

The guide to a better travel experience – for all involved



A quality labelling system for Swedish Ecotourism.

## Preface

The Ecotourism labelling system "Nature's Best" is one of the World's first. Behind it is primarily the Swedish Ecotourism Association, in co-operation with the Swedish Travel and Tourism Council.

"Nature's Best" has two main objectives: to enhance the quality of Ecotourism in Sweden, and significantly increase its volume.

Our goal is to create a well-known Ecotourism quality label that defends both ethical values and high quality travel experiences. It is a label that guides the customer's Travel Choice towards ecotourism operators and their tours.

A label that aims at inspiring Ecotourism operators into an even better performance, making their operations more environmentally sound, and making sure they are firmly embraced by the local communities. In this way, "Nature's Best" will contribute to nature conservation and the long-term viability of the destination. It will also promote the integrity of cultural values while at the same time developing the local economy and a fair trade of services and local produce.

### **We would like to warmly thank all contributors of this work and process!**

The development of "Nature's Best" has been the combined effort of many dedicated professionals, companies, authorities and organisations. The Swedish Board of Agriculture has extended the funding for the major part of the program, while the County Councils of Västerbotten, HälsingeTur, The Swedish Federation of County Councils, The Swedish Tourist Authority, Jämtland-Härjedalen Turism and the Swedish Ecotourism Association have also delivered important contributions.

The development of "Nature's Best" has been a close co-operation between the Swedish Ecotourism Association, HälsingeTur, ALMI Västerbotten and Trollbältet. In addition, a great number of others have contributed actively in this work: professionals, companies and organisations from the travel and tourism industry, NGOs, researchers and authorities.

We hereby would like to thank you all.



#### Copyright

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## **“Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that contributes to the conservation of natural habitats and sustains the well-being of local people”**

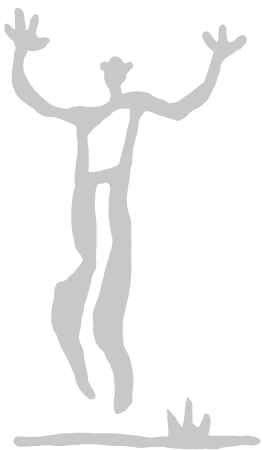
This is how The International Ecotourism Society, TIES, defined Ecotourism in 1992. The same definition was shared by the Swedish World Wide Fund for Nature, WWF, in 1994, and adopted by the Swedish Ecotourism Association at its founding in 1996.

### **Ecotourism is a way to travel that:**

- takes place with maximal caution and minimal impact on local nature and culture.
- aims at conservation of the biodiversity and cultural heritage that the visitor has come to visit.
- actively contributes to conservation.
- sources services and products locally.
- enables respectful encounters with, and is considerate of local people.
- is often carried out in small groups. Always with the integrity of nature and culture in mind.
- makes nature and culture experiences available that would otherwise be difficult or impossible to organize independently.
- represents cutting edge on best environmental practice, thus guiding the remaining Travel & Tourism industry on the inspirational path towards more eco-friendly operations.
- provides visitors with privileged insight and in-depth knowledge about issues related to nature, culture, environment and/or socio-economic development.
- means personalized encounters with the ecotourism operator and its representatives.
- is about experiencing nature, often interlinked with strong cultural aspects.
- is marketed responsibly, providing realistic expectations in the customer.
- makes demands on tour operators, services providers and visitors alike.

### **What are the benefits of Ecotourism?**

- Ecotourism creates employment and sustenance without destroying nature or cultural assets. It is a way of eating the cake while still keeping it.
- Ecotourism is one of the most efficient tools - both in a small and big way - to combine conservation, with socio-economic development. Both at home and at destinations abroad.
- Ecotourism, like no other industry, gives pristine nature an economic value.
- Ecotourism creates more benefits for nature conservation yet a lot less damage on the environment, as compared to conventional tourism.
- Ecotourism works just as well in the Swedish mountains and archipelagos as in Nepal or in New Guinea.
- Ecotourism experiences are cutting edge products that can be used in the marketing of both regions and whole countries.
- Ecotourism is more compatible with traditional livelihoods and indigenous cultures, than are most other kinds of industry.
- Ecotourism is well positioned to promote and develop Swedish nature and cultural tourism.
- Ecotourism normally demands much less heavy investments than conventional tourism, mainly because the clients focus more on the travel experience, rather than on the grade of luxury.



## What are the benefits of an Ecotourism label?

The label:

- makes it easier for the customer to find tours with fantastic experiences in nature and culture.
- guarantees high quality of delivery of the services.
- contributes to nature conservation, is eco-friendly and it defends cultural values.
- makes it easier for the approved tour operators to find their customers.
- contributes to the growth and quality of ecotourism.
- becomes a reassuring factor for the customer, and gives direct answers to important questions about the tour.
- makes it easier for the approved tour operator to communicate environmental issues to other stakeholders in the field, especially business partners in foreign countries, landowners, authorities and active out-door people.
- spurs increased work motivation among the staff.
- becomes an image- and marketing tool for all approved tour operators.
- is a prerequisite for the creation of joint marketing channels for ecotourism.
- forms a creative network of ecotourism operators.
- drives forward the development of innovative, new and genuine travel products.
- will increase the demand for skilled nature guides.
- will in a wider perspective also be able to be linked to, or work in close co-operation with other acknowledged labelling systems (WWF Arctic-LINKS, the Green Key, NEAP).



## What does the label look like?

The label is a printed "Nature's Best"-logotype with the current year and the individual company's registration approval number within the system. It can be used in black/white or in the PMS-colours described in the CD containing logotype templates that is given to each approved company. The label is a registered trademark.

## What can be labelled?

The Travel and Tourism products that meet all the basic criteria for "Nature's Best".

The product owner (the tour operator or service provider) must also meet basic criteria in order to deliver products approved by Nature's Best.

Once the tour operator or service provider has been approved, they guarantee that their labelled products meet the criteria. It is permitted for approved tour operators to offer tours that for one reason or another are not labelled, the point being to only label trips that actually meet the criteria. The tour operator will describe its top five products (preferably "typical" products) at the time of the application. If these five meet the criteria, the tour operator will be trusted to himself label other products/tours, provided they also meet the criteria. Products/tours that are labelled by the tour operator himself must be reported to the "Nature's Best" labelling committee.

During the year 2002, only tours and products within Sweden can be labelled. These can be any of a number of different kinds of nature and culture experiences, like expeditions, wildlife safaris, corporate incentive trips, lodging that includes activities like fishing, horse-back riding, hunting and much more. Tours provided by Swedish tour operators to foreign destinations will be able to become labelled at a later date.

## Who are behind the label?

Behind the label is primarily the Swedish Ecotourism Association, in co-operation with the Swedish Travel and Tourism Council.

## Which are the criteria to meet in order to be labelled?

Below, there is a detailed description of all the criteria that have to be met for tour products that apply to be labelled by "Nature's Best". These have been divided into Basic Criteria, that are compulsory in order to qualify, and Bonus Criteria, of which at least 10 percent must be met for the tour products to qualify. A higher total of Bonus points are important in order to be awarded or to be promoted during special marketing campaigns. The annual Grand Travel Award in Stockholm as well as the annual WWF Arctic Tourism Award are examples of awards to which "Nature's Best" may nominate the tour company. Furthermore, there are specific, additional criteria for a list of specialty travel operations (See the Appendix 2-4).

## References

Each applicant must include two references, who have practical experience of the operations, and who can testify in regard to the company activities. A reference can be an organisation for nature or wildlife conservation, a tourism trade organisation, your local chambers of commerce, the local government or county council, the tourist office, a local company, the authorities, an indigenous people's organisation, co-operation partners or a company that is already an approved ecotourism operator. The labelling committee can also, on its own initiative, contact other sources for opinions and input.

## How often will the criteria be revised/renewed?

Nothing is absolute, permanent and perfect. Not even this list of criteria. The detailed criteria are in continuous development, and will be revised every three years. The first, thorough revision and renewal will take place in June 2004. It will be based upon the experiences gathered during the first three years. The new revision will then be applicable from 2005 onwards. It may well be that many of the current Bonus criteria will then become Basic criteria, and/or the percentage may rise in regard to the share of bonus criteria to be met. Many ways of expressing the criteria will probably be slightly changed. The basic idea is that of continuous improvement, both of the system as a whole, as well as within all the participating businesses themselves.

As we are now launching a completely new labelling system, it is more than probable that minor adjustments will have to be made also during this initial period.

## During which period is the label valid?

This first set of criteria will be valid from 2002 until the end of 2004. This is also the validity of the label. A renewal application will then have to be sent in for the year 2005, taking into consideration the changes in the criteria that may have been made.

## How do I apply?

A "Start-up Package" can be purchased from the Swedish Ecotourism Association. In this package, you will find information about the procedures and rules. There is also an application form, checklists and templates to help you fill in the form. There is also a list of useful resources such as literature, addresses, web sites etc.

The application can be sent to "Nature's Best" anytime during the year. You may list up to five products or tours in the application. The application shall be signed at the bottom of each page, and seven copies of your company brochures/folders/PR- and sales material should accompany your application. Please contact the Swedish Ecotourism Association if anything remains unclear.

The application fee covers the expenses of a first examination of the application, all the way to a possible decision to visit to your company for an inspection.



Application fees 2002: (in SEK)

Annual Turnover	Start-up package&application (VAT excl.)
• < 300 000	500 kr
• 300 000 – 500 000	800 kr
• 500 000 – 1,5 million	1 000 kr
• 1,5 – 5 million	1 500 kr
• 5 – 15 million	2 000 kr
• 15 million +	3 500 kr



With "Annual Turnover" is understood the share of tourism of the company's annual turnover, in the case your company also has other business activities. The fee is a one-time fee per company.

### Who examines my application and how?

The applications are analysed by the labelling committee. The committee then decides whether to go on to the next step, a visit to the tour operator. If a visit is decided upon, then this will be used for going through the application and the activities together with the operator's representative. A report of the visit is made, and the given references are contacted. After this, the applications will be examined, and the labelling committee will come to a decision. The labelling committee is appointed by the initiators of the labelling system, and is, if necessary, assisted by additional, appointed specialists. An application that has arrived within the established time frame will be examined during the next labelling committee meeting.



The labelling committee consists of a minimum of three, and a maximum of seven persons, and it will meet at least twice a year, normally in January and September. The team of labelling assessors and the consultants who make company visits, will receive special training and be accredited as assessors. All this to guarantee as fair assessment as possible. General for all applicants is that all the Basic Criteria must be met. If a specific criterion cannot be fulfilled because of very special reasons, consideration may be taken, and an exception to the rule may be discussed, provided that the applicant can mount convincing arguments for his or her case. If the committee signs a rejection of an application, the reasons for rejection shall be described in short, clear and plain terms.



All details in the applications are covered by professional secrecy and treated with discretion.

### Grievances - Can I appeal against a decision of rejection?

It is possible to appeal against the committee's decisions to the board of the Ecotourism Association. The board will decide whether to confirm the labelling committee's decision or whether to send the application back to the committee for final examination at their next meeting. The appeal must be presented within 30 days of receiving a rejection notice.

### Assessment and revision of labelled products

The labelling system, in the application phase, is in the first instance built upon a self-assessment by the tour operator himself. After this, the labelling committee will judge the tour operator and his or her five products/tours.

A tour operator whose products pass the assessment will be trusted to later choose on their own other possible products with high enough quality to be labelled. These added products must be reported to the labelling committee at once.

Companies who have ecotourism-labelled products are subject to assessment or revision by the labelling committee. These can take place at random, or in case of suspicion of improper usage. Such an audit may be anything from being asked to deliver certain





information, to random on-site audits. In the unlikely event of questions being raised, the tour operator must reply to these within 30 days.

The system also places great importance to customer feedback. In the tour operators' departure information it is mandatory to include simple and clear instructions on how to contact "Nature's Best", stating address and telephone numbers. The customer is advised to communicate any grievances to the tour operator first. Repeated, negative or serious customer reactions will lead to an audit revision by the labelling committee. The tour operator must inform the labelling committee about all vital changes made to tours, to the company itself or to its ownership structure.

### **Can I lose the right to use the label?**

Yes. An operator whose labelled products do not meet the criteria at an audit or assessment, or who consciously uses the label in a suspicious or fraudulent way, may lose the privilege to use the label. This also applies to for businesses that do not pay their annual fees. The privilege to use the label may be revoked temporarily, with immediate effect, by a labelling assessor, but in order to become final it must be confirmed at the next labelling committee meeting. The tour operator has this time to take measures to correct the problem. If this means that a new on-site company visit must be made, the tour operator will need to bear the costs for this.

A tour operator, whose right to use the label has been revoked by the labelling committee, must within 30 days:

- return his or her current labelling diploma.
- immediately cease marketing his or her products as ecotourism, and him/herself as an ecotourism operator. This may mean having to cancel whole editions of printed PR material in which the products are described as ecotourism.
- notify all their retail agents about this fact, with a copy to the labelling committee.

Authorities and travel trade organisations will also be notified about the company's ecotourism label having been revoked. It is possible to appeal against the decision to the board of the Ecotourism Association. The board will decide whether to confirm the labelling committee's decision or whether to send the application back to the committee for final examination at their next meeting.



### **How may I use the label?**

The logotype is a registered trademark. The tour operator signs a contract with the labelling committee as to the usage of the logotype. The logotype may be used actively in a number of ways in the company's marketing material, but only in immediate conjunction with the tours or products that fulfil the criteria. The tour operator may in no way imply that unlabelled activities or products are labelled. The customer shall never risk being in doubt about what product is labelled as ecotourism, and which one is not.

### **How will "Nature's Best" be marketed?**

The label will be marketed as efficiently as possible, with the goal to gain respect, raise curiosity, and create strong interest and high trademark values for the label and the labelled products.

### **What does the company receive in return for approved products?**

- The right to have a link from the planned special web site "Nature's Best" and an individual profile-page on the same site.
- A diploma that can be displayed at the company's offices, and the right to say that you are an "Approved Ecotourism Operator".



- The right to use the logotype in your marketing material of labelled products.
- The right to order the graphically clear logo window decal that will be designed, at the price of cost from the labelling committee.
- The right to a listing in official databases and registers of ecotourism in Sweden.
- The possibility to be chosen to participate in a series of different marketing campaigns focusing on Swedish Ecotourism.
- A CD with digital templates of the logotype both for printing purposes and for electronic media usage.
- The possibility to be nominated "Ecotourism Operator of the Year" at the annual Grand Travel Awards in Stockholm.
- The possibility to be approved, at a reduced price, by other environmental labelling systems with which the ecotourism labelling system may be signing future contracts (such as The Green Key, WWF Arctic Links, etc).

## Fees

The annual fees for the right to use the label are to be paid by approved tour operators per calendar year, and varies in relation to the company's turnover. By "Annual Turnover" is understood the share of tourism of the company's annual turnover, in the case the company also is engaged in other business activities.

Annual Turnover (in SEK)	Annual Fee (in SEK)
• < 300 000	1 000 kr
• 300 – 500 000	2 000 kr
• 500 000 – 1,5 million	3 500 kr
• 1,5 – 5 million	5 000 kr
• 5 – 15 million	8 500 kr
• 15 million +	15 000 kr

A company approved after June 30th will pay only half the annual fee for that first year. The renewal of the fee will be automatically invoiced to approved companies in January each following year.

## Dates for application

To be considered at the next labelling committee meeting, a complete application must be delivered at the latest by June 1st, or by October 1st each year.

## Application form

The application form is a part of the Start-Up Package, and can be purchased through the office of the Swedish Ecotourism Association, or on-line at [www.ekoturism.org](http://www.ekoturism.org)

## Training Courses

Seminars, short training courses and further education in ecotourism will be arranged, and are recommended in the first instance to tour operators and staff from businesses who are candidates for labelling products. The training courses will start during the autumn of 2002. Background compendiums, study plans, and teacher's manuals on different levels will be produced. This is a decisive component of the ecotourism labelling system, and will be closely supervised during the labelling.



## Clarifications and criteria:

General and basic criteria for all applicants:

- The company works with eco-friendly nature tourism.
- The company is a registered commercial business in Sweden, and is also registered with the Swedish Tax Authorities.
- The company is expected to have full knowledge about, and meet the legal criteria of laws and regulations that are in force for different parts of its business activities. Especially: The Travel Guarantees Act, The Act on Package Tours, The Environment Code, The Off-Road Driving Act, The Reindeer Husbandry Act, The Land Code, The Animal Protection Act and The Planning and Building Act.
- All permanent staff that have direct customer contact have undergone the one-day introductory training course in ecotourism, provided by the Ecotourism Association. Exceptions to this will be made during 2002, but the training course will be completed at the latest for 2003.

The criteria for having the right to use the label are divided into two main categories:

### Basic criteria:

that must be fulfilled by everyone who wants to have the privilege to use the label. If not very convincing written motivation is provided as to why these criteria cannot be met.

### Bonus criteria:

of which at least 10 percent must be fulfilled. These are inspirational bonus criteria and each applicant should strive to fulfil as many of them as possible. Future Basic criteria are expected to be upgraded from the Bonus criteria, during future revisions of the system. Moreover, a high percentage of fulfilled Bonus criteria is a clear merit for special attention, e.g. to be nominated to the Grand Travel Awards as the "Ecotourism Operator of the Year", and for special marketing campaigns.

The criteria are further divided into Criteria for the tour operator and Criteria for the tour product. In Appendix 2-4 there is a list of specific, additional criteria for a number of special activities. These criteria must also be fulfilled for the tours that include such special activities.

We want to underline that all information given in the application is of course confidential, and will be treated with full respect for any possible trade secrets.

## 1. Respect the limitations of the destination – minimize negative impact on nature and culture

Ecotourism is about careful use of - not destroying - what the visitor has come to see and experience. It is about not cutting off the branch you are sitting on. The ecological and social carrying capacity of each destination has to be respected. Nothing else will work in the long run. This is why the tour products are adapted to what the local nature and culture of the destination can accommodate. The quality of the visitor experience needs to be safeguarded. This will demand thorough tour operator knowledge about the destination, as well as co-operation with other tour operators of the area, always being extremely sensitive to signals of impact brought forward by from local people and conservation groups.

Ecotourism operators work towards a holistic approach to ecological issues within the company. Ecotourism means taking your responsibility for the destination. Ten visitors can do more damage than a hundred, if the activity isn't well planned or if carried out in the wrong way. Ecotourism means diminishing negative impact or overexploitation, by directly mitigating these. On one's own, or together with other stakeholders. Ecotourism can, in practice, mean refraining from arranging trips to perceived overexploited destinations, where the social or ecological carrying capacity is out of balance. The ecotourism operator works by the Precautionary Principle. The goal is always to have as little impact as possible on the natural and cultural environments. To balance these issues correctly, the tour operator needs to make his/her own thorough analysis of the destination. The more visitors to a destination, the bigger are the needs for such an analysis. Better knowledge about the destination not only minimizes predatory tourism, it also provides for a better visitor experience.

A travel destination analysis is a must for the ecotourism operator. It can have many faces, depending on the type of operator and on the kind or number of destinations. Many tour operators may already have an analysis, but only in their heads. It is better to put it down in writing. A number of important issues for making a travel destination analysis can be found in the Appendix 1. The travel destination analysis will assist the tour operator in evaluating Codes of conduct for the visitors, appropriate group sizes, appropriate pathways, wildlife viewing, and what other special considerations there may be.

The Right of Public Access is a principle sanctioned by long usage in Sweden, and a part of our cultural heritage. It is also something that can simplify careful ecotourism operators' access to their most important nature resources. An ecotourism operator defends The Right of Public Access. Even if this law does not explicitly prohibit commercial tourism on land owned by someone else, agreements should be signed with the owners whose land you are thinking about moving around in, especially if you plan on doing so on a more regular basis.

Tourism that include hunting or sports fishing, which in part actually finally consumes certain natural resources, are here placed in a special category, as they - for obvious reasons - must take on a special responsibility. (See Appendix 2 and 3)

## Basic criteria:

### The tour operator:

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- 1.1.1 The tour operator and his subcontractors all know the destination very well.
- 1.1.2 A travel destination analysis has been made in writing and is attached to the application. See Appendix 1.
- 1.1.3 All local subcontractors and guides have received a specific list of what is expected of them by the tour operator, for each activity that is to be labelled as ecotourism.
- 1.1.4 Subcontractors and/or guides are informed that the visitors may be asked to respond to questions about fulfilment of the ecotourism criteria.

### The tour product:

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- 1.2.1 The travel destination analysis governs how the activity is to be carried out.
  - 1.2.2 The group size depends on the sensitivity of the area to be visited, on environmental factors, and on the safety as well as the general quality of the visitor experience.
  - 1.2.3 A The landowner has been contacted.
  - 1.2.3 B The landowner has been contacted, unless entry only is of slight importance, or if there are too many different landowners involved. Please motivate, in this case.
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- 1.2.4 In places where the tour operator's visitation is concentrated, or recurrent, the tour operator has an agreement in writing with the landowner.
  - 1.2.5 All landowners receive signed agreements, if they wish.
  - 1.2.6 On public lands in reindeer herding areas, permission for your tour/type of activity has been received from the County Administration. (See specifically The Reindeer Husbandry Act §93 and 94).
  - 1.2.7 Local regulations and recommendations for protected areas are always respected.
  - 1.2.8 If there is a risk that the activity might contribute to direct environmental damage, the tour operator will refrain from carrying out the activity. (See the Precautionary Principle in the Swedish Environment Code).
  - 1.2.9 All activities are based upon a ecologically sustainable and ethically acceptable usage of the resource.

- 1.2.10 The nature conservation authorities have been contacted, to make sure sensitive nature values will not be disturbed through negligence.
- 1.2.11 Hunting tours are also to be evaluated as in Appendix 2 , Sports fishing tours are to be evaluated as in Appendix 3, and other special activities are to be evaluated as in Appendix 4.
- 1.2.12 If feeding of wildlife is done for observation purposes, this must be done with the expressed permission of the landowner, the owner of hunting rights, and the authorities. The feeding will be done in carefully chosen and undisturbed areas, in ways that will not disturb neighbours and other users of the area, that does not hurt growing forest or crops, does not increase the risk of traffic accidents, nor change the natural behaviour of the wildlife.
- 1.2.13 The specific needs for the reindeer husbandry is respected, especially during the critical periods, as described in the Reindeer Husbandry Act.

**Bonus criteria:**

The tour operator:

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- 1.3.1 The tour operator will provide each employee of the company paid leave for one day a year to further his or her knowledge about ecotourism (for example through seminars, training courses, workshops or contacts with researchers).

The tour product:

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- 1.4.1 Contracts have been signed with all affected landowners.
- 1.4.2 Nature conservation organisations and authorities, local NGOs, and different local key personalities have been contacted. Please state which.

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- 1.4.3 Codes of conduct and clear distance limits are used for determining how close and how obtrusively different species of wildlife may be observed.

1. The company's own comments and explanations:

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## 2. Support the local economy

Ecotourism is to integrate tourism development and to share the benefits at the community level. Nature conservation can easily become counterproductive if local people are against it. Making sure that people in the area benefit from tourism in different ways, and also earn money from it, is often a positive drive. Therefore, each tour product should in the best possible way contribute to the local economy by local sourcing, purchasing as much as possible in the area. The more the better.

Ecotourism around the world is a vehicle for striking the balance of local economic development and the conservation of biological and cultural diversity. Nature conservation in combination with ecotourism provides more local revenues than any other kind of nature exploitation, this already after a very short time. And besides that, many of the factors that often are a drawback for all other kinds of industry (long distances, low population density, wild lands etc) in this context instead turn into important strengths for ecotourism development. Ecotourism already helps many people that live in sparsely populated areas supporting themselves providing work in forests or other natural areas, often what they like the best. Ecotourism often contributes to some immigration from outside, and provides jobs locally for young people, to the benefit of the local businesses, schools, post offices or other social services.

The criteria below help the tour operators to evaluate to what extent they are actually contributing to the economy of the destination. When making purchase decisions, decisive price and quality differences must of course also be taken into consideration. And sometimes the product or service is simply not available at the local destination.

This is however about starting a process where the amount of local products and services gradually increase. Concepts like "local" and "nearby" do not have fixed definitions, so these will inevitably vary from place to place. Here we use the concept of "local" mostly in the meaning of the same or the neighbouring municipality.

### Basic criteria:

The tour operator:

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- 2.1.1 There is a company policy to give local colour to all activities, like food, lodging, transportation and guiding.
- 2.1.2 The operator contributes to, or takes part in some kind of local development work (village projects, education, mountain rescue, volunteer fire brigades, receiving trainees, the local associations, maintenance of local roads or infrastructure, committee assignments etc). Please state which.

The tour product:

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- 2.2.1 During the activity as much as possible of the products and services are purchased locally. Give a rough estimate in percentages of the total purchases that are done locally.

- 2.2.2 Visitors are encouraged to buy locally produced and sold products.  
Please state how.

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**Bonus criteria:**

The tour operator:

- 2.3.1 The company is both registered and taxed within the area of the destination.
- 2.3.2 The percentage of staff and personnel costs that were paid last year to local staff and local subcontractors was higher than 50%.
- 50-60 %    61-70 %    71-80 %    81-90 %    91-100 %

The tour product:

- 2.4.1 In cases where large parts of the tour product are purchased through a subcontractor, the subcontractor is registered and taxed within the area of the destination.
- 2.4.2 The percentage of locally purchased products and services was higher than 50 % of the total. Please state the approximate percentage of, respectively: food, lodging, local transportation, services, other
- Food  
 50-60 %    61-70 %    71-80 %    81-90 %    91-100 %
- Lodging  
 50-60 %    61-70 %    71-80 %    81-90 %    91-100 %
- Local transportation  
 50-60 %    61-70 %    71-80 %    81-90 %    91-100 %
- Services  
 50-60 %    61-70 %    71-80 %    81-90 %    91-100 %
- Other  
 50-60 %    61-70 %    71-80 %    81-90 %    91-100 %

2. The company's own comments and explanations:

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### 3. Make all the company's operations environmentally sustainable

Ecotourism operators are pioneers of best practise environmental management. We are aware of the fact that travel and transportation does cause negative environmental impact. In some areas, even serious problems. This is why ecotourism operators continuously search for the best methods and appropriate technology to minimise their environmental impact. The goal is for all parts of the company's operations to be as eco-friendly as possible. At the same time, there is real money to be saved here. Alternative modes of transport that saves energy, provides less emissions and noise are sought after, encouraged and preferred. Lodging facilities are made more eco-friendly, and waste is minimized, sorted, and taken care of in the best possible way. All this is a long-term commitment, which can start immediately with just a small change in attitude, with new routines, new technology and the training of staff.

Therefore, each operator has an environmental plan and a controller in charge of carrying it out. The aim is to continuously steer all the company's operations into a more eco-friendly direction. An important step is educating and training the staff in environmental issues. Another is for example the choice of new technological solutions and new work methods. As there is no need to reinvent the wheel, we work in close co-operation with already existing eco-labelling systems (The Nordic eco-label "Svanen" (The Swan), the Green Key, the Swedish eco-label "Bra Miljöval"(i.e. Good Environmental Choice) and the Swedish organisation for ecological food production "KRAV" (active member of IFOAM – International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements), which labels items such as office materials, food and cleaning products.

Ecotourism operators normally have the biggest influence over their own, on-site activities, and that is why this labelling system concentrates its efforts on environmentally sustainable practises in the field. Focus is on making the nature experience as environmentally sound as possible. On-site transportation is carried out in many different ways. Powered by an engine or not. Ecotourism operators choose the transportation that best suits the attraction, but with the aim of limiting the use and thus the negative impact of motorized vehicles. The basic rule is that motorized vehicles can be used for transfers to and from the attraction, but should not be the attraction itself. Ecotourism operators support the principle of zoning and silent, noise-free areas (i.e. dividing nature areas into zones where motorized vehicles either can or cannot be used).

The transport to the destination is in itself a polluting factor, which increases with the distance covered. The tour operator tries to minimise this in different ways. In part through using transport alternatives using the best available technology, and in part by making it possible for the customer to choose means of transportation with less environmental impact. The tour operator also tries to compensate the environmental impact by actively contributing to the conservation of nature and cultural assets on-site. Environmental streamlining of offices and home operations may only result in small gain for the environment, but on the other hand, they are very easily carried-out and symbolically very important. That is why they are a natural part of this labelling system.



## Basic criteria:

### The tour operator:

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- 3.1.1 The tour operator has his own, written environmental plan, describing the impact of his operations on the environment. It is attached to the application (See the example in Appendix 7)
- 3.1.2 The environmental plan includes a specific list of all the improvements that need to be done, and the date by which they shall be implemented.
- 3.1.3 The tour operator's environmental plan is available for all interested customers.
- 3.1.4 The tour operator has a specific controller (could also be the manager or owner) in charge of the regular environmental audit of the company's activities.
- 3.1.5 When new purchases are being made, the choice goes to the best available environmentally friendly technology and materials.
- 3.1.6 When buying paper, chemicals, food or office supplies, the choice goes to the best available eco-labelled or certified alternatives.
- 3.1.7 There are routines for waste disposal, and all waste is source-separated and recycled, when possible.
- 3.1.8. Disposable articles are avoided.
- 3.1.9 At request, the operator will produce all information needed to make an estimate of the environmental impact of the company's transportation to and from the destination, as well as during the activity.

### The tour product:

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- 3.2.1 The operator strives towards using eco-friendly accommodations.
- 3.2.2 Eco-labelled lodgings are used where possible.
- 3.2.3 Regularly used lodgings are influenced into getting eco-labelled.
- 3.2.4 The operator strives towards using KRAV-labelled (Swedish organisation for ecological food production - an active member of IFOAM, International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements), and/or locally produced food.
- 3.2.5 Train and bus transportation is actively offered to the customer, where this is possible.
- 3.2.6 The itineraries of all tours are adapted to the timetabled arrivals – when available - of more environmentally friendly modes of transport.
- 3.2.7 When using air transport, first choice always goes to companies that have an expressed environment policy or program, and who invest in fuel-saving engines with less emissions and noise.
- 3.2.8 Transportation of visitors, materials, supplies and food are as efficiently co-ordinated as possible.

- 3.2.9 Local transportation is done with the environmentally best, and most resource-saving transport systems available.
- 3.2.10 Motorized transportation is limited. Motor vehicles can be used for transportation to and from the site, and during the activity, on condition that they are not the main attraction in themselves, and that a better, more eco-friendly means of transportation is not available.
- 3.2.11 When investing in new motorized vehicles, the most eco-friendly engines are preferred.
- 3.2.12 All the operator's two stroke engines (outboards or snowmobiles) are to be replaced with four-stroke engines, or other engines with the same or lower fuel-consumption, that are less polluting and have a lower degree of noise. (Exemption is granted if the tour operator can show an investment plan of how older engines are to be replaced with newer ones during the labelling period until December 31st 2004.) If the tour operator uses snowmobiles, all the detailed criteria described in Appendix 4 must be met.
- 3.2.13 More eco-friendly fuels (like alkylate petrol) and oils are used throughout the operation.
- 3.2.14 Cars used during the tours are at the oldest from 1993. Buses used are at the oldest from 1991.
- 3.2.15 Helicopters and small aircraft are avoided. Exemption to this rule can be given for transfers to and from activities where there is no other means of transport available. Please describe the reasons here

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Assessment will be made by the labelling committee, which has a very restrictive stand in this matter.

- 3.2.16 If using helicopter transportation, with exemption from the rules, the helicopters used shall preferably be of the kind with improved combustion, lower amounts of emissions and less noise-producing (for example the Eurocopter Colibri which has passed all the new environment and safety requirements according to the International Air Traffic Regulations JAR 27).
- 3.2.17 Other visitors' nature experience is respected, and a "Minimum disturbance"-policy is used.
- 3.2.18 The tour operator strives to undertake all transportation of material in roadless land during low season and with the lowest possible impact or disturbance.
- 3.2.19 If a motor driven electric generator is used, it is sound-insulated and positioned in a way that the emissions do not disturb. Only environmentally classified fuel is used.

- 3.2.20 When choosing subcontractors, clear and concise environmental demands are made. The Basic criteria for the tour operator, under paragraph 3 in regard to environment issues, are also valid for all co-operation partners.
- 3.2.21 Lighting of campfires in the outdoors is always done with judgement and according to local rules and regulations, seasons and the predisposition of the terrain.
- 3.2.22 Insecticides or herbicides are avoided.

### Bonus criteria:

#### The tour operator:

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- 3.3.1 Lodgings used by the tour operator have already been eco-labelled by the Nordic eco-label Svanen (the Swan)/Green Key/Green Globe/ISO 14001 or other equivalent environmental certification systems for lodging. Please attach a copy of the certificate.
- 3.3.2 The tour operator's permanent staff have undergone shorter, in-house environment education/training course and know the contents of the company's environment plan.
- 3.3.3 Travel logs are kept for all vehicles.
- 3.3.4 The environment controller has undergone some form of training in the requirements of the Swedish Environment Code.
- 3.3.5 If the company has several offices, there is an environment controller among the staff at each workplace.
- 3.3.6 The tour operator uses energy from local, renewable sources.
- 3.3.7 The tour operator's energy needs are mainly covered by energy from renewable sources.
- 3.3.8 Electricity is, where possible, of an eco-labelled kind, like renewable energy sources.
- 3.3.9 All waste is separated at the source and recycled.
- 3.3.10 All organic waste is composted.
- 3.3.11 The tour operator's environmental plan is accessible on the Internet and/or is easily available in print.

#### The tour product:

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- 3.4.1 No motorized transportation is included in the local tour/travel product.
- 3.4.2 The tour operator co-operates locally/regionally to promote the development of areas in which the usage of motor vehicles is forbidden or highly restricted, and other zones in which it is admitted.

- 3.4.3 Electrical boat engines are used instead of fuel driven combustion engines.
- 3.4.4 Only cars that have the highest environmental classification are used.
- 3.4.5 Car and bus drivers have been trained in fuel-efficient driving, so called Eco-driving.
- 3.4.6 Transportation to and from the destination is done by train and/or bus.
- 3.4.7 Lodgings are built so as to not disturb the surrounding natural landscape in any significant way.
- 3.4.8 Lodgings are built with local building materials.
- 3.4.9 Lodgings are built in accordance with local building traditions.
- 3.4.10 When refurbishing or constructing a new building, all materials are FSC-labelled, environmentally adapted and/or of local production.
- 3.4.11 The construction site is rehabilitated, and revegetated with naturally occurring native species.

3. The company's own comments and explanations:

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## 4. Contribute actively to conservation

Ecotourism is to take responsibility for biodiversity and the unique values of nature and culture – from virgin wilderness to agricultural farmlands. To defend the one main resource on which the very existence of ecotourism relies, supporting nature and culture conservation in different forms, economically and practically, as well as directly and indirectly. Ecotourism promotes, and co-operates with a vivid nature conservation opinion and reaps the benefits from it. It is a partnership for mutual benefit.

The ecotourism operator supports nature and culture conservation in some way. This is a kind of self-defence, and an integral part of the business. Furthermore, at times also the visitors can be encouraged to participate in this work, in various ways. Besides economic support and/or practical conservation work, it is important to encourage the visitors to spread their new knowledge about the destination's special values. Thus, visitors may become ambassadors for otherwise threatened natural habitats, cultural assets or wildlife and plant species. One method can be to actively show charismatic or rare and endangered species in a non-obtrusive way, protecting them by making them known.

### Basic criteria:

The tour operator:

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- 4.1.1 Support is given to some kind of nature conservation/culture conservation programs, or to nature conservation organisations/-projects, preferably local ones. (Please state what and which).
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- 4.1.2 The tour operator is a member, or equivalent, of a nature conservation organisation.

The tour product:

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- 4.2.1 The tour operator bridges information about the most suitable channels to support different conservation projects to visitors who want to give economic or practical support to nature conservation initiatives at the destination.

### Bonus criteria:

The tour operator:

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- 4.3.1 In the work with the Travel destination analysis (See paragraph 1.1.2) consideration is also taken to external threats, like deforestation projects, planned road constructions or applications for concessions. When found, these threats are taken note of, together with the way in which they threaten the destination's ecological and cultural values. The operator closely follows the development.
- 4.3.2 Nature conservation organisations are offered promotion space in the tour operator's marketing materials, on web sites, in brochures, mailings etc.

- 4.3.3 The tour operator contributes with information about potential threats within the destination, so that the nature conservation opinion can be kept informed.

The tour product:

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- 4.4.1 Elements of practical nature conservation work is offered during the activity (like hay-cutting, winter feeding of eagles, brush clearing, or species surveys). All in co-operation and in agreement with nature conservation authorities and landowners.
- 4.4.2 The visitors to the destination are informed about the concrete threats to the nature and culture at the site.

4. The company's own comments and explanations:

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## 5. Promote the joy of discovery, knowledge and respect

Ecotourism is to travel with a curious and at the same time respectful attitude. Respect comes from knowledge and ethical values. Therefore, to inform and to influence ethical values are natural parts of an ecotourism product. For the ecotourism operator, the personal encounter with the traveller is in focus. Skilled and competent guides are experts in transmitting the joy of discovery and knowledge, and have the knack of raising enthusiasm among the travellers. This is often an important key to the quality of the visitor experience. Well prepared pre-tour documentation is also important. Ecotourism is a question of wanting to influence visitors into having a non-disturbing and respectful attitude towards nature, local people and their cultural heritage.

Ecotourism is tourism that provides and enhances knowledge, and stands for high quality of guides and tour leaders. This goes both for their general skills as much as for their ability to transmit knowledge in an easy-going and pedagogical way. Emphasis is on skilled and entertaining forms of guiding, where the visitor's right to the best possible experience is in focus.

Furthermore, the tour operator's knowledge of the destination transpires in all his or her customer contacts - on the web site, in the brochures, in presentations at travel fairs and over the telephone. Guides are preferably locally recruited at the destination. Local guides often increase the possibilities of memorable encounters with the local people, and usually give the traveller a greater feeling of closeness with the destination. At the same time, when recruiting, also other factors must be weighed into the equation, like language skills, pedagogic skills and service mindedness. Another good option is combining professional guiding with strong local participation.

The conduct of the visitor is also important for how the trip fulfils the criteria of ecotourism. Important local Codes of conduct and information about what is expected from the visitors are therefore carefully explained. The tour operators, through their field staff, have an obligation to try to explain important social, ecological and economical conditions that may enhance the visitor's understanding of the local values of the area.

Ecotourism is, by its very nature, staff-intensive, although all activities do not need a guide present at all times. But ecotourism always contains an element where the visitor is informed about the destination, local codes of conduct, safety measures and special considerations to be taken during the stay.

### Basic criteria:

#### The tour operator:

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- 5.1.1 The tour operator has made sure that all staff with visitor contact, and especially guides and tour leaders, have good knowledge about the destination's natural and cultural values.
- 5.1.2 Explicit information about the destination is readily available in the tour operator's marketing materials (brochures, web site etc).
- 5.1.3 Special care is taken to ensure (through in-house training, development of new methods, and education requirements when recruiting new staff) that the tour operator's guides and tour leaders perform high quality guiding and nature interpretation.

The tour product:

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- 5.2.1 Travellers who make reservations in advance, receive full pre-tour information about the tour and the destination, together with a list of suggested reading, a list of equipment and Codes of conduct.
- 5.2.2 The tour product includes some kind of personal encounter/guiding /instruction by skilled staff. Depending on the kind of travel product, this guiding can vary from an introductory lecture to full guiding throughout the tour. All visitors are informed about the destination, Codes of conduct and about the rights and obligations under the Right of Public Access.
- 5.2.3 The tour operator and its staff strive to actively interpret knowledge about, and respect for the destination's natural and cultural values to the travellers.
- 5.2.4 The tour operator underlines the importance of every single visitor's own responsibility to treat local people in a respectful way, and of working to avoid environmental damage.
- 5.2.5 Codes of conduct are used and explained to the participants. They can include:
  - Local conservation regulations, appropriate behaviour in sensitive habitats, wildlife encounters, finding fragile and rare plants.
  - Recommendations and local regulations regarding camping, making fires, latrines, waste disposal, cleaning.
  - The Right of Public Access in general and specifically during the tour.
  - Rules for access to historical places and/or areas with on-going scientific research.
  - Special considerations during the time of the visit. e.g. during the nesting season.
  - Respect for the local people and their industries.
- 5.2.6 In groups without guides (for example certain rafting trips, canoe-/kayak-rentals, or mountain hiking), the group appoints one participant as responsible for its environmental impact during the tour. In groups without guides, all participants undersign that they have been informed about the operator's Codes of conduct.
- 5.2.7 The guide in charge has the relevant education, or equivalent, and is knowledgeable about the destination and the travel product.



**Bonus criteria:**

The tour product:

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- 5.4.1 Skilled guides or tour leaders always accompany the group/traveller.
- 5.4.2 Guiding is offered also in other languages than English. Please state which.
- 5.4.3 Group size is limited to a maximum of 15 people per guide, in consideration of the quality of the customer's travel experience.
- 5.4.4 Lecturers and guides are recruited among research fellows, wildlife rangers, indigenous and/or local people.
- 5.4.5 A travel library is available during the tour.

5. The company's own comments and explanations:

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## 6. Quality and safety all the way through

Ecotourism is quality tourism. The customer can trust that ecotourism labelled products keep high standards from beginning to end. An approved tour operator is characterised by: serious business-manship, responsible marketing, payment ethics and by having all the necessary legal documents in order. Safety issues are handled cautiously, and satisfied customers are the norm. The travel business partners can trust that an approved ecotourism operator is trustworthy.

Ecotourism operators know their job, and their products are based on smooth, serious and professional businessmanship. Care, attention to details and service mindedness are the words of honour. The tour operator's business is registered in Sweden, characterised by honest payment ethics, has the necessary insurance-coverage and respects laws and regulations. Ecotourism operators take active steps to improve the quality of their products, work towards developing more priced and packaged tour products, and their marketing is considered trustworthy. The decisive point is to create the right kind of expectations with the customers, so that all participants feel that the marketing conforms to on-site reality. When trips are sold to foreign customers, the tour operator and the guides must have the necessary language skills. The ecotourism label also means that the tour operator works seriously with safety measures, and has well prepared routine measures for worst- case scenarios. The labelling system adheres to already existing, established, trade-specific systems of safety rules and regulations.

The tour operator continuously evaluates customer input. Direct feedback from tour participants also works as a quality measure in the ecotourism labelling system. If domestic animals are used during the tours, (for example sledge dogs, sledge reindeer or horses) they are treated with dignity and respect, in accordance with the regulations of the Swedish Animal Protection Act and with high held ethical ambitions for animal keeping.

### Basic criteria:

The tour operator:

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- 6.1.1 The tour operator has a minimum of two years of professional experience of nature tourism.
- 6.1.2 The tour operator is registered with the Swedish tax authorities, and has a registered VAT- and organisation number.
- 6.1.3 The company has a liability insurance. (Please state insurance company and number of the policy).
- 6.1.4 The company, where needed, has a travel guarantee in accordance with the Travel Guarantees Act.
- 6.1.5 The tour operator practices responsible marketing which creates appropriate customer expectations on destinations and activities.
- 6.1.6 The tour operator continuously works at improving the quality of the operation.
- 6.1.7 The tour operator conducts business with honest payment ethics.

The tour product:

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- 6.2.1 The tour operator has the necessary insurance coverage for the business activities.
- 6.2.2 Labelled tours are founded on active and serious safety-work. Potentially risky activities are guided by specifically trained and skilled guides.
- 6.2.3 During more adventurous activities (for example rock climbing, scuba diving, adventure courses, whitewater rafting etc) the specially recommended, trade-specific security measures are followed. (See more in Appendix 5).
- 6.2.4 Routines and back-up plans exist for the unexpected and unwanted. (For example bad weather, delays, accidents or illness). The tour operator asks all participants to state eventual health problems that may be of importance during the tour in order to improve the quality of the travel experience, and the participant's own safety.
- 6.2.5 Minimum one guide on all guided tours is trained to provide First Aid, CPR (and eventual other activity-specific life-saving techniques, depending on the kind of activity). (See Appendix 4).
- 6.2.6 There are routines for receiving and evaluating post-trip customer feed-back forms, proposals and criticism.
- 6.2.7 The participants are informed about the possibility of directly contacting the Labelling Committee with opinions about the tour.
- 6.2.8 For those participants who want to contact the committee, information about its direct address is readily available on the tour operator's web site, or printed marketing/information material.
- 6.2.9 If domestic animals are used during the activities, (for example dogs, reindeer or horses) they are treated with dignity and respect, in accordance with the regulations of the Swedish Animal Protection Act and with high held ethical ambitions for animal-keeping.
- 6.2.10 The keeping of domestic animals has undergone inspection and has been approved by the inspector for animal protection/veterinary /environment inspector. The inspection protocol can be produced upon request.
- 6.2.11 Safe and working communication tools are available when travelling in the wilderness. This means FRS radios/walkie-talkies, communication radios, cellphones or satellite phones.
- 6.2.12 The tour operators' own comments upon what characterises their way of taking care of the customer:

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### Bonus criteria:

The tour operator:

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- 6.3.1 Offers packages and priced products, ready-to-book.
- 6.3.2 Co-operates with other travel businesses in order to offer joint ready-to-book packages and priced products.
- 6.3.3 The tour operator has a web site on the Internet.

The tour product:

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- 6.4.1 All field staff are trained and know how to provide First Aid, CPR (and eventual other activity-specific life-saving techniques, depending on the kind of activity). (See Appendix 4).
- 6.4.2 Customers are asked to fill in a post-trip questionnaire, including questions about how the tour was carried out, and in which there is ample space for suggestions of improvement.
- 6.4.3 Customer questionnaires also include questions about the operators' environmental performance and about their different ecotourism qualities.
- 6.4.4 Each customer questionnaire is followed up by the environment controller, and also by the tour producer. The questionnaires are later available at the tour operator's offices in case of a quality audit.
- 6.4.5 Safety and Rescue routines exist and the Swedish Rescue Service has been notified.

6. The company's own comments and explanations:

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## Appendix

Appendix 1	Travel destination analysis – a template
Appendix 2	Ecotourism labelled hunting
Appendix 3	Ecotourism labelled sports fishing
Appendix 4:1	Horseback riding and driving
Other special activities, Part 1	Kayaking and canoeing Dogsledge Whitewater rafting/whitewater kayaking Winter activities that include snowmobile transfers
Appendix 4:2	Diving
Other special activities, Part 2 (Will be coming at a later time:)	Rafting Climbing Ballooning Bicycling Cave exploration tours Skiing Skating Hiking Bird and wildlife watching Ecotourism for disabled
Appendix 5	Template for agreements with landowners
Appendix 6	Template for the Customer questionnaire
Appendix 7	Suggested checklist for the Environmental plan

