Educating for Sustainability Action
International Conference Celebrating 40 Years of CEE
CEE, Ahmedabad, India, January 9-11, 2025 www.ceeindia.org

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Education for Sustainable Tourism and Hospitality

This session considered the context of the growing impact of tourism on the environment and communities, ranging from ecological footprints to socio-cultural effects, demanding urgent attention. It acknowledged that addressing this local and global concern requires advancing sustainable tourism practices that contribute meaningfully to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It was noted that Sustainable tourism is specifically highlighted within SDG Targets 8, 12, and 14, promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption and production (SCP), and the conservation of oceans and marine resources. The session also explored educational initiatives, highlighting case practices from some of the renowned certification and eco-label programs, such as Blue Flag, to illustrate educational approaches that have the potential to drive sustainable transitions. It also deliberated on the need to integrate sustainability education into tourism and hospitality curricula, fostering a skilled workforce equipped to strengthen industry standards and empower communities and stakeholders to actively shape a sustainable tourism future.

The workshop emphasised that education is a fundamental pillar for achieving sustainability in tourism. Policy alignment, stakeholder engagement, and innovative approaches to certification and responsible tourism promotion are essential.

Speakers

- Mr Prasad Menon, National Jury of Green Key India, Hyderabad
- Mr Daniel Schaffer, Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), Denmark
- Shri Rajendra Kumar, I.A.S., Secretary Tourism, Government of Gujarat
- Mr Masaru Takayama, Blue Flag & Green Key - Japan Alliance of Responsible Travel Agencies (JARTA) and Founding Chair, Asian Ecotourism Network, Japan
- Dr Ajai Saxena, Ex-PCCF, Government of India, Andaman & Nicobar
- Dr Shriji Kurup, Blue Flag India, CEE
- Dr Lajwanti Nadiu, Andhra Pradesh Tourism Authority
- Dr Nikhil Das, District Tourism Promotion Council, Kozhikode
- Dr Jagat Mangraj, Green Key India, CEE

Presentations and Key Messages

Mr Prasad Menon, chairing the session, highlighted the role of education as a key driver in ensuring sustainable practices and systemic changes in the tourism sector. Pricing sustainability benefits, including conservation, must be a key focus. Over-tourism remains a significant challenge, necessitating exploring softer, more responsible tourism approaches and promoting responsible tourist behaviour. Additionally, capacity building and skill development are essential to address critical challenges such as climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, and habitat degradation.

Mr Daniel Schaffer emphasised that Blue Flag is a politically driven process that can be leveraged to promote sustainable practices and attract investments toward environmentally friendly tourist destinations. He noted that marketing is crucial in promoting brands and values aligned with sustainability. Global brands like Blue Flag and Green Key hold significant international value, influencing nations beyond Europe to adopt sustainability principles and benchmarks. However, he stressed the importance of maintaining integrity and transparency while adapting these certifications

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to diverse local contexts. He also highlighted that learnings from India can contribute to cross-learning across South Asia, with the Central and Eastern Europe region playing a key role in mainstreaming sustainability knowledge across all levels and stakeholders. Additionally, Mr Schaffer pointed out that Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents ethical challenges that must be addressed within certification systems to ensure public transparency and empower communities with accessible and reliable information.

Shri Rajendra Kumar, I.A.S., emphasised the importance of learning from Indian traditional knowledge systems (*Parampara*) in shaping sustainable practices. He highlighted that global and national standards must be inclusive and acceptable to all stakeholders, fostering transparency and trust in the system. He noted that Green certifications should consider traditional, local, and national cultural contexts to remain relevant and effective. Political commitment is essential for strengthening and leveraging sustainability certification systems to drive meaningful change. He also underscored education's vital role in influencing individual and societal decisions, and stressed the need to actively promote responsible tourism behaviour among visitors and tourists.

Mr Masaru Takayama highlighted that tourism is a profit-driven market, requiring sensitivity to both demand and supply factors. While many tourism standards have been developed, he stressed that trust and transparency are essential to encourage investment in certifications and the broader adoption of these standards. He pointed out that certification is a key driver for the tourism industry. He underscored the importance of education in raising awareness among tourists and visitors to increase the demand for certified sustainable practices. Effective destination management, supported by a skilled workforce, is vital for achieving tourism sustainability. However, he noted that communicating sustainability across various stakeholders, particularly industry service providers and investors, remains a significant challenge.

Dr Ajai Saxena noted the need to thoroughly review tourism's impact on ecosystems such as forests and beaches. He stressed that policies must be formulated to address the challenges of over-tourism while actively promoting responsible tourism. The Blue Flag initiative, he observed, offers a demand-driven, 'win-win' model that reflects aspirations from both governance and the community. While Green Key may initially appeal to high-end businesses, Dr Saxena emphasised the importance of examining its criteria and implications for small businesses, homestays, and camping sites. He further advocated for promoting responsible tourism, particularly by encouraging homestays, rural tourism, and nature-based tourism experiences.

Dr Shriji Kurup highlighted the benefits of the Blue Flag India programme, particularly in promoting safe tourism, sustainable waste management practices, and environmental conservation. He showcased the MECCE International case study, illustrating how Blue Flag sites function as place-based sustainability learning hubs for environmental, climate change, and sustainability education. He noted that the Blue Flag award system fosters a sense of collective achievement among operators, visitors, and governance bodies. Dr Kurup emphasised that passion, commitment, and a caring attitude are essential for certification systems to be seen as trusted brands rather than mere marketing tools. He also provided examples of how the Blue Flag programme can be leveraged to enhance sustainability practices across coastal areas, including employability, skill development, and marine and coastal biodiversity protection.

Dr Lajwanti Naidu provided an overview of the Andhra Pradesh Tourism Department's initiatives to promote responsible tourism destinations. She emphasised the importance of working closely with

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local communities, such as fishers and farmers, to strengthen their involvement in delivering essential tourism products and services. Dr Naidu highlighted that education can be a transformative tool, fostering a shared vision and offering strategic direction for sustainable tourism policy and governance. She also underscored the necessity of considering cultural and regional contexts when adopting certification standards. Additionally, she showcased the need to integrate accessibility standards into destination design to ensure inclusive and sustainable tourism development.

Dr Nikhil Das highlighted various interventions the District Tourism Promotion Council undertook to advance sustainable tourism. He stressed the vital role of education in promoting responsible tourist behaviour and shared examples of how accessibility standards are being adopted to ensure tourism destinations are inclusive for all. He suggested exploring innovative approaches such as location-based interpretation, AI applications, and audio-assisted walks to enhance visitor experiences. Dr Das noted the growing relevance of digital tourism and emphasised the need to leverage it for mass awareness.

He cited the Tourism Clubs in Kerala as a successful model for promoting responsible tourism, destination management, and sustainability practices, particularly among college students and youth. Additionally, he underscored the importance of investing in sustainable products and practices, including support for local street markets, the use of eco-friendly packaging, and public campaigns promoting carbon-neutral lifestyles. He advocated for traditional art forms and cultural heritage to be recognised as key benchmarks in certification systems, tailored to Indian and regional contexts. Finally, he emphasised that the perspectives of Panchayats and local communities must be incorporated into tourism policies and schemes through inclusive consultative processes.

Dr Jagat Mangaraj highlighted the benefits of the Green Key program in India and emphasised the importance of promoting and marketing sustainability products and services to encourage industry-wide adoption. He advocated for education incorporating traditional knowledge systems, including recipes, architecture, and cultural heritage. According to Dr Mangaraj, tourists should be offered experiences that blend traditional practices with modern facilities to appreciate the depth of sustainability in Indian society fully. He stressed the crucial role of educating hotel staff, owners, and entrepreneurs on environmental conservation and sustainability. Furthermore, he underscored the significant role of academic institutions and researchers in supporting the adoption of tourism certification systems and developing a skilled workforce knowledgeable in sustainable tourism practices.

Key Recommendations from the Session

- *Role of Education in Driving Sustainable Tourism:* Education plays a crucial role in fostering sustainable practices and systemic changes within the tourism sector. A key focus must be placed on pricing sustainability benefits, including conservation and responsible tourism. Additionally, capacity building and skill development are essential to effectively address pressing challenges such as climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, and habitat degradation.
- *Leveraging Certifications for Sustainability:* Certifications such as Blue Flag and Green Key can be powerful tools for promoting sustainable tourism practices. However, adopting these international certifications outside Europe requires transparency, integrity, and careful adaptation to local contexts. Political commitment plays a vital role in mainstreaming certification systems and leveraging them to achieve sustainability goals. Additionally, ethical

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concerns—including the use of AI in certification processes—must be addressed with a strong focus on public transparency and accountability.

- *Learning from Traditional Knowledge Systems:* India's rich traditional knowledge systems (Parampara) offer valuable insights into sustainability. Green certifications should incorporate local, national, and cultural contexts to ensure broader stakeholder acceptance and trust. Moreover, strong political commitment is essential to strengthening sustainability certification frameworks and maintaining their credibility.

- *Responsible Tourism and Destination Management:* Over tourism poses significant risks, making promoting responsible tourism behaviour essential. Education is critical in shaping individual and societal decisions, reinforcing sustainable tourism values. Certification systems must balance profitability with sustainability to build trust among investors, service providers, and tourists. Developing a skilled workforce is also key to effective destination management and the successful implementation of sustainability practices.

- *Tourism's Impact on Ecosystems and Communities:* A critical review of tourism's impact on ecosystems such as forests and coastal areas is needed to ensure sustainable development. Policies must be formulated to mitigate the challenges of over-tourism and promote responsible tourism practices. Initiatives like the Blue Flag programme create win-win scenarios for governance and communities, fostering aspirational sustainability. It is essential to consider the role of smaller enterprises, including homestays and eco-tourism sites, in certification criteria. Furthermore, nurturing tourist destinations, such as Blue Flag beaches, as place-based sustainability learning sites offers valuable environmental education and awareness opportunities. The Blue Flag India programme has demonstrated success in integrating sustainability education with safe tourism, effective waste management, and marine conservation efforts.

- *Transformative Potential of Education for Sustainability:* Education is a vital bridge for aligning policies, governance, and community engagement in sustainable tourism. Certification standards must integrate regional and cultural contexts to ensure inclusivity and relevance. Additionally, incorporating accessibility standards into destination design is essential to enhance inclusivity and provide equitable experiences for all visitors.

- *Innovation and Digital Transformation in Sustainable Tourism:* Digital tools such as AI, location-based interpretation, and audio-assisted walks can potentially enhance responsible tourism education. The rise of digital tourism presents significant opportunities to raise mass awareness about sustainability. Initiatives like Tourism Clubs in Kerala serve as effective platforms to engage youth in sustainability efforts and destination management. Moreover, investments in sustainable products, eco-friendly packaging, and support for local markets are essential to promote environmentally responsible tourism. Finally, traditional art forms and cultural heritage should be recognised as key benchmarks within certification systems to preserve and celebrate cultural identity.

- *Promoting Sustainability in the Hospitality Sector:* Green Key and similar programmes can effectively drive sustainable practices within the hospitality industry. Integrating traditional knowledge—including architecture, food, and cultural heritage—into tourism experiences enriches sustainability efforts. Educating hospitality sector employees, entrepreneurs, and investors on environmental conservation and sustainable practices is essential. Additionally, academic institutions and researchers play a crucial role in developing skilled professionals and supporting the adoption of sustainability across the industry.

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