ECO and Respecting Our Culture Certification

ESSENTIALS

www.ecotourism.org.au
**Table of contents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is ecotourism?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is certification?</td>
<td>3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A smart move for your business</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the benefits?</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certification process</td>
<td>7-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do the criteria include?</td>
<td>10-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About Ecotourism Australia</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**About Ecotourism Australia**

Tasman Venture, QLD (Advanced Ecotourism) Credit: Lloyd Burgess

Gawler Ranges Wilderness Safaris, SA (Advanced Ecotourism)

Wildlife Habitat, QLD (Advanced Ecotourism)
Ecotourism is ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation.

Why apply ecotourism principles to your business?

Ecotourism is one of the fastest growing sectors of the tourism industry worldwide. Ecotourism Australia (EA)’s guidelines help businesses become ecotourism leaders by ensuring the sustainability of destinations and supporting local communities.

Following EA’s best practice standards will enable you to provide a high-quality recognisable product to consumers whilst increasing your sustainable development. This can create cost savings, improve your organisation’s image and help you establish closer connections with your local tourism and protected area management organisations.

Do you operate a nature based tourism product?

Have you already implemented eco-friendly practices?

Does your business offer a high quality experience aiming at educating visitors about your destination?

Get EA certified and have your efforts recognised!

Did you know?

EA’s ECO Certification program has been around since 1996 and was the first of its kind in the world.

ECO Certification was created by industry for industry, with collaboration and consultation by academics, industry experts, environmental scientists and tourism operators.

Our ECO Certification standard is GSTC Recognized through the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). This means that GSTC has verified that our standard aligns with the GSTC Criteria for Sustainable Tourism.
ECO & Respecting Our Culture Certification programs

ECO Certification is product-specific - this means that you will need to answer the criteria as it applies specifically to each of your products. This also means that you are able to apply for ECO Certification even if not all of your products are nature-based.

Did you know?

You do not need to decide which certification level you want to achieve before applying. You will have access to the criteria for each level and you can decide which is most appropriate for your business.

You will still be able to upgrade to a higher level of certification later if you wish to!

The Respecting Our Culture (ROC) program encourages the tourism industry to operate in ways that respect and reinforce Indigenous cultural heritage and the living cultures of Indigenous communities.

ROC certified tourism operators are committed to protecting cultural authenticity and integrity, developing sound business practices, environmental protection and acknowledging Indigenous peoples’ spiritual connection to the land and water.
Get Climate Action Business Certification

Did you know?

You can achieve Climate Action Business Certification through your ECO Certification application.

The Climate Action Business Certification is the first level of EA’s Climate Action Certification program, followed by Innovator and Leader.

Climate Action Certification is designed for all sectors of the tourism industry including hotels, attractions, tours, transport, restaurants, travel agents, tourism commissions and industry bodies. The Climate Action Certification program is dedicated to reducing carbon emissions and assuring travellers that certified products are backed by a commitment to sustainable practices that help address climate change.

The Climate Action Business level of certification recognises businesses that have undertaken a set of adaptation and emissions reduction actions but are not necessarily measuring their carbon footprint.

What does it involve?

If you wish to become Climate Action Business certified through your ECO Certification, you only have to address a few additional criteria and submit a Climate Change Action Plan (templates available).

As you will already hold ECO Certification, you will be entitled to the discounted annual fee for your Climate Action Certification - refer to page 9 for pricing. For information about the other levels of Climate Action Certification, please contact us.
A smart move for your business

ECO and/or ROC Certification are ways for your tourism business to receive official recognition for best environmental and professional practices.

As the programs are endorsed by different government authorities, you can gain access to government grants and promotion, as well as other marketing initiatives such as visiting journalists showcasing those who are making a difference. Depending on where you operate, you may have the opportunity to apply for and obtain longer permits and licences for operations within protected areas and parks.

Undertaking certification enhances the sustainability of your business, focusing on product development. It encourages you to implement and maintain high standard practices that will help you, your staff and the destination plan for the long term.

All ECO and ROC certified tourism operators are listed on EA’s website and promoted by EA in communications and marketing activities. Certification also offers networking opportunities with diverse industry stakeholders.

...Get rewarded for doing the right thing...

The Green Travel Guide

The Green Travel Guide is EA’s online search engine showcasing all of our ECO, ROC and Climate Action certified tourism operators.

Launched in May 2014, the Green Travel Guide lists all EA certified products. Each operator receives a free listing with an opportunity to upgrade to a premium listing in order to maximise their reach.

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Permits

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) promotes businesses that are operating to a high standard by managing their environmental impacts.

Tourism operators certified through the ECO Certification program (at the Ecotourism and Advanced Ecotourism levels) and actively demonstrating their commitment to reducing their impact on the environment can apply for an extended permit.

Certified operators are also listed on the GBRMPA website and are showcased at various trade events (such as the Australian Tourism Exchange) and in publications.
Become Ecotourism Australia certified to:

- **Showcase your certification.** Display your achievement for all to see with your certificate and certification logos to use on all of your print and digital marketing material.

- **Be featured on the Green Travel Guide,** our online search engine for certified tourism experiences. The Green Travel Guide is used by consumers and travel agents alike to source responsible tourism experiences. Certified operators receive a free bronze level listing with the opportunity to upgrade to a premium level listing for further reach.

- **Share with the world!** If you have photos, footage or exciting news, tell us and we will share them through our news page, monthly newsletter and social media channels. The more actively you share with us, the greater the benefits and exposure you receive.

- **Gain international market exposure** through Ecotourism Australia’s exclusive network and reach domestic and international agents, wholesalers and inbound tour operators who value sustainable tourism.

- **Receive discounts, free listings and marketing opportunities through Ecotourism Australia’s partners** including Our Planet Travel and our South African partners, Coastal and Marine Eco Tourism.

- **Be represented at the annual Australian Tourism Exchange.**

- **Grow your certification with ease.** Once certified, it is simple and inexpensive to upgrade and add additional products to your certification.

- **Receive free onsite audits** conducted by experienced, independent and trained professionals to showcase your business, support continuous development, and verify your certification standards.

- **Receive free marketing exposure** through Ecotourism Australia’s popular digital networks; share your new developments, great initiatives, holiday specials and even job vacancies.

- **Receive government recognition.** ECO Certification opens up eligibility for extended permit and licence terms through all of our State and National Park agencies.

- **Be a step ahead of the rest:** Certification is highly valued in grant and award submissions, and it’s mandatory for tourism award entrants in Queensland.

- **Join a nation-wide community of passionate ecotourism professionals.** Ecotourism Australia advocates for the best interests of our environment and our industry’s future.

- **Receive a 25% member discount to our annual Global Eco Conference** and invitation to exclusive Ecotourism Australia member events and professional development opportunities when they arise.

- **Receive full membership rights to Ecotourism Australia,** including voting rights and the right to nominate and stand for the Board of Directors.
Can you apply for certification?

The majority of each customer’s activity time is spent within a natural area or with a focus on the natural or cultural values of the area. The products you wish to certify help customers to directly and personally experience nature and do so in a sustainable manner.

You have obtained all necessary operating licenses, permits and approvals from the relevant authority and understand these will be verified as part of your application.

You commit to and meet the Business Ethics practices that EA requires.

Your operation consistently meets customer service expectations and has defined customer service procedures.

You have a commitment to delivering a quality tourism experience.

Economic, social and environmental sustainability principles are core to your operation.

When applying for certification, EA requires evidence of business sustainability planning. This gives applicants an opportunity to recognise pre-existing, develop new and implement appropriate management planning. Depending on the level of certification you wish to achieve, you will need to provide the following supporting documents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature Tourism</th>
<th>Ecotourism</th>
<th>Advanced Ecotourism</th>
<th>ROC</th>
<th>Climate Action Business through ECO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business plan</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing plan</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations plan</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental plan</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation plan</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate change action plan</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Templates and free coaching sessions are available and you can always get in touch for assistance.
How does it work?

1. Visit the Ecotourism Australia website and select “Apply now!”

2. Fill out the online application form and pay your certification fee.

3. Receive a confirmation email, follow the instructions and get started on your application!

4. Free coaching sessions are available; contact the EA office with any questions.

5. Submit your completed application to EA!

- Your application is assessed and any corrections followed up with you. This process takes between 1-2 weeks.
- Certification granted
  An onsite external audit will be conducted within the first 12 months and then every three years thereafter.

Did you know?

The ECO Certification program covers the following areas:

- Business management and operational planning
- Responsible marketing
- Customer satisfaction
- Environmental management
- Climate change action
- Interpretation and education
- Contribution to conservation
- Working with local communities
- Cultural respect and sensitivity
## How much does it cost?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your turnover</th>
<th>ECO</th>
<th>Climate Action</th>
<th>ROC only or ECO &amp; ROC combined</th>
<th>Discounted annual fee for Climate Action (if combined with ECO)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GST inclusive</td>
<td>GST inclusive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; $250,000</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>130</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$250,001 - $1,000,000</td>
<td>815</td>
<td>195</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,000,001 - $5,000,000</td>
<td>1,170</td>
<td>270</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$5,000,001 - $10,000,000</td>
<td>1,385</td>
<td>325</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; $10,000,001</td>
<td>1,565</td>
<td>375</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### After getting certified...

Once you are certified, we will send you your certificate and marketing material so you can proudly display your achievement.

Every year on the anniversary of your certification you will need to pay your renewal fee and send us your completed annual declaration stating that you are still committed to the agreed terms.

An onsite audit will be conducted within the first 12 months of your certification and every three years thereafter. In order to keep your certification up-to-date and to facilitate the audit process we require your documentation to be updated regularly.
The ECO Certification program has eight sections:

1. Business management and operational planning
2. Responsible marketing
3. Customer satisfaction
4. Environmental management
5. Interpretation and education
6. Contribution to conservation
7. Working with local communities
8. Cultural respect and sensitivity
1. Business management and operational planning

If your business has an existing business and marketing plan as well as operational strategies, it is not necessary to redo these as long as the existing plans and operational policies and procedures meet the criteria. If your business does not have documentation in place, blank electronic templates are available.

Natural area focus: Nature tourism and ecotourism occur in and rely on the natural environment. They focus on directly and personally experiencing nature, including its biological, physical and cultural features.

To become ECO certified, your product must be based in nature or have a nature focus.
1. Business management and operational planning

The nature tourism or ecotourism business must have legal compliance and insurance and document and implement the following management plans and procedures:

1.1 Business Sustainability Planning:

**Business plan:** A business plan helps set out a vision for the business and enables sound future decision making.

**Marketing plan:** A marketing plan helps the business identify where visitors are coming from and how best to access and communicate with those visitors.

**Operational management plan:** Documenting the operational management of nature tourism and ecotourism businesses ensures consistent standards and service quality outcomes.

**Risk management:** The business is committed to providing a safe workplace, providing safe experiences to all customers and has documented risk management and emergency procedures accessible to staff and customers.

**Human resource management:** Effective management policies for staff, combined with staff training, results in more motivated and loyal staff and increased efficiencies within the business.

**Customer service standards:** Established customer service standards set by the nature tourism and ecotourism business lead to greater customer satisfaction and consistent service.

1.2 Legal compliance: This covers the regulations, licences and permits required to operate, including vessel surveys.

1.3 Insurance details: Public liability insurance and other business insurance provide security in the event of an accident affecting the business operation.

1.4 Accessibility: Providing equal opportunity for people of all abilities to access tourism services and activities.
2. Responsible marketing

Responsible marketing is the accurate depiction of the products or experiences you offer to your customers, providing useful information about the natural and cultural environments in which you operate and being honest and transparent about your sustainability efforts.

Responsible marketing ensures guests have realistic expectations of the product or experience prior to their visit and an awareness of the responsible and sustainable behaviours of the business. It ensures your business will be seen as credible and your offering will consistently meet or exceed customer expectations, resulting in happier and better-informed guests.

3. Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is achieved when the products and experiences you offer consistently meet or exceed your customers’ realistic expectations. By monitoring, responding to and acting upon customer feedback, you can continue to develop your products and experiences to better suit visitor demands. What this means for you is that your business will enjoy word of mouth publicity and you will have satisfied return customers — both of which will assist your long-term financial sustainability.

What do the criteria include?

ECO and ROC Certification – Essentials & Criteria
4. Environmental management

The experiences and products you offer should conserve and protect the natural and cultural environment in which your business operates. By incorporating ecologically sustainable practices and minimising disruption to your local environment, your business will be protecting the very assets on which it depends, ensuring that these will be around for years to come and, in turn, ensuring longevity for your business.

4.1 Environmental management procedures: All operations have considered their environmental impacts and documented their impact management in an environmental management plan or a sustainability management system.

4.2 Suppliers and business partners: A business can help reduce emissions by choosing suppliers that are also taking action to reduce the emissions involved in the production and sale of their products and services. Consider collaborating with other operators in your region to make a positive contribution to the environment.

4.3 Emissions measurement, reduction and offsetting: Climate, such as annual rainfall or the frequency of drought, underpins most nature based tourism operations. Identifying and measuring your business emissions can help you determine the best ways to reduce your emissions, increase your energy efficiency and help combat the impacts of climate change. Carbon offsetting compensates the remaining emissions, once the largest possible reductions have been made.

4.4 Business vulnerability and adaptation to climate change: Climate change is likely to cause a range of unavoidable impacts such as extreme weather events, sea level changes and redistribution of flora and fauna. Identifying which impacts may affect your business is part of the business planning process. Negative impacts should be minimised, potential opportunities maximised and mitigation strategies implemented.
4. Environmental management

4.5 Location: Operations are only undertaken in appropriate locations where use and impacts on the surrounding environment are minimised and sustainable.

4.6 Waste minimisation and management: Elimination of waste can be beneficial to reduce impacts on human health and the environment. Ecotourism businesses are well positioned to lead by example, educate guests and influence behaviour on day-to-day decisions regarding waste.

4.7 Minimal disturbance to wildlife: Ecotourism products and experiences should have no enduring impact on the natural behaviour of wildlife. Some legislative requirements exist in relation to tourism activities, particularly feeding and handling.
4. Environmental management

4.8 Site selection: built infrastructure: Design and construction of building and infrastructure pertaining to the selection of the site which includes legal compliance with local zoning, protected areas and cultural heritage. The project utilises the sustainable development framework, is aesthetically pleasing and reduces negative impacts across all elements, while retaining access and exposure to nature-based experiences.

4.9 Operational resources: built infrastructure: Beyond building design, the business should aim to reduce the need for resources like energy and water by implementing minimisation strategies, and, where possible, producing its own resources.

4.10 Landscape, drainage, soil and water management: A sound approach to landscape, drainage, soil and water management works hand in hand with site selection. Landscaping, drainage, soil and water management should involve minimal disturbance to the site’s ecological processes and disturbed areas should be rehabilitated through rejuvenation and revegetation efforts. Ongoing monitoring of the site is important for mitigating the risk of damage caused by the business’ products and activities.

4.11 Embodies energy—construction methods and materials: Embodied energy is the energy consumed by all of the processes associated with the production of a building, from the mining and processing of natural resources to manufacturing, transport and product delivery (yourhome.gov.au). Different building elements contain different amounts of embodied energy. Decisions should be made during the design and construction phase to minimise embodied energy associated with the project.

4.12 Operational resources: Tours and transport: Ecotourism businesses that operate tours and guest transport for their products (terrestrial and/or marine) should implement strategies and initiatives to minimise operational resource use and any potential environmental impacts.

The Busselton Jetty, WA (Ecotourism)
4. Environmental management

The following criteria apply to specialty products:

4.13 Minimal impact swimming pools and spas: Swimming pool and/or spa facilities are available onsite for guest use.

4.14 Minimal impact nocturnal wildlife viewing: Products involve nocturnal viewing of wildlife which may include use of spotlights, camp fires and close encounters with wildlife.

4.15 Minimal impact marine and aquatic animal viewing: Products involve viewing of and/or swimming with megafauna, marine and/or aquatic wildlife.

4.16 Minimal impact walking: Products involve guided or self-guided walks that encompass bushwalking, boardwalks or aerial walkways.

4.17 Minimal impact camping, including regular rest stops for tours: Products incorporate overnight camping AND short day tours that include rest stops.

4.18 Minimal impact vehicle use: Products involve any vehicle use (including both motorised and non-motorised, four-wheel driving, quad bikes, motorbikes, trail or mountain bike riding). Not applicable to coaches.

4.19 Minimal impact power boat use: Products involve any power boat use in marine or inland waters for activities including tours, water sports, jet skis, or recreational activities.
4. Environmental management

The following criteria apply to specialty products:

4.20 **Minimal impact non-powered boating and water sports:** Products involve any non-powered boating and water sports in marine or inland waters for activities, including but not limited to tours, boats, canoes, kayaks, surf ski rafts, stand-up paddleboards, kite surfers, surfboards, windsurfers or other recreational activities.

4.21 **Minimal impact aircraft use:** Products involve transport and/or scenic flights by light aircraft.

4.22 **Minimal impact rock climbing and abseiling:** Products include outdoor rock climbing and/or abseiling.

4.23 **Minimal impact caving - show caves:** Products include viewing of or tours through show caves. A show cave is a cave which has been made accessible to the public for guided visits.

4.24 **Minimal impact caving - wild caves:** Products include viewing of or tours through wild caves. Wild caves are caves that have few or no provisions to assist the general public to visit. Experienced guides, caving experience and specialised equipment may be required.

4.25 **Minimal impact snorkelling and scuba diving:** Products incorporate snorkelling and/or scuba diving.
4. Environmental management

The following criteria apply to specialty products:

4.26 **Minimal impact trail riding and animal tours:** Products include but are not limited to horse riding, camel riding, alpaca and llama tours.

4.27 **Minimal impact fishing:** Products include recreational fishing in marine and/or inland waters and/or fish farms.

4.28 **Minimal impact houseboat use - inland waters:** Products involve houseboat and/bareboat use in inland waters.

4.29 **Minimal impact houseboat use - marine:** Products involve houseboat and/bareboat use in marine waters.

4.30 **Animals in captivity:** Products involve viewing or interaction with wildlife in captivity.

---

**ECO and ROC Certification – Essentials & Criteria**
5. Interpretation and education

Ecotourism provides opportunities for customers to interact with nature and experience it in ways which lead to greater understanding, appreciation and enjoyment. Interpretation enables them to develop their knowledge, awareness and appreciation for nature and local cultures.

5.1 Interpretation planning: It is a requirement that the business documents, implements and regularly reviews an Interpretation Plan, Guide Training Manual or equivalent document that outlines interpretation planning, opportunities, content and training.

5.2 Opportunities for interpretation: Customers have the opportunity to learn about the natural and cultural heritage of the environment they are visiting.

5.3 Credibility of interpretation and educational information: It is essential that all interpretation and educational content is accurate, verified and sourced from reliable sources.

5.4 Staff training, awareness and understanding: Interpretation and education form important components of any ecotourism experience, therefore it is essential that all staff and guides providing interpretation are trained, aware and have sound understanding of the subject matter, communications and delivery methods.
6. Contribution to conservation

Ecotourism businesses contribute to conservation efforts that improve biodiversity, including the biophysical environment, wildlife, and/or combatting climate change impacts. Ecotourism also plays an important role in educating consumers and changing attitudes towards conservation - not only in consumers but also host communities, the broader tourism industry and influencing government policy. Conservation outcomes, or targets, should be set with various actions implemented to achieve them.

6.1 Contributions to biodiversity conservation efforts: Ecotourism businesses provide constructive contributions to the management of natural areas. The business can contribute within its means to local, national or global causes that significantly benefit biodiversity conservation initiatives.

6.2 Conservation education: Ecotourism businesses have a responsibility to educate their guests, staff and community on the importance of conservation and provide them with details of their conservation efforts.

7. Working with local communities

Working with local communities is core to ecotourism. Community engagement by ecotourism businesses should well exceed the requirements of running the business and result in a supportive environment that will shine through to the guest experience, create excellent reviews and contribute to long-term business sustainability.

7.1 Provision of local benefits: Involvement with local communities helps build valuable relationships and encourages a support system that is mutually beneficial. When resources and employment are sourced locally, environmental impacts are reduced and the local economy is strengthened.

7.2 Minimal impact on local communities: Ecotourism operations are developed and managed with consideration and respect for local communities.

7.3 Community involvement: Operators of ecotourism products are regularly involved in the local community beyond what is required to run the business.
8. Cultural respect and sensitivity

Cultural competency is expected of tourism businesses entering Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities. Native Title is enshrined in Australian law, Traditional Owner Settlements are being enacted across the country and cultural heritage sites may be protected. It is a matter of responsibility for ecotourism operators to know who the Traditional Owners are of the areas they visit, where any areas of cultural significance are located, any protocols that exist around visiting these areas and to respect the significance and diversity of belief systems which exist.

8.1 Consultation and training: Tourism operations should acknowledge and respect the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters on which the tourism business operates and consult with these. They may also involve local Indigenous communities in strategic decisions regarding the presentation and interpretation of their culture.

8.2 Cultural interpretation: Tourism operations should consult with Traditional Owners to seek permission to deliver cultural content and to ascertain accuracy of cultural information delivered.

8.3 Indigenous arts, crafts and goods: Tourism operations should use and promote Indigenous goods and services while ensuring they are authentic. A formal agreement for purchase, distribution and/or promotion may be in place and all copyright patent and intellectual laws must be adhered to.
About us

Ecotourism Australia (EA) is a not for profit, membership-based organisation inspiring environmentally sustainable and culturally responsible tourism. Internationally recognised through the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, EA designs and delivers certification programs for tourism products and destinations, assuring travellers that these are backed by a strong commitment to sustainability and quality. Currently representing more than 500 responsible ecotourism operators, 1,600 products and a growing number of destinations, Ecotourism Australia also represents the interests of ecotourism operators and destinations through membership on advisory boards, reference groups and industry bodies, working closely with diverse industry stakeholders to implement and reward sustainable tourism practices. These include operators, protected area managers, state/federal government agencies, local/regional tourism associations, consultants, planners, academics, students and travellers.

Contact us

Ecotourism Australia
1A, 88 Buckland Road, Nundah QLD 4012

T: 07 3256 6777

eco@ecotourism.org.au
www.ecotourism.org.au

Become part of our community

With over 1,600 certified tourism products around Australia, becoming certified is also a way to become part of Ecotourism Australia’s large community and interact with people who, just like you, are working to protect Australia.

Join the conversation with us on social media and get your message out there!

Follow us on social media: