



eARTH'S edge™
explore · experience · evolve

Responsible Business Report 2015

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

We pride ourselves on being a family run Irish business in an age when the travel industry is dominated by big business and conglomerates.

We are passionate about delivering a high quality product with a strong emphasis on safety, fun, professionalism and a personal service. Our philosophy of Explore, Experience, Evolve epitomises our ultimate goal to provide a life-changing experience for our guests in a safe and fun environment. The effect we have on the countries we visit and on our own community is very important to us. We try to have a minimal impact on the environment, support the local economy and educate our clients about local cultures and traditions.



I started the company in 2007 as I was passionate about running high quality trips which focused on the safety, fun and experiences of my guests. I wanted to start a professional company with itineraries, destinations and a service that amazed clients. Happy clients always put a smile on my face and are the cornerstone of our business. I am also passionate about providing sustainable employment to good people and local suppliers in this industry.

2015 can be summarised as the year we won the Small Firms Association's 'Outstanding Small Business Award' which was a great result for all our team. Other highlights included bringing a group to climb Aconcagua, (6,962m) South America's highest peak for the first time and 138 of the 143 clients that attempted Kilimanjaro with us in 2015 reached the summit (a 97% success rate).

The year was not without its challenges too. In April 2015 an earthquake in Nepal resulted in a massive loss of life and overnight decimation of Nepal's vital tourism industry. Luckily we didn't have any groups in Nepal at the time of the earthquake. However due to DFA travel restrictions we had to cancel three groups in the latter part of 2015 which had a significant impact on Earth's Edge and more importantly on our local partners who are now desperate for tourists to return so they can rebuild their lives.

2016 is shaping up to be a very exciting year for us and we are hoping to enhance our CSR policies to increase our impact in Ireland and in the countries we operate. We see reporting with *Responsible Business for SMEs* as a vital way for us to assess our progress, set goals and benchmark. While I see engagement in sustainable practices as part of my civic duty, the tangible benefit to my company is significant. Investment in robust CSR policies increases staff morale, staff retention rates and reduces costs. It also helps generate a positive image of our company to our clients which demonstrates that we care about our people and environment and not just the bottom line. This ultimately results in high quality leads and increases sales. Companies who are not engaging in sustainable business practices are quite simply missing a trick!

James McManus

Director, Earth's Edge

WHAT WE DO

We started out in 2007 as IntoIndia – a small travel company specialising in adventure travel to the Indian Himalayas. In 2011 we developed our business and took a more global focus, rebranding as 'Earth's Edge'.

Today, we are Ireland's only fully licensed and bonded adventure travel company and have increased our offering to 40 countries. We currently run 30 expeditions a year, employ four people full time, have a core crew of 10 Irish guides and a database of 40 doctors.

We're one of a handful of companies worldwide who send a doctor on all expeditions. Our clients are an equal mix of men and women with a thirst for adventure and distaste for mass tourism. Our goal is to take our clients to the most wild and wonderful locations on the planet for life changing experiences.

Contact us: 01 5320869, www.earths-edge.com, info@earths-edge.com

HOW WE DO IT

Our Vision

Our vision is to be the best adventure travel company in the world.

Our Mission

To achieve our vision, we aim for a strategic focus, operational excellence, constant improvement, customer centricity and high employee engagement.

Our Values

Our core value is to put the welfare, safety and happiness of our guests to the forefront of all strategic decisions. This is why the ancient Hindi proverb 'Atithi Devo Bhav' (The guest is the god) is the internal company motto.

STATEMENT OF INTENT

A responsible business supports its employees, connects with its communities, enhances its environment, is accountable in the marketplace and seeks positive social and environmental outcomes, as well as financial.

We believe there is more to Earth's Edge than turning a profit. The wellbeing of our employees, suppliers, community and environment is as important to us as our bottom line. Moreover, investing in responsible business has generated tangible growth for the company. We don't see sustainability as a charitable act, we see it as sound business practice. We have a loyal customer base, 100% staff retention rates and strong partners in over 30 countries due to the responsible business practices at the company. In 2016 we hope to implement the following programmes while maintaining all current activity:

- **KPAP (www.kiliporters.org)** The Kilimanjaro Porters Assistance Project is an American-run Tanzanian NGO which campaigns for the fair treatment of porters on Kilimanjaro. We want to become the first Irish company to achieve KPAP partner status. KPAP will send an investigator on all our Kilimanjaro treks to monitor porter welfare. KPAP investigators report on porter compensation, tips, clothing, food and the weight of their loads.

- **Prompt Payment (www.promptpayment.ie)** Like all small enterprises, getting paid on time is a huge issue for us. Cash flow can cause a lot of stress and we want to make a commitment to pay all our suppliers within 15 days of receiving their invoices.

- **Guide Exchange Programme.** Although vastly experienced, many of the locally based guides we work with, for economic reasons, have never travelled outside their home country. In 2016 we are launching an initiative which will be open for application to all our local partner guides. The successful candidate will be invited to join one of our expeditions in another country at no cost to themselves. For example, a Tanzanian guide who works on Kilimanjaro would join our Everest Base Camp trek in Nepal. We feel this will be a fantastic experience and a great learning opportunity for the successful applicant.

- **Leave No Trace (www.leavenotraceireland.org)** A number of our Irish guides are certified Leave No Trace providers. In 2016, we plan to deliver Leave No Trace training to clients and local staff.

- In 2015 we offset carbon emissions for all staff air travel, at a cost of €912. In 2016 we plan to offset staff carbon again and making a better effort to encourage our clients to offset their carbon too.



COMMUNITY



Kilimanjaro Equipment Rental Programme

In our 2014 sustainability report we stated "We have set up a system where our guests can bring old trekking clothing to donate to the guides and porters on Kilimanjaro." We did do this but ran into a number of issues so had to put the programme on hold in June 2015.

In December 2015 we met with an American run local NGO called the Kilimanjaro Porters Assistance Project (www.kiliporters.org). KPAP have an existing infrastructure to lend equipment to porters who do not have sufficient resources to clothe themselves correctly for Kilimanjaro. Insufficient clothing can have serious consequences as temperatures on the summit frequently drop below -20° celsius.

We are sending our first shipment of equipment in February 2016 and if all goes well we hope to send more throughout the year.

Volunteer Days

While attending a *Business in the Community Ireland* (BITCI) event in May 2014, we were inspired to hear about a BITCI member company that offers its staff three paid volunteer days per year to do community work near the company's offices in Dublin. Being a tech company, they undertook work related to their skill set, including computer courses for the elderly and disadvantaged children.

We felt we should utilise the skill set of our team while volunteering so, after a lengthy search in November 2015, we finally linked up with the



Presentation College Warrenmount, a DEIS school based in Dublin 8 to launch the 'Explore Experience Evolve Programme'. We are taking students on educational hikes in the Wicklow mountains in February and May 2016. Selection for the hike days is based on attendance and performance in school.

Responsible Travel Policy

On all expeditions we try to ensure that the local staff we work with are properly paid, equipped and trained. Our expedition doctors are also available to treat our local staff during our expeditions. We use locally run hotels and guesthouses, visit local markets and use family run restaurants in an effort to support the local economy as much as possible.

We are familiar with local customs and traditions in the areas we operate, and aim to respect these at all times. We advise clients on appropriate dress and the importance of respecting local people and customs.

We encourage our guests to participate in cultural and social events such as traditional dance, song and local religious celebrations and we also support local NGOs and co-ops wherever possible.

ENVIRONMENT



Leave No Trace

We operate under a strict Leave No Trace policy. All biodegradable waste is buried deep in the ground, breaking down over a short period of time. All other waste is carried off the expedition and disposed of responsibly.

We encourage our guests to only take pictures and to only leave foot prints. We use Katadyn filters and iodine to purify river water, cutting down on the quantity of plastic bottles used. In order to reduce soil erosion on trekking and biking expeditions, we stay on existing trails where possible.

Carbon Emissions

We acknowledge that planes release a huge amount of harmful gases into the atmosphere. In 2015 we began offsetting the carbon emissions associated with the air travel of all our guides and doctors. We used Climate Care to offset 102 tonnes of CO₂ at a cost of €912. For more about Climate Care and the work they do visit www.climatecare.org. In 2016 we are planning on offsetting staff carbon again and we are also going to encourage our clients to offset too.

Our Office

In our office in Donnybrook, we are constantly trying to reduce our energy consumption by switching off lights and heaters when not needed. We always seek to use recycled products and environmentally friendly cleaning products where possible.



WORKPLACE



Zero Overtime Policy

We truly believe as a company we are only as good as our people and that the quality of our product We have managed to grow the business year on year with a zero overtime policy in place. We believe there is more to life than working and we value the work life balance of our team.

Apart from James our MD, all staff work a 35 hour week and are not requested to do any overtime hours. Seven hours of quality work per day is enough and any more than that does not allow staff time to rest and play sufficiently!

Employee Engagement

We truly believe as a company we are only as good as our people and that the quality of our product will always reflect the wellbeing of our team.

Highly engaged employees have a sense of ownership of the company and its products. They are emotionally engaged and personally invested in doing great work, and tend to view their work as more than a pay cheque. They are proud of where they work.

We believe in developing our employees, because we think that the more you invest in people, the more you get out of them. That's why we:

- Promote from within.
- Provide constant communication about values, culture and standards.
- Have a highly accountable working environment.



- Have consistent and fair reward and promotion policies.
- Have information transparency.
- Have the same set of behavioural rules for all employees.
- Hire for cultural fit.
- Celebrate new learning and successes.
- Have clearly defined and enforced zero-tolerance policies.

Professional Development

We have four full time staff members based in our Dublin office and a core crew of 10 freelance Irish guides. Once our guides have worked on five expeditions for us, we increase their pay by 25% and make financial contributions to their Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

For us, it's important to invest in our guides and to help them gain new knowledge as they play such an important part in the experiences of our guests. We also encourage our guides to do personal expeditions and adventures in new countries as the more experience they have, the better it is for our business.

We fund training for our office staff and are

WORKPLACE continued

constantly encouraging them to bring new learning to the company. Barbra recently completed a Diploma in Event Management and PR and Lauren is starting a Masters in Travel Business Leadership in 2016, both funded by the company.

Job Flexibility

We allow staff a large degree of flexibility in the working hours they choose. Our standard hours are from nine to five with an hour for lunch. Many of our team frequently work eight to four and seven to three is popular on Fridays!

Expedition Experience

Operations, marketing and sales are managed at our Dublin HQ, while the expeditions take place throughout the world. It's especially important to ensure our office staff understand what happens on expeditions. That's why all our office staff travel on one expedition per year as part of their employment contracts. It's a great bonus for our staff but it's equally important for the company that office staff have first-hand expedition experience.

Employee Communications

We have a small open plan office which makes information transparency a very achievable goal! We have quarterly reviews to discuss potential changes to our product, processes and company performance. We review guest feedback and share it with all staff. At the end of each year we send reviews with learnings and changes to our guides and doctors.



MARKETPLACE



Client Communications

Our website (www.earths-edge.com) is the main hub for information on our expeditions and our company. Our terms and conditions are available on the website, and we're also transparent regarding our cancellation policy.

Health and Safety

We pride ourselves on having one of the best safety records in the world. For us, safety is the most important aspect of expedition management. The adventure sector is under-regulated in Ireland and there is little or no regulation in the developing world.

For that reason it is up to each individual company to set their own safety standards. Unlike most tour operators, an experienced international guide leads all our expeditions. We are also one of a handful of operators worldwide to use expedition doctors. GPs or A&E doctors accompany all expeditions, allowing us to deliver an unparalleled level of safety and service.

While the majority of the time the assistance of our doctors is not required, it offers our guests great peace of mind to know that a doctor is available should the need arise. We equip them with oxygen, a defibrillator, an altitude chamber and an extensive medical kit. Our guides also carry satellite phones, radios and have 24/7 support from our office in Dublin.

Feedback

We are very careful to collect as much feedback as we can, it keeps us up to date and goes a long way to ensure we continue to deliver a world class product. We'll speak to the guide and the doctor personally and send out an online survey to clients. From there, we give feedback to the local suppliers and airline partners.

We're very clear about costs. We give our guests an info pack with exact details on what's included and what's excluded, as well as guidelines on appropriate tipping for each of our destinations. We also try to ensure that tips are split fairly between the local guides, cooks, porters and drivers.

Sustainable Procurement Policies

Sustainability plays a significant part in our selection processes for services. We request and review supplier environmental policies, staff compensation details and their impact on their wider community.

Payment Policy

Suppliers are always paid in advance - we aim to pay a month before departure. We pay our guides on the day they get back from the expedition.





Introduction

Community

Environment

Workplace

Marketplace

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RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS for SMEs

About Us

Responsible Business for SMEs is a new service from *Business in the Community Ireland*, Ireland's only network dedicated to responsible business. In existence since 2000, we are a national non-profit organisation founded by Tina Roche. Our patron is Michael D.Higgins, President of Ireland and our board, chaired by Kieran McGowan, comprises some of Ireland's leading business figures. We ask companies in Ireland to commit to the journey towards being more sustainable and responsible. We offer our members practical support to help them to integrate responsible business practices across their organisations.

What We Do

Initially working with larger corporates in Ireland, we now aim to work with small, medium and micro-enterprises (SMEs) as they represent over 99% of business in this country. In real numbers, they dominate daily life: we shop with them, work in them, use their services, and they include everyone from the local hairdresser to the IT company. They provide high quality and diverse jobs, play an important role in social cohesion and act as incubators of entrepreneurial culture.

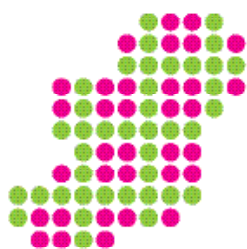
Together, the 230,000 SMEs in Ireland have a huge impact on the viability of Ireland's economy, the community in which it exists, and the environment on which it depends. Through Responsible Business for SMEs, we are inspiring and supporting Irish companies to use that impact to do better business by improving and reporting on their responsible and sustainable practices.

Business in the

Community

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Business
for SMEs**

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