

Ted Turner Announces First-Ever Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria at World Conservation Congress

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Voluntary standards help travel suppliers around the world meet increasing consumer demand for products and services that will have positive effects on communities and the environment

United Nations Foundation Founder and Chairman Ted Turner joined the Rainforest Alliance, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) today to announce the first-ever globally relevant sustainable tourism criteria at the IUCN World Conservation Congress. The new criteria -- based on thousands of best practices culled from the existing standards currently in use around the world -- were developed to offer a common framework to guide the emerging practice of sustainable tourism and to help businesses, consumers, governments, non-governmental organizations and education institutions to ensure that tourism helps, rather than harms, local communities and the environment.

"Sustainability is just like the old business adage: 'you don't encroach on the principal, you live off the interest'," said Turner. "Unfortunately, up to this point, the travel industry and tourists haven't had a common framework to let them know if they're really living up to that maxim. But the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) will change that. This is a win-win initiative -- good for the environment and good for the world's tourism industry."

"Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries and a strong contributor to sustainable development and poverty alleviation," said Francesco Frangialli, Secretary-General of the United Nations World Tourism Organization. "Over 900 million international tourists traveled last year and UNWTO forecasts 1.6 billion tourists by the year 2020. In order to minimize the negative impacts of this growth, sustainability should translate from words to facts, and be an imperative for all tourism stakeholders. The GSTC initiative will undoubtedly constitute a major reference point for the entire tourism sector and an important step in making sustainability an inherent part of tourism development."

The criteria were developed by the Partnership for Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC Partnership), a new coalition of 27 organizations that includes tourism leaders from the private, public and not-for-profit sectors. Over the past 15 months, the partnership consulted with sustainability experts and the tourism industry and reviewed more than 60 existing certification and voluntary sets of criteria already being implemented around the globe. In all, more than 4,500 criteria have been analyzed and more than 80,000 people, including conservationists, industry leaders, governmental authorities and UN bodies, have been invited to comment on the resulting criteria.

"Consumers deserve widely accepted standards to distinguish green from greenwashed. These criteria will allow true certification of sustainable practices in hotels and resorts as well as other travel suppliers," said Jeff Glueck, chief marketing officer of Travelocity/Sabre, a member of the GSTC Partnership. "They will give travelers confidence that they can make choices to help the sustainability cause. They also will help the forward-thinking suppliers who deserve credit for doing things right."

Available at www.SustainableTourismCriteria.org, the criteria focus on four areas experts recommend as the most critical aspects of sustainable tourism: maximizing tourism's social and economic benefits to local communities, reducing negative impacts on cultural heritage, reducing harm to local environments, and planning for sustainability. The GSTC Partnership is developing educational materials and technical tools to guide hotels and tour operators in implementing the criteria.

"The American Society of Travel Agents feels it especially important to be a part of this global partnership that is leading the way in defining once and for all what it means to be a sustainable travel company," said William Maloney, Chief Operating Officer for ASTA. "As an organization with its own Green Member program, it's incumbent upon us to ensure that our steps toward a travel retailers' green initiative were in sync with responsible global developments. The criteria will provide our members with much-needed guidelines for assessing future business partners' commitment to sustainable tourism while offering consumers clear and reliable information about the travel choices they make."

"The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria initiative is about steering the industry onto a truly sustainable path -- one that echoes to the challenge of our time: namely the fostering and federating of a global Green Economy that thrives on the interest rather than the capital of our economically-important nature-based assets," said Achim Steiner, United Nations Under-Secretary General and Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme.

"The Rainforest Alliance celebrates the outcomes of the GSTC Partnership, which we believe will help the tourism industry put itself on a sustainable path," said Tensie Whelan, Executive Director of the Rainforest Alliance. "The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria that have been developed will shape the minimum requirements that the Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council will demand from accredited certification programs and help travelers have the assurance that they are helping, not harming, the environment."

"The GSTC Partnership is a collaborative effort to provide a much needed common framework and understanding of sustainable tourism practices," said Janna Morrison, Senior Vice President of Corporate Social Responsibility at Choice Hotels International. "Tourism is an important and growing industry that supports sustainability and will clearly benefit from this common framework. Ultimately this effort will result in a positive impact on communities and the environment."

"Expedia is proud to support the Partnership for Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria and committed to using these criteria as a standard for designating a travel partner 'sustainable'," said Paul Brown, President Expedia Partner Services Group and Expedia North America. "Consumers today are more motivated than ever to incorporate sustainable practices into their lives, at Expedia we are motivated as well and dedicated to being a leader in sustainable travel. We're proud of our travel partners -- hotels and tour operators -- who are already excelling in this area, and hopeful that they will set the bar for their peers around the world. We hope that our travelers will see and appreciate the hard work our partners go through to fulfill these criteria and reach the benchmark of sustainability."

The Partnership for Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC Partnership) is a coalition of 27 organizations working together to foster increased understanding of sustainable tourism practices and the adoption of universal sustainable tourism principles. The Partnership was initiated by the Rainforest Alliance, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Foundation, and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). These criteria will be the minimum standard that any tourism business should aspire to reach in order to protect and sustain the world's natural and cultural resources while ensuring tourism meets its potential as a tool for poverty alleviation. To learn more, visit www.SustainableTourismCriteria.org.

Additional members of the GSTC Partnership Steering Committee are the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AH&LA), American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA), Caribbean Alliance for Sustainable Tourism (CAST), Choice Hotels, Conde Nast Traveler, Conservation International (CI), ECOTRANS, Expedia, Inc., Federation of Tour Operators (FTO), HM Design, Hyatt Hotels and Resorts, Instituto do Hospitalidade, International Hotel & Restaurant Association (IH&RA), the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Kenyan Ecotourism Society, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SCBD), Solimar International, Sustainable Travel International (STI), The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), Tourism Concern, Travelocity/Sabre, and VISIT.

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