

# Setting standards with EarthCheck

Choosing a venue with a sustainability programme that is third-party certified is the only way to be sure of its integrity. So what's it all about and why is this particular system so well regarded? By *Megan Gell*

EarthCheck is the largest environmental benchmarking, certification and management solution used by the travel and tourism industry, and the leading programme in-market. Organisations use it to guide their sustainability initiatives and validate their carbon claims.

## What is it?

EarthCheck was jointly developed by the Australian government-funded Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC) and Brisbane-based company, EC3 Global.

It is a valuable resource for organisations wanting to begin or improve their sustainability programmes by using an independent auditor. At its heart is an online benchmarking system that tracks and measures resource use and waste output, solutions for design and operational efficiencies, and the encouragement corporate social responsibility.

There is also a wealth of resources at the EarthCheck website, [www.earthcheck.org](http://www.earthcheck.org). These include video case studies, profiles of benchmarked and certified members, fact sheets, university-based research reports and more.

EC3 Global CEO Stewart Moore, says: "We expect these resources to help business managers better understand the benefits of sustainable practices."

"Although they've been developed for the travel and tourism industry, they're of benefit to the wider community as well, as they help clarify the benefits of using an environmental management system that provides benchmarking and offers transparency through independent, third-party audits."

## How does it work?

EarthCheck certification begins with Bronze Benchmarked Status,



**Banyan Tree is one of the leading Asian hotel to have embraced the EarthCheck programme**

which involves submitting a year's worth of operational data and undergoing an independent audit.

Each year progress is measured. If goals are met, the organisation can move up the ranks. Silver, Gold and Platinum Certification all involve an assessment of its compliance, approach, performance and communication over a set number of years.

## Who uses it?

Many major hotel chains in Asia have established group-wide sustainability programmes using EarthCheck. Accor, Langham Hotels, InterContinental Hotels Group, Banyan Tree and Dusit International are all leaders here.

Convention and exhibition centres (CECs) also use it. Coex in Seoul, KLCC Convention Centre in Kuala Lumpur and all the major CECs across Australia are benchmarked.

The results are staggering. For example, Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre has reduced water consumption by 47 per cent and volume of waste sent to landfill by 51 per cent.

Entire destinations are also



beginning to enlist. On the back of Coex's successful benchmarking, the Korea Business Council for Sustainable Development (KBCSD) and EarthCheck have established a public-private partnership based on sustainable tourism.

This will boost Korea's competitiveness as a tourism destination and raise public awareness of the benefits of sustainable practices.

"Korea has shown strong leadership in this region by being proactive with this initiative," says Moore.

## How can it help me create sustainable events?

Sustainable events are as much a mindset as anything and it begins

at the event's inception. For example, holding the event in a location that minimises the carbon emissions of delegates travelling to the event.

Working with a venue that has a third-party certified sustainability programme such as EarthCheck is another major choice that can reduce the environmental impact of your event long after it is over.

But the most important part is building awareness. Many EarthCheck-certified properties offer teambuilding and off-site programmes with sustainability and CSR as part of their overall commitment.

Delegate feedback is quite positive, particularly among those who attend a lot of events, but rarely get the chance to engage with the destination much less the local community.

Shared tasks are a great way to break the ice and encourage bonding, especially when they make a positive impact. These experiences can often be what delegates often remember most and what they talk about when they get home. ■