

TO DO!98
Contest Socially Responsible Tourism

Award Winner

***PWERTE MARNTE MARNTE ABORIGINAL
CORPORATION (PMMAC),
ABORIGINAL ART & CULTURE CENTRE (AACC)***

represented by

Daniel Forrester , „Elder“ and Speaker of the Arrernte-Community

Paul Ah Chee Ngala, General Manager of the Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre (AACC)

Alice Springs, Northern Territories, Australia

Rationale for the Award

by

Dr. Christian Adler

1. INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the Study Institute for Tourism and Development (Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung e.V.) the author of this report travelled to Alice Springs, Australia, in November 1998 in order to assess the project PWERTE MARNTE MARNTE ABORIGINAL CORPORATION, ABORIGINAL ART & CULTURE CENTRE which had entered the contest TODO!98. According to the insights and knowledge gained it is recommended to award the contestant with the TO DO!98 prize at the ITB 1999 in recognition of its objectives, working principles, activities and achievements.

The PWERTE MARNTE MARNTE ABORIGINAL CORPORATION (PMMAC) is an umbrella organisation of the Pwerte-Marnte-Marnte Commune (pronounce Puerte Marte Marte) located in Alice Springs and engaged in economic, social and cultural activities. It belongs to the Arrernte Clan living south of Alice Springs. The family group with its homeland in Orange Creek Station comprises about 300 tribal members. Its centre is located just about 100 km south of Alice Springs, a homeland of 26 square kilometres which was returned to the group by the government in October 1992 (before colonisation their territory covered 4,000 square kilometres). Faced with limited space and resources the Aboriginal Commune decided to look for ways and means to open up income earning possibilities. What immediately suggested itself was the whole sector of tourism. In order to realise this endeavour the ABORIGINAL ART & CULTURE CENTRE (AACC) was founded in Alice Springs in 1995 of which the PMMAC is the sole owner.

2. BACKGROUND

Tourism in Australia essentially concentrates on four attractions, in the following order of precedence:

1. The culture of the Aboriginal people (Northern Territory)
2. The Monolith Ayers Rock (Northern Territory)
3. The Barrier Reef (coast of Queensland)
4. The Opera of Sydney (New South Wales)

For this reason the Australians talk about an icon-tourism which – in the order of precedence shown above – takes place mainly in central Australia in the Northern Territories, in the so-called Outback. That is mainly between the urban centres of Alice Springs and Darwin, on the northern coast of the continent and Ayers Rock in the west. AACC says that among the 1.3 million tourists visiting the Northern Territories every year, about 500,000 go to Alice Springs and roughly 700,000 visit Ayers Rock. Yet, from the presently employed staff in the tourism industry in the Northern Territories of 5,011, only 132 Aborigines are employed in tourism according to the PMMAC (2.5 percent). Of the package tour to Ayers Rock costing 350 Australian Dollars (A\$) only four A\$ remain with the indigenous Aboriginal people. Of the 700 million A\$ turnover of the tourism industry in the Northern Territories the Aborigines are said (by AACC) to make a profit of only 3.5 percent (scarcely 24.5 million A\$).

3. THE SCOPE

The distance from Alice Springs to Adelaide in the south is 1,570 km, to the north, to Darwin it is 1,476 km. To visit Ayers Rock (Uluru) described to be situated "close by", one has to cover a distance of almost 500 km from Alice Springs. The countryside between all these locations is bushland. One crosses the countryside on very good highways and has the impression that the country is empty, belonging to nobody. This is a mistake, because

bushland is pasture land. And here the ranches are measured in hundreds or even thousands of square kilometres. The owners or leaseholders are Whites. At the same time, however, the indigenous population of Australia, the Aboriginal people, continues to be alive and present. But today they mainly live in so-called homelands and in urban centres. This has in some instances seriously changed the cultural and social structures of the Aboriginals.

4. INTERSECTING WORLDS AND REALITIES

4.1 REALITY ONE: ALICE SPRINGS

The best example for the complex situation is the focal point of Alice Springs. The town with a population of 25,000 lives on tourism. In the pedestrian precinct "Todd Mall" one can find galleries with aboriginal art, shops with post cards and presents, boomerangs, didgeridoos, spears etc. You will also find the local tourist agents offering "Ayers Rock" and "Aboriginal Culture" – apart from a whole range of so-called "outback adventures", such as bushwalking, fossicking and outback ballooning. The profit goes to the white Australians, and what they offer is a "posed" reality. Because they no longer exist – the "stone age people" who roam about the bush, armed with spear and boomerang and feeding on bushtucker (in the Australian outback bushtucker is all you can find to eat).

4.2 REALITY TWO: THE TOURIST'S PERSPECTIVE

An Austrian couple reports that on their travel across Australia they had learned and heard a lot about the culture of the Aboriginal people, but that these narratives have only been taken on someone else's authority – that of the white people. Some of the tour guides, they said, had openly slipped their disregard for the indigenous people and their racist attitude into their information. The couple was amazed – in other countries they had been able to get in touch with the indigenous population without any difficulties. But here, where everything was concentrated on the Aborigines, they had so far not had any real encounter with them. They regretted, that there was no possibility to meet with the Aborigines themselves.

4.3 REALITY THREE: THE URBANISED ABORIGINES

When the shops close in Alice Springs in the afternoon the only people staying behind in the city centre, in the area of Todd Mall, are those with whom the couple would like to get acquainted with: the Aborigines. They roam about the main street or they squat in front of the church and drink. They come from quite different regions and they belong to different tribes and clans. Alice Springs appeals to them because here they can get alcohol and social assistance more easily than in the outback. In contrast, many of the far away small settlements are absolutely "dry". Which really means: the alcoholics and beggars among the Aborigines of Alice Springs are only a marginal group among the altogether 35,000 living in the Northern Territories.

4.4 REALITY FOUR: THE UNDIMINISHED SPIRITUALITY

Donald is an Aborigine and 21 years old. He is a computer freak and he shapes and manages the Internet pages for the ABORIGINAL ART & CULTURE CENTRE. During my stay in Alice Springs he is "on leave"; he was sent to the bush for a longer period of time in

order to undergo the traditional initiation rites. He will have to take off his clothes, smear his body with ochre and walk around naked, just as the grandfathers had done, at the time when they were still living in the "stone age".

This shows that there is a world of difference between the past and the world in which the Aboriginal people are living today. And it is just as hard to make people understand that the one does not necessarily exclude the other and that both worlds can be interlinked. But only in as far as all parties concerned respect the "Dream Time", the Aboriginals' holy myth of creation. After all, Australia is interspersed with a number of sacred or taboo places from this Dream Time which, depending on who belongs to which Totem (Aboriginal clan) – must be avoided or can be visited, with the permission of the respective dream holders. Ayers Rock (Uluru) is the most famous (negative) example for the violation and for the disrespect of taboos.

Similarly, there are traditional rules forbidding even to talk about holy objects or ceremonial activities, let alone to walk on foreign "songlines". Songlines are actually existing directions to find your way through the bush, but at the same time there is a spiritual dimension to them. They are only meant for the respective members of a certain clan. Songlines are tracks running straight across Australia right through fences and farm demarcation lines and they describe the traditional path handed down since primeval times which a clan member is supposed to follow on his walkabout – e.g. on his search for water or food so that he may not enter the territory of another clan.

By the way, boomerangs, paintings (unless a totem is the topic) and didgeridoos (the wind instruments) are not taboo.

5. OBJECTIVES

The PWERTE MARNTE MARNTE ABORIGINAL CORPORATION (PMMAC) was founded in 1976. In the beginning it was only concerned with regaining control of lost territories - as mentioned above its efforts were crowned with success in 1992. From 1995 the activities have drastically changed and have been expanding when PMMAC was able – with the help of the ATSIC (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) – to purchase a run down gallery in Alice Springs. Today the pivot of all activities is the ABORIGINAL ART & CULTURE CENTRE (AACC) which pursues the following medium and long-term objectives.

Objective one: The emergence of a sustainable tourism industry in Alice Springs – one that is controlled by Aboriginal people so that the interests of the Aborigines can be better safeguarded. The project wants to create a general economic platform offering a chance to Aborigines as individuals but also to the communities so that they may escape the poverty trap.

Objective two: The revitalisation of the commune – out in the bush, in the homeland. Should they succeed in developing a kind of tourism which is close to nature, out there on a campsite under construction, then a lot of clan members would be able return because they could find jobs there and because they would have a three-fold chance: first, to live independently from government assistance, second, to live a self-determined life in the outback, based on modern livelihood principles, and third, to keep their culture alive on the basis of traditional values.

Objective three: With its procedure the PWERTE MARNTE MARNTE ABORIGINAL CORPORATION wants to become a model for the whole of Australia and to give an example of a successful enterprise, run exclusively by the indigenous population and also owned by them.

The key to all these objectives is the commercial success of the above mentioned ABORIGINAL ART & CULTURE CENTRE (AACC) which is structured in the following way:

- 5.1 A shop where handicrafts and artefacts of the Aborigines are displayed and sold. Furthermore one can get videos, CDs, MCs, postcards, T-Shirts etc. PMMAC acts both as retailer and wholesaler. These products are meanwhile also offered and sold world-wide through internet homepage. There is a great demand for boomerangs and didgeridoos which are presently exported to 83 countries.
- 5.2 The Centre's Art Gallery is on the first floor of an annex with a permanent sales display of local indigenous art. There is also a hall and conference room.
- 5.3 In the rear of the shop a museum was set up displaying exhibits of aboriginal culture. Photos and texts give an explanation as to the use and application of these objects. One room with posters is dedicated to history, another one to the early lifestyle of the Aboriginal people. Some of the old photos were cut so as not to desecrate sacred objects or ceremonies.
- 5.4 A didgeridoo university in separate rooms enables passers-by or participants in a tour programme to learn this instrument in a crash course. Instruments and a video recorder are available for this purpose.
- 5.5 Under the name "Aboriginal Desert Discovery Tours" the AACC organises half-day excursions, day-trips and tours of several days to the world of the Aboriginal people. The range of offers roughly corresponds to the offers of other tour operators in Alice Springs: Ayers Rock and Kings Canyon, in addition a camp stay at the Rainbow Valley etc. And yet, with the AACC two aspects are differing from those of mainstream agencies: First, the profit goes to the commune, second it is only Aborigines who accompany the tourists. They have thus found employment and they can pass on first-hand information to their guests. This includes the complex network of family systems, the use of spear and boomerang, the production of tools and appliances as well as fauna and flora and the bushtucker which is indispensable for survival (in the case of desert hikes).

Since the inception of the AACC the PWERTE MARNTE MARNTE ABORIGINAL CORPORATION has been economically very successful. The turnovers have trebled since 1995. From 260,000 A\$, according to their own information, and a total of five employees in 1995 to about 700,000 A\$ and almost 16 directly and ten indirectly employed Aborigines in 1997.

While my research and assessment was under way the PMMAC got the contract from one of the biggest tour operators in Australia, AAT Kings (Australian Adventure Tours) with a guarantee of 10,000 guests annually, i.e. roughly 30 visitors per day for a half-day culture programme. The continual profit resulting from a contract such as with the AAT Kings (for 1999 it is expected to achieve a turnover of 500,000 A\$) is considered to be an important pillar through which the above mentioned objectives can be achieved and which makes it possible to employ additional staff in the AACC.

6. APPRAISAL

The comparison of PMMAC activities with the TO DO! criteria for a socially responsible tourism results in the following appraisal:

Contest criterion:

Involvement of the different interests and requirements of the local people through participation

Justice is done to this requirement in that the project, the PMMAC with its affiliated enterprises is solely owned by a group of the southern Arrernte and run by their members. The most important objective of their activities, on a long-term basis, is to develop their commune in such a way, and despite the limited assistance by the government, to make it possible for the clan members to return to their homeland. The group is represented by elected speakers who are responsible both for the communal and the commercial section of the Corporation.

The first priority for the local population is the creation of jobs in tourism and of professional training which opens up and safeguards income-earning possibilities. The project complies with these demands as can be seen from its achievements, its fast expansion during the past years and from the implementation of its projects.

Contest criterion:

Strengthening the awareness among local people with regard to the chances and risks of tourism development in their daily economic, social and cultural life

The active members of the PMMAC, the leadership and staff of the organisation fully agree on the common goals. They are also supported by their families for whom they speak and for whose welfare they work. With the course they pursue, they want to improve the livelihood of the people, they want to restore the self-determination and independence of the extended family clan while at the same time safeguarding important elements of their traditional culture.

They are keen on facilitating the encounter between tourists and the indigenous population (which was hitherto hardly possible in Australia or only on a very impersonal level) and on putting it on a personal and mutually agreeable level. They want to provide first-hand information to their guests. Before they are given an assignment they are carefully prepared for this kind of encounter through appropriate trainings.

They are well aware of the risks. Due to the attitude and behaviour of mainstream tourism the Aboriginal people are permanently confronted with these, e.g. the violations of taboos by taking pictures. With their own programmes they take great care to prevent violations of taboos by explaining this aspect in their lectures and during the excursion programmes. Since they give first-hand information they are able to guide developments the way they think is appropriate.

There is no need to revive the cultural heritage within this Arrernte group. On the contrary: they are very much aware of their traditions and their situation within present-day Australian society. Therefore they try to assist other Aborigines, mainly the young ones, those who have fallen victim to negative influences of modern society, so that they may get a new orientation and a chance to re-integrate. This is an attempt to counter the complete dissolution of their tradition and the collapse of the traditional value system. Last but not least, the Arrernte group is also concerned to motivate other Aboriginal groups and, by doing so, to revive the ancient culture on a broad basis.

Contest criterion:

Participation of a broad local population strata regarding the positive economic, social and cultural effects of tourism

The staff of the PMMAC and its affiliated enterprises is presently comprised of members of their own clan of about 300 people. As part of an extended family group to whom the enterprise belongs they see themselves as share-holders of the Corporation.

In 1997, the PMMAC organised a pilot project to assist 30 indigenous people to get a specialised training. They implemented programmes after whose completion they were awarded a nationally recognised certificate. For example: "Certificate I and II in Tourism" or "Certificate II in Land-Caring". This "off-the-job" training was carried out by the Institute of Aboriginal Development. In addition they got an "on-the-job" training within the AACC.

In March 1997 some 13 trainees began with the latter, nine finished their training in December of the same year. 13 students tried to obtain "Certificate I" and they actually succeeded in getting the certificate. Ten started training for "Certificate II", eight students are interested in land-caring. Some of the graduates are today employed with the PMMAC.

Contest criterion:

Guarantee of the attractiveness of jobs in tourism for the local people by improvement of working conditions in relation to payment, social security, working hours, education and training

Amid the rampant unemployment among Aborigines the entrepreneurial activities of the PMMAC and particularly of the AACC have generated sustainable jobs. Due to the success of the enterprise even more jobs will be created this year. Once the "Campsite" will be in place, some sections of Alice Springs will be moved to the vicinity of the homeland. This move is expected to open up new income earning possibilities in the near future for the families living there. It is envisaged that they will work as self-employed entrepreneurs or as employees of the nearby National Park. This will also open up the possibility for the families to settle down in their homeland permanently, something which has not been possible so far.

Remuneration is fixed according to performance. However, this will be handled in a flexible way. As mentioned above, there are cultural commitments which a staff member has to honour and which might cause him to be away from work for several days or even longer – as in the case of Donald who was sent to the bush for initiation. In order to avoid any disadvantage for these employees their salary will be paid even during their absence.

Another issue is alcohol. Those coming to work in a drunken state are sent home. As a compensation these people have to promise to make up for this day on a weekend. If they do so they will not suffer any financial loss.

The salaries paid amount to 35 percent of the turnover. The salary is graded according to qualifications. A permanently employed trainee, such as a salesman in the shop, would earn 360 A\$ per week. As soon as the trainee has terminated his training he will get 450 A\$ per week. A qualified tour guide will also get 450 A\$ per week. A senior tour guide who must also be familiar with the management of an agency earns 650 A\$ per week. There is no social security provision through the employment with the PMMAC.

This is not considered necessary since in case of unemployment the government comes in, e.g. with the following contributions: Unemployment/social assistance amounts to 180 A\$ per week. If unemployed persons offer their services for communal tasks, through the

"Community Development Economic Programme" (CDEP) they will get an additional 50 A\$. As a matter of fact, an alcoholic will get 10,800 DM per year from the State without giving any service in return. If he worked under the communal scheme he would get 13,800 DM per year. If he worked with the AACC as a trainee doing the work of an unskilled labourer he would get 21,600 DM per year, that is almost double the amount.

The job as a guide seems to be very attractive for the indigenous people since they are mainly dealing with things they have grown up with. They act, so to speak, as teachers in order to make other people understand their culture.

Recently the government promised PMMAC a financial grant for the establishment of a training centre where skilled staff for the tourism industry will be trained. The grant amounts to 1.5 million A\$. PMMAC committed itself to train 200 indigenous people according to government standards by the year 2002. This is an offer to all Aborigines who are interested in this training.

The impact of this training can be seen from the following "careers". "X. for example", according to Paul A Chee Ngala, "was roaming around in discos before he joined us; now he plays the didgeridoo and he is an excellent guide. Before Y. came to us he had come into conflict with the law, he burgled and stole, but now he works with the Corporation and he has changed completely. The case of Z. was even worse. We had terrible problems with him during the first months: the police was involved because of his gambling, because of alcohol and all kinds of other things. It took six months to get him out of his earlier cycle. Meanwhile he, too, has completely changed, he now takes his work so serious that he even turns up on Sundays."

Contest criterion:

Reinforcement of the local culture as well as of the cultural identity of those living in tourism destination areas

One of the project's primary objectives is to stop the decline of culture. The causes of this decline – having no prospects in the modern Australian society, high unemployment and serious alcohol problems arising from it – shall, in the final analysis, be eliminated by offering help for self-help. The Aboriginal people try to safeguard their identity which is tradition-orientated while at the same time coming to terms with modern times. By making use of the means and instruments of our time they are now successfully engaged in building up a new basis of livelihood in the tourist sector. In this way they want to escape the poverty trap and free themselves from an appalling standard of living.

Contest criterion:

Avoidance, minimization of social and cultural damage caused by tourism in destination areas

The PMMAC employees make every effort to ensure the comfort and enjoyment of their guests but they also put them in their place, and they let them know this in advance. During the excursions they are in full control of the events. The instructions they give generally direct the inquisitiveness and curiosity of the visitors to issues through which the culture of the Aborigines can be explained in quite practical terms (food, search for water in the desert, the conception of Dream Time, symbols). In contrast, secret and spiritual issues are not discussed. Apparently the guests do not consider this procedure to be a disadvantage, because what is actually offered is professionally structured, exciting and is masterly

presented with a sense of humour. The information given is extensive and the tourists understand that there are cultural taboos which are none of their business.

Contest criterion:

Application of new methods in qualifying partnership and cooperation between the external tourism industry and the local people

Recently the government promised PMMAC a financial grant amounting to 1.5 million A\$ for the implementation of a training programme for 200 Aborigines within a period of four years through which skilled staff for the tourism industry will be trained. This is a first step on the way to the planned establishment of a permanent training centre for skilled experts in tourism in Central Australia. Representatives of the travel industry are among the members of the committee deciding about the training programme.

With this endeavour PMMAC sets new standards: The corporation itself is the initiator and it will also implement important sections of the project – not the authorities supporting them through funds, or institutions and representatives of financially strong mainstream enterprises. As mentioned above the PMMAC is ready for cooperation with big tour operators (as AAT Kings) and can convince them from their touristic product. With this project the PMMAC does not only look after its own interests but it is lobbying for all Aboriginal people in the Northern Territories who are looking for chances and prospects and who want to break new ground.

Contest criterion:

Creation of other favourable conditions for a socially responsible tourism development in destination areas

The PMMAC is set out to develop into a very successful enterprise, one that is exclusively run by members of the indigenous population and that is owned by one of their communes. Because of their manifold activities the PWERTE MARNTE MARNTE ABORIGINAL CORPORATION is apparently developing into a model for all of Australia. Many other Aborigines could profit from the insights and the knowledge of this group – information which the group is prepared to pass on.

Contest criterion:

Projects/measures entered for the contest must be in line with the principles of environmental compatibility

Tourism in Central Australia is generally quite conscious of the environment – with regard to the use of natural resources or the pollution of the bush landscape. With regard to the programmes of PMMAC, too, an incompatibility with the environment cannot be observed. After all, the philosophy of the Aboriginal people is rooted in a sustainable way of life. If they had exploited the resources instead of using them only for their survival they would not have been able to live in the bush or in the desert.

Conclusion:

There is no reason to believe that PMMAC is not able to achieve the objectives they have set themselves. What is convincing is the professionalism in their procedure; they do not leave anything to chance, they are innovative and flexible, they plan carefully and with a purpose, and they are realistic. They base their operation on strategic, financial and

business plans. They critically compare their own estimates with what they have already achieved. They are experts in delegating tasks, they even employ a consultant of Irish origin. And above all they are oriented toward prospects of success. They write: "In every aspect, we strive to be market leaders not followers."

At the same time they endeavour to bridge the gap between two completely different, seemingly irreconcilable worlds. Primarily in order to open up the possibility of regaining self-determination and independence while keeping alive the traditions of the indigenous people. But they also want to give others a point of orientation, act as their "pathfinders" on the journey of the Aboriginal people towards a – hopefully – better future.