

MAINSTREAMING SUSTAINABILITY INTO TOURISM: BRINGING CREDIBILITY TO CERTIFICATION SCHEMES

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

WHAT IS THE STSC ABOUT?

The global Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council (STSC) was created by a coalition of tourism industry associations, nonprofit civil society organizations (NGOs) and government agencies in response to the challenges arising from the growing number of sustainable tourism and ecotourism certification schemes. The STSC is an umbrella organization which will set universal minimum standards for certification programs and accredit those that meet them.

This effort is led by a temporary Executive Board of 17 leaders representing key stakeholder groups and world regions. Final Board will be elected in 2009. A Scientific and Technical Committee to advise the Board has been created and includes representatives from the United Nations Environment Program, the UN World Tourism Organization, and the Rainforest Alliance, which is the international conservation organization that has provided technical and administrative leadership for the effort since 2001.

WHY DO WE NEED THE STSC?

The rapidly growing tourism industry possesses great potential for promoting environmental conservation and the well-being of local communities – only if tourism businesses embrace the concepts and practices of sustainability. Tourism businesses – including hotels, lodges, and tour operators – can demonstrate their commitment to sustainability by meeting the standards for social and environmental practices that have been created by leading national and international certification programs. These impartial third-party organizations offer an authoritative “seal of approval” to those businesses meeting standards that conserve biodiversity and promote the well-being of workers and communities. There are more than 50 certification programs worldwide that have created national and international standards for sustainable tourism and ecotourism, and more are being created every year.

But how can the public tell which of these programs are credible? How can tourism businesses choose which sets of standards will have legitimacy? Which programs can show that they are making a difference – that certified tourism businesses have tangible impacts on workers, communities, and the environment and that those businesses benefit from being certified?

And how can tourists be confident that the programs audit, certify, and provide continuous monitoring of businesses to ensure they are serious about social and environmental accountability? The STSC has been developed in response to these global challenges.

WHAT ARE THE EXPECTATIONS FOR THE STSC?

- Creating the first set of comprehensive global requirements for STSC-accredited sustainable tourism certification programs, building on the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria under development by an initiative coordinated by UN Foundation, UNEP, UNWTO, the Rainforest Alliance, and the IUCN.
- Evaluating the standards and practices advocated by any new or existing sustainable tourism program that wishes to become accredited by the STSC.
- Issuing a STSC seal-of-approval for sustainable tourism certification that meets the accreditation requirements.
- Promoting those tourism certification programs that become accredited and showcasing those national and international tourism companies that met the STSC requirements.
- Protecting the STSC seal-of-approval from misuse by certification programs that are not STSC accredited.



International Task Force on Sustainable Tourism Development

- Evaluating continuously the social and environmental impacts of STSC-accredited sustainable tourism certification programs and, if necessary, modifying STSC accreditation requirements to make certain that the desired effects are being produced.
- Guaranteeing transparent multi-stakeholder involvement in the development of STSC accreditation requirements, following the principles of the ISEAL Code of Good Practice.
- Providing guidance for the establishment and development of new sustainable tourism and ecotourism certification programs around the world and in countries where there are none.
- Advocating internationally and nationally for the political and financial support needed by sustainable tourism and ecotourism certification programs.

HOW DOES THE STSC OPERATE?

After the official launch in 2009, the STSC will have an elected international board representing all stakeholder groups in the tourism industry; that is, tourism operators, environmental and social organizations, consumer groups and governmental agencies. The work of the board (which will make final decisions regarding the accreditation of certification schemes) would be supported by independent (and non-voting) scientific and advisory boards comprising research and academic institutes, associations and international organizations (such as UNWTO, UNEP etc.).

The business plan that has been developed for the launch of the STSC proposes that it would initially coordinate its activities through regional certifier networks – such as the Sustainable Tourism Certification Network of the Americas (STCNA), which represents more than 90 organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean – and other affiliated programs.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS FOR STSC ESTABLISHMENT?

The STSC will work with five main stakeholder groups towards global stewardship of sustainable tourism:

Governments, Local Authorities and DMOs:

The STSC could assist them to raise the market profile and image of a destination in terms of its quality and environmental standards. It could also assist them to monitor and support local or national certification schemes.

Travelers and other Consumers of Sustainable Tourism and Ecotourism:

The STSC will provide new, credible identification of the hotels, lodges and tour operators in which travelers can feel confident of their sustainable practices.

Conservation and Community Development Groups:

The STSC will ensure that accredited sustainable tourism certification programs meet the highest standards for protecting the environment and the rights and livelihoods of communities.

Sustainable Tourism and Ecotourism Certification Programs:

The STSC will provide legitimacy and credibility to all those sustainable tourism certification programs that meet STSC requirements and, through its seal-of-approval, differentiation from those programs that have lower standards and weaker certification practices.

The STSC will also provide global standardization of principles, criteria, and procedures for claims of sustainability in tourism and ecotourism, facilitating comparisons and partnerships across certification programs.

The Tourism Industry:

The STSC will provide stronger and more reliable access to national and international marketing channels for the sustainable tourism sought by an ever-expanding share of the market.

The STSC will also provide international third-party validation of all of the national and international, private and public, sustainable tourism certification programs with which tour operators may wish to engage.

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

The STSC is looking to establish partnerships with the initiative's five main stakeholder groups. These partnerships will assist in the development of the STSC framework and engage in the proposed activities.

If you are interested in participating in the STSC initiative, please send an email to:
sustainabletourism@ra.org

