

THE TOURISM ECO-LABEL JUNGLE



Those who attach importance to aspects such as environmental protection and social standards during their travels will find countless seals and certificates that promise just that. Eco-label jungle may confuse many travelers.

One, who committed to sustainable tourism, could speak of a "label jungle" in tourism. It's estimated that there are around 150 labels worldwide, some of which compete with each other.

To get the given certificate, hotels, destinations and tour operators must have been inspected by external experts and the eco-labels are awarded by independent bodies. **The criteria should be public and accessible to consumers.**

Ideally, an eco-label should consider all dimensions of sustainability. In addition to environmental protection, these include social standards such as working conditions in the hotel as well as cultural and economic aspects. The holiday destination and its inhabitants should also benefit from tourism and be able to play an active role in shaping it.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) has developed a standard that makes certain demands on businesses and destinations in the areas of management, environment, social, economic and cultural issues. The labels which observe the criteria in their certifications, or which provide equivalent specifications may be recognized by the GSTC. These include, for example, Green Globe and Biosphere Tourism.

For some time now, institutes have been able to obtain accreditation from the GSTC and use its standard as a basis for their review, as an eco-label expert Herbert Hamele from Ecotrans, the European Network of Sustainable Tourism Experts, explains. "There is also criticism of this in expert circles in particular. Because the GSTC now checks certificates on the one hand and at the same time acts as a kind of competitor against these same labels on the other," says Hamele. However, the number of organizations accredited by the GSTC is still small.

Experts estimate that only around one percent of all travel and hospitality businesses worldwide have been awarded one of the labels, and even less with a seal recognized by the GSTC. So what is the point of searching for a hotel with a certain certificate in a country if there is none in the end? Many companies that could receive a certificate are not making any effort to do so. Or don't know they could get one because they already meet the criteria.

The website Tourism2030.eu, which operates Ecotrans, provides an overview of the eco-label jungle. In addition to the quick search for sustainability labels, it also offers a map with certified accommodation and destinations with around 14,000 entries worldwide.

The Swiss portal fairunterwegs.org, which lists 20 sustainability labels with brief descriptions on the Internet, also provides an overview.

According to experts, there are basically two different types of eco-label: Management systems and performance labels that are in the majority and make concrete specifications that must be met. One example is the EU eco-label. It lists 100 criteria - from the water flow per minute in the washbasins

to information obligations on ecologically friendly means of transport such as buses and trains near the facilities.

Management systems include the Tourcert seal. This is where companies or destinations develop programmes to continually improve their sustainability performance.

The European Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) is also one of the management systems. Here, the company must first assess the status quo and then develop an action plan to make it more sustainable. The progress is reported annually. But this also means that a company can receive the certificate with the introduction of this system, but start with a very low sustainability standard.

With management systems such as EMAS, the seal alone does not provide concrete information on how sustainable a hotel actually is in the end. Nevertheless, it's better than nothing.

What is decisive is the actual significance of sustainability for holidaymakers. Demand and reality fall far apart here. For them, this is also due to the fact that there are still too few offers that are independently checked and provided with a credible seal.

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