

A NEW TREND IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY: ECOLOGES

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ABSTRACT. – A New Trend in the Hotel Industry: Ecolodges. The change phenomenon is deeply affecting the business world as well as all other fields in social life. One of the fields being affected from the change is the tourism and hotel establishments, which are its basic components. Today, while tourism rapidly continues to develop all around the world, on the other hand, one can see that different hotel concepts are created in parallel to new travelling tendencies. In recent years, since the tendencies particularly for environmental friendly practices have gradually developed, an accommodation concept called “eco-hotels” or “ecolodge” or “green hotel” has occurred. In this study, the importance of ecolodges which are one of the newest trends in hotel industry, is being discussed. Today, ecolodges are one of the first choices for hotel investments in many destinations. In this study, the samples presented are quite interesting and it is anticipated that with its such aspect, it will be quite beneficial to hotel investors and hotel managers.

Keywords: *changing, tourism, hotel establishments, environmental-friendship practices, ecolodges.*

1. INTRODUCTION

A rapidly changing business environment, changing customer demands, and increasing competition has been a challenge for many of today's hospitality companies (Cho et al., 2006). The gradual rising in the importance of tourism for countries' economies have led to an increase in the number of tourism establishment nowadays, and strengthened the competition environment. As for all the establishments, one of the main reasons for the hotels is obviously to stay competitive as well. The way for that is to make the hotel more attractive than the competitors (Didin and Köroğlu, 2008). Ecolodges are accepted as one of the new trends in the hotel industry in recent years. An important part is that the travellers usually live in the industrialized metropolitan areas. Problems in big cities such as noise, environmental pollution, traffic and overpopulation are increasing the people's longing for the nature. Ecolodges offer their environmentally aware customers a holiday alone with nature, and thus gain an important competitive advantage. Moreover, ecolodges adopt an environmental friendly approach and considerably serve for the sustainable tourism efforts.

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The tendency for environmental friendly practices is not only a peculiar concern to tourism, but also to all industries in the world. Particularly, the establishments in all the industries which play a role in environmental problems such as climate changing and global warming are seeking solutions about reducing such negative effects. The problems such as pollution of the seas, melting glaciers and ozone depletion are tried to be minimized by the studies of international environmental friendly organizations, non governmental organizations and scientists. In this context, the "environmental sensitive" concept gradually began to gain importance by the effects of individuals and organizations that behave in a sensitive way for the environment (Gül, 2011: 46). Today, we can abundantly notice that in the hotel industry as well. Rada (1996 adapted from Bohdanowicz et al., 2005: 1643) states that due to high level of resource utilization (energy, water, consumables) in hotel facilities, the environmental footprint of hotels is typically larger than those of other types of buildings of similar size. In this context, Holjevac (2003) suggests that the hotel of the future will be a "green hotel" or an "eco-hotel". Everything, from the choice of the location, construction, equipment, hotel products and hotel services, will be subordinated to the preservation of nature and the environment, to man – the worker, and man – the guest. Nature hotels or "eco-oasis" will be a common phenomenon. Likewise, Leonidas (2004) asserts that the sustainable and environmentalist design in hotels are the criteria which are increasingly demanded by the customers, and states that eco-resorts are new hotel concepts. Hotels have numerous motivations for going green including: a feeling of social responsibility, governmental regulations, and economic benefits (Cometa, 2012: 1 adapted from Bohdanowicz, 2006).

In this study, the importance of ecolodges which are recently one of the newest trends in hotel industry, is being discussed. The study consists of two parts. In the first part, the eco hotel concept and its basic features are explained. The second part includes the samples related to ecolodges in the world. And in the last part of the study, there are some suggestions for the investors who want to make investments in the hotel management field.

2. A NEW PHENOMENON IN TOURISM: ECOLODGES

The term "ecolodge" was formally launched on the market at the First International Ecolodge Forum and Field Seminar held in 1994 at Maho Bay Camps in the U.S. Virgin Islands (Wood, 2002: 27; Mehta, 2007: 418; Dizdarević, 2010: 26) and Maho Bay Camps was determined as the first ecolodge (Mehta, 2007: 418). As a follow-up of the 1994 forum, TIES published the first book for ecolodge industry named "The Ecolodge Sourcebook for Planners and Developers" (Mehta, 2007: 417) which contains information on site selection, finance, planning, design, alternative energy applications, conservation education, guidelines and an impressive set of resources including a variety of architectural plans for ecolodges (Eagles, 2001: 615). Later, "The First International Ecolodge Guidelines" was published in 2002 after the Second International Conference held in 1995 in Costa Rica, which offered a definitive international definition of an ecolodge (Wood, 2002: 27; Mehta, 2007: 418). According to the definition, ecolodge is "an industry label used to identify a nature-dependent tourist lodge that meets the philosophy and principles of ecotourism" (Weaver, 2001: 147; Fennell, 2003: 169; Mehta, 2007: 418; Ceballos-Lascurain, 2008: 197; Kwan et al., 2008: 698; Raju, 2009: 47). Mehta et al. (2002) enriched the definition by utilizing existing one and the following definition was proposed (Mehta, 2007: 418):

"An ecolodge is a five- to 75- room, low-impact, nature-based, financially sustainable accommodation facility that helps protect sensitive neighbouring areas; involves and benefits local communities; offers tourists an interpretive and interactive participatory experience; provides a spiritual communion with nature and culture; and is planned, designed, constructed and operated in an environmentally and socially sensitive manner".

Ecolodges are usually small-scale, individually and locally owned businesses (Moscardo et al., 1996: 32; Wood, 2002: 36; Kwan et al., 2010: 4), rather than being part of a chain. However, there are also a number of outbound tour operators, which have ecolodge chains. For example Abercrombie & Kent Hotels and Resorts, a transnational hotel chain, is corporating with The Nature Conservancy to develop an ecolodge chain in Belize, Brazil and Peru (Honey, 1999: 67; Weaver, 2001: 150). For example, Russell et al. (1995) undertook an international ecolodges survey of 28 operators in nine regions around the world (Belize, Costa Rica, Peru, Brazil, and Ecuador, the state of Alaska, Australia, New Zealand and Africa). This study discovered that many of the lodges were found in or adjacent to protected areas, with outstanding natural beauty acting as a key to success of the operation. Most of the ecolodges sampled were small, accommodating about 24 guests, with some successful operations in Amazonia catering up to 100 guests. Although most of the ownership had been typically small scale and independent, corporate ownership was becoming more common. The authors cited the P&O line in Australia and the Hilton in Kenya as two examples of this recent phenomenon (Fennell, 2003: 173; Raju, 2009: 52).

According to The International Ecolodge Guidelines, an ecolodge should meet the following criteria, which are the key principles of ecolodges (Bien, 2002: 140; Wood, 2002: 28; International Finance Corporation, 2004: 28; Mehta, 2007: 419; Dizdarević, 2010: 27):

- Conserve the surrounding environment, both natural and cultural.
- Have minimal impact on the natural surroundings during construction.
- Fit into its specific physical and cultural contexts through careful attention to form, landscaping and color, as well as the use of localized architecture.
- Use alternative, sustainable means of water acquisition and reduces water consumption.
- Provide careful handling and disposal of solid waste and sewage.
- Meet its energy needs through passive design and combines these with their modern counterparts for greater sustainability.
- Endeavor to work together with the local community.
- Offer interpretative programs to educate both its employees and tourists about the surroundings natural and cultural environments.
- Contribute to sustainable local development through research programs.

Bricker et al. (2004) did a study for determining the location of ecolodges and nature-based lodges in countries. The 60 countries were chosen based on their high concentration of nature-based lodges, their developing (or mature) ecotourism industry, and their location in an area of high biodiversity and/or significant natural attractions. Of the total 5,459 lodges mapped (another 1,059 lodges could not be plotted because no location was available), Indonesia has the largest concentration of lodges (758),

followed by Costa Rica (590), Thailand (468), Peru (356), Ecuador (345), Guatemala (322), Mexico (304), Sri Lanka (277) and Tanzania (259). Of the lodges mapped in all 60 countries, 84 percent are located in biodiversity hotspot areas, as defined by Conservation International. The highest concentration is in Mesoamerica (1,157 lodges), followed by Indo-Burma (543 lodges). Of those ecolodges that completed the in-depth surveys, 60 percent are located within or on the periphery of an established protected area, and 39 percent are located within a private reserve (International Finance Corporation, 2004: 9). Authors marked these ecolodges on the map as seen below:

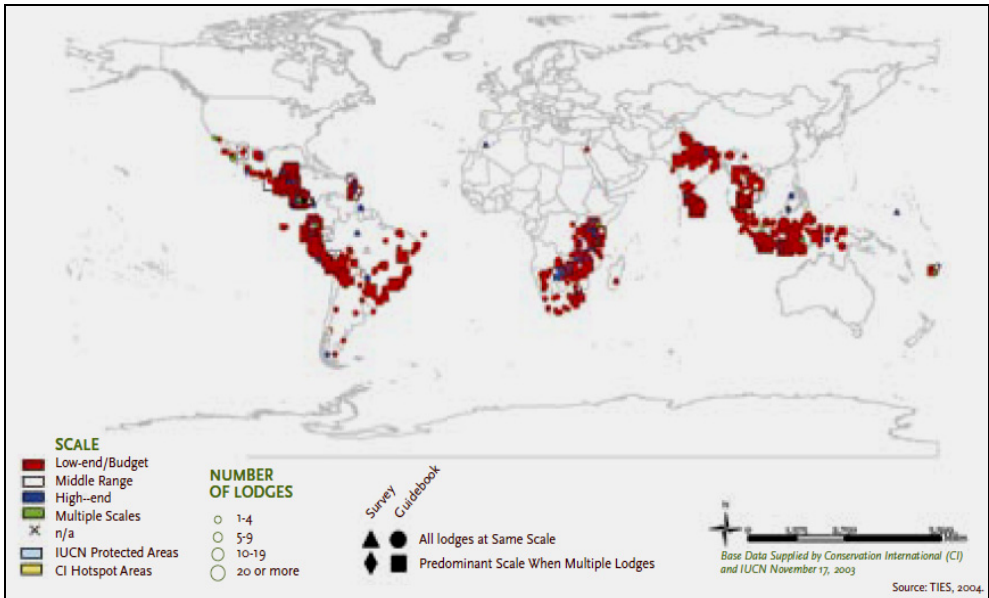


Fig. 1. Ecolodges worldwide

3. EXAMPLES OF ECOLODGES IN THE WORLD

Against all the global warming and environmental pollution which are highly discussed in all fields, hotels are also seen to make efforts for starting to take necessary precautions. The environmental friendly hotels, numbers of which increase day by day, apply various practices to minimize the damage given to the environment. While some of them do not include any electronic appliance within them, some other changes the towels and sheets only if the customer wishes to. And some hotels care about to offer organic food products. Today's travellers mind out that the hotel is environmental friendly as well as with comfort, luxury and design. In this sense, ecolodge models are seen in the tourism industry number of which is growing day by day. Features of some of such hotels may be summarized as in the following (Buckley, 2003; <http://gezz.org/index.php/seyahat/85-seyahat-onerileri/148-dunyanin-en-iyi-eko-sik-otelleri>):

Examples of ecolodges

Table 1

<p>Ngala Lodge and Game Reserve, South Africa (Africa)</p> <p>Glass and cans are recycled in nearby Nelspruit. Catering scraps are used in neighbouring communities for raising pigs. Candle ends are provided for a local village business, which recasts them and sells them back to the Lodge. Sewage is treated in multi-chambered septic-tank systems. Paper and plastic packaging are burnt in an on-site incinerator. The lodge also buys a locally made artisanal paper, manufactured from elephant dung and recycled office paper, for use in the guest rooms.</p>
<p>Rapita Lodge, Solomon Islands (Asia-Pasific)</p> <p>The tourist lodge was constructed by a village working group in the traditional style, using mangrove-pole frames and thatched walls of sago and nipah palms. The resort is run as a cooperative by the Tobakokorapa Association. Members purchase shares in the cooperative in order to receive dividends. The community shares the management responsibilities, providing staff for housekeeping, cleaning and bar and restaurant facilities. Tours are run from the village and include bush-medicine tours and river safaris. A number of young villagers work as guides. Following establishment of the lodge, the village has been able to prevent logging on community land and has banned fishing in several reef areas.</p>
<p>Rara Avis, Costa Rica (South and Central America)</p> <p>Rara Avis sponsors a butterfly-breeding project for export to northernhemisphere zoos; cultivates tree seedlings for reforestation; maintains a live collection of canopy orchids; and supports a range of research and education projects. The main tourist activities are rainforest walks and canopy climbs, principally to watch birds and other wildlife and visit forest pools and waterfalls.</p>
<p>Aurum Lodge, Canada (North America)</p> <p>Aurum Lodge is particularly deserving of the title ecolodge because of its integrated energy-efficient and low-impact environmental design and technologies, and because of its direct involvement in the conservation consequences of other local land-use practices. It has received funding from two relevant Canadian government programmes, the Renewable Energy Deployment Initiative and the Commercial Business Incentive Program. The main building has three storeys, including a partly sunken, full-plan basement which forms an integral part of the building's air circulation and energy management system. Energy-saving design features include; dual insulated walls; overhanging eaves on both upper and lower storeys; windows largely on the southern side; an integrated air circulation system with both passive convective and active ducted-fan components; double-glazed windows; heat exchangers to pre-warm incoming air; and energy-saving appliances. In addition to passive solar heating, there are various energy sources, storage systems and heat exchange mechanisms. There is a cast iron wood stove in the kitchen and a slow-combustion woodstove with a large-mass masonry mount in the main living area.</p>

Daintree Ecolodge, Australia (Australia and New Zealand)
Sewage is treated in a multi-chamber biocycle system located between the villas and the restaurant. Power is supplied from a mains line along the nearby road to Daintree Village. Used kitchen oils are collected and returned for reprocessing.
Whitepod Hotel, Switzerland (Europe)
This hotel, which is located in Switzerland, offers an environmental accommodation facility to winter sports lovers. The hotel consists of nine tents in three different types which are remarkable by their round domes. Recycled materials were used for building the tents, and in order to be ergonomical, white colour was preferred in summer and green in winter. The platforms on which the tents were placed have been designed from sustainable Swiss wood. Therefore the tents are able to be carried to any place easily without damaging the environment. The tents, in which the electricity consumption is minimized, are heated with stoves and illuminated with gasoline lamps. Water consumption is under control by a massive bath located in the main building. All the guests are using the bath in common; sheets and towels are replaced only when the guests want to.

5. CONCLUSIONS

One of the most important factors affecting the success of hotel managements in today's global competitive environment is to be able to create difference. In such an environment, the working of hotel establishments with increasing performance and customer satisfaction level depends on their strategical thinking and to be able to apply them (Seymen, 2001). Eco hotels are accepted as one of the new trends of the tourism in recent years. In an environment where environmental problems are increasing day by day, ecolodges both provide their customers to live a different holiday experience and serve the sustainable tourism efforts at an important level.

Within the frame of this study, suggestions for the entrepreneurs who wish to make investments in hotel management field may be as follows:

- The entrepreneurs who wish to make investments in hotel management field should at first well analyse where the hotel trends are heading towards, who their customers are and in what kind of environment they want to spend their holidays.
- The investors should create common projects with expert architectures, designers and marketing experts in hotel management field, particularly at planning and application levels.
- Close following of the changes in hotel trends by visual and written media and visiting of the international tourism exhibitions by the investors may help to decide what kind of an investment is possible to be made.

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