

Virginia Eco-Tourism Certification Training Program
Curriculum Outline

Course Objectives:

Upon completion of the certification training program, the participants will be able to:

- 1) Effectively communicate the different aspects of local eco-systems, their significance and their interrelationships with one another to their customers;
- 2) Plan and execute safe, interesting and sustainable environmental educational excursions;
- 3) Convey the fragility and limitation of seemingly robust environmentally significant destinations as well as the social and economic importance of the natural resources contained in those destinations; and
- 4) Understand and deliver the high level of specialized customer service and educational experience expected by the target market of this industry.

Elements of Certification Required:

Total certification program requirements must include at least 40 hours of instruction distributed as follows:

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1) First Aid/CPR Training (Red Cross certified) | 15 Instructional Hours |
| 2) Customer Service Training | 6-10 Instructional Hours |
| 3) Local Tourism Information Training | 2-5 Instructional Hours |
| 4) Exposure to High End Research Information | 4-8 Instructional Hours |
| 5) Local Eco-Tourism Skills/Knowledge Training | 10-15 Instructional Hours |

Depending upon local resources, the first four items may need to be accomplished outside of the training provider's specific program offerings. It is recommended that, if the training provider offering the Eco-Tourism training portion of the program does not offer options for the first four items, the program should not be certified unless referrals for those items can be provided to any participants interested in achieving the full certification.

Item #1 above (First Aid/CPR) can be accomplished through any approved Red Cross certified training course that results in the award of an official Red Cross certificate/card. Participants who hold a valid Red Cross First Aid/CPR card will be considered to have met this requirement. Items #2 and #3 above are at the discretion of the training provider as long as some sort of quality verification procedure is in place, and provided that the tourism information conveyed in #3 is focused on the same local geographic area as the eco-tourism information in item #5 above.

Item #4 above is required primarily to expose participants to the fact that high level researched information about sensitive local eco-systems is constantly being updated, and participants should be encouraged to seek out local information sources for up-to-date research in order to remain current in their field. This item can be accomplished through seminars or lectures or even on-line research provided that the information conveyed in this portion of the training is from current graduate level research on local eco-systems. Resources for free or very low cost

seminars that can be included as part of the training program can be found in all parts of the Commonwealth of Virginia provided by any number of graduate level institutions. It is highly recommended that this portion of the training be coordinated by the training provider that provides the local eco-tourism training. This will ensure that participants are exposed to appropriate material and will also allow for more interesting and stimulating participant discussion.

The final item (#5 above) must follow the curriculum outline provided in this document with special care taken to ensure that the information presented is customized to reflect local eco-systems and tourism information. Development of this portion of the localized curriculum should be done by a qualified educational institution with serious connections to the local community. It is highly recommended that the curriculum be developed under the guidance of a local advisory committee that includes representatives from the environmental, educational and business communities.

Pilot Program on Virginia's Eastern Shore:

As an example, this section of the curriculum outline will explain how Eastern Shore Community College meets the requirements of the entire certification program. Some degree of flexibility must be allowed at each local training provider institution.

First Aid/CPR: ESCC offers this class as a one credit hour class in its curriculum. Whenever practical and desired, this class will be offered as a closed class on a special schedule to participants in the eco-tourism program who may need to complete this portion of the program. However, any participant can take the regular ESCC class whenever they wish. Also, any participant who is currently certified can simply present their card to have this requirement verified.

Customer Service: ESCC offers two three-hour classes as part of its existing, but separate customer service certification program that was designed in cooperation with local Chambers of Commerce and the local Tourism Commission. ESCC will be happy to share this curriculum with any interested party who wishes to incorporate this into their eco-tourism program.

Tourism: ESCC offers a third three-hour class in local tourism information as part of the aforementioned customer service certification program. Together, these three classes meet the requirements for a front-line customer service certification that is offered separately from the eco-tourism program. Eco-tourism participants who wish to complete the full eco-tourism certification program at ESCC must complete the customer service certification program either before or after the eco-tourism training.

NOTE: *ESCC is pleased to share our customer service curriculum (mentioned in the two items directly above) with parties who may be interested in establishing Eco-Tourism Certification programs as may be necessary and appropriate. However, any local qualified educational provider's program can be incorporated into the local program as necessary and appropriate,*

provided that quality assurance processes are in place and that minimum instructional hours are maintained as required above.

Research Component: Both the College of William and Mary and the University of Virginia maintain research stations on the Eastern Shore. These facilities offer free monthly workshops to the public. Each workshop lasts approximately 1.5 hours. ESCC works with these institutions as partners and schedules one workshop from each institution into each Eco-Tourism class offering. Participants are required to attend each of the two workshops (along with other members of the general public) regardless of the timing of the workshop as compared to the regular meeting schedule of the ESCC classes. Because these programs are offered monthly, it is always easy to schedule the required “external” lectures during the timeframe of the class offering. After each workshop, the ESCC facilitator, and, whenever possible, the research presenter facilitate a discussion about the information learned in the workshop encouraging connections to and applicability for the eco-tourism business. During the discussions, the ESCC facilitator is careful to point out the purpose for this exercise: to encourage participants to seek out up-to-date high end research in order to remain current in their field.

Eco-Tourism: See the specific curriculum outline that follows this section as well as the Instructor Notes, sample Handout Packet and the Instructor Power-Point presentation for information on the materials and information included in ESCC’s class offering. All of these items are included as the other deliverables to the Coastal Zone Management program.

Summary of Pilot: Because the “Research” component is scheduled during the Eco-Tourism class offering component, ESCC participants automatically accomplish two of the five required elements of the certification at one time. Participants are then encouraged to register for the Customer Service Certification program, which accomplishes two more required elements (“customer service” training and “local tourism” training). Finally, participants who do not already hold a valid Red Cross First Aid/CPR certification card are encouraged to register for ESCC’s one credit hour class to achieve that certification. This can happen in any given semester. Whenever practical and desired, a special offering of the First Aid/CPR class is made available to Eco-Tourism participants on a schedule that is convenient for as many participants as possible. In this way, all five required elements of the Eco-Tourism Certification program are offered. Still, it is up to the participants to work through each requirement either before or after completing the actual “Eco-Tourism” training component.

Recommendations: In order to make Eco-Tourism Certification widely available throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia, and in order to preserve quality through various local offerings and local customizations of the classes, ESCC recommends that the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, through its Coastal Zone Management program maintain a centralized system of quality assurance to certify programs of quality before allowing local programs to offer individual certification classes. There may also be some value in partnering with the Virginia Tourism Corporation to share this quality assurance responsibility. Quality assurance should also include some control over the design and use of marketing collaterals such that certification logos maintain a consistent identity across the Commonwealth. At this point in time, ESCC is offering its own local Certification program, but ESCC is willing to submit to a Commonwealth-wide quality assurance process once such a process can be established. ESCC

believes that outside quality assurance review will make the programs offered throughout the Commonwealth more valuable and credible with the public. Implementing such a program with strict quality control requirements would help to accomplish the conservation goals of the Department of Environmental Quality and also be a valuable marketing tool for the Virginia Tourism Commission and for the businesses and entrepreneurs who achieve the certification.

Eco-Tourism Component – Curriculum Guide:

This guide contains the required elements of the 10-15 hour Eco-Tourism training component, but these requirements must be developed with local needs in mind, preferably under the guidance of a qualified local advisory committee. See ESCC “Instructor Notes” and other materials for more details and suggestions.

- I. Introduction to Sustainable Eco-Tourism
 - a. Ecotourism definition (locally adapted; must be appropriately cited)
 - b. Sustainability
 - i. ecological
 - ii. cultural
 - iii. financial
- II. Leave No Trace
- III. Local Eco-Systems (all items must have LOCAL context)
 - a. Flora
 - b. Fauna
 - c. Topography
 - d. Hydrology
 - e. Geology
- IV. History of Major Local Eco-Tourism Sites
 - a. Natural development and definitions
 - b. Impact on culture and economy (and vice-versa)
 - c. Land management issues, laws, policies
 - i. local
 - ii. state
 - iii. federal
 - d. Involvement/engagement with applicable agencies
 - i. Advocacy suggestions
 - ii. Local support resources
 - e. Discussion about interrelationships between a-d above
- V. Essential Guide Skills
 - a. Teaching skills for recreational learning about eco-systems
 - b. Leadership/group management
 - c. Interpretation
 - d. Public speaking

- VI. Facilitated Activity to Practice New Skills/Evaluate Class
 - a. Applied discussion
 - b. Exercise to demonstrate “connectedness” (ex: “Six Degrees/Separation)

- VII. Local Issues Guide Skills
 - a. Local geography and reference material usage
 - b. Local weather and environmental factors
 - c. Trip planning
 - d. Customer needs
 - i. safety
 - ii. wants / needs
 - iii. keeping promises / dealing with adverse conditions
 - iv. ethical reasons to break promises / handling these situations fairly

- VIII. Customer Service Issues in the Eco-Tourism Industry
 - a. Marketing
 - b. Reservation management
 - c. Communication with customers
 - d. Follow-through
 - e. Evaluation

- IX. Class Presentations

- X. Participant Evaluation of Competencies (Final Exam)