Studienkreis
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TO DO Award 2022 goes to India

»Himalayan Ecotourism« works in the Great Himalayan National Park in the North of India as a local cooperative and tourism enterprise | Trekking tourism takes tour guides' concerns into account | Socially responsible project to ensure income for local people

Seefeld, 08/03/2022 – The Institute for Tourism and Development (Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung) gives its TO DO Award 2022 to **»Himalayan Ecotourism«** (HET) which offers trekking tours to a national park in the North of India – and at the same time represents the interests of the population in this region in the process of tourism development.

The foundation of HET is strongly linked to the history of the Great Himalayan National Park. UNESCO declared the region a World Natural Heritage in 2014. Following the decision by UNESCO, hiking and mountaineering tourism in the region increased significantly. As treks and expeditions over several days are not possible without local guides and porters, tour guides got a lot of job opportunities – but were employed at minimal wages.

Stephan Marchal, a Belgian social entrepreneur, personally got to know this exploitative system. He decided to make his experience available and assist local people in setting up a cooperative to fight for fair working conditions. Local tour operators first refused to contract the members of the cooperative who then founded a tourism company of their own – »Himalayan Ecotourism«. The company works as an incoming agency bringing visitors and groups to the cooperative.

Self-determination and Self-efficacy

The income ensured that the project did not depend on government funding and donors. Part of the income from tourism is retained to cover administrative costs; another part is used to buy equipment (tents, sleeping bags, etc.) and finance promotion. Wages are fixed by the members of the cooperative

themselves, considering both their demands and market rates. In addition, other HET projects for women in the region (e.g. the production, sale and dispatch of soap and oil) contributed to increasing family incomes. Members also started to offer homestay accommodation. In these ways, a major part of the income from tourism benefits the local population. HET is a social enterprise and in the medium term, after successful training on the job, local people are expected to completely take over.

When in 2019 HET was the Overall Winner of Best Adventure Operators, the Indian Responsible Tourism Award, it became clear that »Himalayan Ecotourism« represents the interests of all local inhabitants. The entire community felt proud of this recognition. How to use the prize money was finally also decided by the community. The money went into the reforestation of about five hectares of fallow land.

Claudia Mitteneder, Executive Director of the Institute for Tourism and Development: „Socially responsible – and in this way sustainable – tourism is possible only if all the people concerned are involved in the planning and implementation of these projects, without exception. Participation, gender equality and socio-economic independence will then serve to guarantee its success, as the HET project demonstrates in an impressive manner. The Institute for Tourism and Development supports the members of the cooperative in terms of the content of their work – and also financially with the TO DO Award. We congratulate everybody involved in the project and would be glad to see this form of socially responsible tourism and its spirit of solidarity being replicated globally“.

The virtual award ceremony will take place on Wednesday, 9 March 2022 at 2:30 pm at Livestream „Exhibitor Presentation“ and may, upon registration (free of charge), be viewed on the streaming portal www.itb.com/convention ITB.

The Institute for Tourism and Development (Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung) focuses on development related information and education in tourism. In this context it brings out publications, organises international

contests, offers training and seminars for people employed in the tourism sector, carries out tourism research and consultancy, and is involved in dialogue on issues related to tourism development.

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