6 Leading the Way: Accor Standing for Children's Rights in Tourism

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Synopsis and Learning Outcomes

Accor, one of the leading global hotel operators represented in 90 countries all over the world, is a corporate leader on tourism sustainability. While the responsible operations of Accor cover a wide range of aspects, the purpose of this case study is to focus on the issue of protecting children from trafficking and sexual exploitation within the overall sustainability strategy of Accor. The company has a long history of engaging on child protection, being the first global corporation to formally join a voluntary Code of Conduct in 2002 and operating consistently at the forefront of the advocacy agenda on social responsibility in tourism.

The objective of the case study is to document Accor's work on child protection over the last decade, explaining the corporate philosophy behind it and its theoretical fundaments and presenting the practices implemented into the company's operations. This is done by highlighting a variety of instruments and measures that Accor has put in practice and the impacts they have had in strengthening the corporate brand and partnerships with a variety of stakeholders.

The main finding of the case study is that despite addressing one of the most challenging and highly sensitive topics within the tourism sustainability agenda, Accor has successfully identified appropriate internal and external communication procedures and expertise sources, allowing the company to become a pioneer, then a leading voice championing the protection of children's rights as an integral component of the contemporary tourism sustainability agenda.

The case study draws from stakeholder theory and modern strategic social responsibility research, showing how Accor's work with a wide range of stakeholders has allowed the company to innovate within a sustainable tourism niche that is less often addressed by large companies.

Upon completing the case study, learners will achieve an understanding of the challenges related to issues of child protection in tourism, and be able to explain:

1   The risks that trafficking and sexual exploitation of children pose to a tourism company.

2   The factors that should be taken into account when creating a company-wide strategy to prevent sexual exploitation and trafficking.

3   How a company can engage with a sensitive and potentially negative phenomenon in a way that will positively contribute to building its corporate sustainability brand.

■ Background

☐ Company structure

With more than 3,500 hotels in 92 countries, Accor is one of the world's leading hotel operators. Its brand portfolio ranges from luxury to budget including brands in all categories: Sofitel (luxury), Pullman and MGallery (upscale), Novotel and Mercure (midscale), ibis, ibis Styles, ibis Budget, hotelF1. Accor identifies itself as the only hotel group active across all hospitality market segments. At the end of 2012, the Accor network portfolio was located: 31% in France, 30% in Europe (other than France), 1% in North America, 23% in Asia Pacific, 8% in Latin America and Caribbean and 6% in Africa and the Middle East (see Figure 6.1 below).

Accor worldwide | 3,516 HOTELS | 450,487 ROOMS | 92 COUNTRIES

North America
17 hotels
4,998 rooms

France
1,515 hotels
137,567 rooms

Europe (excl. France)
1,038 hotels
139,443 rooms

Latin America and Caribbean
226 hotels
35,330 rooms

Africa and Middle-East
166 hotels
28,355 rooms

Asia Pacific
554 hotels
104,794 rooms

Figure 6.1: Accor distribution of brands and properties, by geographic region (Figures at 31 December 2012)

The 2012 financial results indicate consolidated revenue of € 5,649 million and market capitalisation valued at € 6.7 billion. 63% of the revenue generated in 2012 was from upscale and midscale brands, 35% from economy and 1% from other businesses.

The company was founded in 1967 and is headquartered in Paris, France. As of the end of 2012, the Accor shareholding was: 75.9 % in floating shares and 24.1% in shares owned by board members and founders.

Accor created its first Environmental Department in 1994, which merged into the Sustainable Development Department in 2003 (Tourism for Tomorrow Awards, 2010). In 2006, the 'Earth Guest' program was launched, mobilising Accor's 145,000 employees, millions of customers and thousands of suppliers and partners. Earth Guest consolidates a range of existing sustainability projects around eight priorities divided into two broad-based themes:

1 *EGO projects:* focusing on support for local development, child protection, fighting epidemics, promoting healthy eating and balanced food.

2 *ECO projects:* which aim to reduce water and energy consumption, improve waste sorting and recycling programs and preserve global biodiversity.

Accor aims to integrate these eight sustainable development priorities at each stage of a hotel's life and with all stakeholders.

Also in 2011, Accor launched a sustainability research program which published the report '*Sustainable Hospitality: ready to check in?*' in June of that year. The survey questioned 6,973 hotel guests in six countries, for all hotel types (chains, independent hotels, etc) and segments (budget to luxury). The six countries surveyed were: Australia, Brazil, China, France, Germany and the United Kingdom. The selection was made in order to allow comparisons between countries of different cultures, with varying levels of economic development; mature and emerging. The research revealed child protection to be one of the four key areas where hotel guests had high expectations for concrete actions from the company.

☐ Legal Context

The link between protection of children from sexual exploitation and trafficking, on one hand, and sustainable tourism practices, on the other hand, is not immediately apparent without explaining the legal context of the phenomenon. Globalisation has increased demand for cheap labour and fomented a worldwide human trafficking industry estimated at USD 9 billion in annual profits, for which 600,000 to 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders every year (Glover, 2006). Many of them are children and teenagers from impoverished rural communities migrating to large urban areas or tourism destinations in search of work opportunities, but vulnerable to labour or sex exploitation.