Ecotourism Destination Certification
Ecotourism Australia – Who we are

Established in 1991

Certification introduced in 1996 (National Ecotourism Accreditation Program, NEAP)

We are a not-for-profit and non-government organisation

Our core function is the design and delivery of certification programs for nature based tourism bringing quality through ecotourism best practice and reassurance to travellers

We represent over 1,500 ecotourism products and close to 500 members all across Australia

Our ECO certification is Approved by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council – they manage the global standards for sustainable tourism
Our Programs

Businesses must be fully operational and bookable to achieve certification.
Businesses displaying the ECO certified tourism logo are certified to high standards across:

- Environmental responsibility
- Minimal impact best practice
- Delivering quality interpretation
- Cultural respect
- Contributing to local communities
- Contributing to conservation
Without Protected Areas there are very limited opportunities for NBT in Australia.

**Our Values**

**Ecotourism in Australia**

*Building regions, creating jobs, inspiring visitors & protecting the environment*

### Protect our Parks
1. Consistent and increased resourcing for natural and cultural heritage management.
   - National Parks and other protected areas are the key ecotourism asset. For the industry to thrive, governments need to invest wisely and sustainably to protect and enhance the National Parks, and other protected areas, values and potential.

2. All commercial development within protected areas should meet National minimum standards.
   - The recent trend to promote tourism development within Parks needs to ensure the values are protected in the long term. All developments should follow "Best Practice Guidelines for Eco-Opportunities in Protected and Natural Areas“, TAPAF 2012.

### Involve the Operators
3. Major development applications to include tour operator input.
   - Major Resource, and other, development proponents with proposals that impact on tourism assets and experiences should be required to:
     3.1. Consult and engage with tour operators in preparing their applications.
     3.2. Include independently prepared tourism impact assessments in major development applications.
     3.3. Acknowledge the Cultural landscape and destination character in development decisions.

4. Embed tourism in National Parks Planning.
   - National Parks Agencies to create ‘tourism reference groups’ of licensed tour operators and industry associations to provide estate wide input to park planning and issue management.

### Invest in the Future
5. Support product development.
   - Realign the current policy direction of many levels of government to include and strengthen tourism agencies’ product and destination development functions/programs.
   - 5.1 Initiatives such as "Australia’s National Landscapes" and "Indigenous Tourism Champions" are valued and resourced by all levels of government and strongly supported by industry.

   - National, State and Territory governments to have developed, resourced and implemented Ecotourism/Nature based tourism plans.

### Incentivise Quality
   - Tourism Research Australia develops and reports on key nature based tourism outcomes and indicators.

8. Reduce risk and improve visitor experience by incentivising quality operations.
   - Tour operators who have committed to Independently Audited Quality Assurance Programs (IAQAP), such as Ecotourism Australia’s ECO certification, to be given preferential listings and treatment.
   - 8.1 National and State Tourism organisation provide preferential marketing and public relations opportunities to IAQAP operators.
   - 8.2 National and State Protected Area Managers to continue providing incentives to IAQAP operators.

8.3 State and National Ecotourism or Nature based Tourism Awards require entrants to hold IAQAP ecotourism certification.
Partnerships - who we work with

- Ecotourism Operators
- All National Park Agencies – Nature based tourism planning & certification incentives
- Austrade, Tourism Australia, State and Regional Tourism Organisations and Industry Councils
- International Tourism Councils and Governments
- Marketing Alliances
Tourism can be an effective tool for the conservation and management of protected areas (IUCN 2002).

Well-managed tourism can generate the financial and political support needed to sustain the values of protected areas.

“Protected areas need tourism and tourism needs protected areas” - Eagles (2002)
Ecotourism Australia has developed an Ecotourism Destination Certification – following the GSTC Destination Criteria

Purpose:

- Well-run, high-visititation protected areas are critical to the success of tourism destinations
- Targeted at high visitation Parks with a tourism focus.

Ecotourism Australia’s Ecotourism Destination Certification Program is designed as a platform to demonstrate to visitors and the rest of the tourism community the leadership of Australia’s protected area management agencies. It also places emphasis on the strength, value and opportunities of collaborative, dynamic partnerships and implementation of industry best practice initiatives.
The GSTC Partnership was initiated by the Rainforest Alliance, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Foundation, and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

Protected areas are defined by IUCN as “clearly defined geographical spaces, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values” (IUCN, 2014a).
Nature-based tourism...

...is growing
In 2014, there were 4.2 million international nature-based visitors to Australia, an increase of 4% per annum since 2010 (Griffith University, 2014).

...is an important motivator for domestic and international visitors to travel within and to Australia
Tourism Research Australia (TRA) has identified 69% of International and 28% of overnight Domestic Tourists are Nature-Based Tourists (TRA Nov 2015).
Nature - based tourism...

…is generating higher yield on average, as its visitors are spending more and staying longer

On average, international nature-based visitors spend $5,548 per trip compared to $3,621 per trip by other international visitors (those who did not undertake nature based activities).

…is driving regional economies and job creation

TRA has stated that when including directly and indirectly employed in tourism-related industries, the number nearly doubles to 925,000 (or 8.1% of Australia’s total labour force). They expect a further 123,000 jobs in tourism to be created by 2020 (a growth of 23%).
Growth in Nature-based Tourism

Nature-based tourism...

...is providing the most memorable experience
International leisure visitors consistently cite “Australia’s natural environment and wildlife” as the most memorable experience they had on their visit to Australia (Griffith University, 2014).

...is forecasted to keep growing positively – potential for growth
Nature based tourism outperformed the overall tourism market on all fronts in 2012 – 13 (TTF, 2014). In 2015, international visitation to National parks increased by 13%. This growth is expected to continue as more people seek to experience and enjoy their leisure time in nature. By 2024–25, total tourism expenditure will reach $145 billion in real terms (TRA, 2015).

As a result, it is increasingly important that Protected Area Management Agencies have access to a simple and effective framework to assist them manage and conserve the natural and cultural values of their protected areas while also demonstrating leadership to visitors and the tourism industry.
Kosciuszko National Park is currently piloting the Certification with the aim of having at least five (5) destination certified protected areas in NSW.

Parks Victoria, WA DPaW and Tasmanian P&WS have already committed to certifying their high visitation Parks, with others expected to follow.

By the end of 2017 the aim is to have 30 certified Protected Areas across Australia.
Ecotourism Destination Certification Benefits

- PARTNERSHIPS
- PLANNING
- PROMOTION
- POINT OF DIFFERENCE
- PROTECTION
Benefits

National Parks who attain Ecotourism Destination Certification will gain:

- Recognition of management excellence and engagement by Tourism Industry, the Community and visitors
- Independent assessment and auditing
- Networking for Park/Agency staff - Sustainable Tourism Destinations
- Leadership in encouraging the tourism industry to follow best practice
- Access to EA marketing opportunities and representation at tourism trade events (i.e. ATE)
- Access to State and Australian Tourism Awards
The Program comprehensively covers four main objectives of sustainable destinations:

- Demonstrating effective sustainable management
- Maximising economic benefits to the host community and minimising negative impacts
- Maximising benefits to communities, visitors, and culture and minimising negative impacts
- Maximising benefits to the environment and minimising negative impacts
This section relates to a holistic approach to sustainable destination management. It emphasises a coordinated approach to planning centred around sustainability, safety, security, accessibility and visitor satisfaction.

- A1 Sustainable Destination Strategy
- A2 Destination Management Organization
- A3 Monitoring
- A4 Tourism Seasonality Management
- A5 Climate Change Adaption
- A6 Inventory of tourism assets and attractions
- A7 Planning Regulations
- A8 Access for all
- A9 Property Acquisitions
- A10 Visitor Satisfaction
- A11 Sustainability Standards
- A12 Safety and Security
- A13 Crisis and Emergency Management
- A14 Promotion
This section emphasises commitment to ensuring the visitor experiences provided within protected areas deliver on the responsibility to involve the local community and make a positive contribution to the region’s visitor economy.

- B1 Economic Monitoring
- B2 Local Career Opportunities
- B3 Public Participation
- B4 Local community opinion
- B5 Local access
- B6 Tourism awareness and education
- B7 Preventing exploitation
- B8 Support for community
- B9 Supporting local entrepreneurs and fair trade
This section emphasises commitment to ensuring the visitor experiences provided within protected areas deliver on the responsibility to be respectful of the natural and cultural heritage of the site

- C1 Attraction Protection
- C2 Visitor Management
- C3 Visitor Behaviour
- C4 Cultural Heritage Protection
- C5 Site Interpretation
- C6 Intellectual Property
Ecotourism Destination Certification
Section D: Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts

This section emphasises commitment to ensuring the impacts on the natural environment are carefully managed.

- D1 Environmental Risks
- D2 Protection of Sensitive Environments
- D3 Wildlife Protection
- D4 Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- D5 Energy Conservation
- D6 Water Management
- D7 Water Security
- D8 Water Quality
- D9 Wastewater
- D10 Solid waste reduction
- D11 Light and noise pollution
- D12 Low-impact transportation
Delivering great tourism experiences – Governments

- Let Tour Operators run their business

- Set the standards, behaviours and outcomes you seek then:
  - Provide meaningful incentives to encourage these,
  - Ensure compliance regimes are in place and effective

- Provide the planning framework
  - Ensure the industry is engaged in a meaningful way
  - Aspire to be leaders in innovative systems and methods

- Review, listen, implement (repeat)

- Work with Industry – Parks are their livelihood
Network of high visitation, sustainable tourism parks

Grouping of high visitation parks

- Forum to share information
- Collecting best practice examples
- Site visits to see best practice examples

- TAPAF (since 2000) – head office staff in tourism and parks have met for 16 years sharing knowledge and initiatives, we see the potential for high visitation park managers from around Australia to have a similar forum – discussing challenges and solutions that are unique to high visitation, sustainable destination parks

- Western Australia, Tasmania, Victoria → 2017
Nature-based Tourism Resource Hub
What this means for you – next steps

- Raise your image even further & tell the world
  - Tell the travellers – get branding on entrance signs, website, brochures, ranger badge
  - Tell your tourism operators – CTOs – this is what it means
  - Tell your RTO, STO – “we understand and accept our role as a tourism destination” (want to embrace)

- Put pressure on tourism operators – expectations can be greater than before
  - We expect you to be certified, to strive for excellence and to actively contribute to conservation and community

- Best of Parks concept – work with Tourism Australia