

## Tourism Change We Can Believe In

© Megan Epler Wood  
January, 2008

What would it take to show that sustainability is truly part of the new tourism landscape? My take is- we need to see a whole new generation of professional endeavor. Tourism 2.0 -- to take a page from Thomas Friedman's books. But what is Tourism 2.0? Can it be defined by the exemplary actions of tourism corporations around the world, or by academics working in universities? How can the next generation of professional sustainable tourism endeavor be put into action, and who will be involved? In sustainable tourism, we continue to believe in change, but it is often difficult to know how much progress is really being made.

In a recent conference hosted by *Condé Nast Traveler Magazine* in September 2008 in New York, featuring the theme *World Savers* – a variety of excellent presenters spoke about their accomplishments in bringing sustainability to every corner of the earth. There was a feeling of such hope and optimism, even while Wall Street was crashing just a mile away. We heard about large hotel chains working towards reducing energy consumption on a global scale, and progress toward making tourism proactively produce life saving benefits for local citizens, such as pure drinking water. We saw how the most horrific genocides in modern memory, are now producing an outpouring of life giving projects funded by tourism pioneers in both Rwanda and Cambodia.

Back in the “day,” we were pleased to celebrate the small number of companies that were achieving change. But now “green” tourism has become a norm that nearly all tourism companies seek to achieve. But the methodologies to deliver “green” are far from systematized.

In 2008, we celebrated the delivery of the first international [Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria \(GSTC\)](#) - which has created the possibility for united action in the tourism field, based on a shared set of values and criteria. These criteria were designed for accommodations and tour operators – but this partnership of 32 organizations has just begun to work on how the criteria will be put into action. Their website states, “the criteria indicate what should be done, not how to do it or whether the goal has been achieved. This role is fulfilled by performance indicators, associated educational materials, and access to tools for implementation, all of which are an indispensable complement to the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria.”

There will be a wide variety of responses to this call for indicators and action, but there are still many areas of the criteria that need further work. Perhaps the most important gap of all is the question of carbon management, which was not part of the GSTC’s work. Given the urgent need to address this issue, and the importance of making tourism’s carbon sustainability a top tier professional priority – it appears we in the tourism field may be well behind our peers in other industries. This is only to point out that more action, that is coordinated and well-funded is urgently needed.

Where to go next? Tourism 2.0 should include a whole new curriculum. The urgent need for professionals already working on the job to have access to this curriculum is beyond dispute.

Innovation will be needed. But plain vanilla hard work will also be required. Benchmarking the environmental and social impacts of large tourism corporations worldwide is a critical starting point. Measuring how our entire industry can limit carbon impacts needs to begin. Now that would be tourism change to believe in.

**Megan Epler Wood is Principal of [EplerWood International](#). This essay is part of a series for TravelMole’s VISION on Sustainable Tourism.**