



Greenbox

Ireland's EcoTourism Destination

# A Quality Labelling System for Ecotourism in the Greenbox

## **Index**

Preface	2
1.1 Definition of ecotourism	2
1.2 Ecotourism is a way to travel	3
1.3 Benefits of ecotourism	3
1.4 Benefits of an ecotourism labelling system	3
1.5 What does the Greenbox Ecotourism Label look like?	4
1.6 What can be labelled?	4
1.7 Who is behind the label?	4
1.8 What criteria need to be met in order to qualify for the Greenbox Ecotourism Label?	4
1.9 Revision and renewal of criteria?	4
1.10 How long are the current criteria valid?	4
1.11 How do I apply?	4
1.12 Who examines my application?	4
1.13 Grievances and appeals	5
1.14 Assessment and revision of labelled products	5
1.15 Can I lose the right to use the label?	5
1.16 How may I use the label?	6
1.17 How will the label be marketed?	6
1.18 What does the company receive in return for approved products?	6
1.19 Fees	6
1.20 Dates for application	6
1.21 How the criteria work	6
1.22 Application form	7
1.23 Training courses	7

## **Preface**

The Greenbox is a completely unique region and is a natural location for Ireland's first ecotourism destination. It boasts unique ecosystems, an unspoiled landscape, centres of learning such as The Organic Centre, a Geo Park (Marble Arch Caves, Co Fermanagh) and off shore islands of high conservation value such as Inishmurray Island in Donegal Bay.

The geographic area is surrounded by water on all sides by the Shannon Erne Waterway, Lough Erne and The Atlantic Ocean. The region, which was once overshadowed by conflict, is now one of the most peaceful places in Ireland and nine years on from a peace agreement (The Belfast Agreement) the destination is in an ideal position to welcome tourists to visit.

The unspoilt nature of the Greenbox has contributed to attracting a high concentration of "green" and ecotourism operators to the region. The Greenbox is working to develop these resources further and to create a world class ecotourism destination with a strong focus on raising ecotourism standards. This is being achieved through a model of tourism partnership and brings together representatives from many national, regional and local agencies. In addition many sound environmental enterprises, ecotourism products and community initiatives fall under the Greenbox umbrella.

Responsible Tourism Ltd (Trading as Greenbox Ltd) is a cross border organisation in the Northwest of Ireland that has been set up to stimulate the development of ecotourism in the region. To achieve these ends we have facilitated the development of an ecotourism quality label that we hope will continue to strengthen the Greenbox brand, and which will defend the ethical values of existing Greenbox ecotourism promoters. In addition the label has been designed to guide visitors travel choices and help them to choose promoters of ecotourism products and the experiences they have on offer.

Core to ecotourism and to the Greenbox philosophy is the concept of environmental sustainability and the label has been very much developed with this in mind, in order to ensure that the environmental impacts of Greenbox products are minimised. The label also encourages proactive nature conservation and the promotion of local cultural values, while at the same time developing our local economy and the long term viability of the Greenbox destination.

## **1.1 Definition of ecotourism**

Ecotourism is defined as *"responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people"*

## **1.2 Ecotourism travel experiences**

A genuine ecotourism travel experience is based on a number of principles that make demands on both ecotourism operators and their guests. Visitors can expect to gain privileged insights and knowledge about the nature and culture of the region they have come to see, and they can also be assured that the people involved in providing their holiday have adopted environmentally sustainable practices. Furthermore, ecotourism operators should be actively contributing to the conservation of their local biodiversity and cultural heritage, and ensuring that steps have been taken to minimise their operations impacts on local nature and culture.

Ecotourism is often carried out in small groups and tends to be focused on enjoying the best nature experiences available in an area, meeting local people, enjoying local food and gaining real insights into the area being visited.

## **1.3 Benefits of ecotourism**

Ecotourism is highly suited to tourism development in unspoilt locations as it can create jobs and income without destroying or degrading the natural or cultural assets that the visitor has come to see. Like no other industry, ecotourism gives natural unspoilt areas an economic value, but this goes hand in hand with actively creating benefits for nature conservation and focusing on reducing environmental impacts. Ecotourism experiences also tend to be at the cutting edge of creativity in the tourism industry, and can be readily marketed to the ever increasing numbers of people who wish to ensure that their holiday creates positive benefits, both for the environment and the local communities visited.

## **1.4 Benefits of the Greenbox ecotourism labelling system**

The system is designed to be business friendly and aims to act as a road map for development by providing a structured approach for the creation of new ecotourism experiences. Once labelled, operators can also be confident that they are meeting all the principles of ecotourism, particularly in relation to nature conservation, eco-friendly practices and ensuring the provision of local benefits.

A wide range of benefits are available to ecotourism operators adopting the Greenbox Ecotourism label ranging from environmental benefits through to actual marketing advantages. In environmental terms operators can save money by adopting eco-friendly practices, particularly in relation to energy use, and the label makes it easier for the ecotourism product promoter to address environmental and conservation issues through asking questions such as:

- How does my company actively conserve the environment?
- How does my ecotourism operation support the local community, not just myself?
- How does my ecotourism product support local, organic and artisan food producers?
- What role does environmental education play in my activities?
- How do I reduce the carbon footprint of my ecotourism product?

In marketing terms the Greenbox Ecotourism Label makes it easier for visitors to find high quality experiences and guarantees a high quality of delivery of the services. It becomes both an image for promoters and is also a reassuring factor for visitors that their holiday is the genuine article. Finally the label makes it easier for tour operators to promote ecotourism experiences to potential visitors and drives the development of new, innovative and genuine ecotourism travel products.

## **1.5 What does the label look like?**

The label is a printed Greenbox Logo 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 colours described in the CD containing the logo that is given to each approved company.



## **1.6 What can be labelled?**

Currently the Greenbox Ecotourism Label can be applied to travel and tourism products that are nature based and have an element of interpretation involved. For example, guided wildlife tours, nature based training courses, instructed outdoor activity, food trails, archaeology tours, hill walking trips etc.

## **1.7 Who is behind the label?**

The label has been developed by Responsible Tourism Ltd (Trading as Greenbox Ltd), a multi stakeholder partnership made up of the following organisations; Western Development Commission, Leitrim County Council, Fermanagh District Council, The Organic Centre, Fáilte Ireland, private enterprises. The creation of the Greenbox Ecotourism Label was funded by Interreg IIIA and the Peace II Programme.

## **1.8 What criteria need to be met in order to qualify for the ecotourism label?**

The published criteria are divided into 26 basic (compulsory) criteria and 30 bonus criteria. Between them they cover a wide range of practices in eight key components of ecotourism as follows:

1. Environmentally sustainable practices
2. Natural Area Focus
3. Interpretation and Education
4. Contributing to Conservation
5. Benefiting local communities
6. Visitor satisfaction
7. Responsible marketing
8. Cultural respect and awareness

Criteria are divided into Basic Criteria, all of which must all be met in order to qualify and Bonus criteria, a number of which must be met in order to qualify

## **1.9 Revision and renewal of criteria**

The Greenbox is committed to a policy of continuous improvement for the region. To enable this process it is therefore essential that all criteria are in continuous development and will be renewed every two years.

## **1.10 How long are the current criteria valid?**

The current criteria are valid until January 2008

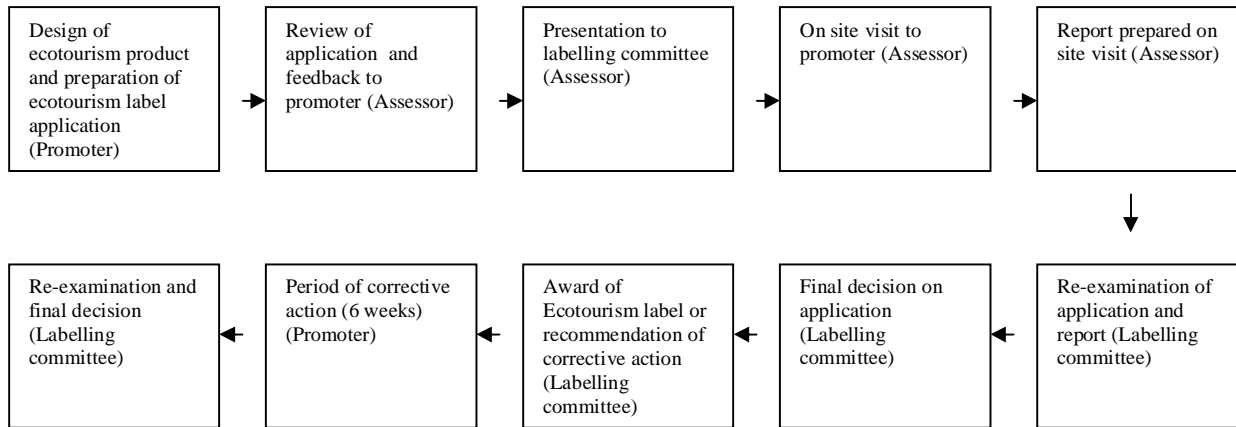
## **1.11 How do I apply?**

A start up package with detailed information about criteria, procedures and rules can be purchased from Greenbox Ltd. This also includes an application form, checklists and templates to help fill out the form and a list of useful resources such as ecotourism literature, addresses and websites

## **1.12 Who examines my application?**

1. Your application is analysed by the Greenbox labelling subcommittee, an independent body set up to provide fair and impartial assessment of applications.
2. Provided all necessary documentary evidence is in place the labelling committee decides on the next step- a visit to the ecotourism product promoter to go through the application and activities with their representative
3. A report on the visit is made and the application re-examined and final decision made

### Greenbox Ecotourism Label- Application process



The labelling committee is appointed by the initiators of the labelling system and assisted by appointed specialists. The committee consists of a minimum of three and a maximum of seven persons and meets depending on demand. Greenbox Ltd endeavours to ensure that all applications received are examined at the next possible labelling committee meeting. The labelling assessors and consultants who make company visits have received special training and are accredited by Greenbox Ltd as assessors. The system has been designed to guarantee as fair an assessment as possible. Reasons for rejection will be outlined in short, clear and plain terms and will include helpful advice on how the product needs to be improved in order to qualify. All applications will be treated as confidential.

### **1.13 Grievances and appeals**

In the first instance unsuccessful applicants will have a period of approximately 8 weeks to work on corrective actions. After this period the labelling committee will reject the application if corrective actions have not been undertaken. In exceptional circumstances derogations may be issued at the discretion of the labelling committee.

It is possible to appeal against the committee's decision to the board of Greenbox Ltd. The board will decide whether to confirm the decision or return the application to the committee for further review. An appeal must be made within 30 days of receiving a rejection notice.

### **1.14 Assessment and revision of labelled products**

Promoters who have been awarded the Greenbox Ecotourism Label are subject to assessment or revision by the labelling committee. Periodic reviews will take place and these can take the form of being asked to submit certain information, through to random on site audits. The system places great importance on monitoring, both in terms of visitor feedback and environmental protection, and a condition of the license is that monitoring forms are regularly submitted to Greenbox Ltd as requested. Product promoters are encouraged to carry out regular internal reviews, so that new and innovative best practices can be identified and adopted. Promoters must inform the labelling committee about all vital changes made to products, the company itself or the ownership structure.

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

While Greenbox hopes that no operator will ever misuse the Greenbox Ecotourism Label it is essential that the label is protected so that the vast majority of ethical ecotourism product providers in the region can enjoy the full benefits of a growing and quality focused brand. Therefore, the right to use the label may be revoked under the following circumstances:

- A failure to meet criteria at audit or assessment
- Any fraudulent use of the label
- Non payment of annual licence fees

In the event that the label is revoked by the labelling subcommittee the ecotourism operator must immediately cease use of the Greenbox ecotourism logo, return labelling certificate to Greenbox Ltd and notify all retail agents of this fact.

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

The label may be actively used in any number of ways in an ecotourism product promoters marketing material. However, it may only be used in immediate conjunction with the specific product that meets the criteria. The operator should in no way infer that unlabelled products or activities are labelled. Greenbox Ltd will actively monitor the use of the label in this regard.

### **1.17 How will the label be marketed?**

Greenbox Ltd will endeavour to market the label as efficiently as possible with the goal being to gain respect, arouse curiosity, create strong interest and promote a high brand value for the label and its associated ecotourism products.

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

Each operator who has been awarded the Greenbox Ecotourism Label will receive the following:

1. An individual profile page on the Greenbox website and link to own website
2. A certificate that can be displayed at the product promoters premises stating that the promoter is an "Approved ecotourism operator" and detailing the specific products that have been certified
3. A attractive wall plaque (designed and manufactured by the Leitrim Sculpture Centre) that can be displayed at the product promoters premises
4. The right to use the Greenbox logo on all marketing material associated with the certified product
5. The right to be included in Greenbox Ltd own marketing system (web based, P.R, etc)

### **1.19 Fees**

A pack containing all relevant information including CD rom, application forms, standard criteria and background information can be purchased from Greenbox Ltd for €25.00 (£17.00)

Greenbox Ltd will invoice applicants for a non-returnable **application fee** on receipt of the application. If the application is successful, the Greenbox Ltd will invoice the licensee for an **annual fee**.

A maximum of five products can be included in any one application. i.e. Promoters wishing to certify six or more products will have to submit two application packs to Greenbox Ltd (e.g. 5 products in application pack number 1 and 1 product in application pack number 2)

- 1 product per application-** €180.00 (£121.00) per annum license fee & €50.00 (£34.00) euro application fee
- 2 products per application-** €342.00 (£230.00) per annum license fee & €95.00 (£64.00) euro application fee
- 3 products per application-** €486.00 (£327.00) per annum license fee & €135.00 (£91.00) euro application fee
- 4 products per application-** €612.00 (£411.00) per annum license fee & €170.00 (£114.00) euro application fee
- 5 products per application -** €720.00 (£485.00) per annum license fee & €200.00 (£135.00) euro application fee

### **1.20 Dates for application**

Applications will be accepted at any time of the year

### **1.21 How the criteria work**

Applicants must comply with all the **basic criteria** where they are relevant to the ecotourism product: for example, the requirement agreement with landowners in measure 1 does not apply if the ecotourism product does not make use of private lands.

Applicants can choose which of the **bonus criteria** they wish to use. Each bonus criterion carries a number of points (shown in the criteria document and in this form), and applicants need to achieve a total of at least 10 points to be awarded the Greenbox Ecotourism Label. However, to be included in special Greenbox marketing campaigns a minimum of 25 points must be obtained in this section.

At the end of each criteria category in the bonus section there is the option to be awarded additional points for **innovative best practices** and points will be awarded in these sections at the discretion of the labelling committee.

N.B. Specific **codes of practice** must be followed for certain activities as stated in measure 1 "Correct minimal impact codes identified and adopted". A range of examples of minimal impact codes have been included in Appendix 1 as follows. If your

ecotourism product involves any of the activities listed below then the relevant codes will have to be followed. Some products may have to use a combination of these codes. For example: A product which uses a boat to allow birdwatchers to view lakeshore species will have to meet "Minimal impact boat use" and "Minimal impact birdwatching" guidelines.

1. "Leave no Trace" Code
2. Minimal impact motor vehicle use
3. Minimal impact walking
4. Minimal impact marine megafauna viewing
5. Minimal impact rock climbing
6. Minimal impact eco-diving & snorkelling
7. Minimal impact wild camping
8. Minimal impact birdwatching
9. Minimal impact boat use
10. Minimal impact trail riding
11. Minimal disturbance to marine wildlife
12. Minimal disturbance to terrestrial wildlife
13. Minimal impact canoeing
14. Minimal impact mountain biking
15. Minimal impact wild plant viewing
16. Minimal impact bog, peatland and wetland visits
17. Minimal impact caving

## **1.22 The application form**

Applications must be made in black, either typescript or manuscript. All Declaration & Compliance forms must be manually signed. The following documents must be completed and submitted in paper form (not by email).

- Ecotourism product promoters details
- Compliance and legal declaration forms
- Checklist- Basic criteria
- Checklist- Bonus criteria
- Application forms (Measures1-55)
- Any documentary evidence required as outlined in each measure

An up to date copy of all documentation must be kept on the promoters administrative premises to show compliance with the label requirements.

## **1.23 Training courses**

Greenbox holds regular training courses for people interested in having their products accredited by the ecotourism label as well as more general courses for those interested in getting involved in ecotourism. Details of these can be obtained by contacting the Greenbox directly.