

From Florida Society for Ethical Ecotourism (FSEE) website:
<http://www.floridasee.org/ecotourism.php>

Ecotourism

Definition of Ecotourism:

According to The International Ecotourism Society, ecotourism is:

"Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people."

Principles of Ecotourism:

Ecotourism is about uniting conservation, communities, and sustainable travel. This means that those who implement and participate in ecotourism activities should follow the following ecotourism principles:

- Minimize impact.
- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect.
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation.
- Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people.
- Raise sensitivity to region's political, environmental, and social climate.

Ethics in Ecotourism:

Certified Florida SEE members provide quality opportunities for eco-travelers to experience nature in ways that lead to greater understanding, appreciation and enjoyment by adhering to the following ecotourism ethics:

- Employ knowledgeable staff/guides that provide accurate information.
- Are sensitive to and involve indigenous cultures.
- Contribute to the conservation of natural areas and local resources.
- Provide constructive and ongoing contributions to your local community.
- Evaluate programs and procedures to incorporate up-to-date knowledge and practices.
- Marketing which is accurate and leads to realistic expectations.
- Consistently meets client and community expectations.

Being an Eco-tourist:

While being "on vacation" should be a relaxing experience for you, many times accommodations or travel providers do not make it easy for you to live the "greener life" you are accustomed to at home. Eco-tourists can have a tremendous impact on the tourism industry by choosing to be a responsible traveler.

By doing a little homework and making informed choices, you can have the

vacation of your dream, while benefiting the environment and the local community. Responsible travel is travel with a purpose. When choosing destinations, accommodations, and tour providers, consider which ones work to protect the environment and benefit local cultures and communities.

To help you plan your visit to Florida, review on our “Certified Providers” page. These Ecotour Providers are recognized as preferred service providers who are committed to using best practices for ecological sustainability, natural area management, and quality ecotourism experiences. Enjoy the many experiences we have to offer along our coast, uplands and wetland habitats. Remember that we are all visitors to these natural ecosystems, and with enjoyment comes responsible behaviors that help keep our “natural heritage” pristine. THANKS for your doing your part!

From: **A SIMPLE USER'S GUIDE TO CERTIFICATION FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND ECOTOURISM, 3rd. Edition**, Center for Ecotourism and Sustainable Development (link below)

Tourism, sustainability, and certification

Tourism is an enormous and widespread industry. It is found all over the world, so its impacts, social, economic, and environmental, are also worldwide. These impacts can be positive, doing good, or negative, doing harm. Sustainable tourism usually aims to have minimal negative impacts, to minimize harm, and to optimize economic benefits. Ecotourism, a type of sustainable tourism, is usually conducted in largely untouched natural areas, which tend to be both environmentally and often socially sensitive (especially if local indigenous groups are involved), so its potential impacts can be even greater, for good or ill. Ecotourism aims to extend the positive impacts, through a special focus on conservation, benefits for host populations, and the education of visitors.

Some businesses really achieve these aims, others falsely claim to, and some don't care. Some would like to, but don't know how. One way of rewarding the businesses that are truly complying with these goals is by giving them credible outside recognition. Certification is a tool for doing so, and here we describe how it works. The certification process can also teach businesses about better or exemplary practices, even if the business never gets certified.

What do we mean by sustainability?

When we talk about "sustainable" activities, it usually means that we can do the activity in the same or similar way for the indefinite future (sustainable in time) in three main aspects:

- **Environmentally** – the activity minimizes any damage to the environment (flora, fauna, water, soils, energy use, contamination, etc.) and ideally tries to benefit the environment in a positive way (through protection and conservation).
- **Socially and culturally** – the activity does not harm, and may revitalize the social structure or culture of the community where it is located.
- **Economic** – the activity does not simply begin and then rapidly die because of bad business practices; it continues to contribute to the economic well-being of the local community. A sustainable business should benefit its owners, its employees, and its neighbors.

When we take these three aspects into account in our activities, this is called the "**triple bottom line**". Sometimes it is referred to as "doing well by doing good." It means running a business, an organization, or a government in such a way that it doesn't destroy the resources – natural, cultural, or economic – on which it depends. In fact, a business that is run

in this way can enhance all three aspects and continue to operate profitably, while benefiting its surrounding natural areas and communities.

What is sustainable tourism?

The principles of sustainability can be applied to any type of tourism – mass or specialty; city, beach, or wilderness; large or small. They also can be applied to all sectors of the tourist industry: lodging, tours, agencies, ground operators, guiding, and transport. According to *Agenda 21 for the Travel & Tourism Industry*, “Sustainable tourism products are products which operate in harmony with local environment, community, and cultures, so that these become the permanent beneficiaries.” Many sustainable tourism certification programs consider sustainable tourism to be any kind of **“tourism that seeks to minimize ecological and sociocultural impacts while providing economic benefits to local communities and host countries.”** (Mohonk Agreement, 2000)

A large, conventional city hotel can be environmentally and socially responsible, and so can a small ecolodge near a national park. More to the point, a small lodge can be just as irresponsible and unsustainable as a large hotel, or even more so in some cases. This is one reason why many people see a growing need for internationally recognized, but locally adapted standards for sustainability.

In tourism, the triple bottom line can be critical, especially for those businesses and tours located outside of large cities. Hotels and tours in rural or natural areas depend on the good will of their local community for their survival. Businesses that do not hire or benefit local inhabitants often lose the support of their neighbors. And towns, villages, and indigenous communities whose social fabric is damaged by tourism often lose their attractiveness for tourists. Businesses based on natural resources cannot survive if the resource is destroyed — this is why the clients are visiting in the first place.

The twelve aims for making tourism sustainable were described in “Making Tourism More Sustainable: A Guide for Policy Makers” (United Nations Environment Programme – World Tourist Organization, 2005) as:

1. Economic Viability: To ensure the viability and competitiveness of tourism destinations and enterprises, so that they are able to continue to prosper and deliver benefits in the long term.
2. Local Prosperity: To maximize the contribution of tourism to the economic prosperity of the host destination, including the proportion of visitor spending that is retained locally.
3. Employment Quality: To strengthen the number and quality of local jobs created and supported by tourism, including the level of pay, conditions of service and availability to all without discrimination by gender, race, disability or in other ways.

4. Social Equity: To seek a widespread and fair distribution of economic and social benefits from tourism throughout the recipient community, including improving opportunities, income and services available to the poor.
5. Visitor Fulfillment: To provide a safe, satisfying and fulfilling experience for visitors, available to all without discrimination by gender, race, disability, or in other ways.
6. Local Control: To engage and empower local communities in planning and decision making about the management and future development of tourism in their area, in consultation with other stakeholders.
7. Community Wellbeing: To maintain and strengthen the quality of life in local communities, including social structures and access to resources, amenities and life support systems, avoiding any form of social degradation or exploitation.
8. Cultural Richness: To respect and enhance the historic heritage, authentic culture, traditions, and distinctiveness of host communities.
9. Physical Integrity: To maintain and enhance the quality of landscapes, both urban and rural, and avoid the physical and visual degradation of the environment.
10. Biological Diversity: To support the conservation of natural areas, habitats, and wildlife, and minimize damage to them.
11. Resource Efficiency: To minimize the use of scarce and non renewable resources in the development and operation of tourism facilities and services.
12. Environmental Purity: To minimize the pollution of air, water, and land and the generation of waste by tourism enterprises and visitors

The publication explains how these aims are related to the triple bottom line and how each of the aims contributes to all three bottom lines.

What do we mean by ecotourism?

Ecotourism is a sector of tourism, based on nature travel and including the principles of sustainability. The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines ecotourism as: “**responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people.**” Whatever definition is used, ecotourism should have a *positive impact* on both natural areas and the local community.

<http://www.ecotourism.org/sites/ecotourism.org/files/document/Certification/ECOTOURISM%20Handbook%20I%20-%20A%20Simple%20User%27s%20Guide%20to%20Certification%20for%20SustainableTourism%20and%20Ecotou.pdf>