

# Loola **adventure** Resort

SOMETHING REALLY DIFFERENT!

## Our Sustainable Tourism Policy (Nov 2014)

This document is a note to all our stakeholders (guests, staff, local community, local government, and owners) to say what we are and what we aspire to be.

**Mission:** to show our guests the beauty of the real Indonesia through a rich set of immersive activities, fully run by Indonesian staff.

We are committed to the idea that any company that is going to last is a company that must always evolve, transparently, for the obvious benefit of all of its stakeholders.

### LooLa aspires to be a force for good for all our stakeholders - summary

**Our guests:** We aspire to give our first-time guests a unique and inspiring experience equal to or exceeding the expectations generated via our sales channels (“experience the real Indonesia through a rustic, scenic location and through exciting eco, community and family friendly activities”). Our return guests, meanwhile, should experience a steady improvement in the scope and the level of service.

- We collect feedback from our guests, both directly at LooLa (also via feedback forms) and in Singapore (via email), to evaluate our performance in this area.
- This feedback policy is dynamic and always evolving. Since the quality of actionable feedback as well as the efficiency of our response continues to improve and return guests comment favorably on changes, we resolve to continue the current policy.

**Local community and local government:** Our company engages the local government as well as the local community (schools, orphanages, and local villagers and communities) to identify worthwhile projects in which our guests can meaningfully participate, and we encourage our (school) guests to join this process.

- In 2012/13, this resulted in \$ 70,000 worth of community projects (over 10% of total expenditure), jointly conceived by the local community, our staff and our clients.
- This policy, as well as our “hire local” policy (see below) has earned us the enthusiastic support of the local government, but we have determined that the local communication (between our local staff and our local communities) should be further improved, so as to align realistic expectations and to achieve a transparent and fair allocation of projects throughout the community.
- See below for more information on our aspirations in this area.

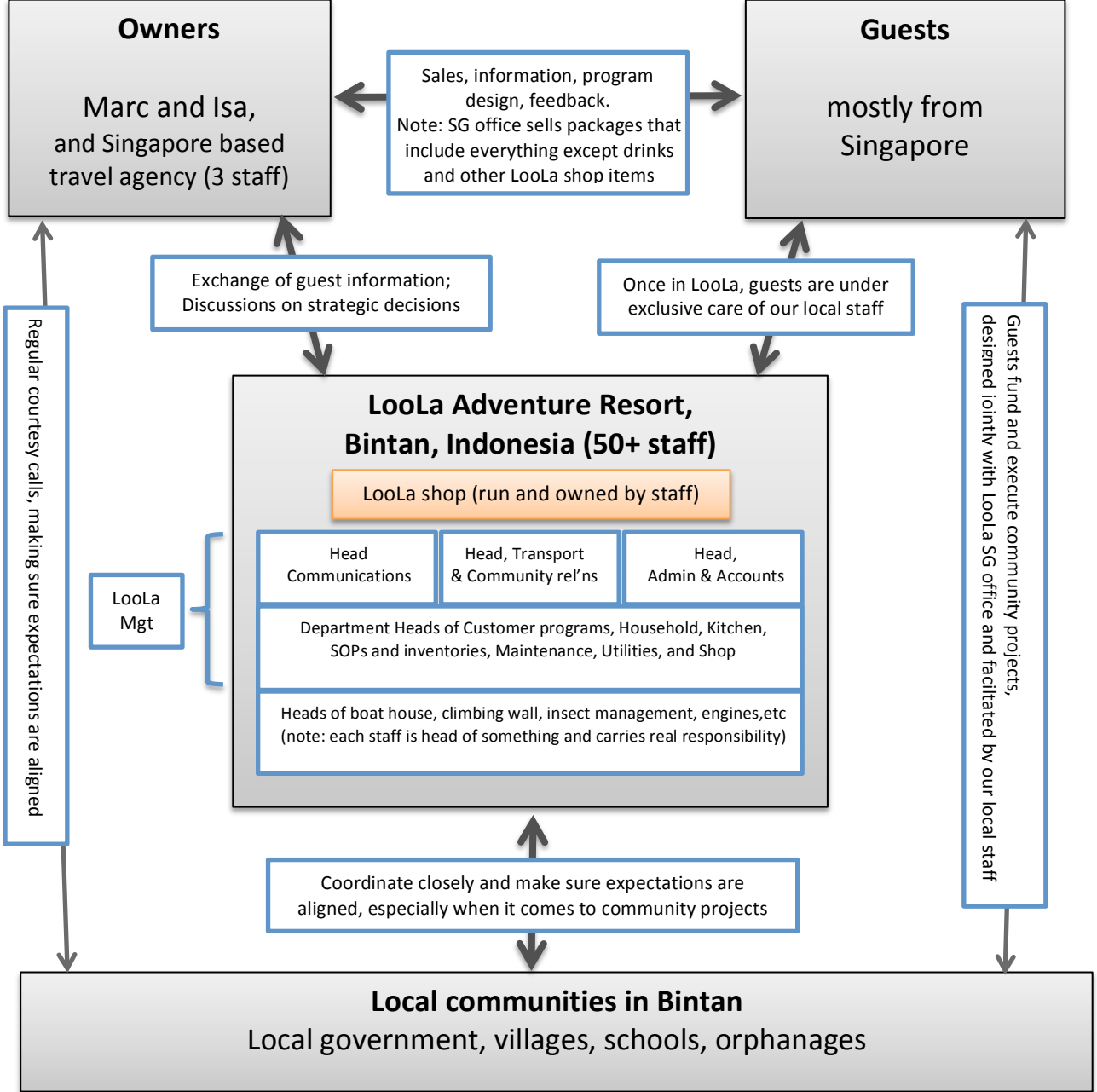
**Our staff:** All our resort staff are recruited from Bintan, in particular from our local village, with the idea to create local quality employment opportunities that give local people a real shot at good wages, professional development and self-empowerment. This, in turn, will secure the owners and our guests with the presence of a sustainable, steady and dependable staff force.

- All our staff hails from Bintan and most are from our local village, there is extremely little staff turnover and a steady progress in staff development and staff ownership, as well as increased participation of women in our work force, so we believe we have shown that “hire local” works. Some challenges remain, but we believe these are surmountable.
- See below for more information.

**The owners:** Dr Marc van Loo and Ms Isabelle Lacoste, the owners, are based in Singapore, and operate a travel agency there with fully local Singaporean staff to service the operations at LooLa. LooLa provides the livelihood for ourselves and our family of 3 boys.

The overall responsibility for the successful execution of this policy lies with the owners.

# LooLa Adventure Group Stakeholder chart



**Note:**  
 All stakeholders are in two-way communication, but the strength of the arrow indicates the strength/regularity of the relationship.  
 The key player is our LooLa resort in Bintan, Indonesia, with 45+ exclusively local staff, 10 of which are in the so-called management. However, there is no hierarchy in LooLa, every staff carries one or more essential responsibilities and decisions are taken by consensus, with members of the management taking the more strategic decisions, in consultation with relevant staff and with Singapore if need be. There is a shop in LooLa, which sells drinks, cookies, telephone cards, souvenirs and so on. That shop is owned and operated by the local staff.

## Our staff and our “hire local” policy

All our resort staff are recruited from Bintan, in particular from our local village, with the idea to create local quality employment opportunities that give local people a real shot at good wages, professional development and self-empowerment. This, in turn, will secure the owners and our guests with the presence of a sustainable, steady and dependable staff force.

- **Hire local:** All 40+ full-time staff at LooLa (which includes the entire management, see chart), are from Bintan (within 40 km from LooLa) with over half the staff hailing from our local village (within 5 km from LooLa). All part-time staff are from within a radius of 15 km. There is extremely little staff turnover, so that repeat guests always see the same staff upon return. We judge the “hire local” policy successful to have got us this far, but our local staff themselves now feel that with further expansion and new developments that need expert input, they will benefit from the intake of new qualified staff from Bintan from outside our kampung. The company will continue to follow the staff’s lead in hiring policies, with the owners typically only getting involved in hiring decisions when new complex developments are involved (such as new construction, overhaul of electricity infra-structure etc).
- **Professional development for local staff:** When we started LooLa in the year 2000, our area, which features the *kampung* (village) Galang Batang, was known as one of Bintan’s least developed areas. In terms of education, for instance, only one of our staff had completed highschool, many others only had had the chance to complete primary school, and the rest (about one third) had no schooling at all. By Mid 2012, however, half of our staff can speak English (and everyone is improving all the time), at least 10 staff own a laptop (60% funded by the company), more than two-thirds hold a first-aid certificate, and our activity staff has international certificates for all the activities they run. We are aiming to have all staff under 50 years of age speak (at least basic conversational) English by the end of 2014, and continue to hold out a salary increase of 20% as an incentive to achieve this. We furthermore continue to fully subsidize the cost of any relevant certificates and encourage staff to identify worthwhile courses to take up.
- **Development of a local financial stake:** To give our staff a direct financial stake and to develop local business skills, all the drinks at LooLa as well as the shop you see at LooLa is fully owned and operated by our staff, who buys and sells for their own profit. The restaurant also has a staff-operated commercial arm, and the staff canteen is wholly owned by some of our staff. Certain activities, such as massage, are fully run by our staff, whereas for other activities, such as wake-boarding, the revenues are split between the company and the staff. The company continues to encourage the staff to expand their own business activities and supports them in helping with the design and implementation of a transparent accounting system.
- **Wage and benefits structure:** The basic wages of all staff are at, or (for half of our staff), well above the recommended minimum, and all our full-time staff **and** their family have comprehensive health and accident insurance, paid for in full by the company. In addition, there is a transparent performance bonus and/or staff business system in place, which covers most individual staff by now (and which we aim to extend to all staff during 2014). We aim to get our staff to double their income through the promotion of their own business as per previous point.
- **Transparent bonus and promotion system:** We have a transparent bonus and promotion system (largely measured via direct guest feedback forms, Tripadvisor ratings, and transparent peer-reviewed assessment sheets), which is regularly reviewed to ensure that everyone has equal access to these opportunities.
- **Woman empowerment:** Women are allowed to bring their small children to work. The company encourages women to take up management positions and other positions of responsibility, which has been difficult as local women are traditionally reluctant to join the management. We have had two success stories in this area in 2012 (Siti and Elsa), and we are hopeful that this will inspire further progress in this area.
- **Children and work:** the owners, being educators, are in complete agreement with our local government and community: children belong in school, not at work. So the children you see at LooLa aren’t working: they are the children of our staff, enjoying their off-school time!

## Interaction with local communities

Our company engages the local government as well as the local community (schools, orphanages, and local villagers and communities) to identify worthwhile **CIPs** (Community Involvement Projects) in which our guests can meaningfully participate. We encourage our (school) guests to join this process, all the way from identification to design to implementation.

- In 2012/13/14, this resulted in over \$ 70,000 per year worth of community projects (> 10% of total expenditure), jointly conceived by the local community, our staff and our clients.
- **Company & Guest communication:** It is the responsibility of the owners and our Singapore based travel agency to inform our guests, in particular school guests, of the opportunities to engage in meaningful projects with the local community (we have specific documentation to support us in this respect). Our guests are looking for challenging tasks that address a genuine local need, and which allow for plenty of interaction with the local people. To facilitate this, we encourage our guests to set aside a modest amount of money (typically in the order of US\$ 15 per half day of community work) and think of a project themselves (with our assistance where needed) or choose amongst a wide number of existing projects identified by the LooLa staff (see below). Over the years, we are delighted to note that we have succeeded in aligning the expectations of our guests with those of our company and our staff, and we resolve to maintain and further strengthen this happy state of affairs.
- **Cost transparency:** Expenditure for the CIP costs is a completely transparent affair, with separate accounts kept, accessible to all. Guests are encouraged to attempt to make budgets, together with their local partners and our staff, and allocate funds accordingly.
- **Company & Local community communication:** LooLa employs a full-time community project coordinator who coordinates the LooLa-village relations. Together with the entire LooLa team and the local community, he identifies meaningful projects which can realistically be serviced by our guests (such as road building, housing upgrades, bed building, mosquito net placements), and make sure that such projects are fairly distributed amongst the community. By all accounts, the projects with local schools and orphanages and communities away from our own village have been largely successful, but mid 2012 it came to light that the local village community's expectations were not fully aligned with those of LooLa and our staff. To address this communication gap, we had earlier, in 2009, conducted a survey on community needs (recorded on a Excel sheet) of the 79 families living within a 5 km radius of Loola. In a successful May 2012 meeting between LooLa, owners, and villagers, it was resolved with the villagers that another local village chief would, on behalf of the villagers, review the survey, and take up joint responsibility to identify and allocate projects, and to communicate this to the local community. This important improved communication, especially after inviting all village (children) to a party at LooLa in 2014, has led to even higher quality community projects.
- **CIP inventory:** We have noticed that we can do a better job with the inventory of materials that can be used more than once (such as shovels and brushes), and a CIP inventory system, as well as a special CIP store room, has been set up.

## Do's and don'ts for our guests

Through word of mouth reputation, as well as careful pre-trip information in Singapore, LooLa tends to receive guests who display sensitivity to local perspectives. But Indonesia is a delightfully easy country in terms of its expectations of visitors. Its people are proud yet modest and extremely open-minded and cognizant of different backgrounds of foreigners. Therefore, the only thing we ask our guests is to engage local people with the normal respect that they would accord anyone in their own culture, keeping in mind a few local cultural twists:

- You can ask anything you want and feel free to question anything you see (really!!), but always keep an open mind to the opportunity that you will need to adjust your perspective.
- Remain friendly and smiling throughout – showing irritation is considered bad manners.
- Solicit local people for their views, and show you are genuinely interested, but don't be afraid to question things if you have a different views – Indonesians love open discussions!
- Don't worry about having to dress differently – Indonesians accept you as you are, if you adhere to the code of conduct as per above
- In general, you are always welcome to visit local villagers, on any occasion; our local staff can advise you on local expectations, but remember the most important one: bring a smile!

## Communication – aligning all expectations

Efficient communication throughout our company and between our company and its other stakeholders is important for our long-term success. It has been recognized throughout our entire company that such efficient communication can be further strengthened.

One challenge is that written materials will not always work since some stakeholders (including about one quarter of our staff) cannot read or write.

That is why we have adopted a versatile system of communication:

- Between LooLa's SG head office and our guests, a well-oiled communication document-supported mechanism is in place, which includes program design and post-trip feedback.
- Between the owners and LooLa, we have efficient email procedures, regular Skype meetings, and instant sharing of documents via Dropbox, Google docs and WeChat
- The key documents are a public "TO DO" file where all outstanding tasks are listed and sorted by the relevant staff, as well as a public management calendar. The chief communicator (Mr Dul) coordinates with all the departments to plan progress and reports to the owners. Both the owners and LooLa's staff can add new issues to these docs.
- We have opened a new office in the neighboring town, Tanjung Pinang, 40 km from LooLa, with a fast internet connection, a fast office computer and permanent Skype connection. At LooLa itself, the existing internet has been strengthened with separate "executive" internet access for one single powerful desktop computer, which is permanently on Skype.
- Between LooLa's staff, we have decided on an all-staff meeting every morning where all issues can be raised and, if necessary, followed up with the relevant staff later on the day.
- As of Nov 2014, 22 staff have company-paid smart phones with WeChat and Duolingo installed. WeChat is the best (group) chat application available in Indonesia, and it makes instant and transparent communication with and between all staff a breeze.
- Our community engagement coordinator has by now (2014) established a great working relationship between himself, the LooLa team, our local community, and the local government. Previous hiccups in communication have been sorted out now.
- LooLa-based staff previously coordinated relations between LooLa and the local government, but we established a new office in Tanjung Pinang in 2014, which successfully drives and maintain relations with government bodies.
- Since efficient two-way communication is traditionally a challenging issue in Indonesia, the owners of LooLa have made it one of their key missions to make clear progress in this area, and continue to adept and fine-tune systems until good and efficient communication comes as a natural instinct to everyone working at LooLa. Our 2014 "360" appraisal exercises (the latest one of which was completed in Oct 2014) where everybody transparently appraised everybody else, and where the management was appraised first by the staff before appraising the staff, was very successful in achieving progress in this area: to overcome the natural Indonesian aversion to criticizing others, the management and owners made it mandatory that every staff had to give exactly one point of personal criticism to each management/owner individual, citing the issue that bothered them most. We limited it to one point per person so as not to overly embarrass less popular management members. This process was cathartic: long-held frustrations were aired and cleared, and people felt far more free to contribute to discussions. We will continue to build on this and do quarterly 360-degree evaluations.

## **Language policy**

It is generally recognized, throughout Indonesia, and in our own company, that speaking English confers lasting economical advantage to any individual. After having attempted to teach English through the use of tutors with limited success, our staff then made their own systems whereby everyone will speak English for an hour a day to each other, assisted by those with better English. They furthermore employ the use of English-language TV in the evening and the magnificent Duolingo smartphone app.

The company supports these efforts at speaking English by offering a salary-add-on to those who can hold a basic conversation with a guest and by having a bonus system in place (based on direct feedback from guests) which rewards speaking English to guests.

Overall, this has resulted in over one-third of our staff speaking English at normal conversational level and well over half being able to understand basic conversations. As staff “infect” each other and each success spawns the next, 2011-2014 has seen a sharp acceleration in mastery of the English language. Some of the older staff who rarely interact directly with our guests (and who have not enjoyed any education in their younger years and hence have difficulties with academic ventures) are respectfully given a pass, but the aim is that all staff under 50 should be able to keep a basic conversation in English by mid 2015.

Visitors therefore are, with enthusiastic support of our staff, encouraged NOT to speak Bahasa Indonesia but to speak English throughout, but to adjust their speaking tempo if need be. During visits to local communities, our staff translates as necessary. There is little point to attempt to learn some words of Indonesian, such energy is better directed at having a quality encounter translated by our staff. Of course, if your Bahasa is good, you know that our staff, as well as any other Indonesian, will enjoy some banter in Indonesian!

## Hire local – buy local

Not only do we hire exclusively local people to work at our resort, but we also believe it makes simple business sense to use local materials wherever possible. Doing so benefits the local community around us and hence strengthens local ties (very important for harmonious and peaceful business operations) but it also makes replacements easy and is often plainly more cost-effective than bringing in materials from afar.

- We spent roughly \$ 700 K per year in 2011-13 on expenses to support resort operations, and well over 90% of that money ended up in the local economy within 15 km of LooLa.
- **Building materials.** Both granite and sand mining is a local industry, which keeps the rest of our neighboring village occupied (notice all the piles of stones of various sizes scattered throughout our kampung: villagers bring in the big granite blocks and whack these down manually to stones of various sizes, so we directly support our villagers by buying such stones). After we discovered that the wooden stilts of our jetty were replaced by wood that was sometimes simply cut from the jungle (a local habit that dies hard), we decided to change all the hard wood stilts by concrete stilts. The wood we now use is mostly Nibung (which looks like a scrawny coconut palm tree), a renewable but durable local wood variety. For roofs we often use “Alang alang” (elephant grass, an abundant local species – look all around you outside LooLa), which keeps a local ancient craft (the making of roof panels) intact. Other than that, we simply use sand, cement and simple basic common materials and we try our best to make things look nice.
- **Local architects.** We have used local architects from Bintan, with mixed success. Some of the construction we’ve done, close to or on the sea-flat, is a bit unusual. The traditional local techniques only provided for expertise with now-impossible-to-get wood, so we needed modern expertise for our sea-based sea-water pool as well as our concrete buildings on the sea. In 2013 we found the help of a Bali-based Australian architect, whose resort is a previous WildAsia award winner and who has been in Bali for over 25 years. He provided a great bridge between the owner and our local staff and local builders.
- **Local landscaping.** We use local plants and flowers for landscaping, and encourage some of the village ladies with green fingers to grow flowers to sell to us.
- **Local cuisine.** Our cooks are all ladies from the local kampung (village) who are, since 2011, supported by a professional cook from the largest village on the East coast, Kawal, 7 km away from LooLa. Our kitchen provides traditional Indonesian dishes with some international twists (less spices) as well as basic international fare such as pasta and pizza from our wood-fired pizza oven, but all according to self-designed recipes. Some of our best dishes are based on fresh seafood from the nearby market in Kawal. Since our food gets high marks from our guests, we will continue on this path, but we encourage our kitchen staff to document our dishes and further diversify them. This effort was hampered by the fact that most of our kitchen staff is illiterate but in 2012 they received help from other staff, and by 2013 most of our menus were charted and costed internally, and we aim to enhance the menu by adding deserts and specialty food by mid 2015.
- **Buy local produce and from local shops.** As a rule, we buy everything from Bintan, except if it is not available on the island (things such as kayaks or sailing boats). For supermarket and maintenance items, we have made agreements with nearby shops: as long as their prices are the same or better as those in town, we buy from nearby shops. After offering to settle every bill immediately in cash, local suppliers were willing to extend small discounts rather than charging us “credit surcharges”. All staff can recommend local shops, but LooLa and our Tanjung Pinang based accountants check from time to time that prices are still competitive. This system appears to work reasonably well. For fresh produce, we turn to local markets. Seafood is fresh every morning from the nearby village Kawal, and fruits come from local markets too.
- **Attempts at village farms.** We have encouraged our kampung people to grow vegetable and fruits so we can buy these items at market prices from them, so far with limited success, even when we offer to buy the seedlings and do all the planting. Encouraging local entrepreneurship has always been a challenge, but it looks like there are some signs of progress lately, and we will continue to raise the opportunities directly with village chiefs and kampung elders.

## Dealing with waste and waste water

This is one of the areas where we have improved the most in the first part of 2014, and where we will continue to improve until the job is done.

- **The past:** We started out essentially leaving waste management procedures completely to our local staff, who employed established kampung traditions: solid waste was burned and buried, organic waste went to a local pig farmer who comes and collects it for free, and waste water was fed into septic tanks that were built according to kampung traditions. Environment experts who came by told us that these methods are OK for LooLa since we are operating in an isolated area, but they also told us that our methods would not be adequate if we were operating in a more densely populated area.
- **Solid waste plans:** Early 2012 we engaged a Java-based German environment expert who, together with his Javanese wife, specialize in environmentally sustainable insect management (more on this below). He had some input into waste management, such as setting up routines for dealing with solid waste, including dealing with toxic waste such as batteries, and to do composting where appropriate, but we still have to formalize such systems and out them in proper protocols that are accepted by everyone.
- **Waste water:** While toilet water from the sea-based chalets was fed into a (sea-based) septic tank, shower water from the sea-based chalets ran straight into the sea. We rectified this early 2014. In 2013 we started working with the earlier-mentioned Bali architect, who was very active in post Aceh relief efforts on waste water systems, and, throughout 2014 we installed his waste water treatment systems (vegetated leach field systems) for most of the resort, with kitchen, girls showers and some beautification still outstanding (TBC by Feb 2015). The systems are recognized as supremely effective, also in terms of affordability, by organisations such as OxFam, Red Cross, and Unesco. Combined with our rainwater collection systems, these systems result in a *nett-adding* of clean water to the water table!
- **Bio-degradable soap.** Our (school) guests are typically expected to bring their own soap (and we just provide back-up) but we are pleased to note that many guests have suggested the use of bio-degradable soap. Since these items are not locally available, we will look into a model whereby our staff shop will sell such soaps and hence benefit both the environment and the local economy. This is on the to do list for (late) 2014.

**Targets for 2015:** We are looking forward to completing an overall waste collection system for our entire kampong in 2014, to the full completion of our waste (water) systems in Loola by late 2014, and to the completion of the waste water systems for kampung households in 2015.

## Water provision (drinking and shower water)

**Drinking water:** Drinking water is exclusively mineral water, which we buy in big bottles from shops. So as to further minimize the use of disposable plastic bottles, our (family or private) guests then fill up their glasses, while school guests fill up their own water bottles.

**Shower and kitchen water: we don't use much, and aiming to use even less ...** For showers and kitchen use, we used to obtain most of our water supply from ground water, from a pipe about 14 meters deep, and pump this water up to drums on towers about 8 meters above the ground. In Nov 2014, however, we completed installing rainwater collection system from two 500 m<sup>2</sup> newly redesigned roofs, which deliver water via a simple gravitation-based piping system with a few strategically placed pumps to get water to the various water towers. The system appears to produce even more water than expected, so we're counting on these systems to cater to at least 90% of all our water needs! We monitor water use through an extensive metering system that was completed in Nov 2014, and we will use this system for educational purposes, both to educate ourselves of where water goes and where further savings are possible and to educate our guests via entertaining games, such as "Measure who uses more water, boys or girls?" "Figure out how much more water per person is used once we allow them access to hot water."

**Targets for 2014:** By Nov 2014, already 32 of the roughly 100 households in our kampong have our waste water processing systems installed, as well as received a ceramic water filter system (allowing them to use their own well once again for cooking and drinking!). We aim to complete the whole kampong (about 100 households) with such systems by 2015.



## **Energy – the answer lies in limiting usage.**

**Current situation: a small carbon footprint considering the size of our operation:** The owner of LooLa is a physicist (with a PhD in cosmology) but to his considerable disappointment, until recently, physics had not produced viable alternative energy for a resort like ours, but things changed in 2013. With the scale of our operations (covering an area of over 4 hectare which needs lighting, and accommodating occasionally up to 400 students), and taking into account the occasional need for drills and other maintenance machinery, it turns out that, even with high quality cables and energy saving lights and fans, we need about 10 kW, going up to maximum 15 kW during peak use (also because LooLa powers the nearby houses of a few of our staff). We've looked into using clean burners feeding on waste, but such machines are huge, need vast amounts of waste, are expensive and not locally available, and cannot cope with more than 5 kW unless one is willing to erect a plant-size object (which is not an option). Since the peak of our usage will be at night, solar and wind energy would need to be coupled with large (environment unfriendly) battery banks.

But then we came across an outfit called Contained Energy in Bali, and they showed us that we could build luxury eco villas that get clean aircon without chemical batteries (PV panels directly drive compressors which in turn freeze a huge block of ice under each villa), and that we could have daytime electricity fully provided by solar panels at (eco) economical costs. To cut a long story short, in April 2014, 70 PV panels (120 m<sup>2</sup>) are on the roof of the boat house, and in Sep 2014 all the other components were in place to deliver green daytime electricity, as well as green electricity for the two luxury eco villas that we're building right now (the first of which will be completed by end Nov 2014, while the other will be ready in Dec 2014). The world-first green aircon systems should be fully functional by the end of Nov 2014.

Generators tend to use more or less a fixed amount of diesel, depending on their size, and we still need them, as solar energy cannot power our resort at night without having large banks of toxic batteries. Right now, we have a silent 30kVa locally available generator that costs about US\$ 10,000, and we have a much smaller engine (5 kVa), which we can use if energy needs are less. The large engine takes up about 3 liters per hour resulting in 1500 liters of fuel a month. While we aim to further reduce this amount and target under 1000 liters for 2014 (see below), the number must be put in context: our total energy fuel use is less than that of 5 typical family cars in Singapore. In fact, our transport CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are far higher than our electricity emissions (see below).

**Targets for 2015 and beyond:** We want to reduce our carbon footprint and reduce fuel bills, but there is only one realistic way: limit the use of electricity, and educate our guests accordingly.

- We were inspired by our experiences on Kanawa island near Flores, which limited the time that people could use showers and electricity, to the full understanding of all their guests. We believe LooLa can achieve something similar and we trust that "eco-surcharges" such as those suggested below will be an efficient tool to alert people to the true costs of energy, and get them to read the accompanying explanations. All this came as an interesting eye-opener to LooLa's owners, and we trust the same will happen to our guests, and that we can thus further the crucial idea that the best way to limit our carbon footprint is to simply use less fossil fuels (and that this is sometimes less difficult than we think).
- During day-time, we limit the use of electricity to Wi-Fi, our office desktop computer, 3 kitchen fridges, and to charging a few laptops and electronic games. This energy is currently fully supplied by the newly installed PV systems.
- Our current non-hot showers greatly reduce the shower times and hence water consumption, to the benefit of our environmental. Nonetheless, feedback indicates that some guests would appreciate hot showers, and we hence provide these hot showers in the 2 new luxury eco villas, but these luxuries will come at a cost. We have decided that for the rest of our resort, we will stick to the non-hot shower and limited electricity routines because our clients happily accept this.
- We aim to introduce bicycles early 2015 that produce electricity so that people can charge their laptops and phones and are educated at the same time to the (eco) costs of such acts.

## **Transport – and how to limit Carbon emissions**

The closest bus operators are based 40 km away from LooLa, in the capital of Bintan, Tanjung Pinang, where also most of guests arrive (although large groups tend to arrive via the Bintan resort port, which is 70 km away from LooLa). The buses we use are owned by local small operators (who typically own one to three 27-seater buses each). There are a limited number of air-con buses on the island, even though, if necessary, air-con buses can be brought in from the neighboring island of Batam. On the whole, our guests accept these constraints, although some guests from Singapore appear to view air-con transport as a near-necessity.

Our community outreach projects (whereby our guests visit villages or schools or orphanages nearby) often causes buses to make the long 40 km journey from Tanjung Pinang again. To reduce transport costs for our nearby Loola community outreach projects and to benefit the local community, we have engaged some of the local village car-owners in a partnership to use their vehicles for local transport close to the resort. This does not reduce our transport bills (we offer the local people the same rate as operators coming from afar) but it does reduce our carbon footprint and stimulates our village economy.

Our company owns two cars (Toyota 7-seater sedans) but we've realized that we'd benefit from closer transport coordination on staff and shopping trips, which account for a whopping 30% of the total transport bills. Logbook protocols have been strengthened and the transport and accounts coordinators shall work together in 2013 to achieve greater economy.

**Targets for 2015:** We aim to bring back the car transport to a total of no-more than 100 km a day on average for the use of cars (about 300 liter of petrol a month), while aiming to limit bus use to no-more than 150 km per guest, or, on the basis of 20 people per bus occupation, about 2 liters of fuel per guest.

## **Local nature and our conservation efforts**

Fortunately, local sentiment and modern eco-tourism sentiment is rapidly converging in Bintan – and in wider Indonesia. There is an increasingly wide-spread realization amongst policy makers and the wider public that Indonesia is extremely rich in natural wonders and that it should remain so. Primary school text books have been rewritten to drive such points home to the new generation. Naturally, there are vested interests pushing the other way, but nonetheless in Bintan, illegal logging is now widely perceived as a bad thing and a fairly efficient fine system coupled with popular pressure has pushed illegal logging into a fringe activity. Mangrove trees used to be harvested for charcoal, but local coastal communities themselves have concluded that the harvesting of mangrove trees has led to erosion and a drop in fish stock, and our company and our guests are helping in mangrove replanting efforts. The local government has concluded that its ground water supplies are under threat because of a lack of trees and is supporting forest tree planting projects. Sand mining (mainly done for export purposes), which was a disaster for local fisheries, was halted under popular pressure in the early 2000's. Against this generally very supportive backdrop, LooLa is doing its bit by stressing the natural beauty of our unique sea-flat marine walks (in addition to oral commentary by our local staff, our local fishermen are assisting our marketing team now to maintain a Facebook page on local marine life). In terms of local land animals, traditional local hunting has unfortunately limited wild life largely to snakes, lizards and a few monkeys. These animals tend to keep a natural distance to our resort, and our company does not allow wild animals on display.

We have furthermore encouraged the local kampung people to engage in native vegetable and fruit growing, the results of which will be bought at market rates by our company.

The government has helped our company and our guests with forest tree planting projects, whereby the government provides land for free, tree saplings at cost price, and expertise so as to advise what mix of trees to plant. This has resulted in our company planting around 4 hectares of new forest, fruit trees and vegetables in 2012, in addition to the around 6 hectare of mangrove and other forest planting earlier.

**Targets 2015:** things are generally moving in the right direction, and we shall continue our current efforts and projects in this area. We shall produce educational leaflets and posters about the rich local marine flat wildlife with the help and expert input of our local staff. To help conservation efforts, a Facebook page of all the wildlife at LooLa was published in Oct 2014.

## Insect control

There are a number of insects we have to control for the comfort of our guests.

- **Mosquitos.** There turn out to be 4 different species in our local environment, more about which below.
- A biting insect known popularly as “**Sand-fly**”. After years of experimentation, we have realized that through vigorous beach cleaning, regular rustling of beach sand, replacement of top sand layers on playgrounds, and removal of dead sea-weed, we have succeeded in the practical removal of this insect – without the use of a single chemical.
- **Wood carving insects** such as termites (which occasionally bite people at night if they are squeezed between mattress and body) and woodcarver bees. We found a local specialist in the nearby village of Kawal, who has an efficient but time consuming way of treating each source point with minimal use of chemicals. He was given a contract to a) remove the more immediate problems, and b) maintain the resort in such a state that future problems would be nipped in the bud. His work was effective, but we were then educated that we could achieve the same result through the use of vinegar and other relatively harmless chemicals, and it is our intent to get these routines under control by the end of 2014.

**More on our mosquito control measures:** over the past decade, there were sporadic but unconfirmed reports of Malaria but in 2009 some of staff got infected with Malaria Vivax. This led LooLa’s owners to initiate an aggressive campaign together with the local government to eradicate malaria from our area. The idea of malaria control is to control the two so-called “vectors”: human malaria patients and malaria-carrying mosquitos are *both* needed for transmission. Following Singapore’s successful campaign against malaria, we focused on people first: mosquito nets were distributed in the kampung, we did a survey of all families to identify all those who might carry malaria, offered immediate free transport to a hospital in case of suspected malaria, while the government pledged to treat any patients for free (and LooLa paid the patients for lost wages while in hospital to finish the cure). The program appears to be a complete success (although we are mindful that, just like anywhere in Asia, malaria could be re-introduced through outside sources): since 2009 (more than 5 years ago at the time of writing) no new transmissions of Malaria have been reported in our area (and neither have other insect borne diseases such as Dengue fever).

In terms of mosquito control, it is not possible to do much outside the resort vicinity (we’re in a thinly populated area of at least 30 square km, much of which is swampy), so mosquito-control measures focus on LooLa itself. LooLa used to follow the advice of Singapore pest control agencies, which focused on chemical fogging, both indoor and outdoor, against mosquitos. However, it became increasingly clear to us that fogging was simply not helping, except in killing off smaller lizards and agitating shell-based animals (chemical fogging apparently causes agony to crabs and prawns and the like, which we have plenty of on our sea-flat).

One of our clients then alerted us to the presence of a Java-based German scientist and his Javanese wife, who had developed a chemical-free system of ovi-traps (water-filled devices that entice female mosquitos to lay their eggs in it so as to allow the abortion of the resulting larvae). It was agreed that, before trying the electricity-operated system designed by the couple, they would show us first that the manual version would be successful. The manual experiment, using hundreds of coconuts as traps, started early 2012 and was deemed a success in June 2012, even though we all learned that human lapses in maintenance of the system exact a heavy price (one coconut can collect as many as a 1000 larvae, so forgetting to empty the water on time results in the release of thousands of mosquitos). The electric system is designed exactly so as to limit the risk of human error, and we ordered 13 of such units, the installation of which started late June 2012. During their use in 2013, however, we found that the systems can not be relied on, and we have decided to revert back to the successful – but labor-intensive – manual manner of operating the ovi-traps.

**Targets for 2015:** we know that our current eco-friendly insect-control measures can work, but we shall work towards making sure that our local staff executes the necessary control work flawlessly (as we have experienced lapses in this regard). We will put performance bonuses into place to help achieving rapid success, as well as clear local lines of responsibility for monitoring this important job. Since Aug 2014, these manual systems have proved remarkably successful, especially after an internal reorganisation revealed an excellent internal candidate, who is passionate about this job, and relishes the compliments he receives from all other staff.

## Inspiring others around us

People power is a fairly well-developed concept in Indonesia, especially since the country turned democratic in the new millennium, and there is a well-developed public sense – which we agree with – that companies have obligations towards their direct communities. Strikes and road-blocks, which pitch workers and/or local communities against companies, are fairly common. But LooLa rarely suffered such set-backs since it was generally recognized that our company's philosophy "hire local, buy local" and our involvement in community projects showed that we were sensitive to local aspirations.

To the owners' delight, the governor of Bintan once dropped by at LooLa (around 2004) for a surprise visit and had essentially only one question for our local staff: "are you happy working for this company?" Our staff replied affirmatively, and ever since then, the support of the local government has been outstanding in all areas where it can help.

The government has directed national radio stations to our local staff for interviews, and we discovered that it has been advising other hotels for a number of years already to adopt what is popularly known on the island as the "LooLa-model".

The practical consequence of this is that a substantial number of hotels are now engaging in community programs, adopting their local neighborhood schools, and so on. We have no doubt that they will have discovered quickly that such investments pay off economically, both short-term (because no efforts are wasted on fighting with local communities), and long-term (because not only locals but also guests and the local government respond favorably to community efforts).

Over the years, a number of would-be entrepreneurs have approached the owners to learn about the keys to our success, and we've always been, and will continue to be, happy to share our experiences and ideas. The market is more than large enough and there is an ever-increasing interest in sustainable business, so we believe the whole industry will profit from the adoption of sustainable standards.

There is some bragging about eco-efforts in the industry (where cosmetic efforts are sometimes presented as the real thing) and we feel that doesn't help and may delay real change a bit, so we prefer to keep our eco-marketing efforts rather low key and let the results speak for themselves. We are very happy to note that a number of eco-enthusiasts have been attracted to LooLa, first as guests, and then as advisors, and we have benefited from the passionate advice. Even though our sea-based chalets hardly use any energy at around 1 kWh per day and hardly use more than 50 liters of water a day, we are hoping to find ways to make the current sea-based chalets self-sustainable – a Singapore-based Polytechnic school is helping us to look into this – and hence perhaps pave the way for community projects delivering electricity to isolated village houses.

## How can guests help

One way in which guests can help is by complimenting our staff on the efforts already achieved, while pointing out the areas where we can further improve. Indonesians in general, and our staff in particular, are sensitive to the argument that the "guest is king" (within reason ☺). As everywhere else in the world, environmental awareness in Indonesia is still developing, and repetition helps! Secondly, our guests are doing a spectacular job in donating their energy and money towards worthwhile community projects and we will continue to make such opportunities available.

Finally, we ask our guests for feedback, both in LooLa (where you can directly rate the services of your personal assistant / activity instructor) and, via email, once you are back home. We hope you will take this chance of giving us constructive feedback.

If you have made it this far with reading, hats off, we hope you enjoyed it!

Dr Marc van Loo,  
CEO and founder of the LooLa Adventure Group.