

Awards for Improving the Coastal Environment: The example of the Blue Flag



Blue Flag



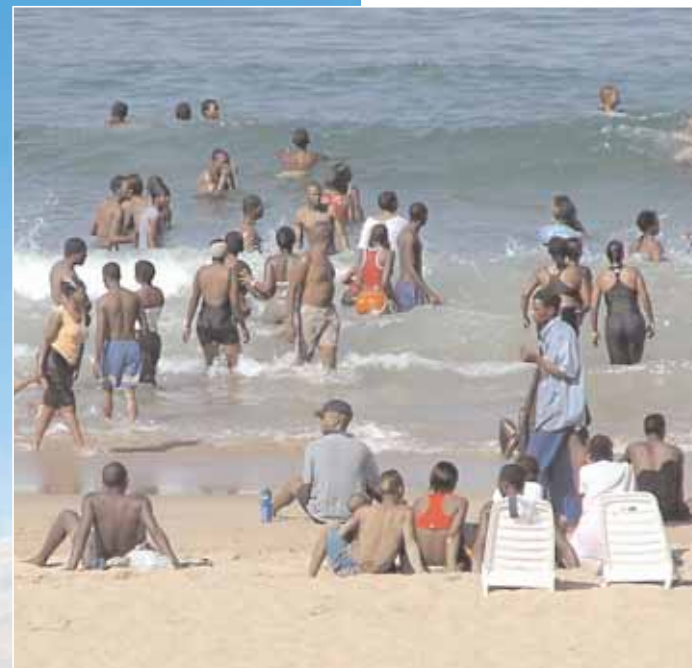
Foundation for
Environmental Education



United Nations
Environmental Programme



United Nations World
Tourism Organisation



Caribbean Tourism Organization



Caribbean Regional Sustainable
Tourism Development Programme /
European Union





Foundation for Environmental Education

Scandiagade 13
2450 Copenhagen SV Denmark
Tel: +45 33 79 00 79 · Fax: +45 33 79 01 79
Email secretariat@fee-international.org · Web Site www.fee-international.org
Email blueflag@blueflag.org · Web site www.blueflag.org



United Nations Environment Programme

Division of Technology Industry and Economics
Tour Mirabeau, 39-43 quai André Citroën, 75739 Paris
Cedex 15, France
Tel +33.1.44.37.14.50 · Fax +33.1.4.37.14.74
E-mail uneptie@unep.fr · Web site www.unep.org



United Nations World Tourism Organization

Capitán Haya 42 · 28020 Madrid, Spain
Tel +34.91.567 81 00 · Fax +34 91 571 37 33
E-mail omt@world-tourism.org · Web site www.world-tourism.org

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Blue Flag International Sponsors

Foreword

The Foundation for Environmental Education – FEE, is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation promoting sustainable development through environmental education and the running of its five programmes, Eco-Schools, LEAF, Young Reporters for the Environment, the Green Key and Blue Flag. The Blue Flag Programme is specifically focused on promoting sustainable development in the coastal tourism sector.

The United Nations Environment Programme – UNEP, through its Tourism Programme under the Division of Technology, Industry and Economics (UNEP/DTIE) has the mission of ensuring that conservation, through sustainable management and use of the natural, cultural and man-made environment, is an integral part of all tourism development.

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation – UNWTO, has continued to support the dissemination of practices on the benefits of tourism and its contribution to the sustainable use of natural resources. As such, UNWTO has produced a number of technical publications with tourism development guidelines and specific policy instruments, including methodologies for setting up sustainability indicator systems at destinations.

Within this scope, the present FEE/UNEP/UNWTO publication provides an update on the status of the Blue Flag Programme and its expansion to new countries of the World.

It further outlines the path that a country may take in adopting the Blue Flag Programme to enhance the quality of their coastal environment. In this regard, the new experiences in the application of the Blue Flag in South Africa, Canada, and the Caribbean region, with diverse ecological, cultural and socio-economic realities, are highlighted as examples outside the European context.

Acknowledgement

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Initial work for this document was done by Monica Borobia (Consultant with UNEP).

Production and management of this publication was coordinated by FEE and the International Blue Flag Coordination – Finn Bolding Thomsen and Carrie A. Dean.

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I. Introduction

Recreation, when properly planned and managed, can minimise impacts on coastal environments and serve as a driving force in bringing sustainable tourism as a vehicle of development to local communities and destinations. Tourism and recreation associated with “sea and sun”, is recognised as an essential component of domestic and international trade and a major contributor to economic growth. However, the costs associated with unplanned and/or poorly managed tourism can also be felt. Losses in traditional and indigenous ways of life, environmental quality, and the natural resource base, which ultimately supports tourism development, are some of the concerns raised.

Businesses and Governments alike are gradually incorporating sustainability as one of the core values to drive the tourism industry forward, in an attempt to be more responsive to current market, environmental and community requirements. Central to this process are the adoption of voluntary initiatives such as environmental guidelines, codes of conduct and certification schemes that encourage commitment to change. Numerous voluntary initiatives exist in developed and developing countries, particularly in the hospitality sector, and are moving the industry beyond compliance with environmental laws and regulations. Voluntary initiatives are also being recognized as effective tools supporting implementation of Government programmes for integrated coastal zone management.

Despite such benefits, much remains to be done in creatively fostering responsible growth while safe guarding the quality of coastal destinations. For this reason, UNEP and UNWTO aim at supporting balanced policies based on a spectrum of tools that may include voluntary initiatives, such as eco-labels, while recognising, at the same time, that they are not the only avenue that can be pursued.

It is against this background that the Foundation for Environmental Education presents this publication with the example of the Blue Flag Programme. This is the first award scheme for coastal recreation in Europe, which was designed incorporating existing relevant instruments, such as the criteria to comply with the European Union Directive on Bathing Water Quality, thus facilitating coastal zone management and integrating the implementation of legal obligations.

The Blue Flag Programme is increasingly being conducted within a wider context, improving the environmental quality of beaches and marinas and the management of coastal areas in a holistic way. It is a system that does not curtail recreation and tourism in the coastal area but rather deals with it through a wide range of subjects, activities and users that have direct and indirect interactions with the coastal environment. The Blue Flag Programme serves to encourage authorities and managers to provide beaches and marinas with a certain level of environmental quality, cleanliness, and safety standards for local populations and tourists.

South Africa was the first non-European country to start the implementation of the Blue Flag Programme in 1991. Caribbean countries and FEE, in cooperation with UNEP, the UNWTO and the Caribbean Blue Flag Consortium, have been working since 1999 on the application of the scheme in the Caribbean which has largely succeeded. As of 2006 other non-European countries involved in the Blue Flag Programme are Brazil, Canada, Chile, Morocco, and New Zealand which are at different stages of implementation.

This report is particularly directed to potential institutions interested in operating the Blue Flag Programme at a national level, i.e. becoming National Blue Flag Operators.

2. Coastal Tourism: Economic relevance and environmental implications



Small Island Developing States, such as in the Caribbean and South Pacific regions, heavily rely on coastal areas and beaches to support tourism, recreational activities and mobilise economies.

Coastal environments contain diverse habitats, such as mangroves, rocky shores, cliffs, beaches and others, which are environmental assets that provide much of the basis for tourism activities to occur in coastal areas.

2.1 Tourism and Environmental Degradation

Travel and tourism is one of the World's biggest industries, accounting for nearly 200 million jobs, and over 10 per cent of world GDP, more than US\$ 3,500 billion. Predictions are that by 2020, 1.5 billion international tourists will be spending US\$ 2 trillion a year – or over US\$ 5 billion every day, this is in addition to domestic tourists, the number of which is very large, especially those using beaches, but difficult to calculate.

Tourism is recognised as one of the most important economic activities of coastal areas. Several regions of the World, notably those comprising Small Island Developing States such as the Caribbean and South Pacific, rely heavily on coastal areas and beaches to support tourism, recreational activities and to mobilise economies.

Although medium to long-term prospects for international tourism have steadily forecasted worldwide growth, the sector has to cope with instability factors such as extreme weather events, economic slowdown, political conflicts and currency fluctuations. In the face of instability, leisure activities tend to be the first affected when household budgets are constrained.

In the above scenario, there is no doubt that the integrity and health of coastal areas are of strategic importance to the development and long term sustainability of the tourism industry.

Marine and coastal environments contain diverse habitats typically comprised of sand dunes, rocky shores, cliffs, beaches, estuaries and lagoons, wetlands, mangroves, coral reefs and seagrass beds. All such habitats are environmental assets that provide much of the basis for tourism activities that occur in coastal areas. Hence, environmental degradation and changes in coastal areas directly affect their sustainability and capacity to provide environmental services, such as acting as a buffer against erosion and storms, as well as serving as a source of marine recreation and food resources. Coastal ecosystems are interlinked, with their function and resilience depending on dynamic relationships among species and physical and chemical interactions within the marine environment.



Coastal areas are exposed to environmental stress because of:

- Land-based sources of pollution including discharge of untreated sewage and industrial effluents
- Marine pollution including oil spills
- Sedimentation as a result of erosion
- Aquaculture activities along shorelines
- Habitat destruction
- Unplanned or ill-planned infrastructure and construction developments and non-regulated activities and
- Petroleum and gas exploitation

The activities listed above indicate that practices at sea and on land can impact the marine environment and its water quality. For example, sedimentation and contamination from untreated sewage, pesticides and other toxic substances can cause coral loss to extents that they may be unable to recuperate. Corals contribute to the formation of many of the World's beaches, through the mechanical breakdown of hard skeletons of calcium carbonate, which make up fine particles of white sand. The loss of beaches have serious consequences among which is the immediate erosion of the coastline, subsequent saline intrusion and soil alteration. In addition to the ecological role that coastal ecosystems play, significant economic, social and cultural values must also be considered.

Coastal tourism is susceptible to other factors, which include hurricanes and tsunamis, as well as man-made effects such as climate change and sea level rise.

The value of coral reefs:

It is estimated at between US\$100,000 to US\$600,000 per square kilometre a year. The estimated cost of protecting them, through the management costs of a marine protected area, is just US\$775 per square kilometre per annum. The costs of installing artificial breakwaters made of concrete tetrapods around the Male, Maldives, was US\$10 million per kilometre. This was done following the degradation of the natural reef. In Indonesia, a hotel in West Lombok has spent an average of US\$125,000 per annum over seven years restoring its 250 metre-long beach following erosion as a result of offshore coral mining.

Source: In the Front Line: Shoreline Protection and other Ecosystem Services from Mangroves and Coral Reefs.

Tourism dependent-economies suffer from such environmental degradation and the resulting decline in tourism causes losses in government revenues and income to local communities and businesses, gradually worsening conditions at the destination level.

While the positive impacts of tourism can be clearly felt in economic terms such as employment and revenue generation, seasonal and spatial concentration of tourists have serious implications for resource management. Increased tourism in coastal areas impacts the physical environment and biodiversity, for example, increased rates of erosion, damage to coral reefs and destruction of mangroves for development purposes.

Coastal areas are exposed to various environmental stresses and increased tourism may impact their physical environment and biodiversity.



The Effects of Water Pollution

- Poorly treated or untreated sewage released into water introduces pathogens, which are a human health hazard. Sewage in seawater is especially critical, since the salinity of the water inhibits the natural bacterial breakdown of the wastes.
- Cholera, typhoid, dysentery, hepatitis, and a variety of skin and eye diseases can be transmitted through contaminated water, fish and all other seafood.
- Solid wastes and effluents dumped in deeper water are often washed up on shore. This is not only unsightly and unhealthy: damage to aquatic life is inevitable.
- Sewage and wastes in water increases its nutrient levels, which can speed up eutrophication. Excessive plant growth affects the volume of dissolved oxygen, which in turn will reduce the growth and diversity of aquatic invertebrates and fish.
- Oil spills from pleasure boats and ships can kill birds and all forms of aquatic life.
- Heavy metals and chemical run-offs from tourist boats, marinas and other such facilities are toxic to aquatic life. Some of these chemicals are surprisingly stable in the environment; they can accumulate in the fatty tissues of aquatic animals and birds further up the food chain.
- Erosion increases silting, which reduces the dissolved oxygen supply for animals and plants, and the amount of sunlight penetrating the water.
- The removal of coral, live shells and other forms from reefs for the making of tourist souvenirs causes the reef and a large section of the coastal ecology to die.

Source: Sowing the Seeds of Change- An Environmental Teaching pack for the Hospitality

Infrastructure such as sewage systems, solid waste disposal, transport services and drinking water supplies are also key factors. While these may be sufficient for a community for most of the year, they may not be adequate during the peak tourist period.

Tourist influx and demographic changes in coastal areas are also presenting new environmental and social challenges, from urban expansion to erosion of traditional cultural values. Additionally, health and safety issues are equally important elements to be addressed when dealing with coastal degradation. Risks to human health imposed from sewage pollution in the water, through respiratory and intestinal diseases and infections among bathers and to marine life stimulating excessive growth of marine plant life – eutrophication – depleting oxygen levels, are also among the challenges facing recreation and tourism.

2.2 The role of voluntary initiatives in Coastal Zone Management

The task of managing the coastal natural environment and their changes will grow in importance as the demand for a quality environment by tourism increases. Success in protecting the marine environment while fostering recreation and tourism will depend on the active cooperation of governments, industry, conservation organisations and local communities.

The importance of coastal and marine resources in meeting current and future development needs requires a strategic approach to planning and management of coastal areas, in order to maintain their functions and the services which they provide. Integrated Coastal Zone Management is a process that seeks to balance the demands of development and conservation of natural resources, assisting coastal area stakeholders in achieving this goal.

There is no single blueprint for Integrated Coastal Zone Management. Among others, implementation depends upon applying a range of appropriate instruments and tools (policy, regulatory and economic), including the promotion of voluntary action by industry and stakeholders. The Blue Flag Programme is an example of a current tool for facilitating coastal zone management by improving not only the environmental quality of beaches and marinas but their management in a holistic way.

Integrated Coastal Management

Integrated Coastal Management (ICM) – also encompassing associated freshwater catchments – is increasingly recognised as an effective approach to managing and protecting the marine and coastal environment. It merits wider application both in resolving existing problems and dealing effectively with new ones, through actions such as:

- promoting coordinated, cross-sectional, and holistic approaches to managing environmental resources and amenities taking full account of environmental, public health, economic, social and political considerations
- make environmental impact assessment (EIA), risk management, and cost-benefit analysis integral elements of the decision making process and incorporate the value of ecosystem services wherever possible
- seek active involvement and participation of all major stakeholders (local authorities, the private sector and particularly the interested public) in the design and implementation of ICM
- regularly review management systems and their implementation and adjust priorities, targets and methods as necessary and
- strengthen institutional capacities through training and retraining programmes

Source: GESAMP (IMO/FAO/UNESCO-IOC/WMO/WHO/IAEA/UN/UNEP Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection). 2001. *A Sea of Troubles*. Rep. Stud. GESAMP No. 70. 35 pp.



3. The Blue Flag Programme

3.1 History and development

The Blue Flag Programme is a voluntary certification scheme for beaches and marinas, owned and run by the independent non-profit organisation, the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) formerly known as FEEE – Foundation for Environmental Education in Europe. Since 1991 the organisation has become international, now with member organisations from around the World. As of 2006 FEE has member organisations in 44 countries.

The Blue Flag was born in France in 1985 where the first Blue Flags were awarded to coastal municipalities on the basis of criteria covering wastewater treatment and bathing water quality. In 1987, with support from the European Commission, the Blue Flag was brought to a European level, functioning as an instrument for application of the EU Bathing Water Directive, including other areas of environmental management, such as waste management, coastal planning and protection, as well as the inclusion of marinas.

More strict and holistic criteria have been adopted over the years. As the programme spread to regions outside Europe different sets of regional criteria were developed for beaches. In 2006 these criteria were combined into one international document which is now followed in all participating countries.

Today, the Blue Flag is a widely recognised eco-label for the public, decision-makers and tour operators. In 2006, more than 3100 beaches and marinas in 36 countries were awarded with the Blue Flag.

Implementation of the programme outside Europe began in South Africa in 1998 with the first Blue Flags awarded in 2001. Other non-European countries running the programme now include the Bahamas, Canada, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Morocco, New Zealand and Puerto Rico. Other countries such as Barbados, Brazil, Chile and Turks and Caicos are currently in the beginning phases of implementation.

Today, the Blue Flag is a widely recognised eco-label for the public, decision-makers and tour operators, awarded in 2006 to more than 3100 beaches and marinas in 36 countries.



Number of Blue Flag beaches and marinas per country awarded in 2006

Country	Beaches	Marinas
Belgium	6	6
Bulgaria	11	0
Canada	5	0
Caribbean	9	2
Croatia	103	19
Cyprus	49	0
Denmark	211	77
England and N. Ireland	85	6
Estonia	2	4
Finland	6	30
France	269	84
Germany	39	123
Greece	411	5
Iceland	2	3
Ireland	81	3
Italy	216	52
Latvia	6	1
Lithuania	6	0
Montenegro	15	0
Morocco	4	0
Netherlands	40	45
New Zealand	0	1
Norway	0	4
Poland	2	3
Portugal	207	11
Romania	8	1
Scotland	8	1
Slovenia	8	2
South Africa	20	0
Spain	480	82
Sweden	45	58
Turkey	192	14
Wales	43	4

Source: Blue Flag Programme

3.2 Aims and strengths

The Blue Flag Programme works towards sustainable development at beaches and marinas through rigorous criteria dealing with water quality, environmental education and information, environmental management, safety and other services.

The main objectives of the Blue Flag Programme are to improve understanding of the coastal environment and to promote the incorporation of environmental issues in the decision-making processes of local authorities and their partners. Environmental education has been and will continue to be a core value and characteristic of the programme. Education is targeted toward decision makers, tourists, managers, employees and local communities, and can cover topics such as environmental practices, management systems, safety and nature interpretation.

The Blue Flag Programme unites stakeholders in the sustainable management and development of marinas and beaches, particularly from the tourism and environmental sectors, and at local and national levels. This is done through:

- The promotion of criteria dealing with water quality, environmental education, environmental management, safety and services
- Education of beach and marina visitors about good practices in the coastal environments
- Education of those working directly with the management of beaches and marinas
- Education of the whole community in protecting the coastal environment, and
- Encouragement of voluntary involvement in environmental action

Since it began, the Blue Flag has grown in size, in coverage, in scope and in influence. The Programme has gradually broadened its objectives to improve the environmental management of coastal regions rather than just individual beaches and marinas.

The strengths of the Blue Flag Programme are due mainly to the principles and characteristics on which the programme operates. These are:

- **Positive reinforcement**, which highlights the achievements of the award-winning beaches and marinas
- **Broad participation**, involving numerous local and national stakeholders on which all action depends
- **Voluntary action**, implying that those who volunteer to join accept the responsibility for complying with Blue Flag criteria
- **Independent operation**, so that the award system cannot be influenced by local or financial interests
- **Adaptability of criteria**, which are adopted internationally but which allow for expansion of the scheme to different regions reflecting specific environmental conditions

4. The Blue Flag Criteria

Two main elements related to the Blue Flag Programme are Criteria and Control & Monitoring. The criteria will be outlined in this section. Control and monitoring are a key part of the programme and will be outlined under the Actors and Procedures section.

Length of season is another element that needs to be taken into account as compliance with criteria is required during the designated Blue Flag season. The official bathing seasons and marina seasons vary among countries, from year-round to lasting several months or only a few months. The Blue Flag season should be set when visitors are present on the beaches and marinas, and for the times of year that the criteria can be met. The season might be limited, for example, due to cold weather or due to the hurricane season.

Criteria

The award, the Blue Flag itself, is given annually to beaches and marinas that satisfy a number of essential criteria covering aspects of:

- *Water Quality*
- *Environmental Education and Information*
- *Environmental Management*
- *Safety and Services*

The Blue Flag criteria are revised and updated every 5 years. The beach criteria were last revised in 2006 and the marina criteria were last revised in 2004.



4.1 Beaches

The award of a Blue Flag beach is based on compliance with 29 criteria. Most criteria are imperative whereas others are guideline or not applicable. All imperative requirements have to be fulfilled, and compliance with a maximum number of guideline criteria is encouraged.

The international criteria are designed to allow for small variations from region to region. The full set of Blue Flag Beach Explanatory Notes outlines what these differences are.

If some of the imperative criteria are not fulfilled during the season or the conditions change, the Blue Flag will be withdrawn. The International Blue Flag beach criteria must be understood as minimum criteria: the National Programmes can choose to have stricter demands.

International Blue Flag beach criteria for 2006

Some criteria are designated as imperative, some as guideline and some as non applicable – *Detailed current beach criteria and explanatory notes are available through the Blue Flag Programme site at: www.blueflag.org*

WATER QUALITY

1. Compliance with the requirements and standards for excellent bathing water quality
2. No industrial or sewage related discharges may affect the beach area
3. Monitoring the health of coral reefs located in the vicinity of the beach
4. Compliance of the community with requirements for sewage treatment and effluent quality
5. Algae or other vegetation should be left to decay on the beach unless it constitutes a nuisance

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

6. Information relating to coastal zone ecosystems and natural, sensitive areas in the coastal zone must be displayed
7. Information about bathing water quality must be displayed
8. Information about the Blue Flag Campaign must be displayed
9. Code of conduct for the beach area must be displayed and the laws governing beach use must be easily available to the public upon request
10. A minimum of 5 environmental education activities must be offered

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

11. A beach management committee must be established to be in charge of instituting environmental management systems and to conduct regular environmental audits of the beach facility
12. The beach must comply with all regulations affecting the location and operation of the beach (coastal zone planning and environmental legislation)
13. The beach must be clean
14. Waste disposal bins/receptacles must be available on/by the beach in adequate numbers, regularly maintained and emptied
15. Facilities for receiving recyclable waste materials must be available on/by the beach
16. Adequate and clean sanitary facilities with controlled sewage disposal
17. On the beach there will be no unauthorised camping or driving and no dumping
18. Regulations concerning dogs and other domestic animals on the beach must be strictly enforced
19. All buildings and equipment of the beach must be properly maintained
20. Sustainable means of transportation must be promoted in the beach area

SAFETY AND SERVICES

21. An adequate number of lifeguards and/or lifesaving equipment must be available at the beach
22. First aid equipment must be available on the beach
23. There must be management of different users and uses of the beach so as to prevent conflicts and accidents
24. An emergency plans to cope with pollution safety risks must be in place
25. There must be safe access to the beach
26. The beach area must be patrolled
27. A supply of potable drinking water must be available on the beach
28. A minimum of one Blue Flag beach in each municipality must have access and toilet facilities provided for disabled persons
29. Map of the beach indicating different facilities must be displayed

4.2 Marinas

The growth of recreational boating and marinas has prompted a growing awareness of the need to protect the environmental quality of waterways as an integral part of the management of coastal areas.

The award of a Blue Flag marina is based on compliance with 22 criteria. As in the case of criteria for beaches, most are imperative (i) whereas others are guideline (g). All imperative requirements have to be fulfilled, and in addition a maximum number of guideline criteria. If some of the imperative criteria are not fulfilled during the season or the conditions change, the Blue Flag will be withdrawn.

International Blue Flag marina criteria for 2006

Detailed marina criteria and explanatory notes are available through the Blue Flag Programme site at: www.blueflag.org

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

1. Environmental information about natural sensitive nearby land and marine areas is supplied to marina users (i)
2. Code of environmental conduct is posted at the marina (i)
3. Information about the Blue Flag Marina Campaign and/or the Blue Flag Marina criteria are posted in the marina (i)
4. The marina should be able to demonstrate that at least three environmental education activities are offered to the users and staff of the marina (i)
5. The individual Blue Flag for boat owners is offered through the marina (i)

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

6. Production of an environmental policy and plan at the marina referring to water, waste and energy consumption, health and safety issues, and the use of environmentally sound products when available (i)
7. Adequate and properly identified and segregated containers for the storage of hazardous wastes (paints, solvents, boat scrapings, antifouling agents, batteries, waste oil, flares). The wastes should be handled by a licensed contractor and disposed of at a licensed facility for hazardous wastes (i)
8. Adequate and well managed litterbins and/or garbage containers. The wastes should be handled by a licensed contractor and disposed of at a licensed facility (i)
9. The marina has facilities for receiving recyclable waste materials, such as bottles, cans, paper, plastic, organic material, etc. (i)
10. Bilge water pumping facilities are present in the marina (g)
11. Toilet pumping facilities are present in the marina (g)
12. All buildings and equipment must be properly maintained and in compliance with national legislation. The marina must be well integrated with the surrounding natural and built environment (i)
13. Adequate, clean and well sign-posted sanitary facilities, including washing facilities and drinking water. Controlled sewage disposal to a licensed sewage treatment plant (i)
14. If the marina has boat repairing and washing areas, no pollution must enter the sewage system, marina land and water or the natural surroundings (i)
15. Promotion of sustainable transportation (g)
16. No parking/driving in the marina, unless in specific designated areas (i)

SAFETY AND SERVICES

17. Adequate and well signposted lifesaving, first-aid equipment and fire-fighting equipment. Equipment must be approved by national authorities (i)
18. Emergency plan in case of pollution, fire or other accidents must be produced for the marina, and safety precautions must be posted at the marina (i)
19. Electricity and water is available at the berths, installations must be approved according to national legislation (i)
20. Facilities for disabled people (g)
21. Map indicating the location of the different facilities is posted at the marina (i)

WATER QUALITY

22. Visually clean water and marina (no oil, litter, sewage or other evidence of pollution) (i)



4.3 Boats

The Individual Blue Flag programme is a personal commitment scheme aimed at encouraging boaters to adopt good environmental practices in the marine environment. Individual boat owners receive a small Blue Flag pennant if they commit to following the Blue Flag Environmental Code of Conduct for boat owners. These boat owners contribute to the objectives of the Blue Flag Programme by minimizing their impact on coastal waters and marine resources. The boat owner signs the Environmental Code of Conduct declaring that he/she will act according to the directives outlined in the Code of Conduct. The content varies from country to country and can be obtained in the national language from National Blue Flag Operators.

The following issues are generally included in the Environmental Code of Conduct:

- I will not throw garbage into the sea or along the coast
- I will not release toilet water in the sea in coastal waters and sensitive areas
- I will not release poisonous or toxic waste (oil, paint, used batteries, cleaning agents, etc.) in the sea. I will deliver these types of waste to the containers in the marina
- I will promote and use recycling facilities (glass, paper, etc.)
- I will use the most environmentally friendly products among paints, anti-fouling agents, paint remover, detergents, etc, that are available and work efficiently
- I will instantly report pollution or other violations of environmental regulations to the authorities
- I will not use forbidden fishing practices and I will respect periods when fishing is prohibited
- I will protect animals and plants in the sea, including not disturbing breeding bird grounds, seals or other marine mammals
- I will respect vulnerable and protected areas
- I will avoid damage of the sea bottom, e.g. in the way that I anchor
- I will avoid disturbing fishery or fishing gear
- I will not buy or use objects made from protected species or from archaeological underwater findings
- I will encourage other sailors to also take care of the environment

5. Actors and Procedures

5.1 The Basic Procedure

The Blue Flag award is given for only one season at a time. To be eligible for the Blue Flag a beach or marina has to fulfil all imperative criteria, and is also encouraged to fulfil a maximum amount of guideline criteria.

Application procedures for beaches involve a process in which the responsible local authority (municipality) files the application form with the National Blue Flag Operator with enclosed documentation, usually following consultations with local stakeholders. In the case of marinas, the marina operator/management applies for the Blue Flag.

The applications are reviewed first by a National Jury and then by an International Jury. If the candidate is approved then the award is given for the coming season. During the season the site is monitored to assure it is in compliance with the Blue Flag criteria.

5.2 Actors and Responsibilities

The Blue Flag Programme is coordinated locally, nationally and internationally. The quality of the programme is heavily dependent on the strength, competence and dedication of the involved actors.

International Blue Flag Coordination

The international coordination is carried out by FEE through the International Coordination located in Copenhagen, Denmark, working closely with international partner organisations. It is the administrative body that deals with the daily issues of the programme at the international level. It acts as a support and resource for the National Operators, deals with future developments, questions, problems and complaints, the exchange of information among countries, and the arrangement of the International Jury evaluations.

National Blue Flag Coordination

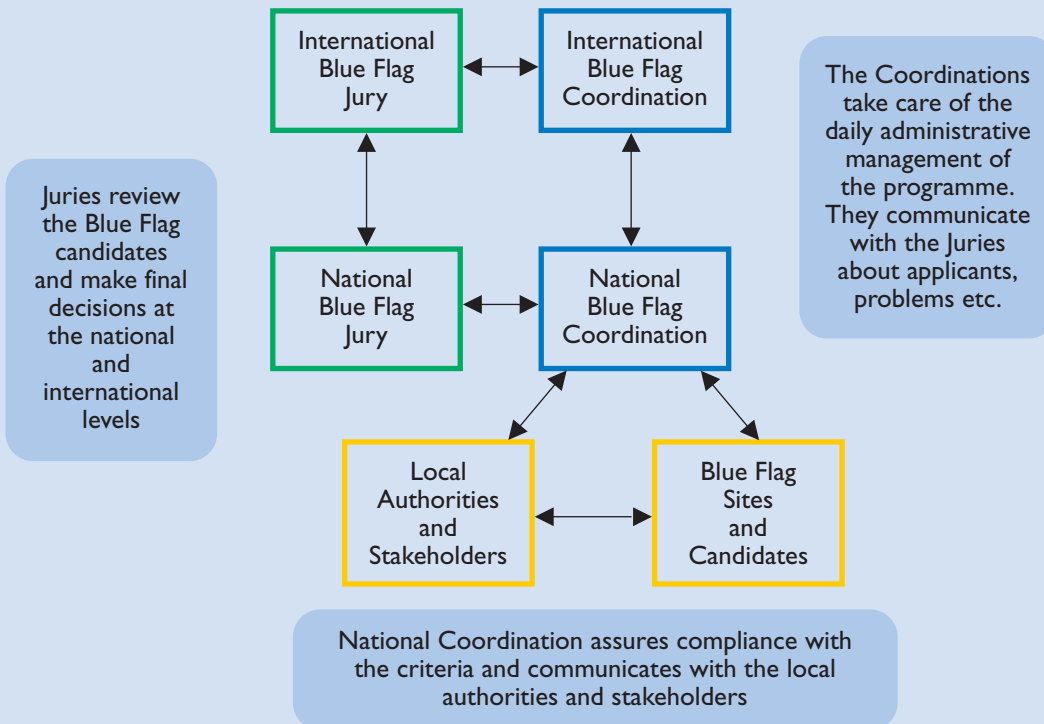
The running of the programme at the national levels is done through the FEE member organisation in that country who acts as the National Coordination. The National Coordination should designate one person to be the official National Operator. They deal with the daily management of the programme at the national level and manage contact with the International Coordination.

The National Blue Flag organisation is expected to fulfil a number of functions as the National Blue Flag Operator. These include:

- Providing potential participants with guidance on how to meet the Blue Flag criteria and explaining the conditions for participation
- Initial evaluation of the applications and recommendations to the National Jury
- Arrangement of the National Jury evaluation
- Carrying out consultative visits to participants and controlling compliance with the criteria during the season
- Providing the participants with information material to be distributed to visitors and users
- Publicly promoting the programme at the local and national levels
- Being a continuous source of inspiration and encouragement to the participants

- Being an active participant and contributor to the international elements of the Programme
- Fund raise for the implementation of the Blue Flag Programme at the national level
- Be active in encouraging voluntary improvements
- Be active in encouraging official and political developments on issues related to the national coastal zone and other aspects of the programme

The Blue Flag bodies and responsibilities



National Blue Flag Jury

The National Blue Flag Jury is the “politically” responsible body for the national campaign. The Jury reviews Blue Flag candidate applications before they are sent to the International Jury to assure that all criteria are being met, and to discuss and take decisions regarding problems or potential problems. The composition of the Jury should assure a wide range of expertise to cover all aspects of the programme.

Standard composition of the National Blue Flag Jury

- Ministry of Environment
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Tourism and/or National Tourism Association
- Association of Local Authorities
- National Sailing Association or other marina experts
- Association of beach managers / Association of marina managers
- National lifesaving association
- Education experts
- The FEE organisation
- Other NGOs
- Other experts (e.g. Association of Consumers, Association of Boatowners, etc.)

The International Jury

An International Jury meets twice a year to review the applications approved by the National Juries and make decisions about dispensation cases. The International Jury is composed of major relevant stakeholders from the international level and FEE representatives. The International Jury takes the final decision regarding Blue Flag candidates.



Composition of the International Blue Flag Jury

- FEE Executive Board
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
- World Tourism Organization (WTO)
- International Lifesaving Federation (ILS)
- International Council of Marine Industry Association (ICOMIA)
- International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
- Environmental education expert
- Health expert
- European Union for Coastal Conservation (EUCC) (only for European countries)
- European Union (only for European countries)

Local Governments and Stakeholders

Local governments and stakeholder groups play critical roles in the Blue Flag Programme. These include:

- Coordinating applications for Blue Flag awards for beaches
- Monitoring that the bathing water quality sample results for beaches are in compliance with the Blue Flag criteria and take action if problems arise
- Organizing litter collection and adequate forms of litter disposal
- Organizing the collection of waste for recycling
- Organizing the collection of hazardous wastes for appropriate disposal
- Ensuring that criteria concerning safety provisions are met
- Managing beaches/marinas to avoid environmental deterioration
- Maintaining beaches/marinas in an aesthetically-pleasing form
- Informing visitors about the need to protect the environment, safety precautions and available services
- Incorporating environmental considerations into local planning
- Improving environmental education and information activities
- Surveying awarded sites and reporting on conditions to the National Blue Flag Operator
- Flying the Blue Flag on awarded beaches/marinas and displaying the relevant criteria and information
- Publicizing the awarded sites and results of the Blue Flag Programme locally
- Taking down the flag in cases of non-compliance

5.3 Control and Monitoring

Consultation, assessment and monitoring are essential components to ensure compliance with the adopted criteria, a successful programme, and the credibility of the award system. Different actors control and monitor the programme in their various capacities throughout various stages of the programme year.

Control Points

- Pre-season
- Application submittal
- National Jury
- International Jury
- Control Visits

Pre-Season

The National Operators should be in contact with participating sites from the previous season and with potential new sites. The potential beach and marina candidates (municipalities and marina managers) should receive information about the coming programme year, application deadlines and changes and developments in the programme.

During this time the potential candidates should also receive consultation from the National Operators about how the beach/marina could be improved. This might be in the form of workshops, seminars, meetings or personal conversations with information exchange. Other relevant stakeholders could also be involved.

This is also a good time to address any problems from the previous year and assure that they are fixed for the coming season.

Application Submittal

Applications are made by the municipalities and marina managers. Help and consultation is provided by the National Operator in the process. The application is submitted with supporting documents. The National Operator reviews the applications and supporting

documents, asking for more information if necessary. For beach applicants, all bathing water quality results from the past season are reviewed and checked for compliance. The applications are prepared for review by the National Jury.

Jury meetings

The National Jury in each country meets to review and make decisions about the beach and marina applications for that year. The Jury should be very well informed about the Blue Flag Programme, the criteria, the spirit of the programme and any new developments. The National Jury members are also the political face of the national programme. Their decisions will ultimately steer the direction and quality of the national programme.

The Jury members should ideally also be involved in the programme beyond the meetings, giving their support for the programme through their political and professional connections, and by helping to solve problems if they arise. For example, the representative from the Ministry of Health or Environment can address bathing water quality issues at a higher level, or the Education representative can encourage cooperation on environmental education activities with other educational institutions.

The National Jury ultimately decides which beach and marina candidates are forwarded to the International Jury. Candidates should be rejected if they are not in full compliance with the Blue Flag criteria, or if they have not submitted all of the required documentation. In unclear situations candidates may be forwarded as dispensation cases for special consideration.



The International Jury meets twice a year, once in April to consider applicants primarily from Europe, North America and Northern Africa, and once in September to consider applicants from Southern Africa, South America, the Caribbean and Oceania. Besides reviewing beach and marina candidates, the International Jury also performs in-depth spot-check evaluations and evaluations about organisational activities at the national level such as national control visits, progress with new developments etc. The International Blue Flag Coordination receives the forwarded applications and requested information and prepares this for consideration by the International Jury.

As with the National Juries, it is the responsibility of the International Jury to review and make final decisions about the beach and marina candidates. They have the final word in the awarding of Blue Flags. The decisions of the International Jury are communicated to the National Juries who then inform the candidates of the results. FEE reserves the right to refuse or withdraw the Blue Flag if the imperative criteria are not being complied with or where the beach/marina operator or local authorities are responsible for current violations of national environmental regulations or otherwise act in discord with the objectives and spirit of the Blue Flag Programme.

The International Jury members should also participate and support the programme outside of the meetings through their network and expertise at the international level.

Blue Flag Season

During the Blue Flag season the awarded sites must be in full compliance with the Blue Flag criteria. It is the responsibility of the local authorities/ marina managers to assure that their sites are in full compliance at all times. If compliance is not met for reasons beyond their control or otherwise, the flag is to be withdrawn and the National Operator notified of the situation. The reason the flag has been withdrawn is also posted for the public on the Blue Flag Information Board at the site.



For beaches, the water quality is to be monitored by an accredited laboratory before and throughout the Blue Flag season, as according to the criteria. The updated bathing water quality results should be posted at the beach and sent to the National Operator. The National Operator should review the results for potential problems in quality or sampling frequency. If problems occur then the National Operator should actively pursue it. For example, if there is a water quality problem they should contact the authorities to locate and fix/remove the source of pollution.

It is the political responsibility of the National Jury to assure that all awarded sites are visited and controlled at least once during the season. In many countries the sites are visited by national controllers multiple times during the season. Normally it is the National Operator who controls the sites but control visits may also be done by other trained staff and volunteers. It is imperative that the people doing the controls are well educated about the programme. They must be knowledgeable about the criteria and trained to a calibrated level of stringency. Strict control of awarded sites is essential to the quality, reputation, effectiveness and future existence of the programme.

National controllers can also, at the same time, play the role of consultants for the beaches and marinas, giving them good advice about common problems, disseminating best practice information and ideas.

The International Coordination also performs control visits to a percentage of the awarded sites each year. Countries with a large number of sites are visited each year while countries with a lower amount of sites are visited every few years, or as needed if issues arise. International control visits can be announced or unannounced and they might be done together with a national controller or alone. It is valuable for the International Controller to visit some sites together with national controllers, to better calibrate the level of stringency in the interpretation of the criteria. Problems found are reported to the National Operator. Feedback about how the problems have been fixed must be given to the International Coordination within a certain time frame.

National and International Blue Flag controllers cannot observe the beaches and marinas at all times. Therefore, it is foremost the responsibility of the local authority/marina manager to assure compliance with the criteria. Their commitment to this is given when signing the Blue Flag application “contract”.

Beach and marina visitors are also encouraged to be observant and give feedback to the National and International Coordination about any problems they have seen. Contact information is given on the Blue Flag information boards at each site. Complaints are immediately handled and can affect the status of the awarded site in the present season or even during the next application period.

After the season

Once the flags have been taken down it is a good time for the National Operator to start collecting information for the next year, reviewing problem areas, deciding how best to progress with the campaign and start arranging seminars and meetings for the municipalities, managers and other stakeholder groups.



5.4 Financial Resources and Support Tools

Financing a National Blue Flag Programme

Various sources and modalities of financing a national Blue Flag Programme can be explored and have been used nationally. National Blue Flag operations do not have to be necessarily expensive but they all require funds. The costs might be the following:

- Costs for starting up; time and expertise needed for the feasibility study
- Annual FEE membership dues
- Operation costs for the organisation; salaries for personnel, overhead etc.
- Organisation of meetings
- Purchasing of flags
- Production and purchasing of signage
- The annual Blue Flag levy per beach/marina (30-36 € in 2006 depending on the number of sites involved in the country)
- Bathing water quality testing (if not paid for by the authorities/municipalities)
- Promotion and awareness-raising for the programme

Fund to cover these costs can normally be obtained, through:

Government grants – from government agencies and ministries (such as Environment, Transport, Tourism, Health) given that the objectives of the Blue Flag respond to or are complimentary to many government policies and programmes (including at the local level)

Sponsorships – from the private sector (such as business, travel and leisure or commercial associations, individual companies, financing institutions and banks) which may provide incentive programmes, operate in areas and with products compatible with the issues addressed by the Programme, for example recycling or coastal activity related equipment

Fees – fees charged by National Operators for applications are used as financial contributions to the Programme in most countries



Other Resources

The Programme can also benefit from the involvement of different partners:

Volunteers – can substantively reduce costs and bring new dimensions and varied expertise directly from local communities or partner institutions

Technical partners – individual companies, non-governmental organisations, universities, technical centres and social programmes, which can assist through jury participation, site evaluation/control visits as well as criteria development and assessment

Communication partners – publications can increase awareness of the programme, major events in coastal areas such as cultural fairs, shows or sport competitions can support awareness raising and education of users for effective management of the marine environment

Official partners – recognised official bodies that may help promote the programme through their network and name

Support Tools

A number of tools are available to support the implementation of the Blue Flag Programme which are produced or organised by the International Coordination of the Programme as well as at the National level:

Publications – National Operator Handbook, Guide to Conducting Control Visits to Blue Flag Beaches/Marinas, Manuals and Training materials, Bi-monthly Blue Flag Newsletter, Beach and Marina Operator Handbooks

Public Relations Materials – leaflets, press releases, videos, reports and others

Meetings and Workshops – annual National Operator meetings, national seminars and training workshops, consultation visits and control visits

Events – Blue Flag raising ceremonies, designation of Blue Flag Day, other related environmental and educational activities (e.g. exhibitions, competitions, guided tours)



The European Blue Flag Experience

The Blue Flag programme has been running in Europe for almost twenty years. There is a large wealth of knowledge from their experiences. The following are some lessons that have been learned in various countries.

Greece – Towards Sustainable Coastal Tourism:

- Prior to the Programme, beach organisation was poor; facilities and regard for the environment were inadequate. The dominating interest was economic: how to attract tourists without much in-depth consideration for the future.
- Securing private sponsorship as a strategic response to the lack of state funding as of 2000 granted greater independence from the political setting, which in turn allowed the Blue Flag Operator to implement a definite policy for improving beach quality, with award criteria interpreted more strictly each year.
- Acquired credibility and on-site results mobilised other sectors, such as hotel operators, that use the Blue Flag application procedures to prepare their environmental reports by which they are judged by foreign tour operators.
- In many beach communities, there is now considerable pride in the possession of a Blue Flag, which is manifested through celebrations when the flag is raised. Economic benefits generated include increased tourism of a higher quality. Thus, economic development produced by tourism is progressing hand in hand with nature conservation, boosting the pace towards sustainability, rather than relying on legislative measures alone.

France – Advantages and Economic Benefits:

- As the country which launched the Programme, the Blue Flag distinguishes and raises the profile of French coastal communities which have used the Programme as a tool to enhance coastal management and support compliance with national coastal legislation (Loi Littoral, 1986).
- The French Programme has been instrumental in ensuring that environmental and safety aspects meet the increasing expectations of tourists, particularly northern Europeans, thus strengthening competitiveness as a tourism destination.
- The economic repercussions of the Programme are many. Significant growth in visitor numbers are often reported in Blue Flag sites and in associated activities, for instance camping, particularly after the first year of receiving the award.

Spain – Progress through Education and Partnerships:

- As a major world tourism destination, Spain was the number one country with Blue Flags in 2005. Its Programme has been based on information and education of users, authorities and local populations. Blue Flag Manuals have been published for beaches and marinas, as a result of a Cooperation Agreement between the National Blue Flag Operator and the National Government (Secretaría de Estado, de Comercio, Turismo y Pyme), along with a variety of information materials, which include a synthesis of 60 types of environmental education activities.
- Opening up the Programme to partnerships with the private sector has enabled significant expansion of information and education activities. The relations between private sector sponsors and the National Blue Flag Operator are governed by a strict Code of Professional Ethics. It contributes to the implementation of a Programme which is independent, participatory and multi-disciplinary.

Through the links of the Blue Flag Programme site further information can be found on National Programmes and individual beaches and marinas awarded the Blue Flag: www.blueflag.org

6. Adapting the Blue Flag to a New Country

Based on the experiences accumulated to date, the process of developing and adapting the Blue Flag Programme to a new country context involves the phases outlined below. The first key is finding a suitable group/representative to take contact with FEE and drive the process.

Who drives the process?

In the beginning stages a coordinator should be designated to drive the implementation of the Blue Flag programme in the new country. This is normally a representative from a non-governmental organisation (FEE member organisation). In cases where the FEE member organisation has not yet been identified a governmental representative or a private sector representative (e.g. Hotel Association) may assume this responsibility for the start-up phase of the programme.

A national NGO must be identified to run the programme beyond the start-up phase. This organisation must become a member of FEE. In order to be suitable, the organisation must be a non-profit, non-governmental, independent organisation and it must have environmental education and protection as important objectives. It must:

- Become a member of FEE
- Be in accordance with the FEE statutes
- Be able to raise the necessary funds to pay its subscription to FEE
- Be able to run the Blue Flag Programme and
- Be ready and willing to participate in the other activities of FEE, including having the capacity to run at least one of the other five FEE programmes

Within the organisation, one person will be designated as the National Blue Flag Operator. This person will be the official Blue Flag representative in that country and will be the contact person to the International Coordination.

1. Conduct a national Blue Flag workshop: which will introduce the Blue Flag Programme to a wide and representative range of national and regional stakeholders, presenting to them the process, discussing with them the procedures for adhesion and the feasibility study.

2. Establish a National Blue Flag Committee: which together with the national coordinating body will oversee the establishment of the Programme, from its onset to implementation, and define a strategy or plan for implementing the Blue Flag Programme, including the production of the feasibility study, training, investment programs, information exchange and monitoring progress.

A National Blue Flag Committee should be comprised of multiple stakeholders representing different interests and expertise. The composition of the Blue Flag National Committee might include the following stakeholders, among others:

- National water quality authorities
- National environmental authorities in charge of national policies on coastal zones and nature protection
- National tourism authorities
- National safety boards
- National associations of local authorities and interests

- Non-governmental organisations representing environmental interests, cultural interests, and environmental education
- National representative of the tourism trade
- National consumers' association

3. Initiate a Blue Flag feasibility study: which addresses the readiness of a new country to establish the programme (see Box 11). The evaluation of the Feasibility Study is carried out by the person responsible for the start-up phase of the programme with the assistance of FEE. A country visit is conducted by FEE to fill the information gaps of the study and to meet with relevant stakeholders. The feasibility study highlights which capacity gaps need to be filled in order to be able to launch the Programme.

The Blue Flag Feasibility Study

A feasibility questionnaire was developed to assist countries in the collection of information to determine whether the necessary elements to support the establishment of a Blue Flag Programme are in place. The basic question to consider is:

- *Is there enough human, technological and institutional capacity for the Programme to exist?*

The feasibility questionnaire also helps compile information on the institutional and legal framework, on the human and technological capacity and other issues from the point of view of: threats to the environment, water quality, environmental management, human health and safety, environmental education and social, cultural and economic issues.

FEE can provide assistance in the completion of the Feasibility Study which is later given to the International Jury for approval.

The Feasibility Study is available through the Blue Flag Programme site at: www.blueflag.org

4. Review the criteria: based on the evaluation of the Feasibility Study the national committee and FEE investigate how the international criteria can be applied to reflect the countries' environmental, social and economic conditions; human and technical capacities; and institutional framework. Any additions/adaptations to the international criteria should be attainable, capable of being monitored and controlled, viable of being implemented and represent an improvement with respect to the status quo. FEE is in charge of approving regional adaptations to the criteria.

5. Carry out a Blue Flag pilot phase: this will serve as the platform for testing the programme and the basis for filling gaps as needed. It is also a platform for upgrading the new beaches/marinas to Blue Flag standards. The pilot beaches and marinas should serve as learning sites and later, as models for new Blue Flag beach and marina candidates. Beach and marina criteria and guidance notes are approved by the FEE Executive Board.



What happens to the National Committee?

After the final launch of the Blue Flag Programme in a country, the National Committee, or part of it, becomes the National Jury that each year evaluates and selects the candidates for the Blue Flag to be forwarded to the International Jury.

7. Experiences from New Non-European Countries

South Africa: Advantages for Local Communities

While the Blue Flag in South Africa has been operating only a short time, it is rapidly growing and gaining the support of government authorities as it directly contributes to the implementation of national coastal policies and legislation, as well as being seen as a timely tool for the sound development of tourism in South Africa. Its promising beginning is leading to the potential expansion of the Blue Flag Programme to other countries in the South & East African region.

KwaZulu-Natal: Some 68% of all foreigners and 71% of all domestic visitors experience the beaches of KwaZulu-Natal, equivalent to approximately 680,000 foreign visitors and almost 6 million South Africans. It is estimated that a foreign visitor to KwaZulu-Natal spends around R1600 per day whereas a domestic visitor around R800. Adhering to an internationally recognised eco-label is expected to raise benefits to municipalities participating in the Blue Flag Programme.

Local authorities participating in Blue Flag report a number of advantages from their Blue Flag beaches which include:

- job creation for unemployed segments of the population (under the Coastcare project)
- an increase in visitors to their beaches
- improved behaviour on the part of beach-goers (vandalism and damage to property drops significantly)
- beach visitors positive feedback from visiting a well cared-for and managed beach
- local businesses are using their local Blue Flag for promotional and dissemination purposes and
- property prices have risen for homes adjacent to Blue Flag beaches.



Caribbean: Regional Development to National Administration

The Blue Flag Programme in the Caribbean has catalysed important changes in the way beaches are managed in the area. Five countries have been able to organize National Committees to co-ordinate individual agency programmes towards a common goal and they are now fully running the programme.

The Blue Flag programme in the Caribbean started with a regional Coordination and focus. After some time and build up of experience, the programme administration was taken over by national organisations who have direct contact with the International Coordination.

In recent years, the Caribbean tourism industry has been involved in several initiatives aimed at enhancing the environmental awareness of the industry and to take advantage of the increased environmental management and marketing opportunities provided by sustainable tourism voluntary certification schemes. UNEP, UNWTO and FEE invited Caribbean environment and tourism stakeholders to participate in a Feasibility Evaluation Workshop held in Puerto Rico in December 1999. The region recognised the advantage of utilizing a scheme that is well known in Europe, a very important tourism source market for the Caribbean.

The original choice of a regional approach for development of criteria reflects the nature of the Caribbean Blue Flag Programme. It gave special consideration to regional standards, including those already adopted for water quality under the Aruba Protocol on Land-Based Sources and Activities of Marine Pollution to the Cartagena Convention. Furthermore, monitoring the health of coral reefs located in the vicinity of the beach reflects due regard given to critical habitats and environmental characteristics of the region. It also directly contributes to the implementation of another regional Protocol of the Cartagena Convention, the Protocol on Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW).

Subsequent production of a Caribbean feasibility study confirmed the eligibility and interest for a Blue Flag Programme in the Caribbean. As a region marked by Small Island Developing States, where beaches and coastal areas are crucial to socio-economic development, the Caribbean was the first such region to complete an evaluation of the applicability of the Blue Flag. As a result of the Puerto Rico meeting, beach criteria specific for the Caribbean were proposed and prepared. At this time an international set of criteria had not been developed. The region decided to directly adopt the European marina criteria for the Caribbean.

In May 2001, the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO), the Caribbean Conservation Association (CCA), and the Caribbean Alliance for Sustainable Tourism of the Caribbean Hotel Association (CAST/CHA), with the support of FEE and UNEP, set the basis for the establishment of the Blue Flag Caribbean Consortium (BFCC). This became the regional interagency team responsible for the implementation of the Caribbean Blue Flag Programme. In October 2002, CCA (on behalf of the Caribbean Blue Flag Consortium) was formally accepted as a member of FEE as required by the statutes of this organisation.

The programme in the Caribbean was run regionally, with national operators and national juries reporting to the regional Blue Flag Caribbean Consortium and a regional Jury, who in turn communicated with the international actors. As of 2006, it was decided that this regional function was no longer necessary. Non-profit organisations in each country then prepared for FEE membership and assumed the responsibility of running the programme at the national levels.

Since the initial development of the programme in the area, criteria specific to this region have been adapted into the international set of beach criteria. This illustrates the adaptability of the Blue Flag programme on the international level, to embrace changes and developments as the programme spreads into new areas. It also reflects the strength of the international programme with a stable identity where certain regional variations can be worked into an existing framework, rather than becoming exceptions.



Canada: A Welcomed Community Actor

In Canada, the Blue Flag Programme is run by the NGO and FEE member organisation, Environmental Defence. They have seen that the Blue Flag Programme provides a much welcomed focus on the quality of their beaches. Beginning in the City of Toronto, Ontario, which has had a reputation for poor recreational water quality, has enabled the Blue Flag Programme to establish an effective role as a third party monitor. Their interactive web site, www.blueflag.ca, which provides the most up to date water quality test results for beaches in the program, is an invaluable tool for public outreach and they are seeing an increase in visitors every year.

The additional criteria under environmental management, environmental education and safety have served to engage a broader cross-section of stakeholders in working together for a common goal. Interest in the program is growing and Environmental Defence is receiving help in promoting the program to new communities.

At Environmental Defence they see an opportunity to establish real community stewardship of beaches through the Blue Flag program. They are creating partnerships with groups involved in coastal management, organisations that support recreational beach activities, and small NGOs that foster awareness and educational programs for their local beach.

8. Lessons Learned



Eco-labels (or awards) can play two main roles: serve as a mechanism to guide industry actors to improve their performance by providing defined operational guidelines and serve as a communication tool for consumers in highlighting products and services that have met or exceeded a set of defined criteria.

The example of the Blue Flag Programme starting in Europe, based on almost 20 years of experience, has demonstrated improvements not only in the direct management of beaches, marinas and boat activity, but also the management of coastal zones as a whole, where they are implemented.

The holistic approach to the management of coastal areas, which was gradually pursued as the Programme matured and expanded, has proven to be a key factor helping to turn sustainable development principles into practice.

It has served as a vehicle to enhance government commitment, drive the industry beyond legislative compliance and materialize crucial public-private partnerships, all of which have been fundamental to sustain the Programme itself and set the path towards sustainability.

As a result, Blue Flag beaches and marinas are synonymous with quality, and thus responsive to ever increasing tourist demands and expectations for a healthy environment.

It is important to note that in the process of adapting and establishing a new Blue Flag Programme, national and local characteristics along with social and environmental differences need to be respected. Regular meetings of National Committees in the start up phase are essential, as are Blue Flag workshops. As the programme spreads to new areas, the relevance of the existing international criteria will be continually evaluated and perhaps, added to.

Regional characteristics must equally be considered. In the Caribbean for example, coral reefs and mangroves are an important and unique characteristic of the environment. Criteria to assure the protection, monitoring, and education of these areas was included into the criteria for this region.

Among the challenges faced in adopting the Programme to new countries is the need to devise creative modalities and partnerships to fill gaps in technical resources and monitoring capacities in the initial stages of development. Additionally, raising public awareness and understanding of voluntary initiatives, their benefits and potential weaknesses, are also crucial to their success and credibility.

In summary, the Blue Flag Programme:

- Can be instrumental in improving compliance at the local level with national and regional environmental legislation and policies, and coastal regulatory instruments
- Offers an opportunity to strengthen existing local and national capacities for coastal zone management
- Can be a tool to formulate and strengthen objectives for national, regional and local policies and actions related to the management of the coastal zone for tourism and socio-economic development
- Provides networking opportunities on the national and international levels, between organisations, authorities, education institutions, industries and other experts, to name a few
- Provides a framework within which public, private and community organisations can interact and cooperate toward common goals related to the environment, safety and education
- Provides a platform for discussion and conflict resolution surrounding the management of coastal zones and other community environmental initiatives



Annex

Contacts

FEE/International Blue Flag Coordination

Scandiagade 13

2450 Copenhagen SV

Denmark

Tel: +45 33 79 00 79 (Mo-Th 10-15, Fr 10-14)

Fax: +45 33 79 01 79

Email: blueflag@blueflag.org or coordination@blueflag.org

Web: www.blueflag.org

International Blue Flag Coordination: [Finn Bolding Thomsen](#) or [Carrie A. Dean](#)

Contacts for all other FEE and Blue Flag member organisations can be found on the websites:

www.fee-international.org

www.blueflag.org

Organisations and further reading

The United Nations Environment Programme – Division of Technology, Industry and Economics. A Division of UNEP that works with governments, local authorities and industries (including tourism) to promote policies and practices that are cleaner and safer, make efficient use of natural resources, ensure adequate management of chemicals, incorporate environmental costs and reduce pollution and risks to humans and the environment (<http://www.unep.org>).

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation – An intergovernmental organisation that serves as a global forum for tourism policy issues and a practical source of tourism expertise, supporting the sustainable development of tourism and providing technical assistance to developing countries. Since 2003, UNWTO has become a Specialised Agency of the United Nations (<http://www.world-tourism.org/sustainable>).

Caribbean Environment Programme – Promotes regional co-operation in 32 member countries for the protection and development of the marine environment of the Wider Caribbean Region and serves as Secretariat to UNEP's administered Cartagena Convention (<http://www.cep.unep.org>).

The Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) – tourism development agency comprising 33 member governments from the French, English, Spanish and Dutch speaking Caribbean, as well as private sector organisations, with headquarters in Barbados and marketing operations in New York, London and Toronto ([http:// www.onecaribbean.org](http://www.onecaribbean.org)).

The Caribbean Conservation Association (CCA) – oldest environmental regional body in the Caribbean (38 years old), 18 Caribbean governments, 19 NGO's, several hundred individual and corporate members (<http://www.caribbeanconservation.org>).

The Caribbean Alliance for Sustainable Tourism (CAST)- the environmental arm of the Caribbean Hotel Association (CHA) for the promotion of environmental management actions in Caribbean hotels ([http:// www.cha-cast.com](http://www.cha-cast.com)).

The International Lifesaving Federation (ILS) – works to support and help coordinate lifesaving development activities of member federations and regions (<http://www.ilsf.org>).

Reef Check – Dedicated to global coral reef education, monitoring and management (<http://reefcheck.org>).