

Ninth edition of Eurosif/“Le Monde”, “El Pais” and “La Stampa” indicators for environmental and social performance of international companies

Tourism industry lacks clarity when it comes to ecological impact

Twelve years ago, in 1995, the World Tourism Organisation organised the first “Sustainable Tourism” conference in Lanzarote, in the Canary Islands. Since then, there hasn’t been a professional convention without the theme being addressed, or a publicity campaign from a big player in the sector without the promotion of a “sustainable” deed (with regards to the environment) or a “socially responsible” action (with regards to the local population). This can range from suggestions of re-using the same towel in hotel rooms to a catalogue of “fair trade” trips in African villages.

But paradoxically, according to a survey carried out by TNS Sofres in March, for the SNCF (editor’s note: French rail company), of 1002 French people who had taken at least one trip in 2006, only 27% of them said they had heard of “*responsible tourism*”, and 2% had heard of “*travelling responsibly*”. 84% feel they are “*badly*” or “*very badly*” informed about the subject, and they are almost unanimous in asking tour operators “*for transparency about their engagements and actions carried out and redistribution of amounts*” (99%) and “*offers of responsible trips*” (98%).

The ninth edition of Eurosif/Le Monde indicators, published with *La Stampa* (Turin) and *El Pais* (Madrid), indicates that there is still work to do in this area. Out of the top 36 global companies in the sector studied by the consulting firm Ernst & Young, less than half (the 17 listed in the table) publish data that can be used to make comparisons concerning sustainable development practices. “*Despite a history of often important reporting*, notes Frédéric Papon, consultant in the environment and sustainable development department at Ernst & Young, *the tourism sector has not always agreed on quantified indicators that allow you to follow the progression on their performances, or at least compare them.*” Most of all, he adds, the tour operators don’t publish any data on a major impact of tourism on the environment: tourists’ means of transportation, in particular by plane, leaving this up to the airline companies.

In terms of the environment, there is considerable room for improvement, and in particular concerning water and energy consumption.

Margin of savings

Certain tour operators publish data on the topic: TUI announces that their water consumption is at 345 litres per client per day, Carnival 370. Accor publishes 407 litres, but this represents water per room and not per client. Pierre et Vacances has 700 litres per overnight stay, similar to Radisson (groupe Razidor) with 450 litres. The lack of a common measuring unit hinders comparisons, but this data can still give an idea of the average amount of water consumed per overnight stay based on the different hotel categories, calculated by Ernst & Young from data gathered from hotel companies: 200 litres for budget hotels, 300 litres for average hotels and 550 litres for upscale hotels. The margin of savings appears to be important, especially when we know that average person in France consumes 150 litres of water per day.

There is a similar problem for energy consumption. TUI publishes 64,563 gigawatts/hour (gWh) in 2006, versus 3,442 gWh for Accor – but TUI includes transportation of passengers in their calculations, which gives an indication of how much travel related to tourism impacts the environment. Other tour operators give numbers for electrical consumption based on square meters (206 kWh for Radisson), per day and per room (23.9 kWh for Accor), for a section of their properties (59 gWh for Club Mediterranean villages in France in 2006, 274 gWh for Sol Melia hotels in Spain, 167 gWh for 193 sites for Pierre et Vacances). Again, even though they are different, these data can provide an idea of the average consumption of electricity in kWh per overnight stay, based on the hotel category – 20 for the budget hotels, 50 for the average hotels and 80 for the upscale hotels – compared to an average consumption of electricity per person per day in France of 20 kWh. Only two tour operators, the British First Choice Holidays (for half of their activities) and the French Pierre et Vacances, have established an eco-design and environmental management system for their sites.

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French tour operators are rated among the best

	Environmental footprint (note out of 3)*	Sustainable tourism (note out of 4)**	Responsible tourism (note out of 5)***
Tourism groups			
Walt Disney World Co (United States)	1	1	0
TUI (Germany)	2 ^(c)	2	1
Hotels			
Marriott International ^(a) (United States)	1	1	0
Accor (France)	2	3	5
Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide (US)	0	0	0
Hilton Hotels Corp ^(a) (United States)	1	0	0
Club Méditerranée (France)	2	3	3
Sol Melia (Spain)	2	1	0
NH Hoteles SA ^(a) (Spain)	2	0	0
Rezidor SAS (Belgium)	2	1	0
Cruises			
Carnival ^(a) (United Kingdom)	2	0	0
Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd ^(a) (Liberia)	1	0	0
Tour operators			
Thomas Cook (Germany)	2	1	0
First Choice Holidays plc (United Kingdom)	3 ^(d)	1	2
Kuoni Reisen Ltd (Switzerland)	2 ^(e)	2	1
Aitken Spence & Company Ltd (Sri Lanka)	2	0	1
Vacation residences			
Pierre et Vacances ^(b) (France)	3	1	0

(a) 2005 data (b) 2005/2006 data (c) 33% of sales (d) 50% of sales (e) 23% of sites

Each point is given based on the publication of information concerning the following criteria:

* 1: Punctual initiative. 2: Systematic creation of environmental management OR design. 3: Systematic creation of environmental management AND design.

** 1: Promotion of labelled sustainable tourism. 2: Offers sustainable or responsible products, trips and overnight stays.

3: Implication of local economies, promotion of local products. 4: Promotion of products from fairtrade.

*** 1: Is a member of Ecpat (End Children Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes) or the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism. 2: Employees are trained to fight against sexual tourism. 3: Clients are made aware of efforts to combat sexual tourism. 4: Employees are trained to prevent STDs. 5: Clients are made aware of efforts to prevent STDs.

Source: Ernst & Young, based on information published by companies

PUBLIC DATA

Information published in this table was collected and processed by the consulting firm Ernst & Young based on documents published by companies. Companies were selected based on their sales (highest at the top), published by Forbes and Hotel Mag. Nineteen companies were excluded from the table for a lack of publishable information. Jin Jiang Hotels, MyTravel Group plc, Harrah's Entertainment, MGM Mirage, Global Hyatt corp., Carlson Hospitality Worldwide, Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, InterContinental Hotels Group, Wyndham Worldwide, Sabre Holdings corp., Star Cruises, Expedia Inc, Alpitour, Best Western International, Société du Louvre, Choice Hotels International, Interstate Hotels & Resorts, Arca-Enel, Ventaglio.

Jean Viard: “Sustainable tourism shouldn’t cause immobility in southern communities, but be a vector of their future”

Companies and clients in the tourism sector seem to be more and more concerned with sustainable development. Is it a viable economic model for the sector, or just a communications ploy?



Tourism is a booming economic and social activity that doesn’t need to find a second wind. The industry is above all super sensitive to prices. The largest consumers try to go on vacation more often, and for others, they are simply trying to go on vacation at all. In both cases, access to tourism is a question of price. This is why Northern European tour operators, capable of capturing the largest hordes of clients, are buying up tour operators in Southern Europe. Even though the latter have created concepts of modern tourism products, and then took control of the tour operators in vacation destination countries.

Models that differ from this format are only marginal. An increase in standing and quality could justify an increase in price, or it could be due to identical niche markets like hiking, adventure, and cultural or responsible tourism.

Are these niche markets the beginning of a new model?

Tourism is above all a product that relies on the imagination. The consumer prefers, in the imaginary reconstruction of their holiday, to have played a positive role regarding the environment and for the host country. And the tourist wants the provider to integrate elements into their offer that will allow him to feel honourable because he will have had an honourable holiday. However, tourism is a predatory activity, which shakes up the societies and territories that people travel to, and sets off proportionally violent responses. No less than the arrival of any new economic activity, but bearing in mind that this one is harder to justify than a new automobile factory, for example, because it is based on the concept of leisure time and the pleasure of consumers from rich countries.

Is sustainable tourism a dream?

It all depends on what you call sustainable tourism. I studied the way tourism has transformed the French Riviera and California. These leisure areas have become high technology zones because the new economy first looks for places where it is nice to live and where there is a concentration of highly qualified residents. And this does not diminish their attractiveness as a tourist destination.

Such scenarios can also exist on the other side of the Mediterranean. With the condition that sustainable development is taken to mean that you don’t change

anything in the host area. That’s not development, it’s immobility. To get your products from a local farmer and fight against sexual tourism is good, but to teach computer skills to your daughter is better!

Sustainable tourism shouldn’t try to make museums out of the south, which, if they satisfy the idea of authenticity and respect the consumer, it could become the exact image of the theme: ancient things are more beautiful.

If tourism entrepreneurs do not want to have to choose between dictators who ensure a certain level of security and fleeing violence from fundamentalists, they have to create “after-tourism” conditions, and be a vector for the future of host countries. Tourism is a million men who travel across the earth, an extraordinary technological and imaginary potential. To start with, why not offer training sessions in every vacation village and hotel that welcome children and adults during the off-season? A drop of water for sales figures of tour operators, but an important step for host countries.

Interview conducted by Antoine Reverchon

CV

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2006 He published *Eloge de la mobilité. Essai sur le capital temps libre et la valeur travail* (Ed. de l’Aube).

2003-2006 He participated in the Datar/Ademe/Inrets programme on new relationships between leisure and tourism.

2001 He is in project leader at the Ministry of Employment and Solidarity for how the 35-hour work week affects free time.