

Review of criteria, procedures and legal framework for ecotourism in Europe

Labels of Tourism in Europe

Ecotourism labels

Nature's Best

NATURE'S BEST is a quality label for Swedish Ecotourism, launched during the UN International Year of Ecotourism 2002. The label has been tailored to guarantee a very high quality of tour products, combined with contributions to nature conservation, environmentally friendlier ways of travelling and care for the cultural heritage of the destination. NATURE'S BEST is a trademark for the best Swedish nature tour operators and their finest products.

These are the basic requirements for the Natures Best label

1. Respect the limitations of the destination
2. Support the local economy.
3. Make all the company's operations environmentally sustainable.
4. Contribute actively to conservation.
5. Promote the joy of discovery, knowledge and respect.
6. Quality and safety all the way through.

See appendix or www.naturesbest.nu

The Green Globe 21 International Ecotourism Standard

The GREEN GLOBE 21 International Ecotourism Standard is based principally on the highly regarded Australian Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation [Certification] Program (NEAP) Standard combined with elements of the very latest GREEN GLOBE 21 Benchmarking performance system. Criteria have been adapted to ensure their applicability in an international setting and both the Standard and Certification Program incorporate the fundamental principles for sound ecotourism certification identified in the Mohonk Agreement. The Standard was developed in consultation with select tourism/ecotourism certification experts and was piloted with a number of ecotourism operations from a wide range of countries and products.

The principal objective of the GREEN GLOBE 21 International Ecotourism Standard is to facilitate environmentally sustainable ecotourism. This Standard provides a basis for assessing a baseline environmental management performance standard for ecotourism products and recognising best practice ecotourism.

Ecotourism: definition and key principles

The Green Globe 21 International Ecotourism Standard has adopted Ecotourism Australia's definition of ecotourism:

Ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation.

However, a more definitive “definition” of ecotourism is the expansion of this statement into a core set of principles with specific performance indicators (i.e. the key ecotourism performance areas).

The core set of eight principles are that ecotourism product should:

1. Focus on giving visitors the opportunity to personally and directly experience nature (Natural Area Focus);
2. Provide opportunities to experience nature in ways that lead to greater understanding, appreciation and enjoyment (Interpretation);
3. Represent best practice for environmentally sustainable tourism (Environmental Sustainability Practice);
4. Contribute directly to the conservation of natural areas (Contribution to Conservation);
5. Provide ongoing contributions to the local community (Benefiting Local Communities);
6. Be sensitive to, interpret and involve the culture/s existing in the area (Cultural Respect);
7. Consistently meets consumer expectations (Customer Satisfaction) ; and
8. Be marketed and promoted honestly and accurately so that realistic expectations are formed (Responsible Marketing).

These principles have been used to develop the Standard criteria – with specific indicators for each of these eight performance areas. The criteria support the major principles and are based on a hybrid of ‘process’ (i.e. creating a documented procedure) and ‘performance’ (e.g. that sewage treatment meets certain effluent standards) standards.

Although some criteria are relatively general and rely on a commitment by the operator to implement a process to meet a desired outcome (e.g. provision of an interpretation plan in order to stimulate better designed interpretative activities, leading to quality experiences) there is distinct emphasis on specific performance indicators. These are technically prescriptive and deliberately target real environmental outcomes. These criteria include quantification of environmental performance for most of the key environmental indicators. This allows recognition and encouragement of ecotourism product that makes measured environmental improvements which result in a more sustainable world.

Read more on <http://www.greenglobe21.com> where you also will find the criteria.

Forum Anders Reisen, Germany

The aim of the members of “Forum Anders Reisen.” is the building up a sustainable tourism. The products of these small and middle classified tour operators set great store by the environment and the people of a single destination. Journeys are strongly orientated at nature and of particular quality. Innovative and creative ideas are the warranty for holidays with pleasure and recreation. These tour operators have in mind not only to satisfy the demands of their guests but also the consequences of travelling around for the environment and the people in the destinations visited.

The model

The members of the “Forum Anders Reisen.” aspire to a model of tourism which is acceptable by ecological means, realizable by economical means and also ethical and social justified for the local communities (sustainable tourism).

The aims

The first aim is the improvement and spreading of the model of sustainable tourism. This aim has to be attained by a qualitative and quantitative growth of the “Forum Anders Reisen” and its members. This will be achieved by:

1. control of the journeys of the members by means of constant development of the catalogue of criterions
2. amplified stimuli for the members to engage themselves
3. target promotion of members
4. concrete power-package for the members
5. strengthening of public relations
6. development and consolidation of the federal structures

You can find the criteria to be a member on the website, but they are just in German.

www.forumandersreisen.de

Estonia –the Natural way

<http://www.ecotourism.ee/eng/index.html>

The English version does not work at the moment.

PAN Parks Initiative

PAN Parks is a concrete tool to improve nature protection

The idea is simple and exciting: to introduce a marriage between nature conservation and tourism on a European scale. In other words, the initiative aims to put economic value into European nature, thereby offering a means of protection. PAN Parks aims to create economic incentives for conservation of nature by changing tourism from a threat into an opportunity by building partnerships with nature conservation organisations, national parks, tourism businesses, local communities, and other interest groups on a local, national and international level. The PAN Parks concept provides a nature conservation based response to the growing market for nature-oriented tourism.

The quality PAN Parks brand stands for:

- an expanding network of well-managed protected areas with high conservation value;
- areas which are widely known by Europeans as natural capitals of our continent, which they know and are proud of;
- ‘must see’ sites for tourists and wildlife lovers representing responsible, high quality nature-based experiences for visitors;
- wider public and political support for protected areas through changing attitudes and stimulating their economic value;
- new income for parks, and in particular, new employment opportunities for people in rural areas

On <http://www.panparks.org> you can find the criteria.

Dutch and Italian labels for ecotourism

There is a work for the Dutch government with the aim of developing a label for eco tourism. Eco Turismo Italia and Ambiente Italia will also start develop a quality eco tourism label based on Natures Best. These projects have not yet published any results of their work.

Other Quality Labels for Tourism



Horse-shoe labeling, Hungary

In Hungary most equestrian establishments enlarge the touristical supply, by offering special equestrian services. The establishments offer “ordinary” equestrian touristical services, use “horse-shoe” emblem to show the quality of the services. According to the labeling system the establishment, using 1 horse-shoe has the basic service conditions, and by increasing the number of horse-shoes shows the enlargement of the type and quality of services.

The Commissions of the Hungarian Equestrian Tourism Association make proposal for the number of horse-shoes. The Association approves them, according to the quality of the services.

Main labeling aspects:

- A. Environmental aspects**
- B. Aspects of horse-keeping and suitability**
- C. Aspects about equestrian services**
- D. Personnel aspects**
- E. Other programs and possibilities**

Labeling Categories:

The aspects are being estimated by points one to five, and following the points of the main aspects are being calculated from the sub-categories’ average points. The establishments are labeled by points between one and five, according to the score result. Total obtainable score is: 25 points (the sum of the average points of the main aspects)

Objective parameter of the labeling system

	5 average score of the main aspects severally *	Number of the participating horses	Number of types of services (min.)**	Compulsory foreign language knowledge	Score
5 horse-shoes	>4	>12	>3	+	22-25
4 horse-shoes	>3.8	>10	>3	+	19-21
3 horse-shoes	>3.4	>8	>2		17-18
2 horse-shoes	>3	>6	>2		15-16
1 horse-shoes	>2.4	>5	>1		12-14

* (1) Environmental aspects, (2) Aspects of horse-keeping and suitability, (3) Aspects about equestrian services (4) Personnel aspects, (5) Other programs and possibilities.

** Education, cross-country riding, coach driving, exhibition, special services: hunting horse-riding, therapy horse-riding, breeding

See more in Appendix 2 or on <http://www.equi.hu/eng/>. The information about the labelling is still not published (March 04).

Labels for Sustainable Tourism

Most ecolabels certify environmentally preferable products. A few certificates include social and economic criteria, but not enough to be called ecotourism labels. From the client experienced quality is not a high priority in most ecolabels. Most ecolabels deal with accommodation and very few label tours or tour operators.

VISIT

VISIT (Voluntary initiative for Sustainability in Tourism) is an initiative to support the development of tourism Ecolabels in Europe and to show how they can effectively promote sustainability to consumers and to the tourism industry. The VISIT promotion activities supports those certificates which guarantee a high level of environmental quality of their products in their countries. The newly developed VISIT standards allow such schemes to be recognized. Members in VISIT label mainly accommodation. **See appendix.**

Legal Framework of ecotourism

Sweden

The Right of Public Access

The Swedish right of public access is not a law, nor is it an absolute right. It may rather be regarded as an opportunity, one that makes it possible for everyone to enjoy the countryside. But it is an opportunity that requires responsibility, consideration and good judgement. The right of public access can be concisely expressed in the phrase, "Do not disturb, do not destroy". Rules describing the kinds of consideration that must be shown are incorporated into Sweden's environmental law, and apply to everyone who exercises the right of public access.

Organized outdoor recreation

To a large extent, it is the right of public access that makes ecotourism and other forms of organized outdoor recreation possible. But that right is purely individual; it does not extend to businesses and organizations. Swedish environmental law imposes strict demands on those who conduct organized activities in nature.

Individual right

The right of public access applies to all individuals. But the right does not extend to tour operators and other organizations. The right of public access cannot be cited in support of organized non-profit or commercial activities on anyone else's land. Such activities are allowed in the countryside only if they do not result in damage or inconvenience to landowners, or if the landscape and animal life are not damaged.

Requirements of environmental law

Swedish environmental law includes regulations regarding care and consideration that apply to all activities in the countryside. Those who arrange organized activities on someone else's land are obliged to:

- acquire necessary knowledge of what the right of public access involves
- take adequate measures and exercise sufficient caution to avoid damage and inconvenience to others
- choose an appropriate location in order to reduce the risk of damage and inconvenience
- inform all participants about the right of public access and the responsibility that follows with it.

Prior consultation

If there is a risk that an activity could lead to an alteration of the environment, the appropriate municipality or county administrative board must be consulted in advance. This applies equally to events repeated at regular intervals and to certain types of facility for outdoor recreation and ecological tourism. For larger or repeated events, the affected landowner should always be consulted, as well. Any individual or organizers of outdoor activities who causes damage to the environment or to private property in connection with outdoor recreation may be liable for damages.

<http://www.naturvardsverket.se/allemansratten>

National Parks and nature reserves

The regulations vary in the national parks, but generally it is prohibited to disturb and destroy - which also applies to all the Swedish countryside under the right of public access. In several parks you are not allowed to light fires, to camp or to bring a dog which is not on a leash. You may not gather stones or plants, but it is permitted to pick berries and mushrooms just like in other parts of the country. Apart from the national parks, Sweden has a large number of nature reserves and protected areas. In both national parks and nature reserves commercial activities, like organised tourism, are forbidden or have restrictions and often require a permit from The County Administrative Boards. For the moment the government plan to ease these restrictions quite soon. As long as the commercial activity doesn't harm the protected area organised tourism will be allowed.

Safety regulations

There are very few safety regulations for tourism. However, to organise white water rafting you have to be certified. See SJÖFS 1997:18. Also www.sjofartsverket.se.

Hungary

In Hungary there are no legal regulations about tourist activities at nature conservation areas. The nature reservation act, as a general framework, does not contain any comments about the activities, which can be realized at nature conservation areas.

Romania

Tourism operators must have license in tourism - in accordance with Ordinance no 170 from April 3, 2001. The Executive Manager of these operators must to be licensed by the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Tourism.

Non-governmental organizations dealing with tourism activities must have the approval of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Tourism before to start their activities and must to respect the conditions from the Ordinance no 26 from January 26, 2000.

The Tourism Operators must have tourist guides licensed by Ministry of Transport, Construction and Tourism in accordance with HG 305 from March 08, 2001.

There is an Ordinance no 69 from January 28, 2003, which provide the rules regarding the contract between Tourism Agencies and tourists.

Greece

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Who can certify ecotourism?

Sweden

The Swedish Ecotourism Association (SEF) has initiated the Natures Best ecotourism quality label. SEF is a NGO and has developed the label and is also responsible for the whole labeling system. The Swedish government has given a substantial economic support to the process of developing the label, but in the long run the label has to finance itself. The Swedish Travel and Tourism Council, and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, a NGO, are partners in Nature's Best. www.naturesbest.nu.

Romania

In Romania it seems as the government have the control of most things that deals with tourism.

- The Ministry of Transport, Construction and Tourism, with:
 - ◆ General Board for Control and Authorization
 - ◆ General Board for Tourism Promotion. www.ministerul-turismului.ro
- The National Institute for Research and Development in Tourism – INCD Bucharest – which is subordinated to the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Tourism, and the main activities are to make researches for development and promotion of Romanian Tourism - <http://www.incdt.ro/>

One NGO that deals with ecotourism is The Initiative Group for Ecotourism (IGE). This is a partnership for nature conservation and tourism in Romania. It is incorporating protected areas, tourism associations, non-governmental associations (acting in local development and nature conservation), nature conservation projects and tourism agencies. <http://www.eco-romania.ro>

Hungary

In Hungary the tourist labeling belongs to the Hungarian Standardization Body's duty. In general, that civil organization initiates the label who'd like to introduce it, i.e. Hungarian Equestrian Association initiated the horse-shoe emblem for the equestrian establishments. After it, the Standardization Body makes the official arrangements about the introduction.

According to the regulation of 45/1998.(VI.24.) *Ministry of Industry and Trade* – about the classification of public and private accommodations – the notary and the Consumer Protection Inspectorate controls the labeling aspects.

Greece

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Literature

Voluntary Initiatives for Sustainable tourism

The World Tourism Organization has made a worldwide Inventory of Ecolabels. You can buy the book including a CD on http://www.world-tourism.org/frameset/frame_sustainable.html

Sustainable Development of Ecotourism - A Compilation of Good Practices

This publication has been prepared on the occasion of the International Year of Ecotourism 2002. It is the second volume within the series of Good Practices published in the area of Sustainable Development of Tourism. The 55 case studies taken from 39 countries present a wide range of successful ecotourism initiatives. Each of them is presented in a systematic form, describing stakeholders involved, objectives and strategies, funding, sustainability and monitoring aspects, problems encountered and solutions found in each project, etc. The sustainability aspects are further detailed according to specific elements of ecotourism such as: conservation, community involvement, interpretation and education, as well as environmental management practices.

This compilation is of great value for tourism professionals from both the public and private sector, who can learn from these experiences and adapt them to ecotourism activities in their own country.

Contents :

- Some examples of the 55 case studies included:
 - Strategic and Participative Management Plan for the Protected Area of the Valdes Peninsula, Argentina
 - Ecotourism Poles: A National Framework for Local Ecotourism Development, Brazil
 - Redberry Pelican Project (RPP): Conservation through Research, Education and Tourism, Canada
 - Environmental Protection and Ecotourism Development in Emei Mountain Scenic Area, China
 - Agrotourism in Cyprus
 - Kapawi Ecolodge and Reserve: Community Ecotourism Project, Ecuador
 - European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas, Germany
 - The Josvafo Village Walk in the Aggtelek National Park, Hungary
 - Community-based Ecotourism Development and Conservation in the Togean Islands, Indonesia
 - Wetland Conservation Project in Muthurajawela, Sri Lanka
 - Community Participation in Ecotourism Development in the Bazaruto Archipelago, Mozambique
 - Forest Resource Management in North-West Russia: The Karelia Project, Russia

and many more. Cost: EUR 35

Sustainable Development of Ecotourism - A Compilation of Good Practices in SMEs

This compilation contains 65 case studies received from 47 countries about exemplary practices in small ecotourism businesses (SMEs). The cases provide rich details on

methodologies and business approaches applied successfully by a wide range of ecotourism companies; they provide a valuable well of information that can serve for generating ideas and adapting sustainable ecotourism practices to the specific local conditions elsewhere. The experiences presented in this book come directly from the field, from the people who have developed these initiatives and who are daily in charge of these business ventures. They reflect well the complexity of small businesses, the great challenges and opportunities they face, and the endless creativity that this business allows for.

Contents :

- Cross-border cooperation in the Ohrid and Prespa Lakes region (Albania, Greece and Macedonia)
- Cabalgatas por Salta: Mountain excursions on horse-back (Argentina)
- Yacutinga Lodge (Argentina)
- Biolandhaus Arche: Mountain Hut (Austria)
- Heinrich-Kiener-Haus: Mountain-hut (Austria)
- The Guide Tours Ltd (Bangladesh)
- Okavango Polers Trust (Botswana)
- Ghanzi Trail Blazers - Ked Trading LTD (Botswana)
- ODYSSEIA-IN Sport & Travel Agency - Incoming tour operator (Bulgaria)
- Nature Ribaritsa Association (Bulgaria)
- Mount Cameroon Ecotourism Organization (MtCEO) (Cameroon)
- Ecotourism Project in Ebodje, a small fishing village (Cameroon)
- Jamie's Whaling Station Ltd. (Canada)
- Turismo Rural Weche-Ruca: Mapuche ethnic tourism (Chile)
- El Almejal Ecolodge (Colombia)

and many more. Cost: Euro 35



A system of labelling Ecotourism

The Swedish Ecotourism Association has launched a powerful labelling system that brands locally connected quality tourism, a greater degree of nature preservation, a more environment-friendly way of travelling and a greater care for the nature and culture of the destination. This will be a strong brand, common for all competent operators who organise exclusive eco friendly activities. The aim is to provide travellers with a tool to help them find the operators who work with truly unique nature and cultural experiences, both within Sweden and abroad.

What is Ecotourism ?

Already in 1994 the World Wildlife Fund, WWF, summarised Ecotourism as being:

”A responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people.”

In Sweden, Ecotourism has many faces: The excitement of getting face to face with a bear in the deep forests of Hälsingland, slowly rafting down the clear waters of Klarälven, galloping through the troll-woods of Östergötland, snorkelling-safari in the waters by the steep cliffs of Kullaberg, meeting the Laplanders at the springs of the wild river Vindelälven, slowly kayaking over the mirror like waters in the Archipelago of Stockholm or catching a salmon in the rushing rapids of a stream are just to mention a few examples.

Different types of Ecotourism may vary, but the common denominators are:

- Tours that are organised by companies that specialise in their destination and employ staff good at sharing their knowledge in a pleasant, promoting and informative way.
- Tours that put as little pressure on local nature and culture as possible and are usually carried out by small groups of people possessing a huge sense of responsibility for the natural environment.
- Tours using locally sourced transport, food and lodging, all of which are as environmentally friendly as can be, depending on available local conditions.
- Tours that contribute to the local economy as much as possible.
- Tours that in different ways support local culture and the preservation of nature.

The result is often a more enjoyable trip for all parties involved. The traveller gets to experience more, the local population gets its economy strengthened and the operator gets more and more interested customers, from a segment in steady growth within the travel industry. Moreover the destination's nature, culture and people are treated with respect and consideration.

Read more on www.ekoturism.org!

Why do we need a branding system for Ecotourism?

More and more customers are requesting details about the trip and the operator. Is the bear-safari really on the bear's terms? Do they treat the sledge-dogs well even after we have left the site? Is it really safe to go rafting here? How has this trip been set up in regards to nature preservation?

A lot of companies offer ecotourism. A credible and trustworthy system of labelling will show who is not just talking about it but also actually acts upon it. This way the customers can get help in choosing their operator.

Most Swedish operators of culture and nature-tourism are still relatively small and most often have small budgets to efficiently market their products. This makes it difficult for the interested customer to actually find them. A common labelling system will make it easier for all parties.

These are the basic requirements for branding of Ecotourism !

1. Respect the limitations of the destination

Ecotourism is about preserving, not destroying, whatever it is that the visitor has come to see. The carrying capacity, in ecological and social/cultural terms, of each destination must be respected. Nothing else will work in the long run. This requires that the operator possess comprehensive knowledge about the destination; works in close co-operation with other operators and are always extremely sensitive to the alarm signals from locals and environmentalists.

2. Support the local economy.

Ecotourism means using local sources of goods and services. Preservation of nature easily becomes counterproductive if the local population is against it. A positive way of engaging the local community is if it can be made part of the organisation, or in other words, can benefit from the visitors. Therefore, every trip should in the best possible way contribute to the local economy - spending nights at local lodges, use local guides and purchase both products and services locally. The more the better.

3. Make all the company's operations environmentally sustainable.

Ecotourism-branded Tour Operators should be in the forefront with regards to waste management and garbage disposal etc. We cannot take away the fact that travelling in itself creates some environmental impact. This is why the operators, that is part of the labelling system, always and continuously should look out for new and better ways to minimise the environmental impacts of their trips. Operators should encourage travel by collective means of transport, the use of lodges that are eco friendly and make sure that, where appropriate, waste management has been implemented.

4. Contribute actively to conservation.

Ecotourism takes active responsibility for the biodiversity and the unique nature of a location – from virgin wilderness to agricultural farmlands. This means, directly or indirectly, economically or practically, that it supports the preservation of nature in all its different forms.

5. Promote the joy of discovery, knowledge and respect.

Ecotourism implies travelling with a curious but still respectful attitude. Something built on

knowledge and strong personal beliefs. The tour operators carrying the Ecotourism label will always focus on the personal relationship with the traveller. Competent and knowledgeable guides, adequate introductions to the destination and well thought-through tips to the visitor are all important components.

6. Quality and safety all the way through.

Ecotourism is quality tourism. The customer must be able to trust that the branded organisation keeps high standards from start to end. Every branded operator is characterised by: serious entrepreneurship, responsible and honest marketing, good payment-ethics and has the entire legal framework in order. Security should be handled seriously and customer satisfaction a main priority.

Appendix 2

The VISIT Standards for Tourism Ecolabels in Europe

VISIT (Voluntary initiative for Sustainability in Tourism) is an initiative to support the development of tourism Ecolabels in Europe and to show how they can effectively promote sustainability to consumers and to the tourism industry. The VISIT promotion activities supports those certificates which guarantee a high level of environmental quality of their products in their countries. The newly developed VISIT standards allow such schemes to be recognised.

Tourists expect environmental quality

Consumer expectations on environmental qualities, the existing Ecolabels for Tourism and the interests of responsible tour operators are complementary. For consumers the environmental quality of the tourism product is very important. Issues such as: clean beaches and clean water, no rubbish and pollution, protected nature, low noise are all very high ranking consumer requirements. Around one third of European tourists prefer to be able to reach a destination by bus or train, and would also prefer to have good public transport at the holiday destination instead of having to use the car. More than 40% of visitors would like to stay in environmentally-friendly accommodation. One in five tourists would like tour operators, accommodation operators and destinations to clearly indicate their higher environmental quality products with an Ecolabel.

Ecolabels shall give a “better choice” to the consumers

In the year 2000, research revealed 40 regional, national and international Ecolabels for Tourism operating in Europe. However, the effectiveness of these labels at reaching the consumer has been limited. The development of the European single market and the task of reaching such a large and wide audience requires joint efforts. Ecolabels can be successful if they certify really *good environmental quality* (“better than non certified”) and provide a suitable choice of products in their countries. In order to maintain effective consumer’s recognition, ecolabels also need to have a reliable verification procedure.

Standards assure the quality of Ecolabels

The development of common standards for Tourism Ecolabels in Europe allows those Ecolabels which are highly reliable to be recognised . International Standards Organisation terminology, this means fulfilling the requirements for so-called 'type I' or third party verified certificates. The VISIT standards for the Ecolabels' criteria require the verification of key requirements and procedures, on a third party basis. This ensures ecolabelled tourism products meeting the VISIT standards may not mislead consumers or make erroneous claims regarding their environmental quality.

In 2001/2002 a strong partnership with 10 regional, national and international Ecolabelling schemes was achieved within the VISIT project. Together with ECOTRANS as co-ordinator these labels developed common “VISIT standards for Tourism Ecolabels in Europe”. Work was based on the ISO 14024 standards for Type I Ecolabels. At the end of 2002 the participating Ecolabels agreed on the VISIT standards. These consist of 21 key requirements which have a specific relation to tourism (*see next page*). The recognition of and compliance with these standards is now the precondition for the promotion of Ecolabels and their underlying products in 2003 by VISIT.

The following documents from each Ecolabel were provided to and checked by ECOTRANS as independent project partner:

- A written declaration on the compliance with each of the 21 requirements
- The complete list of environmental performance and management criteria for each label (2002)
- A detailed description of the procedure for application of these criteria, their verification and certification
- The full list of certified products in Europe (2002)

This information allow Ecolabels to be reliably identified which do or do not require specific product criteria and how they verify the compliance of their certified products whether by on site visits or other third party evaluations – very important key requirements of the VISIT standards.

The VISIT Standards
21 key requirements for Tourism Ecolabels
(Version 12/2002)

The VISIT Ecolabel

1. aims to contribute to **sustainable tourism** development in Europe and - as far as possible – to verify those products with advanced performance in terms of environmental qualities
2. aims to contribute to maintaining and enhancing **service quality** in tourism in Europe
3. **recognises** other Ecolabels meeting the VISIT Standards
4. has considered **product life cycle** issues when setting product environmental criteria
5. requires **attainable levels** and give consideration to relative environmental impacts (“per unit”), measurement capability and accuracy
6. is based on sound scientific, engineering, management and social principles. The criteria are derived from data that support the claim of **environmental preferability** (high environmental benefit and/or efficiency)
7. took into account during the process for establishing the criteria **relevant** local, regional, and global environmental issues, available technology, and economic and social **issues** avoiding compromising service quality
8. **reviews** the criteria and product functional requirements within a predefined period
9. declares that compliance with environmental and other relevant **legislation** is a pre-condition for the applicant to be awarded and to maintain the label
10. selected **product environmental criteria** which are expressed in terms of **impacts** on the environment and natural resources **or emissions** to the environment. Such performance criteria shall be expressed in absolute (numbers) or relative (%) figures and measure units (e.g. kWh, litre, volume, weight per product, room, bed, overnight stay, m²) and may also recommend the exclusion / non-use of special materials or substances
11. requires criteria in the following **environmental fields** as far as relevant in its area of operation and as far as relevant for the specific product group : purchasing, transport and mobility, energy, water, waste, chemical substances, air, noise, nature/landscape
12. for accommodation shall have the following **management** criteria which complement other Environmental Management Systems: Environmental commitment, Environmental co-ordinator, communication and training: guests, staff, public; Monitoring regularly energy, water, waste consumption/ overnight
13. is able to demonstrate **transparency** through the following stages of its development and operation: product categories, product environmental criteria, period of validity of criteria, testing and verification methods, certification and award procedures, compliance verification procedure, complaints procedure
14. legally **protects** the Ecolabel (i.e. the certification mark/logotype) in order to prevent unauthorized use and to maintain public confidence in the programme
15. is **voluntary** in nature
16. is open to all potential **applicants** of the predefined product group in the area of operation. All applicants who fulfil the product environmental criteria and the other programme requirements, are entitled to be granted a **license** and authorized to use the label

17. *guarantees that all the elements in the product environmental criteria and product function characteristics are **verifiable** by the ecolabelling body*
18. *has a **verification procedure** which guarantees a high level of reliability. This includes **on site visits** at least every three years (accommodation: once per certification period)*
19. *has general rules guiding the overall operation of the programme. These general rules control the **general conditions for the awarding** of the licence and the use of the label*
20. *Issues awards on business performance against criteria which apply to the site for a predefined **period** of not more than three years*
21. *maintains a publicly available **list of products** which have been awarded the label.*

(This list of requirements were supposed to be revised by the VISIT partners and Ecolabels in December 2003)

The VISIT Ecolabels

To date the following 10 Ecolabels fulfil the VISIT standards (*December 2002*). They are able to guarantee tour operators and guests both a high environmental quality and a strong commitment to environmental issues at their more than 1000 certified hotels, campsites, beaches or marinas.

Das Österreichische Umweltzeichen für Tourismusbetriebe (Austrian Ecolabel for Tourism)

The Austrian ecolabel with the "Hundertwasser Logo" is the first state ecolabel for tourism in Europe (since 1997). To date Austria offers a choice of about 200 certified hotels, holiday apartments, youth hostels, private guest houses, campsites, mountain guest houses and restaurants.

Ecolabel Luxembourg

This initiative was launched in 1997 by the Ministry for Tourism in Luxembourg in co-operation with representatives from the Ministry for Environment and private stakeholder associations. 23 places offer high-quality service and local products under the motto „Experience your environment and enjoy your holiday“.

Nordic Swan in Scandinavia

The *Nordic Swan* is the official Ecolabel for products and services in the five Scandinavian countries Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark and Iceland. It is a very well known at the Nordic population. Since 1999 consumers have also the choice of 32 certified Hotels in Sweden and Norway.

Den Groenne Noegle (Green Key) in Denmark

This label was developed in the early 1990's by the *Danish Association of Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Industry* (HORESTA). The purpose of the project is to improve the environmental awareness among hotels, youth hostels, conference and holiday centres, camping sites and holiday houses in Denmark; since 2001 also in Sweden, Greenland and Estonia. In 2002 more than 100 accommodation businesses are awarded.

Green Tourism Business Scheme in Scotland (& the UK)

Scottish tourism businesses are encouraged to demonstrate achievements in environment and quality by joining VisitScotland's Green Tourism Business Scheme. The certification process started in 1998. In 2002, more than 400 members were certified with bronze, silver or gold. This amount represents about 10% of the available beds in Scotland and a range of visitor attractions and other tourism facilities.

Milieubarometer in The Netherlands

Since 1998 more than 200 campsites, holiday parks, hotels, group accommodations and restaurants in The Netherlands have been awarded the Milieubarometer certificate with one of the three different categories (bronze, silver, gold). The gold level is equal to the high standards of "Milieukeur", the official state Ecolabel. In 2001 14 Center Parcs businesses in Germany, Belgium and The Netherlands were awarded with the Dutch certificate.

La Clef Verte in France

Since 1999 the Clef Verte (Green Key) can be seen as a proof that environmental protection is not a contra-diction to a high level of comfort. More than 50 camping sites from Brittany to the Mediterranean coast are certified for their specific measures to maintain bio-diversity and for their effective preservation of natural resources.

Legambiente Turismo in Italy

Since 1997 Legambiente, the leading Italian Environmental Association, has been operating an eco-friendly management scheme to improve the environmental quality of tourist businesses in a range of seaside, natural park and mountain destinations in several regions of Italy. 168 accommodation businesses as well as 51 bathing establishments at the beaches were certified in 2002.

Ibex-Label in Switzerland

The Ibex-label of the "Ö Plus" association is given to traditional 3* and 4* hotels as well as to hotels with a special and strong orientation on ecological issues. Certified hotels show a high engagement for all sustainability responsibilities: environment, social aspects to staff and society, as well as economic results. A hotel can achieve up to 5 ibexes. 11 hotels in three Swiss cantons have received 3, 4 or 5 ibexes in 2002.

Blue Flag

The international Blue Flag campaign started already in 1985. Clean bathing water and beaches are key qualities for satisfying holidays at the sea or the lake. Since 1987 the Blue Flag is recognised as a symbol for good bathing water quality, clean beaches and environmentally acceptable waste disposal. In 2002, more than 2.000 beaches and 727 marinas were awarded all over Europe.

The "Green Certificate" in Latvia

The aim of this project is to promote the development of environmentally friendly tourism in rural areas and provide for:

- Protection of ecosystems and maintenance of biological diversity,
- Preservation of natural landscapes, cultural and historical heritage,
- Mindful exploitation of natural resources,
- Control and prevention of environment pollution,

- Environment protection through offering nature friendly tourist activities,
- Improved quality of life of the local communities.

Currently the "Green Certificate" eco-label can be awarded to country B&B homes, vacation cottages, guesthouses and campings, which meet the requirements of the "Green Certificate" regulation and criteria.

<http://eco.celotajs.lv>

The VISIT Ecolabels Encouraging best environmental practice

Ecolabels recognized by VISIT are

- **demanding**
- **reliable**
- **committed**

The VISIT Ecolabels are demanding: they make sure that their certified tourism products as far as relevant make efforts to-

- the protection of nature and landscape
- purchase local, environmentally-friendly products and organic food supplies
- **reduce and limitation of energy consumption and drinking water, and the growing use of renewable energy sources**
- proper treatment of sewage and the reduction and recycling of waste
- the use of public and environmentally-friendly means of transport

The VISIT Ecolabels are reliable: they achieve this through

- clear minimum standards in each environmental category which exceed the levels required by law
- effective environmental management requirements at the tourism companies, including staff training and providing environmental tips for visitors
- thorough inspection of tourist facilities applying for the environmental certificate, carried out by independent, trained experts
- a limitation of the validity of the ecolabel to a maximum of three years and through regular monitoring and updating of the criteria, in consultation with tourism, environmental and consumer organisations
- regular evaluation of environmental impact of their certified tourist facilities, in order to quantify environmental benefits.

The VISIT Ecolabels are committed: they co-operate with other initiatives to achieve more sustainable tourism development, which means benefits for all:

- high level of service quality and recreation for guests
- good jobs for the local population and economic success for businesses and destinations
- Maintenance of the cultural and natural diversity

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