

# Green your Business:

## Toolkit for Tourism Operators



Parks Canada  
Parcs Canada



Canadian Tourism Commission  
Commission canadienne du tourisme

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# Introduction

## Purpose

We have arrived at an incredible moment in the 150-plus-year history of this nation's tourism industry. The marketplace is evolving, the competitive landscape is shifting and at times, new threats seem to appear on the horizon every other month. But through change and challenge comes unprecedented opportunity. Canadian operators large and small can show stewardship and leadership-and significantly reinvigorate their businesses-by embracing a new, greener set of principles, and by extension, the swelling numbers of customers who now follow them.

A growing body of evidence suggests that integrating sustainable practices into your business-whether in the areas of heating, lighting, water usage, landscaping or printing-will ultimately reduce your operating costs. A green strategy will also attract the emerging but fast-growing market of discerning travellers seeking authentically sustainable experiences and services.

The Green Your Business: Toolkit for Tourism Operators-a collaboration between the Tourism Industry Association of Canada (TIAC), the Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC), Parks Canada along with author Marr Consulting-aims to provide practical tips and sound guidance to the Canadian tourism industry. We've placed a special focus on small- and medium-size enterprises (SMEs). Think of this document as a kind of "best practices" handbook, stocked with user-friendly, accessible and practical tips. Readers may undertake as many or as few of the suggestions as their time and resources allow.

## What is Sustainable Tourism?

A sustainable tourism business fulfills economic, environmental and socio-cultural obligations while generating income, contributing to employment, maintaining cultural integrity, and preserving essential ecological processes and biological diversity. Broadly speaking, sustainable tourism is that which aims to enhance the quality and sustainability of natural and cultural heritage-based experiences by:

- ◆ Minimizing the tourism industry's negative economic, environmental and socio-cultural impacts
- ◆ Generating greater economic benefits for local communities
- ◆ Making positive contributions to the preservation of natural and cultural assets.

Sustainable tourism delivers a meaningful experience and thus a high degree of customer satisfaction.

## Canada's Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Sustainable Tourism

The enclosed toolkit builds upon *Canada's Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Sustainable Tourism* (Appendix A), a statement of principles jointly authored by TIAC, Parks Canada and the CTC. Released in 2005, the document declares a commitment to an industry that "balances economic objectives with safeguarding and enhancing the ecological, cultural and social integrity of Canada's heritage." While the Code affirms some important, high-level guiding principles, that document does not offer on-the-ground, business-level advice and recommendations for operators. This toolkit seeks to bridge this gap by delivering practical and meaningful actions that SMEs can begin putting in place today.

Note that while we recognize that sustainable tourism hinges on socio-cultural, economic and environmental factors, this toolkit places a special emphasis on the latter. This is because environmental strategies such as waste diversion and energy-efficiency improvements represent the "low hanging fruit" for SMEs. The moves suggested within are tangible and easy to implement, and offer the most direct business case for going green. That said, the authors see the Green Your Business Toolkit as one step in an integrated corporate commitment to sustainability. We expect this document will grow and evolve, and with time and use, more fully embrace a broader view of sustainable tourism. To this end, we welcome your feedback and suggestions via the e-mail address at the end of this introduction.

## A Canadian Perspective

This toolkit acknowledges a number of fundamental facts about Canada. In terms of land mass, this is one of the world's largest countries, with a hugely diverse regional topography. The majority of the nation experiences a long and harsh winter; we also possess a great variety of regional climates ranging from temperate on the west coast, to extremely cold in the north, to desert-like in parts of interior British Columbia. Our nascent arctic tourism industry poses unique challenges of its own with respect to costs, distances and logistics, not to mention complex cultural and ecological sensitivities.

These objective realities have profound implications for how travellers get to Canada and move around once they are here, and the amount of energy required to provide for the comfort of our guests.

While this document advocates for a sustainable Canadian tourism industry, it does not deny these challenges. For instance, it recognizes that air travel will remain a practical necessity for many years to come. This is especially true for properties located in remote parts of the country where ground-based access may be constrained or simply unavailable. The transportation sector will remain the industry's largest source of greenhouse-gas emissions.

However, this document encourages Canadian destination marketing organizations, businesses and operators to reduce their reliance on private vehicles, both for guest transportation and employee commuting. While this toolkit does not specifically address intermodality-the interlinking of air, rail, coach and marine modes-such efficiencies are likely to reduce energy consumption, enhance the seamlessness of travel and shorten overall trip itineraries.

The accommodations sector-the second-largest source of carbon emissions-also represents a unique set of challenges and opportunities. The heating and cooling of North America's buildings, including B&Bs, hotels and resorts, accounts for as much as 40% of the continent's greenhouse-gas emissions. All of these properties can make a difference to both the climate and the bottom line with an energy-efficiency retrofit. In 2007 Willard InterContinental, a luxury hotel in Washington, DC, reported that its sustainability program cut expenses by 20% via reduced electricity, gas and water consumption.

Many utilities and provincial authorities offer financial incentives for programs to update windows, insulation, plus heating and cooling equipment, all of which save on energy costs. Further, many of the operations-side suggestions outlined on the pages that follow are inexpensive, and in some cases, free.

When considering new construction, tourism operators should investigate a third-party green-building certification standard, such as LEED or BuiltGreen. Studies of green buildings suggest that the cost premiums are not as high as often believed, especially with the help of innovative financing options coming available through credit unions and other progressive lenders. The many documented advantages of green buildings include decreased energy costs, improved worker health and productivity, and-perhaps most important for tourism businesses-a strong and positive market differentiation.

## Making the Business Case for Green

As a small business owner or destination marketing agency, you most likely have limited discretionary capital to reinvest in your property, technology or personnel. You must justify investments on the basis of their returns. In our view, greening your business offers at least two tangible payoffs.

First, odds are that your heating, cooling and lighting infrastructure was designed for an era of seemingly limitless and inexpensive energy. Insulation of the time was often inadequate, toilets and showers used needlessly large volumes of water, furnaces ran 24/7, and cars and buses idled at the curb. Canadians and North Americans generally took heat, gasoline, water and electricity resources entirely for granted.

Those days are over. Business-as-usual energy consumption is simply no longer financially justifiable. And that's where we can help. By assessing the way you currently do business against some of this toolkit's recommendations, you will reap savings and economies that will tangibly bolster your bottom line.

The second business justification for greening your operations is the growing market of sustainably minded travellers. Various labels such as "ethical travellers," "future-shapers," or "green consumers," this group's purchase decisions are now being noted across a wide range of markets. Although concerns about price or weather at the destination continue to be important factors in choosing vacations and packages, a growing number of travellers are making purchase decisions based on a prospective destination's commitment to sustainable business practices. Preliminary findings from the CTC's 2008 Global Tourism Watch survey reveal a growing number of consumers in the nation's core markets are interested in sustainable tourism and are willing to pay a premium for sustainable travel products. Of the nine countries surveyed, 60% of travellers (on average) in those countries are willing to pay a one percent to 10% premium for environmentally friendly travel products.

Another international survey (TripAdvisor, April 2007) of 1,000 travellers worldwide found that 40% take environmentally friendly tourism into consideration when making travel plans. TNS Canadian Facts has found in its own survey research that these "future shapers" exhibit a growing awareness of global warming and of matters such as child labour or the plight of indigenous peoples. Many of these travellers plan their trips independently, are Web savvy and are beginning to alter purchasing habits. Beyond their commitment to "green" values, these consumers expect higher standards of cuisine, accessibility to spa and wellness facilities, and other higher value "authentic" products and experiences. This toolkit can help you begin to market to these travellers.

## Who Should Use This Document

We've designed this resource for multiple tourism-sector audiences. Owners and managers will find material addressing the policy, budgetary and strategic aspects of their operations. Staff "champions" will find resources for individual employees keen to lead the green charge at their workplace. The toolkit will also appeal to tourism associations and destination marketing organizations that wish to disseminate some of these ideas amongst members.

## How to Use the Toolkit

This resource is organized around three themes: tourism industry sector, business process, and the needs of SMEs. For example, in the first section, accommodations providers, tour operators, plus hunting and fishing outfitters will find tips and resources tailored just for them. Likewise, business processes such as purchasing, marketing and product development and needs such as water, waste and energy are addressed. The toolkit is not intended to be read back-to-front, nor is it a definitive treatise on sustainable tourism. While the case studies and scenarios scattered throughout are intended to provide inspiration and background, this document focuses squarely on actions, tasks and implementation. So get going. Review the table of contents, find a section that might have a strong application to your business-and jump right in.

If you work in tourism in Canada, there's something for you inside. And please share your thoughts and insights at [info@tiac.travel](mailto:info@tiac.travel) as you begin your own green journey; we'll work to include your own advice in future versions of this document.

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# Making the Switch

If you are reading this, chances are that you have already recognized that the tourism industry is undergoing a profound shift. Owners and operators from sectors as diverse as accommodations, restaurants, museums, hunting and fishing outfitters, and travel agents are all revisiting the idea of "business as usual" and embracing a new range of best practices. Whether you want to save a little energy and money, give back to the community or set your business on a course toward full-on carbon neutrality, you've come to the right place.

## Self-assessment Tool

To get you started on your own sustainable journey, we've assembled a set of questions to help you evaluate your knowledge, values, motivations and practices.

1. Which of the following do you feel is most important to growing the Canadian tourism industry's presence in the world market? Select one or more of the options below.

- Experiential travel
- Nature or wilderness-based tourism
- Aboriginal or community-based tourism
- Industry collaboration and partnerships
- Developing tourism infrastructure
- Niche marketing

2. Which of the following issue(s) are of greatest concern to you? Select all that apply.

- Human Health
- Loss of Culture
- Energy Conservation
- Water Pollution
- Sustainable Forestry
- Poverty
- Air Pollution
- Climate Change
- Wildlife Habitat
- Biodiversity

3. How much do you know about environmental and social issues? Select one of the options below.

- I seek out information on pressing environmental and social issues.
- I know what I hear on the news or read in newspapers and magazines.
- I recognize "buzzwords" but I feel I don't have a full sense of the issues.
- I have little awareness of environmental and social issues.

4. What is it about sustainable tourism that appeals to you? Select all that apply.

- Reducing costs
- Increasing market share
- Ensuring prosperity
- Positioning my company as an "employer of choice"
- Becoming a leader
- Reducing risk
- Generating good public relations
- Increasing employee morale
- Being part of the solution
- Reflecting my personal values in the company

5. How would you assess your current business practices?

- I mostly factor environmental and/or social considerations in my decision-making.
- I sometimes factor environmental and/or social considerations in my decision-making.
- I occasionally factor environmental and/or social considerations in my decision-making.
- Environmental and social considerations are not factored into my decision-making.

## The 4 Rs

Here are four actions to guide you as you reflect on your responses to the questions above.

- ◆ Review: Read over your answers. Really let them sink in.
- ◆ Reflect: Consider that the answers above reflect your values, motivations and understanding with regards to sustainable tourism.
- ◆ Remember: Keep them in mind as you use this toolkit.
- ◆ Return: Come back to the questions at a later date and see if your answers have changed.

## Making a Statement

We adapted the statements below from the Tourism Industry Association of Canada's Code of Ethics. Consider how you might adopt them in your business or organization.

- ◆ encourage protection of natural and cultural heritage resources through education and awareness.
- ◆ I promote appreciation and enjoyment of Canada's natural and cultural heritage and encourage sensitive use of heritage resources and places.
- ◆ I respect and involve local communities by supporting the development of tourism programs and services that preserve social, economic, environmental and cultural integrity.
- ◆ I influence responsible use and enjoyment among travellers of our nature, culture and communities through marketing and education tools.
- ◆ I minimize negative impacts of tourism through pollution prevention, responsible use of resources, and harm reduction of threatened habitats, species and communities.
- ◆ I raise awareness of the value and needs of heritage resources and places by creating educational opportunities for travellers, employees and others.
- ◆ I build partnerships with governments, communities, stakeholders, and travellers to encourage responsible practices.
- ◆ I will contribute to the development of the Canadian tourism industry as a leader in sustainable tourism.

## Take Action

There is no one size-fits-all approach for integrating the principles of sustainable tourism into your business. There are many ways to take action. Find out which approach best suits your style.

### The Self-Starter

Do you take a no-fuss, dive-right-in approach? Then start right away. Pick any two actions and put them into practice. Check out the "Quick Starts" checkmarks throughout the toolkit for immediate actions.

### The Fact Checker

Do you like to have all of the information before moving forward? Check out the "Business Case" sections of this toolkit, which will direct you to the best resources. Once you are into the toolkit, pay special attention to the maroon boxes. These contain bites of background information, including definitions and descriptions.

### The Copycat

Do you like to take the beaten path? Don't reinvent the wheel. Instead, borrow from others. Think green and check out the "Case Study" boxes throughout the toolkit.

### The Planner

Do you like to map out every aspect of your strategy? Skip ahead to the "Strategic Planning" section in the [Business Processes](#) section. And pay close attention to the detailed "how-to's" in the toolkit.

## The Experimenter

Do you like to test out ideas on a small scale? The blue "Try This!" boxes are for you.

## Measuring Progress

To know where you're headed, you need to know where you've been-and the best way to do so is to keep careful track your progress. Diarize or chart your improvements on an ongoing basis, or schedule a time to come back and reflect. For a meaningful evaluation and comparison, establish a baseline of your current situation before implementing a change such as a water or energy retrofit.