

Frequently Asked Questions – New Sustainability Programs Ecotourism Australia

STRIVE 4 SUSTAINABILITY SCORECARD

What is sustainable tourism?

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) has defined sustainable tourism as, “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.” Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability.

What will my scorecard do for my business?

The Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard is a pathway program for any tourism business or business supporting the tourism supply chain in Australia. This scorecard is a helpful and practical business development tool, de-mystifying what genuine sustainable and responsible travel is for you as a supplier and for your customers.

Our simple scorecard will show you and your customers what you’re doing well and how you can strive to improve. It also gives you an industry recognised rating that you can use to promote your business, making it more attractive to suppliers, providers and tourists choosing to align their sustainability values with yours if you choose to do so.

What does the scorecard assess?

The Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard measures where your business is at on your sustainability journey at a point in time. Based on Ecotourism Australia’s existing globally recognised certification criteria, businesses will track their own operations against 50 criteria across all four pillars of sustainability:

- I: Sustainable management
- II: Environmental management
- III: Socio-economic impacts
- IV: Cultural impacts

The scorecard is not a certification or accreditation, but a benchmark with which your business can strive for sustainability.

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Can any business apply to get a scorecard? How can I check if it applies to my business?

Any tourism business or operator can be assessed with the scorecard provided annually by Ecotourism Australia. Such businesses can include cafes, restaurants, bars, breweries, tour providers, activity/attraction providers, accommodation providers, events and festivals, tourism organisations, travel agents, visitor centres and tourism consultants. A scorecard assessment is ideally taken annually to see how your score improves over time.

How do you ensure the scorecard is credible?

The credibility and assurance process of the scorecard is of utmost priority to Ecotourism Australia. The 50 selected scorecard topics are based on our globally recognised, best practice criteria for sustainability in tourism. Your scorecard responses will be assessed by a trained sustainability assessor within the Ecotourism Australia team before a personalised score is provided to you. Your score is based on the information you provide, and evidence or examples of how your business applies sustainability principles in practice helps raise your overall score.

Do I need to do the scorecard every year?

Your scorecard is valid for 12 months from completion of your criteria. At the end of your 12 months, we encourage you to keep striving for sustainability and to aim for a higher score in your next scorecard assessment. Sustainability is a journey, not a destination. The intention is that you will learn ways to improve your sustainability efforts and therefore credentials year on year by monitoring with the scorecard.

How will this be promoted and how can I communicate to customers what my scorecard means?

Once your sustainability assessment is complete, you will receive a PDF scorecard with your scores against each sustainability theme. Your scorecard can be displayed publicly or you may choose to keep it internal for education of your staff, supply chain and stakeholders. The scorecard will include a scannable QR code for anyone to learn more about the scorecard and Strive 4 Sustainability program. If you score more than 50% overall, you will also receive a PDF certificate to proudly display your score.

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What's the difference between a scorecard and certification and can I have both?

The Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard is not a certification program; it is a pathway and a first step towards a more sustainable future for your business. The scorecard is an annual snapshot of your current sustainability practices in your organisation as a chance to benchmark your business by answering 50 of our best-practice criteria.

Our certification process is a way for your tourism business to receive official recognition for your sustainable initiatives and to test yourself against global best practise standards.

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SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CERTIFICATION

What will Sustainable Tourism Certification do for my business?

We recognise the growing demand for sustainability across the entire tourism industry and want to ensure that every business in the tourism supply chain has access to a credible, independently verified certification program that captures their individual circumstances.

Using Ecotourism Australia's globally recognised criteria, the new Sustainable Tourism Certification program is ideal for tourism businesses that are committed to improving their sustainability and business practices but do not provide nature-based or ecotourism experiences. Sustainable Tourism Certification is a way for your tourism business to receive official recognition for your sustainable initiatives and practices.

What does the Sustainable Tourism Certification program assess?

Our Sustainable Tourism Certification is designed for all businesses that operate in the tourism supply chain in a non-nature-based space, including hotels, attractions, tours, transport, restaurants, breweries, and others. It assures travellers that certified experiences are backed by a strong, well-managed commitment to sustainable practices.

The Sustainable Tourism Certification program assesses businesses across the following eight categories:

1. Business management and operational planning
2. Responsible marketing
3. Customer satisfaction
4. Environmental management
5. Interpretation and education
6. Contribution to conservation
7. Working with local communities
8. Cultural respect and sensitivity

How long will it take to complete?

We allow 12 months for you to complete your application for certification, however it is expected most businesses will submit within six to eight months depending on their ongoing commitment and existing sustainability practices that are in place. Once submitted, your application will undergo an assessment by one of our industry experts before you're awarded certification. To maintain your Certification, you will need to remain as a financial member each year and complete a successful audit every three years.

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How do I communicate with customers what my certification means?

Once you are certified, we will send your certificate, logo and an announcement toolkit so you can proudly display your achievement.

All Sustainable Tourism certified businesses will be listed on Ecotourism Australia's Green Travel Guide and promoted by Ecotourism Australia in communications and marketing activities. Certification also offers networking opportunities with diverse industry stakeholders. As the program is endorsed by different government authorities, you can gain access to government grants and promotion, as well as other marketing initiatives such as visiting journalists showcasing those who are making a difference.

What is the difference between Sustainable Tourism Certification and Advanced Sustainable Tourism Certification? Can I have both?

Sustainable Tourism Certified is awarded to tourism businesses that minimise negative impacts on the environment and maximise positive impacts for community, culture, and local economy. Our Advanced Sustainable Tourism Certification are industry leaders in sustainable tourism best-practice.

You do not need to decide which certification level you want to achieve before applying. You will have access to the criteria for each level and you can decide which is most appropriate for your business. You will also have the option to revisit your criteria and achieve another level of certification later.

I'm currently applying for ECO/Climate Action/Respecting Our Culture program. However, I think the new Sustainable Tourism Certification is a better fit for my business; what should I do?

Contact our friendly certification team and they can advise you on the best way forward. The criteria and requirements for both programs are very similar, so it is possible to change between certifications. Before you decide, please ensure you understand the difference in pricing structure and ongoing costs of your preferred program. You can find detailed information about each program in the Essentials guide.

How much does it cost?

Check out our Sustainable Tourism Certification Essentials Guide for pricing according to the size of your business.

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SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DESTINATION CERTIFICATION

What is the difference between Sustainable Tourism Destination and Advanced Sustainable Tourism Destination Certification?

The Advanced level assesses additional criteria and requires your Destination Managers to rigorously maintain existing points of criteria. Certified Sustainable Tourism Destinations receive an audit every four years, while Certified Advanced Sustainable Tourism Destinations are audited every two years.

What does the Sustainable Tourism Destination Certification program assess?

The Sustainable Tourism Destination Certification program assesses management practices across the four pillars of sustainability: environment, economic, social and culture. It holds the same global best practice standard criteria as our ECO Destination Certification program, excluding requirements with a focus on nature tourism, making it accessible to all destinations in Australia.

What will Sustainable Tourism Destination Certification do for my region?

Using Ecotourism Australia's 30+ years of experience, destinations can align their sustainable destination management practices with global best practice standards. Our qualified team will celebrate your destination's wins and provide ideas, support, and practical ways to improve your sustainability to meet our reputable criteria standards.

Sustainable Tourism Destination Certification is a valuable avenue for destination managers to lead by example and support local businesses to join their sustainability journey. The Ecotourism Australia team can help you find ways to involve tourism businesses and supply chains in your broader sustainability mission, whether it be through creating information sessions, employee awareness and training, or Ecotourism Australia's Certification programs.

Destinations can use certification to strengthen connections with other Ecotourism Australia certified and applicant regions through various events which foster collaboration and knowledge sharing to build a sustainable Australia.

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How can I involve local businesses and the community in our Sustainable Tourism Destination Certification journey?

Sustainable Tourism Destination Certification is not a solo venture, but one that requires collaboration with key stakeholders from council departments, Traditional Owners, LTO/RTOs, business chambers and industry representatives to achieve strong foundations for sustainability. Ecotourism Australia facilitates industry engagement through our certification programs.

How long will it take to complete?

Depending on destination resource capacity and the level of sustainability efforts a destination already implements, Sustainable Tourism Destination Certification can be completed between 12 months and three years. However, the average time to achieve certification is between 18 months and two years.

How long does my certification last?

Your certification is maintained through an annual renewal fee and an audit every two to four years to ensure criteria is maintained at global best practice standards.

How do I communicate with locals and travellers what my certification means?

Once your destination is Sustainable Tourism Destination certified, Ecotourism Australia will provide you with an announcement toolkit to help you communicate what your rigorous efforts mean for the future of your region and the significance of supporting sustainable destinations.

What's the difference between Sustainable Tourism Destination Certification and ECO Destination Certification? Can I have both?

Sustainable Tourism Destination Certification is for an urban region with minimal nature experiences. ECO Destination Certification is for regions with nature at the core of the visitor experience and includes more extensive criteria to comply with environmental benchmarks. Both programs use the international standard set by the GSTC and Green Destinations.

Ecotourism Australia's friendly staff are available to answer any questions you may have about eligibility and which program is right for you. To enquire, email sustainability@ecotourism.org.au or call 07 3256 6777.