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# NEWSLETTER



## MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

The number of accredited businesses linked to VISIT is ever increasing. Recent news is that the Danish Green Key and the Clef Vertes have amalgamated into one certification system and this leads us to discuss whether the new green key is one member eco-label or if each national body should be treated as a separate label. This will form part of our discussions in 2006-7.



In addition the Milieubarometer is negotiating its future as a label with the green key with the objective that within 2 years the green key and barometer will operate as one green key label.

A number of new associates joined VISIT in 2005-6 and these vary from academic institutes working with eco-labelling to private consultancies operating certification schemes. SEA Ltd joined visit and since becoming a member has undertaken 17 accreditation audits for the EU flower, TUV Hellas has a similar role and this associate member role in an international body represent one of very few methods where EU flower practitioners can meet together and exchange best practice and other development ideas.

One issue, which has arisen during the 2005-6 year was the application of the Austrian eco-label. Unfortunately changes to their auditing system resulted in the label not meeting the 21 key requirements for full membership. The issue of the 21 key requirements and a broader discussion on updating these requirements will form part of a VISIT discussion at the WTM in November 2006.



## VISIT comes to the World Travel Market

On Wednesday the 8th November VISIT will be having an open forum to discuss the VISIT 21 key criteria to an audience of interested professionals in sustainable tourism.

VISIT is the only association of certification systems in tourism in Europe. It comprises of the leading lights in independent voluntary accreditation labels and has over 1600 certified products. The event at WTM will allow an open discussion of the future of ecolabelling and how it can develop further. Some case studies will be highlighted demonstrating how it can work with tour operators schemes. initiatives will be presented.



The meeting will be held at 4.30 pm where the latest developments in VISIT will be highlighted and where a number of ecolabelling

One of the themes for the open discussion will be "is the future of sustainable tourism in mainstream developments or in niche branding".

Jon Proctor, VISIT vice Chairman stated "This is a great opportunity to have an open discussion about eco-labelling and its effectiveness in delivering sustainable tourism and how well different approaches have worked. It is clear that we need to move tourism in a strong positive direction to help deliver an effective practical framework for sustainable development and that tourism is increasingly being seen as a vital industry in establishing a more sustainable lifestyle from alleviating poverty in the poorer developing world to preserving cultural identity and building sustainable economies in the developed world."

<b>Full members</b>	<b>No. of businesses</b>	<b>Country</b>
Green Key	90	Denmark
Green Certificate Latvia	50	Latvia
Green Tourism Business Scheme	938	United Kingdom
Legambiente Turismo	318	Italy
Ecolabel Luxembourg	22	Luxembourg
Milieubarometer	200	Netherlands
Steinbock Ö-plus	21	Switzerland
<b>Total Members</b>	<b>1639</b>	
<b>Associated members</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
SEA Ltd.	Scotland	Approved 2005
Leeds Metropolitan University	United Kingdom	Approved 2005
TUV Hellas	Greece	Approved 2005
NFI	Austria	Projectpartner
Ecocamping e.V.	Germany	Approved 2004
Ecotrans e.V.	Germany	Projectpartner
<b>Applications / interested parties</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
Umweltzeichen	Austria	not approved
La Clef Verte	France	?
PAN Parks	Hungary	??
Ecolabel Scheme	Malta	?
Biosphere Hotels	Spain	?

## TOURBENCH project comes to an end

A number of the VISIT ecolabels have been involved in a very innovative project to develop a common approach to monitoring and benchmarking in ecolabels. This project called tourbench is now complete and the lessons learned from the various efforts to gain useful data from tourism businesses are being collated.



The GTBS one of the largest ecolabels in Visit has nearly completed their evaluation of the successes and lessons learned and these are highlighted below:

1. Tourism is a broad industry and benchmarking efforts should be confined to a small user group and establish a useful tool for this subsector rather than a generic tool for all tourism businesses.
2. Most businesses will only undertake benchmarking if the system is able to produce rapid results which are transparent and easily understood
3. There is a general suspicion with providing sensitive commercial data to an organisation which is not known to the business
4. There is a growing reluctance to provide data onto an online system in case it results in follow up spam emails
5. There is a lack of confidence and patience in systems which may ask irrelevant questions in relation to the businesses activities.
6. A unified approach is difficult to establish across a rapidly evolving tourism marketplace with its own specific characteristics dependent on the destination.
7. Benchmarking as a tool has a great deal to offer tourism businesses provided it closely meets their specific business footprint.

Overall the project has been an interesting development which has allowed the GTBS to trial a number of different data gathering and benchmarking methods in order to better define the needs and goals of benchmarking in tourism businesses.

## The developing trends in Sustainable Tourism

### The EU flower and Agenda 21

Luigi Rambelli the chairman of VISIT has prepared the attached briefing paper for VISIT members in order to make progress on the general development of ecolabelling in tourism and the interested stakeholders together with a set of recommended action s related to the new EU flower ecolabel for tourism developed over the last 2 years.



The most important conclusions reached by European bodies in approaching tourism are the proposals by the Conference of Ministers of Tourism of EU Member States that took place in Vienna on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2006. The Conference highlighted the role of tourism within the EU economy and the need to increase competitiveness of the European tourist industry. Among selected tools are:

- promotion of the extraordinary variety of European heritage, nature and culture
- environmental protection
- implementation of local Agendas 21 on tourism
- involvement in actions by communities and civil society
- development of a strong cooperation between the EU and its member states (and between public and private) by virtue of the subsidiarity principle.

A "European Agenda 21 for Tourism" to promote tourism sustainability is also announced, since the Commission will present a proposal for an Agenda 21 by 2007, based on input from the Tourism Sustainability Group, composed of tourism stakeholders in 2005.

This orientation is in line with a series of official positions that were issued in the last few years - such as the Commission Communication on basic orientations for the sustainability of European tourism (COM(2003) 0716), the Conclusions by the WTO Regional Conference for Europe (Marienbad, 2004), the Basic guidelines for sustainable

The Ministers' Conference in Vienna also confirmed the need to develop a close partnership of the EU Commission with Member States' authorities and the tourism stakeholders. Most important, the Conference recognizes that partnerships must be a central component of action at all levels (European, national, regional and local; public and private) to make European tourism policy complementary to policies carried out in Member States.

Indications emerging from the Conference were also inspired by the innovative thrust of several voluntary initiatives to improve environmental performance of accommodation businesses, with a special reference to the VISIT Life Project (quoted in the preparatory materials of the EU Commission) from which the VISIT Association was born. Since the beginning, the VISIT Association's steady approach and methodology has been to adopt the sustainability criteria defined in the Common Basic Standards and to promote close cooperation with the tourist industry, based on business, environmental and tourist diversity in different countries. This approach helps incorporate actions towards sustainability by single accommodation businesses within the tourist setting in each country. It also tries to put subsidiarity between public and private into real practice, thus leading to common actions and methods at local community and government levels.

Based on this experience, the VISIT Association feels to advise member eco-labels to declare themselves available to participate in discussion tables and experience exchange - within the frame of local and national agreements.

Further, the VISIT Association believes that any national agreements between VISIT ecolabels and Competent Bodies managing the EU-Flower may be favourably considered, when these arrangements provide for explicit authorisations and financial backing to promotional/dissemination activities on the EU-Flower to already eco-labelled businesses (by national or local awards) to make their course towards achieving the EU-Flower.

Our experience also demonstrated the need to focus benchmarking on simpler and more specific goals tied to particular tourism industries such as small guest houses in the UK rather than the larger goals such as the campsite activities which represented only a small part of the GTBS certification scheme.

The final report for the project as a whole is being completed by Syncera leisure and they are collating all the results from the online system together with details provided by the different partners. When this is available we will publish this on the VISIT21.net website