

## **Recommendations on the Proposed Basic Environmental Standards for Hotels: Vietnam July 2004**

The Basic Standards proposed by Nguyen Phuong Aah of VNAT (Vietnamese Administration of Tourism) do encompass some of the routine environmental issues likely to occur in accommodation/fixed infrastructure and serve to highlight the particular environmental concerns. The points raised may well form part of the basis of developing more detailed criteria and formal standards. However, there needs to be a more detailed framework of principals and overarching aims in order for such standards to be really effective.

The focus on environmental criteria is not surprising as these form the basis of most management plans (and indeed, most sustainable tourism certification programs), are the most obvious cause of negative impacts (pollution, loss of visual amenity, destruction of habitat) and if adequately controlled can raise profit margins by increasing eco-efficiencies.

However, in order to achieve true sustainable tourism outcomes, the standards developed need to address not only environmental criteria, such as waste minimisation and energy conservation, but also economic viability and socio-cultural issues. These appear to have been neglected in the proposed draft standards.

It is recommended, therefore, that "big-picture" principles for the major components of sustainable tourism are developed along major outcomes in order to ensure:

- Environmental sustainability
- Provision of returns to local community
- Provision of returns to environment (conservation)
- Provision of education and interpretation
- Ensuring cultural sensitivity
- Ensuring financial / business viability.

The degree to which any of the big picture outcomes is to be elaborated in a certification program depends upon the sophistication of current control and regulations present within the country, appropriate and relevant training programs, and business development support.

### **Environmental Sustainability**

The major considerations here should include (not listed in any particular order):

- Environmental Planning and impact assessment
- Location
- Construction method and materials
- Site disturbance
- Visual impacts
- Lighting
- Water conservation

- Treatment of wastewater and effluent
- Noise
- Air quality
- Waste minimisation
- Energy efficiency
- Minimal disturbance to wildlife.

Obviously in an environmentally sensitive area like Cat Ba, precautionary principles need to be considered because of the potential for destroying a unique and world renowned fragile area (especially the potential for eutrophication through sewage and grey water if appropriate waste water/effluent treatment is not ensured.)

These components merely ensure that the footprint of built infrastructure is minimised – that is there are controls and measures in place to ensure that negative impacts of development are minimised. For sustainable development to occur it will be important to go beyond these basics and ensure that the potential positive impacts of tourism are guaranteed through providing returns to the local community and conservation of the environment, and generating a conservation ethic through an adequate education and/or interpretation program for both staff and guests/clients.

### **Social and Economic Sustainability**

Criteria here might include components such as a proactive local employment or local purchasing policy, development of appropriate training; hands-on, cash or in-kind contributions to local conservation efforts.

In order to achieve some of these components, it will be necessary to provide information and training on environmentally friendly practices, and ensure that operators have the ability to measure, monitor and have some degree of control over inputs.

As pointed out by Nguyen Phuong Anh, the “purpose and meaning of environmental management” or sustainability for built infrastructure will have to be carefully articulated such that participants are bought into the program because they see the obvious tangible benefits such as: eco-efficiencies/cost savings, value adding, attracting higher paying guests, educational spin-offs, and the retention of the natural environment that attracts tourists.