

## DestiNet provides more transparency in sustainable tourism

by Herbert Hamele

### 25 years of sustainable tourism certification

When 25 years ago the first Eco-labels for tourism were awarded to the Austrian Kleinwalsertal ("Silver thistle"), in Germany („Blue swallow“) and in Europe („Blue flag“), the concept of „sustainable tourism“ was not on everybody’s lips yet, however, the development targets of an environmental-friendly, social responsible and economical sensible travel were already fiercely discussed.

Important impulses were given by the international initiative „Tourism with insight and understanding“ in the years 1987-1992 at the international tourism fair in Berlin with concrete demands on tourism companies, travel businesses and destinations.



► [Sustainable tourism certification worldwide](#)

Today more than 100 ecological labels and sustainability certificates are awarded to tourism worldwide, most of them at national level for hotels and restaurants, approximately half of them in Europe.

The labels with main focus on the environment still account for a majority, however, newer certificates and those in Latin America, Africa or Asia also put social, cultural and economic requirements to the support of a sustainable development.

However, this absolutely welcome development has also seen increasingly critical for more than ten years: Which of these certificates are really good? How can they be distinguished? And above all: How can they actually move the market?

### On the way to international recognition

In 2000 about 30 experts gathered to this end for the first time in Mohonk/New York and agreed on the common aim to develop a global minimum standard for sustainable tourism in order to use it as a basis for the international recognition of certificates.

The ► [“Global Sustainable Tourism Council”](#) arose from this initiative, supported by more than 100 governmental and non-governmental organizations, tourism associations and other stakeholders. An independent professional committee verifies on the basis of the "Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria" and the ISO norm 17065 for independent certification the criteria catalogues and verification procedures of existing labels.

Currently, the standards of about 15 certificates for sustainable tourism are GSTC recognized. In the verification procedure the differences in the respective countries were taken into account in the decision making: Some of the global criteria are not so relevant, e.g., in Austria as in Costa Rica or South Africa, or they are no problem and therefore require no additional demands.



► [Transparency on 50 leading certificates](#)

## Transparency on differences and strengths

The approval of standards and certificates by the GSTC is an important market orientation, but tour operators and travel agencies, tourism businesses and destinations, marketing organizations and professionals need more information regarding transparency, credibility and sustainability:

- Who is behind these labels?
- What specifically does the criteria catalogue require from the certified hotels and travel offers?
- How reliable is the verification procedure?
- Which sustainability areas are covered by the label?
- Which standard is (not yet) "GSTC recognized"?
- What are the labels particular strengths?
- Which businesses and services are certified and where can I find them?

This gap is closed by the independent knowledge portal DestiNet.eu. DestiNet is a UN-registered "Partnership for Sustainable Development", supported by the European Environment Agency EEA, the World Tourism Organization UNWTO, the United Nations Environment Programme UNEP, and managed by ECOTRANS. The global database currently comprises around 130 certificates for sustainable tourism, the 50 most important with detailed information on the above issues.

	Sustainability areas (Main issues covered)				Transparency (Access to the standard)		Verification Procedure			Global Recognition
	Environment	Social issues	Economy	Culture	Published	Partially published	Not published	On-site third party	On-site second party	GSTC recognized standard
Adventure Green Alaska (USA)	•	•	•	•	•					•
Aviation Ecolabel	•				•					•
Bonghiere Responsible Tourism	•	•	•	•	•					•
Blaue Schwalbe	•	•	•	•	•					•
Blue Flag	•	•	•	•	•					•
EST, Costa Rica	•	•	•	•	•					•
Green Tourism Certification, Poland	•	•	•	•	•					•
CSR Tourism, Germany	•	•	•	•	•					•
EarthCheck	•	•	•	•	•					•
ECEAT Quality Label	•	•	•	•	•					•
ECO awards Namibia	•	•	•	•	•					•
ECO Certification Program, Sintkalla	•	•	•	•	•					•
ECO Certification, Malta	•	•	•	•	•					•

### ► At a glance: differences and strengths

The wide range of certificates for sustainable tourism reflects the diversity and differences of destinations with customized and controlled criteria. DestiNet now provides the most important information about each certificate for the necessary transparency and supports responsible deci-

sions of tourism businesses, destinations, tour operators, travel agencies, marketing organizations and the media.

## Supporting independent market access



### ► Global Green Market Place on DestiNet

So far It is not easy to find the better choice of environmentally friendly and socially responsible products: to facilitate the market access for sustainable tourism the certification bodies have started to link their hotels and camping sites, restaurants, destinations and transportation companies, attractions and activities, travel packages and tour operators with the independent and quality assessed global Green Market Place Atlas on DestiNet: 2000 certified products and services are already published, more will follow.

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