



A new global initiative in Asmara helps relieve poverty

Lying on the North East coast of Africa, Eritrea is one of the poorest countries on the planet. It has a long desert coastline along the Red Sea, and suffers from severe drought. An exciting new project is being pioneered there which is helping both to improve the environment and build hope for the future.

The InterContinental Asmara, winner of the second Conserving Our Planet competition for Six Continents Hotels EMEA, is working in partnership with the Seawater Forests Initiative to help develop sustainable mangrove forests on the Red Sea coast of Eritrea. As more and more of the saltwater-loving trees are planted, the hotel will be able to offset its carbon emissions through the development of forest farms and coastal habitation provided by Seawater Forests. If successful, the concept can be extended to other Six Continents properties.

The goal of the Seawater Forests Initiative is to reforest the desert coast of Eritrea and other countries with similarly denuded coastline. The trees involved, which are native species, are



Above: One of the foresters carefully manages the dense forest.

Top: With the support of the InterContinental Asmara, women foresters in Massawa, Eritrea replant the tidal mangroves in areas where animals, including man, have denuded the forests and played havoc with the habitats and the seashore.

Top right: Haptom and Gezai hold up a mangrove tree from Seawater Forests to show why roots are one answer to global warming.

Lower right: A mangrove gets the royal treatment at the UN Sustainable Development Conference in Johannesburg.

mangroves – the only trees in the world that can be irrigated with 100% salt water. Eritrea has given up most of its mangroves to over-grazing by camels and goats and by harvesting for charcoal, which is the preferred fuel for cooking.

Mangrove trees are comparable to coral reefs in their ability to shelter marine animals, crustaceans and other creatures during some part of their life cycle. They also produce a full metre of new growth every year. This makes it possible to farm mangroves intensively for animal fodder as well as to grow them to build new coastal forests. The Seawater Forests Initiative does both. It also creates jobs in sustainable forestry and agriculture in areas where such opportunities are desperately needed, and educates local people in sound environmental management practices that they can harness to provide themselves with a decent livelihood.

Mangrove forests, essentially seawater wetlands, build biodiversity and like other forests, absorb large amounts of atmospheric carbon. The newly created wetlands and re-established coastal forests in Eritrea, just north of the port city of Massawa – have already attracted over 200 species of birds. This suggests a major new opportunity for eco-tourism. The potential draw for new guests is not overlooked by the InterContinental Asmara's General Manager Malcolm Rann, who plans to develop packages for these new guests in joint co-operation with the Ministry of Tourism. The planting of new mangrove forests is creating new wealth for local citizens. It will provide important new products – including animal fodder, carbon sequestration, mangrove honey and a beautiful seaside parkland as well.

Six Continents is proud to be supporting the Seawater Forests Initiative with this visionary project that is both helping to build a better environment and contribute to reducing poverty by creating valuable and sustainable jobs in one of the world's least wealthy countries.

