

Community Tourism News

Duncan, British Columbia

July - September, 2009

Certification and Eco-Labeling Gain Credibility in the Tourism Sector

by James MacGregor
President, ecoplan:net ltd.
jmacgregor@ecoplannet.com

Significant consumer demand for environmentally responsible products and services is no longer in question. More and more companies are promoting their green credentials as they try to keep pace with consumer surveys that consistently demonstrate that buyers expect businesses to be eco-friendly. One example of an industry that has listened to the consumers and has substantially moved towards greener products is the tourism industry. The transition to green facilities and services is best demonstrated by the hotel sector where almost daily there are press releases indicating the various hotels and resorts that have 'gone green'.

Tourism regions at both the national and state levels now see the value of positioning themselves as a sustainable tourism destination. In the US, for instance, states such as Michigan, Florida and New York have launched their own certification programs. Similarly most European destinations have been strong supporters of eco-labeling initiatives at both the national and broader regional level. These countries are expected to become even more focussed on eco-labeling as EU regulations increasingly require improved corporate social and environmental responsibility.

Further confirmation of the importance of these programs was

demonstrated by the recent selection of the *Morocco Rural Tourism Ecocertification Program* for the prestigious Tourism for Tomorrow Award, by the World Tourism and Travel Council. The WTTC judges found that both the process of developing the program as well as the ongoing efforts of the rural tourism sector were making a substantial contribution to environmental protection and community development in rural Morocco. This is a particularly interesting program because it was spearheaded by the Zakoura Microcredit Foundation, in an effort to ensure that its clients, or borrowers, could demonstrate that they met the highest social and environmental standards. The certification program was designed by, Canadian, James MacGregor, and was funded by the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg Fund. In an interview with MacGregor, following the recent award, he reinforced the value of such a certification program for the protection of the fragile rural resources of Morocco. "During the development of the program we were able to go to representative regions of Morocco to identify the actual impacts of tourism on the local natural and cultural resources. This enabled us to identify more than 140 criteria, each designed to minimize these impacts. As well within the various regions we were able to work directly with the small business owners and provide assistance that immediately improved their green operations." MacGregor was also hired to train the auditors who worked in each of the regions where the microcredit foundation operated. In fact the auditors were credit agents of the foundation, but with adequate

training they were able to assess as well as provide technical assistance to the various tourism operators.

When asked why the foundation do not simply import one of the many available programs, MacGregor noted that, "there are three important reasons for any destination to establish its own program. The process of working with the industry, to set up a program, it is very beneficial. And then of course there is the fact that the criteria responds exactly to the various environmental, social and cultural conditions of the destination. Finally, an imported system usually requires bringing in auditors and this can be very expensive, especially for small operators."



For further information go to:
www.tourismfortomorrow.com/Winners/2009_Winners_and_Finalists/zakoura-foundation/ind ex.php

Inside This Issue

Certification and Eco-Labeling Gain Credibility in the Tourism Sector

..... 1

Tourism for Tomorrow 2009 Awards 2

Tourism for Tomorrow 2009 Awards

The **Tourism for Tomorrow Awards**, now in their fifth year under the World Travel & Tourism Council's stewardship are aimed at recognising best practice in sustainable tourism within the Travel & Tourism industry worldwide. Given the growing concern about natural and cultural resources, these awards are particularly important to WTTC and provide the opportunity of promoting and partnering with the industry leaders in responsible tourism, highlighting prime examples of best practice.



DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP AWARD

Grupo PUNTACANA is a pioneer in sustainable tourism management with nearly three decades of innovative work in the Dominican Republic. Its vision was to create a community that respects the natural

habitat of Punta Cana and supports the local people in bettering their lives.



CONSERVATION AWARD

In 2004, **NatureAir** made a pledge to set new standards for sustainable practices in the airline industry, compensating 100% of its greenhouse gas emissions through preservation and reforestation of tropical forests in the Osa Peninsula.



COMMUNITY BENEFIT AWARD

The **Zakoura Foundation for Micro Credit** is a Moroccan based not-for-profit organisation founded in 1995. In 2003, Zakoura launched a

Rural Tourism Programme to develop tourism-related projects focussed on financial, cultural, and environmental sustainability to give rural people opportunities to diversify and increase their incomes by creating or developing tourist activities.



GLOBAL TOURISM BUSINESS AWARD

Marriott International, Inc is one of the world's largest hotel groups. Over the last year and a half, Marriott has worked with Conservation International in a bold initiative to put 1.4 million acres of Amazon Rainforest under conservation protection, in what many conservationists consider a "game changing" scenario for collaboration between the private sector and conservation organisations.

For further information go to:
www.tourismfortomorrow.com/Home/

“To be successful in today’s increasingly competitive environment businesses [and destinations] must learn to stage experiences for each one of their individual customers. We have entered the Experience Economy, a new economic era in which all businesses must orchestrate memorable events for their customers that engage each one of them in an inherently personal way.”

– B. Joseph Pine II & James H. Gilmore 1999, *The Experience Economy: Work is Theater & Every Business a Stage*

Community Tourism News is edited and published four times a year by Michael E. Kelly, AICP, MCIP in Duncan, British Columbia. The newsletter may be freely copied and distributed to others with due credit and contact information provided to recipients. Contact newsletters@community-tourism.net to be added to or deleted from our distribution list, for further information, or to make contributions to future issues.

www.community-tourism.net



Community Tourism
Planning & Design
Helping Communities Succeed