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**Tourism and related services —
Sustainable tourism — Principles,
vocabulary and model**

*Tourisme et services connexes — Tourisme durable — Principes,
vocabulaire et modèle*

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular, the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

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For an explanation of the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), see www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html.

This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 228, *Tourism and related services*.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at www.iso.org/members.html.

Introduction

In the past 10 years sustainability has become a subject of great importance for the tourism sector. Numerous factors have contributed to the fast growth of sustainability as a need. Accommodation establishments, tour operators, restaurants, tourist attractions and others have applied strategies, communications processes, standards and certifications schemes. The global interest in environmental and sociocultural themes has increased the desire of tourists to experience more sustainable services and products.

Sustainability in tourism is almost always addressed from the perspective of environmental protection, CO₂ emissions reduction and care in the consumption of energy and water. Sometimes there is also a concern with social issues, involving local communities or economic aspects, which basically involves the viability of businesses.

However, despite this increasing interest, today most organizations understand sustainability in different ways. Different approaches have been adopted by organizations and digital platforms help to spread all types of information about sustainable tourism.

Today it is possible to identify more than a hundred references – private, public, international, regional and national – that naturally present many different concepts and understanding about sustainable tourism.

Additionally, both ISO 21401 and ISO 20611 contain concepts about sustainable tourism.

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly approved the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and with it the Sustainable Development Goals, a framework comprising 17 goals. Tourism is an economic powerhouse and can play a significant role in delivering sustainable solutions for people, the planet, prosperity and peace.

Therefore, it is acknowledged that there are a lot of challenges for sustainable development but that one of them is critical: the recognition of the minimal principles for sustainable tourism and a definition of a common understanding.

These principles are the basis for the sustainable development of tourism and should be taken into account as much as possible by interested parties.

Worldwide it is recognized that tourist destinations select development models that can respond to either supply or demand. Both of them have their attributes, and destinations choose them according to their interests, tastes, preferences and strategies.

Some characteristics of the demand model are spontaneous growth, emphasis on natural attractions and a single-minded focus on wealth generation by, in the main, tourism businesses, accompanied by an intensive use of resources (natural and human), large investment, quicker returns on investment and low spillover effect. The destination is normally designed and based on icons to attract visitors.

On the other hand, the supply model is characterized by controlled growth, the emphasis not just on protecting the environment but also making the processes fully sustainable. Businesses are concerned about profitability but also care about improving the quality of life in their communities. In addition, the tourist experience is enhanced by high-quality services throughout the visit, the spillover effect is higher, investment is smaller and there is a slower return on investment. Finally, the destination designs products rather than attractions.

No matter which of the models is been applied, both should seek recognition as the “archetype” of a sustainable destination. In addition, destinations should look for the highest spillover effect so that the local and national economies benefit directly, meaning that a high percentage of tourism expenditure remains in the surrounding communities, with a direct positive impact on improving the quality of life of people and relieving poverty.

Businesses need to demonstrate their commitment not only to the environment but also to sustainability globally. Good practices guide businesses to identify, assess and mitigate any negative impacts to the

environment, social fabric and local culture, while maintaining a high quality of service and protecting their employees and addressing the needs and expectations of their interested parties. Sustainability is generally incorporated as a transversal axis in all public or private business policies, improving innovation and competitiveness as a key to maintain leadership. Sustainable tourism can be a way of being and living, not a way of doing.

This document is intended to provide a common and sound basis for the process of sustainable development for all interested parties and to increase the expected potential benefits for the tourism sector.

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Tourism and related services — Sustainable tourism — Principles, vocabulary and model

1 Scope

This document specifies the fundamental concepts and principles of, and a model for, sustainable tourism. This document is applicable to private and public organizations and destinations, regardless of their size and location, plus other interested parties engaged in sustainable tourism development.

2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminology databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <https://www.iso.org/obp>
- IEC Electropedia: available at <https://www.electropedia.org/>

3.1 Terms related to sustainability

3.1.1

sustainability

state of the global system, including environmental, social and economic aspects, in which the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs

Note 1 to entry: The environmental, social and economic aspects interact, are interdependent and are often referred to as the three dimensions of sustainability.

Note 2 to entry: Sustainability is the goal of *sustainable development* (3.1.2).

[SOURCE: ISO Guide 82:2019, 3.1]

3.1.2

sustainable development

organizing principle for achieving human development goals while at the same time sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depend

Note 1 to entry: The desired result is a state of society where living conditions and resources are used to continue to meet human needs without undermining the integrity and stability of the natural system.

Note 2 to entry: Sustainable development can be defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

3.1.3

sustainable tourism

tourism sector that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, employees, the industry, host communities and climate change among others, while working closely with interested parties on the implementation of sustainability policies

3.1.4

sustainability aspect

activities, elements, practices, products or services of organizations and other providers in the tourism sector which can interact with the dimensions of sustainability (environmental, social and economic)

Note 1 to entry: A significant aspect of sustainability is one that has or can have a significant impact.

Note 2 to entry: Some examples of sustainability aspects are energy consumption, solid waste generation, recyclable packaging and water consumption.

3.1.5

sustainability objective

intent to achieve global sustainability, resulting from the sustainability policy that an enterprise or destination sets itself to achieve, being quantified whenever possible

3.1.6

impact on sustainability

change to the environment, society or economy, wholly or partially resulting from an organization's sustainability aspects

Note 1 to entry: Impacts on sustainability can be adverse or beneficial.

3.2 Terms related to the environmental dimension of sustainability

3.2.1

climate change adaptation

process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects

Note 1 to entry: In human systems, adaptation seeks to moderate or avoid harm or exploit beneficial opportunities.

Note 2 to entry: In some natural systems, human intervention can facilitate adjustment to expected climate and its effects.

[SOURCE: ISO 14090:2019, 3.1, modified — term revised.]

3.2.2

climate change mitigation

human intervention to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or enhance greenhouse gas removals

[SOURCE: ISO 14050:2020, 3.8.6]

3.2.3

environment

surroundings in which an organization operates, including air, water, land, natural resources, flora, fauna, humans and their interrelationships

Note 1 to entry: Surroundings can extend from within an organization to the local, regional and global system.

Note 2 to entry: Surroundings can be described in terms of biodiversity, ecosystems, climate or other characteristics.

[SOURCE: ISO 14001:2015, 3.2.1]

3.2.4

environmental impact

change to the *environment* (3.2.3), whether adverse or beneficial, wholly or partially resulting from an organization's environmental aspects

3.2.5**natural protected area**

clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed through legal means or other types of efficient means to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values

[SOURCE: ISO 18065:2015, 3.6]

3.2.6**biodiversity conservation**

active management of the ecosystem to ensure the survival of the maximum diversity of species and the maintenance of genetic variability within them

3.2.7**carrying capacity**

maximum number of people that can visit a tourist destination at the same time without causing destruction of the physical, economic and sociocultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitor satisfaction

[SOURCE: ISO 20611:2018, 3.3]

3.3 Terms related to the economic dimension of sustainability**3.3.1****corporate responsibility**

how an organization takes responsibility for its actions and their impact on employees, stakeholders and communities

3.3.2**economic impact**

impact to the economy, wholly or partially resulting from economic aspects

[SOURCE: ISO 15392:2019, 3.17.1]

3.3.3**safety and security measures**

< accommodation establishments and tourist operations > conditions and factors related to the level of control and minimization of risks affecting workers, guests or others in accommodation establishments or tourist operations

3.3.4**circular economy**

economy that is restorative and regenerative by design, and which aims to keep products, components and materials at their highest utility and value at all times, distinguishing between technical and biological cycles

[SOURCE: ISO 21401:2018, 3.6]

3.4 Terms related to the social dimension of sustainability**3.4.1****accessibility**

extent to which products, systems, services, environments and facilities can be used by people from a population with the widest range of user needs, characteristics and capabilities to achieve identified goals in identified contexts of use

Note 1 to entry: Context of use includes direct use or use supported by assistive technologies.

[SOURCE: ISO 21902:2021, 3.1]

3.4.2

universal design

design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design

Note 1 to entry: Universal design shall not exclude assistive devices for particular groups or persons with disabilities where this is needed.

Note 2 to entry: Terms such as universal design, accessible design, design for all, barrier-free design, inclusive design and transgenerational design are often used interchangeably with the same meaning.

[SOURCE: United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 2, available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>]

3.4.3

accessible tourism

tourism that involves a collaborative universal design process with stakeholders that enables people with access requirements, including mobility, vision, hearing and cognitive dimensions of access, to function independently and with equity through the delivery of accessible products, services and environments

[SOURCE: ISO 21902:2021, 3.3]

3.4.4

local community

people living in the geographical area of the *tourism destination* (3.5.1)

3.4.5

native population

people born and raised in the place where they live, using natural resources for subsistence

3.4.6

traditional population

native population (3.4.5) which maintains an ancestral and cultural relation with the region in which they live, using natural resources and depending on them for their survival

EXAMPLE Indigenous, caiçaras, quilombolas, ribeirinhos, jangadeiros, seringueiros (Brazil), bribri (Costa Rica) and guarani, diaguitas, qom, mapuche (Argentina).

3.4.7

cultural heritage

legacy of physical objects and intangible attributes of a group or a society that are inherited from past generations, maintained and protected in the present and preserved for future generations

[SOURCE: ISO 18461:2016, 2.1.3]

3.4.8

interested party

stakeholder

individual or group that has an interest in any decision or activity of an organization

3.5 Terms related to tourism destinations

3.5.1

tourism destination

geographical area, including cultural, social, economic and environmental aspects, where tourism activities occur, consisting of services, attractions, resources and infrastructures necessary for a tourist experience

Note 1 to entry: Tourism destinations can nest and network to form larger destinations.

4 Principles of sustainable tourism

4.1 Manage sustainable tourism effectively

Interested parties in the tourism sector shall set up and/or promote ethical business processes that seek to engage the corporate responsibility (social, economic and environmental) of those involved, promoting the establishment of the circular economy and increasing the commitment to the sustainability of destinations and businesses in the elaboration and implementation of a mission, goals, strategies, plans and processes of management.

Sustainable tourism management shall be based on the assessment of the destinations' sustainability aspects in order to develop the sustainability objectives that manage the impacts on sustainability.

In managing sustainable tourism, interested parties in the tourism sector should consider the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as shown in [Annex A](#).

4.2 Guarantee the rights of local communities

Interested parties in the tourism sector shall seek and promote mechanisms and actions of social and environmental responsibility and economic equality, including the defence of human rights, the responsible use of land and resources, the consumption of materials and services, and maintaining or increasing the dignity of employees and the well-being of the communities involved.

NOTE Local communities can include the native and traditional populations.

4.3 Conserve the natural environment and its biodiversity

In all stages of implementation and operation, interested parties in the tourism sector shall adopt practices of carrying capacity and minimal impact on the natural environment, including biodiversity conservation, wildlife protection, monitoring and effectively mitigating any negative impact, and thus contribute towards maintaining the natural dynamics and processes of their physical, biological and landscape aspects, in particular in natural protected areas, taking into account the existing social and economic context. This can include measures related to climate change adaptation and climate change mitigation.

4.4 Consider cultural heritage and local values

Interested parties in the tourism sector shall recognize and respect the historical-cultural heritage of tourism destinations. Tourism activities shall be planned, implemented and managed in harmony with cultural traditions and values, collaborating towards their development.

4.5 Stimulate the social and economic development of tourism destinations

Interested parties in the tourism sector shall contribute towards strengthening the local economy, raising skill levels, increasing economic impacts, generating jobs, promoting equal access to work, income and services, increasing accessibility and fomenting the local capacity to develop tourist enterprises that stimulate, at the same time, local responsible supply chains.

NOTE Accessibility is based on universal design.

4.6 Guarantee the quality of products, processes and attitudes

Interested parties in the tourism sector shall provide reliable information, promote awareness of tourism destinations, evaluate tourist satisfaction and encourage the implementation of recognized service standards related to, but not limited to, sustainability, quality, universal design and food safety.

4.7 Provide for the health, safety and security of destinations

Interested parties in the tourism sector should provide for and enhance the conditions of destinations, adopting safety and security measures, including health measures, to increase the levels of health (guarding against infection or disease) and comfort of the local population, workers and tourists.

4.8 Take legal compliance into consideration

Interested parties in the tourism sector shall identify and be aware of applicable legal requirements.

4.9 Prepare for emergencies and establish response procedures

Interested parties in the tourism sector should establish procedures to respond to potential emergency situations, including, for example, pandemics, disease, accidents, climate change emergencies and contamination of the environment. The scope of the procedures should consider plan and response involving tourists, workers and the local population. In order to guarantee the effectiveness of the established emergency procedures, drills should be conducted at the destination, whenever possible.

5 Sustainable tourism model

5.1 General

Regardless of the model selected, the destinations should be clear about the answers to the following issues:

- defining a value model (e.g. What does it offer? To whom it is addressed? What makes the product attractive? How can we retain the tourist? Are the tourism products and services accessible to people with a range of disabilities?);
- defining a goal, aiming for it over the long term and maintaining focus on the core concepts of sustainability;
- ensuring that the public and private sectors work hand-in-hand towards agreements that bring real benefits for all;
- encouraging private sector businesses to organize, in order to represent their interests to public institutions such as national tourism authorities;
- working to ensure that the benefits of tourism are not left in the hands of a few (avoiding the concept of tourism enclaves), focusing on efforts to generate positive impacts on the quality of life of the people who work in tourism as well as those who live in the tourism destinations and nearby.

5.2 Sustainable tourism model

Tourism destinations should define a sustainable tourism model based on the principles defined in [Clause 4](#), taking the following into consideration:

- a) Definition of responsibilities of the destination management function in relation to the integration of all the issues and aspects relating to sustainable tourism destination management, including a development of sustainable tourism policies that would bind all key destination stakeholders into a common cause.
- b) Identification of sustainable tourism aspects and understanding of the range of significant sustainability issues that are specific to the destination, including identifying the tourism supply chain in the destination and analysing local risks and opportunities.
- c) Assessment of material issues, defining what issues are truly relevant to the destination by taking into consideration important factors such as societal needs, environmental constraints, regulation, climate change adaptation, accessible tourism, safety and security, as well as infrastructure

planning. Possible additional factors include commercial issues such as revenue growth, efficiencies, differentiation and tourism seasonality.

NOTE Material issues are considered those that have high external relevance as well as high internal relevance.

- d) Development of a sustainable tourism strategy, in accordance with a vision for the future, which aims to close the gap between the vision for the future and the current state.
- e) Planning of the necessary destination resources and processes in order to make the sustainable tourism strategy a reality, taking into consideration areas that need to be addressed, for example public participation, tourism awareness and education, protection for attractions and visitor management, cultural heritage protection, destination water and solid waste management, noise and light pollution management, protection of wildlife, greenhouse gas emissions and eco-transportation.
- f) Implementing and monitoring sustainable tourism indicators for destinations, resource policies, processes and action plans, to be implemented by engaging a variety of active stakeholders who affect the operation of the sustainable tourism destination. Defining how these indicators will be continually monitored and how corrective action will be implemented.
- g) Reviewing continuous feedback and reporting based on monitoring the effective implementation of the action plans as a result of the sustainable tourism destination strategy. This includes feedback from all key stakeholders, including tourists and visitors. All data relating to feedback and reporting should be reviewed periodically by the sustainable tourism destination management organization to make sure that a continuous improvement cycle is established.

Annex A (informative)

Principles of sustainable tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

A.1 Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Tourism plays a key role in the global economy, in particular through creating employment and generating value for local economies.

Tourism is a unique economic activity that, among numerous features, can bridge several other industries and activities, using them as resources and simultaneously creating high interdependence.

At the same time, tourism faces big challenges, such as the preservation of natural and cultural resources, and can contribute in many ways to the United Nations SDGs:

- SDG 1 No poverty
- SDG 2 Zero hunger
- SDG 3 Good health and well-being
- SDG 4 Quality education
- SDG 5 Gender equality
- SDG 6 Clean water and sanitation
- SDG 7 Affordable and clean energy
- SDG 8 Decent work and economic growth
- SDG 9 Industry, innovation and infrastructure
- SDG 10 Reduced inequalities
- SDG 11 Sustainable cities and communities
- SDG 12 Responsible consumption and production
- SDG 13 Climate action
- SDG 14 Life below water
- SDG 15 Life on land
- SDG 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions
- SDG 17 Partnerships for the goals

For examples of how tourism contributes to the SDGs, see tourism4sdgs.org.