



Uniting communities,
business and travellers
through ecotourism

A simple **users' guide** to

Ecotourism Standards and Certification Scheme for tourism enterprises

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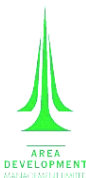
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Introduction

On 13th July 2004 the Western Development Tourism Programme (WDTP) facilitated a forum which was held in the Organic Centre, Rossinver, in the run up to the second Green Festival. This forum invited people living in the Greenbox area to put forward their ideas as to how the region could be developed as an alternative holiday destination. The following are just some of those ideas:

“Community compost heaps, ‘Green bus’ routes, woodland creation, organic food sold in shops and at the farm gate, walking festivals, fair trade products in local shops, forest activities, trails and walks, learning about life in the lakes, boating, swimming, cycling, music events, organic pub crawls, local food banquets, collecting and cooking wild foods, eating seasonal foods, health and healing, spirituality, cooking workshops for children, promotion of junk free days in schools, green mapping, competitions, showcases, eco-landscaping, wood carving, thatching, sustainability, linking with other rural ecotourism projects in Europe, pottery workshops, messy art for kids, festivals of fire and light , fancy dress parties, kite festivals, lantern boats on Lough Melvin, dancing weekends, kiln building, environmental awareness, eco-housing, hemp, lime, mud, cob, visiting expert talks, eco-architecture, low impact homes, biomass, woodchip, bio-fuel, farmers markets, bat walks, valuing local history, townland tidyup, sacred sites, debate, education, networking, inclusiveness, authenticity, cooperation, commitment, lifelong learning, sustainable futures . . .”

The delegates agreed that underpinning all these activities should be a standards and certification scheme that would ensure that visitors to the region would enjoy not only a genuine ‘green’ experience but also find it easier to get involved in many of the activities listed above.

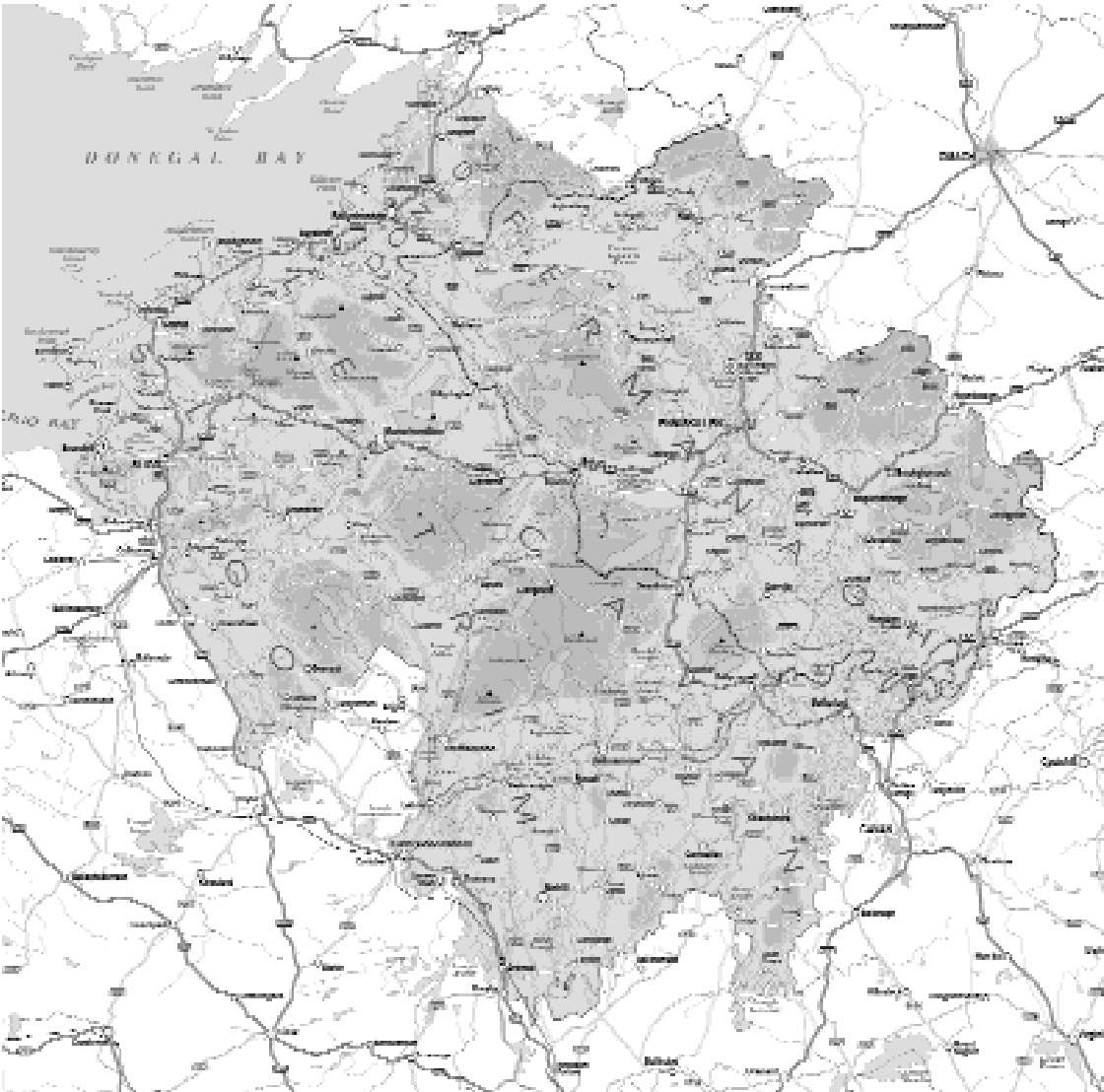
Just over one year on from this event and after considerable research the Greenbox Ecotourism programme is ready for initiation. This ecotourism awards scheme has been specifically tailored to suit the Greenbox region, meets International and European norms, can be reckoned with some of the best similar schemes around the globe, is strong on sustainability, is robust, auditable and deliverable. Perhaps most importantly we believe that the scheme complements the spirit and ethos that has brought the Greenbox concept to its current position. Thanks to everyone who’s helped along the way.

1st September 2005

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1. The Greenbox Ecotourism Destination



The Greenbox covers the whole of Leitrim and Fermanagh, a bit of North Sligo, and South-West Donegal up as far as Laghey village. It also covers part of Northwest Monaghan (down nearly as far as Clones) and a good part of West Cavan.

2. Sustainable Tourism or Green Tourism?

Many sustainable or green tourism schemes have been developed over the last few years to cater for environmentally conscious holiday makers. Any tourism product provider in the Greenbox who incorporates sustainable practices into their tourism enterprise can be described as participating in sustainable tourism. Types of sustainable practices include measures to conserve energy and water, reduce waste etc. Not only are these measures good for the environment and good for business, but they will also save your business money as well! Some examples of sustainable tourism practices include: switching over to Airtricity, choosing eco friendly household products, fitting energy efficient light bulbs, using 100% recycled paper in your office, planting an organic herb garden, buying energy efficient appliances, implementing a towel policy, etc

While we recognise sustainable tourism as very valid the Greenbox would like our tourism enterprises to first make their enterprises sustainable but then take things a few steps further.....we want to develop an **Ecotourism destination**.

3. Ecotourism

Ecotourism can be defined as “**travel that is small scale, low impact, culturally sensitive, community & conservation orientated, primarily nature based, educational and capable of broadening peoples minds and enlivening their souls while providing a unique experience, firmly grounded in sustainable principles and practices**”

When properly understood ecotourism is a set of sound principles and practices for how the public should travel and how the travel industry should operate. In total there are eleven of these principles as follows:

1. Your product should have been developed appropriately on the basis of ecological sustainability and an understanding of its potential environmental impacts (**Ecologically compatible infrastructure**)
2. Your product should employ environmentally friendly 'green' practices in operational management to ensure that its activities do not harm the environment (**Ecologically sustainable practices**)
3. Greenbox ecotourism product providers must display a public commitment to uphold the eleven principles of ecotourism and put in place management systems to ensure their performance. (**Ecotourism Policy, Performance and framework**) e.g. *This can be as simple as having your policy displayed next to the reception, your till, on your website etc. The Greenbox can provide templates to help!*
4. Your ecotourism product must ensure that visitors enjoy a direct personal experience of nature. (**Natural area focus**) e.g. *This might involve making a map available with an interesting walk around your own townland (Back roads of course!) or maybe directions to your favourite picnic spot.*

5. Your product should provide an opportunity for visitors to experience the nature and culture of the Greenbox in ways that can lead to their greater understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of this part of Ireland. **(Interpretation & Education)** *(There's plenty of activities happening in the Greenbox that you can benefit from when creating your ecotourism product.....walks, cycle trails, summer festivals, local dances, local festivals and music events etc...)*

6. Ecotourism product providers should make tangible contributions towards conservation in the Greenbox **(Contributing to conservation)**. *e.g. this can be as easy as making a contribution to a local school organic growing project or maybe organising an annual tidy up of roadside rubbish in your townland.*

7. Your product has to demonstrate areas in which its operation will provide ongoing contributions to the local Greenbox community **(Ecotourism benefiting local communities)**. *e.g. Perhaps you might demonstrate that your product is creating local employment or that the local Greenbox community is benefiting from your product encouraging more people to stay in the region.*

8. Your product must meet or exceed customers expectations **(Customer satisfaction)** *e.g. People renting self catering accommodation might present their guests with a box of organic vegetables on arrival or make a gift of some native tree seeds at the end of their stay.*

9. You must provide accurate and responsible information about your product that leads to realistic expectations **(Responsible marketing)** *N.B This is an essential component of any good ecotourism business*

10. Ecotourism product providers should make available a defined code of practice for your guests to help minimise their impact on the natural, social and cultural environment of the Greenbox. **(Minimal impact codes of conduct)** *N.B The Greenbox can help you plan and implement these.*

11. Your ecotourism product in both its development and operation must be respectful and sensitive to the local community. To ensure community values are treated appropriately providers must consult with local people so that their legitimate aspirations are met and authentic community values are presented to visitors. **(Cultural respect and sensitivity)** *No need to worry! This doesn't mean the whole townland has to be consulted on a fortnightly basis. It might just involve running an information evening in your local community centre or church to tell people about your product and your experiences of working in the ecotourism business.*

4. Eco-labeling and The EU Flower

Eco-labeling is a method of environmental performance certification that is practiced around the world and the system can be applied to a wide range of products.

Luckily for the Greenbox the EU has created its own environmental eco-label or quality mark for tourist accommodation.



It is anticipated that our use of this particular eco-label will form a solid foundation for us to build our ecotourism destination on.

The scheme sets out specific ecological criteria that accommodation providers must comply with to be certified as environmentally friendly. The Flower is independently verified, endorsed by the European Commission and widely recognised throughout Europe. Based on the EU Flower the Greenbox has created other standards (for cafes, heritage centres etc) that use similar criteria. We will be reviewing and revising these annually to ensure that we maintain the highest possible standards in the marketplace.

5. The Greenbox Company

The Greenbox Company has been set up to work with communities and product providers as the Greenbox develops. Through our unique certification scheme and dedicated team we can drive the creation of our ecotourism destination and help to deliver real benefits to tourism enterprises across the Greenbox. You might just want to get involved at community level by joining the Greenbox network or maybe you would like a marketable award that will really help your business. We can help you make the necessary changes, help save you money and provide valuable assistance in marketing your ecotourism enterprise internationally.

Basis of Certification Scheme

6. The Greenbox Standards and Certification Scheme

Greenbox Ecotourism Certification is a process that allows us to help you guarantee that customers purchasing your ecotourism products will be absolutely convinced as to their authenticity. It is a means of assessing, monitoring and giving written assurance that a Greenbox product provider is meeting and exceeding minimum standards. Furthermore it allows you to confidently market your products globally, safe in the knowledge of the Greenbox guarantee. It also gives credibility to Greenbox products when compared with competitors.

The Ecotourism Certification Programme has at its foundation the themes of energy use, water use, green purchasing, dangerous chemical avoidance, waste management, staff training and making information available to guests.

Only businesses successfully tailored around the eleven core principles of ecotourism can be marketed by the Greenbox.

7. Types of products covered under Greenbox Ecotourism Certification Scheme

Currently the Greenbox can provide certification in the following product categories:

1. Tourist accommodation & Campsites (EU Flower)
2. Food service establishments
3. Visitor attractions
4. Tour operators
5. Festivals & Events

In addition to these the Greenbox plans to develop an annual competitive awards scheme aimed at setting high standards in Food Production, Arts and Crafts & Traditional Skills. We are also creating good practice guidelines for a range of activities, again to ensure that high standards are maintained across the region.

The first thirty accommodation providers to participate in the EU Flower will be selected based on criteria set by the Greenbox. These criteria will include measures to ensure an even spread across the region, will consider the type of accommodation and will attempt to ensure an even distribution on both sides of the border.

8. Ecotourism Certification Logo

Once you become certified you will be awarded the distinctive Greenbox logo and will then be allowed to display the logo on your premises and on all your marketing material. Use of the logo also extends to marketing of your product through all Greenbox marketing channels such as our website, national & international media, overseas trade workshops, regional show cases and ecotourism tour operators. The Greenbox ecotourism award is a guarantee of quality, will be unique to the Greenbox area and is the first of its kind in Ireland.

9. The likely benefits to businesses

- The ecotourism market is growing rapidly as more and more people are trying to live more sustainably in their day to day lives. People who are interested in nature and lifestyle choices that are positive for the environment, generally want to continue with these choices when they go on holiday.
- You will have the benefit of a marketing manager dedicated to promoting your business.
- The Greenbox has a team of skilled mentors who are on hand to provide quality advice.
- You will see measurable returns on your investment both in financial terms and quality of life.
- Going forward the Greenbox will operate a continuous improvement policy in terms of marketing scope and range of certifiable products.
- The Greenbox places a strong emphasis on niche marketing, the home market and educational holidays.
- Ecotourists tend to stay longer and spend more.

- Marketing studies carried out by the Greenbox expect ecotourism revenue in the area of approximately 2.5 million per annum to be generated by 2008.
- The Greenbox company is a member of The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)
- The scheme places a positive emphasis on our environment and creating good links with interested people around the world!
- People will love your ecotourism experience and want to return again and again!
- Imagine for a moment.....
 - o Solar panels on our heritage centres.
 - o Loads of 'Mini Green Festivals' all over the Greenbox.
 - o Plenty of ecotourism guaranteed accommodation available.
 - o Biogas buses ferrying people around.
 - o Tasty trails of restaurants selling local and organic food.
 - o Community run eco-lodges full of guests.
 - o Local cafes powered by small wind turbines and serving organic deserts.
 - o And that's just for starters...the possibilities are endless.....

10. Reaching the relevant standard

Getting involved in ecotourism may seem a bit daunting at first but once you grasp the basics you'll be well on the way. Most of it is really just down to common sense and there'll always be plenty of help, advice and support available.

11. Auditing

Yes, we know no one likes them! . . . but they're essential when it comes to keeping standards high. On the path to ecotourism certification you will receive two audits as follows:

At step one:

1. Participants will receive an annual onsite audit of their sustainable practices by a trained EU Flower auditor (for accommodation providers) or a trained Greenbox auditor (for pubs, cafés, tour operators etc).

At step two (Ecotourism certification)

1. Certification at level one will have been achieved
2. A five member Greenbox panel will carry out a desk audit on evidence of businesses being tailored towards the eleven core ecotourism principles.
3. Desk audits of marketing materials and two referee checks are also required.
4. Customer and stakeholder feedback may be solicited
5. A percentage of total applicants will receive an annual onsite visit

N.B Ecotourism certification for festivals and events is slightly different and is awarded after successful participation in a planning process.

Support

12. Helping you achieve your award

A dedicated Training & Networking Co-ordinator and a team of knowledgeable and professional trainers and mentors are on hand to answer your questions and help you through the certification process.

13. Training and Networking

The Greenbox has implemented a number of measures to help drive the creation of our destination including a dedicated Ecotourism Certification Training Programme and a mentor programme. An individual training needs analysis will be carried out on each participant and all our training days and venues have been designed to suit participant's busy schedules.

The Greenbox Ecotourism Certification Programme

Module 1 (Mandatory):	Introduction to The Greenbox Standards & Certification programme
Module 2A (Mandatory):	Introduction to The EU Flower eco-label (Step 1)
Module 2B (Mandatory):	Introduction to other Greenbox standards (Step1)
Module 3A (Optional):	Implementing the measures in the EU Flower & Greenbox Level 1 Standards (Focus on sustainable practices)
Module 3B (Optional):	Implementing the measures in the EU Flower & Greenbox Standards (Focus on food)
Module 4 (Mandatory):	Creating your ecotourism business & Ecotourism Certification (Step 2))
Module 5 (Optional):	Practical steps to creating your ecotourism business (Product development workshop)

We also have a 'hothouse' programme designed to help existing Ecotourism operators achieve certification quickly.

Other optional activities for trainees include networking events, familiarisation trips, visiting expert talks and trouble shooting sessions.

We use professional trainers and learning methods include trainer presentations, discussions, quality take home course materials, question and answer sessions, hands on experience, further reading references, case studies and best practice examples, product samples, taste tests and much more....

Our mentors have an expert knowledge of the ecotourism business and can provide hands on practical advice and tailor made solutions on site. They can also help with form filling and provide good information on energy use, waste management, green purchasing etc

The future

14. Future Possibilities

With training, education, a capital development programme and plenty of intelligent marketing we can do great things together. As the project develops, more and more people will want to come and see the fantastic innovation in the area. It's this type of educational tourism that holds great potential for us going forward. And besides, getting into ecotourism is not that complicated really. We think everyone who's interested and prepared to make a commitment will have no problem meeting the Greenbox standards.

15. Benefits for the wider community

At the very least we can expect a real increase in the number of tourists coming to the Greenbox region and the scheme has been designed first and foremost to make small tourism businesses not only viable but profitable. Reviving and expanding the local tourism economy, with the benefits that entails for everyone, is at the forefront of our agenda. At another level we hope that by promoting ecotourism there will be beneficial effects for everyone living in the Greenbox as more and more communities learn about the importance of sustainable living.

16. A vision for the not too distant future

Imagine if we had the following across the region by mid 2006.....

- 30 certified accommodation providers
- 20 certified restaurants serving local and organic food
- 10 certified visitor centres
- 5 certified year-round festivals in planning
- 10 certified ecotourism tour operators

Imagine how marketable our destination will become when all these great products are available . . .

17. The Greenbox Cross Border Peace and Reconciliation Programme

Considerable discussion has taken place in recent years about peace-building in an attempt to understand, in particular, the legacy of the Conflict to communities in the border regions. The Greenbox Standards and Certification Scheme is funded by the Peace II Programme and this affords us a unique opportunity to explore the concept of peace-building and to deepen our understanding of its context in the Greenbox region.

Alongside the Certification scheme the Greenbox will be hosting a series of Peace & Reconciliation workshops over the next two years culminating in the hosting of an "International Peace through Tourism" conference to be held in late 2007 in the run up to the 10th anniversary of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement.

Getting Involved

18. Costs involved

All training and mentoring costs necessary for achieving certification are covered by the Peace II Programme during your first year of participation. However, it is mandatory that all participants join The Greenbox Network © in their first year and pay a membership fee of €100 for accommodation providers and €50 for everyone else. This membership fee will be lodged in a dedicated account and used as the networks fund to assist local conservation projects. In subsequent years the Greenbox intends to create a fair and equitable annual fee based on size/turnover of a particular business.

19. Application process

If you have any questions or would like an information pack and application form sent out please contact:

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e: info@greenbox.ie
w: www.greenbox.ie

Guidelines for sound ecotourism in the Greenbox

The Greenbox ecotourist code of conduct is designed to provide visitors with the 'do's and 'don't's of responsible ecotourism. In addition to limiting the negative impact of human presence on the Greenbox natural habitat, our ecotourist code of conduct champions the protection of Ireland's natural & cultural heritage. It is aimed at visitors from all backgrounds who intend to practice ecotourism and visit natural sites in the Greenbox.

Guidelines for the ecotourist:

1. Prepare before you leave

- Choose a Greenbox business, promoter or accommodation provider who cares about minimising environmental impact.
- Choose a travel agency or tour operator who offers an introductory session covering such topics as site and facility use and environmentally-friendly activities.
- Take time to find out about the natural habitat and cultural values of the Greenbox.
- Take steps to get to know as many people as possible in the locality you're visiting.

2. Follow the rules

- Don't enter areas that are off-limits to the public.
- Please obey signs.

3. Respect wildlife, flora and their habitat

- Move around calmly to avoid upsetting the natural environment.
- Keep at a reasonable distance from animals to avoid disturbing them.
- Never feed animals.
- Don't alter the natural habitat.

- Don't enter areas where animals are in high numbers: nesting and spawning sites, hibernation areas, etc.

- Leave things where they are. This includes plants, animals, or parts thereof.

- Carefully plan your itinerary, rest areas, activities and accommodation to avoid environmental degradation.

4. Lessen your impact on the environment

- Adopt behaviour that reduces pollution, be it chemical, biological, visual, olfactory or noise pollution.
- Travel in small low-impact groups.
- Be aware of how your activities affect the environment.
- Keep motorized equipment in good working order.
- Use non-polluting or low-polluting equipment.
- Choose durable, biodegradable and renewable products.
- Separate and dispose of waste in designated sites
- Try to use transportation that has little or no impact on the environment (walking, cycling, climbing, rowing etc....)
- Choose food that is locally grown and prepared, and preferably produced using organic methods.

5. Respect the human environment

- Appreciate the uniqueness of the people you visit.
- Respect local customs, local traditions and cultural differences.
- Be open to learning something new.
- Please support our local economy by buying local products and services.
- Respect people's privacy and private property.
- Adapt to local culture.
- Be considerate of other visitors.