



ECO Certification
Essentials



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Cover image -
Kingfisher Tours, Kimberley, WA
Ecotourism certified & ROC

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We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing custodianship of the land, waters and culture for over 60,000 years. We pay our respects to them and their elders past, present and emerging. We are privileged to learn from them in the way we care for and share Australia's diverse nature and culture, and we strive to walk humbly in the footsteps of those who have walked these paths before us.



Welcome to being part of **ecotourism**

The ECO Certification Essentials is your comprehensive guide to our ECO Certification program. The ECO Certification program is a world first, launched by Ecotourism Australia in 1996 and recognised by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council. Its criteria are reviewed regularly to ensure they continue to meet world's best practice standards.

We hope that the information in this guide will help you assess whether our certifications are right for you, and we trust that if you do choose to pursue certification for your operations, you will find it a helpful business development and continuous development tool.

We're always happy to help so if you've still got questions or would like to know more, please [get in touch](#).

The Ecotourism Australia team

HELLO

WHAT IS ECOTOURISM?

“Ecotourism is ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation.”

Ecotourism Australia



EXPERIENCE



Pemberton Discovery Tours, WA
Advanced Ecotourism certified
Tourism WA

Why apply ecotourism principles to **your business**?

Ecotourism is one of the fastest growing sectors of the tourism industry worldwide. Ecotourism Australia'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 cut costs, reduce expenditure, save you money, improve your organisation's image and help you establish closer connections with your local tourism and protected area management organisations.

1. Is the majority of each customers' activity spent within a natural area or with a focus on natural areas?
2. Is the prime focus of the product on the presentation of the natural and cultural values of the local area?
3. Does the product help customers to directly and personally experience nature in a sustainable manner?

Get EA certified and have your efforts recognised!

PRINCIPLES



Faraway Bay, Wyndham, WA
Tourism Western Australia

did you know?

Ecotourism Australia'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 recognised through the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). This means that GSTC has verified that our standard aligns with the GSTC Criteria for Sustainable Tourism.



Rawnsley Park Station Wildlife Adventure, Flinders Ranges, SA
Advanced Ecotourism & Climate Action Business certified

ECO Certification program

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.



Tourism in natural areas that leaves minimal impact on the environment.



Tourism in natural areas that focuses on optimal resources use, conservation practices and helping local communities.



Tourism with strong interpretation values and a commitment to nature conservation and helping local communities.

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 also have the option to revisit your criteria and achieve another level of certification later.

Specialty programs for ECO certified businesses*

Tourism operators holding ECO Certification are eligible to add Ecotourism Australia's specialty certification programs **Respecting Our Culture (ROC) Certification** and **Climate Action Business Certification** to their suite of certifications.



Respecting Our Culture (ROC) Certification program

The Respecting Our Culture (ROC) Certification 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.



Climate Action Business Certification program

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 adaption 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 19 for pricing. For information about the other levels of Climate Action Certification, please contact us.



Ringneck Parrot, Wilpena Pound SA.
Maxime Coquard

A smart move for your business

ECO Certification is a way for your tourism business to receive official recognition for best environmental and professional practices.

As the program is 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 certified tourism operators are listed on our Green Travel Guide and promoted by Ecotourism Australia in communications and marketing activities. Certification also offers networking opportunities with diverse industry stakeholders.

SMART



Orpheus Island Lodge, QLD
Advanced Ecotourism & Climate Action Business certified

Generate more bookings with the **Green Travel Guide**



The Green Travel Guide is Ecotourism Australia's online search engine showcasing all of our ECO certified tourism operators. Launched in May 2014, the Green Travel Guide lists all Ecotourism Australia 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 and experience these benefits

1

Business development and training

Certification is a business development tool. By getting certified, you get access to:

- Specialised resources and business documentation templates
- Fact sheets and hints on how to improve your business
- Benchmarking through our ReviewPro partnership
- Business coaching with certification experts
- Regular audits and reviews from our independent, expert auditors
- Access to free webinars with industry experts
- Our online portal, so you can keep tracking your progress

2

Credibility

By becoming certified, you also become part of an international community of globally recognised certified operators and destinations.

- Our programs are recognised by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)
- We provide independent, third party verification of your sustainability efforts
- We actively fight against greenwashing

BENEFITS

3

Recognition

When you become certified, you receive access to:

- Certification logos and certificates to display in your facilities, vessels, website and marketing collateral
- A listing on our Green Travel Guide
- Extended permits in many protected areas
- Official recognition of your certification on your Google and Booking.com listings
- An ATEC Trade Ready checklist
- Access to special offers through our industry partners
- Marketing and promotion through our digital and social channels

4

Community

Once you're certified, you're part of our family. We advocate for you, and connect you to:

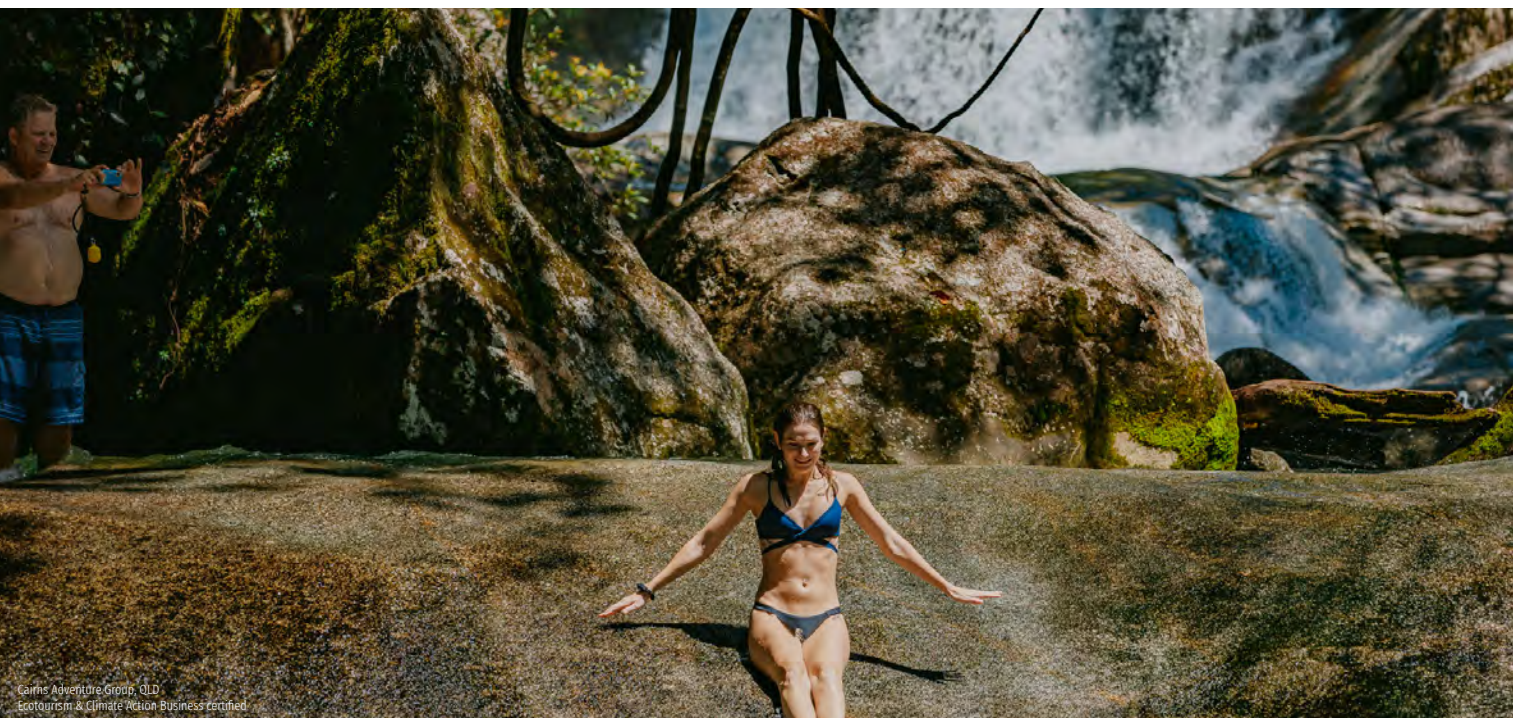
- Our member network of 500+ passionate, likeminded operators and stakeholders
- International buyers and stakeholders at the Australian Tourism Exchange and Global Eco Conference

The certification application process for **your business**

Our criteria to apply for certification follows these guidelines.

- ✓ 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 Ecotourism Australia Business Ethics practices that we require.
- ✓ 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.

APPLYING



Cairns Adventure Group, QLD
Ecotourism & Climate Action Business certified



Paperbark Camp, Woollamia, NSW
Advanced Ecotourism certified

What you'll need to supply to apply for certification

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 listed below.

	Nature Tourism	Ecotourism	Advanced Ecotourism	ROC	Climate Action Business
Business plan	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Marketing plan	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Operations plan	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Environmental plan	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Interpretation plan		✓	✓	✓	
Climate change action plan			✓		✓

Templates and free coaching sessions are available and you can always [get in touch for help.](#)

How the Ecotourism Australia certification **process works**

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! Free coaching sessions are available; contact the Ecotourism Australia office with any questions.

4

Submit your completed application!

5

Your application is assessed and any corrections followed up with you. This process takes between one and two weeks.

CERTIFICATION GRANTED

An external audit will be conducted within the first 12 months and then every three years thereafter.

What happens after your business is 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 of your certification.

An 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.



Calypso Star Charters, Port Lincoln, SA
Advanced Ecotourism, Climate Action Leader & Eco Guides certified



Ocean Free, QLD
Advanced Ecotourism certified

Investing in certification offers great value

Annual certification fees are based on the size of your business. This is calculated based on the number of rooms (for accommodations only) or full-time employees (FTE) for all other businesses.

Annual fee for ECO Certification

Price tier	FTE	Rooms	Annual fee
Micro	<2	1-2	\$900
Small	3-10	3-24	\$1,200
Medium	11-50	25-99	\$1,600
Large	51-100	100-249	\$2,200
Enterprise	100+	250+	\$2,800

* Certification fees are current as at 01 July 2023 and are exclusive of GST. Fees will be reviewed annually and may be subject to change.

** Please note that the annual certification fee does not include independent audit and associated audit travel costs which occur upon completion of the initial application and every 3 years thereafter.

FEES





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



CRITERIA

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.



Gippsland High Country Tour VIC
Advanced Ecotourism certified & ROC

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 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.



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.



Back Country Bliss, QLD



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.

4.8 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. Environmental management

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 Embodied 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.



Canopy Rainforest Tree Houses, Tarzall, QLD
Advanced Ecotourism certified



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. Environmental management

The following criteria apply to specialty products.

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.

4.20 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. Environmental management

The following criteria apply to specialty products.

4.25 Minimal impact snorkelling and scuba diving

Products incorporate snorkelling and/or scuba diving.

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/or bareboat use in inland waters.

4.29 Minimal impact houseboat use - marine

Products involve houseboat and/or bareboat use in marine waters.

4.30 Animals in captivity

Products involve viewing or interaction with wildlife in captivity.

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.



Mossman Gorge Centre, Daintree National Park, QLD
Ecotourism Certified



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.



Lake Ballard, Kalgoorlie & Goldfields, WA
Tourism Western Australia



We're 100% committed to supporting **eco and sustainable tourism**

As the peak body for ecotourism and sustainable tourism we connect, champion, inspire and inform through strategic partnerships and global best practice standards.

Ecotourism Australia is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation, established in 1991, that promotes and supports the eco and sustainable tourism industries in Australia through building capacity and actively promoting sustainable tourism operations and systems. Our key program – ECO Certification – was the world's first national ecotourism certification program. Ecotourism Australia's standards are recognised by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC).

We are recognised as a credible, national peak body for sustainable and nature-based tourism.

We have over 1,700 certified experiences with 500 certified operators in our ECO, Climate Action, and Respecting Our Culture Certifications. In 2018 Ecotourism Australia launched the ECO Destination Certification program where operators and government work together to demonstrate a community-wide and entire regions' commitment to sustainable tourism management practices. Ecotourism Australia and our certified operators and destinations are committed to sustainable destination management, protecting the natural environment and bridging the gap between tourism and conservation.

To support the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard, launched in 2022 with founding partner Tourism Australia, Ecotourism Australia developed the Sustainable Tourism Certification program for businesses wanting to progress further on their sustainability pathway. Capturing tourism businesses and suppliers across the entire industry, these programs create a framework for sustainability management and see businesses strive for a more sustainable future.

Make a start on your certification - contact us today on 07 3256 6777

become part of **our community**





Phone 07 3256 6777
Email eco@ecotourism.org.au
Web ecotourism.org.au

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