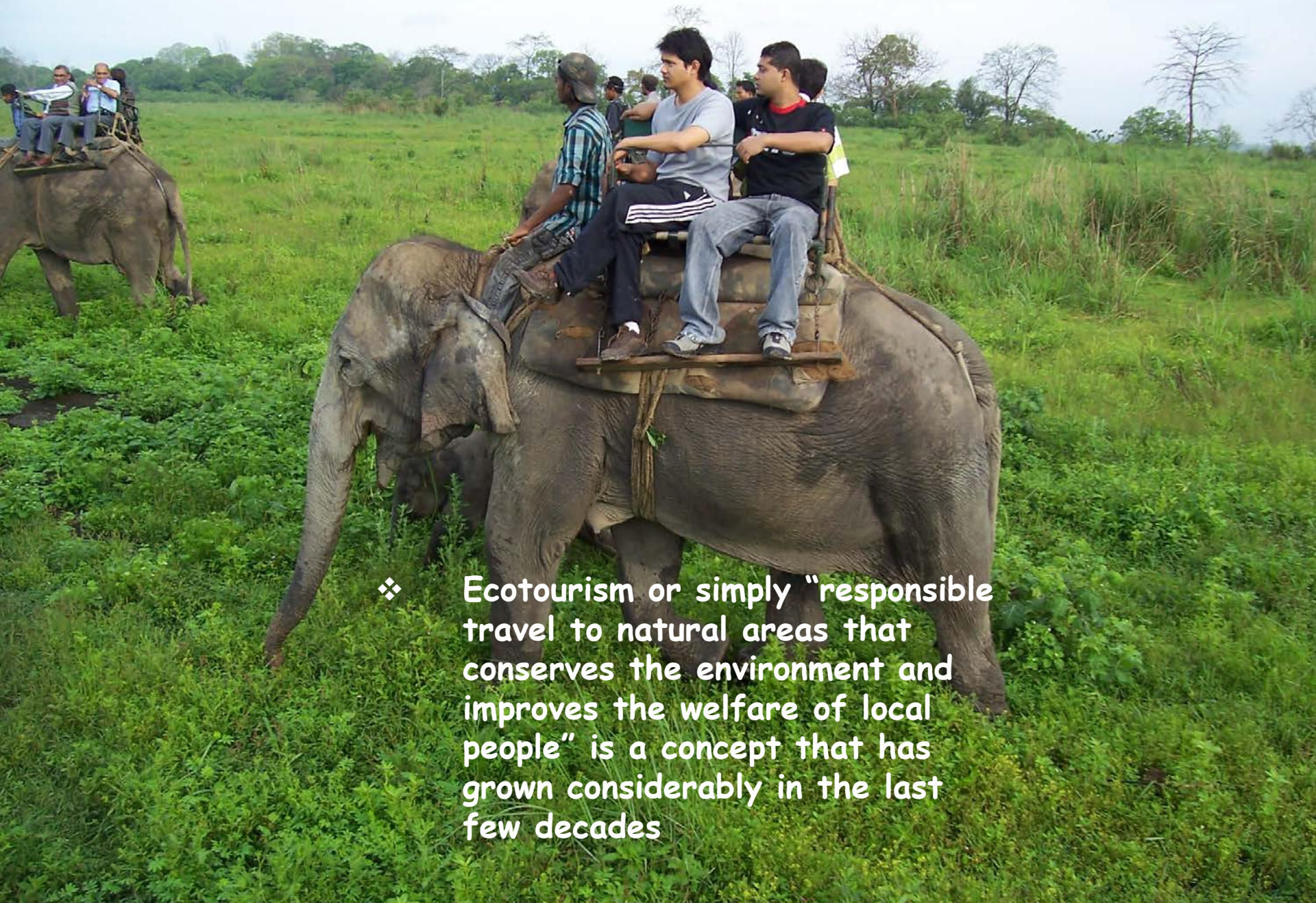


A photograph of a vast field of low-growing purple flowers, possibly Salvia leucoloma, interspersed with clumps of tall, green grass. The field stretches towards the horizon under a clear sky.

Setting Standards for Ecotourism

Seema Bhatt



- ❖ Ecotourism or simply “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people” is a concept that has grown considerably in the last few decades

Tourism is a double-edged sword.

It could:

- bring benefits to the country, the state, and local communities
- be an incentive for the conservation of biological diversity
- do inordinate harm to people and the environment

- ❖ How then does one ensure that tourism is responsible?
- ❖ Setting standards for a concept like ecotourism is extremely important
- ❖ Call it certification or something else



- ❖ Simply defined, “certification is a procedure that assesses audits and gives written assurances that a facility, product, process or service meets specific standards”
- ❖ These standards are set against management, social, cultural and environmental criteria



Conroy (2007) states that certification schemes have several characteristics in common:

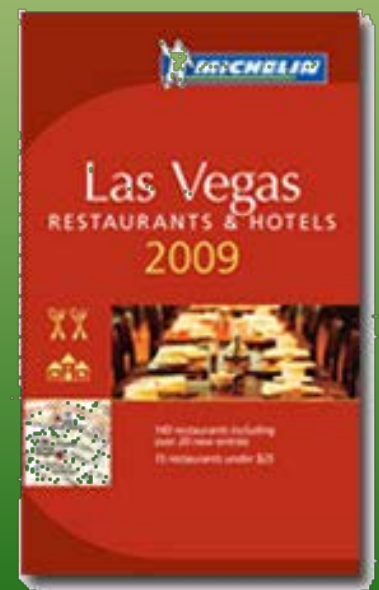
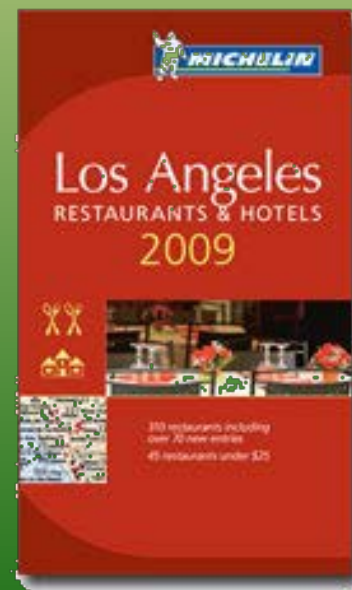
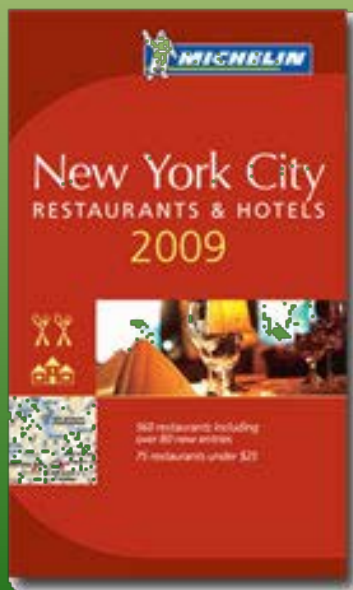
- A set of standards that are needed to get certification
- A process involved in confirming that a product, service, or person has achieved those standards
- The verification is portrayed by a logo, certification mark or seal
- A system to monitor or audit to ensure that the certification mark is being used appropriately is in place. This system would also ensure that these standards are continued to be met.

Certification could:

- Help raise the international standard for ecotourism in the country
- Lend credibility to tour operators
- Ensure that ecological impacts from tourism are monitored in ecologically fragile areas
- Bring credibility to local community-based tourism initiatives
- Help tourists make informed choices

History

- Travel industry certification for accommodation is not new. Michelin guidebooks being the oldest covering France and other parts of Europe.



- ❖ Biggest impetus for ecotourism came as a result of the 'Earth Summit' in 1992
- ❖ The ISO 14001 was released in 1996 and is now a generic standard for environmental management systems

May not be appropriate to certify sustainable tourism practices since it does not take into account social and cultural factors and is also expensive

❖ Two significant ones being used across the globe, including India, are the ECOTEL and GREEN GLOBE programs.



THE HALLMARK OF ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE HOTELS®

- ❖ **Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST) in Costa Rica in the mid to late 1990s: one of the first in-country programmes**
- ❖ **The Blue Flag for beaches and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF's) PAN Parks program for certifying tourism specifically around protected areas**
- ❖ **Globally, the Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council (STSC) will use the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria as the basis for assessing and certifying individual certification programmes around the world**

❖ Is it possible for India to have a 'home-grown' certification scheme?



Certification Initiatives in India

- *Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve: A People's Ecotourism Initiative*
- *Travel Operators for Tigers (TOFT)*
- *Green Palm Certification of Boats by Kerala, State Tourism Department*
- *Corporate Initiatives towards Setting Standards and Creating Certification Programmes*

The ITC Welcomgroup

The Ecotel Hotel

The Global Sustainable Criteria and Indicators

The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) are the result of collaboration of over 30 varied organizations that came together in an attempt to come up with a minimum level of standards of sustainable tourism. 37 criteria are organized under four main themes:

- Effective sustainability planning
- Maximizing social and economic benefits for the local community
- Enhancing cultural heritage
- Reducing negative impacts to the environment

Although these criteria were developed to be used primarily by the accommodation and tour operation sectors they could be equally applied across the industry

Green Certification Scheme for Ecotourism in Community-based Homestays in Ladakh

A. Demonstrate effective sustainable management

A.1. All personnel receive periodic training regarding their role in the management of environmental, sociocultural, health, and safety practices and hospitality in general

- ***Potential Indicators***

- Calendar of training programmes and documentation of the same
- Nature of training programmes
- Exposure Tours if any
- Evaluation of trainees
- Budget of training programmes
- List of training institutions/individuals

- ***Data Sources***

- Records
- Training reports
- Training material
- Interviews with homestay owners

A.2. Customer satisfaction is measured and corrective action taken where appropriate

• *Potential Indicators*

- Customer satisfaction evaluation form
- Record of corrective action taken
- Number/type of complaints received
- % of complaints resolved
- % of returning guests

• *Data Sources*

- Analysis of customer analysis form
- Visitor Book
- Direct feedback/comments received from tourists

A.3. Design of homestay follows traditional architecture

- ***Potential Indicators***

- The homestay building structure

- ***Data Sources***

- Comparison with other traditional structures around

A.4. Information about and interpretation of the natural surroundings, local culture, and cultural heritage is made available to customers and is accurate.

- ***Potential Indicators***

- Interpretation material exists
- Checking of its accuracy
- Information is accessible to tourists

- ***Data Sources***

- Interpretation material

A 5. Code of Conduct for tourists explaining appropriate behavior while visiting natural areas, living cultures, and cultural heritage sites and behavior while staying in the homestay is available in every room

- ***Potential Indicators***

- Code of Conduct exists
- Code of Conduct is appropriate
- Reports of violation of Code of Conduct
- Code of Conduct is accessible to all tourists

- ***Data Sources***

- Code of Conduct
- Records of it being followed and/or violated

A 6. Adequate standards of cleanliness are maintained in each room

- ***Potential Indicators***

- Frequency of cleaning of the room
- Frequency of washing and replacing sheets and towels

- ***Data Sources***

- Record of cleaning of room, sheets etc.

B. Maximize social and economic benefits to the local community and minimize negative impacts

B.1 Homestays are run only by local people.

- ***Potential Indicators***

- Record of all homestay owners and their residency

- ***Data Sources***

- Records/List of homestay owners with residency

B.2. A fixed price for the stay is determined and ensured that it is equitable across the board.

- ***Potential Indicators***

- Income earned over past years and break up of same
- Meeting records to indicate community decision of equitable distribution of income earned from homestays

- ***Data Sources***

- Balance Sheets
- Records maintained by each homestay
- Minutes of community meetings
- Discussion with community

B₃. A system is established to ensure that each homestay gets a chance to host tourists equally

- ***Potential Indicators***

- Oral or written indication of such a system

- ***Data Sources***

- Discussion with homestay owners
- Relevant Documentation

C. Maximize benefits to cultural heritage and minimize negative impacts

C.1. Historical and archeological artifacts are not sold, traded, or displayed illegally

- ***Potential Indicators***

- Oral or written indication of such violations

- ***Data Sources***

- Discussion with community
- Relevant information in the print or electronic media

D. Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts

D.1. Conserving resources

D.1.1. Energy consumption should be measured, sources indicated, and measures to decrease overall consumption should be adopted, while encouraging the use of renewable energy.

- ***Potential Indicators***

- Sources of existing energy
- % from renewable sources

- ***Data Sources***

- Discussion with homestay owners and local governing bodies

D.1.2. Water consumption should be measured, sources indicated, and measures to decrease overall consumption should be adopted

- *Potential Indicators*

- Sources of water
- Approximate consumption

- *Data Sources*

- Discussion with homestay owners

D.2. Reducing pollution

D.2.1. A solid waste management plan is implemented, with quantitative goals to minimize waste that is not reused or recycled. There must be a plan particularly for the disposal of plastic water bottles or alternately to provide safe drinking water to tourists.

- ***Potential Indicators***

- Total waste generated by type and disposal method
- Percentage of total waste reused and/or recycled
- Disposal of plastic mineral water bottles
- Alternate arrangement to provide safe drinking water to tourists eg presence of water filters

- ***Data Sources***

- Regular waste audits
- Discussion with homestay owners

- **D.3. Conserving biodiversity, ecosystems, and landscapes**

 - **D.3.1. No wildlife species is harvested.**

- ***Potential Indicators***

 - Oral or written documentation of the same

- ***Data Sources***

 - Discussion with local community
 - Media reports

D.3.2. The enterprise uses native species for landscaping and restoration, and takes measures to avoid the introduction of invasive alien species.

- ***Potential Indicators***

- Record of presence/absence of invasive alien species

- ***Data Sources***

- Inventories
- Field Observations

D.3.3. The enterprise contributes to the support of biodiversity conservation, including supporting natural protected areas and areas of high biodiversity value

- ***Potential Indicators***

- Record of conservation initiatives

- ***Data Sources***

- Discussion with homestay owners
- Written documentation if any

D.3.4. Interactions with wildlife must not produce adverse effects on the viability of populations in the wild; and any disturbance of natural ecosystems is minimized

- *Potential Indicators*

- Record of wildlife damage/disturbance

- *Data Sources*

- Discussion with homestay owners
 - Written documentation if any

In August 2014 The Ministry of Tourism, GoI launched the Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India (STCI)

These criteria are for:

- Tour Operators**
- Beaches, Backwaters, Lakes and Rivers**



The challenge lies in the implementation.....