

Green certification in tourism

The number of stars a hotel boasts has long been a major consideration when planning a holiday. Whether a hotel or tourism agency is certified as environmentally friendly may soon become as important. Tourism development invariably necessitates infrastructure construction. However, the adverse impact on nature is an increasingly sensitive issue as the power and economic potential of the tourism industry increase in many developing countries. While most governments claim that their tourism and environmental policies protect the environment, in reality much more needs to be done.

Recognizing the widespread concern over possible negative impacts of tourism, the APO organized a seminar in Nepal, 4–8 August, focusing on green certification as a means of promoting green tourism. “Establishing productive green tourism is founded on the sustainable development concept. It links poverty eradication, environmental protection, and efficient resource use in the tourism development process,” explained Secretariat Industry Department Program Officer K.D. Bhardwaj. The seminar discussed the need for green certification and its significance for hotels and restaurants. Three resource speakers presented case studies of green certification systems.

Managing Director Enver Loke, Changemakers, the Netherlands, introduced Green Key, a European approach to tourism and hospitality industry environmental certification. Green Key has 23 mandatory and 22 optional criteria related to technical, managerial, and communication considerations. Loke stated that, “Green Key certifies tourism businesses in a number of European countries. Green Key camping sites are aware of environmental impact and natural preservation, and Green Key hotels offer high-quality services that minimally impact the environment.”

Two Asian best cases were also presented. Dr. Chirapol Sintunawa, Mahidol University and Vice President of the Green Leaf Foundation (GLF), explained GLF activities and Green Leaf standards, a Thai hotel certification program



(L-R) APO Resource speakers Loke, Sintunawa, Batta

that assesses environmental impacts in multiple-stage audits. Hotels that meet certification requirements are awarded from one to five leaves, with five denoting the best environmental performance. Special Secretary Dr. Ravinder Batta, Tourism and Planning, Himachal Pradesh, India, introduced India's hotel and restaurant eco-awards that measure six environmental criteria. Dr. Batta emphasized that adapting these certification procedures is not a form of corporate philanthropy but instead benefits businesses by increasing their operational sustainability.

Seminar participants agreed that developing and adapting green certification systems in each country require the integrated efforts of all stakeholders. National governments set the policy framework and platforms, industry associations adopt and propagate systems, while the APO functions as a regional adviser. Based on the recommendations of the seminar, the preparation of a manual on approaches to green certification systems has been initiated with expectations that it will be useful in illustrating this concept for application in concrete projects in future. 