones). Some of the steps within the zoning process entails:

- *Data gathering, review and analysis.*
- *Development of a zoning allocation decision model (several scenarios were created).*
- *Public Consultation and final selection of the model.*

The zoning process resulted in 71% of the Iwokrama Forest being exempted from intense commercial activities. This is particularly relevant for protection of scenery and species conservation, as the most effective and efficient mechanism for protecting species and conserving biodiversity is protection of habitats.





The Implementation of Checkpoints and Monitoring Activities

In order to ensure the continued protection of the Rainforest, Iwokrama has developed a robust monitoring system. This system seeks to address the social and environmental impacts of various activities within the protected zone.

Additionally, this system includes boundary monitoring which is becoming increasingly important as access roads are improved which would further heighten threats to the rainforest due to the large amount of traffic within the zone and the potential exposure to other illegal activities (such as hunting, mining, and deforestation). There is also the threat of negative impact on the indigenous culture and heritage due to this phenomenon. The following monitoring activities were embarked upon:

Activities 1: Checkpoints at the Northern and Southern boundary access of the forest. These gates are opened twelve (12) hours daily. Checkpoint officers record data of all vehicles passing through the Iwokrama Forest and also check each vehicle with the assistance of wildlife police.

Activity 2: Weekly road and river patrols are conducted. Each road patrol consists of the following:

- Road surface, bridges and creek inspections and clearing.
- The clearing of fallen trees to prevent traffic hazards.
- Upkeeping of all road signs.
- Signs inspection of unauthorized or illegal activities.

Activity 3: Co-monitoring agreements with community partners support monitoring activities. Iwokrama has agreements with Surama to monitor the Burro Burro River and with Rewa and Apoteri to monitor upstream Essequibo River.





Key success factors

Iwokrama, throughout the years, has forged and sustained relationships with the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA), the North Rupununi District Development Board (NRDDDB), and other agencies such as the Guyana Police Force (GPF), Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC), the Protected Areas Commission (PAC) and the Wildlife Management Department to continuously promote the conservation of Guyana's rainforests. The following must be noted:

Iwokrama's relationship with the GTA has played a major role in the establishment's tourism-focused initiatives. Training opportunities, specifically in the areas of Hygiene & Sanitation, property inspections as well as monitoring visitor arrival statistics have allowed Iwokrama to tap into its main tourism markets and continuously promote one of Guyana's key tourism pillars - Conservation & SAVE (Scientific, Academic, Volunteer & Educational).

In an effort to fulfil Iwokrama's mandate (monitoring and preservation of Guyana's rainforests), multi-stakeholder collaboration is critical. For example, regular monitoring by Iwokrama's rangers with support from NRDDDB, GGMC, PAC and GPF has allowed Iwokrama to mitigate instances of illegal activities and maintain a low ecological footprint.

Research conducted has allowed Iwokrama to fully understand the vast biodiversity that makes up Guyana's rainforests, more specifically, its flora and fauna resources. Some of which were conducted in the early stages of the centre's development, which has contributed to the zoning of Iwokrama's rainforest.

Iwokrama has also employed the support of the local Indigenous communities to develop and execute education and awareness sessions which sought to inform them of unauthorized activities within the forest and how they can avoid indulging in them. This method of co-monitoring with neighbouring Indigenous communities provides invaluable information to the centre's monitoring efforts.

The implementation of checkpoints at both the North and South boundaries of Iwokrama has helped the centre to monitor road users in real-time and maintain records of the impacts of road users on the environment through vehicle movement in various forms.

GGMC and the GPF have contributed to Iwokrama's efforts to monitor and minimize illegal mining activities within the rainforests through increased surveillance and awareness activities.

Road and River patrols contribute to showing signs of wildlife and human activities which helps in better decision making, this information is shared with the tourism department for the purpose of making a guest's specific expectation met.

Partnering with wildlife management in cases of illegal hunting or trapping of wildlife contributes to Guyana's overall wildlife management activities. All the work Iwokrama is currently doing aligns with Goal 15 of the SDG - Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.





Lessons learned

While implementing the Good Practice what challenges were faced, and how were they overcome?

A few key challenges of the center were:

Budget – There is a limited budget allocated to executing activities at Iwokrama. This budget is tied to a number of different projects which results in the centre having to split the costs for activities. Some examples can be noted below:

Vehicle resources are shared so in instances where patrols are needed, it is always tied into another activity such as sourcing and restocking meat. This often slows down the patrol team's monitoring efforts. Notwithstanding the fact that the high costs attached to executing monitoring activities in difficult terrains would also require shared activities.

During the rainy season, the roads are severely impacted which results in an increase in maintenance costs for vehicles. Executing monitoring activities during this season will require more time from the patrol team as well as revising their schedules and expected outcomes.

Having to continuously draft and submit project proposals to raise additional funds to support new, innovative ways (the use of drones) to execute monitoring activities can sometimes be monotonous and don't always yield positive results.

Illegal Activities – Illegal activities such as mining threaten the integrity of the rainforest. Through collaborative efforts with GGMC and the GPF, awareness sessions were held with representatives from the neighbouring Indigenous communities and the miners. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a need to increase awareness as well as monitoring methods to ensure that safety and respect for the environment were upheld.





Results, achievements and recognitions

What were the qualitative and quantitative results of the good practice?

- Iwokrama has been responsible for the protection of 371,681 Ha of pristine rainforests, biodiversity, and culture for over 20 years.
- Iwokrama has fostered collaborative relationships with 20 neighbouring Indigenous communities to propel the work that they do.
- A number of COVID-19-focused training were executed in collaboration with key partners such as the GTA in an effort to prepare Iwokrama's staff for its official reopening in December 2020.
- Iwokrama's annual target is to host 1000-1500 visitors annually. This target has been maintained, with the centre receiving 1300 visitors in 2019. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these numbers have decreased by approximately 75% in 2020 and 50% in 2021.
- In collaboration with the GPF, Iwokrama developed a Memorandum of Understanding with relevant organisations to collaborate in areas that will aid in the protection of the rainforest.
- A memorandum of Understanding was also signed with Surama, Rewa and Apoteri in support of their monitoring activities in 2019.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the total employee count was reduced since the operations were scaled down, however, the centre is happy to report that 75% of the staff that were terminated were since invited back to execute their duties. It is also important to note that 60% of Iwokrama Staff are Indigenous locals from neighbouring Indigenous communities.
- In 2008, Iwokrama received the Community Benefit Award from the Caribbean Tourism Organisation and the TravelMole Sustainable Tourism Awards.
- Iwokrama River Lodge was awarded the TripAdvisor 2015 Certificate of Excellence.
- Iwokrama was featured with 8 others as examples of good governance practices in the Amazon Region in a regional report titled "Implementation of the Program of work on Protected Areas 2011-2015 Amazon Biome Region" presented at the 13th COP of the Convention on Biological Diversity, held in Cancun, Mexico in December.
- In 2016, Iwokrama received EPA's Green Award for Environmental Leadership and the GTA's People's Choice Award for Responsible Tourism.
- Memorandum of Understanding with Environmental Management Consultants signed 2020.
- A Memorandum of Understanding with the Hydrometeorological Service was signed in 2020
- A Memorandum of Understanding and the Collaborative Management Agreement with the North Rupununi District Development Board was renewed in 2021
- A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with Guyana Wildlife Conservation and Management Commission in 2021
- A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with Guyana Marine Conservation Society in 2021





Additional references

Provide links to further information. Pictures and videos should be available for download either from YouTube, Vimeo or other Cloud-based (Google/ One Drive) download URL (not WeTransfer).

[Science and Research | Iwokrama River Lodge](#)

[Mammals of Iwokrama | Iwokrama River Lodge](#)

[Video Library | Iwokrama River Lodge](#)

[Iwokrama 2021 - YouTube](#)

