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TO DO! 2013: Winners from Cambodia, Mexico, and Iran

19th Award Ceremony of the International Contest for Socially Responsible Tourism on 5th March, 2014, at ITB Berlin

The **Chambok Community Based Ecotourism Project** in **Cambodia** at the Kirirom National Park, the regional development project of **Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda** in the Biosphere Reserve in Querétaro, **Mexico,** and the **Boomkolbeh – Turkmen Ecolodge** at the rim of the Golestan National Park in **Iran** are the winners of the TO DO! 2013.

The trophies of the international Contest for Socially Responsible Tourism will be awarded at this year's ITB on 5th March, 2014, at 2.30 pm on the main stage in hall 4.1.

Participation and Sustainability

The tourism projects awarded with the TO DO! 2013 share the same objective: to improve people's living conditions by carefully developing tourism products and services in a planned manner – in ecologically valuable areas. The most important criterion for the award is the participation of the local population in the planning and implementation of all the tourism related projects. This establishes a special connection between participation, social responsibility and sustainability.

All the three projects are situated on the rim of or directly within nature conservation areas. Due to the lack of income opportunities, illegal activities such as logging and poaching happened in the past. Through the various initiatives aimed at a touristic valorisation of scenically attractive regions, a new way of natural resource use has emerged, along with alternative income opportunities – especially for women. Furthermore, the population living in the respective regions benefits from more eco-friendly ways of dealing with nature and from the reforestation These concepts are supported with training and education programmes, partly also for tourists or for the staff of companies.

Cambodia

The **Chambok Community Based Ecotourism Project** is situated about 120 km west of Phnom Penh in a scenically attractive forest area with a diverse flora

and fauna. It has existed since 2003 and was developed in cooperation with the regional NGO Mlup Baitong. It is now managed autonomously by a democratically elected committee. According to the statutes, at least three women must be part of the committee. Even from the beginning of the project, all the community's nine villages with 750 families were involved in all decision making processes.

This is particularly remarkable, as there are only a few people in Chambok who have completed their schooling or know English. Through the work of this project, several things were achieved: For example, more than 70 charcoal pits were shut down, and wildlife hunting was brought under control. The destruction of natural sources of livelihood was stopped, a tourism infrastructure emerged. The tourism products and services offered in Chambok include home stay accommodation and small restaurants as well as a variety of nature-based activities such as hiking, bullock cart rides, or bathing at the water falls. By now, the number of excursionists and guests staying over night has reached 10,000 per year, the number of foreign guests in increasing.
Information and contact at www.chambok.org – www.mlup-baitong.org

Mexico

The **Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda (GESG)** was founded in order to improve the living conditions of people in the Sierra Gorda. GESG is a civil society cooperation project with a total of 75 initiatives and micro enterprises involved. The mountain region covering an area of about 3,900 km2 is situated in the state of Querétaro in the North of Mexico. It was declared a UNESCO biosphere reserve in 1997. The participation of the local population in the tourism development projects is an integral component of the overall concept. With the UNESCO programme "Man and the Biosphere", people's use of nature is to be aligned with the conservation of ecosystems – which was achieved in the Sierra Gorda. To create alternative income opportunities, GESG supported the development of suitable tourism products and services in the region, from accommodation and restaurants to handicraft and small museums or historical places of interest. In this way, the financial dependence on remittances from migrant family members was also reduced.
Today, GESG only has an advisory role – the business operations are in the hands of the local population. GESG supports the project mainly through marketing, training programmes, or by providing micro-credits.
Information and contact at http://sierragorda.net

Iran

The activities around the **Boomkolbeh – Turkmen Ecolodge** on the rim of the **Golestan National Park** in the North of **Iran** have also convinced the TO DO! jury, because from the beginning participation had been an essential part of the concept. In this place, decisions of concern to the village community can anyway not be made over the heads of the local people. In Tootly Tamak, a community of six extended families forms a "council of elders". The lodge, too, was set up after consultations of this council and the villagers. It is owned by a local family and leased by the managers. The clay house with a size of about 120 m2 has about 20 bedsteads. In the house, traditional items of daily use, clothes, or handicrafts are displayed, and sometimes there are small concerts. Excursions into nature and to the national park are offered on a regular basis. Tourists may only walk around the village if accompanied by a guide in order to ensure appropriate and respectful behaviour towards local people.
This project, too, has generated alternative income opportunities for the local population and strengthened civil society in the community. For the managers of the lodge, environmental education of the Iranian population is also an important concern.
Information and contact at www.turkmenecolodge.com

All three TO DO! winners provide successful examples of sustainable achievements of socially responsible concepts, especially through the intensive involvement of the local population in the development of tourism. Therefore, they are examples of best practice for other tourism destinations. The three winners are given one TO DO! trophy each. The Swiss Foundation for Solidarity in Tourism supports the projects with an additional 5,000 Swiss Francs each, meaning to support the further development of the projects.

The TO DO! Contest Socially Responsible Tourism is supported by the Engagement Global/ German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Protestant Agency for Diaconia and Development/Tourism Watch, forum anders reisen, ITB Berlin, the Swiss Foundation for Solidarity in Tourism (SST), and Studiosus Reisen München GmbH.

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TO DO! 2013 Award Ceremony: ITB Berlin, 5th March, 2.30 pm, hall 4.1, main stage. Please also visit the Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung at ITB Berlin 2014: hall 4.1, stall no. 231