

Urban Nature – Youth Ecotourism Forum Presentation
Madeleine McGann & Shenade Muller
Thursday 2 November 2006
Southbank Convention Centre

Madeleine: Good afternoon ladies, gentlemen and respected guests from across the globe. My name is Madeleine and this is Shenade. We are students from the Cathedral School, here in Townsville, but today we represent the youth of the world.

So all of you know and understand what ecotourism is; but now is our turn to explain to you what our understanding is.

This week we have had the amazing opportunity to be involved in the **2006 International Ecotourism Conference** and we have been exposed to and discovered a range of ideas which have helped to shape our perspectives on ecotourism.

Shenade:

The artwork on display behind us is from the Urban Nature Ecotourism Puzzle Map.

This project, unlike a traditional jigsaw puzzle, the pieces of this puzzle map do not join together to create one whole piece, but rather remain as separate pieces that are nonetheless connected – just like our local natural environments.

Over 350 students, from year 1 through to year 7 have participated in the project with the assistance of four local artists.

The Puzzle Map was launched on Monday 30 October, at the Perc Tucker Regional Gallery and was a huge success!

As another complementary activity to this International Conference, we were lucky enough to have the opportunity to attend the Urban Nature – Youth Ecotourism Forum.

Throughout the day, we listened to many different guest speakers, each sharing with us their extensive knowledge and experiences in the ecotourism industry.

Dr Alistair Birtles, the first guest speaker of the day, told us the definition of Ecotourism and introduced to us the Ecotourism Bottom Line equation, SOCIETY, ECONOMY & ENVIRONMENT, which we now know are aspects that we must take into account when working towards a sustainable future.

Throughout the forum, we also heard from many other guest speakers who provided us with an informed insight to an array of ideas in relation to ecotourism, all of which were very informative to all of us involved.

Our international guest speakers came from countries such as Brazil and Kenya.

From these speakers, we have each developed our own ideas and definitions on what ecotourism really is.

I personally found the Biosphere Reserve youth programme in São Paulo, inspiring.

Poverty is a major inhibitor on ecotourism potential and its connection to environmental protection.

I think it is amazing that not only does this programme incorporate getting poverty-stricken youth off the streets, but also showed reconciliation between man and the earth.

Overall it was a great day and learning experience that we all thoroughly enjoyed.

Madeleine: But this fun, international learning adventure didn't stop there.

Last night Shenade, myself and a number of other Townsville youth, were invited to attend the International Youth Video Conference at Reef HQ.

There, we had the **awesome** pleasure of literally linking up with the World.

We connected with youth from France, South Africa and EVENTUALLY Brazil!!

We shared our ideas and perspectives on Ecotourism and discovered that wherever you are, tourism should have an Eco-focus.

From the deep rainforest of Brazil to the savanna grassland of South Africa, ecotourism as an economy means community livelihood as well as wealth creation.

Young people are becoming more and more disconnected from their natural environment, causing not only the environment to become fragmented but also the opportunities, understanding and natural appreciation associated with it.

The experience we learnt from Kenya, Brazil, France and good-old Townsville, show that young people such as ourselves are today's leaders and everyday we make a difference to ensure ecotourism as a profit-maker, community job-creator and environmental protection venture can work in balance The food was good too!

More than ½ the world's population is under 25, but we are leaders without a voice.

We have discovered the actions and activities of young people can and *do* really make a difference, which is why this week has been such a great experience.

We may not be experts, as all of you are, but we are the future. Not in a few years, not even in a month. We are the future now.

We must take into account ecotourism when working towards a sustainable future, not only for Australia, but for our wonderful, culture-filled, ecosystem-packed Mother Earth.

Thank you.