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Green shine in new star ratings of Sri Lankan hotels

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All registered hotels in Sri Lanka should now have a star rating – according to a new regulation, which came into effect recently. Star classifications are primarily aimed at improving the quality of services offered by hotels. The star ratings can also be used as a marketing tool. Official star ratings are one source of information on quality for

customers among others such as customer ratings in booking and review websites, information obtained through travel agents, publications, etc.

In addition to imposing a mandatory requirement for a star rating for all registered hotels, it is noteworthy that the requirements or criteria for classifying hotels have also been revised. This has been a long-felt requirement in the industry as the previous criteria were much outdated. Most interestingly, a new set of requirements/criteria are now being introduced in the new list to cover environment and community aspects.

Environmental aspects in new system

Accordingly, eight non-mandatory requirements under the title of 'Environment, Community and Sustainability' have been included. (See Box 1) They are applicable for any star category of tourist hotels.

Accordingly, energy management aspects are highlighted in the form of improving energy use efficiency, energy conservation and use of alternative environment-friendly energy sources. This would help to reduce operational costs as energy costs consist of around 18 percent of total operational costs on average (Miththapala, 2011). It will have positive impacts certainly on the natural environment. Waste, both solid and waste water, has also been incorporated to new requirements. Environmental pollution is minimized by discouraging the use of polluting materials. The last criterion aims to offer benefits to local communities and it relates to the 'social' dimension of sustainable tourism.

Research findings

It is interesting to note that the star classified hotels are performing better in terms of their environmental management, according to a research study carried out by the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS) based on the registered hotels in the Western Province. The research covered energy, water and waste management aspects in 98 registered hotels in the province.

Accordingly, classified hotels adopt around nine good (energy, water, waste management) practices on average, where for unclassified hotels it is around six. Only a few hotels interviewed have sewer and wastewater treatment facilities and it was observed as a common aspect for both classified and unclassified hotels.

It indicates that 'being classified' increases the hotel's orientation towards improved environmental management practices. Therefore, incorporation of the environmental aspects into official star rating system is likely to bring in positive impacts.

As per the study sample, hotels in the unclassified category are smaller, with an average number of rooms of 42 per hotel. In the classified category, the average number of rooms per hotel was 110.

When asked about the constraints in adopting good environmental management practices, lack of will and commitment were mentioned around 28 percent of the unclassified hotels in the sample. Also, around one fourth of unclassified hotels are facing space constraints for implementation certain practices – may be owing to relatively smaller scale of their operations.

Reflections

Inclusion of environmental aspects into the country's official star rating system should be viewed as a plus point for Sri Lanka as a destination, which is ambitious about promoting sustainable tourism. Though the environment-related requirements are not mandatory, the hotels, which follow the requirements, are to obtain more marks against their competitors. Sri Lanka should include this aspect in its marketing activities to gain attention of environment-conscious tourists.

However, inclusion of environmental aspects to day-to-day activities of hotels involves investments. Particularly, small registered hotels will have to be assisted with capacity building and training support, as well as financial terms.

Periodical reviews of the set requirements for star rating are also required given the set targets of the tourism industry. Changing aspects of consumer demand, competition with other destinations and feedback of stakeholders including the hoteliers should be necessarily considered in reviews.

(Kanchana Wickramasingha is a Research Economist at the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS). To view the article online and comment, visit the IPS blog 'Talking Economics' – www.ips.lk/talkingeconomics)

Environment, community and sustainability aspects in new star rating system

1The hotel shall be equipped with a sewer and wastewater treatment plant/system approved by the Central Environmental Authority (CEA) and maintained in good working order. The treated effluent shall be recycled to effectively reduce the consumption of water. Performance test certificates for the plant shall be available.

2Solar hot water heating shall be used for the production of hot water requirements.

3Effective, energy-efficient methods of hot water production such as air to water heat exchangers from air cooled AC systems, heat pump systems, etc., shall be used.

4Alternative, renewable fuel and/or energy shall be used (eg. Grilicidia as a fuel, wind energy, solar energy for electricity generation, etc.

5Effective energy conservation measures shall be implemented. The effectiveness of the measures shall be supported with historical data.

6A system shall be in place for recycling of waste. Food waste shall be composted or used as animal fodder. Solid waste shall be separated for recycling. A very clear arrangement shall be in place for disposing of separated solid waste for recycling.

7The use of plastic, polythene and PVC shall be discouraged. A policy to minimize the use of the above items shall be in place. The use of recyclable containers such as glass bottles, glass jars, etc., shall be encouraged.

8A system shall be in place to pass on benefits to the neighbourhood and the area. Policy on recruitment and procurement shall have built in mechanisms to make the above process meaningful.

(Source:

Extraordinary Gazette No. 1963/28, 20th April 2016)

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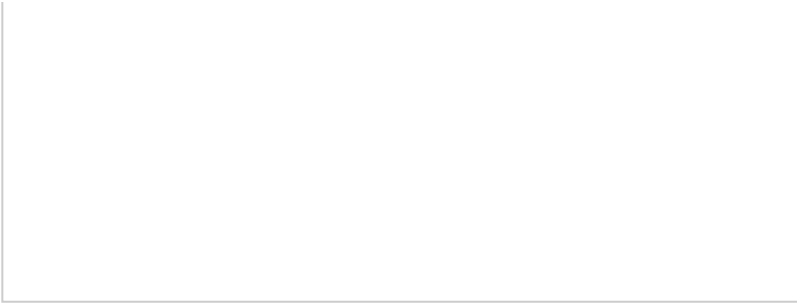
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