

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

With respect to the current favourable trend in the development of tourism in the Czech Republic, aspects of environmental friendly tourism have been integrated into the process of planning and decision-making at a national level as well as regional and local levels. The majority of global principles regarding sustainable tourism and protection of biodiversity has been gradually incorporated into strategic and conceptual materials such as: The State Environmental Policy, the Conception of the State Tourism Policy, the State Programme of Nature and Landscape Protection, the Strategy of Biodiversity, the Czech Republic Strategy for Sustainable development etc.

The promotion of the sustainable tourism has also been supported by the „green“ certification of landlords, providers of tourism services, tour-operators and whole tourist destinations. Nowadays several voluntary environmental management systems such as ISO 14001, EMAS and ECO-labelling run in the Czech Republic. The extension of these certificates in the sector of tourism still lags behind other branches of industry and services.

The Czech Republic concentrates within the framework on the promotion of the sustainable form of tourism mainly on its implementation in the protected areas and in the locations where the most fragile ecosystems are located. For this purpose, the Ministry of the Environment has supported the creation of a network of centres of environmentally-friendly tourism. These centres will be established in each region and will be governed by a single National Centre. The main impetus of these centres is a gradual setting and enforcement of the basic principles of environmentally-friendly tourism, particularly the regulation and monitoring of the movements of tourists in the countryside and during their visits to places of interest. To enhance the efficiency of the centres, it is foreseen that a cooperation with other institutions such as administrative offices of protected landscape areas, nature conservation and landscape protection is required.

Particular projects which have been created in close co-operation with regional centres are for example: advisory - educational programme of environmental certification concentrating on subjects providing accommodation; education and assistance programmes for the support of the local development of environmentally-friendly tourism intended for representatives of municipalities and other public institutions; and an educational programme for guides which has been prepared in close co-operation with the Club of Czech Tourists, tourist information centres and the administration staff of protected landscape areas. These activities have been mainly focused on broadening the scope of the current guide activities and on specialised model guide programmes suitable for sensitive localities. A part of these programmes has been the creation of marked-trails such as Greenways, the

Multi-functional main-trail of the Euroregion Nisa, the Heritage trails, the Moravian wine trails, the Farmer's trails around agricultural operations in Šumava, which fit in a framework of specific products supporting the implementation of environmentally-friendly tourism.

In order to promote a better cooperation and development of environmentally-friendly tourism in the protected areas the „Recreation, Sport, and Tourism Working Group” was created. It is composed of members of the administrative offices of protected landscape areas of the Czech Republic and its main task has been the stocktaking of recreational and sport activities which can have, or do have, a significant impact on wildlife and the landscape of protected landscape areas. Furthermore, to analyse the individual function and purpose of each protected landscape area, to define conflicts of interests and to propose possible solutions, to negotiate with representatives of interest groups, associations (sport and tourist unions) and entrepreneurs in the sector of tourism.

The Ministry of the Environment together with the Ministry of Local Development intends to launch a new project „National System of Certification of Environmentally-Friendly Tourist Services“, which focuses on the certification of accommodation facilities. After the creation of a framework for the evaluation and monitoring of these facilities and the introduction of a specific national trade-mark, this system should be verified in practice on pilot projects in the Czech Republic and subsequently utilize its marketing potential at national level as well as abroad. All important entrepreneurs and managers in the field of tourism such as the Union of Trade and Tourism, the CzechTourism Agency, the Club of Czech Tourists, the Regional Environmental Centre (issuing already the certificate for environmentally friendly products/services in the areas of NATURA 2000), ECEAT CZ (a guarantor of the promotion of rural and agricultural tourism) together with micro-regions, regions and other associations have collaborated on this project.

The Czech Republic has joined a new initiative for the creation of so-called “geoparks” this year. “Geoparks” support one of the environmentally-friendly forms of tourism - geotourism – which interlinks tourism with education and enlightenment and thus contributes towards sustainable development of the whole territory. So far the only geopark set up in the Czech Republic is „Český ráj“ (Bohemian Paradise), which is a part of the European geoparks network and thank to its unique nature also became a UNESCO geopark. The Ministry of the Environment strives to promote a further development and expansion of the national network of “geoparks” through a creation of methodical guidance for areas which are interested in setting up a “geopark” on their territory.