

European accommodations awarded for their sustainability performance.

During the recent Rhodes Tourism Forum addressing sustainable tourism development, five European tourism accommodation facilities were awarded the “Royal Accommodation Award for Sustainable Tourism, 2006”. More than 420 delegates’ applause welcomed the winners from Germany, Sweden, Czech Republic, and Portugal.

- It was the first time in Europe that more than 30 eco-labels and environmental certificates addressing the accommodation sector have invited their certified businesses to apply for an international award by presenting their contribution to sustainable development, said Herbert Hamele, President of ECOTRANS, the European network for sustainable tourism development. Many of them are already using TourBench, the new multi-language tool for monitoring their environmental cost and resource consumption.

From 60 facilities in 15 European countries, a prominent jury of sustainable tourism experts have selected 22 finalists to the award, and eventually the five winners. These have all demonstrated major achievements towards more sustainable development in the tourism industry, including highly innovative measures to minimize their environmental impacts.

- All nominees for the Royal Accommodation Award for Sustainable Tourism 2006 demonstrate an excellent picture of innovation regarding sustainable development in the major sectors of the tourism industry, said Stefanos Fotiou, Tourism Programme Officer of the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), also member of the jury. The collaboration of all sustainable tourism recognition schemes in Europe in nominating and promoting these businesses will contribute to the ongoing efforts of reducing environmental impacts to society. But in the end the tourists themselves will make the most significant contribution by selecting one of these businesses for their next holiday stay.

Besides the honour of being recognized for their efforts towards sustainability, winners received a statue and a certificate, handed over by prominent representatives of the Greek authorities, including the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yiannis Valinakis.

- The statue, named *Oikos* is very exclusive, but also symbolic, the Executive Director of the Royal Awards, Professor Mikael Backman explains. It demonstrates on one hand the huge impact of mankind on earth’s environment, and on the other hand the worried and innovative human being that has to find the solution to these problems. It almost seems like the man would need at least two or three globes to sit comfortably, but the sad story is we only have one.

The winner in the category Hotel & Guesthouse was Hotel Mürz Spa Wellness & Golf, in Bad Füssing, Germany. Among a huge variety of sustainability initiatives the hotel is equipped with an ecological swimming pond without need of chemical water purification additives.

The award in the category Bed & Breakfast went to Penzion a Kemp Javořice from the Czech Republic. Being used to limited resources, the facility manages to reduce costs substantially by minimizing energy use in many different ways.

Alma Verde Village & Spa of Portugal, winner in the category Holiday Homes, clearly demonstrated the possibility of delivering a nice and cool indoor climate using almost no energy. The lower temperature of the ground at a depth of two metres is used to cool fresh outside air in summer, which is then distributed to the interior of the building.

From far up in the north of Sweden, Grövelsjöns Fjällstation won the award for their innovative geothermal heating system. This unique technology is being used in an area covered with snow for most of the year. In addition this mountain lodge is providing organic cooking and ecotouristic excursions.

Finally, in the category camping, the prize went to Campingplatz Elbsee, Germany, which shows among many other initiatives how to run a campsite without any contribution to the greenhouse effect.

- The issue is not whether we can afford to take these measures, but whether we can afford *not* to, the architect of Alma Verde observed.

The Royal Awards for Sustainability Foundation was initiated by the European Environment Agency in 1996, to promote sustainable development by rewarding excellent performance and best practice. The Royal Awards are protected by his Royal Highness Crown Prince Frederik of Denmark and His Royal Highness Crown Prince Felipe of Spain.

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