

Pros and Cons of Tourism Business Sustainability Certification Programs

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PROS

- A platform for a cluster marketing consciousness about selling a product with an integral shared policy of conservation, socioeconomic aid and involvement, education and training as well as quality service and personalization.
- Norms that require adherence and identification through metric evidence for monitoring the business' financial sustainability that ultimately helps these businesses identify their consumption and waste, which converts to savings, such as;
 - Consumption of electricity,
 - Water,
 - The creation of organic, recyclable and non-recyclable waste,
 - Their carbon footprint,
 - Adherence to human rights laws and fairness in labor practices,
 - Education of their staff and clients about good practices, conservation, achievements and successes (as well as challenges and weaknesses),
 - Marketing policies that include their vision for sustainability.
- It builds a template for integrating a sustainable philosophy and implementing the tools necessary for every segment and growth strategy for the business.
- A long-term building block for future generations: The development of a pool of the workforce who will evolve and grow and climb the ladder to success in the industry, carrying this precious baggage of a learned and understood complete sustainability vision wherever they go.
- The development of a working strategy for developing new methodologies to fulfil the requirements of the norms and to build a collective voice within the business' employees for improvement and reduction of waste, use of utilities, materials, unwarranted consumption and thus creating a positive financial gain for the company.
- Creating a credible "certified" platform for clients to use in order to make decisions based on responsibility rather than just value, convenience and availability.
- In a well-designed certification program, the whole supply chain is affected and must respond to the needs of their clients. In this way, the "ecology" of the business model becomes holistic and symbiotic which can have a powerful and productive positive impact.
- The peer pressure by many admired or respected certification programs can create a desire to "get on the bus" at which point the direction the company takes will be one of trying to augment their image as a responsible business. This in turn affects and impacts all for the businesses and work force that come in contact with them.
- Operator credibility and industry recognition.
- Certification logos and certificates to display your achievement.

- Marketing across platforms and free listing on the searchable database of online travel guides.
- Discounted registration for tourism conferences.
- Various discounts and opportunities with ecotourism organizations and industry partners.
- Access and eligibility for extended licenses and permits through Protected Area Management Agencies.
- Representation at international tourism fairs
- Incites interest from the bottom to the top of the holistic potential of sustainability recognition, which would influence other businesses in the cluster area.

CONS

- The lack of data to show that certification warrants higher prices or increases occupancy for hotels or more clients for businesses.
- The general misunderstanding or lack of understanding regarding what certification implies and its significance in choosing a destination or business to manage your tourism needs.
- The lack of credibility of certification programs because;
 - They are usually funded by the business buying into the program which can create a cynical sense of having “bought” your certification.
 - The perceived experiential notion that the investment required to present the evidence for certification does not have a return on this investment in terms of added income.
 - The general apathy regarding the investigation of certification programs and what they entail.
 - The plethora of seals, labels, certifications, lists etc. that one encounters in all tourism marketing has led to a general disregard for their importance or significance
 - The lack of continuous monitoring of the certified entities that would ensure that their levels of certification are constantly monitored and maintained.
 - The ability for many tourism entities throughout the world to “hire” consultants and specialists who will build a sustainable grid which will fulfil the requirements for the norms, but do not allow for a macro understanding or commitment to the greater goals of sustainability.
 - The lack of investment and time necessary by the certifying body to keep informed about the anomalies and advances in technology that would permit changes and an evolution in the allowed and rejected practices of the companies being certified.
 - The plethora of labels and certifying bodies can potentially have a backlash effect where the client sees this as false advertising instead of “walking the walk”. By this it is meant that some tourists want to see real results first hand and do not trust the

marketing of destinations and businesses as sustainable when labels and awards, seals, and certifications are concerned.

- The money required to keep the certification norms up to date and in the format required by the certifying body, coupled with the organizational requirements to present the final documents and evidences, are often seen as oppressive and costly. As a result, the money used for this purpose might be better spent on experimentation, developing local community programs and for purchasing new green technology. Furthermore, this would saved capital would allow for a greater commitment to marketing and web designs, as well as the myriad other expenditures required for sharing the good practices and commitments of the tourism business.
- There is a lack of understanding and acknowledgment of the importance of sustainability and its norms. This is coupled with the lack of the certifying bodies to generously share their criteria, their commitment and their staunch and unconditional loyalty to the norms and their fulfilment.
- The glut of consulting businesses that can “guarantee” the success of a tourism company through the contracting of their services creates a sense of loss of commitment and personalization. There is a growing concern among the client base that these certifications are really a “purchased” flag in order to convince them that the company is responsible. As a result there is an implied cynicism that affects the credibility to the potential client.
- There are more than a 150 certification programs at last count, with maybe 30 that are considered reliable. Until there is a massive understanding, acceptance and reliability by the clientele and the potential clients worldwide, the certification programs will not have the level of impact that they potentially should have. It takes more involvement by the whole supply chain for instituting and the utilization of good practices with reliable and well know certification entities to approve them.

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