



## 2.2 Aurinkomatkat-Suntours: Green Contracting for Hotels

### Description of Good Practice

Aurinkomatkat, a Finnish outbound tour operator, introduced minimum environmental criteria into its partner hotels' contracts in 2003, including connection to a wastewater treatment system, and water- and energy-saving measures.

The programme, instituted in early 2000, has been implemented in phases, to give existing contract partners a two-to-three-year transition period to fulfill the criteria and understand what will be expected in the future. The first phase of the programme included monitoring of environmental performance, but did not actually require accommodation providers to meet all the requirements. By 2003, Aurinkomatkat had completed monitoring all of its existing partners, and environmental criteria are now integrated into all new contracts.

The sustainability criteria were developed based on existing tourism literature and using expertise from academia, with priority given to good water management and energy saving. The programme is now part of strategic planning for the future.

To complement the minimum criteria, the company has created a sustainability classification system for its hotels and holiday apartments, which will soon be available to customers. Currently, this information can be accessed by sales personnel who can assist customers in booking a more sustainable accommodation option. The classification system (see Box 1) will soon appear beside the traditional quality classification in Aurinkomatkat brochures and web pages. The classification system is based on a 100-point scale. By meeting the minimum criteria of connection to a wastewater treatment system, and water- and energy-saving measures, a facility can achieve the 30-point minimum required for inclusion in the sustainability programme.

### Implementation

Aurinkomatkat informs its suppliers about the criteria and how to fulfill them through letters and personal visits, depending on the destination. Because many of the accommodations are family-owned enterprises, the environmental programme and the criteria are translated into the language of the destination. In some destinations, the Manager of Sustainable Tourism visits and arranges meetings for hotel owners and managers with tourism and environmental authorities.

Most of the monitoring of the programme is done by the Manager for Sustainable Tourism together with staff and agents at the destinations. The initial monitoring takes place through a checklist completed by a representative of the facility, which is then checked by Aurinkomatkat personnel at the destinations and verified annually in conjunction with the regular hotel check performed by destination staff.

In addition to the company monitoring, feedback from customers is collected through questionnaires and via the feedback mailing option at the company web sites. If there is negative feedback from customers or if issues arise that compromise the criteria, a hotel may have its environmental classification downgraded. Until December 2005, there will be no penalties for breaching the environmental criteria, because some contract partners may not fully understand what the policy and new requirements mean. However, after that, contracts will not be renewed without evidence of improvement in those practices that do not fulfill the criteria.

All Aurinkomatkat staff have been trained in sustainable tourism through lectures and round-table discussions. Training continues through discussions, an intranet site, a newsletter on sustainable tourism

and an information package. Responses to the programme from Aurinkomatkat agents and accommodation suppliers in the destinations have been positive, and some hotel managers have provided information on their environmental performance before being asked to do so.

## Benefits

The programme enables Aurinkomatkat to work with its partners to achieve more sustainable tourism development. Asking contract providers to give information on their environmental performance is a way of making them more environmentally aware. By fulfilling the Aurinkomatkat criteria, an accommodation supplier can gain a competitive advantage and benefit from long-term cost savings that come from water and energy conservation strategies. In addition, Aurinkomatkat will benefit from a more positive public image in terms of sustainability issues.

## Comments

One danger in integrating environmental criteria into the contracts with hotel service providers is the risk of losing touch with the socio-cultural and economic sides of sustainability. An 800-room hotel has a different scale of impact than a six-room holiday apartment hotel, and their resources are not comparable. It is important to realize that the five-star multinational resort with eco-certificates is not necessarily a 'better' choice than the family-owned apartment building that has no environmental programme but which employs the family next door and helps the local economy by encouraging tourists to buy food and other goods from local stores. Therefore, indicators for social, cultural and economic sustainability have been integrated into the programme. Achieving the minimum level in the classification system has been made easier in order to take into account small family-owned properties that cannot invest in environmental technology to the same extent as large hotels by giving an additional five points to small-scale locally owned accommodations. Thus, a family-owned six-room holiday apartment hotel in the Greek islands that uses water- and energy-saving measures and treats its sewage appropriately will be included in the Aurinkomatkat programme. Achieving a higher environmental classification will require more investment.

The next steps in the programme include the development of environmental criteria for transport companies (mainly airline and coach services). Aurinkomatkat will begin monitoring these partners in 2004 and draft a set of criteria based on the results of that monitoring.

### Box 1: Aurinkomatkat's Sustainability Classification System

The classification system is based on performance on 35 sustainability measures. A hotel can receive a maximum of 100 points.

Points are awarded for:

- |   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| • Independent and locally owned accommodation               | 5 points                   |
| • Environmental/sustainability policy, certificates, awards | 5 points (maximum)         |
| • Wastewater treatment system                               | 15 points                  |
| • Waste management system                                   | 1 point/measure (max. 12)  |
| • Water saving and monitoring measures                      | 5 points/measure           |
| • Energy saving measures                                    | 10 points                  |
| • Renewable energy sources                                  | 10 points                  |
| • Sustainable purchasing policy                             | 2 points/measure (max. 10) |
| • Community relations programmes                            | 5 points (maximum)         |

Hotels can be classified at four levels:

- |                               |               |
|-------------------------------|---------------|
| • Minimum level of acceptance | 30-39 points  |
| • One star                    | 40-59 points  |
| • Two stars                   | 60-79 points  |
| • Three stars                 | 80-100 points |