



Travelife – A market led approach towards sustainability in the European travel sector

INTOUR project

Layman's Report



Co-funded by the Eco-innovation Initiative of the European Union





“The phase of pioneering is already over, we need to convince the entire industry to become more sustainable, and that is why we support strongly the Travelife initiative. It is a very recommendable one as it will expand the application of good practices throughout the industry in Europe”
Eugenio Yunis UN-WTO at Travelife launch event - ITB Berlin

Intour project

Integrating industry sustainability tools with EU voluntary instruments and implementing them in the tour operator supply chain: a market led, cluster based approach to EMAS III and eco-labelling (INTOUR - ECO/09/256189/S12.570838).



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1. BACKGROUND

Fifty percent of global tourism takes place in Europe. Tourism is the third largest sector in Europe, accounting for 10% of GDP and 12% of total employment. It is the main source of income for many European coastal regions, mountains, islands and historic towns.

'Destination Europe' has a large number of assets. It has a rich diversity of landscapes, climates, protected areas, historic monuments, cultures, languages and lifestyles, together with a high standard of tourist services and infrastructure. But to ensure its future success and enduring benefits to local businesses and people, these assets must be protected and capitalized on in a sensitive way.

The European tourism industry is very diverse. It includes some of the largest tour operators in the world as well as innumerable micro-, small- and medium-sized businesses (such as hotels and excursion providers). These organisations are not only dependent on each other, but also on the unique environments in which they operate – each of which attracts different tourists, from different markets, seeking a holiday experience that meets their individual needs.

2. THE CHALLENGE

Tourism development usually comes with a number of challenges to the natural and socio-cultural environment. Standard tourist accommodations typically consume high levels of energy, water and chemicals and produce large amounts of solid waste and waste water. Transport accounts for 60–80% of the total carbon footprint from a travel package. Tourist behaviour may jeopardise nature conservation, biodiversity and animal welfare. Traditions and other cultural resources may be affected by tourism, and labour rights and local community interests may not always be respected. These impacts undermine the success of tourism operations as well as the wider social, environmental and economic situation. Increasing awareness of this has fuelled a demand for more sustainable tourism, leading to a number of leading tour operators including TUI, Thomas Cook and KUONI to integrate sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) principles into their daily operations.

Their unique position between suppliers and buyers enables tour operators and travel agencies to influence consumer demand, procurement policies and the development of destinations. European tour operators are in contact with more than 200,000 suppliers (accommodation, transportation, excursions etc). An average tour operator works with 400–4,000 suppliers. Tour operators are able to influence suppliers through contract- and relationship management. For example, the tour operators that participated in this project maintain relations with more than 100,000 different hotels in Europe. This unique position enables travel companies to make an important contribution to sustainable development and the protection of the environmental and cultural resources of tourist destinations.

Key operating areas where travel companies can integrate sustainability practices are:

Internal management (e.g. resources management, office supplies and social policies).

Product development and management, by planning tours and selecting holiday package components that minimise environmental, economic and social impacts.

Contracts with suppliers, by integrating sustainability principles into the selection criteria and service agreements with suppliers.

Relations with destinations, by supporting destination stakeholders' efforts to address sustainability issues, and financially contributing to conservation and development projects.

Customer relations, by providing information on the environmental and social aspects of the product offer, responsible behaviour (e.g. code of conducts) and sustainability issues in destinations.



In 2005 no common standard did exist for tour operators to work towards sustainability. Each individual tour operator was applying different individual standards to assess the sustainability of its contracted business partners (e.g. Hotels). This led to confusion and duplication of efforts. It made it impossible to consistently manage sustainability performance (benchmarking, target setting, and measurement) or to effectively communicate it to consumers and other stakeholders.

Acknowledging this challenge, European travel trade associations, leading NGO's and universities took the initiative to develop a common sustainability system in the EU-LIFE supported project (TOUR-LINK 2004-2007). This so-called Travelife initiative, which was launched in 2007 covered all aspects of sustainability (environmental, cultural, socio-economic), all fields of the industry (tour operating, accommodation, transport), and was widely accepted and promoted among tour operators in The Netherlands and the UK. Travelife has two focuses:

1. Travelife for Tour operator - CSR Management for Tour operators and travel agents (managed by ECEAT)
2. Travelife for Hotels and Accommodations – Sustainability management for Hotels (managed by ABTA – The Travel Association)

3. PROJECT OVERVIEW

The INTOUR project (2010-2013) took the Travelife system a major step forward by integrating its industry standards with the EU voluntary instruments EMAS III and EU Ecolabel, and by extending sustainability certification to the tour operator sector. The EU instruments have provided credibility and direction to the work of European tour operators and travel agencies, while Travelife's innovative approach has helped mainstreaming environmental management and certification within the European tourism industry. In addition the INTOUR project has replicated the successful approach from the Dutch and UK tour operators to other countries in Europe involving large numbers of trade associations, travel companies and hotels.

The INTOUR project focused on the following four key objectives:

Tour operators and travel agencies

1. Sector specific management system for tour operators and travel agencies. Integrating EMAS III in Travelife for Tour operators, introducing a step-up methodology to sustainability certification and EMAS III registration.
2. Market replication. Applying and testing the sector specific management and certification system amongst 18 trade associations and 1.000+ tour operators and travel agencies.

Hotels and accommodations

3. Harmonising Travelife standards, criteria and tools with the EU Ecolabel for accommodations; industry-wide standards for cruise tourism, animal welfare and nature-based activities.
4. Market replication. Encourage sustainability management and certification through a market-led supply chain approach, among hotels with tour operator contracts. Specific focus was on Turkey, Italy and Austria.

4. RESULTS

Key deliverables from the project included:

Travelife for Tour Operators and Travel Agents

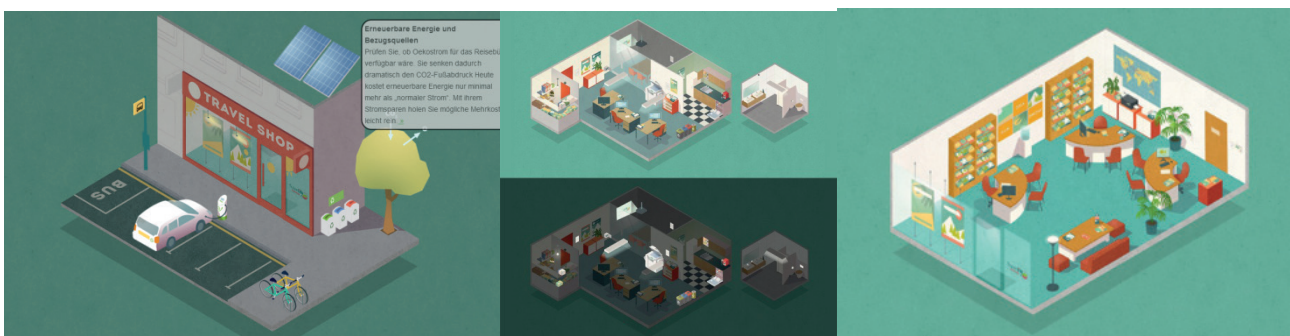
Development

- A state-of-the-art online **training package** for travel agents, including practical examples and exams leading to a personal certificate. Translated into more than 10 languages.
- A sustainability **reporting, planning and audit tool** based on EMAS III management methodology and 200 sector specific indicators.
- Development of an online interactive **environmental management** tool-kit for travel agents (retail) and tour operators (wholesale).
- Inventory and online publication of 200 examples of **best practices** for tour operators and travel agents
- **Company certification** based on international sustainability standards, in line with EMAS III and recognised by the UN supported Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

The screenshot shows the 'Travelife' online sustainability management tool interface. The page is titled 'Planning and reporting' and is for a user named 'HOME \ TUR UK \ TRAVELIFE CERTIFIED'. The main section is '1. Sustainability Management & Legal compliance', with a sub-section 'Engagement of company'. Under 'Action', there is a list of tasks with progress indicators (checkmarks and colored circles):

- I.1. Sustainability coordinator (main office): 100% complete (green)
- I.2. Management integration: 100% complete (green)
- I.3. Committed resources: 100% complete (green)
- I.4. Mission statement: 100% complete (green)
- I.5. Trained sustainability coordinator / team: 75% complete (yellow)
- I.6. Trained lay staff: 50% complete (yellow)
- I.7. Additional training: 25% complete (yellow)

Task I.1 is expanded to show details for '1.1 Sustainability coordinator (main office)'. It states: 'A sustainability / CSR coordinator is appointed and his/her role and activities are defined (corporate level)'. Below this, there are buttons for 'Reporting', 'Resources', 'Guidance', 'Action plan', 'Best practices', and 'Tools'. The 'Reporting' section has a 'Yes' checkbox selected and a 'No' checkbox unselected. It includes a text input field for 'Please include the name of the person' with an 'Update' button, and a text input field for 'Please describe or upload a file with the job specification' with an 'Update' button. A file named 'TUISustainabilityRoles.docx' is listed below.



Animated online training

Market replication

- Agreements with 21 national **travel associations** on supporting and disseminating Travelife among their members.
- Promotion of Travelife through website and at key **industry events** and trade fairs
- Motivation and **participation of tour operators** and travel agents in Travelife’s sustainability system
- Training of 29 **auditors and advisors** in travel company sustainability management
- **Training and certification** of more than 1,000 tour operator and travel agent personnel and businesses

COUNTRY	TRAVEL ASSOCIATION	COUNTRY	TRAVEL ASSOCIATION
Austria	ÖVT	Italy	FIAVET
Croatia	UHPA	Latvia	ALTA
Czech Republic	ACCKA	Netherlands	ANVR
Cyprus	ACTA	Poland	PIT
Denmark	DRF	Spain	AEPT
Finland	SMAL/AFTA	Sweden	SRF
France	CETO	United Kingdom	ABTA
Germany	ASR	Ireland	ITOA
Greece	HATTA & SETE	Sweden	SRF



Mr. Taleb Rifai, General Secretary UNWTO, hands out “Travelife Certified” awards to TUI Nederland, SNP Natuur-reizen and Kuoni Specialists.

Travelife for Hotels & Accommodations

Development

- The alignment of the sustainability criteria with the **EU Ecolabel** standard for accommodations.
- **The Travelife sustainability handbook:** A comprehensive set of guidance notes covering a broad range of sustainability issues including organisational reporting and management, minimising environmental impacts, treating people fairly as well as social and community involvement.
- **The 'Getting started in sustainability' guide:** Provides expert advice and tips on low-cost actions to save energy, water and waste. Through case studies, videos and other helpful hints, the guide will give businesses many ideas on how to make successful partnerships with local suppliers, communities and your employees that will improve your reputation and enhance your brand.
- Development of the Travelife for Hotels & Accommodations **auditing process and handbook.**
- Development of standards and guidance for **holiday packages** and **excursions**
- The development of new sustainability criteria for the **cruise holiday** industry
- The development of new best practice guidance on **animal welfare** in the holiday industry



Market replication

- A coordinated **Destination approach** as a methodology to work in partnership with other travel companies, NGOs and local stakeholders towards more sustainable destinations.
- Promotion of Travelife through website and at key industry events and **trade fairs**
- Series of market development and **hotelier information events** held in key European destinations, including Austria, Turkey, Italy and Spain.
- More than 20,000 registered hotels of which about 1,000 are **certified**.
- Promotion of all awarded hotels in the **The Travelife Collection:** linking through to tour operator websites.
- Promotion and indication of awarded hotels within more than 500 tour operator brochures reaching **millions of European tourists**.



5. INNOVATION

The INTOUR project and Travelife provided innovation at both a European and global level. This included:

- Creating a sustainability management system linking the industry, supply chain and consumers.
- A sustainability system covering all elements of the 'triple bottom line' (social, environmental and economic) for the travel and tourism industry.
- Using B2B on a structural basis as a driver for sustainability.
- A common industry wide supplier sustainability assessment standard including data sharing between (competing) tour operators.
- The first industry sector in Europe which is working on the basis of a single sustainability standard widely accepted by national trade associations.
- Incorporation of EMAS, EU Ecolabel and Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) criteria into Travelife to ensure consistency across different systems and regions (Europe and global standards).
- Integration online training, reporting, action planning and auditing system.
- The first sustainability certification scheme for tour operators.

ABTA ANIMAL WELFARE GUIDELINES

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6. BENEFITS

Project benefits of the Travelife INTOUR project included:

- The development and dissemination of an industry-specific tool to achieve environmental and social best practice (linked to existing standards)
- The development of consistent sustainability standards across Europe for the travel and tourism industry
- The development of new and enduring industry-wide partnerships on the cross-cutting issue of sustainability
- Improved awareness, engagement, skills and knowledge of sustainability within the industry
- The mainstreaming of sustainable tourism into tour operator, travel agent and hotel operations
- The facilitation of major tour operators to transform their business on a large scale, including core operations and key elements of the supply chain
- Improved sustainability performance of the travel and tourism industry in Europe.
- Uptake of the European approach in destinations outside Europe including Asia, Africa and Latin America.



Travelife advisory committee meeting, Manchester April 2012

PROJECT PARTNERS

The INTOUR project was carried out by the following consortium of project partners:

ECEAT

European Centre for Eco and Agro Tourism (Netherlands)

www.eceat-projects.org



ABTA

ABTA – The Travel Association (United Kingdom)

www.abta.com



ANVR

Dutch Association of Tour operators and Travel Agencies (Netherlands)

www.anvr.nl



ASR

Alliance of Independent Travel Traders Germany R.A. (Germany)

www.asr-berlin.de



LMA

Austrian Ministry of Environment (Austria)

www.lebensministerium.at



ACTA

Culture, Tourism and Environment Association (Italy)

www.actanet.it



KOAN

Consulting (Spain)

www.koanconsulting.com



ALTSO

Alanya Chamber of Commerce (Turkey)

www.altso.org.tr/en



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