



From a Basement to the World

- The story of Green Key



Green Key
HORESTA • Vodroffsvej 32 • DK-1900 Frederiksberg C
T +45 35 24 80 80 • Mail: green-key@horesta.dk

Green-key.dk



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Green-key.dk

The story of the International Eco-label of the Tourism Industry

Green Key is an extraordinary example of an idea developed by forward-thinking individuals and organizations. 20 years ago they realized that the need to protect the environment is both imperative and, from a business perspective, basic common sense. In other words, there is a financial as well as a social justification in doing the right thing.

On the basis of Denmark Green Key has shown its potential as an instrument to promote the company's eco-management and as an opportunity to create sustainable products and experiences.



The guest will have an opportunity to add an extra dimension to their choice of hotel, campsite, hostel, attractions etc. The employee will gain pride and satisfaction in working for a company that takes responsibility for its environmental footprint. The company will have an opportunity to improve their bottom line as well as a marketing advantage. But the biggest winner is and always will be the environment.

Green Key is created in a joint venture with environmental organizations, the tourism industry and public institutions based on a pragmatic and trustworthy Danish model. It has created a unique non-profit environmental certification which focuses on the collaboration between the companies involved in a pace where the company itself sees the rationale in taking the lead.

At this point Green Key has expanded to 50 different countries and has been awarded to almost 2400 tourist organizations. Most recently Green Key has travelled to Mexico and Kenya where hotels have been awarded the International Eco-label of the Tourism Industry.

Every participant who have helped create and develop Green Key to the success it is today can be proud of the result we have achieved together. With this historic publication we would like to acknowledge the effort and commitment everyone has put in. We would also like to thank everyone involved for your cooperation with Green Key over the past 20 years.

The job is far from done and as founder and co-owner of Green Key, HORESTA is looking forward to continuing to disseminate and further develop Green Key– for the benefit of the tourism industry, society and the environment.

Kind Regards,

Kirsten Munch Andersen
President of Green Key Denmark



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"The reason for the success of Green Key is the fact that the industry sees it as its own eco-label....The ownership is very important – especially when we first started but also to this day."

- Lone Njor Hulth,
former president of DGN
and then CEO of HORESTA



When the Climate Took Green Key's Archive

The climate changes spoke for themselves and showed us that the effort is necessary when the historic Green Key archive was washed away. In connection with two severe rain storms in Copenhagen in 2011 and 2014 the entire historical archive was destroyed due to water damage.



Green Keys 20th Anniversary, Vejlsohus in 2014

This historic document is based on information collected from archives and key people who have or have had an impact on Green Key.

In addition to first-hand accounts from the people involved, a number of archives that wasn't drowned, including HORESTA's electronic archive, have been searched.

Simultaneously, a number of other relevant people have had the opportunity to contribute with clarifications and their version of the story.



From a Basement to the Tourism Industry

The first couple of steps were taken in the basement of HORESTA's old headquarters, where then CEO Mogens Beier met with Jan Eriksen, CEO of The Outdoor Council, and Jørn Grønkjær, former President of the Danish Association of Tourism Managers.

Lars Blicher-Hansen joined HORESTA as Deputy Director in 1994 and took over from Mogens Beier as Vice Chairman of the Board in 1995. After a few years Lars transferred to The Danish Tourism Board (later VisitDenmark) which he represented for a period of time with a continuous seat on the board.

The inspiration for Green Key came from Blue Flag in particular which had become an international success. The idea was to create a similar concept for tourism businesses as for hotels. Initially the Green Key initiative was met with some scepticism as well as resistance from many people within the industry when first established.

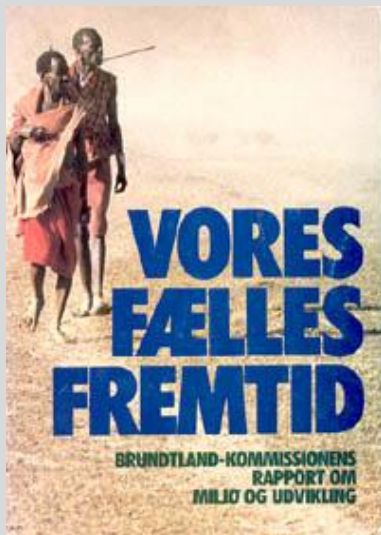
The Political Landscape

Green Key was created during a time where the environment – despite the many sceptics – was slowly given a bigger role in the political landscape with Ministers of the Environment such as Lone Dybkjær from 1988-90 and Svend Auken from 1994-2001.

The support from then Minister Lone Dybkjær meant a great deal and the fact that she became Chairman of the opposition.

At the same time there was focus on tourism with its own ministry and former Communications and Tourism Minister Arne Melchior, 1993 – 1994, was an advocate for Green Key and Blue Flag.

The effort continued to build on a wave of focus on the environment with "Our Common Future" of 1987 and later the Rio Declaration of 1992.



Gro Harlem Brundtland, who was appointed Head of UN Environment and Development Commission in 1983, published in 1987 the report "Our Common Future" also known as The Brundtland Report.

The report which was compiled by "The World Commission on Environment and Development" under the UN, focused on global sustainability for the first time. It was addressed to the various governments, the business community but first and foremost to the people whose welfare served as the main objective for the environmental and development policy.

The Rio Declaration is a document that was produced at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992. It consists of 27 principles that define people's right to development and their responsibility to protect the common environment. The Agenda 21-effort is another important result of the same conference.



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HORESTA • Vodroffsvej 32 • DK-1900 Frederiksberg C
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Development of the Hotel Criteria

The criteria development was a slow process but experience and knowledge from Blue Flag already existed and it was important to adjust the criteria to the industry.

Yes, my office at St. Annæ Place by the Neptun Hotel provided the framework for the many meetings associated with laying the foundation for Green Key.

- Bente Noyons,
then Manager, Neptun Hotel

The criteria were drawn up in the basement of the old HORESTA in collaboration with The Danish Association of Tourism Managers, the Outdoor Council and later the Danish Tourism Board.

But also Neptun Hotel provided the framework for many meetings associated with laying the foundation for the regulation.

Involvement of Industry Knowledge

In relation to the comprehensive work HORESTA 's classification inspector also joined as it was imperative that the criteria were developed with knowledge of the industry. The inspector often visited the hotels and thus gained knowledge of what could and could not be done.

This was important for both the hotels and the organizers not to destroy the future members' core service.



Types of Criteria

Apart from mandatory and optional criteria time-dependent criteria were introduced from the beginning so that members had the time to meet some harder requirements. Since this was a national programme it was alright to adjust the criteria along the way whenever knowledge was obtained.

There were endless discussions about sub-meters in the hotels, where to place them and about public transportation and bicycles at the hotels which today is a natural fixture in many places.

Training as Part of Green Key

One of the major challenges was to include the training part. Not everybody believed it to be relevant or realistic to include this part in the requirements. Some of the challenges were the many nationalities and languages spoken among the staff and some of the tasks, such as cleaning, were outsourced to subcontractors. But the training part was eventually included and is today one of the areas in which Green Key differs from other brands.



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Other Business Types Connect

When the foundation for the hotel criteria was laid, requirements for other business types were devised the following years.



Green Key at Feddet Camping

Camping Sites:

The first camping sites were labelled in the year 2000. Before then the requirements had been developed and adjusted to campsites in collaboration with the Camping Council and with inspiration from France, which had already introduced Green Key to camping.

Holiday Homes and Agencies:

The criteria for holiday homes and their letting agencies were developed in collaboration with FB – The Danish Holiday Home Letters Trade Association.

The first holiday homes were awarded in 1997 where they connected with the letting agencies. Together with the Trade Association they ensured the homes met the requirements. In connection with FB's resignation from the steering committee the programme closed down in 2010.



Green Key holiday homes



Eurest joins Green Key

Restaurants:

In 2002 criteria were composed for restaurants where several Eurest-canteens held memberships

In recent years, the programme in this field has come to a halt. Though Danish restaurant criteria exist, and have inspired international requirements, they are not currently in use in Denmark.



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Ongoing Revisions

Green Key has raised the bar by continuously adjusting the criteria – both nationally and internationally

In 2012 the Danish criteria went through a major revision based on a long and open consultation process.

The international criteria are also tightened at long intervals but they are not as tight as they are in Denmark due to the fact that Denmark has worked with the environment and this system for many years.



Reasons for Membership

From the beginning there were different reasons for becoming a member.

- At first it was about showcasing an environmental profile, thus improving the image of the place.
- Later on the members realized the huge savings potential in becoming a member.
- It also became clear to more people that a membership had an impact on/a significance for the staff. They felt motivated and bonded over a common goal.

"In connection with an event at the Scandic Hotel, then-director shared over the canapés that changing all of the light bulbs had cost the hotel DKK80.000. He paused for a moment and sighed: But the DKK80.000 is recouped in 11 to 13 months.

This was the first time we had an actual number for the savings potential. Energy saving light bulbs were really expensive back then but they quickly paid for themselves."

- Jan Eriksen, former director of the Outdoor Council

These are some of the same reasons for membership today (2016 ed.), where some have been further strengthened.

Society and the world's increased focus on CSR and the environment has made this even more topical.

More and more companies require an environmental profile when choosing hotels and conference venues. A business could end up being de-selected if they don't do something for the environment.

"There is an increasing demand for environmentally certified hotels especially from major companies."

- Jens Zimmer Christensen,
Chairman, HORESTA

Public companies are also putting greater emphasis on the environmental profile of the hotels and conference venues, either in their procurement or their tender procedures.

Today it is basic common sense being conscious of the potential savings by focusing on the environment. This action could be the difference between black and red figures on the bottom line.



Organisation and Administration

Both the Secretariat and the presidency have changed hands over the past 20 years.

Before the establishment of Green Key there was shared presidency between the initiating organizations. The first real president was former Danish Minister of the Environment, Lone Dybkjær, who at the time had a seat in the European Parliament. Subsequently the presidency has been held by HORESTA.

The Secretariat has moved a few times and has been handled by various people. At first it was an independent secretariat but was transferred to HORESTA in 2000.

Membership Progress

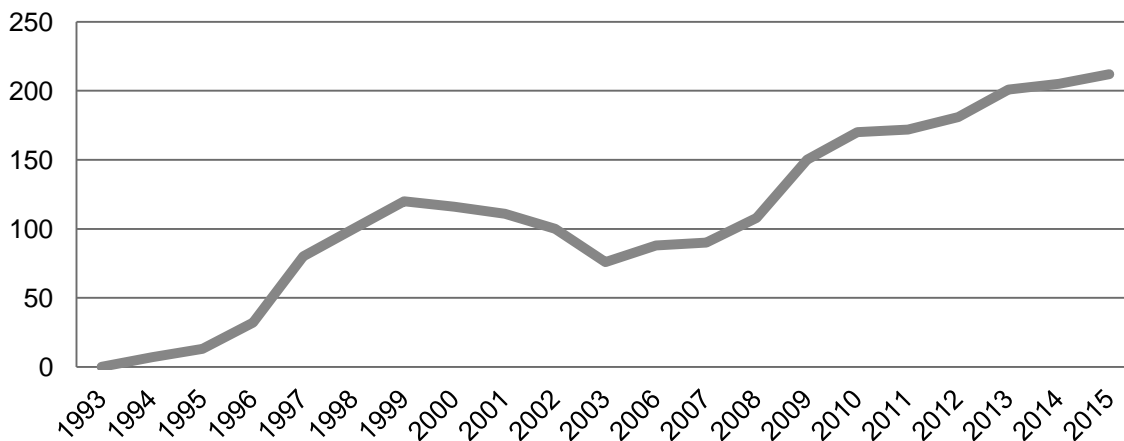
Today we have members from various types of businesses. On an international level, it is possible to label attractions, bed & breakfasts and even dessert camps in the Arabic Countries

In Denmark it is the hotels, conference venues, hostels, camping sites and sports stadiums. Previously we've had members from tourist offices, holiday homes and restaurants.

Membership Progress in Denmark

The membership progress has peaked twice, the last peak not yet finished. The number rose slowly the first couple of years and reached a respectable level with more than 100 businesses towards 2000.

Total number of Green Keys in Denmark



Source: HORESTA and KU

After the millennium there was a decline in the number of Green Key businesses. It actually declined so much that the steering committee was contemplating shutting down the programme.

COP15 and the EU Presidency Reboots Green Key

Then the second peak started leading up to COP15 in 2009, where the number of members/memberships increased significantly as the meeting was conducted as the first sustainable climate summit.



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The efforts continued during the Danish EU presidency in 2012 when many of the same players joined forces in a bid to carry the presidency in a sustainable way with no increased costs.



Green Key flag at Bella Centre and stall during COP15

Latest Development

Though some businesses have left the programme the number of memberships has been steadily climbing – notably carried by the hotel- and conference venues and sport facilities. In 2013 Green Key reached a milestone with 200 businesses labelled.



Bella Sky with Green Key label

Traditional Members

The first Green Keys were awarded to Hotel Esplanaden and the Neptun Hotel in Copenhagen. In other parts of the country Vejlsøhus in Silkeborg and the Sinatur Chain were also awarded.

Radisson BLU was one of the first hotel chains to focus on the environment and was part of the initiative in the very beginning. They subsequently left in favour of the Nordic Eco-label, Svanemaerket, but re-joined in 2015.

In Denmark, many of the larger hotels have jumped on the Green Wagon - both individual companies and most chains.

There is still a possibility for an increase on the hostel and camping front, some of which have been there from the start.



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Finances

In the start-up phase Green Key received DKK130.000 in funds from The Green Foundation in 1995.

Apart from the beginning, the economy of Green Key has primarily rested on three parts:

1. Contributions from the Steering Committee
2. Membership Fees
3. Funds from the Host

Ad 1. Contributions from the Steering Committee

An agreement was made with the members of the steering committee to pay an annual fixed amount for secretariat services.

Ad 2. The Membership Fee

From the start there has been a membership fee to participate in the programme. The significance of the fee has varied according to the number of members. In tough times, revenues have obviously been smaller and therefore there has been a reliance on other funds, while it was and still is easier to cover expenses in good times.

Ad 3. Funds from the Host

For a period of time Green Key has been hosted by an organization such as HORESTA. In times of trouble, the host has had to act as an economic backup, as has been the case with HORESTA.

Green Key has also benefited from the knowledge and probably funds as well from the environmental projects HORESTA has run concurrently.

Internationally

Internationally, member countries must pay an annual fee per membership to an international secretariat. This amount varies according to the number of members from each country.

The various international secretariats have contributed with favourable solutions for the accommodation of the secretariat in addition to sponsorship revenues. Today the international effort is under the FEE Secretariat.

There is a difference between how the various Green Key economies are put together and how big a portion of the expenses is covered by membership fees. It differs in correlation with each nation's organizational support and organizing as well as the prospect of sponsorship and funding.



International Progress

When Green Key was initially devised, the idea was not to make it a global regime. Inspired by Blue Flag and the FEEE collaboration it became a possibility.

There were several inquiries from different countries including Sweden but in certain Danish circles there were some scepticism and caution against making the brand international.

But more queries and the growing threat from other players who began to invent other brands and competitors such as Green Globe, The Nordic Eco-label (Svanemaerket) and the EU Flower spurred the process toward making the brand global.

Part of FEE(E)

In 1998 it was decided that Green Key was to be presented at the FEEE General Assembly. Jan Erik-sen took to the podium to tell about the initiative, as were the case the following year, though not in 2000.

When Green Key was brought to the General Assembly in Copenhagen in 2001, the French shared that, since the presentation in 1998 a certificate, *Les Clefs Verte*, had been introduced to France. Therefore several places had already been marked where most of them were campsites.

It was then decided that Green Key was to go international. That same year FEE removed one of its "E's" (Europa) and became global, rather than a European organization.

In 2002 Green Key became FEE's 5 programme but it was a very slow start as it was difficult to get through to Caribbean members due to the existence of Green Globe.



HOTREC

Alongside his work with FEE the hotel organization HOTREC was also involved. Niels Nygaard, who was chairman of HORESTA and HOTREC had Jan Erik-sen give a lecture on Green Key at the HOTREC conference in Malta in 2000.

This and the support of Niels Nygaard helped create an international breakthrough as it gave tailwind to Green Key in relation to HOTREC thus gaining further acceptance in HORESTA.

It was supported by the fact that *Flower* of hotels had begun to stir in the EU and HOTREC preferred to support an initiative rooted in the industry rather than one from the EU.



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HORESTA and the International Effort

HORESTA slowly entered the international circuit. Greenland joined in 2000 with Hotel Arctic and in 2001 Sweden joined Green Key with several hotels and a youth hostel. The Faroe Islands joined with one single company from 2008 to 2012.

From 2001 to 2003 HORESTA ran an "Estonian Green Key Concept" supported by funding from the Ministry of Trade and Industry through the Danish Tourist Board, which aimed to establish Green Key in Estonia.

In 2002 HORESTA made an agreement with FEE, in which it appeared that a steering committee of two representatives from FEE and two of the owners of the so called Green Key Organization was to be set up. In the same contract it was agreed that the international coordination was to be shared. Denmark and HORESTA were responsible for the Northern European countries incl. the UK, Holland and Germany, while FEE France was responsible for Southern Europe as well as Morocco and Turkey.

International Secretariat

From 2008 the international coordination was handled exclusively by FEE France, while HORESTA as representative of the owners retained its commitment to the international steering committee.

After a few years in France and Holland the secretariat was gathered into one unified FEE office in Copenhagen.

2002-2007	Shared coordination between HORESTA Denmark and FEE France
2008-2009	FEE France
2009-2011	FEE Holland
2011-2013	Coordination of the Outdoor Council
2013 →	FEE office in Copenhagen with Green Key International Secretariat



Development of the International Criteria

This was a challenge for the international steering committee to develop the international criteria as several countries had to come to an agreement. The requirements had to be developed in an international context as some countries were reluctant to transfer to the Danish criteria. This was despite the fact that Denmark had years of experience with the scheme and had been accustomed to working with the industry.

In 2013 an international review of the criteria was conducted, while a new one is on the way for 2016.

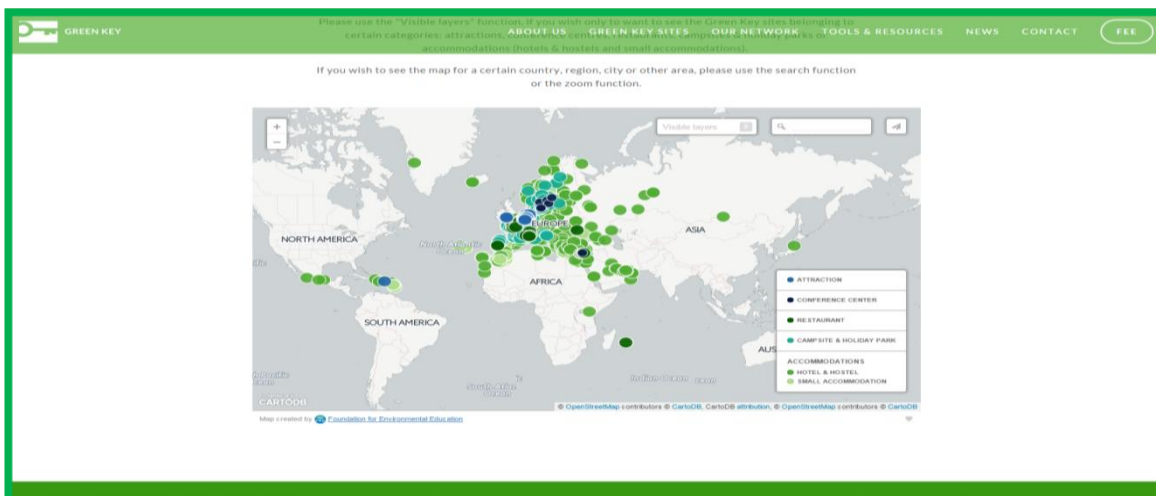


Green Key at the Radisson BLU Hotel Astana in Kazakhstan in 2014 and Belgrade, Serbia in 2015

International Dissemination

As evident, more and more countries have joined the Green Key Initiative. Initially HORESTA, helped start the programme in some countries but via the collaboration with FEE things suddenly happened quickly.

In 2009 17 countries had joined the programme but in the following years agreements are made with international hotel chains that further advances the progress. To Carlson-Residor, which handles the Radisson BLU hotels, Green Key becomes the preferred eco-label of the hotel chain. This means that Green Key is suddenly present in countries with no FEE/Green Key office. Here the International Coordination or the neighbouring countries act as supervisor. At the turn of 2015 and 2016 Green Key is now present in over 50 countries and in more than 2350 tourism businesses where the majority is located in Europe and quite a few in the Arabic countries.



New Green Key website that shows the reach of the programme



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The Year the Countries Joined Green Key

Year	Countries
1994	Denmark
1998	France
2000	Greenland via Denmark
2001	Sweden
2002	FEE-programme approved
2003	Estonia
2005	Lithuania
2006	Latvia and Portugal
2007	Belgium, Holland, Italy and Tunisia
2008	Cyprus, (Faroe Islands) and Morocco
2009	Greece, Japan and Jordan
2010	Puerto Rico and The Arab Emirates
2011	Bahrain, (Jamaica), Lebanon, Oman, Poland, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Ukraine
2012	Bulgaria, Croatia, Egypt, England, Georgia, Kuwait, Malta, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, Czech Republic, Turkey, Germany and Austria
2013	(Albania), Dominican Republic and Qatar
2014	Finland, Iceland, Israel and Kazakhstan
2015	Luxembourg, Mexico, Norway, Serbia, Sint Maarten and Wales
2016	Kenya...

Albania, Faroe Islands and Jamaica have subsequently left Green Key.



International Coordination and Governance



The first international Green Key assembly outside Europe was held in Japan in 2013

International Green Key assemblies are held every one to two years where the national coordinators meet in order to discuss certain issues and share experiences. For many years these meetings were held in Europe, but as the initiative became more international the first meeting outside Europe was held in Japan in 2013.

The international steering committee– which is also the Board and the decision-making body– holds meetings 2-4 times a year. Here important decisions for the operation and future of Green Key are made. As are strategic planning and decisions regarding the approval of criteria and new candidates who do not have a national Green Key office.

Since the agreement of 2002 the steering committee has consisted of two representatives from FEE and two representatives from the industry (The Camping Council, Danhostel and HORESTA).

Inspiration to the Outside World

Green Key has also served as inspiration around the world. When the world's largest organization for the business meetings and event industry, Meeting Professionals International (MPI) created the organization's "White Paper on Green Meetings" it was based on the experience and the principles of Green Key.

Around the same time, a hotel organization in Canada felt so inspired that they developed their own Green Key label, which is now available in North America, where tourism enterprises can be awarded between one and five keys.



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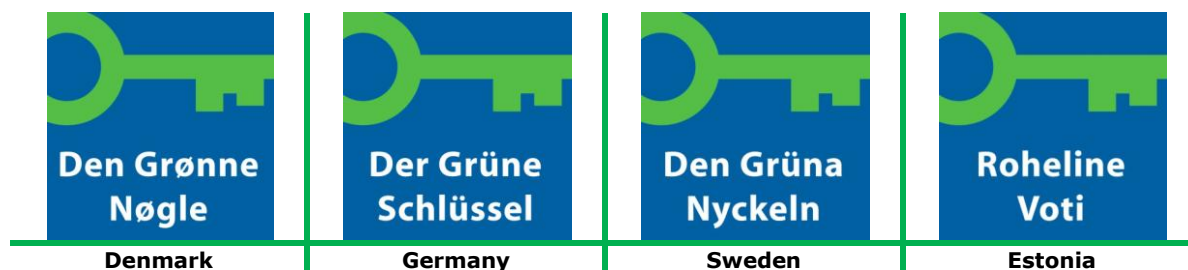
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Logos and Names Through the Years

As can be seen below, the logo has changed its expression since the system was first launched.



As a direct consequence of tourism being international, Denmark switched its name to the English "Green Key" instead of the Danish "Den Grønne Nøgle" in 2009, though it is still used in some circles. In many countries there is still the national name, but it has been decided to slowly phase it out so that all countries in the future will be using the "Green Key".



Other Eco-labels

There have been many eco-labels on the market over the years. Around the Millennium, a professor at Lund University had researched the number of eco-labels and the result was around 90, where more than 2/3 parts were related to accommodation. Many of them were local and regional brands but a large part of them did not get a long life.

The most significant brands have been Green Globe, The Swan and the Flower.

- **Green Globe** and Green Key had around 2000 negotiations regarding a merger. During negotiations it became clear that at the time, Green Globe was a private organization, which was about making money and lacked credibility. Therefore an agreement was not signed.
- **The Nordic Eco-label, The Swan** appeared alongside Green Key, and it came as a surprise to Green Key that the Scandic hotels that focused so strongly on the environment, chose to have their hotels Swan-labelled. It had to do with the fact that the hotel chain was able to mark the rest of their Scandinavian hotels with the same label since Green Key at the time was not represented in Norway and Sweden.
- **The EU Flower** is not - with few exceptions - widely used in the tourism industry. Several attempts at financial support for the programme has not borne fruit. The EU paid the FDM Camping sites in Denmark to join the system but as the support stopped so did the campsites.

Denmark has concurrently been collaborating with Green Key, The EU Flower and The Swan in connection with the webpage www.groennekonferencer.dk, the COP15 and by Green Key recommending the use of Swan and Flower-labelled products and suppliers



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Important Years

1992-94	Preliminary work for the establishment of Green Key by HORESTA, the Danish Association of Tour Managers and the Outdoor Council.
1994	Green Key is founded in Denmark on the initiative of HORESTA, the Danish Association of Tour Managers, the Outdoor Council and VisitDenmark.
1995-96	Camping sites, hostels and holiday homes join Green Key.
1998	Green Key is established in France for hotels and campsites.
2002	Green Key becomes a FEE-programme with access to FEE countries. The international secretariat is established in HORESTA, Denmark and FEE, France.
2008	The international coordination is moved from Denmark to France.
2009	The international coordination is moved from France to Holland. COP15 in Copenhagen with focus on Green Key.
2012	The international coordination is moved to FEE-office in the Outdoor Council. 35 have joined the programme and around 2000 businesses.
2013	Independent FEE office in Denmark with Green Key coordination.
2015	50 countries have joined Green Key and approximately 2350 businesses.



The Long-term Perspective

In connection with these meetings there have been questions on how the initiators and relevant people see the future for the programme from a long-term perspective.

More people point to an expansion of the system so that it contains several types of businesses in tourism. It could be:

- Attractions, including museums, rides and the zoo
- Events and festivals
- Cruising
- Labelling of tourist agencies and tourist offices
- Restart Restaurants and catering

In Jordan a Green Key for Desert Camps has been established, while Cyprus has been looking at the development of criteria for cruise ships.

Several in the group have noted that Green Key could play a role or even develop a labelling system for Green Destinations inspired by Destination 21.

With several types of businesses, synergy, visibility and an even greater effort to protect the environment is achieved.



20th Anniversary celebratory cake in 2014 at the FEE General Assembly in the UN-City, Copenhagen, Granly Kindergarten singing Happy Birthday at Vejlsøhus, Silkeborg



From a Basement to the World

The international eco-label of tourism, Green Key, was established 20 years ago and is rewarded to more than 200 Danish tourism companies. It exists in over 50 countries in more than 2.350

Businesses the world over.

Green Key is an example of a fruitful collaboration between the private industry, interest groups and public authorities. A successful system has been created based on the willingness and motivation within the business community to choose eco-friendly and sustainable solutions.

This publication tells the story of the birth and start-up phase of Green Key and how this programme slowly but surely has manifested itself in the tourism industry and has now become the most widespread eco-label in Danish Tourism. The publication also outlines how the international development of Green Key was set in motion and how the system has since become the most widely used eco-label of the international tourism industry.



The publication is composed by the Green Man of Tourism: Mikal Holt Jensen, executive secretary of Green Key Denmark, seen here with Marketing Director Claus Frank Hansen from Hotel Nyborg Strand at the Meeting and Event Fair 2014



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