



## Blue Flag in the UAE

*Moaz Sawaf*  
**Project Manager, Conservation & Education**  
**Emirates Wildlife Society – WWF**  
**United Arab Emirates**

If you are a beach or marina lover, you may noticed recently the word “Blue Flag” and it will not be surprising that the first thing come to your mind what is Blue Flag? The Blue Flag is a voluntary eco-label awarded to approximately 50,000 beaches and marinas in 46 countries across Europe, South Africa, Morocco, Tunisia, New Zealand, Brazil, Canada United Arab Emirates and the Caribbean.

The Blue Flag works towards sustainable development of beaches and marinas through strict criteria dealing with Water Quality, Environmental Education and Information, Environmental Management, and Safety and Other Services. The Blue Flag Programme is owned and run by the non-government, non-profit organisation the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE).

### Blue Flag History

The concept of the Blue Flag was born in France. In 1985, French coastal municipalities were awarded with the Blue Flag for complying with sewage treatment and bathing water quality criteria.

In 1987, the "European Year of the Environment", the Foundation for Environmental Education in Europe (FEEE) presented the French concept to the European Commission, and the Blue Flag Programme was launched as one of the year's community activities.

In addition to sewage treatment and bathing water quality, criteria for obtaining a Blue Flag on a European level included other areas of environmental management, such as waste management and coastal planning and protection. Marinas were also made eligible for the award. In 1987 the Blue Flag was awarded to 244 beaches and 208 marinas in ten European countries.

In 2001 FEE became a global organisation and changed its name from FEEE to FEE (Foundation for Environmental Education). Since then, many organisations and authorities outside Europe wishing for cooperation on spreading the Blue Flag Programme have made applications to FEE. With the expansion of the program, the criteria has become more rigorous and unified. As of 2006 an international set of criteria is being used with some variation within to reflect the specific environmental conditions of certain regions.

In the UAE Emirates Wildlife Society in association with World Wide Fund for Nature (EWS-WWF) were awarded to be the official representative for FEE in the UAE and took the Blue Flag project.

In 2009 EWS-WWF launched the Blue Flag program in the UAE with Abu Dhabi Corniche being its pilot phase, which in 2010 became the first Blue Flag beach in the country. In 2011 Merdein Mina Siyahi and Westin complex became the first Blue Flag beach in Dubai, and 2012 will see more beaches and marinas awarded the Blue Flag.

## How does the Blue Flag benefit the UAE and the people?

The award of a Blue Flag beach is based on compliance with 32 criteria covering the aspects of:

1. Environmental Education and Information
2. Water Quality
3. Environmental Management
4. Safety and Services

For the water quality, the beach must sample the water once a month and the results should comply

with the Blue Flag standards that ensure the water is safe for swimming, which means when you go to a Blue Flag beach you know the water is safe.

As for safety, the beach should have safety standards, like lifeguards, first aid, emergency plan, clean toilets, shower, drinking water, well posted sign boards, separate rubbish bins for recycling.

The beach must also raise awareness on the importance of marine life and how it should be protected and saved. Also the beach must hold five environmental education activities for the public, so if we say we have 20 Blue Flag beaches, this mean 100 environmental awareness activity.



## Beside this the Blue Flag helps in:

- Contribute to the on-going development to safeguard the coastline, the marine environment and the public health.
- Encourage the community involvement to maintain the beaches and marinas and raise their awareness of the sensitive marine environment and raise awareness about other environmental issues
- Cooperation and coordination among the different sectors to share the responsibility for the protection of sensitive and unique costal habitats.
- Increase opportunities for eco and sustainable tourism and attract more tourists to the country's beaches and coastal areas, as the experience of other counties shows.