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## **Tourism and related services — Sustainable tourism — Principles, vocabulary and model**

*Tourisme et services connexes — Tourisme durable — Principes,  
vocabulaire et modèle*



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## Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular, the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see [www.iso.org/directives](http://www.iso.org/directives)).

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights. Details of any patent rights identified during the development of the document will be in the Introduction and/or on the ISO list of patent declarations received (see [www.iso.org/patents](http://www.iso.org/patents)).

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For an explanation of the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), see [www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html](http://www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html).

This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 228, *Tourism and related services*.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at [www.iso.org/members.html](http://www.iso.org/members.html).

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## Introduction

In the past 10 years sustainability has become a subject of great importance for the tourism sector. Numerous factors have contributed to the fast growth of sustainability as a need. Accommodation establishments, tour operators, restaurants, tourist attractions and others have applied strategies, communications processes, standards and certifications schemes. The global interest in environmental and sociocultural themes has increased the desire of tourists to experience more sustainable services and products.

Sustainability in tourism is almost always addressed from the perspective of environmental protection, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reduction and care in the consumption of energy and water. Sometimes there is also a concern with social issues, involving local communities or economic aspects, which basically involves the viability of businesses.

However, despite this increasing interest, today most organizations understand sustainability in different ways. Different approaches have been adopted by organizations and digital platforms help to spread all types of information about sustainable tourism.

Today it is possible to identify more than a hundred references – private, public, international, regional and national – that naturally present many different concepts and understanding about sustainable tourism.

Additionally, both ISO 21401 and ISO 20611 contain concepts about sustainable tourism.

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly approved the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and with it the Sustainable Development Goals, a framework comprising 17 goals. Tourism is an economic powerhouse and can play a significant role in delivering sustainable solutions for people, the planet, prosperity and peace.

Therefore, it is acknowledged that there are a lot of challenges for sustainable development but that one of them is critical: the recognition of the minimal principles for sustainable tourism and a definition of a common understanding.

These principles are the basis for the sustainable development of tourism and should be taken into account as much as possible by interested parties.

Worldwide it is recognized that tourist destinations select development models that can respond to either supply or demand. Both of them have their attributes, and destinations choose them according to their interests, tastes, preferences and strategies.

Some characteristics of the demand model are spontaneous growth, emphasis on natural attractions and a single-minded focus on wealth generation by, in the main, tourism businesses, accompanied by an intensive use of resources (natural and human), large investment, quicker returns on investment and low spillover effect. The destination is normally designed and based on icons to attract visitors.

On the other hand, the supply model is characterized by controlled growth, the emphasis not just on protecting the environment but also making the processes fully sustainable. Businesses are concerned about profitability but also care about improving the quality of life in their communities. In addition, the tourist experience is enhanced by high-quality services throughout the visit, the spillover effect is higher, investment is smaller and there is a slower return on investment. Finally, the destination designs products rather than attractions.

No matter which of the models is been applied, both should seek recognition as the “archetype” of a sustainable destination. In addition, destinations should look for the highest spillover effect so that the local and national economies benefit directly, meaning that a high percentage of tourism expenditure remains in the surrounding communities, with a direct positive impact on improving the quality of life of people and relieving poverty.

Businesses need to demonstrate their commitment not only to the environment but also to sustainability globally. Good practices guide businesses to identify, assess and mitigate any negative impacts to the

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environment, social fabric and local culture, while maintaining a high quality of service and protecting their employees and addressing the needs and expectations of their interested parties. Sustainability is generally incorporated as a transversal axis in all public or private business policies, improving innovation and competitiveness as a key to maintain leadership. Sustainable tourism can be a way of being and living, not a way of doing.

This document is intended to provide a common and sound basis for the process of sustainable development for all interested parties and to increase the expected potential benefits for the tourism sector.