

# Ecotourism International<sup>TM</sup>

*"Protecting our environment while promoting Ecotourism"*

in collaboration with  
The University of Victoria  
Faculty of Business



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## Executive Summary

Ecotourism International will be a not-for-profit ecotourism-certifying agency established in Victoria, British Columbia, starting operations in January 2004. The objectives of the agency are:

- a) to provide ecotourism recognition benefits to tour operators in BC and Canada;
- b) to market ecotourism to tourists in BC and Canada;
- c) to promote Canada as a sustainable and nature responsible country.

Matching the objectives, the business scope of Ecotourism International includes two-tier aspects are tightly integrated into one structure:

- a) to provide membership, certification, periodic auditing, and co-marketing to over 1,000 BC ecotourism operators. This will be the initial function/tier and the primary focus in the first two-three years of operation. Expansion West->East for the other provinces will occur in year 3-6.
- b) to execute marketing activities and to sell:
  - ❖ ecotourism publications to tourists and operators – in the first stage of operations (expected to last up to two years).
  - ❖ ecotourism-branded products to tourists – will start occurring in the second stage of operations (after year 3).

The **mission statement** of the organization is:

*“To develop, market and implement an industry/member driven Canadian ecotourism organization focused on providing globally recognized ecotourism accreditation for Canadian eco-tour operators and eco-lodge owners, giving tourists means by which they can make informed and ethical choices that will protect the natural and cultural environment of Canada.”*

Ecotourism is defined as *“ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation.”*<sup>1</sup>

Ecotourism International performs activities built on six principles or pillars, which will function primarily as incentives to local ecotour operators to join in, as means of recognition into the eyes of tourists, and as tools to advocate ecotourism to the communities and public.

### Ecotourism International Pillars

**1. Visitor empowerment.** Visitors to the province will have the chance to make informed choices for their places of destination based on a five-leaf rating of ecotouristic operations

**2. Public Relations.** Ecotourism International aims at educating the public about ecotourism and creating relevant partnerships and alliances for BC ecotourism (i.e. other ecotourism certifying agencies, such as Green Globe 21, NEAP and Ecotourism Costa-Rica). As educated choices on behalf of residents and tourists, and alliances are critical elements for success, Ecotourism International will concentrate on consolidating, educating and raising awareness

**3. Marketing to and for ecotour operators.** Ecotourism International intends to educate the public and provide promotional means to ecotour operators who choose to become members.

**4. Industry Protection.** By creating a membership association for various categories of ecotourism operators, this venture plans to build a voice for the group. This will protect it before the government and help raise issues about applicable laws and regulations.

**5. Research-Support.** In the proximity of several universities (University of Victoria, UBC, Simon Fraser), some of which have shown an active interest in sustainability research, Ecotourism International will try to participate in meetings, conferences and academic discussions, on behalf of the industry, exchange information and then deliver significant pieces to local operators.

**6. Community Economic Development and Sustainability.** As many of the rural communities that have been resource dependant (ie. fishing, forestry, mining) are looking for creative ways to revitalize their communities

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<sup>1</sup> Green Globe 21 International Ecotourism Standard, Version 1.1 International Ecotourism Conference, Cairns, October 2002.

there will be a growing trend to use ecotourism as the key economic driver. By providing globally recognized standards, and a rating system Ecotourism International will be positioned well to collaborate with the Federal, Provincial, and Municipal governments' Economic Development plans. Ecotourism International will be the buffer zone between protecting our environment and exploiting the business opportunity of ecotourism – ensuring sustainability.

The primary target markets of the organization will be:

- a) Ecotour operators in most or all ecotourism sectors present in Canada.
- b) Tourists in Canada.

Vancouver Island alone is home to over 150 operators and the entire province is expected to host over 1,000 operators. In terms of tourists, in 2001 there were 22.4 million overnight visitors coming into British Columbia, who spent \$9.2 billion.<sup>2</sup> Among them 3.6 million overnight visitors came into Victoria and spent \$1.0 billion<sup>3</sup>. 43% of these tourists engaged in ecotouristic activities.<sup>4</sup>

In the initial stage Ecotourism International will start operations in an office in downtown Victoria, with two executives directors and one assistant.

The timeline of operations is currently divided into three stages:

- a) First stage – operations in BC only. Expected to last up to three years.
- b) Second stage – operations in other Canadian provinces. Starting in year 3 and continuing all throughout year 6.
- c) Third stage – international operations. Expected after year 6.

The certification and auditing that Ecotourism International will provide is based on a set of ecotourism standards that is currently in the process of development. Factors that are being taken into consideration when drafting the standards are environmental and ecotourism regulations imposed by the United Nations at the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992, geographical conditions of BC and other environmental regulations supported by local green groups. The team that is involved in the drafting process includes local and national geographers, environmentalists and sustainability specialists.

The strengths of Ecotourism International rely on being the first agency of the kind in BC, entering an industry with strong local and international potential for growth, and being managed by a team of individuals with business experience, connections in the local community and enthusiasm for supporting and promoting a sustainable form of tourism. The organization will attract member operators by providing reliable and sustainable standards that will be recognized by the provincial and federal governments, and aims at becoming the number one source of information for national and international tourists traveling to BC in search of the perfect ecotouristic activity. By differentiating and identifying true ecotourism operators, and promoting a consistent and sustainable set of standards, Ecotourism International hopes to become a model organization that will bring high standards of operations, help protect the natural and cultural heritage of the province and open new exploration avenues for tourists.

In order to achieve these goals, Ecotourism International will employ a variety of marketing tools that will help raise awareness of its brand and purpose. In the initial stage, marketing will be carried out through co-marketing with other organizations involved in the process, marketing through self-owned channels and other traditional tourism marketing channels. In addition to the set of standards that will be made available to operators directly or online, Ecotourism International will also design and distribute the "Ecotourism International Magazine" listing all member operators and examples of success stories, and provide ecotourism magazines and books through an information booth set in Victoria Inner Harbor.

Alliances with stakeholders and other ecotourism certification agencies and ecotourism groups will be most important. By expanding its network of connections and partners, Ecotourism International will try to attract larger numbers of ecotour operators and become a reliable source of information for tourists. Aware of the

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<sup>2</sup> Tourism British Columbia Value 2003 Book.

<sup>3</sup> Tourism Victoria Research Center <http://www.tourismvictoria.com/Content/EN/731.asp>, Nov. 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Canadian Heritage – Tourism Segments [http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/arts/pubs/research-culture/b2\\_e.cfm](http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/arts/pubs/research-culture/b2_e.cfm)

difficulty of surviving as a non-profit organization in a young industry and of the challenges that other ecotourism certifying agencies have faced, Ecotourism International will constantly search for new sources of revenue and establish a model that will combine a non-profit and a for-profit tiers.

Financial revenues will be initially provided by certification, auditing and membership fees, ecotourism publications produced and/or distributed by Ecotourism International and grants that will be derived from either the government and/or private foundations. The initial starting capital is estimated to be CAD \$350,000 in the best and most probable scenarios.

Starting in the second stage of operations, Ecotourism International will also investigate the feasibility of other business models and revenue sources, such as travel agency and intermediary between operators and ecological materials producers.

## In Summary

Ecotourism International is beginning its Canada-Wide Marketing Campaign now! We are looking for partners who will support this venture. We welcome an opportunity to share our full presentation, business plan, and marketing plan with you.

## Benefits for our Community Partners and Sponsors include:

- ❖ Joint Promotion throughout BC, Canada and United States
- ❖ Logo on Info Booth downtown Victoria and Vancouver
- ❖ Logo on brochures, newsletters, guide books
- ❖ Logo on all conference material (4-6 regional conferences are planned in year 1)
- ❖ Logo and link on Website

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