

Section 1 Introduction to Sustainable Tourism

What is 'Sustainable Tourism'?

In defining Sustainable Tourism it is useful to start with an understanding of sustainable development. A term popularised following the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, sustainable development is broadly defined as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. It naturally follows that Sustainable Tourism applies the same rule but specifically to areas impacted by tourism development.

Some Definitions of Sustainable Tourism:

Sustainable tourism: Tourism that is economically, socioculturally and environmentally sustainable. With sustainable tourism, sociocultural and environmental impacts are neither permanent nor irreversible.

Beech & Chadwick, Coventry University.

Sustainable tourism in its purest sense, is an industry which attempts to make a low impact on the environment and local culture, while helping to generate income, employment, and the conservation of local ecosystems. It is responsible tourism which is both ecologically and culturally sensitive.

Global Development Research Centre, Japan.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM, like a doctor's code of ethics, means "First, do no harm." It is basic to good destination stewardship.

Sustainable tourism does not abuse its product—the destination. It seeks to avoid the "loved to death" syndrome. Businesses and other stakeholders anticipate development pressures and apply limits and management techniques that sustain natural habitats, heritage sites, scenic appeal, and local culture.

It conserves resources. Environmentally aware travellers favor businesses that minimize pollution, waste, energy consumption, water usage, landscaping chemicals, and unnecessary nighttime lighting.

It respects local culture and tradition. Foreign visitors learn about and observe local etiquette, including using at least a few courtesy words in the local language. Residents learn how to deal with foreign expectations that may differ from their own.

It aims for quality, not quantity. Communities measure tourism success not by sheer numbers of visitors, but by length of stay, distribution of money spent, and quality of experience.

National Geographic Sustainable Destinations Resource Centre
<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable>

Why is a Sustainable Approach to Tourism Development important in Mourne?

Tourism in sensitive rural areas like Mourne provides both opportunities and challenges to the tourism industry. It is well known that the aesthetic beauty of the Mourne landscape and the opportunities to get involved in outdoor activities is a major attraction for visitors to the region. It could be said that much of the tourism industry in Mourne depends on the natural environment. At the same time the coastline, forests, mountains, lakes and rivers of Mourne contain habitats and wildlife species of international importance. The threat of pressure on these valuable features from visitors and inappropriate development must be carefully managed to ensure that the integrity of the communities, wildlife and landscapes of Mourne is maintained for perpetuity so that future generations can enjoy and benefit from the region as we do today.

Tourism developed in the right way in the Mournes will not only maintain the beauty of the landscape and the integrity of wildlife and habitats, but will also promote sustainable economic development in the communities of Mourne.

Tourism developed in inappropriate ways will undermine the very appeal which the region holds to the visitor and will limit the potential for sustainable economic growth in Mourne.

The Mourne and Slieve Croob Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

The Mournes were designated as an AONB in 1966. Subsequently in 1986 the area was extended to include Slieve Croob. The area is 57,012 hectares in size and is one of 9 AONB's in Northern Ireland. A map of the area is shown on the next page.

The designation as an AONB recognises that the Mournes and Slieve Croob are an area of landscape of distinctive character and of special scenic value. This is designed to protect and enhance the qualities of the area and to promote its enjoyment by the public.

As well as designation as an AONB the Mourne area has a range of other conservation designations assigned to specific sites and areas. These include ASSI's, SPA's, SAC's, ESA's, NNR's and a RAMSAR site. These sites and what their designation means are outlined below.

Conservation Designations within the Mourne AONB

Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI)

Eastern Mourne's 7507.5 ha, designated 1995
Rostrevor wood 16.64 ha, designated 1998
Murlough 1452.8 ha, designated 1995
Carlingford Lough 1105 ha, designated 1996
Black Lough 44.55 ha, designated 1998
Lackan Bog 88 ha, designated 1993
Greenan Lough 18.24 ha, designated 1998
Ballybannan 1.47 ha, designated 1997
Castlewellan Lake 47ha designated 2003

National Nature Reserves (NNR)

Murlough 282 ha, designated 1977
Rostrevor Oakwood 16.64 ha, designated 1977

Special Protection Areas (SPA)

Carlingford Lough, designated 1998

Ramsar Site

Carlingford Lough, designated 1998

Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Rostrevor Wood, 16.64 ha
Eastern Mournes, 7507.5 ha
Murlough, 1452.8 ha

National Nature Reserves (NNR)

A nature reserve is defined as an area of importance for flora, fauna or features of geological or other special interest, which are reserved and managed for conservation and to provide special opportunities for study or research. Environment and Heritage Service declares nature reserves under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. To date, 47 nature reserves have been declared in Northern Ireland.

Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI)

Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) are areas of land that have been identified by scientific survey as being of the highest degree of conservation value. They have a well-defined boundary and by and large remain in private ownership. The underlying philosophy is to achieve conservation by co-operation and in this, the part played by landowners is fully recognised and appreciated.

Special Protection Areas (SPA)

Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are designated under the European Commission Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (The Birds Directive). All European Community member States are required to identify internationally important areas for breeding, over-wintering and migrating birds and designate them as Special Protection Areas (SPAs). Generally in the UK the practice is to protect these areas with UK designation prior to classification as an SPA.

Ramsar Site

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat was adopted at a meeting of countries concerned with wetland and waterfowl conservation which was held at Ramsar, Iran in 1971. The objectives are to stem the progressive encroachment on and loss of wetlands, both now and in the future and to encourage the wise use of wetlands.

Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

The European Commission Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora (The Habitats Directive) requires member states to designate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) to protect some of the most seriously threatened habitats and species across Europe.

For information on conservation designations you can refer to the Natural Heritage section of the Environment and Heritage Service Website. <http://www.ehsni.gov.uk>

Information for this section was largely drawn from the EHS website and Naturenet (www.naturenet.net)

The World Charter for Sustainable Tourism

Following the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and the growing realisation of the importance of a sustainable approach to tourism development a number of international organisations began efforts to develop principles to guide the development of appropriate tourism. In 1995 the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the European Union (EU) and the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) organised a world conference on sustainable tourism in Lanzarote, Canary Islands.

While previous declarations had been made in Berlin and the Hague relating to the appropriate development of tourism, the Lanzarote conference produced the first agreement on how sustainable tourism should be developed. 'The Charter for Sustainable Tourism' defined 18 Principles which defined how tourism should be developed. This charter has been the basis for much subsequent work on how tourism should be developed.

Charter Text is found at <http://www.world-tourism.org/sustainable/doc/Lanz-en.pdf>

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas

The origins of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas are in a project started by the Euoparc Federation¹ in 1991. This project resulted in a report titled '*Loving Them to Death*' which highlighted the threat that inappropriate tourism development poses to the integrity of protected areas.

The charter was developed over a period of more than 5 years by representatives of European protected areas, the tourism industry and their partners and follows the 18 principles of the World Charter for Sustainable Tourism (see above) as well as being supported by the Tourism and Protected Areas and Tourism Task Force of the World Conservation Union (the IUCN – see www.iucn.org).

The Charter consists of **3 Sections:**

Section I relating to Protected Area Management Authorities,

Section II relating to ***Tourism Businesses within Protected Areas***

Section III relating to Tour Operators taking people to Protected Areas

In August 2003 the Mourne AONB was awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism, being the first protected area in the British Isles to achieve this recognition. The Mourne AONB is now known as a 'Charter Park' which shows its commitment to the 12 principles of Section 1 of the Charter (See overleaf). In late 2005 Section II of the Charter will open, allowing Charter Parks to acknowledge those businesses in their area who have fully adopted a sustainable approach to tourism, by awarding them the Charter.

SECTION 3 OF THIS MANUAL DESCRIBES IN MORE DETAIL WHAT YOU AS A BUSINESS WILL NEED TO DO TO QUALIFY FOR THE EUROPEAN CHARTER.

The Charter website is www.european-charter.org

¹ The Euoparc Federation is the Umbrella Body for Protected Areas across Europe (see inside front cover).

12 Principles for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas has identified 12 key principles defining 'Sustainable Tourism'. The Mourne Heritage Trust, as the management body for the Mourne AONB made a commitment to these principles as part of the process of becoming a Charter Park. In the future, businesses who are applying for recognition under Part II of the Charter will also make a commitment to abide by these same 12 principles:

- 1. Increasing awareness of, and support for, Europe's protected areas as a fundamental part of our heritage, that should be preserved for and enjoyed by, current and future generations.**
- 2. Improving the sustainable development and management of tourism in protected areas, which takes account of the needs of the environment, local residents, local businesses and visitors.**
- 3. Involving all those implicated by tourism in and around the protected area in its development and management.**
- 4. Preparing and implementing a sustainable tourism strategy and action plan for the protected area.**
- 5. Protecting and enhancing the area's natural and cultural heritage, for and through tourism, and to protect it from excessive tourism development.**
- 6. Providing all visitors with a high quality experience in all aspects of their visit.**
- 7. Communicating effectively to visitors about the special qualities of the area.**
- 8. Encouraging specific tourism products which enable discovery and understanding of the area.**
- 9. Increasing knowledge of the protected area and sustainability issues amongst all those involved in tourism.**
- 10. Ensuring that tourism supports and does not reduce the quality of life of local residents.**
- 11. Increasing benefits from tourism to the local economy.**
- 12. Monitoring and influencing visitor flows to reduce negative impacts.**

Why get involved in Sustainable Tourism?

As tourism in the Mournes depends on maintaining the magnificent landscape and conserving the precious habitats and wildlife, it is in all our interests to adopt a sustainable approach to tourism. As you will see throughout this manual, 'Sustainable Practices' need not cost you much and will actually bring many benefits to your business both by saving you money on energy and water as well as increasing the quality and profitability of your business.

Increasingly tourists are willing to pay a little extra for the knowledge that they are using an environmentally friendly business and many visitors will choose their destination based on its proven record of sustainability (see *Section 2 of this manual*).

How will adopting a sustainable approach to tourism benefit your business?

- By saving you money through improved business management and by using local products and services.
- Raising your profile.
- Giving you a Green/Caring Image with a new potential for marketing.
- Improving the quality of your visitor's experience.
- Improving your relationship with the local community.
- Ensuring the long term future of your business.

Some strategies to lighten the load

- Establishing a team of your staff to contribute to decision making and implementing the actions identified.
- Involving your visitors in putting ideas into action.
- Working with the Mourne Heritage Trust on joint projects.
- Working with other tourism businesses in Mourne to share the load.

Further Information on Sustainable Tourism

Global Development Research Centre, Japan

www.gdrc.org/uem/eco-tour/eco-tour.html

European Charter for Sustainable Tourism

www.european-charter.org

World Tourism Organisation:

www.world-tourism.org/frameset/frame_sustainable.html

United Nations Environment Programme

www.uneptie.org/pc/tourism

The Green Audit Kit- A Practical Guide to Improving your Energy, Waste, Purchasing and Marketing Performance

www.greenauditkit.org