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**ATINER's Conference Paper Series**

**TOU2012-0117**

**Environmental Performance of  
Tourism Accommodations in the  
Protected Areas and Status of  
Tourism Ecolabels in Turkey**

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URL Conference Papers Series: [www.atiner.gr/papers.htm](http://www.atiner.gr/papers.htm)

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**ISSN 2241-2891**

6/09/2012

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This paper should be cited as follows:

**Erdogan, N. (2012) "Environmental Performance of Tourism Accommodations in the Protected Areas and Status of Tourism Ecolabels in Turkey" Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: TOU2012-0117.**

## **Environmental Performance of Tourism Accommodations in the Protected Areas and Status of Tourism Ecolabels in Turkey**

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### **Abstract**

The main objective of this study is (a) to explore the nature of environmental performance of tourism accommodations in the Cappadocia Region and (b) to explicate the status of tourism ecolabels in Turkey. The necessary data were collected from 73 accommodation managers by using a survey questionnaire which included 39 environmental performance indicators and general demographics of accommodations. The environmental performance was assessed through the evaluation of environmental management practices. Findings show that they all have low performance on energy efficiency, water conservation, waste management, environmental training, environmental awareness, and necessary knowledge about and interest in the environmental protection and policy. Study has some important business implications for the development of better environmental practices. It suggests that accommodation managers are in need of better understanding the importance of environmental protection practices in the industry, and the value of using ecolabeling in tourism products.

**Keywords:** Environmental performance; Tourism accommodations; Tourism ecolabels; Turkey.

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## Introduction

Environmental protection and performance initiatives have been gaining increasing importance by the hotel managers all over the world, because of the question of ecological and economic sustainability of the industry. This study builds upon the theoretical framework that the environmental performance (EP) is closely related with the environmental impacts of the prevailing policy and management activities of the tourism establishments. The environmental policy and environmental management stand for the system that include the organisational structure, the responsibilities, policies, practices, procedures, processes and resources that are geared to achieve and maintain a specific environmental management that can reduce the impact caused by the daily operations on the natural environment. Thus, the preferred EP means the minimization of the negative repercussions on the natural environment that stem from the character of daily production activities and relations in the service industries (Welford & Ytterhus, 2004). Such management system concentrates on recycling, waste minimization, energy saving, water conservation, compliance with legislation, purchasing policy, education and architectural and landscape design (Mayaka & Akama, 2007; Warnken, Bradley & Guilding, 2005), environmental planning and management (Ayuso, 2007; Claver-Cortes, Molina-Azorin, Pereira-Moliner & Lopez-Gamero, 2007; Erdogan & Baris, 2007; Erdoğan & Tosun, 2009), and social responsibility (Tsai, Hsu, Chen, Lin & Chen, 2010).

It is now generally accepted that tourism is potentially harmful to the environment and needs to comply with sustainability criteria to maintain tourist destinations. While there is a broad understanding of the general environmental impacts of tourism, and more particularly of tourist activities, there has been little research in the field of resource use (Becken & Simmons, 2002).

National parks in Turkey and elsewhere in the world are invaluable public assets. Unfortunately, national parks all over the world have prevailing problems such as lack of funds for proper maintenance, development and management, improper use by visitors, tour operators and private enterprises operating within the park boundaries (Alpizar, 2006; Li, 2004). The emphasis of the research on national parks and reserves arises because many of the country's hotels are located in or near national parks and reserves or accommodate tourists who visit parks and reserves. Various studies have been conducted on the tourism accommodations in protected areas. Masau and Prideaux (2003) analysed the hotel sector from the point of view of international travellers visiting Kenya for the purpose of tourism. Dewhursts & Thomas's (2003) study present an empirically based, qualitative insight into the attitudes and response of a sample of small tourism firms in a UK national park to the challenge of sustainable tourism.

The present study is designed to explore the nature of environmental performance (EP) of tourism accommodations in the Cappadocia region and explicate the status of tourism ecolabels in Turkey.

### *Method*

The population of the study included all 104 accommodations operating in the study area. The top managers of 78 accommodations agreed to complete the survey questionnaire. In total 73 valid questionnaires were used for the analysis. Distribution of accommodations in the study area are as follow: 3 five-star, 17 four-star and 9 four-

star hotels in the Group A; 22 special-licenced, 1 apart, 4 two-star hotels in the Group B; 3 one-star hotels and 14 boarding houses in the Group C.

Thirty-nine EP indicators were developed with the aim of assessing the EP of the tourism accommodations. They were selected among the indicators that were put forward and discussed by the World Bank (2008), YCELP & CIESIN (2010), and the related literature cited in this study (Montoro-Sánchez, 2008; Mensah, 2006; Lesli, 2007; Özgen, 2006). Thirty-two performance indicators for the seven groups were measured on a scale ranging from 1 (= no performance) to 4 (= the highest performance). The central tendency distributions and item-averages were used in order to analyze the data. First, the mean score of each indicator in every performance was determined. Second, a group mean for each category was calculated by averaging the mean scores of the group indicators. Finally, a general EP index was calculated by averaging the group mean scores.

The status of the tourism ecolabels in Turkey was discussed by using the written materials that include published research, governmental and legal documents.

### *Findings and Discussion*

#### Exploring the Environmental Protection Practices

Statistical analyses of EP were done under eight groups. The mean distribution of each performance indicator, the group means and the overall mean were presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Environmental performance of accommodations (n=73).**

<b>Groups and Performance indicators</b>	<b>Group A mean</b>	<b>Group B mean</b>	<b>Group C mean</b>	<b>Total mean</b>	<b>Std</b>
<b><i>Architecture and landscape design</i></b>					
Using local materials in construction	2.35	3.17	2.71	2.73	1.23
Hotel architecture in harmony with environment	2.81	3.57	2.71	3.03	1.18
Environmentally suitable garden planning	2.92	3.39	2.82	3.06	0.98
Plan that does not spoil natural and historical site	2.74	3.74	2.86	3.10	1.17
<b><i>Group mean</i></b>	<b>2.71</b>	<b>3.47</b>	<b>2.78</b>	<b>2.98</b>	<b>1.14</b>
<b><i>Energy efficiency</i></b>					
Using key-card control system in guest rooms	1.50	0.65	0.19	0.85	1.52
Energy-saver control system in guest rooms	0.67	0.36	0.00	0.38	0.99
Using solar energy	1.50	1.36	1.10	1.34	1.52
Using photocell lighting in washrooms	2.21	1.24	0.95	1.55	1.69
Using phosphorate cat eye in lighting outside	0.69	0.62	0.18	.51	0.93
Purchasing low energy consuming materials	2.44	2.05	2.30	2.28	1.26
Using the energy saving light bulbs in rooms	2.97	2.23	2.43	2.58	1.35
<b><i>Group mean</i></b>	<b>1.71</b>	<b>1.22</b>	<b>1.02</b>	<b>1.36</b>	<b>1.32</b>
<b><i>Waste reduction</i></b>					
Solid waste separation at source	1.28	1.36	1.81	1.46	1.57
Using recycled paper in brochures	1.07	0.78	0.90	0.93	1.26
Composting the organic and food waste	0.41	0.19	0.43	0.35	0.90
Purchasing materials with recyclable feature	1.59	1.61	1.67	1.62	1.28
Cooperation with recycling firms	1.21	0.09	0.62	0.68	1.14
<b><i>Group mean</i></b>	<b>1.11</b>	<b>0.81</b>	<b>1.09</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.23</b>
<b><i>Water efficiency</i></b>					

Using treated water in garden irrigation	0.32	0.14	0.10	0.20	0.65
Wastewater treatment	0.59	0.35	0.24	0.41	0.90
Using photocell water armateurs	0.93	0.27	0.43	0.58	1.22
Use of water saving measures on linen change	1.81	1.82	2.52	2.03	1.58
<b>Group mean</b>	<b>0.91</b>	<b>0.65</b>	<b>0.82</b>	<b>0.81</b>	<b>0.78</b>
<b><i>Education and training for environmental awareness</i></b>					
Providing environmental education to personnel	1.86	0.83	1.00	1.29	1.15
Providing environmental sensitivity training	1.10	0.57	0.81	0.85	1.27
Providing environmental education to guests	1.32	0.52	0.81	0.92	1.07
Participating in environmental meetings	2.18	1.17	1.20	1.58	1.20
<b>Group mean</b>	<b>1.62</b>	<b>0.77</b>	<b>0.96</b>	<b>1.16</b>	<b>1.17</b>
<b><i>Communication for environmental awareness</i></b>					
Brochures on environmental protection	1.25	0.55	0.76	0.89	0.98
Getting guest opinions on environmental activities of hotel	2.07	1.74	1.90	1.92	1.28
Reflecting guest opinions about environment to hotel activities	2.11	2.77	1.95	1.96	1.16
Encouraging guests to use mass transportation	1.50	1.17	1.80	1.48	1.37
Posting educational posters for customers	1.34	0.83	1.33	1.18	1.46
<b>Group mean</b>	<b>1.65</b>	<b>1.41</b>	<b>1.55</b>	<b>1.49</b>	<b>1.25</b>
<b><i>Managerial knowledge on the environmental protection</i></b>					
Knowledge on the ISO 14001	1.27	0.59	0.95	0.96	1.07
Knowledge on the Pine Awards	1.30	0.78	0.85	1.00	0.93
Knowledge on the Blue Flag Project	1.52	1.43	1.71	1.55	1.12
<b>Group mean</b>	<b>1.36</b>	<b>0.93</b>	<b>1.17</b>	<b>1.17</b>	<b>1.04</b>

**Architecture and landscape design:** The performance indicators included the use of local materials in construction, hotel architecture in harmony with environment, landscape/garden planning which is suitable with environment. The five design indicators' group mean was 2.98 (lowest 2.35 and highest 3.57)) with rather high standart deviations (ranging from 0.98 to 1.23). The results show that the accommodations have over average performance on the architectural and landscape design in the park. In fact, Turkey's tourism accommodations generally lack environmentally friendly architectural and landscape design.

According to National Parks Act, all facility developments must be compatible with the environment, including appropriate sewage management, and native plants disturbed from the site and surrounding area must be relocated as an integral part of plans for landscaping and landscape restoration. The importance of hotel architecture and landscape design is getting increasing recognition. The design is significant criteria in Turkey's ecolabel scheme known as the Green Star Award.

**Energy efficiency:** Study results show that the overall energy saving performance of the accommodations is rather low (group mean= 1.36). The use of energy-efficient light bulbs is the only cost-saving measure that accounts for a little over average performance (mean=2.58). Very few hotels use other energy conservation practices, and great majority have no energy-saver system, the key-card lighting controls and the cat-eye in general lighting. Only large hotel operators use solar panels, computerized air conditioning and heating system, recycling, reduced water usage and cutting-edge energy-saving architectural designs.

Turkey is in the process of developing its energy policies aligned with the requirements of the European Union (EU). To date, Turkey has met the EU requirements in terms of adopting regulations on the energy labelling of



fridges/freezers and ballast for fluorescent lighting. The EU Green Light Programme showed that most of the energy savings in lighting are highly cost-effective, using up to five times less electricity. Most five-star hotels in Turkey have effective energy management policies that aim to reduce costs and incorporate the use of energy-saving materials (Erdogan, 2009).

**Waste reduction:** Findings indicate that most accommodations have very poor performance on waste reduction: The group-mean is very low (1.01) which indicates that the environmental performance on waste reduction is in between nonexistent and insufficient. These results showed that they attached little importance to the waste reduction. Most of them do not implement or participate in the municipal solid waste recycling programs. Very few have waste-sorting and recycling programs.

Waste management and recycling are also important criteria of the Green Star and White Star ecolabels in Turkey. As with wastewater, infrastructure for solid waste management and recycling is improving but still poor. Infrastructure for tourism related solid waste seems to be inadequate and recycling rates are very low, particularly in terms of the standards expected by the EU.

**Water efficiency and water conservation:** Findings show that water performances on three indicators out of four are very low, and the group mean is 0.81. Only use of detergent and water saving measures on linen change is at average level (2.03). As Erdogan and Baris pointed out (2007) the towel reuse program is an already established practice in many accommodations in Turkey. This practice saves water and electricity, and reduces the use of detergent and labor time. Findings on energy efficiency, water conservation and waste demonstrate that the accommodations mostly adopt the conservation practices that immediately reduce the cost of the hotel operation. Thus, it is understandable that they use energy saving light bulbs and try to reduce the frequency of washing towels and changing linens. On the other hand, they tend to reduce the use of solar energy for heating water because the solar panels are very expensive, despite the fact that they have long-term benefits. In many tourism destinations and adjacent residential areas, wastewater treatment is insufficient or nonexistent in Turkey. Wastewater treatment is therefore often limited to a few four and five-star hotels.

**Education and training for environmental awareness:** Mean distributions of this group reveal that the overall performance of the accommodations is also low (1.16). This result shows that the most accommodations have no or very little educational activity for themselves, their personnel and guests. There is a general lack of environmental awareness and concern, albeit some hotels reportedly give a high priority to the environment. Many studies indicate that there is an increase in consumer awareness of environmental issues and hotel managers are facing increased societal pressure to take action on environmental issues. Yet, there is a lack of environmental awareness and interest and environmental education in sustainability issues (Erdogan & Baris, 2007).

**Communication for environmental awareness:** The group score of the five performance indicators of this group is also low (1.49). Only two indicators (getting guest opinions and reflecting guest opinions) are at the average performance level.

**Managerial knowledge on the environmental protection:** Group mean about the managerial knowledge is very low (1.17). The mean distributions show that managers have insufficient knowledge on the ISO 14001 (0.96), the Pine Awards (1.00), and the Blue Flag project (1.55).

There is no information on the number of hotels that have ISO 14001 certificate (Aslanertik & Özgen, 2007). Only one hotel which has gained Green Star ecolabel in the Cappadocia region.

In Turkey, the legal provisions for the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) are provided by the Environment Act in 1983. Also, the European Commission has made it a requirement of Turkey's accession to the European Union that Turkey take steps to adopt the EIA Directive of EU. According to the EIA regulation, hotels with 50 or more guest rooms must prepare an EIA pre-report, tourism accommodations with over 500 rooms, holiday villages, tourism complexes and skiing fields should have to have EIA report. 104 tourism accommodations have received EIA approval from the authorities since 1994 (Erdoğan, 2009).

### *Tourism Ecolabels and Certification Programmes in Turkey*

Awards and ecolabel accreditation schemes, in particular, have been viewed as promising self-regulatory mechanisms for improving the industry's environmental performance (Warnken, Bradley & Guilding, 2005; Sasidharan, Sirakaya & Kerstetter, 2002). Ecolabels have also been used to encourage the development of less-damaging, more environmentally friendly hotels as well as potential tools to educate and influence customer behaviour. Ecolabeling, started in Europe in 1985 with the Blue Flag Award, granted by the Foundation for Environmental Education in Europe (FEEE), for beaches and marinas where environmental protection is a high priority. There are over 250 voluntary initiatives conducted for the World Tourism Organisation identified 59 ecolabeling or certification schemes (WTO 2002). Many of the standards focus on accommodation, and in particular on hotels, but there are also very specific standards covering, for example, beaches, tour guides, protected areas and tour boats in the Galapagos Islands (Roe, Harris & Andrade, 2003). Also, various environmental assessment methods have been introduced to evaluate the environmental performance of hotels such as Green Globe 21 (GG21), ECOTEL, Green Leaf (Canada), Green Key (Denmark), the EU Ecolabel in Europe, Energy Star (the United States), ISO 14000 and so on.

**Blue Flag** is an exclusive eco-label given to beaches and marinas having reached to a standard stated in the criteria. It is an international programme currently being implemented in 49 countries around the world. Blue Flag programme coordinated by Foundation for Environmental Education in Turkey representing 324 beaches, 17 marinas and 12 yachts Blue Flag; ranking Turkey four among 49 countries (Blue Flag 2012).

**Green Globe21 (GG21)**; as a follow-up to the Earth Summit, in 1994 WTTC set up GG21. Now an independent private sector company, GG21 is an Agenda 21-based industry improvement programme, which provides guidance material and a certification process linked to both ISO standards and Agenda 21 principles, throughout the world. There are 4 hotels which have GG21 awarded in Turkey (Green Globe21 2012).

**Green Key**, Denmark, a scheme operated by the Hotel, Restaurant and Leisure Industry Association (HORESTA) in that country, applies 78 criteria to be met by properties seeking certification. Green Key is an eco-label awarded to over 1500 establishments in 28 countries worldwide. Green Key has recently begun to award hotels in Turkey. This is due to the effective and professional work of our National

Operator, (TURÇEV) Foundation for Environmental Education in Turkey. There are only 4 hotels that have Green Key in Turkey (Green Key 2012).

Turkey will continue to implement projects to preserve the environment and its cultural identity. Adoption of environmental standards and ecolabelling are important opportunities to remain competitive. Unfortunately, only a few companies understand that adopting environmental standards can increase competitiveness in Turkey. In terms of rewarding sensitive businesses, an investigation carried out on the hospitality industry to evaluate the effects of environment on tourism reveals that relevant campaigns started in 1992: Pine Award which was the first national ecolabel scheme, but it is not in effect now. Green Star, White Star, and Greening Hotels started in 2008 and all of them are still in use (Colakoglu & Mil, 2011). The main features of each scheme are summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2. Summary of ecolabel schemes for tourism accommodation in Turkey**

Name of Ecolabel/ award	Pine Award	Green Star	White Star	Greening Hotels	Green Globe 21	Green Key
<b>Status</b>	Voluntary	Voluntary	Voluntary	Voluntary	Voluntary	Voluntary
<b>Coverage</b>	Hotels	Hotels	Hotels	Hotels	All	All
<b>Initiation &amp; Cessation Date</b>	1992 - 2008	2009	2009	2009	1994	1994
<b>Certified Members</b>	Not used anymore	22 hotels	40 hotels	43 hotels	4 hotels	4 hotels
<b>Number of Criteria</b>	-	122	55	87	-	78
<b>Certifying Authority</b>	MCTR Public Authority	MCTR Public Authority	TUROFED	TUROB	WTTC	HORESTA

**Pine Award:**National Governmental Institutions Ecolabel: In recognising the need for improving the environmental performance of the sector generally the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Turkish Republic (MCTR) started environmental sensitivity campaign in 1992 to encourage tourism enterprises to contribute to environmental protection and conservation in their daily practices. This is a voluntary certification programme for hotels whereby an enterprise that meets the requisite criteria can apply for accreditation. If successful, a "Friend of the Environment" certificate, known as the Pine Award, will be awarded. Only 30 hotels, mostly situated along the Mediterranean shore, and are predominantly five-star and four-star establishments, got the Pine Award. However, the scheme was not well known by hotel managers in Ankara (Erdogan & Baris, 2007). Pine Award is not used anymore.

**Green Star:** The Green Star certificate was introduced in 2009 by the MCTR. The certificate will be given to eco-friendly hotels based on their environmentally conscious practices. The green stars are given 122 criteria based in 10 essential subjects. The hotels should have an environment policy and a private eco-manager, or be audited by a specialist firm. They should also pay attention to water and energy usage, and training employees to raise their environmental awareness. Furthermore, they should use local products in their menu at least twice a day. The number of the hotels with green star has reached 22 in the beginning of 2012 (Özçoban, 2012).

**White Star:** White Star started in 2008 by Turkish Hoteliers Federation (TUROFED) with the slogan of “Livable Environment Project”. The main aims of this project are to reduce damage to environment and natural resources by decreasing the amount of water, electrical energy, chemicals and solid waste used in tourist facilities. It also showed the ways of maintaining a cleaner and livable environment and reducing the expenditures of the tourist facilities by increasing the efficiency, by providing savings without giving up the comfort and by organizing environmental trainings on the project for hotel managers and employees some tourism destinations (Çoban, Akpınar, Küçükçankurtaran & Ergin, 2011). 40 hotels, mostly situated along the Mediterranean seashore and predominantly five-star establishments, have gained White Star ecolabel (TUROFED 2012). There is only one hotel which has White Star ecolabel in the Cappadocia region.

**Greening Hotels:** Touristic Hotels & Investors Associations (TUROB-National Tourism Organization-NTO) leads to this idea via Greening Hotels Project. Launched during the 5th World Water Forum, The Project has been continued As “Greening Hotels Project”. Audits are made objectively by one of the world’s biggest accreditation firms; Bureau Veritas which also pursued the project at world water forum. There are 43 hotels which have Greening Hotel award in Turkey.

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas was funded by the European Union until 1999, but is apparently no longer listed either by European Union (2000) or by its sponsoring organization, the Europarc Federation (2000). A Worldwide Fund for Nature ecolabel for rural tourism accommodation in France, Gites Panda, also seems to have been adapted extensively, to judge from listings (Buckley, 2002).

The Turkish accommodation sector is only recently being investigated from the environmental perspective and not much work has been published in this area. Especially there is no study about the EP of tourism accommodations operating in the national parks in Turkey. The present study was designed to investigate the general nature of environmental performances including waste management, energy use, landscape and architectural design, and conservation practices of hotels in Goreme Historical National Park. In light of the quintessential need to maintain the delicate balance between tourism development and the environment in these regions through appropriate planning and management of tourism resources, recommendations for regulating tourism's negative impacts by ‘ecolabeling’ tourism products are being put forth by concerned parties (Sasidharan, Sırakaya & Kerstetter, 2002).

### *Recommendations*

The study findings have some important business implications for the development of better environmental practices: There is a need for environmentally sensitive practices, education and training courses in order to promote participation of the accommodation employees. The environmental knowledge and sensitivity of managers should be enhanced. They should participate in resource saving practices and make a commitment to institute a resource minimization policy, allocate staff and necessary funding for implementation, and establish an energy performance rating system and a periodic or continuous monitoring system to assess the nature and outcome of the daily practices. There is a need for ecolabel schemes in tourism

accommodations in protected areas as an integrated part of the environmental performance.

The number of tourism licensed accommodation in Turkey is 3808, whereas the number of Green Star ecolabelled accommodation is only 22. The low numbers of hotels with the White Star (40 hotels), Greening Hotels (43 hotels) and Green Star (22 hotels) indicate the low interest in the industry and government. The worst fact is that no hotel operating in the protected area has an environmental certificate. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism is planning to set obligatory rules for the new accommodations. It seems that government and all the concerned parties should pay more attention to the prevailing environmental issues beyond setting some legal regulations.

To achieve the goals and challenges set for the travel and tourism industry as it continues to grow throughout the coming decades, will require a strong and co-operative partnership between government departments, national tourism authorities, international and national trade associations, trade unions and the travel and tourism private sector. All stakeholders now need to share the responsibility for travel and tourism's future and need to deliver the following to ensure its sustainability: Governments should integrate travel and tourism policy, especially the environment, into broader government policies, design policies creating incentives for corporate social responsibility in tourism. Public-private partnerships should be established and they should plan and develop infrastructure with a long-term view and within a reference framework based on Agenda 21, implement indicators and environmental impact assessment tools to enable successful and effective local management and appropriate development. International bodies should co-ordinate environmental action to be undertaken by all sectors of the travel and tourism industry, at an international level (UNEP, 2002).

The deteriorating environmental condition on Earth requires not only a environmentally active people insisting on environmentally sensitive hotels, but also a sensitive and responsible hotel industry employing managers, architects, analysts, landscape designers and employees who are eager to establish and sustain a hotel with environmentally sensitive design and environmental protection programs and activities. Unfortunately, the study findings indicate that very few tourism accommodations have knowledge, motivation and activity to set clear and measurable goals and action plans in order to achieve improvement in energy and resource management, waste recycling programs, proper environmental design, motivate staff to carry out the mission to further EP. The inadequacy of time, money and personnel resources affect the extent to which stakeholders are involved during the environmental impact identification phase of ecolabeling programs. For some researchers, rather than contributing to environmentally sensitive tourism development and protection of natural resources of developing countries from the detrimental environmental impacts of tourism, ecolabels are likely to function as nothing more than marketing gimmicks for large-scale enterprises of the growing tourism industry (Sasidharan, Sirakaya & Kerstetter, 2002).

Prevailing conditions on the environmental plans, policies and activities, enforcement of legal provisions, interest in environmental organizations and professional associations, waste minimization and waste management, energy consumption indicate a general inadequacy in the necessary environmental knowledge and interest to meet the basic objectives of social and environmental responsibility. Hence,

tourism establishments should keep up with the integration of environmental concerns in tourism development strategies and be part of the national strategic action plan for sustainable tourism development. According to the Tourism Strategy of Turkey-2023, there will be a National Tourism Certification Service. It will support the development of national and application of international standards in Turkey. The current status of legal environmental laws and regulations in Turkey indicates the existence of a contemporary environmental policy. However, the daily practices of tourism industry follow the legal development far behind. Thus, Turkey is still in need of enforcing the laws properly and tourism industry is in need of policies and daily practices that carry social responsibility and environmental sensitivity.

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