



## Sustainable Tourism Certification Program



# Table of Contents

Table of Contents .....	2
Background Information .....	3
ABOUT THE HAWAII ECOTOURISM ASSOCIATION .....	3
HISTORY OF CERTIFICATION.....	3
Certification Objectives, Scope and Framework.....	6
OBJECTIVES.....	6
SCOPE .....	6
FRAMEWORK.....	7
Evaluator Code of Conduct.....	8
Certification Process, Recognition and Usage .....	9
PROCESS .....	9
ACHEIVING RECOGNITION .....	9
CERTIFICATION SEAL USAGE POLICY .....	9
Sustainable Tourism Certification Checklist .....	10
SECTION A: BUSINESS INFORMATION.....	10
SECTION B: MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS .....	10
Member of Hawaii Ecotourism Association .....	10
Legal Compliance .....	10
Sustainability Commitment Statement .....	11
Commercial Tour Operator Engaged in Guided Activities .....	11
Accurate Interpretation .....	11
Marketing Integrity .....	12
Guest Feedback.....	12
Environmental Conservation.....	13
Sustaining the Community .....	14
SECTION C: OPERATING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES .....	15
Environmental Management .....	15
Staff Management .....	25
Interpretation Management .....	26
Consumer Evaluation Management.....	33
Marketing Execution .....	36
Bonus Section.....	37
Acknowledgment Page.....	39
Appendix A: Suggested List of Items to Submit with Application .....	40
Appendix B: Sample Sustainability Commitment Statement.....	41
Appendix C: Sample Evaluation Survey .....	42
Appendix D: Sample Sustainability Plan .....	43
Appendix E: Sample Environmental Briefing Outline And Checklist For Scuba Diving And Snorkeling.....	44
Appendix F: Sample Environmental Pledge.....	45

## **Background Information**

### **ABOUT THE HAWAII ECOTOURISM ASSOCIATION**

#### ***Mission Statement***

The Hawaii Ecotourism Association (HEA) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose goal is to protect Hawaii's unique natural environment and host culture through the promotion of responsible travel and educational programs relating to sustainable tourism for residents, businesses and visitors.

#### ***Organizational Goals***

- Promote communication and education about ecotourism and sustainable travel.
- Promote community-based visitor businesses that are environmentally sensitive and culturally accurate.
- Provide information and professional development, and resource network.

## **HISTORY OF CERTIFICATION**

#### ***Origins***

The creation of a statewide HEA certification program tailored to the unique needs of the Hawaiian Islands started with the development of *E Malama, The Ecotourism Manual for Hawaii* written by Barbara Mills, funded in 1999 by Employers Training Fund, Department of Labor & Industrial Relations, Workforce Division, published by HEA and co-sponsored by Kapiolani Community College's Interpret Hawaii Program. The purpose of the document was to train tourism businesses in ecotourism principles relative to Hawaiian culture. This manual is still used today by the Interpret Hawaii Program.

With grant support from the Hawaii Tourism Authority (HTA) in 2001, HEA conducted workshops on Oahu and Maui in order to educate HEA members and other business operators using *E Malama*. HEA also worked with several other organizations to explore the creation of a certification program to ensure the authenticity and accuracy of cultural information shared in tours and other activities involving visitors. The conclusion among those participating in the discussion was that Hawaii was not ready for a formal certification program because a permanent funding source did not exist for the program.

HEA was also involved in efforts by the Coral Reef Alliance in 2008 to encourage the use of sustainable practices in marine tourism. The Coral Reef Alliance worked with local stakeholders and marine recreation businesses to facilitate the development of the West Hawaii Voluntary Standards for Marine Tourism and promulgates these standards by entering into a Standards Implementation Agreement (SIA) with marine tourism businesses. A business that signs the SIA agrees to "allow, support and facilitate the assessment of the standards through several methods: 1) passenger/client exit surveys (administered onsite or online); 2) self-assessment questionnaire; 3) Environmental Walk Through (EWT); and 4) anonymous third-party community participation and feedback..." To date, over 30 marine recreation businesses have adopted the West Hawaii Voluntary Standards; a listing of these companies can be found at [www.westhawaiimarinetourism.org](http://www.westhawaiimarinetourism.org).

In 2006, HEA partially funded a graduate student to complete a survey of HEA members to explore their interest in a certification program. The thesis concluded that members supported a certification program as long as it was simple and inexpensive<sup>1</sup>. Members hoped that consumers would be willing to pay more for certified ecotourism products and/or services and that certification would promote ecotourism across the State.

As a result of these conclusions, an HEA committee developed a review process for ecotourism operators based on the information about best practices found in other certification program and on the content of *E Malama*. A small number of ecotour operators were reviewed, but the program has had very little visibility or participation across the State.

Given today's socio-political climate and the increased awareness of sustainability issues, HEA wanted to expand the review process to become an ecotourism certification program.

### **Pilot Program**

In 2009, HEA received funding to achieve this goal from HTA's Natural Resource Award Program. The following sources of information were used to develop the pilot ecotourism certification program.

1. Green Globe 21 International Ecotourism Standard (Green Globe, Asia Pacific)
2. Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program (Eco Australia)
3. Sustainable Travel and Ecotourism Program (Sustainable Travel International)
4. A Simple Users' Guide to Certification for Sustainable and Ecotourism (TIES, Rain Forrest Alliance, CREST)
5. Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (The Partnership for Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria)
6. Peer Review Process (Hawaii Ecotourism Association)
7. *Putting Traffic Lights on the Road Less Traveled: Ecotourism Certification & its potential for Hawaii* (Wendy Bauckham, 2005)
8. West Hawaii Voluntary Standards (Coral Reef Alliance)

HEA with the strategic support of Dr. Linda J. Cox, Dr. John Cusick, and Amber O'Neill reviewed, and discussed these documents in order to formulate the first draft of the pilot program which includes a variety of best management practices. Linda J. Cox, PhD has served over 30 years as a Community Economic Development Specialist in the University of Hawaii at Manoa, Department of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources. Dr. John Cusick is an Assistant Specialist, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Environmental Center. In addition to their individual work in sustainable tourism, Drs. Cox and Cusick have worked together for the past seven years doing research, instruction, and community outreach in the area of sustainable tourism and ecotourism. Amber O'Neill is a consultant who worked with HEA for more than three years and assisted Drs. Cox and Cusick in various research and outreach efforts. Additionally, Gail Suzuki-Jones from the State Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT) provided research and in-kind support of the project to integrate built environment best practices.

Upon approval of the pilot program from the HEA Board of Directors, thirteen tour operators were certified in the 2011 pilot effort. While the pilot effort did result in certified businesses, the pilot

---

<sup>1</sup> Wendy Keala Bauckham. *Putting Traffic Lights on the Road Less Traveled: Ecotourism Certification & Its Potential for Hawaii*. May 2005. MA Thesis in Geography, University of Hawaii at Manoa.

program needed some revision to bring more specificity to the best practices, a wider appeal to tourism businesses and a more robust scoring system. At the same time, HEA needed to develop more capacity to support a statewide certification program including an outreach program in order to educate tourism businesses, residents, and visitors about the benefits of a certification program.

### ***Current Program***

In 2013, HEA was awarded another grant from HTA's Natural Resources Program to:

1. Refine the pilot certification program to integrate the West Hawaii Voluntary Standards for Marine Tourism into the HEA's Sustainable Tourism Certification Program.
2. Develop capacity for the further expansion of the program statewide that includes an outreach effort to educate businesses, visitors and residents about HEA's Sustainable Tourism Certification Program, a cadre of trained evaluators and group of certified businesses.

To attain these goals, HEA hired Chris Barzman to consult as the Grant Project Manager for the 2013 project. Mr. Barzman brought over a decade's worth of experience in tourism from both the operator and business development perspectives, experience working on the Hawaii Green Business Program at DBEDT, as well as project management expertise. Additionally, to assist with the integration of the West Hawaii Voluntary Standards, HEA recruited Liz Foote, Hawaii Field Manager for the CORAL Reef Alliance. Dr. Linda Cox continued to support the development of the program by serving as the Project Chair. HEA Board Members and volunteers worked hundreds of hours to ensure that the program continued to develop and improve.

As part of the development of a the current checklist, HEA Board Members and Evaluators also participated in two "test" evaluations of both Atlantis Submarines and Kualoa Ranch. Through these trainings, the program was revised to reflect practical applications of the checklist and methods for consistent evaluation and interpretation were developed.

The result of these efforts resulted in a number of significant modifications to pilot program. The following is a list of the major highlights:

- Rebranded as the Sustainable Tourism Certification Program (previously Ecotourism Certification) to better identify the purpose of the program.
- New certification scoring system, intended to be adaptable to the various tour operations being considered.
- Transition to from a multi-tiered rating system to a dichotomous one, intended to increase participation and reduce conflict over final certification.
- Funding mechanism built into the program to sustain the program.
- Integration of the West Hawaii Voluntary Standards as well as recognition for participation in other certification programs.
- Training and development of a cadre of Evaluators across the State.
- Development of an integrated marketing communications plan to raise awareness.
- Economic incentives (i.e., advertising, press outreach, etc.) for tour operators to participate.
- Research to track the impact of the program.

# Certification Objectives, Scope and Framework

## OBJECTIVES

The certification offers a comprehensive assessment program that will:

1. Educate commercial tour operators and community stakeholders on certification and best management practices for the responsible use of natural and cultural resources.
2. Ensure credibility using third party assessment for tour providers whose operations positively affect the natural and cultural resources, contribute to conservation, and help sustain local communities.
3. Increase visibility of sustainable tourism operators and raise awareness amongst visitors.

## SCOPE

HEA's Sustainable Tourism Certification Program required careful examination of each applicant and a wide variation in the type of business that was described in the application. In order to assure that the evaluation was uniformly conducted across each operator, the following assumptions were made:

- **Definition of Sustainable Tourism.**

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.<sup>2</sup> To maximize social and economic benefits to Hawaii's communities and businesses while respecting, nourishing, preserving and enhancing Hawaii's natural, cultural and human assets.<sup>3</sup>

- **Evaluation does not include impacts from air travel.**

Sustainable tourism is difficult for island communities because air travel is required to reach these destinations. The scope of this document includes activities once on an island.

- **The whole tour operator company/organization is certified.**

Although tourism businesses in general often offer a wide range of activities, some of which may not be eligible for sustainable tourism certification, in order to obtain HEA certification, all of the company's operations - including work commissioned to subcontractors - are required to meet the minimum set of sustainability practices outlined.

- **Only established operations are evaluated.**

Some operators may plan to construct buildings in the future, rent a location for their operation, or add a product or service. This certification assumes that the operation at the time of evaluation is being certified.

- **Tours have a natural and/or cultural area focus.**

Eligible tour operators must principally engage in activities which involve guided excursions for the purpose of engaging Hawaii's natural environment and/or cultural resources.

---

<sup>2</sup> United Nations World Tourism Organization, *Sustainable Development of Tourism*, <http://sdt.unwto.org/content/about-us-5>, (February 13, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Hawaii Tourism Authority, *Strategic Plan 2005-2015*: 7.

## FRAMEWORK

The HEA Sustainable Tourism Certification Program has two components:

### *Part One: Minimum Requirements*

This section addresses whether or not the operation meets the following minimum requirements for certification:

- A current member of the Hawaii Ecotourism Association.
- In compliance with all Federal, State, and Local regulations for all products/services, and commits to abide by all necessary permit conditions.
- Has a Sustainability Commitment Statement posted on the website that guides its operations and demonstrates commitment to HEA's Sustainable Tourism principles.
- Is a commercial endeavor primarily engaged in providing guided tours and/or activities.
- Provides accurate information to guests that can be referenced.
- Utilizes marketing that is accurate and demonstrates responsible travel practices.
- Has a system to monitor and respond to guest and employee feedback.
- Contributes to conservation outcomes annually.
- Contributes to the communities in which they operate annually.

### *Part Two: Operating Principles*

This section evaluates how the operation addresses the operating principles in the following content areas:

- Environmental Management
- Staff Management
- Interpretation Management
- Consumer Evaluation Management
- Marketing Management

## **Evaluator Code of Conduct**

The Hawaii Ecotourism Association (HEA) maintains certain policies to guide its evaluators with respect to standards of conduct expected in areas where improper activities could damage HEA's reputation and otherwise result in serious adverse consequences to HEA and to evaluators involved. The purpose of this Policy is to affirm required standards of conduct and practices with respect to Evaluator for HEA's Sustainable Tourism Certification Program.

Evaluators will:

**1. Place the integrity of the profession and the interests of HEA above their own interests.**

Each evaluator has read and understands the Hawaii Ecotourism Association's Mission Statement and agrees to use it as a prism for viewing and evaluating tour operators. Evaluations will strictly be based on the Evaluation Checklist. Personal opinions, biases, etc., will be kept private and not influence decisions.

**2. Disclose any potential conflicts of interests.**

Evaluators will make it known if they have any potential conflicts of interest for conducting an evaluation and will share this information with HEA and the tour operator. Conflicts could include, but are not limited to, previous experience working with the company or its direct competitors.

**3. Act with integrity, competence, and respect.**

Evaluators agree to conduct themselves in a professional manner. Interactions with tour operators will maintain a business tone. Evaluators will dress in appropriate clothing to safely conduct the evaluation, with consideration for professionalism and modesty when appropriate. Furthermore, Evaluators will follow all written or verbal instructions given to them and agrees to abide by all applicable laws.

**4. Not accept cash, gifts, or other compensation from those they are evaluating.**

Gifts include, but are not limited to, apparel, souvenir photos/dvds (not typically included), cash, gift certificates, consideration for future tours, etc.

**5. Facilitate the certification process for tour operators.**

Evaluators will work with tour operators to help them understand the certification checklist and process. They will also work to reconcile any discrepancies regarding evaluation, while not compromising the integrity of the program.

# Certification Process, Recognition and Usage

## PROCESS

### *Step 1: Self-Evaluation*

Applicants will complete and submit to HEA a self-assessment checklist which evaluates their operations addressing the minimum requirements as well as the operating principles. Submissions will include a certification administration fee of \$200 and supporting documentation (i.e., photos, reports, etc.) for review.

### *Step 2: Third Party Evaluation*

An HEA Evaluator will contact the Applicant to review the checklist and schedule an in-person evaluation. The Evaluator then participates in one tour, verifies components of the self-assessment checklist, and rates the applicant on the various operating principles. The Evaluator will then review their findings with the Applicant to reconcile any discrepancies in their findings.

### *Step 3: Reporting & Certification*

The HEA Evaluator will submit their findings and all supporting documentation to HEA for final approval. HEA will then contact the Applicant regarding their certification award status. Tour operators will also be recognized at the HEA Annual Luncheon.

For those that do not attain certification, a report detailing key metrics that were not satisfied will be returned to the tour operator and they are offered the opportunity to be reevaluated at no additional cost within six months.

## ACHIEVING RECOGNITION

Tour operators can attain certification by reaching the following level of achievement:

- ✓ Meets all the minimum requirements.
- ✓ Has an average rating of “Adequate” or better in all five Operating Principle categories.
- ✓ Has an average rating of “Good” or better in at least three out of five Operating Principle categories.  
or  
Is able to check at least 40% of the applicable boxes

## CERTIFICATION SEAL USAGE POLICY

The HEA Sustainable Tourism Program’s seal will signify that certification was awarded and the years covered by the certification. In order to recognize businesses for their commitment to sustainable tourism and provide a means for customers to become aware of the business’ commitment to this goal, certified businesses may use the certification seal for the duration of the year(s) in which certification was awarded on all marketing materials. These include, but are not limited to, internal and external publications, signage, promotion of services or events, and website usage. Any website usage is required to be hyperlinked to a description of the certification program on the HEA website.



## Sustainable Tourism Certification Checklist

In order to achieve Sustainable Tourism Certification, operators must follow the instructions listed under each section or check N/A and skip that section if it does not apply. When completed, please submit the checklist and supporting materials to: [TravelPono@hawaiiecotourism.org](mailto:TravelPono@hawaiiecotourism.org).

Upon submission a HEA Evaluator will review your application and contact you to schedule a site visit and collect the \$200 administration fee.

### SECTION A: BUSINESS INFORMATION

Business Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### SECTION B: MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

#### 1. Member of Hawaii Ecotourism Association

**The principle:** Operator supports the Hawaii Ecotourism Association's mission and has shown that commitment through membership in the organization.

- Current member of HEA
- Does not advertise HEA membership on website or in other marketing materials in such a way as to confuse potential customers about their current certification status (i.e., membership does not equate to certification and this should be clear to guests).

#### 2. Legal Compliance

**The principle:** Operation is in compliance with all Federal, State, and Local regulations for all products/services, and commits to abide by all necessary permit conditions.

Operators must:

- Have all the necessary licenses, permits and approvals to tour each destination.
- Maintain valid permits to be in compliance with relevant Federal and State environmental, public and occupational health and safety, hygiene, and employment regulations.

### **3. Sustainability Commitment Statement**

**The principle: Operation has a written Sustainability Commitment Statement that guides its operations and demonstrates commitment to HEA Sustainable Tourism principles.**

The Sustainability Commitment Statement must:

- Have defined sections that briefly address each operating principle.
- Is adopted by the operation's senior management and is subject to periodic review.
- Is publicly displayed on the company website.
- Provides a link to the certification overview page on HEA's website.

See Appendix B for an example.

### **4. Commercial Tour Operator Engaged in Guided Activities**

**The principle: Operation is a commercial endeavor primarily engaged in providing guided tours and/or activities.**

Operator must:

- Engage in commercial activity.
- Primarily engage in guided tours and/or activities.
- Have guests engage in experiences with nature and/or culture.
- Educate guests about respectful interaction with nature and/or culture.

### **5. Accurate Interpretation**

**The principle: Interpretation provided to guests while on tour about nature and/or culture must be accurate and able to be referenced.**

Operator must:

- Educate guest about the nature and/or culture they will experience while on tour.
- Be able to provide citations or references regarding the interpretation provided to guests.
- Provide accurate and continued training for guides and make reference material accessible.

## **6. Marketing Integrity**

**The principle:** Through its marketing materials the operator provides accurate and responsible information about products and services.

Operator must:

- The operation will not promote any images, activities, etc., that disrespect nature and/or culture or are not accurate.
- Images will not be digitally manipulated or enhanced to promote unrealistic or inappropriate experiences or expectations by guests relative to nature and culture (e.g., wildlife interactions, species encountered, cultural imagery, etc.).

## **7. Guest Feedback**

**The principle:** The company has system to continuously monitor and analyze its operations and act upon the feedback provided by both guests and employees.

Operator must:

- Seek and respond to guest feedback.
- Seek and respond to employee feedback without repercussion.
- Conduct both formal (i.e., guest questionnaire) and informal (i.e., guest comments, TripAdvisor, etc.) evaluations.

## **8. Environmental Conservation**

**The principle: Operation contributes to conservation outcomes annually.**

Operator must:

- Provide evidence of at least two hands-on, in-kind, and/or financial contributions to statewide and/or local community-based environmental conservation outcomes over the previous 12 months.

First contribution to a conservation outcome:

Second contribution to a conservation outcome:

Examples include:

- Invasive species management under a sanctioned program.
- Natural area restoration under a sanctioned program.
- Recycling program.
- Historical building restoration.
- Active participation in, and/or financial support of the maintenance and/or management of private and/or public natural protected area(s).
- Annual contributions to local environmental conservation organizations, e.g. protecting rare and endangered species, etc.
- Provide sustainably and/or locally sourced goods to Guests whenever such goods are available.

## 9. Sustaining the Community

**The principle: Operation makes ongoing, positive contributions to the community annually.**

Operator must:

- Provide evidence of at least two hands-on, in-kind, and/or financial contributions the local community and have attempted to reduce economic leakage out of the community over the previous 12 months.

First contribution to local community:

Second contribution to local community:

Examples include:

- Supporting local community development groups, schools, events and activities with program discounts, in-kind, funding, or volunteer time.
- Keeping the majority of operation's profits within the state.
- Working with associations or groups to improve and contribute to the welfare of local community.
- Providing resources, training, financial assistance or in-kind support to residents for workforce development so that they can work for the operation and/or improve their chances of gaining more highly skilled work.
- Providing resources, training, financial assistance or in-kind support to residents to research and/or monitor environmental impacts in areas of client visitation and/or implement conservation practices locally.
- Assisting in the environmental, ecological and cultural awareness, and education of the community by presenting or sharing relevant information at schools, community events, etc.

## SECTION C: OPERATING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

### 1. Environmental Management

**The principle:** Tour operator employs environmentally sustainable practices to ensure that their activities do not degrade the environment.

Note: Sustainable practices should be employed at the operation's storefront, headquarters and/or base of operations and during each tour. However, the operation may not own the building or other square footage that contains the operation's storefront, headquarters and/or storage facility. In these cases, check Not Applicable and explain. Pictures or evidence should be provided to demonstrate other qualifying.

#### 1.1 Built Environment

##### 1.1.1 Lighting Fixtures

Not Applicable (Please Explain: \_\_\_\_\_)

Suggested examples include:

- External illumination system(s) does not alter the natural environment or change wild animal behavior, and is limited to that necessary for orientation, security and safety.
- Pathways corridors and external areas are illuminated by lights governed with motion sensors.
- Lights are not pointing above the horizontal.
- Guests are provided with portable lights to avoid fixed outdoor lighting.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information about practices in this section:

For Evaluator Use Only:

Inadequate

Adequate

Good

Excellent

Notes:

### 1.1.2 Landscaping

Not Applicable (Please Explain: \_\_\_\_\_)

Suggested examples include:

- Use and propagation of invasive species is avoided.
- Native and Polynesian introduced plants are to be left undisturbed and/or incorporated into the landscape.
- Landscaping is maintained through the use of organic methods.
- Integrated Pest Control Management system is used instead of standard chemical pesticides.
- Rainwater catchment system utilized for irrigation.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information about practices in this section:

For Evaluator Use Only:

Inadequate

Adequate

Good

Excellent

Notes:

## 1.2 Water Management

The principle: Water consumption is minimized and the water accessed/used is protected.

### 1.2.1 Conservation Measures

Not Applicable (Please Explain: \_\_\_\_\_)

Suggested examples include:

Landscaping with native plants and xeriscaping consistent with the location and climate of the area, to minimize water use.

Appropriate use of rainwater and reuse of grey water.

Use of dual and/or low flush, composting toilets, and/or waterless urinals.

Use of water-efficient appliances (e.g.; dish-washers, laundry washing machines, faucets, etc.) and flow restrictors, aerators, and/or automatic turn-off taps.

Signage to remind staff and guests about best water management practices.

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information about practices in this section:

For Evaluator Use Only:

Inadequate

Adequate

Good

Excellent

Notes:

### 1.2.2 Water Usage/Access

Suggested examples include:

- Wastewater is captured or filtered before being discharged to the environment.
- Green certified cleaners are used for cleaning gear and equipment (i.e., Green Seal, Ecologo, etc.)
- Care is taken to avoid polluting surface water by not swimming in pools or small streams.
- Provide alternate protection from the sun and insects on tours entering a water source (i.e., providing sun shirts or citronella insect repellent).
- Provide guests with suggestions about alternate sun and insect protection prior to tour (i.e. FAQ section of website, suggestions on brochures, etc.).
- Educate guests about proper usage of sun protection for tours entering a water source (i.e., apply at least 5 minutes before entering, use waterproof sunscreen only, etc.).
- Any overnight camps/toilet use is set a minimum distance (see Legal Compliance Section) from surface waters.
- Marine operators will hold waste and use shore based pump out stations.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information about practices in this section:

For Evaluator Use Only:

Inadequate

Adequate

Good

Excellent

Notes:

### **1.3 Noise Management**

**The principle: Noise pollution is+ minimized to reduce impact on the natural environment, provide guests the opportunity to hear the natural sounds, and for staff safety.**

Suggested examples include:

- Controlling noise from machinery, generators, and air conditioners by using sound insulation.
- Minimizing the time that motorized vehicles (including vessels) are left idling.
- Ensuring that noise pollution (human or mechanical) is appropriately located (or isolated) and meets local regulations and guidelines where applicable.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information about practices in this section:

For Evaluator Use Only:

Inadequate

Adequate

Good

Excellent

Notes:

## 1.4 Air Quality

**The principle:** Tour operation has a minimal impact on air quality and greenhouse gas emissions.

Suggested examples include:

- Vehicles are filled to capacity whenever possible.
- Engines for outboard motors and small motorized vehicles are maintained according to manufacturer's guidelines.
- Written purchasing policy in place requiring all purchased equipment to be as energy efficient as possible.
- Prohibiting smoking and fires of any kind in natural areas.
- Utilizing a carbon calculator to consistently monitor and track total carbon output (e.g., <http://www.carbonfootprint.com/calculator1.html>, or a similar method).
- Allocating resources to achieve carbon neutral status.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information about practices in this section:

For Evaluator Use Only:

Inadequate

Adequate

Good

Excellent

Notes:

## 1.5 Waste Management

**The principle: The waste management hierarchy of REDUCE, REUSE and RECYCLE underpins operations of the tour product.**

Suggested examples include:

- Written purchasing policy to avoid over-packaged goods.
- Written purchasing policy to purchase materials in bulk and/or reusable containers.
- Avoiding the sale of disposable items, particularly bottled water.
- Sourcing locally produced, sustainably produced, and/or USDA Organic products.
- Implementing a recycling program and encouraging staff and guests to recycle.
- Keeping all protected natural areas and culturally significant areas visited clean and unspoiled including by collecting and removing all litter generated and litter encountered.
- Providing composting toilet for terrestrial-based operations.
- Holding waste and using shore based pump out stations for marine operations.
- Efforts are made to keep food waste out of the landfill (i.e., donated to pig farmers).
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information about practices in this section:

For Evaluator Use Only:

Inadequate

Adequate

Good

Excellent

Notes:

## 1.6 Energy Management

**The principle:** Tour operators strive for maximum energy-efficiency and reduced usage of fossil fuels/non-renewable energy.

### 1.6.1 Built Environment

Not Applicable (Please Explain: \_\_\_\_\_)

Suggested examples include:

- Buildings are designed to take into account climatic conditions (e.g., use of passive solar heating and/or open ventilation techniques to minimize energy use for heating, ventilation and air conditioning; insulated roofs and walls; low heat absorption siding and roofing materials).
- Natural light sources are optimized to minimize need for artificial light.
- Selection of appliances and lighting based on energy efficiency (e.g., Energy Star appliances, CFLs, etc.).
- Use automatic controls to ensure that air conditioners and other energy consuming appliances are used only when required
- Air conditioners and other energy consuming appliances are managed to take account of peak loads.
- A system for monitoring energy consumption has been implemented.
- Use of motion detectors or timers to control lighting and other appropriately controlled devices.
- Use of renewable energy systems (e.g., PV, Wind, Solar).
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information about practices in this section:

For Evaluator Use Only:

Inadequate

Adequate

Good

Excellent

Notes:

## 1.6.2 Transportation

Suggested examples include:

- Tour vehicles achieve at least 150 passenger miles per gallon (i.e. Toyota Corolla: = 30mpg \* 5 passengers = 150 passenger miles/gallon) and standard protocol is to have vehicles filled to capacity when applicable.
- All vehicles are regularly serviced and maintained.
- Electric/clean fuel vehicles are used where feasible.
- All routes and schedules for tour and support vehicles are arranged to minimize distance traveled, avoid congestion and peak traffic periods.
- Staff has been trained in fuel-efficient driving practices (<https://www.fueleconomy.gov/feg/driveHabits.jsp>).
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information about practices in this section:

For Evaluator Use Only:

Inadequate

Adequate

Good

Excellent

Notes:

## 1.7 Risk Management

**The principle: Tour operator has demonstrated increased awareness and a shared responsibility for resources conservation and risk management within its field operations.**

Suggested examples include:

- Environmental Watch Plan to; 1) prevent introduction and spread of invasive species, e.g., vehicles and gear are inspected and cleaned before each tour to ensure that weeds (terrestrial or aquatic) or their seeds or propagules are not being spread; 2) monitor the displacement and /or destruction of natural features in the operating area; and 3) create a way to report violations to the proper authorities.
- Fire Prevention and Management Plan.
- Emergency/Rescue Management Plan.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information about practices in this section:

For Evaluator Use Only:

Inadequate

Adequate

Good

Excellent

Notes:

## **2. Staff Management**

**The principle:** Tour operators hire guides and staff based on their knowledge and qualifications in the field of sustainable tourism; provide accurate and appropriate training to ensure quality of ecotourism experience to guests; and encourage staff professional development.

### **2.1 New Guide Training**

Suggested examples include:

- Ecological and cultural heritage of the area.
- Environmental management issues and practices of concern for the area.
- Completed Dolphin SMART standards training
- Sound environmental protection practices for the area.
- The principles of sustainable tourism and how they are achieved through participation in this program.
- Safety and emergency preparedness.
- Certified first aid and CPR practices (guides).

Additional information about practices in this section:

For Evaluator Use Only:

Inadequate

Adequate

Good

Excellent

Notes:

## 2.2 Continuing Education

Suggested examples include:

- Provide a training manual and/or supplementary resource information kits for staff which addresses the topics identified above.
- Support and encourage all employees to undertake regular and relevant professional development. (e.g. Multi-cultural communication, cultural sensitivity training, responsible environmental and/or ecosystem training)
- Guides/Instructors have and maintain current certifications through recognized industry programs in their specific area. See Resource List online at ([www.hawaiiecotourism.org/TourOperatorResources](http://www.hawaiiecotourism.org/TourOperatorResources)).
- Provide funding to attend Hawaiian Language and Culture classes.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information about practices in this section:

For Evaluator Use Only:

Inadequate

Adequate

Good

Excellent

Notes:

## 3. Interpretation Management

**The principle: Tour operators provide all guests with accurate information and foster a better understanding and appreciation of the ecological and cultural heritage of the place being visited.**

### 3.1 Natural Resources

Suggested examples include:

- The principles outlined in Section 1: Environmental Management are demonstrated and shared with guests (i.e., environmentally sustainable practices to ensure that their activities do not degrade the environment are shared with guests).
- Providing guests with information about proper behavior and their responsibilities when visiting natural areas and encountering wildlife.
- Providing detailed information about each officially established protected natural area visited by its guests.

- Providing guests with information about environmental issues and initiatives in each of the regions in which it operates.
- Promoting a constructive interaction between guests and nature with tours and other related activities, while minimally disturbing wildlife.
- Viewing routes are rotated regularly to help protect wildlife.
- Wildlife is observed from an appropriate distance that doesn't disturb wildlife and is avoided during sensitive times, such as mating, resting and nesting.
- Guests and employees are prevented from feeding wild animals.
- Food and trash are always securely stored to avoid attracting wild animals.
- Fragile terrain and areas critical to wildlife are avoided.
- Guides who lead off-trail tours are knowledgeable of which plants are most resistant to trampling and they educate their guests accordingly.
- Introduction or transportation of native species is avoided through inspections and cleanings of vehicles and gear prior to each trip.
- Removal, extraction and alteration of cultural or historic structures or artifacts as well as rocks, native plants, and other natural objects by guests and employees is not permitted.
- Regular feedback is provided to the protected area manager for all natural areas utilized as part of the company's programs and / or services.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information about practices in this section:

For Evaluator Use Only:

Inadequate

Adequate

Good

Excellent

Notes:

### 3.2 Aquatic Resources

- Not Applicable (Please Explain: \_\_\_\_\_)  
Suggested examples include:

- Integrate the Coral Reef Alliance's West Hawaii Voluntary Standards for Marine Tourism into your daily practices (i.e., SCUBA & Snorkeling, Boating, and Wildlife Interactions).
- Guided SCUBA diving group size shall not exceed eight certified divers per divemaster.
- Marine recreation providers shall not sell fish food; promote or participate in fish feeding; or allow clients to fish feed.
- When SCUBA/SNUBA diving and snorkeling from shore, entry and exit routes shall be used that avoid walking on corals.
- Before entering water provide guests with a briefing about appropriate behavior, ecological information, and site characteristics (see Appendix E for sample Environmental Briefing).
- Have guest review and agree to an environmental pledge for SCUBA/SNUBA diving and snorkeling (see Appendix F for sample Pledge).
- Captains shall use day-use moorings whenever available or anchors shall be placed in sand or rubble channels large enough to assure the anchor does not contact coral reefs.
- When the captain, crew or clients observe trash or other floating debris at dockside, or in the ocean, these shall be collected whenever possible and properly disposed of at onshore facilities.
- At no time can anyone touch, pet, ride, feed, handle or in any other way harass a sea turtle, and turtles are observed from a respectful distance (one car length).
- Never attempt to swim with, pet, feed, handle or in any other way engage a monk seal, and monk seals on land are observed from at least 150ft away or behind posted signs.
- For Manta Ray viewing at night, do not use lights to attract manta rays away from the established circle to your group, over the coral, or angle lights across the circle.
- Marine mammals (i.e. whales, dolphins, etc.) shall not be fed, touched, or inhibited.
- Observation of marine mammals is limited to no more than one-half hour with each animal or pod (NOAA Guideline).
- Marine vessels observing marine mammals shall reduce their speed to no greater than the speed of the individuals in the group and avoid crossing paths.
- Provide education pertaining to environmental stewardship and recognition programs (i.e., Dolphin SMART, WHVS, HEA, etc.).
- Having each guest review and sign Molokini Shoal Marine Life Conservation District Use Key Rules and Guidelines from Department of Land and Natural Resources.

Additional information about practices in this section:

For Evaluator Use Only:

Inadequate

Adequate

Good

Excellent

Notes:

### 3.3 Cultural Resources

Suggested examples include:

- Ensuring that cultural protocols, practices and sensitivities are respected.
- Advising guests on appropriate behavior and kapu so as not to offend or break a kapu when visiting a culturally significant site or region.
- Providing detailed information about each officially established protected cultural site visited.
- Management has integrated Hawaiian cultural values into their business philosophy and practices.
- Staff participates in at least one Hawaiian cultural training class per year from an accredited source.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information about practices in this section:

For Evaluator Use Only:

Inadequate

Adequate

Good

Excellent

Notes:

### **3.4 Interpretation Method**

**The principle:** Tourism products shall include at least one face-to-face or one static interpretation opportunity which allows visitors to learn more about the natural and cultural resources of the area being visited.

#### **3.4.1 Face-to-face interpretation**

Suggested examples include:

- Educational talks or lectures by trained guides or experts in their fields.
- Other interactive educational activities (e.g., music, cultural ritual, hula, role-plays, craft and theater activities).
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information about practices in this section:

For Evaluator Use Only:

Inadequate

Adequate

Good

Excellent

Notes:

### 3.4.2 Static/non-personal interpretation

Suggested examples include:

- Pre-travel educational materials (e.g., printed, electronic or web-based, are provided).
- Printed materials including brochures, educational fact sheets, and interpretive leaflets are available.
- Reference material is held on location and is accessible to guests upon demand.
- Tour programs are supplemented with audio-visual presentations.
- Displays with interpretive signage and/or brochures.
- All self-guided trails provide interpretive signage and/or brochures.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information about practices in this section:

For Evaluator Use Only:

Inadequate

Adequate

Good

Excellent

Notes:

### 3.5 Accuracy

**The principle: Content used for interpretive materials and activities is accurate according to credible reference and is relevant to both the site and audience.**

Sources of major interpretive narratives are verified through cross checking with (please detail below):

Suggested examples include:

- Professional persons with knowledge of the specific area of interest (e.g., botanists, biologists, academics, anthropologists, environmental managers, cultural practitioners, etc.).
- Knowledgeable local people/cultural practitioners who have a high level of association with the site.
- Reference books scientific journals or the like.
- Scholarly film and television documentaries.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information about practices in this section:

For Evaluator Use Only:

Inadequate

Adequate

Good

Excellent

Notes:

## **4. Consumer Evaluation Management**

**The principle:** The company continuously monitors its operations and analyzes and acts upon the feedback provided by guests and employees to ensure that tour products meet or exceed consumer expectations.

### **4.1 Content Evaluated**

Please submit a copy of the most recent evaluation management report.

Suggested examples include:

- Ecological Interpretation
- Cultural Interpretation
- Quality of the Experience/Consumer Satisfaction
- Safety

Additional information about practices in this section:

For Evaluator Use Only:

- Inadequate       Adequate       Good       Excellent

Notes:

## 4.2 Informal Feedback

Suggested examples include:

- Guest book remarks or feedback on electronic media (i.e., Yelp, TripAdvisor, Facebook, etc.).
- Discussions with booking agents, retailers and wholesalers.
- Media reviews of the product.
- Follow-up, phone calls and correspondence with guests.
- Guide(s) has been recognized by the Hawaii Ecotourism Association as the *Ecotour Guide of the Year*. Please provide name and year below.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information about practices in this section:

For Evaluator Use Only:

Inadequate

Adequate

Good

Excellent

Notes:

### **4.3 Formal Feedback**

Please submit current evaluation questionnaire with application. See Appendix C for a sample evaluation questionnaire.

Suggested examples include:

- Structured interviews of guests.
- Questionnaires distributed to guests
- Formal written peer review, and/or advisory group review.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information about practices in this section:

For Evaluator Use Only:

Inadequate

Adequate

Good

Excellent

Notes:

## 5. Marketing Execution

**The principle:** Through its marketing materials the operator provides as much information before the tour as possible to set appropriate guest expectations and allow for pre-departure learning.

Suggested examples include:

- The natural and cultural resources of the area or site (e.g., rare species, geological formations, anthropological evidence, etc.).
- The formal status, if any, of the site (e.g., National Park, World Heritage Area, etc.).
- The range and style of interpretive services provided with qualifications of guides and experts.
- The number of people in a typical group.
- Frequently asked questions webpage detailing more exact expectations (i.e. our tours do interact with wildlife, this tour does not swim in waterfall pools, etc.).
- The principles of sustainable tourism and the benefits of certification to the environment and community (<http://www.hawaiiecotourism.org/Review>).
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information about practices in this section:

For Evaluator Use Only:

Inadequate

Adequate

Good

Excellent

Notes:

## 6. Bonus Section

**The principle:** The items in this area are considered important, however may not be practical for most tour operators and should not count against the overall scoring of an organization.

### 6.1.1 Independent Certification & Recognition

Suggested examples include:

- Operate out of a *LEED* Certified building.
- Operate out of an *EnergyStar* Rated building.
- Recognized by the *Hawaii Green Business Program*.
- Recognized by the *Kuleana Green Business Program*.
- ISO 14000 family of standards.
- Recognized Dolphin SMART business or Proud Supporter.
- Formally adopted the CORAL Reef Alliance's West Hawaii Voluntary Standards.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information about practices in this section:

For Evaluator Use Only:

Inadequate

Adequate

Good

Excellent

Notes:

### **6.1.2 Comprehensive Sustainability Plan**

**The principle: Operation has a written sustainability plan that which measures and tracks various measures of sustainability and guides its operations to demonstrate a commitment to HEA Sustainable Tourism principles.**

The Sustainability Plan must (all required items):

- Have defined sections that address each minimum requirement and operating principle.
- Is adopted by the operation's senior management and is subject to periodic review.
- Includes an ethics policy that demonstrates sound business practices by treating all guests, employees, the public, and partners with respect and fairness, and demonstrates a method for resolving disputes in a fair and expeditious manner.
- Is available upon request to the company's employees, management and stakeholders.

Tour operator must supply a copy of your Sustainability Plan for credit. See Appendix D for a sample Sustainability Plan.

Additional information about practices in this section:

For Evaluator Use Only:

Inadequate

Adequate

Good

Excellent

Notes:

## Acknowledgment Page

I acknowledge that:

1. Our business complies with all federal, state and city permits and laws.
2. All the measures identified on this checklist are currently implemented by our business.
3. All the information contained herein and information attached to this application is true and correct.

I hereby certify that the statements and information in this application form are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Please sign and print your name

---

Signature

---

Date

---

Print Name

---

Title

---

Please submit completed checklist and supporting materials to:

[TravelPono@hawaiiecotourism.org](mailto:TravelPono@hawaiiecotourism.org)

Or by mail to:  
Hawaii Ecotourism Association  
P.O. Box 61796  
Honolulu, HI 96839

Upon submission an HEA Evaluator will review your application, contact you to schedule a site visit and collect the \$200 administration fee.

## **Appendix A: Suggested List of Items to Submit with Application**

All items submitted to HEA will be kept confidential and are only intended for verification purposes. Photographic evidence will often suffice.

### **Mandatory**

- ✓ Completed and Signed Checklist
- ✓ Proof of current Hawaii Ecotourism Association membership
- ✓ Sustainability Commitment Statement (website url)
- ✓ Proof of commitment of 2 (minimum) hands-on, in-kind, and/or financial contributions to statewide and/or local community based environmental conservation outcomes over the previous 12 months.
- ✓ Proof of commitment of 2 (minimum) hands-on, in-kind, and/or financial contributions to the local community and have attempted to reduce economic leakage out of the community over the previous 12 months.
- ✓ Marketing materials (i.e., brochure, pre-arrival hand outs, print out of website, etc.).
- ✓ Proof of reference material for interpretation provided to guests (i.e., journal articles, professional references, etc.)
- ✓ Evaluation/Report of Customer Satisfaction Survey results

### **Recommended**

- ✓ Copy of Purchasing Policies
- ✓ Licenses
- ✓ Permits
- ✓ Tour Permits
- ✓ Any company policies and procedures relating to the company's environmentally sustainable practices (lighting, landscaping, water consumption & usage, noise management, air quality, waste management, energy management, or transportation)
- ✓ Environmental Watch Plan
- ✓ Fire Prevention and Management Plan
- ✓ Emergency/Rescue Management Plan
- ✓ Other Risk Management Documents
- ✓ Guide Training Manuals and Sign-in Sheets
- ✓ List of First Aid Certified Employees, and certificates
- ✓ Safety and Emergency Preparedness Manuals
- ✓ Information provided to guests regarding proper behavior and their responsibilities when visiting natural areas and encountering wildlife, and any other handouts or signage provided to guests regarding natural resources management
- ✓ Information provided to guests regarding cultural protocols, practices, and sensitivities
- ✓ Training that staff has attended regarding Hawaiian cultural training
- ✓ Training Manuals and sources for cultural and environmental trainings
- ✓ Customer Satisfaction Survey
- ✓ Copies or evidence of Certification/Recognition by other 3rd party organizations (i.e. LEED Certification, EnergyStar, Hawaii Green Business Program, Kuleana Green Business Program, ISO 14000)
- ✓ Company Sustainability Plan

## **Appendix B: Sample Sustainability Commitment Statement**

The following statement would be posted on your website and management should be able to speak to these principles.

We support the Hawaii Ecotourism Association's principles of sustainable tourism, which addresses operating principles in the following content areas:

- Environmental Management
- Staff Management
- Interpretation Management
- Consumer Evaluation Management
- Marketing Management

For more information, please visit: <http://www.hawaiiecotourism.org/Review>

## Appendix C: Sample Evaluation Survey

<b>Please Evaluate Your Experience With Us</b>			
<b>Not very satisfied</b>	<b>Somewhat satisfied</b>	<b>Very satisfied</b>	<b>Extremely satisfied</b>
Overall quality of the tour experience.			
Quality of the information about cultural resources/integration of Hawaiian culture into narration.			
Quality of the information provided about natural resources (i.e., plants & animals).			
Safety while on tour, including explanations about expected dangers and emergency procedures.			
Comments/Suggestions:			
Your Contact Information (optional):			
Management Contact Information: NAME, Title – EMAIL – PHONE – SOCIAL MEDIA			

## **Appendix D: Sample Sustainability Plan**

A sample will be made available as soon as possible. Please monitor the HEA website for more details.

## **Appendix E: Sample Environmental Briefing Outline And Checklist For Scuba Diving And Snorkeling**

From the West Hawaii Voluntary Standards

1. Describe the local rules, regulations or laws that apply to the area; provide examples of bad practices and violations; and provide contact information of local authorities;
2. Provide a description of environmental, biological, and physical features of the dive or snorkel site – this can easily be done with the use of the coral, manta ray or marine mammal flip chart;
3. Advise on proper snorkeling, SCUBA diving techniques specific to the characteristics of the marine environment in which the snorkeling or SCUBA diving activity is to be carried out, such as sandy bottoms, reef walls, and fragile local wildlife;
4. Review with clients the preferred practices for good environmental behavior specified in this standard and this Annex;
5. Encourage snorkelers and SCUBA divers to provide feedback on compliance with the code of good environmental behavior by the marine recreation provider and its staff through use of an exit survey at the end of the excursion;
6. Include fundamentals of buoyancy control in each pre-dive briefing; check if SCUBA divers are over-weighted; observe SCUBA divers both above and underwater in order to identify buoyancy control problems, and help adjust their diving weights if necessary. If buoyancy problems persist, divers shall remain over sand or rubble areas;
7. Ensure that all snorkelers and SCUBA divers understand that the health of coral reefs and related coastal environments shall not be compromised by any activity, including photography, and provide specific advice on proper snorkeling and SCUBA diving techniques when in environmentally sensitive areas;
8. Take appropriate action in the event snorkelers or SCUBA divers cannot or do not comply with the rules, regulations or laws that apply in the area and the good environmental behavior specified in this standard and this Annex.

## Appendix F: Sample Environmental Pledge

From the West Hawaii Voluntary Standards

The precious coral reefs of Hawaii are facing many serious threats from human actions. Divers, snorkelers and other recreational users can harm coral reef ecosystems if they behave carelessly and do not show respect for marine life. Hundreds of thousands of people visit Hawaiian reefs every year so small individual actions can add up to have a significant effect. Because we care about our coral reefs and want to do everything possible to reduce human impacts, we ask that you commit to not participating in potentially destructive behavior.

Following these rules of responsible marine recreation will help you to better understand and appreciate coral reefs while you help to preserve this unique ecosystem for future generations.

"I have received a briefing about the SCUBA diving or snorkeling activities or both in which I am about to engage, and this pledge indicates my awareness of the potential impact of my activities upon the reef environment and associated marine wildlife.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, pledge to minimize my impact to the sensitive coral ecosystem by following these rules of responsible marine recreation below.

I Promise to:

1. Never touch, stand-on, or kick coral reef or live coral.
2. Carefully select points of entry and exit to avoid damaging areas of the reef.
3. Secure all dangling equipment and accessories.
4. Maintain neutral buoyancy at all times (divers).
5. Maintain a comfortable distance from the bottom that does not kick-up sediments or allow me to come into contact with the reef while SCUBA diving, snorkeling, or free diving.
6. Never throw food or rubbish into the water or feed fish.
7. Never chase, move or manipulate marine life or habitat.
8. Move slowly and deliberately in the water.
9. If new to Hawai'i waters I will go with a guide the first time, or at minimum seek local knowledge to orient myself to local waterways, ocean conditions, marine life and local guidelines and regulations.

---

Signature

Date