



Green Leaf Environmental Standard For Thai Hotel Operation

Dr.Chirapol Sintunawa
Green Leaf Foundation, Faculty of Environment
and Resources Studies, Mahidol University, Thailand

Hotels, tourist transport, and related activities consume huge amount of energy, water, and other resources and generate pollution and waste, often in destination that are unprepared to deal with these impacts. And many communities face cultural disruption and other unwelcome changes that accompany higher visitor numbers. Although fears of terrorism and the safety of air travel have dampened interest in much international travel for the time being, over the long term the demand for tourism is expected to resume its rapid rise(6).

Many governments, industry groups, and others are promoting “ecotourism”- responsible travel that generates money and jobs while also protecting local environments and cultures. While it does succeed in some circumstances, ecotourism can suffer from many of the same environmental and social pitfalls as conventional tourism, including using resources irresponsibly, creating waste, and endangering ecotourism in some cases, it is little more than a “green” marketing tool for enterprises hoping to promote an environmentally conscious image(4).

As tourism’s impact, both good and bad, continue to spread, it is increasingly important to redirect activities onto a more sustainable path. This will require deep sectoral changes that reach far beyond the scope of ecotourism. A broad range stakeholder – including governments, the tourism industry, international organizations, nongovernmental groups, host communities, and tourists themselves – will need to be involved with sustainability efforts at all levels.

By redirecting tourism, these groups can not only enhance the benefits of tourism, but also help meet many of the goals of Agenda 21, the blueprint for sustainability agreed to at the 1992 U.N. Conference an Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. These include generating jobs and revenue, protecting the environment, and strengthening cultural diversity.

As soaring air travel brings many of Earth’s most ecologically fragile destinations within easy reach, concern about tourism’s environmental impacts is rising travelers from industrial countries often try to replicate

their own high consumption lifestyles, increasing the pressures on ecosystem and resources.

Tourism's environmental impacts begin even before arrival. Studies suggest that as much as 90 percent of a tourist's energy consumption is spent in getting to and from the destination (2). Unfortunately, air transport is also one of the world's fastest growing sources of emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, responsible for climate change. Once tourists arrive at their destinations, their choices of where to sleep, eat, shop, and be entertained increasingly come at the expense of the environment. Natural and rural landscapes, for example in Phuket, are rapidly being converted to roads, airports, hotels, gift shops, parking lots, and other facilities, leading to deterioration of the scenery, wild life habitats, and other sites that are the attraction in the first place.

Thailand's hotels and their guests use massive quantities of resources on a daily basis, including energy for cooling rooms, lighting hallways, and cooking meals, as well as water for washing laundry, filling swimming pools and watering golf courses. This resource use is not only expensive, it can damage the environment.

At destination, like Pattaya, where fresh water is scarce, over consumption by tourists and tourism facilities can divert supplies from local residents or farmers, exacerbating shortages and raising utility prices. In addition to consuming water, energy, and other resources, tourism creates large quantities of waste. It was found that, the average tourist staying at a first class hotel in Bangkok produces roughly 3.8 kilograms of solid waste and litter each day. Hotels, swimming pools, golf courses, marines, and other facilities also generate a wide variety of harmful residues on a daily basis, among them synthetic chemicals, oil, nutrients, and pathogens. Improperly disposed of, this waste can damage nearby ecosystems, contaminating water sources and harming wildlife.

Not surprisingly, the environmental damage caused by tourism can ultimately hurt the industry by destroying the very reefs, beaches, forests and other attractions that lure visitors in the first place. If the environmental damage is significant enough, a destination may begin to lose visitors, as is the case in Pattaya and parts of Phuket. Environmental deterioration also continues to impede efforts to boost tourism to many destinations in Thailand: growing gridlock and pollution in places like Bangkok, Pattaya and Chiangmai often alienate visitors.

Over the past decade or so, tourism authorities, environmentalists, academics, and other have embraced sustainable tourism as a way to address some of tourism's negative impacts while simultaneously generating foreign exchange, creating jobs, and stimulating investment.

Yet whether ecotourism or sustainable tourism can actually achieve its ambitious goals is increasingly under question. Part of the problem is definitional. Growing members of hotels and tour operators now bill themselves as ecotourism outfits, whether they are environmentally responsible or not.

According to the WTO, sustainable tourism should lead to the "management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support system" interest in making tourism more sustainable has grown steadily over the past decade in Thailand. Making tourism more sustainable requires careful planning at all levels and the involvement of all stakeholders – including the local communities that will be directly affected by tourism's presence. At its core tourism is a private sector activity, driven in large part by international hotel chains, tour companies, and other businesses.

Sustainability will therefore require systemic change in how this industry operates (1). The tourism industry has taken many positive steps to become more environmentally and socially responsible. At least some of this change is a response to growing consumer pressure for more environmentally friendly tourism products. A 1997 study by the Travel Industry Association of American reports that some 83 percent of the public supported green travel services, and that people were willing to spend 6 percent more on average for travel services and products provided by environmentally responsible companies. In a similar survey in the United Kingdom, more than half the interviewees said that when planning vacation to deal with a company that takes environmental issues into account (6).

Arguably, the bulk of the change in the tourism is being driven by financial self-interest rather than genuine environmental concern. Perhaps more than any other industry, tourism depends on a clean environment. Declines in environmental quality can hit industry pocket books directly. On the other hand, more environmentally sensitive practices can boost the profit of tourism businesses (3).

Many of the world's larger tourism companies, from hotels to tour operators, are taking formal steps to restructure their management and operations along environmental lines including reducing consumption of water, energy, and other resources and improving the management, handling, and disposal of waste. Changes in the hotel industry can be particularly fruitful, not only because these facilities consume large quantities of resources but also because they can have enormous influence over the broader habits and practices of their guests, employees, and suppliers. A simple step such as outfitting rooms with cards that encourage guests to reuse linen and towels when they are staying more than one night can conserve an average 114 liters of water per room each day, plus energy at a daily cost savings of at least US \$ 1.50 per room(4).

Leading this movement in Thailand is the Green Leaf Foundation (GLF), which works with hotels, hotels association, suppliers, governments and NGOs to encourage environmentally and socially responsible business practice. Founded in 1998, GLF has more than 100 hotels participating green leaf certification program. Many hotels are embracing a wide range of environmental and cost-saving actions, from installing energy efficient lighting and appliances to purchasing biodegradable house keeping supplies.

GLF has a long history back in 1991 when a lecturer and researcher from the Faculty of Environmental and Resource Studies, Mahidol University worked together with a hotelier of The Dusit Thani Hotel in Bangkok to minimize waste and increase resource efficiency in hotel. Several visits to different hotels were made in 1992 as well as meeting were organized to learn and understand what needed to be done to raise staff participation in greening the hotel business. Active members of green leaf core group in 1992 expanded from three persons of the Association for the Development of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) and Thai Hotel association (THA) to include representatives from the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT), Metropolitan Waterworks Authority (MWA) and Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). Collaboration with United Nations Environment program (UNEP) took place in the second half of 1994. Two year experience of working jointly with hotels, and authorities the body of knowledge in sustainable hotel business was expanded. A series of seminars and workshops on waste minimization, resource efficiency and green hotel operation were organized extensively in conjunction with EGAT's Green Building Program in 1993 and 1994. In late 1995, six organizations namely THA, ADEQ, EGAT, MWA, TAT and UNEP jointly established a working committee called the Board of Environmental Promotion of Tourism

Activity (BEPTA) to raise fund from both domestic and international sources. The Asia Foundation, the Global Environment Facility of the World Bank, UNEP, TAT and the Electricity Generating Public Company Limited (EGCO) have been prime financial sponsors to BEPTA and GLF since 1995. Information and knowledge on resource efficiency, waste minimization and handling, and environmental protection were disseminated through Green Hotels Fair and seminars organized several times throughout the country by BEPTA during 1995-1997. These educational activities were aiming to boost understanding and awareness of hoteliers to help preserve a quality of environment, appreciate the value of energy and natural resources and minimize impact to the environment from their hotel operations. More than 1,000 hotels nationwide attended these awareness raising activities organized by BEPTA during 1995-1998. BEPTA became the Green Leaf Foundation in March 1998 and continued to encourage active participation from hotels to contribute to the promotion of sustainable hotel business in Thailand. An environmental standard certification was initiated in 1998 to institutionalize environmental best-practices for all hotels, as well as to promote the efforts of those who already contribute to the protection via efficient management of energy, environment and natural resources. This was also designed to help lower operational costs and pass those cost-savings on to the customers, too. Indeed, the program also encouraged participatory activities by customers in saving energy and natural resources. GLF's dissemination and technical consulting activities were increasingly expanded to several countries; the translated environmental standard is accessible at the secretary office in Bangkok. Several promotional activities are conducted to cover important objectives as follows.

1. Raise environmental awareness to hotels and general public to promote sustainable tourism.
2. Encourage continuous improvement of resource efficiency in hotels and tourism business.
3. Raise environmental standard in tourism business through the development of green leaf certification program.
4. Increase competitive advantage for regional tourism business.

As a consequence of BEPTA and GLF activities and studies, Green leaf environmental standard has taken into accounts all aspect of sustainability: environmental, social and economic. Many criteria and standards of green leaf certification program are designed to work in parallel with government health and safety regulations, environmental laws, and other related regulations. GLF uses green leaf certificate as a tool for

motivating tourism business to improve their environmental performance, while rewarding them for doing so.

Benefits at large

1. Efficient use of resource and energy in tourism business protects both the environment and the social structure of local communities.
2. Sustainable tourism develops better relationships with local, respects local cultures and provides economic and social benefits for it.

Benefits for certified tourism business

1. Average occupancy rate rises after joining green leaf certification program and implementing green hotel guidelines.
2. Green leaf participating hotels became knowledgeable on the elements of sustainability in their operations and can focus their attention on the changes they needed to make in their business.
3. Participating hotels benefit from cost reduction through improved resource efficiency.
4. Certified hotels gain competitive advantage in the highly competitive market.
5. Financial and technical assistances become more accessible to green leaf hotels.

Benefits for guests

1. Encourage consumers to activity participate green hotel operations in resource efficiency, wildlife protection, energy efficiency, and local community support.
2. Provide additional alternatives to consumers to choose to stay at conventional or green hotels and to stay at which level of greenness hotels.
3. Proud to be able to contribute to the betterment of the environment during their holiday vacation.

Government efforts to hotel's environmental standard

1. Both in kind and financial supports to GLF development and activities have been made through government's participating organizations such as EGAT, TAT, and MWA in GLF.
2. Introduction and promotion of One Tambol and One Product (OTOP) program, Thai government has recently begun to incorporate small-scale community based initiatives into sustainable tourism development efforts.

Where should a hotel begin?

1. Application forms can be obtained at the Green Leaf Foundation, 1600 NewPhetburi road, Makasan, Rajtevee, Bangkok 10400 or Email address at contact@greenleafthai.org. Completed application form then can be sent directly to the GLF. As soon as this gets accepted by the GLF, the first set of screening checklists or questions will be sent to the hotel. These questions screen and check whether the applying hotel fails to abide environmental laws and other related laws or not. If the hotel's application is marked "PASSED" at their stage of becoming a Green Leaf member hotel another set of questions will be forwarded to the hotel by GLF staff. This set of questions is called "Qualifying Questionnaire" aiming to assess the hotel in some basic resource and environmental management. Qualifying Questionnaire assesses whether the hotel raises or uses wildlife such as elephant, bird, gibbon, monkey, snake, shark etc. or not. The applying hotel will be disqualified if wildlife is raised or used in the hotel. In early 1990s, there were hotels that raised elephants and other wildlives to entertain guests creating increasing demand to illegally domesticate wildlives from forest resources wildlife sanctuaries and national parks. The hotel will also be disqualified if plastic foam or polystyrene foam is used for decoration in function rooms or other parts of the hotel. This plastic product is mostly disposable, durable, non-recyclable and widely used in hotel decoration.
2. As soon as the completed Qualifying Questionnaire is returned from the applying hotel and accepted by GLF, the hotel will then be given a "Letter of Participation" and "Grading Questionnaire". In Grading Questionnaire, a set of 244 questions are listed to assess the hotel role and involvement in promoting and developing the quality of life and environment in the community. A total of 11 sections are assessed as follows:
 - Section 1: Environmental policies
 - Section 2: Waste Management
 - Section 3: Energy and water efficiency
 - Section 4: Procurement of hotel supplies
 - Section 5: Indoor Air Quality
 - Section 6: Air pollution
 - Section 7: Noise Pollution
 - Section 8: Water Quality

Section 9: Fuel, Gas and Hazardous Material
Management

Section 10: Ecological Impact

Section 11: Collaboration with Community and
Local Administration

All the 244 questions are designed to be instructive checklist that hotel should follow. Going through this grading questionnaire an hotelier will find it a learning experience. Answering questions at this stage of assessment, the applicant hotel has to provide evidence to support the declaimed results of the hotel's environmental activities. The completed questionnaire needs to be returned to GLF within 30 days.

3. After reviewing the returned grading questionnaire from the hotel, GLF will arrange for a visit to inspect the applicant hotel. An auditing team set up by GLF will inspect the hotel within 48 hours of advance notice. The inspection will be carried out during 06.00 a.m. and 06.00 p.m. and has to be done within the same day.
4. Decision to award green leaf environmental standards. Evaluation of returned grading questionnaire will be carried out at GLF and evaluation outcomes will be compared with 20 inspections of reference hotels. The comparison will categorize the applicant hotel in one to five ranks starting from relatively low standard of one leaf to the top standard of five leaves. The appropriate "Green Leaf" rating will be approved by GLF executive board.

The applicant hotel will be informed of a preliminary certification ceremony which will be followed by an official ceremony when the Green Leaf award and certification will be publicly presented and the hotel's name will be enlisted and published in the Green Leaf Directory.

Validity Period

The awarded certificate is valid for two years from the date of issue. Hotels can apply to renew the certificate as per the procedures of the Green Leaf Program.

Certificate Renewal

A reminder letter will be sent to Green Leaf member hotels six months prior to expiry date. Evaluation and Inspection of hotel need to be carried out within this six months period.

Letter of Participation

Hotels will receive their formal letter of participation and become eligible for the following:

- a. Receive news and information via Green Leaf Bulletin, Green Leaf-Let
- b. Participate in Green Leaf activities at special cost (in case a cost is incurred)
- c. Receive the Green Hotel Directory
- d. Invitation to participate in the various programs offered by the Green Leaf Foundation

Green Leaf Award Ceremony

The Green Leaf Certification is designed to recognise hotels which have passed the standard quality assessment and demonstrated their practical commitment towards environmental preservation and the efficient usage of energy and natural resources. Hotels which pass the audit will receive up to five levels of “Green Leaves.”

The Green Leaf Foundation so far has conducted three Green Leaf Award ceremonies as follows:

1. On 30 November 1998 at Dusit Thani Hotel in which 34 hotels were conferred awards
2. On 2 October 2000 at United Nations Conference Centre in which 64 hotels were conferred awards
3. On 17 December 2003 at Dusit Thani Hotel in which 79 hotels were conferred awards.

The growing number of hotels that are joining the program shows that the Green Leaf environmental standard is gaining increasing acceptance among hotel operators. The last ceremony in December 2003 also featured the theme “Green Leaf Standard... for ASEAN”. This is to demonstrate Thailand’s potential for taking a leadership role in developing high energy and environmental management standards for the hotel and tourism industry and raising it to an international level.

Standards of Green Leaf Hotels

First Standard: The first standard of the Green Leaf program, set up in 1998, focused only on imparting knowledge and techniques for boosting

the efficiency of environmental preservation activities. Hotel members of the Green Leaf Program applied the Green Leaf standards in their human resources training program and in conducting cooperative activities, both inside and outside the hotel, with the local community and other organisations. This helped the Green Leaf standard gain acceptance and become a guiding handbook for the hotels.

Hence, the grading questionnaire at the first standard is like a guideline in assessing hotel's commitment to environmental conservation and development. It consists of 170 questions in 11 sections as follows.

Section 1: Environmental Policies

Section 2: Waste Management

Section 3: Energy and Water Efficiency

Section 4: Procurement of hotels suppliers

Section 5: Indoor Air Quality

Section 6: Air Pollution

Section 7: Noise Pollution

Section 8: Water Quality

Section 9: Fuel, Gas, Hazardous Materials Management

Section 10: Ecological Impact

Section 11: Collaboration with Community and

Local Administration

Current Standard: The current standard of Green Leaf was created in 2002 by taking the previous information-oriented focus and positioning it within the context of hotel environmental management practices. It provides for greater quantitative detail to be provided to evaluate the progress and success of the hotel's environmental program. Hotels have to develop more intra-departmental cooperation in measuring energy, managing waste, etc. so that they make clearly measurable progress in their environmental-protection work.

It includes 244 questions in 11 sections as follows.

Section 1: Environmental Policies

Section 2: Waste Management

Section 3: Energy and Water Efficiency

Section 4: Procurement of hotels supplies

- Section 5: Indoor Air Quality
- Section 6: Air Pollution
- Section 7: Noise Pollution
- Section 8: Water Quality
- Section 9: Fuel, Gas, and Hazardous Materials
Management
- Section 10: Ecological Impact
- Section 11: Collaboration with Community and Local
Administration

Future Standard: The future standard of Green Leaf will focus on the ability of the hotel in terms of participatory activities by employees, customers, and suppliers of the hotels, as well as the presentation of new technological ideas. The applicant hotel will have to focus on demonstrating its leadership ability in using new and appropriate technology to create greater resource efficiencies that are clearly measurable. In addition, it will make the Thai hotel and tourism industry a leader in environmental progress in ASEAN and other countries.

Green Leaf Foundation

The Green Leaf Foundation was established on 17 March 1998 by both its public and private founding partners including the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), Thai Hotel Association (THA), United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT), Metropolitan Waterworks Authority (MWA) and Association for the Development of Environmental Quality (ADEQ).

All are extensively involved in developing the tourism business, an industry which has a high consumption level of natural resources, to help preserve environment, increase the efficient usage of energy and natural resources, and minimize garbage and waste disposal.

The Green Leaf Foundation was created to promote and develop the efficient usage of energy and natural resources, and create a culture of environmental preservation among tourism-related businesses like hotels, restaurants, accommodations, souvenir shops, tour operators, guides, and tourism attractions.

The first stage was initiated as the Green Leaf Program for Hotels. Currently, a total of 79 hotels have received the Green Leaf certificate and 21 hotels to be audited as of May 2004. Moreover, the foundation has helped develop the environmental standards of accommodation available at the EGAT dam reservoirs.

The foundation is now planning to expand the Green Leaf Certification Program for Eco-tours and for Standard Tours. Each year, about two million tourists engage in some form of eco-tourism activities in Thailand. The most popular activities are forest trekking, bird watching, wildlife watching, scuba diving etc. However, these tours still lack a code of conduct and quality control standards. Certification should help resolve this issue.

Other future plans include:

1. Working with World Wildlife Fund Thailand to promote ecological awareness.
2. Working with other organizations such as the Association of Thai Travel Agents (ATTA) and the Thai Ecotourism & Adventure Travel Association (TEATA)
3. Encouraging the hundreds of uncertified hotels throughout the country to join the program.
4. Promoting the exchange of information on certification of tourism activities among ASEAN countries.

The foundation plans to work with partners in setting standards for souvenir shops in order to discourage them from selling products derived from endangered and wild animals and plants, and products that are illegally made from wild animals and plants. It also plans to set standards for eco- and adventure tour program among tour operators as well as certification schemes such as those for Green Leaf hotels.

Guideline of the past progress

Green Leaf Foundation has conducted a broad range of activities to encourage and promote environmental awareness amongst tourism businesses and hotels during 1998 to 2004 as follows:

1. Organized meetings and seminars, developing handbooks, and other activities to spread knowledge and raise awareness environmental protection.
2. Conducted visits and create advisory activities to improve and develop the hotel and tourism business in order to maximize the efficient use of energy and natural resources.
3. Conducted studies and researches in order to create measurable standards of environmentally efficient working processes.
4. Conducted and conferred Green Leaf Certificate to hotels and tourism operators to indicate their level of environmental commitment.
5. Created the Green Hotel Directory listing all the Green Leaf-certified hotels and tourism-related operators and distributed it at all possible occasions.
6. Published the names of hotels under Green Leaf Standards and help them gain more global media exposure.
7. Continually developed and improved the standards for hotel and tourism businesses in line with the changing needs of customers in a dynamic society.
8. Conducted and promoted activities amongst the local community to raise the role and participation of organizations in preventing and solving problems related to energy usage.
9. Conducted activities to promote cooperation amongst the industry operators and their staff, government and private organizations and the local community.
10. Promoted knowledge, awareness and participation of consumers in order to promote hotel and tourism businesses which are committed to energy conservation and environmental preservation.
11. Carried out research and study to upgrade environmental development standards.
12. Acted as a centre for exchanging information on energy saving and environmental preservation as well as created information such as handbooks, posters and other publications for members.

13. Conducted seminars and trainings on environmental development for hotel owners and high-level executives.
 14. Organized training camps for young people and other interested parties, including hotel owners.
 15. Organized meetings to disseminate knowledge and encourage participating hotels to support promotion of the environmental agenda.
 16. Met with local and international experts to help boost the results of these activities as well as organize regular seminars and meetings to upgrade Green Leaf Program standards.
-

References

1. Deloitte and Touche, IIED , and ODI, “Sustainable Tourism and Poverty Elimination Study”, a report to the U.K. Department for International Development (UKDFID) (London : April 1999).pp 9-10
 2. International Federation Free Trade Union and Trade Union Advisory committee , Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development “Tourism and Sustainable Development : Workers and Trade Unions in the Web of Tourism”, Background Paper No.2 prepared for the Seventh Session of UNCSD, New York ,19-30 April 1999 p. 9
 3. “Listening the Environmental Impacts of Leisure Facilities”, Green Hotelier ,April 1999,pp 18-24
 4. Martha Honey, Who Owns Paradise? Ecotourism and Sustainable Development (Washington, DC: Island Press,1998)
 5. U.S. survey reported in International Ecotourism Society , “U.S. Ecotourism Fact Sheet , “Information sheet (Burlington, VT : 1999)
 6. World Tourism Organization (WTO) “Tourism Knocked Down, But Not Out , “ press release (Madrid:17 September 2001)
-