

# ECOTOURISM

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## ECOTOURISM

provides effective economic incentives for conserving and enhancing bio-cultural diversity and helps protect the natural and cultural heritage of our beautiful planet.

By increasing local capacity building and employment opportunities, ecotourism is an effective vehicle for empowering local communities around the world to fight against poverty and to achieve sustainable development.

### Definition

Ecotourism is now defined as

“responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education” (TIES, 2015).

Education is meant to be inclusive of both staff and guests.

ECOTORURISM  
https://ecotourism.org

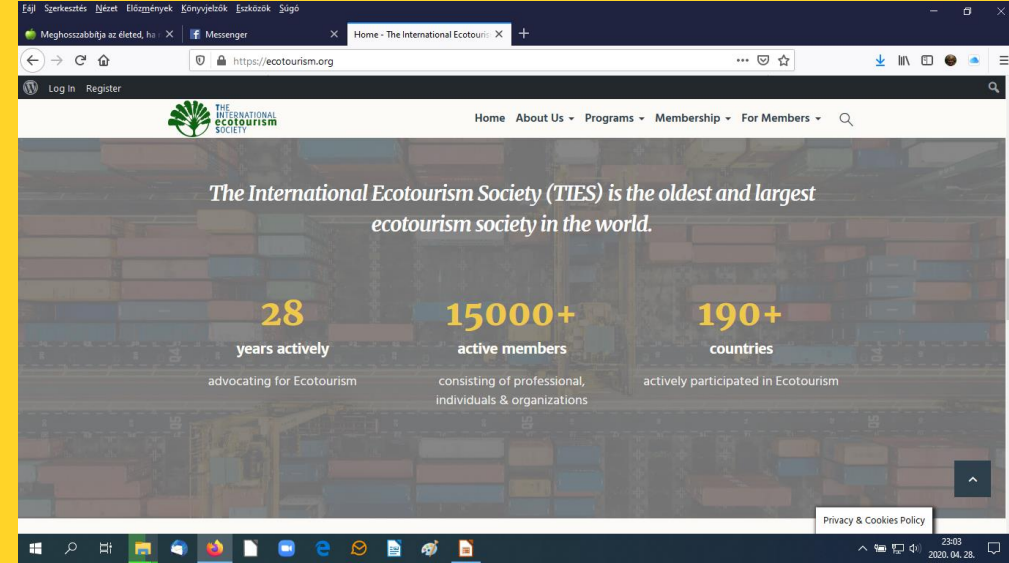
Project ID #/Title: 21930290, A Voice for Tropoja 2.0  
Cooperating to Empower Rural Communities in Sustainable Development

## ECOTOURISM

With an emphasis

on enriching personal experiences and  
environmental awareness  
through interpretation, ecotourism

promotes greater understanding and appreciation  
for nature, local society, and culture.



**The International Ecotourism Society** (TIES) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting ecotourism. Founded in **1990**, TIES has been on the forefront of the development of ecotourism, providing guidelines and standards, training, technical assistance, and educational resources. TIES' global network of ecotourism professionals and travellers is leading the efforts to make tourism a viable tool for conservation, protection of bio-cultural diversity, and sustainable community development.

Through membership services, industry outreach and educational programs, TIES is committed to helping organizations, communities and individuals promote and practice the principles of ecotourism. TIES currently has members in more than 190 countries and territories, representing various professional fields and industry segments including: academics, consultants, conservation professionals and organizations, governments, architects, tour operators, lodge owners and managers, general development experts, and ecotourists.

## What is certification?

[https://www.responsibletravel.org/docs/Ecotourism\\_Handbook\\_I.pdf](https://www.responsibletravel.org/docs/Ecotourism_Handbook_I.pdf)

**Certification is a way of ensuring that an activity or a product meets certain standards.** Within the tourist industry, different organizations have developed certification programs measuring different aspects of tourism:

- (a) quality, for the entire tourist industry,
- (b) sustainability, also for all sectors, and
- (c) ecotourism, for sustainable tourism that takes place in natural, protected, or fragile ecosystems, that may include indigenous communities, and that conforms to the definition above.

## 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.

## Benefits for certified businesses

- 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.

## Benefits for certified businesses

- 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.



## Benefits for certified businesses

- 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 the environment and local communities

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.

## Different types of certification

There are many different types of certification systems, as well as related awards and ecolabels, and there is much confusion about how they differ.

## similar components:

- voluntary enrolment by businesses
- well-defined standards and criteria
- assessment and auditing
- recognition and awarding the use of a logo
- periodic follow up audits to renew the certification
- continual improvement
- transparency
- participatory mechanisms to define standards

## Types of certifications and ecolabels

Some of the main distinctions among programs are

- (a) first, second, and third party certification,
- (b) process- versus performance-based systems,
- (c) certification to minimum standards versus ecolabels, and
- (d) multiple levels versus pass-fail awards.

All of these systems usually follow generally accepted rules.

## How to choose the most appropriate certification program?

All sustainable tourism certification systems are voluntary.

No business is required to be certified, nor can any one certification system be imposed on those businesses that want to be certified.

(Obligatory standards are called regulations, and they are imposed by governments.)

The first step in certification then, is to determine which programs are available in your area and choose the one that best fits your needs.

Or, if you are involved in creating a new program, you need to decide which model or models of existing programs to use.

## The certification process

Once you are ready to be certified, the process usually consists of paying a fee to the certifier, filling in a series of documents and questionnaires, and evaluation by an auditor or some other mechanism of determining compliance.

An auditor will usually meet with management or the owners, and then inspect the critical areas of the business that have been determined by the questionnaires. An auditor will also request to see documents, and although these may be confidential, the auditor should be legally bound to respect confidentiality.

You should then receive a report that identifies areas that need improvement (called “non-conformities”), and you should be given an opportunity to correct these or to appeal the report.

The certification program will then decide whether or not your business can be certified and will award your logo or inform you of the improvements you need to make.