



The outcome of debate at three workshops with experts from tour operators and tourism and environmental organizations in Germany in the spring and summer of 1996

## **The Environmentally Oriented Tour Operator**

A contribution to sustainable tourism development

Recommendations and proposals for tour operators:  
An orientation and basis for further debate

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*Prepared with the support of the German Federal Ministry  
for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Reactor Safety*

Bonn, February 1997

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Notes on content.....</b>	<b>4</b>

## **I. The tour operator as a business undertaking**

• <b>Environmental management and information system.....</b>	<b>7</b>
• <b>Marketing: product policy .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Consideration on environmentally sound management of accommodation and gastronomy enterprises.....	8
Consideration of environmentally committed destinations.....	8
Low-impact leisure programme.....	9
Consideration of environmentally sound means and modes of Transport.....	10
• <b>Marketing: distribution policy.....</b>	<b>11</b>
Catalogues and advertising media: materials and handling.....	11
• <b>Marketing: communication policy.....</b>	<b>11</b>
Catalogues: contents.....	11
Advertising and PR, information for guests and public.....	12
Training.....	12
• <b>Cooperation.....</b>	<b>13</b>
• <b>Political activities.....</b>	<b>14</b>

## **II Headquarters/ Offices**

• <b>Building management.....</b>	<b>15</b>
• <b>Environmentally sound procurement.....</b>	<b>15</b>
• <b>Environmental communication within the company.....</b>	<b>15</b>
• <b>Transport.....</b>	<b>16</b>

## Introduction

"Tourism is like a fire: it can cook one's soup, but it can also burn down one's house" - thus goes an Asian saying quoted by the German Environment Minister, Mrs. Angela Merkel, in her opening address to the first Environment Conference of the German Federation of Travel Agencies convened in conjunction with the Berlin ITB in March 1996. She went on to appeal in a press statement: "Through the continuing tourism boom, the great diversity of new travel opportunities and the growing number of leisure activities, we are observing today worldwide an intensity of claims made upon nature and landscape such as has never been seen before. Germany, the 'world champion of travelling', has a particular responsibility to orient itself in future more closely to the principle of sustainable development".

In 1995, some 49 million German citizens undertook a total of 64.5 million holiday trips of more than 5 days. About 40% of these trips were booked in Germany in travel agencies or directly with the operators as organized tours or part-services of a trip. These companies provide services ranging from the selection of the destination (region, locality) over the choice of the mode of transport for arrival and departure and the selection of accommodation (hotel, holiday apartment etc.) through to the offering of special sports and leisure activities. Obviously, tour providers have a key function in taking environmental concerns into account in tourism. Further important aspects are that they reach many travellers, and can fulfill a model function by setting a good example.

The conceivable fields of action and possible optimization potentials can vary greatly. With a large company, small adjustments to existing products can already greatly relieve the burdens placed upon the environment. For example, preference can be given to hotels run in an environmentally sound way, in transport the modal split can be shifted to railways, etc. Smaller operators specialized on certain segments of the market could already today offer consistently eco-friendly products.

Among hoteliers and local tourist resort authorities in Germany, the environmental debate is already well advanced, and a broad-based exchange and intensive dialogue with environmental associations has taken place. A dialogue in this form among tour operators has not yet taken hold, although since some years now environmental and nature conservation efforts have been under way within both companies and their associations.

This is why representatives of tour operators and tourism and environmental organizations came together in the spring and summer of 1996 upon the invitation of Ö.T.E. (an association of various organizations working in the field of tourism and environment) to debate, in three workshops, criteria for environmentally oriented tour operators. Following the first drafting of criteria, these were reviewed on the ground at selected operators, and finally debated at two follow-up workshops.

It could not yet be the aim of this process to present fully developed criteria equipped with ecological indexes and detailed evaluation matrixes. The purpose was rather to identify criteria at all levels of action, and to subject these to a first rough assessment regarding their priorities and viability.

The criteria presented in the following must therefore be seen as a first overview and orientation. In this phase, an overall assessment of the environmental performance of a company or of a specific tour can only be made in a very approximate manner. Nor can the purpose be to satisfy all criteria uniformly and immediately. A criterion may go beyond the means of one company while being too lax for another. Some companies will be "strong" in some areas, but less so in others.

The criteria are rather to be understood as suggestions and recommendations for the tourism industry. They are primarily directed to operators and agencies who until now have only paid marginal attention to environmental issues.

Secondly, they are intended to give a renewed impulse to the debate within the industry and to form a basis upon which, through greater study and intensive deliberations, these criteria can be further refined and optimized, and comparable indexes and evaluation matrixes formulated.

Not least, the consumers themselves are called upon to demand and support environmentally sound products, and thus to reward the environmental efforts of providers.

## **Note on content**

### **a. Social responsibility**

This catalogue focuses on environmentally oriented measures. The experts involved in the workshops wish to stress that beside environmental orientation the observation of criteria of social responsibility, the orientation of operators to social and ethical principles of travelling within a holistic understanding, is also of great importance in tourism.

In particular, this means e.g. respecting the cultural characteristics (customs and practices) of the host country, cooperating in partnership with the population and service providers in the destinations, supporting income effects for the local population, abstaining from "sex tourism", special training for staff and tour leaders, and a number of other points.

It is thus equally indispensable to work towards and realize the formulation of criteria in this sector.

### **b. Structure of the catalogue**

The listed criteria are numbered through with thematic sub-divisions. Here and there they are linked by brief introductory texts. Examples taken from German practice are cited where these fit the theme. The extensive German-language literature citations for the individual thematic blocks that were given in the original German edition have not been reproduced in this translation. Those interested are requested to order a copy of the German original.

The catalogue has been shortened in order to concentrate on the main points that has to be fulfilled for being an environmentally oriented tour-operator. No criteria has been taken out, only some additional explications.

A distinction must be made between two types of criteria: Firstly, such criteria that can be autonomously and comprehensively influenced by a tour provider, such as the enshrinement of environmental objectives in the corporate philosophy and the environmental training of staff, through to office organization and the paper used for catalogues etc.

On the other hand, there are criteria that can partly only be indirectly influenced, because the services involved generally do not belong to the immediate field of business activities of a company. This can be the case in the choice of modes of transport, of destination regions and resorts, accommodation and suitable leisure activities. These criteria nonetheless have the purpose of helping the provider to include environmental aspects in its products, to purchase or demand correspondingly structured services from its business partners, and to help in close cooperation with local actors to develop and flesh out ecological standards.

## **I. THE TOUR OPERATOR AS A BUSINESS UNDERTAKING**

### **Environmental management and information system**

An environmental management and information system defines ecological objectives, sets out individual responsibilities involving all staff, and systematically organizes and integrates environmental protection into business activities at all levels. This ensures a comprehensive and continuous implementation of environmental protection activities both within the company itself and for the travel products and services of the company. The voluntary eco-audit scheme of the European Union can serve as an orientation here, despite this having originally been conceived for the manufacturing sector.

The extent and range of concrete system implementation depend ultimately upon the company size, structure and policy and its focuses, and can thus vary greatly. The following six criteria give the main cornerstones.

- 1. Enshrinement of binding environmental principles or guidelines for environmentally acceptable and socially responsible tourism and sustainable development as corporate goals**
- 2. Organization of environmental responsibilities at the highest level within the company**
  - through establishing an environmental management system
  - through appointing an environmental officer
  - through establishing an environment department
  - in the form of an environmental committee
- 3. (Systematic) surveying of the environmental qualities of the company and of its tourism products, e.g. using environmental checklists and guidelines for offices, carriers, accommodation and destinations**
- 4. Definition, review and monitoring of environmental standards ("environmental controlling") and development of a comprehensive environmental information system**
- 5. Evaluation, application/implementation and practical availability of gathered environmental information, e.g. in an environmental data bank, with feedback to data suppliers, such as purchasers, hotels, airlines and regions**
- 6. Regular compilation of environmental reports by responsible staff/ departments on internal areas and products**

### **Marketing: product policy**

The degree to which travelling receives an ecological orientation is determined by the selection of the individual components. Insofar as accommodation, transportation etc. are not undertaken by the operator itself, but are purchased from business partners, the possibilities of influencing these services are limited. An environmentally oriented tour operator can, however, give intensified consideration in its tour planning to e.g. eco-friendly hotels and restaurants, ecologically committed destinations, environmentally sound leisure programmes and means and modes of transport. It can also work together with local partners towards environmental improvement of products and services (see Cooperation, point 28 ff. below). The impact of such efforts will no doubt depend upon the "buyer concentration of power" of the operator.

## 7. Ecological orientation in product planning and definition of purchasing criteria

### A. Consideration of environmentally sound management of accommodation and gastronomy enterprises

#### ***Environmental management***

- Environmental protection is organized in the enterprise
- There is some form of certification of environmental orientation or environmentally sound management (e.g. guidelines/manuals, awards, quality labels)

#### ***The enterprise practices environmentally oriented measures and activities in the fields:***

- Waste: Avoidance and management
- Energy: Environmentally sound energy supply (e.g. use of renewable sources) and reduction of consumption (energy-saving measures)
- Water: Reduction of consumption (economy measures) and of pollutant release, environmentally sound effluent disposal (e.g. connection to sewage treatment plants), use of rain and non-potable water
- Noise and air: Avoidance and abatement of emissions/pollution
- Ecological information for guests on the enterprise and its environment: e.g. concerning environmental qualities, any problems or restrictions, suggestions on appropriate and recommended behaviour for holidaymakers (e.g. relating to energy, water, waste, landscape), leisure services, information material
- Healthy and environmentally sound catering
- Environmentally sound purchasing, with preference to regional supplies
- Ecologically oriented care and design of outdoor facilities
- Training of staff to behave in an environmentally conscious manner

### B. Consideration of environmentally committed destinations

#### ***Environmental policy***

- A development concept for sustainable (tourism) development has been presented

#### ***The region practices environmentally oriented measures and activities in the following fields:***

- Monitoring of environmental qualities
- Planning, construction and operation/use of infrastructure facilities according to environmental aspects (e.g. replacement of environmentally damaging facilities by new ones, utilization or preference of existing environmentally sound structures before creating new ones)
- Landscape and nature conservation: Ecologically oriented construction (such as through planning instruments, architecture), species/habitat conservation
- Setting of capacity limits for all infrastructure facilities, such as leisure and sport facilities, heritage attractions and other places of interest, accommodation and gastronomy, transport infrastructure, supply and disposal facilities (waste, energy, water)
- Determination and designation of zones with specific ecological carrying capacities with regard to buildings and visitors, where necessary regulatory measures
- Transport: Promotion of environmentally sound means and modes of transport (such as increased use of bicycles and local public transport, development of environmentally acceptable transport concepts), avoidance or abatement of transport-related pollution
- Energy: Environmentally sound energy supply (such as renewables), reduction of energy consumption, energy conservation
- Waste: Avoidance, disposal (collection, source segregation) and management (recycling, hazardous waste)
- Water: Supply (aspects of potable water capacity and quality), reduction of water consumption (economy measures) and pollutant releases, effluents (wastewater system, treatment and reuse)
- Bathing waters and beach quality (European Blue Flag award)
- Noise and air: Avoidance and abatement of emissions/pollution, climate protection

- Information and public relations work: Information on environmental qualities, educational campaigns, support programmes, events, production of information material

### **C. Low-impact leisure programme**

The increasing urge of holidaymakers to have an action-packed holiday is putting increasing strains on nature and environment. Special offers of tour operators can help to minimize or entirely prevent these strains.

#### ***Sport, excursion and culture programmes***

- Promotion of sports and sporting products and services structured so as to have minimum impacts on nature and environment.
- Performance of environmentally benign sports courses
- Products and services with ecological focuses
- Control/direction of products and services in ecologically sensitive areas, e.g. protected areas
- Natural phenomena and special attractions of the region
- "Soft" adventure tours
- Activity courses (e.g. farming, landscape conservation, crafts)

#### ***Animation***

- Presentation of environmental aspects at events
- Inclusion as a matter-of-course component of programmes in such a manner that the issue of "nature/environment" is easily grasped and positively associated by the holidaymaker
- Offers of environmental events in which fun, adventure etc. are in the foreground

### **D. Consideration of environmentally sound means and modes of transport**

Transport-related impacts play a particular role in tourism. Air and car transport generate the highest output of CO<sub>2</sub> (carbon dioxide, the main culprit of global warming) per passenger. Long-haul travelling is becoming ever more popular. A result of this is that air transport is acquiring a growing predominance in the choice of mode of transport. The car leads with a share of more than 50%, followed by air transport with 27% and a rising trend. The shares of the environmentally sound modes of transport continue to drop: bus (9.8%) and rail (8%).

Here we find on the one hand the justified demand that impacts be reduced, while on the hand operators have great trouble motivating their customers to switch to alternative modes of transport in view of the currently relatively low costs of a (package) air journey and the convenience of the reduced time needed for travelling. The prevailing price structures leave the companies little leeway. It is to be wished that through a Europe-wide or even globally harmonized taxation of aviation fuel its present, ecologically counterproductive subsidization is removed, and incentives are given for the use of energy efficient aircraft.

The criteria formulated in the following attempt a compromise between "reduction of air transport" and "economic exigencies of tour operators" intended to do justice to both perspectives in this first phase of debate.

#### ***Environmentally sound arrival and departure***

- Promotion of environmentally sound ways of arrival by bicycle, bus, railway and ship, wherever possible and reasonable (time needed, quality of connections, distance), particularly for short distances
  - to the destination
  - information on Rail&Fly in the catalogue
  - promotion (through information, special offers, incentives) of (inland) travel to the departure airport by means of public transport
- Extension of the duration of long-haul journeys, e.g. as a rule of thumb: number of travelling hours smaller than number of days on holiday
- Promotion of comparable tour offers to nearby destinations, e.g. in the trekking sector

- Increased use of modern, less polluting aircraft
  - low fuel consumption
  - reduced pollutant and noise emissions
  - low-pollutant paints and varnishes
  - waste management concepts
- Clipping transport volume peaks, e.g. through using night trains, mid-week arrivals etc.

#### ***Environmentally sound mobility at the destination***

- Preferential treatment or promotion of environmentally sound modes of transport (walking, cycling, bus, mountain railway etc.) and of local public transport in both "everyday holiday mobility" and in excursion programme

### **8. Step-wise increase of the share of environmentally sound tours and services (incl. accommodation/gastronomy enterprises and transport services) in the overall volume of products and services**

## **Marketing: distribution policy**

### **Catalogues and advertising media: materials and handling**

- 9. Use of papers and materials with minimum environmental impacts and according to state of the art**
- 10. Suggest or create the structures for distributors to recommend that catalogues are passed on to friends and acquaintances, or are handed back to travel agencies for reuse**
- 11. Reduction of catalogue consumption**
  - Splitting of the overall catalogue - where products and services are suited to this - into destination and special thematic catalogues, insofar as this reduces the total volume of catalogues per customer
  - Use of new media
  - Dispatch of catalogues to travel agencies other than those with which regular business relations exist only upon request
- 12. Participation in and promotion of initiatives of the trade associations for optimized use of catalogues and materials, and for reduction of their consumption**

## **Marketing: communication policy**

An ecologically oriented communication policy promotes the demand for ecologically sound tours. Beside what is said, here it is essential how it is said: With an animating and motivating policy, both holidaymakers and business partners are more likely to be reached than with boring lecturing and dry information.

### **Catalogues: contents**

- 13. Presentation of corporate principles and environmental activities**
- 14. Environmental information on accommodation, the destination area, transport/traffic situation, leisure/sports, and suggestions for appropriate behaviour of holidaymakers at the locality - perhaps in the form of a matrix**



- 15. Labelling of accommodation enterprises and destinations that have received environmental awards**
- 16. Recommendations of particularly ecological products/services**
- 17. Good and clear placement of environmental information**
- 18. Presentation for orientative purposes of typical energy indexes and pollutant inventories per mode of transport as a function of travelled distance**

**Advertising and PR, information for guests and public**

- 19. Aggressive marketing for environmentally benign tours and services**
- 20. Provision of information for the use of environmentally sound modes of transport and public transport (line maps, timetables, mobility advice)**
- 21. Surveys of and exchange of information with holidaymakers on the ecological "satisfaction" of their tour**
- 22. Offer to customers to acquire further information upon request on environmental issues at the travel agency**, e.g. through keeping available separate catalogue information, general environmental information on the destination, and suggestions for appropriate behaviour of holidaymakers
- 23. Offer to customers to request environmental information from the tour operator at the destination or accommodation**, e.g. suggestions for appropriate behaviour, and information on the environmental situation in the destination (beach/bathing, excursions, sports, ecological "sights", problems and restrictions, culture). Information should be processed such that it can already be used by the holiday maker at home.
- 24. Handing out of information material (bicycling maps, information brochures) and recommendations for travel guides, and literature in the travel agency before and during the booking**

**Training**

This means in the broadest sense every form of dissemination of environmental information. It serves to keep staff and business partners in both head office and at the destinations abreast with the latest state of affairs concerning environmental protection and corporate policy. Ecological concerns can both be made the subject of special environmental events, and can be integrated into other training measures.

- 25. Regular environmental training of staff at head office, at least once a year**
- 26. Regular information and further education of field staff (tour leaders, hotel procurement, animators, guides) on ecological issues and the local situation (in accommodation and destination in general)**
- 27. Offers of central, joint training of business partners in the industry (e.g. accommodation enterprises, travel agencies)**

## **Cooperation**

Both at the home base of the company and at the destinations the tour operator can promote environmental protection efforts - these will be particularly effective when undertaken in cooperation and exchange with its business partners. The size and importance of a company doubtlessly determine the impacts of these efforts. However, smaller operators also have the option of undertaking joint moves together with other companies.

### **28. Activities at the destination**

- Coordination with business partners, politicians, municipal bodies and nature and environmental organizations, e.g.
  - to secure or improve environmental quality through appropriate measures and activities
  - in providing support for an ecologically oriented, holistic tourism concept
  - in taking ecological carrying capacity limits into account
  - in giving suggestions for appropriate behaviour of local staff (e.g. "stop the engine" for bus drivers, e.g. done by the → Studiosus-Reisen operator)
  - through reacting to environmental information given in reports by head or regional tour leaders

### **29. Coordination with travel agencies**

- Distribution of information on environmental aspects of a tour (e.g. transport, destinations, accommodation enterprises) and references to further sources of information (media, organizations)
- Support in selling environmentally sound products and services through commission structures or bonus systems
- Joint advertising campaigns and actions for environmentally benign travelling

### **30. Maintenance of contacts and cooperation with nature/environmental organizations**

- Exchange of information on the ecological situation in the destinations
- Joint initiatives such as the dissemination of information and performance of information events, presentations, seminars and guided tours
- Structuring of special tours and leisure programmes
- Project promotion/sponsoring of actions in the destination area

### **31. Support of business partners**

- Motivation and recommendation to participate in environmental competitions or pioneering projects

### **32. Cooperation with other tour operators**

- Cooperative actions in dealings with common partners such as travel agencies, accommodation enterprises, destinations (surveying of environmental qualities, strategies, monitoring)

### **33. Cooperation with educational institutions (universities) for the preparation of studies, diploma theses etc.**

## **Political activities**

### **34. Participation in the bodies of tourism associations/federations and other bodies with environmental relevance (e.g. 'round tables', working groups, project partnerships)**

### **35. Support of political lobbying for improvement of regulatory, fiscal and financial framework conditions for environmentally oriented tour operators**

## **II. HEADQUARTERS / OFFICES**

### **Building management**

36. Energy conservation, e.g. use of compact fluorescent lamps, regular maintenance and demand-based control of heating system
37. Water economy, e.g. regular maintenance of fittings and immediate repair of leaks, use of modern devices (e.g. flow limiters, flush stops), use-dependent control for all points of use, minimization of pollution from cleaning agents through selection of type and sparing dosage
38. Waste avoidance and recycling

### **Environmentally sound procurement**

#### **Environmentally friendly office materials and equipment**

39. Use of paper with minimum environmental life-cycle impacts
40. Use of environmentally sound expendable materials, e.g. refillable pens made of environment-friendly materials such as wood or recycled plastic
41. Use of environment-friendly office equipment, e.g. clean manufacturing (energy input, flame proofing agents, plastics), and energy-saving in operation
42. Use of low-radiation VDUs and, where appropriate, measures to reduce radiation and electrostatic/magnetic fields
  - Take-back and recycling guarantees of retailers or manufacturers
  - Multiple use or reuse of printer ribbons, toner and ink cartridges (e.g. refill systems)
  - Choice of products with an eco-label award
43. Environmentally sound disposal of materials and equipment

#### **Further aspects**

44. Preferential procurement of environmentally sound building materials and furnishings
45. Consideration of environmental aspects in procurement and operation of vehicle fleet

### **Environmental communication within the company**

- 46. Regular distribution of environmental information (e.g. behaviour suggestions, timetables)
- 47. 'Environmental Notice Board' in company, or other medium for ideas, information and suggestions concerning all environmental aspects
- 48. Offers to staff of creative workshops, idea competitions or model tours

#### **Environmental behaviour of staff**

- 49. Sparing use of paper, e.g. double-sided photocopying, use of back side of printed paper for draft documents and sketches
- 50. Environmentally conscious use/handling of energy, water and waste, e.g. demand-dependent use of office equipment and lighting (only switch on when in use), source segregation of waste, sparing use of water (kitchen, toilet) and heating energy (brief, not continuous ventilation through windows)

#### **Transport**

- 51. Creation of incentives to use local public transport, such as job tickets, provision of annual rail tickets for staff, or reimbursement of fares
- 52. Organization of group transport to workplace
- 53. Preference to environmentally sound modes of transport for company outings, business travel and events
- 54. Measures to promote the use of bicycles (bicycle stands, company bicycles)
- 55. Use of company (inter-modal) mobility consulting services