

Entering the European market for ecotourism

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Ecotourism refers to tourism experiences that are low impact, help to conserve the local environment and bring positive benefits to local communities by contributing to economic independence and skills development in the long term. The forecast for ecotourism is one of growth, driven by an increasing demand for sustainability. Sustainable actions that are visible and measurable must be embedded into all tourism businesses, and certification is recommended.

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1. What requirements must ecotourism comply with to be allowed on the European market?

European ecotourists want to enjoy immersive experiences in rural locations and travel more sustainably to destinations with good reputations for best practices in ecotourism. As the sector continues to grow, making ecotourism businesses sustainable is essential. Several countries are recognised for their ecotourism credentials, including Costa Rica. The GSTC standards are a blueprint for the sector. The marketplace for sales is a mix of specialist tour operators and independent travellers. The marketplace is closely aligned with nature tourism and community-based tourism.

What are the mandatory and additional requirements that buyers have?

The mandatory and additional requirements for ecotourism services apply across the sector and include:

- The European Package Travel Directive
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- Liability Insurance and Insolvency Protection

You can learn more about them in CBI's study [What are the requirements for tourism services in the European market?](#) The study will help you understand the legal, non-legal and sector-wide requirements that European tour operators must comply with. If you understand these requirements and can adapt your business to meet them, European tour operators will be more likely to do business with you. It is important to European buyers that they can trust their suppliers to meet their own and their customers' needs.

Embedding sustainability into an ecotourism business

Making sure your tourism business is sustainable is an essential part of ecotourism. The purpose of sustainable tourism is to increase the benefits and reduce the negative impacts of tourism. Sustainable tourism includes:

- Protecting the natural environment, wildlife and its habitats and other natural resources when planning, developing and managing tourism activities.
- Providing tourist experiences that are authentic, so distinctive culture and heritage are preserved and celebrated.
- Empowering local people and communities through employment, economic independence and skills development.

More and more European tour operators will only work with suppliers who are certified or can prove their sustainability credentials. For example:

- [TUI](#), Europe's largest tour operator, expects all its accommodation providers to be sustainably certified by a standard recognised by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC).
- Leading cruise line [Royal Caribbean Group](#) (PDF) announced that shore excursion operators will get preferential buying treatment if they are certified sustainable suppliers.
- As from 2024, German tour operator [ASI Reisen](#) aims to work only with suppliers who are sustainably certified.
- [Exodus](#) is a well-regarded UK adventure travel operator that has embedded sustainability throughout its business to ensure its trips improve life for people, places and the planet. You can see the operator's commitment in the infographic below. Read more in their [2021 Sustainability Report](#).

Sustainable tourism is directly related to ecotourism. If you do not put sustainability at the centre of your business, you will not succeed in this niche.

Figure 1: People, Places & Planet Plan



Source: [Exodus](#)

What are the requirements for niche markets?

The main requirements in the ecotourism sector are related to sustainability certification. Destinations and local tour operators that operate on sustainable principles, which help to empower local communities and protect the environment, are more likely to benefit from European travellers who seek to minimise the impact of their travel.

Standards and certifications

There are more than 130 certifications worldwide for responsible or sustainable tourism. Many follow the [GSTC Criteria](#), developed by the [Global Sustainable Tourism Council \(GSTC\)](#). The GSTC manages the global baseline standards for sustainable travel and tourism. The criteria for sustainability in tourism cover four topics:

- Sustainable management
- Socio-economic impacts
- Cultural impacts
- Environmental impacts, including use of resources, reducing pollution and conserving biodiversity and landscapes

Examples of sustainability certification programmes include:

- Specific schemes for [tour operators and travel agents](#) and Travelife [hotels and accommodations](#) that are widely used throughout Europe.
- [Sustainable Tourism Eco-Certification Program \(STEP\)](#) is a global scheme offered by Sustainable Travel International that is suitable for all types of tourism businesses.

- [Preferred by Nature](#) is the tourism certification scheme aligned with the Rainforest Alliance.

The [International Standards Organisation \(ISO\)](#) develops and publishes international standards for certification. ISO standards for ecotourism are:

- If you are an accommodation provider, the [ISO 21401](#) covers sustainability management systems for accommodation establishments.
- If you are a local operator of experiences, the [ISO 20611](#) covers requirements and recommendations for sustainability good practices.
- The [ISO 18065](#) covers tourist services for public use provided by Natural Protected Areas Authorities. This includes areas where ecotourism may take place such as protected forests, conservation areas and so on.
- The [ISO 14000](#) group of standards covers environmental management responsibilities.

It can be expensive to become certified as a sustainable tourism business. If it is too expensive for you to do now, there are some simple, low-cost steps you can take to prepare your business for certification in the future. The CBI study [How to be a sustainable tourism business](#) has many practical tips.

Whatever you do, it is essential that you tell your buyers – both tour operators and fully independent travellers (FIT) – what sustainable actions you have in place. You must also be able to provide proof. Include as much information as you can on your website, if you have one.

Tips:

Consult the [GSTC Industry Criteria for Tour Operators](#) or the [GSTC Industry Criteria for Hotels](#) to learn more about the scheme and which organisations use these criteria.

Research the different schemes on the market to decide which one suits your business best. This guide by the [Global Ecotourism Network](#) has many examples, both global and regional.

Requirements for ecotourism providers

Ecotourism often involves an overnight stay in an ecolodge or other rural setting in an area that may or may not be protected. As an ecotourism accommodation provider, your guests will want to know that you manage your property sustainably. This involves communicating with them about your sustainable actions and encouraging them to behave responsibly. Other topics include:

- Environmental management – how you implement proper waste management and minimise use of resources like water and energy.
- Reduce, reuse and recycle – have a system in place and encourage guests to behave responsibly. For instance, encourage guests not to bring single-use plastics to your site and provide filtered water and reusable beverage containers. Do not provide plastic straws.
- Source local produce – do this wherever possible, and grow your own vegetables. Encourage guests to take part in gardening activities.
- Employ local people – it is essential that your business involves local people so the economic benefits of tourism are shared and the community is empowered through skills development.
- Promote local culture and heritage – to ensure an immersive experience.

There is overlap between ecotourism and community-based tourism (CBT). Visits to ecotourism destinations often involve a community element and therefore it is sometimes referred to as community-based ecotourism (CBET). CBET has a focus on empowerment of the local community while also protecting and conserving the

local natural and cultural environment.

CBT and CBET involve community members who provide their skills as guides, hosts, demonstrators and sellers to visiting travellers. Environmental protection and sustainability should be a part of the community's everyday management to further minimise the negative impacts of tourism.

CBT and CBET activities that are also eco-friendly include:

- Cycling and hiking/walking trails, either guided or self-guided.
- Wellness activities such as yoga or treatments based on local traditional practices led by a local expert/practitioner.
- Learning experiences about the local flora and/or fauna with a local expert.
- Guided birdwatching trips.
- Trips to local wildlife conservation parks or sanctuaries.
- Trips to local communities, villages, festivals and events.
- Food experiences – enjoying meals with local families, learning to cook a traditional dish, shopping in local markets, meeting local artisan producers.

Tips:

Read the CBI study about CBT: [What are the opportunities for community-based tourism from Europe](#), to learn more about the European market.

Read this blog for more tips about [how to start an ecotourism business](#).

2. Through what channels can you get ecotourism on the European market?

How is the end market segmented?

Ecotourists are also categorised as 'adventure tourists' and 'nature tourists' and share many characteristics with these two niche segments. However, an ecotourist's primary motivation is to travel sustainably, stay in ecolodges or accommodations that can demonstrate high levels of sustainability, or camp wild and 'leave no trace'. Making a positive contribution to local communities is also important to them.

There are two main types of ecotourist:

- The older ecotourist is the largest group and is aged between 50 and 70. They have money to spend and time to travel. They are experienced travellers, well-educated and prepared to spend more for an authentic, immersive experience. They often like luxury ecolodges. Comfort is important to this group.
- The younger ecotourist has less money to spend and less time to travel. Aged between 25 and 50, they are professionals, well-educated and very concerned about the environment. This group likes comfort but will also be satisfied with basic facilities as long as they are clean and functional.

Ecotourists generally also have a secondary reason for travel, which is typically to immerse themselves in local cultures and engage in outdoor activities in pristine environments.

You can learn more about the European ecotourist in the CBI study on [the European market potential for ecotourism](#).

Tips:

Explore other markets with similar characteristics. Read CBI's market information studies on [Nature tourism](#) and [Adventure tourism](#).

Also consult the following CBI studies: [What are the opportunities in the European market for adventure tourism?](#), [What are the opportunities in the European market for nature tourism?](#) and [What are the opportunities in the European market for FIT tourism?](#)

Through what channels do ecotourism products end up on the end market?

The European market for nature and ecotourism travel tourism products is served mainly by European tour operators, travel agents and online travel agents (OTAs). A further channel is sales made directly by local providers, ecolodges and destination management companies (DMCs) to ecotourists. The chart below shows these sales channels.

Figure 2: Sales channels for ecotourism products



Source: Acorn Tourism Consulting

An explanation of the major channels is provided below.

Direct sales include ecolodges that offer both accommodation and a range of activities within their local environment. They make direct sales to both European tour operators and to ecotourists that are FIT (fully independent travellers). FITs are independent travellers who make all their own bookings directly with ecolodges or local tour operators. They research their trips extensively on the internet. If you want to target them, you will need a good website and social media marketing strategy.

Ecolodges can also be seen as a competitor. Examples include [Bellavista Cloud Forest Lodge](#) in Ecuador, [Biodiversity Nature Resort in Raja Ampat](#) in Indonesia and the award-winning [Lapa Rios Lodge](#) in Costa Rica.

Indirect sales are sales made to European tour operators and OTAs. They sell tourism products indirectly to European travellers.

European tour operators usually offer a range of different experiences that may include an ecotourism element. This could be a homestay with a local community or a stay in an ecolodge in a rainforest destination. Examples include:

- France – [Chamina Voyages](#), [Grandes Latitudes](#), [Explorator](#)
- Germany – [ASI Reisen](#), [ReNatour](#), [Unforgettable Journeys](#)
- Netherlands – [Better Places](#), [Shoestring](#), [WRC Reizen](#)
- UK – [Pura Aventura](#), [Far and Wild Travel](#), [Imaginative Traveller](#), [Tribes](#)

OTAs that offer trips and experiences are the fastest growing sales channel in the sector. Many are looking for new suppliers. There are a few platforms that specialise in ecotourism. They include the UK's [Responsible Travel](#) and US-based [Lokal Travel](#), which both sell to the European market. [Mynatour](#) specialises in ecotourism and responsible travel and is expanding beyond Europe to destinations including Guatemala and India. [SafariBookings](#) (Netherlands) specialises in trips to Africa and is a well-respected OTA. Others include [Emotion](#)

[Planet](#) (Belgium), [FairAway](#) (Germany) and [Not In The Guidebooks](#) (UK).

Tip:

Read CBI's [tips for finding buyers in the European tourism sector](#) to find new buyers.

What is the most interesting channel for you?

European tour operators and OTAs are both interesting channels for ecotourism products.

OTAs are a quick route to market. However, you must do your research first as every OTA is different and has different types of customers they market to.

Building a relationship with European tour operators takes longer, but when you find the right one it should be a mutually beneficial partnership.

Tips:

Build strong business relationships with all of your buyers. Consult CBI's [tips for doing business with European tourism buyers](#) and [tips for organising your tourism exports to Europe](#) for more information.

Read the CBI study [How to work effectively with OTAs?](#) to learn more about working with OTAs.

Read the CBI study [How to be a successful company online?](#) for tips on how to improve or build your own website.

3. What competition do you face on the European ecotourism market?

Which countries are you competing with?

Central and South America have some of most biodiverse environments and landscapes in the world and are a hotspot for ecotourism. Costa Rica, Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands and Guyana have some of the best ecotourism initiatives. In Africa, Kenya has some excellent ecolodges. Elsewhere, the island of Palau and India also have some good ecotourism initiatives. A profile of each competing destination follows below.

However, these are not the only destinations competing for ecotourism and you should do your own research. Other competing countries include Brazil, Bolivia, Cambodia, Colombia, Nepal, Rwanda and Tanzania.

Costa Rica

Costa Rica was one of the first countries in the world to embrace ecotourism and is recognised for pioneering the global trend. Development of the tourism sector began in the mid-1980s and ecotourism rapidly increased during the 1990s. Today, tourism is one of the country's largest exports and accounted for 6% of Costa Rica's GDP in 2021. It is estimated that half of all tourist arrivals engage in ecotourism activities.

Its national [Certification for Sustainable Tourism \(CST\)](#) programme is recognised by UNWTO as the model for

sustainable tourism practices in the region and it is used by several other countries in South America.

Costa Rica is a 'hotspot' of some of the world's greatest biodiversity. There are more than 160 national parks, refuges and other protected natural areas that account for almost 26% of Costa Rica's landmass. The country's sustainability model is one of integrated development, with responsibility for maintaining environmental standards and developing local cultural traditions. As a result, ecotourists enjoy an outstanding immersive experience in the natural environment and local culture and society.

Table 1: Popular activities enjoyed by leisure tourists in Costa Rica, 2017-2019

Activity	% of respondents
Sun and beach	79.7%
Ecotourism	68.7%
Adventure	65.8%
Culture	60.9%
Wellness	42.4%
Sports	25.3%

Source: Instituto Costarricense de Turismo (ICT)

Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands

There are many regions in Ecuador that are good for ecotourism and it has a good reputation for ecolodges all over the country.

The Galapagos Islands are one of the world's best-known nature and ecotourism destinations because of the incredibly rich flora and fauna. Tourism income is also essential for monitoring and protecting the Galapagos National Park Islands. However, tourism has been increasing in unsustainable numbers, which is threatening the Galapagos ecosystem.

Initiatives have been put in place to manage [ecotourism in the Galapagos](#). They include limiting visitor numbers at sites, planning boat routes, introducing visitor fees for the national park, allowing guided visits only and establishing urban development zones.

Guyana

Guyana is a fast-emerging ecotourism and adventure destination. It has made considerable efforts to adopt sustainable destination management, development and marketing best practices throughout all of its tourism operations and programmes. In 2019, the country won Green Destinations' Best of Ecotourism Award. This gave the country global recognition of its outstanding ecotourism credentials. In 2022, the Iwokrama International Centre and Eco-Lodge was nominated for a Green Destinations Top 100 Stories Award.

Guyana has consolidated and strengthened its tourism message across its core brand pillars of Nature & Wildlife, Culture & Heritage, Active Exploration, Birding and Conservation, appealing to the adventure, nature and ecotourism markets. To learn more about how Guyana has developed its strong sustainable tourism

credentials, read the plan for [Sustainable Tourism Development in Guyana: 2019-2025](#).

India

India is a destination rich in culture, heritage and biodiversity and there are many places to enjoy ecotourism. The Himalayas, Kerala, India's northeast and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are some of India's hotspots. Strict laws protect India's 441 wildlife sanctuaries and 80 national parks, which make them good places to enjoy ecotourism.

Kerala is at the heart of the country's ecotourism movement, which India calls responsible tourism (RT). It was the first region to implement sustainable policies and educate visitors on local lifestyles in villages. The Responsible Tourism Initiative was established in 2008 in four destinations across the state, chosen to represent the state's diverse ecology. They are: Kovalam (beach), Kumarakom (backwaters), Thekkady (wildlife) and Wayanad (hill station).

In 2017, a new project called the [Responsible Tourism Mission](#) was launched to spread and implement RT activities. These are aimed specifically at promoting rural development and employment opportunities, empowering women and public participation in tourism and waste management.

Kenya

Ecotourism in Kenya is a mix of public and private initiatives that revolve around Kenya's iconic African wildlife living in the country's 54 national parks and reserves and several private and community-owned ranches and sanctuaries. Ecotourism and sustainability are built on four principles of: environmental conservation, education and empowerment, social responsibility, and cultural and heritage preservation. The Kenya Tourist Board introduced an [Eco-rating Scheme](#) (PDF) in 2002 for accommodation providers. In 2016, Kenya's tour operators signed up to become [Travelife-certified](#). This certification was chosen because of European familiarity with the scheme.

Ecolodges are common in Kenya. Some ecolodges are collaborations between local communities that provide land and work on the project and investors that help fund and manage it. Others are fully owned by the community.

In Kenya, ecotourism also helps minimise conflicts over territory and natural resources between humans and animals, which are detrimental to conservation efforts. You can read more about Kenya's sustainable developments in the Kenya Tourism Board's [Sustainable Tourism Report 2016](#).

Palau

Palau is an island nation in the Micronesia region of the Pacific Ocean. It has actively developed conservation initiatives to protect marine resources and promote ecotourism in order to generate revenue. Palau was declared a National Marine Sanctuary in 2015. Visitor numbers to the outstanding marine environment of coral reefs and fish species have increased significantly in recent years. It is home to the world's first shark sanctuary, which was launched in 2009.

In 2017, Palau launched an 'eco-pledge' system requiring that all visitors to the islands sign a pledge (promise) in their passports to respect the pristine environment during their visit. The Palau Pledge also has a [sustainable tourism checklist](#) to ensure that visitors:

- Do not collect marine life souvenirs
- Do support local businesses and communities
- Do not feed fish and sharks, or touch or chase wildlife
- Do not drag fins over coral when swimming, or touch or step on coral
- Do learn about the culture and people

- Do not litter

As of February 2023, almost 760,000 pledges had been taken and similar pledges are being trialled in other countries including New Zealand, Hawaii and Finland.

Key takeaways:

- Find out what ecotourism initiatives exist at a national level in your country. They may also be called 'responsible tourism' or 'sustainable tourism'. Contact your national tourist board and ministry of tourism for more information.
- Find out if there are any ecotourism guidelines and regulations that you should comply with.
- Identify where ecotourism is most often practiced in your destination and find out what is on the market, such as ecolodges, activities, learning experiences and so on. Could you partner with an existing ecotourism business to offer them a service?

Which companies are you competing with?

Companies in Costa Rica

Costa Rica is one of the leading ecotourism destinations in the world and most of its ecotourism experiences involve local communities. [ACTUAR \(Costa Rican Association of Rural and Community Tourism\)](#) is a locally-owned community association that supports a network of over 40 partner communities in Costa Rica. The association offers a range of trips that offer an authentic experience of Costa Rican culture while promoting ecotourism.

Costa Rica is well known for its luxury ecolodges such as [Lapa Rios](#), voted the number one hotel in Central America and ninth in the world by travel publication Travel+Leisure in 2019. A more affordable rainforest ecolodge is the [Finca Luna Nueva](#), near La Fortuna and Arenal Volcano. It hosts many activities such as an herbal medicine workshop and cow-milking, which are fun activities for guests.

The [Tree House Lodge](#) is a collection of beachfront houses on the Caribbean coast that have been constructed using wood from fallen trees and recycled materials for roofing, and are all heated with solar power. The lodges are CST-certified and have been awarded the CST Five Leaves award.

Local tour operators offer a broad range of packages and trips and ecotourism is generally included as a theme. [Imagenes Tropicales](#) is one example and has been promoting ecotourism since 1996. It offers tailor-made ecotourism packages throughout Costa Rica. Its website outlines its commitment to sustainability in the country and actively encourages guests to travel sensibly.

Companies in Ecuador and the Galapagos

[The Secret Garden Cotopaxi](#) is located in a spectacular area near the Cotopaxi volcano. It has a range of rooms for various budgets and offers a wide range of activities including a free 2-hour trek on guests' afternoon of arrival. The homepage has an inspirational video offering a drone view of the property, the volcano and short views of some of the activities enjoyed by guests. Videos are a very popular marketing tool these days and are very appealing to European travellers.

The website offers instant online booking through the [Cloudbeds](#) hotel platform. The property has a sister lodge in Quito and provides shuttles between the two. The website is available in several languages and prominently features its 2022 TripAdvisor Travellers' Choice award.

[The Kapawi Ecolodge](#) is an award-winning indigenous community ecotourism enterprise. It was built by the local community using traditional Achura architecture and is located in the Amazon in a wetland sanctuary. The ecolodge offers several rainforest tours of 3, 4 and 7 nights that include hiking, exploring the river and meeting

the local Achuar communities. It is a member of the [Adventure Travel Trade Association \(ATTA\)](#) and has [TourCert](#) certification.

[Chez Manany Galapagos Ecolodge](#) is a family-owned business. Their attractive website features a range of special offers through a 'call to action' button on the homepage. This is a great way to tempt visitors to find out more. Communication on the website is very good. The homepage has a welcoming message from the owners which is personal and appealing. The TripAdvisor testimonials are prominently placed and it is easy to find their sustainability credentials and other information.

Figure 3: Good example of a welcoming website message



Source: [Chez Manany Galapagos Ecolodge](#)

Companies in Guyana

The [Iwokrama International Centre for Rainforest Conservation and Development](#) was established in 1989 to manage the forest area located in the 'Green Heart of Guyana'. It is part wilderness preserve and partly used for sustainable activities, including ecotourism to support financial self-sufficiency. The [Iwokrama River Lodge](#) has eight river-facing cabins with solar power and organises many activities for guests such as boat trips and jungle hikes. It partners with CATS (Community and Tourism Services), whose ecotourism model formed the basis for the lodge.

The award-winning [Surama Ecolodge](#) offers accommodation and tours. It is wholly community-owned and managed by the Amerindian community of Surama in the Rupununi district. It offers basic but comfortable accommodation. Immersion in the community and learning about it are key aspects of a stay at the ecolodge. It is updating its website and helpfully redirecting visitors to its [Facebook page](#) in the meantime.

[Wilderness Explorers](#) is a Guyanese DMC that also operates internationally in the region. It offers tours that are ecologically sensitive and have a responsible attitude towards the environment. Communities are involved in providing tourism experiences, so they benefit financially. It also meets the high standard of service demanded by the international market. The company is a member of ATTA and [LATA](#) and its tours have been featured in National Geographic's Tours of a Lifetime.

Companies in India

[Thenmala Ecotourism](#) is based in Kerala in southwest India. It is one of India's first planned ecotourism destinations. It offers a range of soft-adventure ecotourism activities including a guided trekking trip in a wildlife sanctuary, boat trips, a butterfly safari and visits to a deer rehabilitation centre. There are several places to stay including tented accommodation, canopy huts and dormitory accommodation.

[Mangalajodi Eco Tourism](#) is a community-owned and managed conservation venture in Odisha state, on the east coast of India. It is a wetland ecosystem that is home to more than 300,000 birds. It has a range of accommodation options and caters for leisure and business tourists and students visiting for educational projects. Its packages are constructed for different markets such as photographers and corporate groups. Although the website design is somewhat old, there is a lot of useful information and a good photo gallery.

Learn more about ecotourism companies in India on this blog: [These 5 Eco-Tourism Companies In India Are Breaking The Norms of Travel and Tourism](#).

Companies in Kenya

[Il Ngwesi](#) is wholly owned by the local Maasai community and was built using local materials. Profits from the

lodge, donations and partnerships with local and international NGOs support a range of community projects and help to sustain the environment and local wildlife. Il Ngwesi has received great international acclaim for its successful engagement with local communities in remote places. The lodge has been operating for nearly 25 years and in 2019 was featured in National Geographic's [50 places to stay if you care about the planet \(PDF\)](#).

[Cottar's Safaris](#) is one of Kenya's oldest tourism companies and an award-winning ecotourism operator based in the Masai Mara National Reserve. Visitors are charged a fee for wildlife conservation, which is shared with local communities. The funds are used to develop territory beside the reserve as a way of expanding the area under conservation. Visitors are also encouraged to bring items from their home countries to donate to local communities, such as school supplies. The company has [Global Ecosphere Retreat \(GER\)](#) certification.

Companies in Palau

[Ol'au Palau](#) is a new ecotourism rewards programme that rewards travellers for travelling to Palau sustainably. It is an app-based programme and the first of its kind in the world. Examples of rewarded behaviours include signing the Palau Pledge, wearing reef-safe sunscreen, carbon footprint tracking and offsetting (the app has a carbon calculator), visiting cultural sites and eating sustainably-sourced food. Qualifying visitors can use points to take part in special cultural experiences usually reserved for locals, such as access to pristine areas, meeting island elders and touring historic sites.

Many tour operators in Palau focus their tours on and around the water. [Fish 'n 'Fins](#) offers a range of trips and experiences focused on conservation, and established the Micronesian Shark Foundation. This company has won numerous awards including TripAdvisor's Certificate of Excellence in 2018 and has many good customer reviews.

Key takeaways:

- Publicise your sustainability actions on your website. Ecotourists will only buy your services if they are sure that what you are doing is eco-friendly and meets high standards.
- It is also a good idea to offer tips on how guests can act responsibly when travelling with you or staying in your accommodation. For example, eating locally, walking or cycling in the local area, staying longer to offset travel-based carbon emissions, leaving no traces and so on.
- Ecolodges must be furnished to an acceptable standard for European ecotourists. They need not be luxurious (unless marketed as luxury) and facilities can be basic, but cleanliness and privacy are very important.
- Use plenty of inspirational images and videos on your website.
- European travellers like to make direct bookings for instant confirmation. If you can enable your website to take bookings, it will give you a competitive advantage.
- Add links to your page on TripAdvisor or other review sites. Ecotourists do a lot of research before booking travel and use reviews sites extensively.

Which products are you competing with?

Tourism products on the wider adventure tourism market are your biggest competitors. European travellers have a huge amount of choice and sustainability is now an essential feature of many adventure trips. This means that you will have to work hard to create a unique selling point (USP) to differentiate your travel product from others on the market. To learn more about creating a USP, read [CBI's tips for doing business with European tourism buyers](#).

You should also carefully consider CBT experiences as they are closely aligned with nature and ecotourism. Many ecotourism operators combine an element of CBT with their experiences.

Deciding how to package your tourism trip or experience could help you stand out from the competition. If there are many ecotourism experiences locally that also focus on nature, think about including an element of CBT and brand it as 'CBET' to help create a different product. If your region is popular among adventure tourists,

consider adding an adventure element to your ecotourism trip as an ‘added extra’.

Tips:

Conduct a SWOT analysis to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of your business. SWOT analyses are a common business tool used to help make a clear business development plan.

Research what other operators and providers are doing in your area so you know what your competitors offer. This ensures you’ll have a thorough understanding of the market in your area.

Consult the following CBI studies to learn more about the adventure and CBT markets: [What are the opportunities in the European market for adventure tourism?](#) and [What are the opportunities for community-based tourism from Europe?](#)

4. What are the prices for ecotourism products on the European market?

European ecotourists want to make a difference and want to know that the tour operators they choose are also helping to make a difference. Therefore, they expect that part of the price they pay will go to support environmental sustainability and/or community development. They may also be willing to pay a bit more for an experience that they know will make a difference.

Ecotourism products are packaged and priced similarly to adventure tourism products. Accommodation is usually the largest component and can account for as much as 60% of the overall cost. This share can be even higher in an ecolodge if it is the primary reason for the trip. Environmental contributions and community benefits are usually built into the cost of the stay.

Other factors that contribute to higher ecotourism prices include:

- Quality of guides: professionally trained, qualified, multi-lingual, experienced naturalists.
- Quality of services: staff trained in hospitality, tours carefully planned by knowledgeable staff, provision of additional activities.
- Availability and reliability of transfers for international travellers.
- Local transportation costs: travel to remote areas can be very expensive. For instance, in Guyana, it is only possible to reach many of the top nature destinations by air.
- Quality, standard and safety of local transport, and knowledgeable drivers.
- Food and beverages, if included. Supply should be locally sourced where possible.

Table 2: Prices of ecotourism trips on the European market, 2023

Ecotourism trip	Country	Duration	Guide price per person €
Farm tour of Finca Luna Nueva	Costa Rica	1.5 hours	23

Experience Arai – Cultural Tour and Buffet Lunch	Palau	3 hours	23
Horseback Riding across the high Andean Plains	Ecuador	4 hours	35
Activities at Mangalajodi Ecotourism	India	1 day	36
Overnight stay and activities at Thenmala Ecotourism	India	2 days	58
Overnight and activities at Magalajodi Ecotourism	India	2 days	83
Overnight stay in Finca Luna Nueva	Costa Rica	2 days	107
SUP Arai Cave Tour	Palau	Half day	114
Overnight stay at Secret Garden Cotopaxi	Ecuador	2 days	123
Quetzals in the Cloud Forest	Costa Rica	8 hours	136
Waterfall, Coffee Activities and Hot Springs	Kenya	2 days	179
Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary Trekking	Kenya	1 day	180
Lake Naivasha to Hell's Gate Walking Safari	Kenya	1 day	190
Arenal Volcano with Tabacon Hot Springs	Costa Rica	13 hours	199
Tour of Tortuguero National Park	Costa Rica	3 days	286
Kaiteur Falls & Orinduik Falls Tour	Guyana	1 day	316
Costa Rica Classic Getaway	Costa Rica	3 days	396
Overnight stay and activities at Iwokrama Lodge	Guyana	2 days	646
Galapagos Tour by Catamaran	Galapagos	4 days	1455

Source: Acorn Tourism Consulting

Tips:

Do your own research to find typical prices for nature-based tourism products in your destination. Be sure to compare 'like for like' (or as similar as possible) to assess if your product offers value for money.

Consult the CBI study '10 tips for doing business with European tourism buyers', and specifically Tip 7: [Set a fair price for your services](#).

For more advice on setting prices, download this guide published by Destination New South Wales: [Pricing your tourism product](#) (PDF).

[Acorn Tourism Consulting Limited](#) carried out this study on behalf of CBI.

Please review our [market information disclaimer](#).