

SNAPSHOT

A Mark of Quality for Albanian Tourism

Country's first Quality Mark boosts membership and advocacy efforts of fledgling sector

The visual identity of the *Authentic Albania* Quality Mark program was developed based on motifs placed on ancient Illyrian vases and amphora, as well as ornamental designs used in Albanian traditional folk costumes. The key symbolizes Albanian hospitality.

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Telling Our Story
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For a small Balkan country that just 20 years ago was completely closed to foreigners, Albania has come a long way to overcome its isolation, building both infrastructure and a reputation for hospitality that has grown a burgeoning travel industry. In fact, *Lonely Planet* travel guides currently list Albania as one of this year's top 10 travel and tourism destinations in the world.

USAID began work with the Government of Albania and its tourism industry (or ATA) in 2003 to promote the country's image and strengthen tour operator competition. In 2010, in partnership with the ATA, USAID's *Rritje Albania* (“*Grow Albania*”) project launched the industry's first quality certification system for hotels and guesthouses: the *Authentic Albania* Quality Mark. USAID has supported assessor training and the design and promotional campaign.

So far, over 60 hotels and guesthouses have applied to the program to have their facilities and services evaluated based on the international hospitality standards and Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria that govern receipt of the Quality Mark. In April 2011, ATA awarded its first 20 Quality Marks to those businesses meeting its standards.

The program is encouraging better business practices and providing recipients with an extremely effective publicity campaign.

“This is becoming one of our association's most visible and effective programs,” said ATA's executive director, Ms. Matilda Naco. She added, “There is evident value in the Quality Mark for businesses because it helps members set themselves apart in terms of quality. [...] It is increasingly important that we can advocate for sustainable tourism development at the national level. This must be the future of tourism in Albania.”

USAID has been an important partner in the development of tourism sector since 2003, helping promote Albanian tourism, working with small and medium enterprises in the tourism sector, as well as the ministry to improve Albania's image as a desirable tourist destination.

The Agency will continue to support *Rritje Albania* until 2013, at which time local tourism authorities will assume full ownership.