

Cairns Charter on Partnerships for Ecotourism

The World Ecotourism Summit, in May 2002, reviewed the principles of Ecotourism and outlined these in the *Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism*. The *Cairns Charter* draws on the definition and principles for ecotourism developed within the *Quebec Declaration* and the objectives of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, South Africa August-September 2002) and then focuses on the development of effective partnerships for ecotourism.

It is recognised by the Cairns Charter that successful partnerships form the foundation upon which ecotourism can and has taken root in the world with notable positive results. Where effective partnerships have been absent, problems have often resulted in the planning and implementation of ecotourism projects. Partnerships have and will continue to exist at many levels, across differing sectors and involving differing degrees of formality. Recognition of the overwhelming importance of partnerships in delivering successful ecotourism is at the heart of the Cairns Charter. Therefore, the purpose of the *Cairns Charter* is to:

1. provide guidance on the development and operation of ecotourism partnerships;
2. encourage and support the establishment and operation of ecotourism partnerships that conform to the terms of the Charter; and
3. outline a post-IYE partnership action plan.

This document is underpinned by values outlined in the following Vision Statement:

Ecotourism respects the desire of indigenous peoples and other local communities, government, business and society as a whole to profitably generate sustainable economic and social development. Through partnerships, the natural, human and financial capital of the world's peoples can contribute to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage. Partnerships shall be a means to achieving positive futures for all parties and generations to come.

ECOTOURISM PARTNERSHIPS

Ecotourism partnerships may incorporate partners from the private sector, public sector, non-government organisations, community and indigenous groups, academic and research institutions, inter-governmental organisations, financial institutions, and; development assistance agencies. Every situation is different and each partnership will have different characteristics.

Partnerships are beneficial to ecotourism because they can assist in:

- providing new information, or perspectives to partners;
- achieving higher levels of efficiency;
- developing competitive advantage by strengthening or coordinating efforts;
- creating new products, services, or value-added packages;
- improving community awareness;
- conservation of natural resources;
- protecting and maintaining community values and culture;
- reducing risk by securing support, investment, or resources;
- opening new markets or opportunities, by adding credibility or opening new channels; and
- enabling success that normally could not be achieved alone.

The foundation for a partnership is the sharing of skills and resources in order to plan for and deliver successful ecotourism in practice. In the realm of ecotourism there are an array of natural, human and financial resources to consider in the partnership mix:

Natural capital:	land, waters and other natural resources from which materials and energy are taken, and into which solid, liquid, and gaseous wastes are returned.
Human capital:	human resources in their broadest sense – culture, society, population structure and health, ingenuity, enterprise, physical exertion, relationships, values, skills and intellectual property.
Financial capital:	financial resources to acquire or influence the natural and human capital associated with ecotourism partnerships.

Recognising the value of each of these inputs is essential, as is understanding that the relative value of these inputs will vary over time and will require periodic re-assessment.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL ECOTOURISM PARTNERSHIPS

Successful ecotourism partnerships result in a positive outcome for all parties. Success can be maximised when ecotourism partners share optimal characteristics. Ideally ecotourism partners:

1. enter into partnerships voluntarily;
2. respect each partner's aspirations and accommodate each partner's operational requirements, including respect for social and cultural values;
3. work together to ensure partnerships benefit natural areas in which ecotourism occurs.
4. commit to collaborate, share knowledge and adapt individual goals and objectives for the good of the partnership;
5. actively participate in partnership activities and establish regular, clear and open communication strategies;
6. establish equitable access for all parties to expertise and resources necessary to become full participants in the partnership;
7. value each party's contributions to the partnership – acknowledging traditional inputs such as financial capital; and less tangible factors, such as intellectual property; and
8. work together in a transparent planning process to define milestones, monitor performance and periodically re-evaluate goals and objectives, as a flexible response to the dynamic nature of partnerships.

ARTICLE 1: Indigenous Communities

In addition to reflecting the general characteristics of successful ecotourism partnerships (above), under optimal circumstances indigenous partners:

1. are recognised for their contributions of unique human capital to a partnership, including cultural contributions such as traditional building techniques and materials, modes of transport, traditional foods, medicines, handicrafts and respect access to cultural sites,
2. are given the right of prior informed consent on ecotourism development in the areas they live or depend upon,
3. encourage the utilisation and protection of their human capital, while maintaining cultural integrity; participating in capacity building and education or training programs; and
4. work to encourage the appreciation and understanding of indigenous culture and ethics to identify partnership opportunities.

ARTICLE 2: Local Communities

In addition to reflecting the general characteristics of successful ecotourism partnerships (above), under optimal circumstances community partners:

1. establish representative governance systems that allow them to be accountable and assume responsibilities within the partnership, and take action to fulfil them within the duration of the partnership; and
2. are actively involved in and benefit from community capacity-building initiatives relating to local ecotourism initiatives, in accordance with the principle of prior informed consent.

ARTICLE 3: Government and Inter-governmental Organisations

In addition to reflecting the general characteristics of successful ecotourism partnerships (above), under optimal circumstances government and inter-governmental partners:

1. ensure that policies and programs facilitate the development and continuation of partnerships, and may involve the provision of assistance with feasibility assessment, loan schemes, partnership advisory services, legal advisory services, dispute mediation services and community capacity building;
2. separate government's roles in partnerships, as an ecotourism provider, and as a regulator of ecotourism to avoid a conflict of interest;
3. ensure ecotourism regulatory systems reward best practice, taking a performance based approach rather than managing for minimum standards. Regulation of ecotourism will also recognise and, where appropriate, reward participation in best practice certification programs;
4. ensure natural and protected areas are managed to provide opportunities for ecotourism activities.
5. ensure ecotourism in natural and protected areas makes a positive contribution to those areas.
6. encourage and assist community capacity building with indigenous communities;
7. play a role in incubating potential partnerships – seeking opportunities to bring parties together to develop ecotourism opportunities;
8. work to achieve the best practice standards ecotourism delivery. This may result in all providers of ecotourism products (whether private companies, public organisations or other) participating in relevant certification schemes;
9. work to encourage ecotourism partnerships through planning, policy and practical programs;
10. monitor the development of the ecotourism industry in partnership with operators and communities to ensure that products are ecologically sensitive;
11. establish regional tourism planning initiatives in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. Stakeholders could contribute to site and conservation planning; and

12. establish information networks to facilitate information sharing among stakeholders, particularly communities, that may be interested in developing ecotourism projects.

ARTICLE 4: Non-governmental Organisations

In addition to reflecting the general characteristics of successful ecotourism partnerships (above), under optimal circumstances Non-government Organisation partners:

1. monitor developments related to all stakeholders, and report independently and openly on results;
2. implement aspects of the partnership, disseminate best practice examples to promote positive ecotourism partnerships, as well as building the capacity of all stakeholders according to participative needs assessments;
3. play a role as facilitators and mediators, encouraging other parties to come together and establish ecotourism partnerships;
4. provide technical and financial assistance, as appropriate, as well as facilitating technology transfer and experience exchanges;
5. Raise awareness for informed decision-making regarding ecotourism development in local and indigenous communities; and
6. Facilitate the equitable integration of communities and indigenous peoples into ecotourism consultation processes and projects.

ARTICLE 5: Ecotourism Business

In addition to reflecting the general characteristics of successful ecotourism partnerships (above), under optimal circumstances ecotourism industry partners:

1. facilitate community development through business mentoring and educational opportunities that contribute to increasing skills of indigenous communities and local residents as well as stimulating the local economy and industry;
2. contribute to conservation of natural areas;
3. lead the development and implementation of best practice through the development of minimal impact codes of practice and certification programs;
4. invest in partnerships, environmental and social initiatives and to ensure stable employment and income for local communities; and
5. work closely with the local community to plan and design products and improve local prospects through capacity building and training.

ARTICLE 6: Financial Institutions and Development Agencies

In addition to reflecting the general characteristics of successful ecotourism partnerships (above), under optimal circumstances international financial institutions and development assistance organisation partners:

1. deliver assistance to ecotourism related activities that are based on partnerships developed in accordance with the Charter;
2. identify and provide resources that will allow local communities to deal on equal terms with other partners; and
3. demonstrate a commitment to ethical investment, supporting ecotourism ventures that involve best practice partnerships, as appropriate.

ARTICLE 7: Training, Education and Research Organisations

In addition to reflecting the general characteristics of successful ecotourism partnerships (above), under optimal circumstances training, education and research organisation partners:

1. deliver training and education in the field of ecotourism and nature conservation in partnership with industry; and
2. provide research, monitoring and technical support in partnership with industry, government and communities.

ARTICLE 8: Media and Marketing Organisations

In addition to reflecting the general characteristics of successful ecotourism partnerships (above), under optimal circumstances media and marketing organisation partners:

1. Strive to work with partners to produce accurate and ethical articles and marketing pieces on products and destinations;
2. Inform the public about the risks and benefits of ecotourism development and issues around sustainable tourism; and
3. Inform the community on ecotourism partnerships.

Draft Cairns Charter Partnership Action Plan

The Cairns Charter Partnership Action Plan is a set of recommended activities that promote a practical approach to the development of Ecotourism Partnerships across the globe. The Action Plan aims to guide implementation of outcomes from the Cairns International Ecotourism Conference, and encourage monitoring and reporting on outcomes from the Cairns Charter on Ecotourism Partnerships. Action items and timeframes for implementation must be agreed to by the nominated responsible organization.

Action items that have been endorsed to date are as follows:

Action	Organization responsible	Timeframe (from October 25, 2002)
Finalize the Cairns Charter in conjunction with UNEP, WTO and international partners.	Ecotourism Australia	2 months
Produce a publication featuring Ecotourism Partnership case studies and guidelines	UNEP	18 months
Support the dissemination of case studies/demonstration projects or guidelines	Rainforest Alliance	18 months
Develop a project that exhibits the principles of the <i>Cairns Charter</i> and links them to specific conservation outcomes	UNEP UNESCO Conservation International	18 months
Coordinate and facilitate review and revision of the <i>Cairns Charter</i> long-term	Ecotourism Australia	Ongoing – in conjunction with Ecotourism Australia's Annual conference

Possible further initiatives:

- Develop a series of best practice case studies specifically on indigenous communities involved in ecotourism partnerships
- Organise local workshops and training on establishing partnerships;
- International mentoring/buddy system between ecotourism partnership projects;
- Inclusion of partnership category in tourism/environment awards schemes;
- Establishment of a grant scheme (funded through philanthropic organizations) to enable partnerships to form from the basis of equal resource footing (eg legal, economic, community capacity building inputs);
- Establish a mechanism for partnering ecotourism with mass tourism industry to improve the broader industries level of sustainability

Note: to be included in the endorsed Action Plan, these projects require commitment to implementation from an organization.

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