

# HANDBOOK 3



## PRACTICAL STEPS FOR MARKETING TOURISM CERTIFICATION

*A publication of the Center for Ecotourism and Sustainable Development*



*Together with*



**Disclaimer:**

The opinions and concepts expressed in this document are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinion of the sponsoring organizations.

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**Cover Photo:** Jessica Webb; Los Angeles Times Adventures in Travel Expo, 2007.

**Who should use this guide?**

This guide is part of a series of practical, “how-to” handbooks on sustainable tourism certification. These handbooks are based on research and reports done by the Center on Ecotourism and Sustainable Development (CESD) and The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) as part of a certification project directed by the Rainforest Alliance and funded by the IDB/MIF. The research was conducted primarily in Latin America and the handbooks are particularly relevant for this region. However, important lessons learned and implications are applicable to other parts of the world. The reports upon which this Handbook 3 is based, the other handbooks in this series, and additional related materials may be found at [www.ecotourismcesd.org](http://www.ecotourismcesd.org). The reports and series of handbooks cover a range of subjects including financial sustainability, monitoring and evaluation, and numerous marketing topics related to certification. This collection of resources is designed to help certification practitioners and interested supporters advance tourism certification so that it becomes a useful and reliable tool for travel consumers and businesses to recognize and apply the principles of sustainable tourism.

The marketing reports focused on how to build consumer and industry buy-in for certification. Fourteen researchers and industry experts in four continents used interviews, focus groups, field experience, internet and existing literature to produce ten interim reports and a final marketing strategy which can be found with other marketing reports at [www.ecotourismcesd.org](http://www.ecotourismcesd.org). This handbook is based primarily on two reports: “Marketing Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Certification” and “Business Incentives Offered”. This handbook is primarily aimed for use by certification programs; however, the strategies involve the other stakeholders – businesses, governments, NGOs, trade associations, etc – who will also find this guide useful.

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## Introduction

Certification is a market-based tool. It links players in the value chain by guaranteeing, or certifying, to users (tourists and tourism intermediaries) that the suppliers (tourism providers) adhere to a specific set of standards and indicators of sustainable practices. In this day of globalization and increasing tourism to remote destinations, the certification label provides the trust and confidence bridging the various market players.

### Why do tourism businesses enter into certification?

- Improve quality and performance of their business and staff
- “Do the right things” to protect the environment and local communities
- Cut costs
- Gain marketing advantage
- Avoid being lumped with “greenwashed” businesses that are not sustainable, yet try to claim to be.

### Is there a Marketing Advantage?

#### How can we create one?

Most certification programs have insufficient funds for effective, broad-scale consumer marketing which can be notoriously expensive. In addition, they often lack expertise in marketing to tourism intermediaries (such as tour operators), the media, travel shows, or elsewhere.. Beyond these audiences, certification programs must be promoted to governments, potential funders, and relevant non-governmental organizations. Business planning should include marketing as an important line item. Effective marketing of certification programs takes time and money. However, as this handbook outlines, there are methods of decreasing costs while at the same time effectively broadcasting the benefits of tourism certification to a wide range of audiences.

## **Chapter 1: Marketing 101**

The tourism industry is a marketplace. However, sustainable tourism certification programs, tourism businesses, funders, and policy makers who assume that certification will automatically attract tourists and intermediaries and generate revenues are underestimating the challenges of the marketplace. Having a marketing plan and strategy ensures success and long-term sustainability of the certification program and tourism business – a win-win situation.

There are numerous definitions of marketing and what constitutes a marketing strategy. Often marketing is thought of only as the promotion of products, especially advertising and branding. However, marketing has a wider meaning which recognizes that it is customer centered. A marketing strategy is the business' approach to promoting its products and services expressed in broad terms.

Marketing strategies are dynamic and interactive. They are partially planned and partially unplanned. A flexible marketing strategy allows the program to react to changes in the marketplace.

A marketing strategy, in turn, forms the basis of the marketing plan. The marketing plan contains the set of specific activities required to successfully implement a marketing strategy. Thus the marketing strategy serves as the fundamental underpinning of a marketing plan which is designed to reach marketing objectives. It is important that these objectives have measurable results.



### How to Develop a Marketing Strategy and Plan

The United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) report “Marketing Sustainable Tourism Products” provides valuable guidance on marketing sustainable tourism products. The full report is free and available on their website. [http://www.uneptie.org/pc/tourism/documents/marketingsustainabletourism/marketin\\_g\\_sustainable\\_tourism.pdf](http://www.uneptie.org/pc/tourism/documents/marketingsustainabletourism/marketin_g_sustainable_tourism.pdf).

**ANALYSIS**  
Market  
Resources  
Competitors  
Environment

The model used in the UNEP report is simple and applicable for certification programs. It begins with a review of the key stages of a marketing plan: Analysis, Marketing Strategy and Marketing Mix. Below are excerpts from the UNEP report:

The first stage in developing a market plan is a thorough analysis of the market, including resources, competitors, and the business environment.

**STRATEGY**  
Segmenting  
Targeting  
Positioning

The second stage is to decide on the strategic choices of how to segment markets, to determine the sectors to be targeted, and to plan an appropriate product positioning.

**MARKETING MIX**  
Product  
Price  
Promotion

The last stage is to determine the marketing mix, which in its most basic sense means how the product – in this case, the certification program and certified products -- will be offered to consumers – (both intermediaries and tourists), the price that will be charged, how the product will be communicated, and how it will be placed or distributed.

**Chapter 2: Market Analysis**

**Stage 1:  
ANALYSIS**  
Market  
Resources  
Competitors  
Environment

The first stage in developing a market plan is a thorough analysis of the market, including resources, competitors, and the business environment.

Again, remember that certification is a market-based tool. It is critical to understand the market, the demand for the certified services and product, the competitors, and the other tourism stakeholders. This analysis provides the foundation for developing a strategy to address the threats, challenges, barriers, opportunities, and competitors. This can be done via a SWOT analysis that lists in a grid the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats faced in marketing certification programs. (For details on SWOT analysis, see, for instance: [http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC\\_05.htm](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_05.htm)).

The marketing reports produced by CESD and TIES are based on analysis of existing marketing studies, interviews with key players in U.S., Europe, Asia-Pacific, Africa, and Latin America, and studies of successes and failures in the marketing of certification within tourism and other industries. These marketing reports provide the basis for this first stage of the market plan: the market analysis. The full reports are available at [www.ecotourismcesd.org](http://www.ecotourismcesd.org). The analysis and findings of these marketing studies highlighted a number of issues and challenges:



## Key Issues and Challenges for Successful Marketing

- Creating sufficient supply and demand:  
A critical mass of certified products is essential.
- Limited consumer demand:  
Little public recognition of existing 'green' tourism certification programs.
  - too many logos and brands.
  - a proliferation of small programs.
  - a "green gap" between stated consumer preferences in surveys and real world behavior of consumers' purchasing patterns.
- Unrealistic expectations that certification will increase sales.
- Small businesses often unable to successfully undertake certification.
- Certification programs often lack:
  - Marketing staff, budgets, and expertise.
  - Knowledge of "lessons learned" from successes and failures of certification in other industries.
- Current lack of international standard, accreditation body and logo.
  - Regional initiatives are step towards global body.
  - Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council (STSC) vital for global marketing and credibility of certification programs.

### Creating Sufficient Supply and Demand

In order for markets to be interested in certified products (demand), there must be sufficient number of alternatives and options (supply). There must be a critical mass of certified products. This is not yet the case:

- By 2007, total certified products in Europe were estimated to be between 6000 and 10,000; in Latin America's four programs there were 168 certified accommodations and tour operators; and globally less than 15,000 certified businesses and products. This constitutes only a tiny fraction of tourism businesses and products.
- With certification programs spread unevenly around the world, there are limited opportunities for consumers to learn about certification.
- Tour operators and other marketers cannot give preference in their catalogues if there are not enough quality certified products in their market.
- Most 'green' tourism labels have several dozen or at the most a few hundred (not thousands) of certified businesses or products. One of the most successful programs, Nature's Best in Sweden, began in 2002 and by 2007 had certified 75 companies and about 300 activities.

### Addressing Consumer and Industry Confusion

Most sustainable tourism certification programs are nationally based, operate only regionally, and have limited consumer recognition. The two main exceptions are

Blue Flag and Green Globe 21, both of which operate in many countries and have gained considerable market recognition.

Blue Flag, one of the oldest and most successful tourism certification programs has certified over 3200 beaches and marinas in 39 countries across Europe, South Africa, Morocco, New Zealand, Canada and the Caribbean. (See [www.blueflag.org](http://www.blueflag.org).) Begun in France in 1985, it focused on two issues of critical concern to beachgoers – water quality and beach safety. Its logo has become widely recognized and popular with consumers.



Green Globe 21 (GG21), which was first developed in the mid-1990s by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), has undergone numerous revisions which have strengthened and expanded its criteria and procedures. Now based in Australia, Green Globe 21 has “benchmarked” (a self assessment process against a set of indicators and checklists) or “certified” (using independent third party auditors) over 200 accommodations and other tourism facilities in 75 countries. (See [www.greenglobe21.com](http://www.greenglobe21.com))



While it is widely recognized that nationally or regionally based sustainable certification programs allow criteria to be tailored to local realities, there is a need for universally accepted procedures and basic criteria against which all programs can be measured and harmonized. The well established 5 star certification program for hotel quality and service, for instance, has common criteria although each country runs its own program.

### **Building a Global Standard and Brand**

At present there is no global criteria or standard for the 80-odd sustainable tourism certification programs. There are, however, two important documents that are serving informally as a template for helping to harmonize certification programs. One is the Mohonk Agreement, a set of basic criteria that need to be part of any sustainable tourism certification program. This document was adopted at a 2000 meeting of ‘green’ tourism certification programs. (Available at



[www.ecotourismcesd.org](http://www.ecotourismcesd.org)) The second is the Baseline Criteria drawn up from existing programs by the Sustainable Tourism Certification Network of the Americas. (See [www.rainforest-alliance.org/tourism/documents/baseline\\_criteria.pdf](http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/tourism/documents/baseline_criteria.pdf)).

In Europe, surveys<sup>1</sup> find that consumers support creation of a single eco-label. In Italy, for instance, nearly 90% of those surveyed rated a European eco-label focused on environmental quality in hotels as “quite important” or “very important.” There are two initiatives to harmonize criteria and collectively market ‘green’ certification programs for accommodations: the European Union’s Flower ecolabel which is awarded to tourism businesses and many other product groups that meet agreed upon core ecological and performance criteria (See <http://www.eco-label.com>) and the VISIT (Voluntary Initiatives for Sustainability in Tourism) initiative, an NGO effort to create a network of sustainable tourism eco-labels in Europe that meet a common set of criteria certificate. (See [www.visit21.net](http://www.visit21.net))



The creation of a global accreditation body, the proposed Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council (STSC) which is being spearheaded by the Rainforest Alliance, seeks to create a framework of criteria and procedures and an easily-recognized logo that would assure all users that member certification programs meet internationally accepted standards of sustainable tourism. When launched, an STSC will help to build international credibility and transparency of certification programs and to promote a common global logo for all accredited programs. (See [www.rainforest-alliance.org/tourism.cfm?id=council](http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/tourism.cfm?id=council)). A worldwide accreditation logo can foment brand recognition.

### **The “Green Gap” and Consumer Preference**

While surveys show consumer support for environmentally and socially responsible tourism, there is also evidence of a “green gap” between what consumers say they would do and actual behavior.

- In the U.S., 80% of tourists say preserving environment is important, but only 14% say they ask if a hotel has an environmental policy.
- In Germany, over 70% of domestic travelers say an environmental label for tourism is important, but only 53% say they would use an eco-label, if available, to chose a vacation.

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<sup>1</sup> All surveys referred to in this Handbook are found in CESD’s “Consumer Demand and Operator Support for Socially and Environmentally Responsible Tourism”, available at [www.ecotourismcesd.org](http://www.ecotourismcesd.org).

Consumers purchase based first on price, quality, & safety.



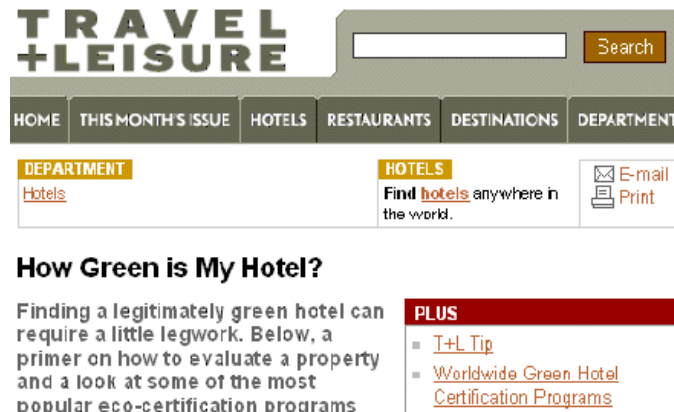
Source: Ariane Janer, Eco-Brasil

This pyramid illustrates that most fundamental to consumer decisions are health, safety, accessibility, and price issues. However, once price, quality, and safety are assured, a growing number of consumers say they prefer companies that are environmentally and socially responsible.

- o More than two-thirds of U.S. and Australian travelers, and 90% of British tourists, consider active protection of the environment, including support of local communities, to be part of a hotel's responsibility.

### Lack of Marketing Staff or Budgets with Certification Programs

Few certification programs have staff or budgets dedicated to marketing. Not only do constrained resources limit an organization's ability to promote its program, but more importantly, the organization is often unable to monitor trends to take advantage of new market opportunities. For example, the increasing importance and mainstreaming of environmental concerns around the globe has led to more coverage of the topic in traditional and business press. The *Economist*, *Newsweek*, *Travel & Leisure*, *Plenty*, and *The New York Times* have all recently published articles about ecotourism, sustainability and certification labels.



### Key Opportunities

Certification programs with limited geographical scope, small staffs, and tight budgets, can take advantage of marketing opportunities by focusing on:

- Working with key intermediaries in the supply chain, including tour operators, the media, and guidebooks.
- Establishing alliances with other organizations - public or private, local or international - to reach more people.
- Uniting logos or brands within a region and marketing under one umbrella.

The Rainforest Alliance's Sustainable Tourism Certification Network of the Americas is, for instance, promoting all certifications programs in the hemisphere at travel shows, in publications, and online.



## **Chapter 3: Market Strategy**

**Stage 2:**  
**STRATEGY**  
Segmenting  
Targeting  
Positioning

The second stage is to decide on the strategic choices of how to segment markets, to determine the markets to be targeted, and to plan an appropriate product positioning.

### **Findings and Implications for the Marketing Strategy**

Below is a list of steps to consider in developing a marketing strategy:

#### **Steps to Developing a Marketing Strategy**

1. Build a Critical Mass:
  - Increase consumer demand over time
  - Leverage the supply chain
  - Motivate businesses to become certified
2. Incorporate health, safety, and quality standards into 'green' certification programs.
3. Define tangible incentives to help industry buy-in to certification
4. Understand international trade agreements to avoid conflicts
5. Promote a global accreditation body

#### **1. Build a Critical Mass**

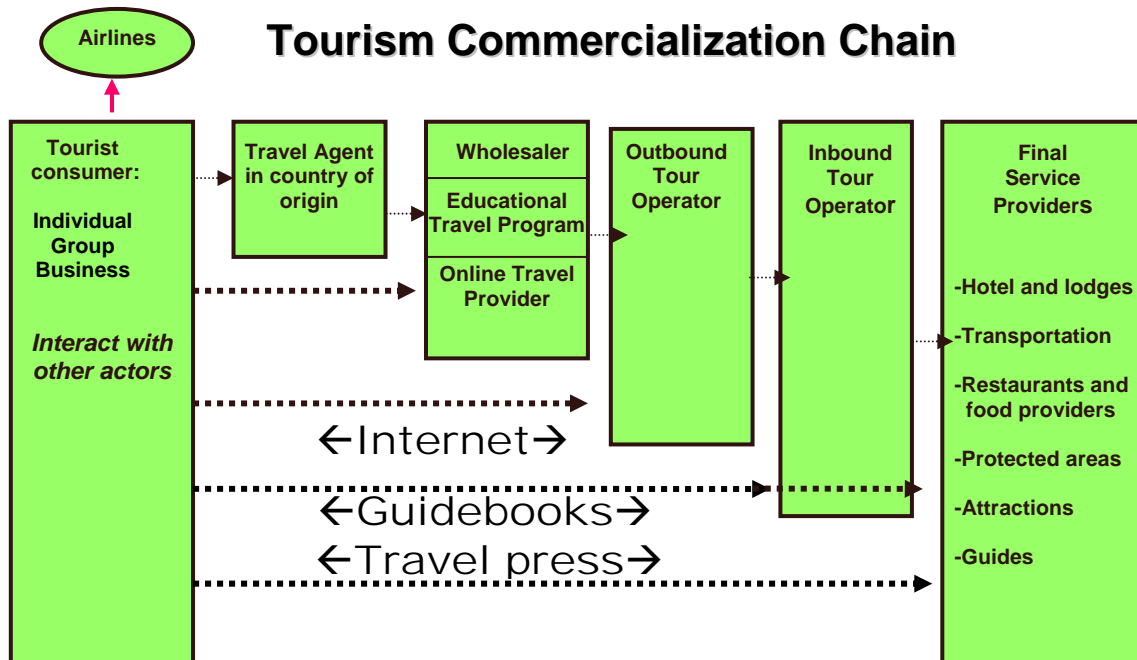
There is currently insufficient awareness among consumers and the tourism industry about the value of sustainable tourism certification. On the supply side, most

sustainable tourism certification programs have relatively few certified products. It is estimated that most programs have less than 50 businesses on board and that only between 1-5% of the potential pool of sustainable businesses are certified. In contrast, the best-recognized labels, such as Blue Flag for beaches for the five star quality and service labels, have thousands of certified businesses or products. A critical mass is essential for 'green' tourism certification programs to be credible, for consumer recognition to increase, and for the marketplace to have options. A larger certified portfolio also establish economies of scale for certification programs and ensures financial sustainability through income from fees, services, and products. (See Financial Sustainability report [www.ecotourismcesd.org](http://www.ecotourismcesd.org)). When developing a marketing strategy, it is important to consider several factors related to building a critical mass of certified businesses.

- **Consumer demand takes time to build:** A number of vocal critics maintain that 'green' tourism certification cannot be successful because there is little existing consumer demand. However, one of the principal conclusions of the CESD/TIES marketing studies is that successful certification programs in many industries are built over time and most start out without pre-existing consumer demand. Instead, demand develops over many years (typically 8-15 years, sometimes as long as 20 years), long after industry decision-makers and intermediaries have begun to use certification as part of their due-diligence and purchasing criteria. In the U.S., organic foods, wood, coffee, and energy star appliance certification programs all began to grow successfully through using wholesalers, retailers, and other intermediaries in the supply chain, rather than through direct consumer campaigns. (See Conroy, *Branded!: How the Certification Revolution Is Transforming Global Corporations*).

Certification program efforts to market directly to consumers frequently fail, at least in the first decade of a program's existence, because (a) there are initially not enough certified products; (b) the cost of direct consumer marketing is extremely high, and most certification programs have minimal income because they are striving to keep the cost of certification low and accessible to smaller businesses; (c) certification programs would have to pay the entire cost of a promotional program unlike retailers who market to consumers on a daily basis and can therefore add certification into their existing promotional packages at little additional cost; and (d) again, unlike retailers, certification programs are generally unskilled in primary consumer marketing.

- **Leverage the supply chain:** Analyzing the tourism commercialization chain will help certification programs identify the most effective partners for marketing. Certification programs should ask where certification can best be marketed – “where is the most leverage?”



Source: de Vicente, 2004

It is generally not effective for certification programs to target tourists directly: it is too costly and requires considerable skill. Instead, certification programs should use intermediaries -- tour operators, guidebooks, internet providers, and the media – as well as government agencies, trade associations, parks and protected areas, and conservation and tourism NGOs to help market to both consumers and industry. Marketing of certified products to consumers is usually most successful when done by the final intermediary, who retails products directly to the consumer. For instance, retail stores in the United States such as Lenox, Carrier, Sears, and Lowes all co-market EnergyStar certified appliances directly to the consumer, with substantial success (See [www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov)). Similarly, consumer demand for Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) products greatly increased after retail chains such as Home Depot and Ikea adopted a purchasing policy for certified timber and after Kinko's began purchasing certified paper. Similarly, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) does little marketing to consumers, and instead concentrates on selling to retailers such as Legal Seafood and Whole Foods who, in turn, promote the label to consumers.

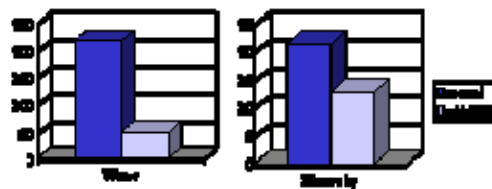
In the travel industry, tour operators are viewed as an important intermediary for marketing certified businesses and products. Many tour operators Europe, as well as a few in North America, are implementing "sustainability policies." While their choice of products to include in their catalogues depends on their own direct inspection of properties to ensure quality and sustainability, an increasing number of tour operators see certification as a way of pre-selecting the businesses they will consider using for their itineraries. These tour operators can help influence hotels and other businesses to become certified, just as Home Depot has exerted pressure to help motivate timber certification.

- **Motivate businesses to become certified:** Unless a certification program is long established and has excellent brand recognition, simply adding a certification logo to a business’s advertising is not going to increase occupancy. There are, however, two other important early gains that tourism businesses can receive from certification: 1) improved standards through compliance with recognized norms of best practices, whether for quality, environmental protection, or social responsibility, and 2) cost savings. Several studies have demonstrated important cost savings in energy and water that more than compensate for the cost of implementing certification in medium to large hotels. For instance, one early study of using environmental management systems (EMS) and Green Globe certification in hotels in Jamaica, found significant savings:



### Results of applying an EMS and certification in Jamaica

- Savings of up to 77% of water consumption
- Savings of up to 30% of electric consumption



Source: Hagler Bailly, 1999

It concluded that for Green Globe certification, “Over a 3-year period, the initial investment of US\$40,000 will yield approximately US\$112,000 in savings, or a net profit of about US\$70,000.” (Meade & del Monaco, “Environmental Management.”)



Similarly, the Green Tourism Business Scheme (GTBS), in Scotland, England and Europe, calculates that operating costs of its 1100 certified accommodations, attractions, and other businesses have been reduced by 10-30% and that over 30% of its members in Scotland can demonstrate an increase in profits as a result of participation in the certification program. (See [www.green-business.co.uk](http://www.green-business.co.uk) and Rome, “Current Range of Incentives”)

In addition, certification often requires substantial restructuring of poorly-run businesses and is likely to improve the quality of service of a business to meet the certification criteria. Reports from certified businesses also indicate dramatically improved staff morale and commitment, when they are involved in implementing a sustainability policy. This has direct repercussions in improved service and attention to clients. Improved quality in all aspects – environmental, socio-cultural, and



economic – greatly increases a business’ reputation and often leads to higher occupancy over time.



### **Certified Businesses and Staff Performance**

Karen Lewis, co-owner of Lapa Rios Eco-lodge in Costa Rica, says:

*“Being certified provides better marketing placement, an advantage over non-certified businesses. It adds real value to guest, staff and community experiences because of improved infrastructure and attention to better operations. Certification challenges creativity from owners, management, staff and guests. The process becomes self-energizing, gathering commitment to more improvements when today’s impacts are examined with how they will affect the future.”*

Lapa Rios, the first accommodation on Costa Rica to earn 5 green leaves, the CST’s top ranking, has actively promoted certification at international forums and with other businesses. Lapa Rios has also won numerous other prestigious awards, including the 2005 State Department Award for Corporate Excellence and the Rainforest Alliance’s 2007 Sustainable Standard Setter prize. (See [www.laparios.com](http://www.laparios.com))

Certification programs should work with successful certified tourism businesses to promote the benefits of certification. For example, Green Globe 21 (GG21) encourages peer relationships among businesses interested in certification and companies that have already been certified.

### **2. Incorporate health, safety, and quality standards into ‘green’ certification programs**

Research suggests that environmental and social responsibility is important to consumers, but only once their demand for safety, quality, and price have been satisfied. In other words, a consumer who is offered a choice between a certified and a non-certified business might well choose the certified business, if all other factors are the same. Coffee and organic food certification programs only began to gain popularity when they incorporated quality along with environmental and social criteria. Stressing quality, price, and value would seem to be an essential ingredient of any ‘green’ tourism certification program’s promotional campaign.

For certification programs there are two ways to address these important issues:

- Businesses should already meet minimum quality and safety standards before being eligible for applying for sustainability certification, or
- The quality and safety criteria should be included as part of the sustainability standard.

This does not mean tourism businesses must adopt the five star system which is often inappropriate both for small businesses and for sustainability principles, but rather that it is vital that ‘green’ businesses also provide good service, and high standards of hygiene and safety.



For instance, Nature’s Best, described as the “quality label” for Swedish ecotourism, includes “quality and safety” as one of its six basic criteria. (Its other core criteria are that the business or product provides support for the local economy, contributes actively to conservation, is operated sustainably, respects limitations of the destination, and provides guests joy, knowledge and respect.)

### 3. Define tangible incentives to help build industry buy-in to certification

Analysis of existing certification programs reveals that there are a growing number of concrete incentives, many offered by government agencies, parks boards, guidebooks, and the media that are helping to increase business interest in becoming certified. Certification programs should work with all these public and private intermediaries to help publicize their program and certified businesses and products.

- **Government Incentives:**

Governments are increasingly recognizing that certification helps ensure high standards for tourism businesses and protects a country’s reputation with the public.

- Barbados gives 150% tax deduction to businesses acquiring Green Globe 21 or other recognized certifications.
- The EU Commission directed that its member countries should try when possible to make its public purchases from certified and environmentally-friendly businesses, products, and services.
- The Canadian government’s Green Travel Program encourages employees and business travelers to stay in hotels certified by Audubon Green Leaf Eco-Rating. (See [www.terrachoice.ca/hotelwebsite/indexcanada.htm](http://www.terrachoice.ca/hotelwebsite/indexcanada.htm))
- In U.S., several states, including California, Florida, and Wisconsin, request state employees use environmentally-sound hotels whenever possible.

- **Tourism Boards:**

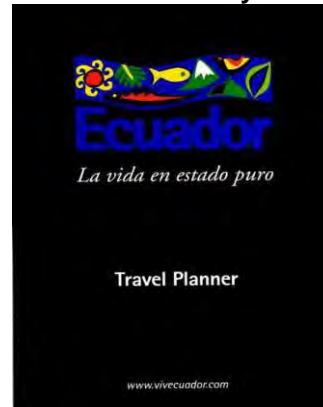
A number of government tourism boards are helping to publicize certified businesses.

- The Queensland Tourism Board produced an attractive map for tourists of certified businesses.
- Ecuador's Fondo de Promocion Turistica del Ecuador was established by the Ecuadorian government in 2002 in order to assist the Ministry of Tourism with its goal of promoting tourism growth. It uses combined public and private sector funds to promote sustainable tourism and certified businesses in a variety of ways, including an attractive Travel Planner directory that highlights responsible businesses.

**Queensland Tourism Board's Map of Certified Businesses**



**Ecuador's Sustainable Tourism Directory**



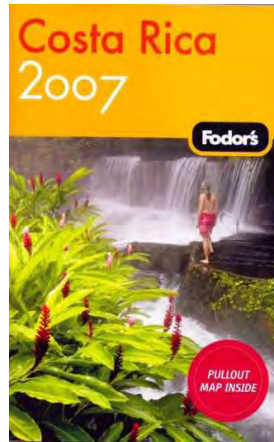
**• Parks and Protected Areas:**

Protected area managers are increasingly looking to certification programs to help ensure that businesses operating within their parks conform to high social, environmental, quality and service standards. Some are actively providing incentives to certified businesses and products.

- Australia's Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority gives longer operating license (15 years) to operators with EcoCertification.
- Western Australia's Conservation Department reduces fees and extends licenses for certified businesses on public lands from 1 to 3-5 years.

**• Guidebooks:**

A growing number of guidebook series are including information about certification programs and recognizing certified businesses. These include Hunter Travel Guides for Ecuador & The Galapagos which has an insert on Smart Voyager, Lonely Planet for Guatemala which includes Green Deal, and Fodors guide for Costa Rica which includes information on the Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST) program.



#### 4. Understand international trade agreements to avoid conflicts

There has been concern that the large number of binding trade agreements in force, or likely to be ratified, will affect voluntary certification and the incentives that can be offered to certified businesses. However, a study of trade agreements and certification by Stanford University law professor Barton Thompson concluded that voluntary certification is not likely to violate trade agreements. (Available at [www.ecotourismcesd.org](http://www.ecotourismcesd.org)) Thompson's study examines the implications of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) for the voluntary certification of sustainable tourism. Thompson's findings suggest that serious problems are unlikely, as long as certification programs are voluntary and either internationally recognized or comply with generally accepted international criteria.

Where there is government involvement or incentives, programs must be equally applicable to all eligible businesses or products, irrespective of nationality. Tourism certification programs might have difficulty where there are government incentives that give preference to nationals over foreigners in purchasing, hiring, or ownership. Certification programs' marketing activities must ensure that there is no discrimination against any qualified businesses and that international and national businesses are treated equally. Thompson states that "sustainable tourism standards that encourage the purchase of local versus foreign food and other products poses the greatest current concern. GATT explicitly prohibits discrimination against foreign products through any governmental measure, including arguably standards addressed to tourism services."

Thompson concludes, "Current trade law is less restrictive of restrictions on trade in services than in goods. In addition, trade law is generally less restrictive of voluntary labeling or certification programs than of mandatory governmental standards, and most trade provisions apply to governmental rather than private actions. For all of these reasons, a privately-sponsored international effort to

develop a certification program for sustainable tourism should not pose significant concerns under GATT, the TBT Agreement, GATS, or regional trade agreements.”

### **5. Promote a global accreditation body**

It is unrealistic to achieve a single international certification program in the near future. Instead, an international baseline standard and a global accreditation body such as the Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council (STSC) could establish credibility by establishing a mechanism to ensure that ‘green’ tourism certification programs meet a set of agreed upon criteria. A worldwide accreditation logo (which could be used alongside certification program logos) can foment brand recognition. A growing number of certification programs and networks have endorsed the STSC. These include EcoCertification in Australia, Green Deal in Guatemala, Green Globe 21, Green Seal USA, Smart Voyager in Ecuador, Sustainable Tourism International in the US.

### **Push and Pull Strategies for Certification Programs**

Marketing resources in many certification programs are minimal or non-existent. However, as described above, there are a range of cost effective opportunities for certification programs to market smarter. While marketing benefits are only one of the reasons business get certified, the long term sustainability of certification programs will depend on building a critical mass of certified businesses and increasing the demand for certified products and services.

This involves a combination of PUSH and PULL strategies. The PUSH strategy maximizes all the available channels of distribution to “push” certified product into the marketplace. This strategy includes government and business incentives, use of intermediaries (tour operators, travel agents, travel shows, guidebooks, the media, etc), and alliances (such as the Sustainable Tourism Network of the Americas and VISIT in Europe). One of the most commonly touted benefits of tourism certification is that it will increase occupancy and sales to consumers. However, as discussed above, for most ‘green’ tourism certification programs, this has not yet been proven. Certification programs therefore need to ensure that certified businesses gain other clear and tangible benefits such as reduced operating costs, increased eco-efficiencies, improved quality, better management, improved community and staff relations, and better business to business marketing.

The PULL strategy is aimed at getting users of certified products and services such as travelers and tourism intermediaries – tour operators, guidebooks, websites, trade shows, parks, government agencies, tourism bureaus, socially and environmentally minded companies and institutions (museums, NGOs, universities, etc.) for instance – to DEMAND certified products and services. In doing so, these intermediaries can also help to market the certified businesses, products, and services.

The marketing plan is the recipe for certification programs to market smarter, despite limited resources and staff.

## **Chapter 4: Marketing Plan or Mix**

<p><b>Stage 3:</b> <b>MARKETING MIX</b> Product Price Promotion Placement</p>
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The last stage is to determine the general set of activities of the marketing plan. This includes determining the Marketing Mix or the 4Ps: Product, Pricing, Promotion, and Placement. There are many marketing models. However, the simple 4Ps approach will help certification programs identify the basic components necessary for implementing a successful marketing strategy.

### **1. Product: Product management and marketing deals with the specifications of the certification program and how it relates to end-user's needs and wants.**

- Understand the market needs:
  - Consumers purchase first based first on price, quality, and safety. Therefore, 'green' certification labels must fulfill these needs, as well as ensuring environmental and social responsibility.
  - Quality and sustainability assurances should be integrated into the marketing plan.
- Include input from a diverse variety of stakeholders. When certification programs are designed with input and participation from a diverse variety of stakeholders – government officials, trade associations, businesses, consumer and advocacy groups, NGOs, academics, and community organizations -- their buy-in and allegiance is more assured.
- Seek alliances and support from governmental and international bodies (such as the UN), trade associations, and leading NGOs which can bring recognition, respect, and financing.
  - A number of certification programs are managed by ecotourism societies, including in Kenya, Sweden, and Australia. This provides marketing and organizational support, but care must be taken to ensure the certification program is independent of industry.
  - Others, such as FTTSA in South Africa, Pan Parks in Europe, and Green Deal in Guatemala have been supported and promoted by leading environmental NGOs.
  - Rainforest Alliance has played a pivotal role in strengthening and promoting certification programs in the Americas, building a regional network, and raising funds, especially from the Inter-American Development Bank, to create and market new certification programs.
  - The EnergyStar program has been successfully run and marketed by the US' Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). More mixed is the experience of CST in Costa Rica. Run by the tourism institute (ICT), the CST has suffered from underfunding, political in-fighting, and bureaucratic sluggishness. Despite being an excellent program, it has been poorly marketed.



- Support the creation of an accreditation body to strengthen the marketing, particularly of nationally- and regionally-based certification labels, and to promote international recognition.

**2. Price: Pricing involves setting and marketing the cost for the certification process, including discounts, financial incentives, savings, in-kind benefits, and services.**

- Promote reduced costs -- energy, water, and operational -- that offset certification implementation costs.
- Utilize financial incentives to reduce costs of certification such as tax incentives, credits, and grant programs (covered in depth in Handbook 2: Practical Steps for Funding Certification of Tourism Businesses, available at [www.ecotourismcesd.org](http://www.ecotourismcesd.org)).
- Tax mechanisms dedicated to sustainable tourism programs include. airport departure taxes, tourism sales taxes, hotel taxes, land transfer taxes, and cruise passenger taxes.
- Gaining access to funding from international donors, especially in developing countries. (In the Americas, the IDB has helped fund a number of programs.)
- Tax and license concessions for certified businesses and programs. For instance, Barbados which gives a tax write off of 150% of the cost of participating in the Green Globe certification program, and the Great Barrier Reef in Australia gives longer operating permits to certified businesses.
- Document and promote positive impacts. This will serve to attract other businesses who want to become certified, as well as to encourage intermediaries and consumers to use certified businesses and products.

**3. Promotion: This includes advertising, sales promotion, publicity, and word of mouth selling, and refers to the various methods of promoting both the certification program and certified businesses and products.**

- Provide a clear simple name or acronym and logo that captures the program's central message. Once a clear message is developed, it should be used in all communications and promotions. Stick to the central message, and don't dilute it with too many other messages. Work with all stakeholders – media, certified businesses, government, NGOs, etc – to get them to use the message, and provide them with materials and resources to do so.
  - The ROC program created and run by Aboriginal Tourism Australia conveys a clear message of its core mission: “Respecting Our Culture”.



- Also effective logos and names are Smart Voyager begun to certify boats in the Galapagos and Travel Green Wisconsin, one of the first state-wide programs in the U.S.



- The Blue Flag and Green Globe also logos (and names) successfully capture the spirit of each program and are now quite widely recognized.
- In contrast, both the CST, GTBS in Scotland, PCTS (Programa de Certificação em Turismo Sustentável) in Brazil. all suffer from awkward names and acronyms.
- Gain recognition and credibility through eco-awards and endorsements.
  - For instance, Nature's Best was awarded the Swedish government's Grand Tourism Prize" in 2006 for "creating a strong label for Sweden. abroad" and awarded the Publisher's Prize in 2005, for the best Swedish webpage.



- Enlist certified businesses, especially the best "success stories" to promote certification and its benefits.
  - In Costa Rica, for instance, Lapa Rios Eco-lodge, Finca Rosa Blanca Country Inn, and Horizontes Nature Tours have all earned the highest 5 Green Leaf rating under the Costa Rica's Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST) program. These businesses have also won numerous other awards and they are highly profitable. Their owners actively promote certification at national and global forums, at trade associations, on their websites, and to the media.



*“Tourism businesses need a convinced leader or champion of the certification process to seize upon the market opportunities for differentiation presented by certification.”*

- Deirdre Shurland, Director, Caribbean Alliance for Sustainable Tourism (CAST) (See [www.cha-cast.com/](http://www.cha-cast.com/))

- o Many certified businesses do not take advantage of the opportunities certification offers to differentiate their business. Certified businesses should:
  - Use the certification logo on all printed materials.
  - Create a link from their website to the certification program.
  - Educate travelers and intermediaries of their sustainable practices.
- Identify the most appropriate and cost effective promotional channels and develop a media outreach plan.
  - o **Travel Media:**
    - The number of tourism media outlets has expanded greatly in recent years. By early 2007, there were, for instance, over 2400 print and broadcast travel media outlets in the US and Canada.
    - There is growing media interest as well in ecotourism, sustainable travel, corporate social responsibility, and certification.



- Contact airlines to explore possibilities to publish articles on sustainable tourism in their magazines and include a list of responsible tourism operations (with their contact information) located in key destinations where the airlines travel to.
  - Use negative news to promote standards and certification. Concerns about, for instance, the adverse effects of cruise tourism on natural destinations or greenhouse gas emissions from travel can be used to promote certification which measures impacts.
- **Internet/Webpage**
    - Internet presence is critical in today's tourism commercialization chain. In the US, over 80% of traveler's research and plan vacations on the internet.
    - Websites as well as search engines, online guidebooks, and portals are important marketing venues for certification programs and businesses.
    - Website should include short articles or comments about tourism operators' efforts to become certified and implement best management practices.
    - Websites should including travelers' stories of their visits to certified hotels and with certified tour operators to reinforce word of mouth marketing.
    - Catalogues, brochures, and other print materials of certified companies and tourism products should be posted online for easy access and promotion.
  - **Guidebooks**
    - Generally independent and rely on quality, objectivity, and trust.
    - While their influence has declined, still an estimated 10-15% of US travelers book vacations using guidebooks. Many more take guidebooks when they travel.
    - Sustainability is increasingly promoted, including certification.
  - **Familiarization ("Fam") Trips**
    - Use "fam" trips to showcase newly certified businesses or promote vacation packages using only certified businesses and products.
    - Tie familiarization and press trips to existing or new events such as conferences and festivals.
    - Invite guidebook writers to participate in fam trips.
  - **Trade Shows**
    - While trade shows may not directly generate sales, they help certification programs and businesses gain exposure, make

business to business, media and consumer contacts. and learn about markets.

- Partnerships will reduce costs. The Sustainable Tourism Certification Network of the Americas and VISIT networks, for instance, market regional certification programs at various travel shows.

**4. Placement:** Placement or distribution refers to the channels by which a certification program and its businesses and projects are marketed within the commercialization chain. By examining the commercialization chain for tourism, 'green' certification programs can identify several important entry points to target.

- **Marketing via Partnerships:** The formation of partnerships with a wide spectrum of interested parties for collaborative marketing can be very effective, especially when the partners exert significant or broad influence. Marketing partnerships may involve any of the following:
  - Intermediaries such as wholesalers, distributors, tour operators, travel agents, educational travel organizers, etc., who buy tourism services and have direct contact with travelers.
  - Non-governmental advocacy organizations that address environmental, social, indigenous and consumer issues. Most of these have links to other organizations as well as large membership bases to whom they can promote the benefits of tourism certification. Some are producing certification guides and carrying out collective marketing.
    - *Green Holiday Guide Europe* by the European Center for Eco Agro Tourism.
    - *Campsite & Caravanning Guide* highlights certified sites (ADAC, Europe's leading touring club).
    - Rainforest Alliance's directory of *Certified Products in the Americas*.



- Other 'green' businesses and 'green' certification programs in other industries that address the same or similar markets as sustainable tourism certification, and producers and suppliers of environmentally and socially responsible products and services. By increasing the number and scope of certified businesses, they can increase their own sales.



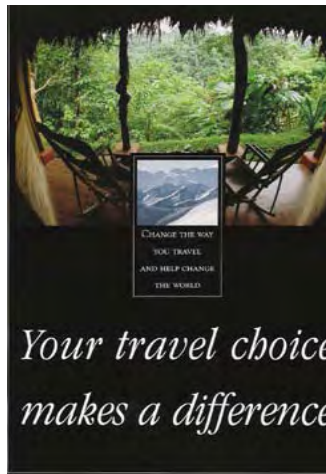
*“The only solution that I see, at least in the short term, to increase awareness of the program and logo, is through alliances. Supporting regional networks for global marketing strategies, like the European VISIT and the Sustainable Tourism Certification Network of the Americas is essential for smaller programs to combine resources to increase brand recognition and reach consumers and wholesalers. Green Deal has benefited for its participation in regional networks to influence wholesalers to support certified businesses.”*

-- Saúl Antonio Blanco Sosa, Vice President, Alianza Verde and Green Deal certification program)

- **Travel agents:** used by half of US outbound travelers
  - Handle mainly mass tourism and therefore are less likely interested in certification
  - But can't afford to do due diligence and so could over time, interest could be built.
- **Educational Travel Programs/Affinity Groups** such as museums, universities, zoos, etc. interested in quality & social/environmental standards are a logical market because they need to ensure high standards.
- **Media Outlets**, including guidebooks, travel magazines, websites, etc., who are in the business of disseminating information and influencing their audiences.
- **Online Travel Providers:** Large and small internet providers (such as Expedia, Responsibletravel.com) are marketing and selling sustainable tourism and increasingly recognizing certified businesses.
- **Outbound and Inbound Operators:** while handling only a small fraction of the tourism market, they are highly motivated to use certified businesses as a tool to help ensure high environmental, social and quality/service standards.
  - A recent global survey found more than 70% of tour operators consider “sustainable” tourism important to the quality of experience they are able to offer their customers.
  - In Costa Rica, a group of inbound tour operators will require all accommodations they use to be certified by 2008.
- **Why Certification is useful to Tour Operators?**
  - Allows operator preliminary due-diligence screening, especially for new destinations and new companies.
  - Projects a positive image of the tour operator. Certified businesses tend to have overall high quality and service standards
  - Reduces costs of carrying out site inspections.



- (Re)insures companies require social and environmental sustainability criteria for large companies.
  - Substitutes in-house guidelines for criteria reached through multistakeholder process and carried out through third party audits.
- **How can Certification Organizations work with Inbound and Outbound Tour Operators?**
    - Educate the tour operator owners, managers and staff about your certification program and certified businesses.
    - Provide materials (consumer brochures, fact sheets, reading list, etc.) to be sent to their clients (travelers) before they take their vacation.



- Talk to their suppliers (hotels, airlines, car rental companies, attractions, etc) about certification. Make sure they educate and inform their guests on what they are doing in sustainable tourism, and how it is making a difference on the natural and social surroundings.
- Send out to the traveler, once they have returned home, a communication that says “Your travel choice makes a difference”. This communication can tell them more about sustainable tourism and certification, point them to

places where they can get additional information, and encourage them to incorporate sustainability in their next trip. TIES and Rainforest Alliance have produced a “Travel Choice” consumer publication and market certification and best practices at travel shows under their “Travel Choice” banner.

## European Tour Operators Increasingly Use Certification

- **Algemene Nederlandse Vereniging van Reisondernemingen (ANVR)**, the Dutch association of 170 tour operators, requires its members to have an environmental statement, trained coordinator, and concrete criteria for selecting hotels and other suppliers. ([www.anvr.travel/index.php](http://www.anvr.travel/index.php))
- **Federation of Tour Operators** in UK, representing 14 largest companies and over 20 million tourists, has published a Supplier Sustainability Handbook with guidelines on managing environmental and social issues and information on certification. ([www.fto.co.uk/responsible-tourism/sustainability-guidelines/](http://www.fto.co.uk/responsible-tourism/sustainability-guidelines/))
- **Tour Operators' Initiative** for sustainable development, based at the UNWTO and supported by UNEP and UNESCO, promotes best practices and has increasingly promoted certification. (<http://www.world-tourism.org/tour/www.toinitiative.org>)
- **TUI**, one of the world's largest tour operators, has Sustainable Tourism Departments in Netherlands and Germany. ([www.tui.com](http://www.tui.com))
- **German Forum Anders Reisen (FAR)** has 122 specialized operators committed to sustainable tourism, including certification. ([www.forumandersreisen.de/](http://www.forumandersreisen.de/))



**forumandersreisen**

- **Governments:** Governments benefit from sustainable tourism certification in a variety of ways: increased economies, employment opportunities, protection of sensitive areas, reduced water usage and improved waste management. Government agencies can assist certification programs through:
  - Cooperative advertising and promotion for certified businesses at trade shows and in government-issued tourism booklets, websites and other materials.
  - Promotion through Ministries of Tourism and other government-sponsored tourism programs, many of which have strong tourism marketing capabilities.
  - Protected area managers (government as well as private) who have good reason to want to promote eco-labeling because certified businesses benefit the resources they manage.
  - In addition to marketing, government agencies can provide a range of incentives for certified businesses. Examples include:
    - Reducing interest rates on government loans and improved credit ratings.
    - Offering tax credits or deductions to certified businesses.

- Providing longer term permissions (extended tenure), preferential access to protected or sensitive areas, or discounts on concessions.
- Reducing fees for use of public resources, such as national parks.
- Providing endorsements for exemptions from certain policies or limited access regulations.
- Developing programs to help hotels and other industry sectors adopt sustainable practices.
- Offering training programs on environmental technologies, environmental management, human resources, socio-cultural practices, community relations, strategic planning, marketing, etc.
- Establishing purchasing policies requiring staff and contractors to opt for certified businesses.
- Officially endorsing certification programs, sometimes as a response for implementing environmental legislation.

The endorsement of existing certification programs by governments and multilateral agencies will enable tourism certification to move from niche to mainstream. Governmental tourism departments and institutes should include certification as part of the marketing efforts of their country. Sustainable practices will no longer be a market strategy, but the minimum requirement for doing business. Thus the resources will be used in an environmentally responsible, socially equitable and economically viable way so that the users of the tourism products and services can meet the current needs without compromising future generations from using these same resources.

## **Conclusions**

There will never be enough resources to market through all channels and to all audiences. The certification programs must thus make decisions on which tools and activities are the most effective. For a certification program's marketing mix to be effective it must 1) be easily accessible (equity), 2) ensure market penetration, 3) provide positive benefits relative to cost, and 4) have good potential for promoting and encouraging sustainable tourism (normalization). These four factors were analyzed for the UNEP's Marketing Sustainable Tourism Products report ([www.unep-tie.org](http://www.unep-tie.org)) and full details of each can be found in the report. The summary table below highlights some interesting conclusions for certification programs to consider when developing their marketing strategy and plan.

**Summary:**  
**Promotion and distribution tools for marketing sustainable tourism products<sup>2</sup>.**

	Supplier equity	Market penetration potential	Cost-benefit analysis	Normalization Potential*	Industry recommendation	Policy Recommendation
Tourist boards and DMOs**	High	Varied	Varied	Strong	Destination brand Sales portal	Strengthen. Provide training
Tour operators	Varied	Varied	Positive	Weak	Volume at lower price	Industry driven standards
Guidebooks	High	Strong	Positive	Strong	Mid term investment	Criteria for inclusion
Media	Low	Varied	Positive	Weak	Education consumer	Public relations clearinghouse
Certification schemes	Low	Varied	Varied	Varied	Business to business lobbying	Experiment
Travel fairs	Low	Weak	Negative	Strong	Education supplier	Evaluate effectiveness
Internet retailers	Varied	Strong	Varied	Strong	Risk mgmt or commission	Regulate
Consumer organizations	Low	Varied	Positive	Weak	Mid term investment	Sustainability criteria

\*Normalization refers to the ability to encourage and promote sustainable practices, i.e. moving from niche to mainstream.

\*\*DMOs are Destination Management Organizations.

Specific recommendations from the UNEP report for certification programs are that programs need to monitor equity consequences for small businesses and the overall cost/benefits of specific marketing activities. In line with other studies is the conclusion to prioritize business to business marketing as funds spent on business to consumer marketing at this stage will require major resources and have a low return on investment. Alliances with NGOs, trade associations and particularly governments are necessary for mainstreaming sustainable tourism certification. And finally, effective marketing needs adequate time, resources and staff.

<sup>2</sup> Font and Carey, UNEP, *Marketing Sustainable Tourism Products*, Figure 6, p 33.

## **Resources**

*Most of these reports and studies were prepared by CESD and TIES researchers as part of the Rainforest Alliance's project, "International Accreditation System and Consolidation of National Systems for Sustainable Tourism Certification to Facilitate Small and Medium Enterprises' (SMEs) Competitiveness and Market Access", that was financed by the IDB/MIF. Unless otherwise indicated, these publications are available on the CESD website: [www.ecotourismcesd.org](http://www.ecotourismcesd.org).*

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## About CESD



Launched in 2003, the Center on Ecotourism and Sustainable Development (CESD) is a non-profit research organization dedicated to the improvement of ecotourism as an instrument of biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation. With offices in both Washington, D.C. and at Stanford University, CESD functions as a bi-coastal institute, conducting research and offering programs, conferences, and courses at both locations, as well as field research opportunities at home and abroad.

CESD's mission is to design, monitor, evaluate, and improve ecotourism and sustainable tourism practices and principles, through collaborative work by academics and industry experts.

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