

## **ECO-LABEL AS A SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION TOOL**

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Eco-labels are tools that businesses can implement under the assessment of environmental agencies and conservation institutions as an evidence of their care for the environment and their conservation efforts. Our team proposed the creation of a new eco-label at the micro-scale based on a number of actions involving the local small enterprises. We suggest this tool to actively involve the owners of small hotels and restaurants in the nature conservation programs in the Tortuguero area. Tortuguero is a village located in the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica. The focus of this eco-label is the contribution of a given business in the elimination/reduction of the anthropogenic impact on the nesting sea turtle population of Tortuguero. The establishments that join this initiative will be rewarded with an eco-label that identifies them as a responsible business with nature. Some of the proposed actions that would qualify for the awarding of such eco-label are: reforestation with native species along the coast line, waste separation, reduction of single use plastics, changing white lights to turtle friendly alternatives, etc. This program is expected to lead to a significant involvement of the local enterprises in helping the Sea Turtle Conservancy (STC) achieve their short and mid-term goals in the area such as: reducing the number of light sources close to the beach that may affect the orientation of nesting individuals, increasing the vegetation density in the path along the beach, decreasing the use of non-reusable plastic items (bags, straws, etc.), more recycling bins, and setting up regular beach clean-ups. Finally, once the eco-label is implemented, we will assess the commitment of the local businesses of Tortuguero regarding the protection of the natural resources which they rely on. At the current stage of the program, we have undertaken an informative campaign within the local business owners to explain what the main sources of anthropogenic impact in the Tortuguero area are (light pollution, plastic waste, etc.), and how can they be detected and mitigated. We have already experienced a good response from the participants and the eco-label is seen positively as it would set a difference against their competitors. In this first edition of the program, 12 hotels have participated and 10 of them have won the gold award" and 2 the "silver award" for their involvement in the project.