



## THE ECO-RATING CERTIFICATION GUIDE

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## **1. BACKGROUND**

The Eco-rating Certification Scheme is a sustainable tourism certification program that aims to promote responsible tourism in Kenya. The program was launched in 2002 by Ecotourism Kenya in cooperation with tourism stakeholders in Kenya with a prime focus of recognizing best practices in business practices, conservation, community engagement and cultural performance by tourism accommodation facilities. The accommodation facilities that apply and meet the criteria set are awarded Bronze, Silver or Gold certification based on their performance.

This criterion has been aligned to the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) formed under the umbrella of the United Nations (UN) but is adapted to suit Kenya's local context. Under the Eco-rating Certification Scheme, a systematic procedure is followed. This seeks to assess a tourism accommodation facility performance in promoting sustainable business practices, conservation, community engagement and enhancing cultural performance. Through the Eco-rating certification scheme, Ecotourism Kenya aims to promote these best practices in accommodation facilities within the tourism industry by:

- Increasing awareness of environmentally and socially sound business practices (educational/ change of attitude towards environmental governance and social responsibility).
- Enhancing the socio-economic development of the local communities where these facilities are located (developmental).
- Increasing contribution of tourism to community development (developmental).
- Enhancing contribution of tourism practices to conservation of the natural resources upon which tourism is dependent (conservation).
- Improving destination image, hence attracting more potential tourists (marketing advantage).

### **1.1 Participate in Eco-rating Certification**

The Eco-rating Certification Scheme is designed for all tourist accommodation facilities that want to implement best practices to enhance sustainable tourism practices in their business. These facilities include:

- Hotels
- Lodges
- Camps
- Bush homes /homestays
- Bandas

## **1.2 Best practices (values) of Eco-rating Certification**

This refers to excellent or superior practices in environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of a facility's operation. They include:

- Protecting, conserving and investing in the environment
- Proper waste management (Reducing, reuse and recycling waste)
- Preventing pollution
- Responsible use of resources such as land, water, energy, culture etc.
- Investment in people (employees and local population)
- Local people empowerment programs
- Fair (favorable) workplace conditions and policies
- Fair business practices
- Support for local economy trade linkages with local communities/economy
- Legal compliance to relevant laws
- Responsible tourism and environmental education to staff and visitors

## **1.3 Benefits of Eco-rating Certification**

- Publicity in the publications, website and events of Ecotourism Kenya and her partners
- Technical advice (feedback) from the evaluation process
- Potential for competitive advantage (from using the Eco-rating label)
- Improved efficiency of resources used and reduced negative environmental impact
- Motivation of staff and management through associated trainings offered to Eco-rated facilities
- A recognized means of identifying genuine responsible tourism products
- Environmental conservation and preservation of communities and culture
- Improved local community relations
- Higher company profile, respect and credibility
- Business sustainability (as more resources are used responsibly)
- Mechanism to support local environmental conservation values
- Pre-audit training for prospective Eco-rating certification applicants

## **2. Eco-rating Certification Criteria**

The eco-rating certification criteria is mainly hinged on sustainable business practices, conservation, community engagement and cultural performance. The criteria lays emphasis on sustainable use of natural resources, protection of the environment, community empowerment, promotion and preservation of local culture(s), compliance with legal requirements and support to local economies.

### **2.1 Levels of certification**

There are three progressive eco-rating levels of certification, namely: Bronze, Silver and Gold.

#### **Level 1: Bronze Eco-rating Certification**

Bronze eco-rating certification is the entry level, awarded to facilities that demonstrate awareness of and commitment to sustainable business practices, conservation, community engagement and enhancement of cultural performance. In order to qualify for Bronze Eco-rating Certification a facility must:

- Meet all necessary legal requirements including compliance with the Environmental Management and Coordination Act, 1999.
- Scored at least 40% in the Eco-rating Questionnaire
- Have a demonstrable level of awareness of and commitment to conserving the environment, managing waste preventing pollution, using resources (water, energy etc.) responsibly and investing in local economies
- Have no outstanding formal complaint against them lodged by a recognized entity and related to any of the Eco-rating certification criteria

#### **Level 2: Silver Eco-rating Certification**

Silver eco-rating certification is an intermediary level that is awarded to facilities that demonstrates a move towards achieving excellence in sustainable business practices, conservation, community engagement and enhancement of cultural performance. In order to qualify for Silver Eco-rating Certification a facility must:

- Meet all the Bronze Certification requirements
- Scored at least 60% of the points in the Eco-rating Questionnaire
- Have clearly outlined policies and strategies for conserving the environment, managing wastes, preventing pollution, using resources (water, energy etc) responsibly, educating visitors, and investing in local communities & economies
- Demonstrate effective practices for conserving the environment, using resources responsibly and investing in local communities & economies

#### **Level 3: Gold Eco-rating Certification**

Gold eco-rating is the highest level of certification and is awarded to a facility that has achieved superior and replicable levels of excellence sustainable business practices, conservation, community engagement and enhancement of cultural performance. In order to qualify for Gold Eco-rating Certification a facility must:

- Meet all the Silver eco-rating certification requirements and should have attained Silver eco-rating certification for at least **six (6) months**
- Scored at least 80% of the points in the Eco-rating Questionnaire
- Demonstrate success in abiding by the laid-down policies for conserving the environment, managing wastes, preventing pollution, using resources (water, energy etc) responsibly, educating visitors, and investing in local communities & economies
- Demonstrate innovative and outstanding levels of excellence/ best practices in environmental conservation, responsible resource use and investment in local communities & economies

## 2.2 Summary of Evaluation Criteria

	Considered Parameter	Bronze	Silver	Gold
1	<b>Environmental Policies</b>	<p>Demonstrate awareness of environmental issues within their setting</p> <p>Show demonstrable evidence of addressing resource (water and energy) use issues</p> <p>Have a vision of conserving the environment within the facility</p>	<p>Show a clear progress in responding to environmental issues by improved management of energy water</p> <p>Evidence of drafted EMS and EMP including its intention</p>	<p>Responsively and conclusively addressing water, energy and waste management within the setting</p> <p>EMS and current EMP detailing plan of action, responsible persons and timeline available and progress is verifiable and positive</p>
2	<b>Environmental Conservation</b>	<p>Demonstrate effort in mitigating negative effects and protecting the natural environment</p> <p>Demonstrate positive partnership (s) and past or present concern with protecting the natural environment</p> <p>Environmental consideration in building renovation processes (materials used)</p> <p>The facility should have an EMS</p>	<p>There should be evidence of direct involvement to reduce negative impacts and protection of natural environment</p> <p>The facility should demonstrate involvement with relevant conservation facility in protection of the natural environment</p> <p>The facility design should demonstrate satisfactory consideration in the design and subsequent renovation</p> <p>EMS and EMP should adequately address conservation concerns surrounding the facility</p>	<p>Effective action in mitigating negative effects and protecting natural the environment</p> <p>Verifiable relevant and positive partnership(s) with environmental conservation orgs. to protect natural environ.</p> <p>Environmental consideration in facility design (including use of materials) Effort in maintaining pristine environment</p> <p>EMS and EMP incorporating components of environmental conservation</p>

3	<b>Wastewater Management</b>	<p>The facility should demonstrate proper wastewater management</p> <p>Evidence of regular testing of samples in compliance to legislation</p> <p>Disposal of waste water should not compromise the environment or the health of living organisms</p>	<p>The facility should show that wastewater has been adequately managed</p> <p>The facility must in addition demonstrate evidence of compliance with minimum regulatory requirements</p> <p>The EMS and EMP should demonstrate adequately how wastewater will be managed</p>	<p>Evidence of regular testing with parameters and compliance with minimum regulatory requirements</p> <p>Conclusive plan integrated in EMS and EMP.</p>
4	<b>Solid Waste Management</b>	<p>Should demonstrate effort in waste management</p> <p>Waste should be separated at the source</p> <p>Waste disposal should be in line with legislation and law</p>	<p>Waste management techniques should be evidently functional</p> <p>Evidence should show that solid waste management at source is efficient and effective</p> <p>EMS and EMP should conclusively cover solid waste management</p>	<p>Outstanding effort in reducing solid waste production</p> <p>Evidence of precise procedures for solid waste management</p> <p>Showcase innovative methods of waste reduction strategies</p> <p>Conclusive plan of waste management integrated in EMS and EMP</p>
5	<b>Pollution</b>	<p>Demonstrate clear understanding of potential pollutants within their operation and how to handle them</p>	<p>There should be evidence within the EMP to show that the facility is working to reduce pollutants where applicable</p>	<p>Outstanding evidence of abating environmental pollutants (emissions, effluent)</p>
6	<b>Water Policy and Usage</b>	<p>The facility must be in compliance with laws regarding water extraction and use</p> <p>Water extraction should be ethical and not in contradiction to community usage</p> <p>There should be demonstrable evidence of involvement in protection of water catchments or prospective plan</p> <p>Evidence of policies addressing water use should be in place</p>	<p>The facility must show evidence of addressing water consumption through the EMP</p> <p>Water abstraction and consumption must be in tandem with corresponding legislation</p> <p>The facility must show evidence of participation of protection of watershed and water catchment areas</p>	<p>Techniques of wastewater management (application of innovation e.g. flow reducers etc.)</p> <p>Have a conclusive water policy addressing usage and includes benchmarking and elaborated plans to reduce consumption</p> <p>The policies should show responsiveness to local, national and international consumption regulations and strategies</p> <p>Policy should also reflect on protection of source</p>

				and watershed
7	<b>Energy Policy and Usage</b>	The facility must demonstrate effort in reduction of energy consumption	The facility must show clear documentation of energy consumption  The EMP must adequately address the issue of energy consumption reduction	Remarkable reduction of energy consumption comparable to the facility  Careful consideration in choice of energy source (the source cannot be orthogonal to sustainability efforts)  Clear benchmarking with pragmatic approaches to consumption reduction
8	<b>Socio-economic Considerations</b>	The facility must demonstrate sensitivity to the community through evidence of contribution and participation in their well-being	The facility must demonstrate reasonable support of the local community through CSR  Partnership with the community should be objective and targeted  Staff and employment should be considerate of socio-economic state	Competent and sustainable approach of channeling help to the local community (job offers, CSR, etc.)  Evidence of partnership agreements where they exist  Sensible and considerable remuneration of staff
9	<b>Health &amp; Safety</b>	The facility must be in compliance with health and safety regulations concerning the hotel and workers	Absolute compliance with health and safety regulations concerning the hotel and its workers evidenced by documentation	Absolute compliance with health and safety regulations concerning the hotel and its workers evidenced by documentation
10	<b>Documentation and Recording</b>	The facility must provide minimum documentation namely (Environmental Management Plan) EMP, mission statement and vision	There should be verifiable evidence that documentation is in place or is actually on-going	Clear documentation  EMS, EMP, monitoring docs (water, electricity, gas, waste, effluent)
11	<b>Visitor Education</b>	The facility should be able to demonstrate that they educate visitors on environmental issues	The facility should show evidence of implementation of effective communication about their environment	Effective communication and perceived understanding of the facility's ethos by visitors
12	<b>Staff Education and Awareness</b>	There should be evidence that the staff are adequately educated concerning environmental conservation	The hotel should show a developing schedule on staff training both internal and external regarding environmental conservation  Staff should demonstrate awareness of environmental issues	Regular staff training programmes  Verifiable competence of staff of knowledge and support of facility's ethos (contractual commitment, etc)

13	<b>Program Sustainability</b>	There should be adequate evidence of clear leadership of environmental issues	The facility should demonstrate functional inclusion of departments in environmental management  There should be evidence of formation of spearheading team	There should be an effective team of multidisciplinary staff spearheading environmental and socio-economic issues within the hotel  There should be a clear organizational structure and evidence of how decision processes are made and reached
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## 2.3 Eco - rating Certification Process

### I. Application

An interested accommodation facility contacts the Eco-rating certification secretariat at Ecotourism Kenya, expressing their interest in eco-rating certification. The prospective applicant receives an eco-rating certification application questionnaire, which they are required to fill and return to the Eco-rating certification secretariat in soft and/or hard copy, within **two weeks**.

### II. Desk evaluation

The Eco-rating certification secretariat at Ecotourism Kenya scopes the application questionnaire **within a week** of receipt to confirm that they meet the Eco-rating certification requirements as stipulated. Any arising issues are communicated to the applicant accordingly. Once the Eco-rating certification application is approved, the applicant is required to pay a non-refundable application fee of **USD 150** before a site audit is conducted.

### III. Facility Site audit

After approval of the application, the Eco-rating certification secretariat plans a facility site audit at least **within one month**. A team of Eco-rating certification auditors conduct the site audit which may take 1 – 2 days depending on the size of the facility. To facilitate the audit, the applicant may be required to provide accommodation to the auditors. The team of auditors then compile an Eco-rating audit report of the facility from the information collated in the desk evaluation and site audits.

### IV. Eco-rating Committee evaluation

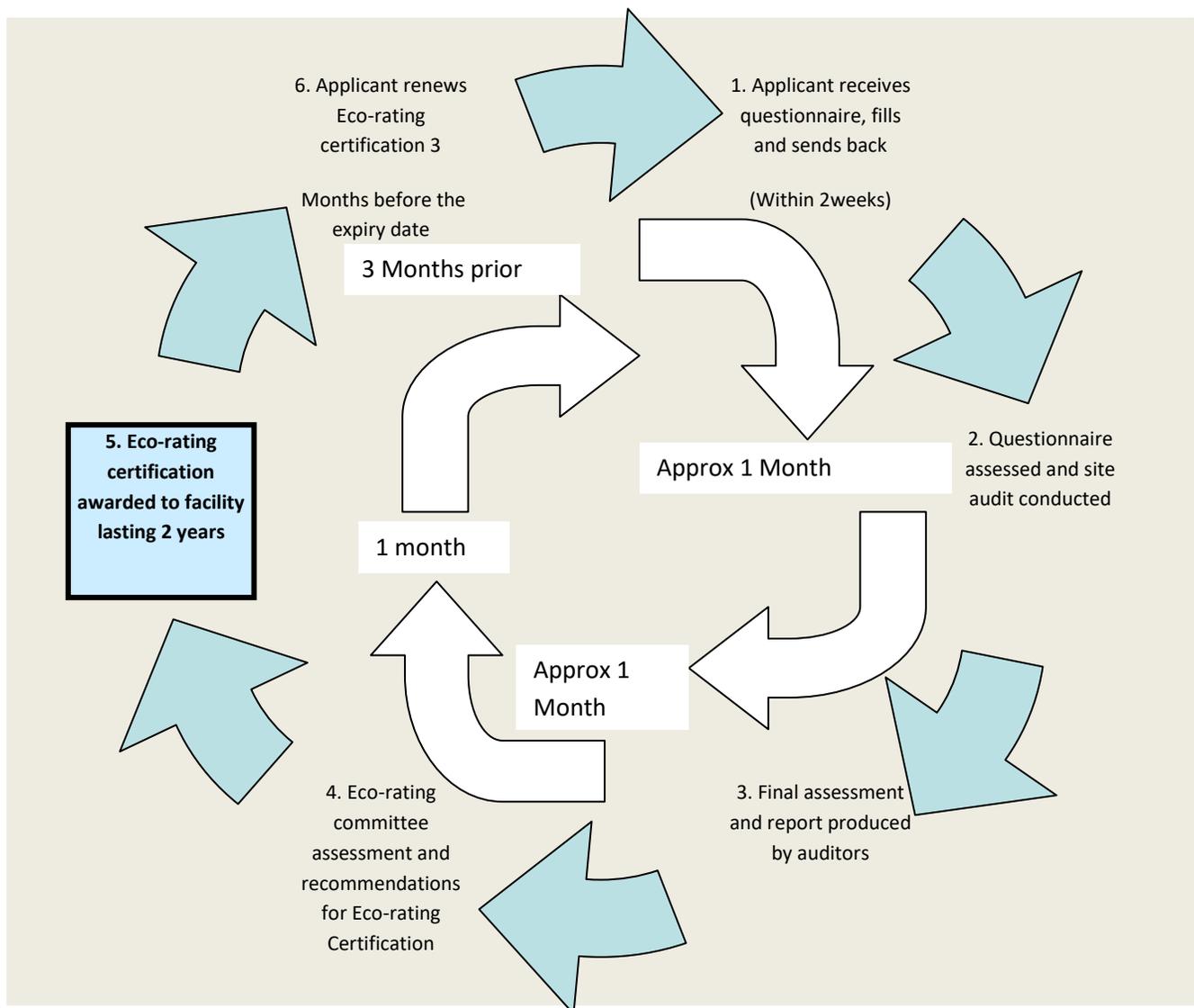
The Eco-rating certification secretariat presents the Eco-rating report for evaluation to the Eco-rating committee, **within one month** of the audit. The committee evaluates the report in accordance to the Eco-rating certification criteria, and based on the scoring an eco-rating certification is awarded with accompanying recommendations.

## V. Outcome

The applying facility is notified of the outcome within **two months** of the facility site audit. The outcome can be a confirmation of the Eco-rating certification award, the deferment of the Eco-rating certification award pending the enactment of listed recommendations or a denial of the Eco-rating certification award. Successful applicants are required to pay the Eco-rating certification fee of their respective Eco-rating certification award within **14 working days**. Deferred applicants are expected to re-apply within 6 months to avoid nullification of their application.

Upon payment of the full fees, all successful applicants receive the appropriate Eco-rating Certificate award, the respective Eco-rating certification emblem and the Eco-rating evaluation report. They are required to display and use the appropriate Eco-rating Scheme emblems on their promotional material.

### 2.3.1 Eco-rating Certification Cycle



## **2.4 Administration and governance**

The Eco-rating certification scheme is managed under the Standards and Best Practise program of Ecotourism Kenya and is administrated by the secretariat based at the Ecotourism Kenya head office.

The delivery and the development of the programme is a prerogative of the Eco-rating committee, which is a sub-committee of the Ecotourism Kenya board. The Eco-rating committee draws expertise both from private and public sector professionals, specialized in tourism, conservation and environmental management.

Eco-rating certification is made possible by a team of auditors who provide technical expertise in assessing facilities. This team comprises environmental audit experts both from the private and public sector.

## **2.5 Rules and Regulations**

- a) Applications will only be assessed once the applicant has returned a duly completed Eco-rating questionnaire. This must be accompanied by a signed and stamped declaration form, and an application fee of 150 US dollars.
- b) Decisions regarding the Eco-rating certification can only be communicated by an official of ecotourism Kenya.
- c) The outcome of the audit can either be a confirmation of the Eco-rating certification (Bronze, Silver or Gold) or a deferment.
- d) If deferred, applicants can re-apply within 6 months to avoid nullification of their application. After this six month period, a fresh application would need to be submitted along with a reapplication fee of 150 US dollars.
- e) Successful applicants are required to pay the Eco-rating certification fee according to the level of award achieved. This payment should be made within 14 working days.
- f) Upon full payment of the certification fees, all successful applicants will receive the appropriate Eco-rating Certificate and respective certification emblem.
- g) An Eco-rating certified member shall be required to display the Eco-rating certification emblem, with appropriate information enabling its interpretation, and links to the Ecotourism Kenya webpage.
- h) The certified facility shall be required to submit a renewal application, at least three months before the certification expiry date.
- i) Complaints against a certified members' conduct shall be expressed in writing, and the member will be given an opportunity to respond to the alleged claims within one month, in writing. Failure to respond to the complaint will lead to the withdrawal of the certification and associated emblems. This action shall be communicated to all Ecotourism Kenya members.

- j) A member who is not certified under the Eco-rating certification program shall not use the certification emblems in any way.
- k) Eco-rating certification status will be awarded at any time of the year and will end at two years from the date indicated on the cover letter accompanying the certificate.

## **2.6 Grounds for Discipline**

### **2.6.1 Suspension and annulment of certification**

- a) Eco-rating certification may be suspended until an identified problem is addressed or annulled by Ecotourism Kenya if the facility is found not to meet the set Eco-rating Certification criteria
- b) If Ecotourism Kenya receives a complaint, consumer feedback or audit recommendation that requires a response from the facility, Ecotourism Kenya will communicate to the facility requesting for a written response.
- c) The facility has 2 months to respond to the complaint and 6 months to change the practice where necessary. Failure to respond or to rectify the practice in question will lead to **immediate withdrawal** of the Eco-rating certification.
- d) A certified member will lose their Eco-rating certification:
  - i. If they fail to renew the certification promptly, after receiving written communication.
  - ii. If their conduct is contrary to Ecotourism Kenya Members' Charter and Code of Conduct.
  - iii. If they don't respond to alleged complaints in writing to Ecotourism Kenya as stipulated.
  - iv. If they bait any wildlife

### **2.6.2 Re-application Guidelines upon withdrawal of Certification**

1. A member who expresses interest in rejoining the Eco-rating scheme shall be required to rectify outstanding issues.
2. All reapplications shall be subject to terms and conditions of new applications.

***\*Withdrawal of certification*** means that the property will be required to return the current certification and the operator must STOP to use the Eco-rating emblems in anyway including promoting their products.

## 2.7 Eco-rating certification fee

LEVEL	APPLICATION FEE US\$	CERTIFICATION FEE US\$	VALIDITY PERIOD
BRONZE	150	350	2 YEARS
SILVER	150	850	2 YEARS
GOLD	150	1,350	2 YEARS

## 2.8 Eco-rating certification emblems



## 3. MEMBERS CHARTER

Members of Ecotourism Kenya are expected to abide by the following charter:

All members of Ecotourism Kenya accept responsibility for protecting and enhancing the natural and cultural environment of the areas in which they operate. They undertake to implement sound environmental practices in all their operations, the properties they manage and/or promote, the destinations they manage and/or sell, the natural areas they visit and the tours they package. And all this is done in collaboration with the communities they are part of. In general, they seek:

- To be proactive and innovative in their environmental programs
- To minimize waste and pollution of natural resources like water, land, and air
- To minimize the amount of waste generated from their operations and to safely dispose of all wastes without injury to the environment
- To participate in management of the natural areas in which they operate
- To comply with all relevant environmental legislation
- To educate their visitors about their natural areas and local cultures
- To observe the Kenya Safari Code and Coast Code
- To actively participate in programs developed to promote sustainable tourism including voluntary certification
- To have clear environmental goals and to develop programs necessary to achieve these goals
- To develop linkages with local communities in the areas in which they operate

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**To apply for Eco-rating,**

request for an information package from Ecotourism

Kenya by sending an e-mail to

[ecorating@ecotourismkenya.org](mailto:ecorating@ecotourismkenya.org)

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