

NTA Board of Directors Endorses Sustainable Travel International's Sustainable Tourism Eco-Certification Program

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'NTA's endorsement of STI and our Sustainable Tourism Eco-certification Program is noteworthy as it speaks to the organization's commitment to sustainable tourism and the future of the travel industry,' said Brian T. Mullis, president of Sustainable Travel International. 'Our programs will help NTA members to proactively integrate responsible business practices into their operations, improve the health and safety of their employees and guests, and support environmental conservation while gaining a competitive advantage and increasing operational efficiencies, which is good business in this economic climate.'

STI's eco-certification program, known as STEP, is the world's first comprehensive, global sustainable tourism eco-certification program offered by a non-profit organization. It is designed to aid tourism businesses of all sizes ensure the preservation of destinations and cultures.

'NTA believes that sustainable travel connects cultures and enhances quality of life. Bringing this eco-certification program to NTA members is an important step in the association's support of sustainable travel,' said NTA Chairman and CEO Bob Hoelscher, CTP. 'As part of NTA's commitment to support its members' move toward sustainability and to set standards for successful travel professionals, NTA began exploring accreditation programs. After reviewing STI's mission and eco-certification program, it made sense to connect with STI, support their mission and bring this comprehensive program and services to NTA members.'

As part of this collaboration, NTA members exclusively will receive a discount to obtain eco-certification and off of STI's other services like carbon offsets and travelers' philanthropy. Also, Mullis will speak at NTA's first green Annual Convention in Pittsburgh this year about the market advantages of green travel and how travel professionals can integrate sustainable practices into their businesses.

'As many travelers are putting great importance on sustainability, this program will offer NTA members a competitive advantage in the marketplace,' added Hoelscher.

STEP was developed in conjunction with stakeholders from around the world, starting in 2003. STI solicited feedback from more than 500 organizations in creating the program to make it the most comprehensive sustainable tourism certification initiative available. In an independent assessment commissioned by the United National Foundation focused on developing baseline criteria for sustainable tourism, STEP met more criteria than any other global certification initiative and more criteria than all but one other regional certification initiative.

NTA members wanting more information about eco-certification should visit NTA's Keep It Green Web section on NTA Online.

Sustainable Travel International is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose mission is to promote sustainable development and responsible travel by providing programs that enable consumers, businesses and travel-related organizations to contribute to the environmental, socio-cultural and economic values of the places they visit, and the planet at large. For more information, visit www.sustainabletravelinternational.org.

The National Tour Association is the preferred association in the tourism industry for packaged travel professionals. NTA's diverse membership and progressive nature make it an industry leader as the place to do business. NTA consistently seeks innovations for the services and business tools it provides to members, and the leadership keeps its fingers on the pulse of the ever-changing world. In turn, NTA members are some of the most creative in the dynamic travel industry. NTA membership represents 34 countries, and tour and travel packagers of all types, including a group, independent, student, and more. To learn more, please visit www.NTAonline.com.

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