

Why is certification important for ecotourism providers?

According to The International Ecotourism Society, certification sets standards and helps distinguish genuine ecotourism and sustainable tourism businesses from others that make empty claims. This helps to protect the integrity of these concepts.

Certification is not an end in itself. It is one of a number of tools for motivating businesses and others to improve their environmental, social, and economic performance, while rewarding them for doing so. These rewards are sometimes tangible and sometimes not. They include:

Benefits for certified businesses:

- **Certification helps businesses to improve themselves:** going through a certification process is educational. Many certified businesses have stated that one of the greatest benefits of the certification process was to teach them the elements of sustainability in their operations and focus their attention on the changes they needed to make in their businesses. **A better-operating business tends to be more efficient and to attract more clients.**
- **Certification tends to reduce operating costs.** This has been found in almost every type of business certification. In tourism, it has been shown to dramatically reduce the costs of water, electricity, and fossil fuels, without reducing the quality of service, as in the graph at right.
- The process of implementing **certification of sustainable tourism is often accompanied by easier access to technical assistance and financing for businesses to implement new technology** – the business is educated about these technologies, while donors and financial institutions are more likely to offer low-cost financing.
- Potentially, **certification can provide a marketing advantage** to certified businesses, as consumers learn to recognize credible certification brands. This has happened in other industries, such as organic foods, wood products, clothing, wine, etc.

Benefits for consumers:

- Certification **provides tourists with environmentally and socially responsible choices** – it helps consumers to know which businesses are truly socially and environmentally responsible and to make choices on this basis. As certification programs become better known, this may produce tangible benefits in a business's reputation and popularity.
- Certification in general **increases public awareness of responsible business practices.**
- Certification can **alert tourists to the environmental and social issues in an area**, allowing them to act more respectfully or contribute to solutions.
- **Certified businesses tend to offer better quality service.**

Benefits for governments:

- Certification helps governments **protect their market niches as ecotourism or sustainable tourism destinations**, especially when the credibility of the destination is threatened by greenwashing.
- Certification **raises industry standards** in health, safety, environment, and social stability.
- It **lowers the regulatory costs** of environmental protection.
- By requiring economic benefits to communities, **certification can help reduce poverty, especially in rural areas**.

Benefits for the environment and local communities:

- Finally, certification of sustainable and ecotourism **protects both the environment and the social and economic structure of local communities** near the certified businesses.
- Certification requires the businesses to **protect the environment** and do little or no damage to it.
- It requires businesses to **respect local culture** and provide real economic and social benefits for it.
- When the business is economically sustainable, and offers quality of service to ensure that, it is **likely to continue offering benefits for the long term**.



Florida Society for Ethical Ecotourism (SEE) is dedicated to maintaining a professional code of ecotourism ethics in order to encourage an awareness and stewardship of Florida's natural and cultural heritage by:

1. Endorsing compliance with federal, state, and local laws regarding the protection of natural resources and customer safety.
2. Providing environmental education and awareness which encourage behaviors that contribute to the sustainability of Florida's natural ecosystems and resources.
3. Promoting professionalism and integrity within the ecotourism industry by providing and maintaining a certification/recognition program for ecotour providers.

For information on the Florida SEE Certification/Recognition Program:

go to: <http://www.floridasee.org/certification.php>

or email: certification@floridasee.org