



Introduction

With the advent of words such as *green*, *eco-friendly*, *responsible* and *sustainable* as powerful marketing slogans, it should come as no surprise that many tourism businesses have adopted these terms to attract customers.

There are financially lucrative reasons for marketing hotels and vacation activities in this manner since surveys have indicated that customers are willing to pay a premium for a product when they are aware that an organization is environmentally conscious.

Financial reasons aside, tourism organizations are also taking advantage of the fact that there are no globally agreed upon definitions for any of the aforementioned terms. To make things even more complicated, there are different interpretations of what constitutes a natural or wildlife habitat, what amounts to environmental degradation, and what characterizes local prosperity.

In North America for example, ecotourism has been heavily marketed and related to adventure travel where tourists are enticed to visit pristine areas across the globe so that they can, for example, go kayaking or horseback riding. Alternatively, in Europe, vacationers view ecotourism as a way to minimize their carbon footprint entirely by first traveling within Europe by train, for example, and then staying in rural areas where they can hike or go camping. Finally within Africa and South America, there is an entirely different approach toward ecotourism where sightseers are encouraged to visit scenic and wildlife areas in order to help alleviate the host destination's economic and social hardships and preserve local heritage and traditions.

Given the marketing power of the term *eco*, in October 2008, an initiative led by the Rainforest Alliance, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the United Nations Foundation, and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) resulted in the formation of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council and the development of a set of 37 universal sustainable tourism standards.

These criteria represent the minimum that any tourism business should aspire to reach in order to protect and sustain the world's natural and cultural resources while ensuring that tourism meets its potential as a tool for poverty alleviation. In addition to these globally-relevant efforts, various countries have also developed certifications to keep tourism organizations in check as well as consumers informed.


While it can be very complicated and time consuming to understand all the certifications and their nuances, this document is meant to serve as a reference guide for the most common ecotourism and sustainable tourism certifications.

For more information about each individual certification award process and criteria, please refer to the Greenloons Blog
<http://www.greenloons.com/ecotourism-blog/eco-certifications.html>


Ecotourism / Sustainable Tourism Certification Standards Summary

	ECO Australia	Aventura Segura Brazil	CST Costa Rica	FTTSA South Africa	Smart Voyager S. America	Green Globe Worldwide	S.T.E.P. Worldwide	UN Global Compact Worldwide	Rainforest Alliance Verification
Developed by Non Governmental Organization (NGO)	✓			✓	✓				✓
Multiple Levels of Certification	✓		✓				✓		
Course Completion Requirement		✓							
Self-Assessment Requirement	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Third-Party Evaluation of Credentials	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Recognized by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)	✓		✓	✓			✓		✓
Best Practices Available to Tour Operators	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Reauthorization / Recertification Process				✓		✓	✓	✓	
Evaluation Criteria Addresses:									
Business Management and Operational Planning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Business Ethics	✓			✓		✓		✓	✓
Responsible Marketing	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓
Customer Satisfaction	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Natural Area / Cultural Focus	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Environmental / Climate / Energy Management	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Interpretation and Education	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Contribution to Conservation / Ecosystem Sensitivity	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Safety Procedures / Quality Control		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Working with Local Communities / Employment Equity	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Local Design / Construction Requirements			✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Eco-friendly Product Purchasing			✓			✓	✓		
Integrated Waste Management					✓		✓	✓	✓
Cultural Respect / Sensitivity	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓

Ecotourism / Sustainable Tourism Certification Standards Summary

	Sweden Nature's Best	Italy Legambiente Turismo	Mexico SEMARNAT	ISO 14001	UK Green Tourism Business	Kenya Eco-Rating	Norway Ecotourism	Adventure Green Alaska	Ecotourism Botswana
Developed by Non Governmental Organization (NGO)	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	
Multiple Levels of Certification					✓	✓		✓	✓
Course Completion Requirement	✓								
Self-Assessment Requirement				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Third-Party Evaluation of Credentials	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Recognized by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
Best Practices Available to Tour Operators	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reauthorization / Recertification Process	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Evaluation Criteria Addresses:									
Business Management and Operational Planning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Business Ethics	✓						✓		✓
Responsible Marketing	✓				✓		✓		✓
Customer Satisfaction	✓						✓	✓	✓
Natural Area / Cultural Focus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Environmental / Climate / Energy Management	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Interpretation and Education	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Contribution to Conservation / Ecosystem Sensitivity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Safety Procedures / Quality Control	✓		✓					✓	✓
Working with Local Communities / Employment Equity	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓
Local Design / Construction Requirements	✓		✓			✓	✓		✓
Eco-friendly Product Purchasing		✓			✓		✓		✓
Integrated Waste Management	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Cultural Respect / Sensitivity	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓

Ecotourism / Sustainable Tourism Certification Standards Summary

	Biosphere Responsible Tourism	TourCert	Croatia Environmental Label	Netherlands Green Key	Ecotourism Ireland	EarthCheck
Developed by Non Governmental Organization (NGO)						
Multiple Levels of Certification						
Course Completion Requirement						
Self-Assessment Requirement						
Third-Party Evaluation of Credentials						
Recognized by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)						
Best Practices Available to Tour Operators						
Reauthorization / Recertification Process						
Evaluation Criteria Addresses:						
Business Management and Operational Planning						
Business Ethics						
Responsible Marketing						
Customer Satisfaction						
Natural Area / Cultural Focus						
Environmental / Climate / Energy Management						
Interpretation and Education						
Contribution to Conservation / Ecosystem Sensitivity						
Safety Procedures / Quality Control						
Working with Local Communities / Employment Equity						
Local Design / Construction Requirements						
Eco-friendly Product Purchasing						
Integrated Waste Management						
Cultural Respect / Sensitivity						