
Mohonk Agreement:

Proposal for an International Certification Program for Sustainable Tourism and Ecotourism

Mohonk Agreement

A framework and principles for the certification of sustainable and ecotourism.

Background

This document contains a set of general principles and elements that should be part of any sound ecotourism and sustainable tourism certification programs. This framework was unanimously adopted at the conclusion of an international workshop convened by the Institute for Policy Studies with support from the Ford Foundation. It was held at Mohonk Mountain House, New Paltz, New York on November 17-19, 2000.

Workshop participants recognized that tourism certification programs need to be tailored to fit particular geographical reasons and sectors of the tourism industry, but agreed that the following are the universal components that must frame any ecotourism and sustainable certification program.

1. Certification Scheme Overall Framework

Basis of Scheme

The objectives of the scheme should be clearly stated. The development of a certification scheme should be a participatory, multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral process (including representatives from local communities, tourism businesses, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, government, and others).

- The scheme should provide tangible benefits to tourism providers and a means for tourists to choose wisely
- The scheme should provide tangible benefits to local communities and to conservation
- The scheme should set minimum standards while encouraging and rewarding best practice
- There is a process to withdraw certification in the event of non-compliance
- The scheme should establish control of existing/new seals/logos in terms of appropriate use, an expiration date and, in the event of loss of certification, withdrawal

- The scheme should include provisions for technical assistance
- The scheme should be designed such that there is motivation for continual improvement—both of the scheme and of the products/companies to be certified

Criteria Framework

- Criteria should provide the mechanism(s) to meet the stated objective(s)
- Criteria used should meet and preferably exceed regulatory compliance
- Criteria should embody global best practice environmental, social and economic management
- Criteria should be adapted to recognizing local/regional ecological, social and economic conditions and local sustainable development efforts
- Criteria should be subject to a periodic review
- Criteria should be principally performance-based and include environmental, social and economic management process elements

Scheme Integrity

- The certification program should be transparent and involve an appeals process
- The certification body should be independent of the parties being certified and of technical assistance and assessment bodies (i.e., administrative structures for technical assistance, assessment and auditing should avoid conflicts of interest)
- The scheme should require audits by suitably trained auditors
- The scheme should require mechanisms for consumer and local community feedback

2. Sustainable Tourism Criteria

Sustainable tourism is tourism that seeks to minimize ecological and socio-cultural impacts while providing economic benefits to local communities and host countries. In any certification scheme, the criteria used to define sustainable tourism should address at least minimum standards in the following aspects (as appropriate):

Overall

- Environmental planning and impact assessment has been undertaken and has considered social, cultural, ecological and economic impacts (including cumulative impacts and mitigation strategies)
- Environmental management commitment by tourism business

- Staff training, education, responsibility, knowledge and awareness in environmental, social and cultural management
- Mechanisms for monitoring and reporting environmental performance
- Accurate, responsible marketing leading to realistic expectations
- Consumer feedback

Social/Cultural

- Impacts upon social structures, culture and economy (on both local and national levels)
- Appropriateness of land acquisition/access processes and land tenure
- Measures to protect the integrity of local community's social structure
- Mechanisms to ensure rights and aspirations of local and/or indigenous people are recognized

Ecological

- Appropriateness of location and sense of place
- Biodiversity conservation and integrity of ecosystem processes
- Site disturbance, landscaping and rehabilitation
- Drainage, soils and stormwater management
- Sustainability of energy supply and minimization of use
- Sustainability of water supply and minimization of use
- Sustainability of wastewater treatment and disposal
- Noise and air quality (including greenhouse emissions)
- Waste minimization and sustainability of disposal
- Visual impacts and light
- Sustainability of materials and supplies (recyclable and recycled materials, locally produced, certified timber products, etc.)
- Minimal environmental impacts of activities

Economic

- Requirements for ethical business practice
- Mechanisms to ensure labor arrangements and industrial relations procedures are not exploitative, and conform to local laws and international labor standards (whichever are higher)
- Mechanisms to ensure negative economic impacts on local communities are minimized and preferably there are substantial economic benefits to local communities

- Requirements to ensure contributions to the development/maintenance of local community infrastructure

3. Ecotourism Criteria

Ecotourism is sustainable tourism with a natural area focus, which benefits the environment and communities visited, and fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation, and awareness. In any ecotourism certification scheme, the criteria should address standards (preferably mostly best practice) for sustainable tourism (as per above) and at least minimum standards for:

- Focus on personal experiences of nature to lead to greater understanding and appreciation
- Interpretation and environmental awareness of nature, local society, and culture
- Positive and active contributions to conservation of natural areas or biodiversity
- Economic, social, and cultural benefits for local communities
- Fostering of community involvement, where appropriate
- Locally appropriate scale and design for lodging, tours and attractions
- Minimal impact on and presentation of local (indigenous) culture