

Hotel and Tourism Eco-Certification Workshop Report Hanoi, July 14th & 15th 2004

A two-day workshop on environmental certification for tourist accommodation took place in Hanoi on July 14th and 15th. The aim of the workshop was to raise partners and stakeholders' awareness on green certification programs for hotels and tourist accommodation as well as international moves towards developing an overarching accreditation body.

The workshop achieved the following goals:

- Provide examples of eco-tourism and community-based tourism.
- Introduce environmental and eco-certification initiatives from around the world.
- Provide information and invited input for a proposed environmental certification pilot program for Vietnam.

The workshop was co-organized by VNAT (Vietnamese Administration of Tourism) and Fauna Flora International thanks to the sponsorship from USAID, US-AEP, ICMA, British Petroleum Vietnam and Sheraton Hanoi. There were nearly sixty participants including international experts from USA, Australia and Thailand; representatives from international agencies such as UNESCO, USAID, and the European Union; Vietnamese National, Provincial and Local Administration for tourism, energy and environment; representatives from the private sector (tour operators, hotels and suppliers); NGOs such as the Asia Foundation, VNCI, SNV, IUCN, and WWF; and journalists.

Vietnam's tourism industry is still in its infancy, and the potential for development along more sustainable guidelines which would allow both better biodiversity conservation and more equitable distribution of tourism-generated income was explored in some depth. The advantages of meeting the requirements of the specialist and potentially high-yielding eco-tourism market were also debated.

The workshop gave international, national and regional overviews relating to tourism standards, with details of ecotourism and sustainable tourism certification programs from Australia (Eco certification – formerly NEAP), Thailand (Green Leaf) and International (Green Globe 21) presented. A pilot hotel mentoring program run by ENERTEAM (Energy Conservation Research and Development Center) based on ISO 14001 standards was also examined in depth. This set of presentations formed the basis of workshop discussions on the design of a possible Vietnamese eco-certification program.

The main challenges identified were:

- Ensuring accessibility for the small and medium enterprises,
- Financing the development and management of an eco-certification program, and
- The level of involvement of different stakeholders from the government, the private sector, the universities and the NGO in setting, monitoring, auditing and managing an eco-certification program.

The workshop produced the following outcomes:

- Regional standards or reciprocity between standards were also contemplated at the ASEAN level, with plans for study tours to Green Leaf Hotels in Thailand.
- Dr. Luong from VNAT announced the integration of a paragraph in the new tourism ordinance that specifically relates to the need for eco-certification of accommodation.
- Fauna Flora International's pilot Cat Ba Hotel-specific environmental certification program provided a promising start for the design of a National Vietnamese eco-certification program. Links between existing innovations already underway in Vietnam, such as the ENERTEAM hotels and VNAT's Green Star system were established.
- Awareness of international guidelines and standards provided by the Mohonk agreement and the World Tourism Organisation were raised.

Links:

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES): www.ecotourism.org

Fauna Flora International: www.fauna-flora.org

Eco Certification Program, Ecotourism Australia:
www.ecotourism.org.au/eco_certification.asp

Mohonk Agreement - a framework for the certification of sustainable tourism:
www.rainforest-alliance.org/tourism/documents/mohonk.pdf

VNAT: www.vietnamtourism.com

ENERTEAM: www.enerteam.org