

# Sustainability in tourism

A position paper and basis for discussions  
From the Austrian National Tourist Office (ANTO)

Requirements and visions  
for sustainable tourism products and services



# Table of contents

1.	Introduction.....	2
2.	Sustainability in tourism .....	4
2.1.	Basic requirements.....	5
2.2.	Requirements for tourism .....	6
2.3.	Visions for tourism.....	8
2.3.1.	Technology Vision .....	8
2.3.2.	Regionality and Identity Culture Vision.....	9
2.3.3.	Vision for effective visitor-host relations .....	10
3.	Summary and prospects .....	12

# 1. Introduction

Our society is subject to permanent change, and social scientists have established that we are currently in a transition phase. In transition phases of this kind, old values are replaced and new values gain in importance.

**Sustainability** is one of these values which are currently changing our society on many levels. For the paradigm shift which we are experiencing today, sustainability is particularly important because it is geared to the future and to the quality of life of future generations. Sustainable planning and action is affecting every area of our lives, and will do so even more strongly in future. That much is evident not just in the global debate about the climate, in politics and culture, but also in core areas of the Western economy, if you consider aspects such as the growing market segments for bio-products or sustainable investment, for example. And in tourism too, as one of the “pleasure markets of the future”, sustainability is set to play an increasingly important role.

***But what does that mean exactly – what form should Austrian sustainable tourism offers take, what direction should our thinking be taking, and what examples already exist?***

This discussion paper is intended to **offer ideas** on these questions, to clarify some fundamental **concepts** and to illustrate one **way** in which Austria’s tourist industry could approach this issue. This paper is also the result of intensive preparatory work by ANTO for the atb\_experience, being held for the first time in 2013, with its overall theme of sustainability. This new format is aimed at showing international product developers, tour operators and journalists the answers and contributions that the Austrian tourism industry can make to the relevant themes for future travel.<sup>1</sup>

What you can expect from this paper:

The term “sustainability” is actually derived from forestry, and means not consuming more than can be re-grown. Today, the term is used beyond the context of supplying raw materials, and describes the use of a system capable of being regenerated overall.

Accordingly, it now takes in three dimensions – ecological, economic and social sustainability (the “three-pillar model of sustainability”).

If a country known as a holiday destination presents itself today in relation to sustainability, the focus is generally on inspiring natural landscapes and protected areas – in other words, on the **ecological dimension**. These resources will continue to be an essential basis for Austrian tourism moving forward. However, there is a lot more to innovatively-oriented, sustainable offers than this. It is only by combining this with **social** and **economic** sustainability that offers can be developed which will be successful in the medium- to long-term; in **Chapter 2.1. “Basic requirements”, this is considered in greater detail.**

Although the tourism sector repeatedly places particular emphasis on the aspect of “sustainability” in its advertising and catalogues<sup>2</sup>, it is noticeable that customers tend to take their decisions on travel based on other criteria. At present sustainability is, to a large extent, not yet a key theme in the immediate travel decision. Rather, it can be considered a **competence and values issue**, where **responsibility for a better world tomorrow** finds expression. **Sustainability should therefore not only be viewed as an added value in the travel offer, but needs to be integrated into the core business of tourism.** What this means in concrete terms for the development of offers and products is set out in **Chapter 2.2., “Requirements for tourism”.**

For those looking to go beyond this in product development – for those truly concerned about **excellence** **Chapter 2.3. outlines three visions** in which Austria’s tourism economy has opportunities for special profiling: in addition to **technology** and **regionality**, this chapter also describes the **visitor-host relationship** and illustrates it with examples.

<sup>1</sup> While atb\_sales supports today’s business as a market-place, the atb\_experience is aimed at preparing tomorrow’s business.

<sup>2</sup> In most cases, this is understood as ecologically sustainable travel offers.

As a tourist destination Austria can – as the summary in **Chapter 3. indicates** – develop **new opportunities for positioning itself in the international competition** via an orientation to sustainability. For it is particularly in times of upheaval and of changing values that people look for answers. And with precisely this in mind, Austria's tourism industry can offer services featuring sustainable and innovation-oriented facilitated experiences, as the extensive (but by no means comprehensive) collection of examples demonstrates.

Based on outstanding examples of sustainability in Austrian tourism already in place today<sup>3</sup>, the comments which follow are aimed at **nurturing an awareness of the need for a comprehensive approach to planning and action, and a long-term orientation.**

In part areas, Austria is already well-equipped and has taken on board the paradigm change which is taking place: in the National Social Responsibility Index produced by the international consultants mhc international, where the concept of corporate social responsibility<sup>4</sup> (CSR) was applied to nation-states, Austria ranks 12<sup>th</sup> amongst the 180 countries included in the study, ahead of Germany, Great Britain and France.

In the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index 2011 produced by the World Economic Forum, Austria ranks fifth in the world for nature conservation/sustainability, and it has improved its ranking compared with previous years. Austria holds leading positions in evaluations of environmental quality (ranking 2) and provisions for environmental protection (ranking 3). Overall, this produces an **outstanding starting situation** for this area of profiling.



<sup>3</sup> See examples in the box inserts.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. On this point: Wikipedia (translated from the German site): "Corporate Social Responsibility describes the voluntary contribution of a business to sustainable development which goes beyond the statutory requirements (compliance)."

## 2. Sustainability in tourism

Aspiring to sustainable development in tourism means applying the objectives in all areas of sustainable development (ecology, economy, social affairs) to tourism. And it also means developing visions for the future which represent the aspirational “ideal scenario” (even if this is difficult to achieve).

This is demonstrated by the **pyramid** shown here with its **three levels of requirements**, whose quality characteristics become increasingly more specific and “sharper”. In an initial step, the challenge for tourism products or services is to satisfy the **basic requirements in relation to sustainability**.

In other words, fundamentally sustainable principles must be respected and the product must not stand in contradiction of those principles (basic requirements).

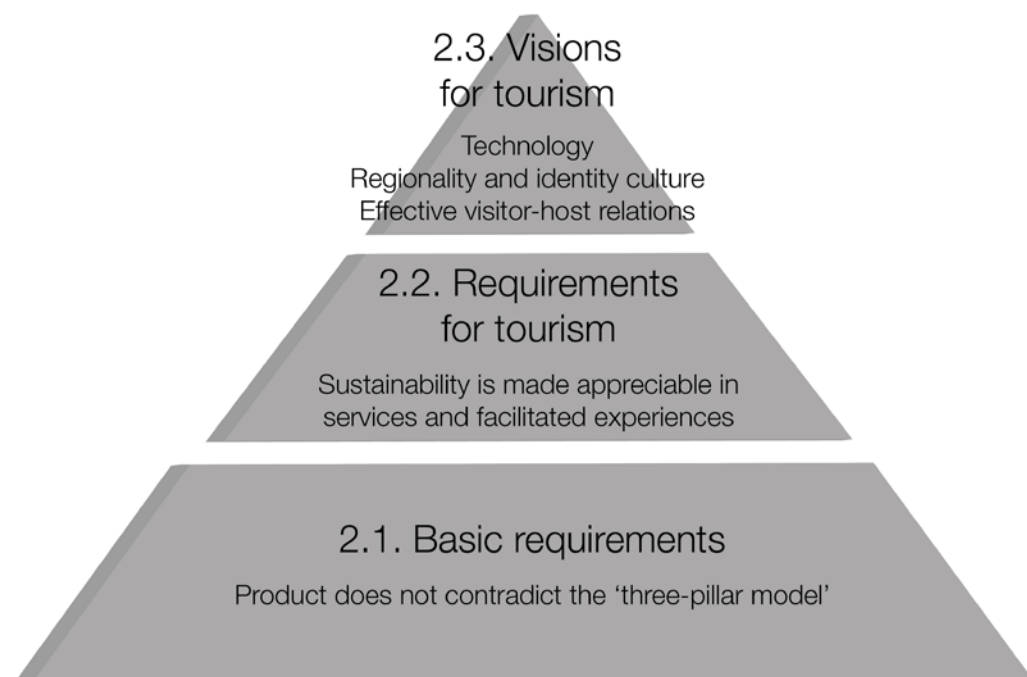
Building on this, the challenge is to make sustainable aspects perceptible for visitors and something to be experienced – at both the tangible and intangible level (requirements for tourism).

In addition to the use of sustainable materials and sustainable company management, this primarily involves services and experiences whose sustainable aspects are to be actively marketed and communicated in the engagement with the (potential) visitor.

The vision of the “ideal scenario” ultimately consists in implementing optimal, sustainable principles in at least one of the following areas:

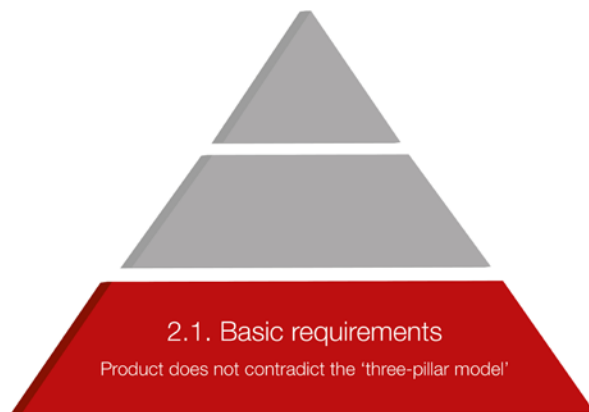
- Technology
- Regionality and identity culture
- Visitor-host relationships (visions for tourism)

These three tiers of requirements are explained in more detail below, with the figures shown in the graphic indicating the chapter numbers.



Graphic 1: Sustainability pyramid in tourism (source: ANTO representation)

## 2.1. Basic requirements



The concept of sustainable development was defined at the end of the 1980s by the World Commission on Environment and Development<sup>5</sup>.

The concept describes a system that can regenerate itself in such a way that its existence is ensured in a natural manner and for the long term.

According to this model, lasting development is ensured if the ***needs of the present are satisfied without this jeopardising the interests of future generations.***

Lasting development is, moreover, a change process under which the use of resources, the aim of investments, the direction of technological advances and institutional change harmonise with one another and expand present-day and future potential to satisfy human needs and desires.

Society, the environment and the economy are therefore interlinked, and should not be viewed one-dimensionally. The actions of public and private actors alike need to take account of the interaction of these three areas. Sustainable developments thus contain the simultaneous and equally-weighted implementation of environmental (***ecological***), commercial (***economic***) and societal (***social***) objectives.

The three-pillar model represents the basic requirements for sustainable projects, products and services.

The key features of the three pillars are:

### Ecological sustainability

Natural resources should only be claimed for use in such a way that they are able to renew themselves. The careful use of natural spaces worthy of protection contributes just as much to ecological sustainability as the conscious and economical use of energy and resources.

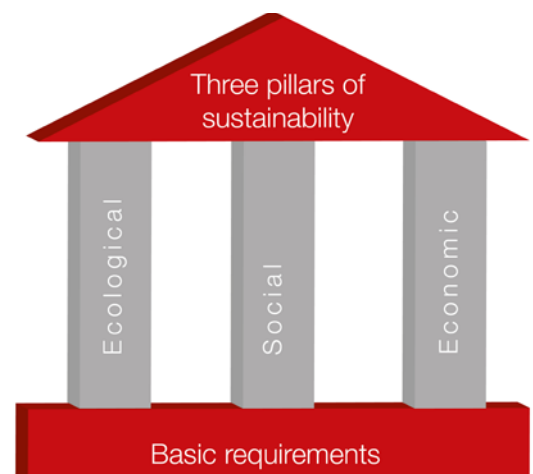
### Social sustainability

Taking account of the interests of the local population, involving regional actors in relevant projects, creating good working conditions and training staff are as much a part of social sustainability as taking account of local identity.

### Economic sustainability

The resource provision necessary for specific projects is also guaranteed for the future. There is sufficient market demand for a product/a service. Economic success is guaranteed as a result.

Irrespective of the sector to which the three-pillar model is applied, it always means ***thinking and acting long-term*** and not simply aspiring to short-term successes. Sustainable tourism products and services should therefore not contradict any of the three basic requirements in terms of content, and require long-term structural change.



<sup>5</sup> <http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm>

Abb. 2: The three pillars of sustainability



## 2.2. Requirements for tourism



At this tier of requirements and above, the focus is on **designing the sustainability of specific tourism projects for visitors in a manner that can be experienced and appreciated**. The sustainable management of ecological, economic and social aspects is communicated to the target group via services and facilitated experiences.

The tourism sector is therefore challenged to focus on offers and services in its core business when addressing sustainability. Only in this way can the competitive positioning of Austria as a holiday destination be improved.

A reduction in the consumption of fossil fuels, for instance, ranks as part of the core business of the regional heat suppliers, but not as part of that of tourism. Sustainable mobility solutions for visitors and sustainable management of cultural or natural resources of importance for tourism, on the other hand, are suitable examples of perceivable benefits with international appeal in the core business of tourism.

### *Pielachtal*

The Pielachtal valley was awarded the title of “best upcoming rural region” in recognition of its development of sustainable tourism. Here, all travel experiences are built on sustainability, from gardens celebrating the natural landscape to walking and cycling paths to regional products and the preservation of rural culture.

<http://www.pielachtal.info/>

But it is not just a proactive approach in product development that determines the hoped-for economic success of such services. Professional integration of the facilitated experience that has been created into tourism marketing also becomes a decisive factor. **Embedding sustainable facilitated experiences in the communications and marketing** by tourism providers can exert a positive influence the booking decisions of the target group. Companies, regions or cooperations can acquire a USP on the basis of these facilitated experiences, which simultaneously work in a fruitful way for the location and serve as key incentives.

If these tourism-specific requirements are applied to sustainable offers and services in accordance with the three-pillar model, the following measures can be derived as illustrations:

### **Ecological sustainability in tourism**

- Tourism drives a strengthening of awareness of ecological connectedness in visitors and locals.
- Sustainable use of energy and resources (e.g. for mobility) adds to the value of tourism products and services, and is brought closer to (potential) visitors.
- Use of regional products and local materials is encouraged under these offers, and this is also brought out in their marketing.
- Visitors are given the opportunity to experience protected natural spaces and regional species diversity. The host assumes a key role in communicating the sustainable management of natural resources.

### **Social sustainability in tourism**

- The interests of the local population in relation to tourism products and services are taken into account by including regional actors in the development phase.

- The value of regional identity is appreciated or strengthened, and becomes a key argument in the marketing of tourism products and services. The historical legacy and regional culture are used in a deliberate manner to enrich offers, including in communications.
- Corresponding working conditions and staff training support the medium-term and long-term quality of sustainable offers. This helps to support how sustainable facilitated experiences are viewed at the local level.

### **Economic sustainability in tourism**

- The resourcing needed for sustainable tourism projects is secured for the medium- and long-term.
- Sustainable tourism products meet the needs of the target group or potential visitors, and result in sufficient market demand via their integration in marketing.

At this level, there are already a range of outstanding examples in Austria. To illustrate this, some Austrian tourist offers are included below.



#### ***Nationalpark Hohe Tauern***

The Hohe Tauern National Park developed offers such as walking programmes, national park ranger activities, shuttle buses for walkers, regional seasonal gastronomy with a „zero kilometre“ balance sheet, and a National Park active card for easy access to these programmes.

Hosts and regional visitor guides are becoming the most important promoters of regional nature conservation areas and diversity of species.

<http://www.hohetauern.at>

#### ***“Ramsauer Bioniere”***

In Ramsau, a group of people including businessmen, organic farmers, caterers and hoteliers have made a commitment to sustainability, as the “Ramsauer bioniers”. All the bioniers produce regionally, process non-GM products and are guided by the waste and energy criteria of the Austrian eco-label which they have been awarded.

The sustainable management of local resources is part of the profiling strategy, is being used deliberately in communications, and - at the local level - is a constant thematic focus for holidaying in Austria.

<http://www.bioregion-ramsau.at>

#### ***Bio-Hotels***

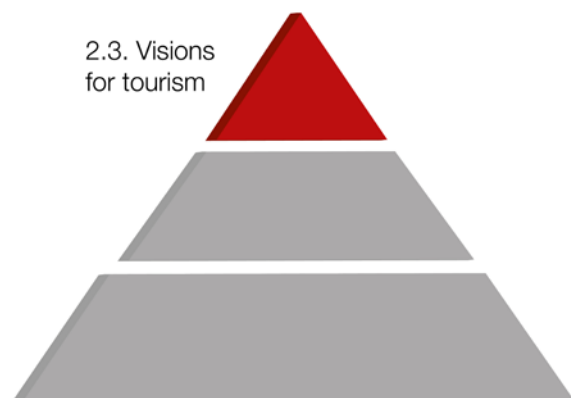
From the organic farm to the five-star luxury hotel, visitors can enjoy sustainable holidays. The sustainable offer is a key part of the marketing of the ‘Bio-Hotels’, and is actively promoted to visitors locally by staff.

All Bio-Hotels are regularly checked by independent monitoring agencies, and guarantee perfect ecological standards. Many of them have already been chosen several times amongst the top ten eco-hotels in Europe.

<http://www.biohotels.info>



## 2.3. Visions for tourism



We now turn of attention to the third and final tier of requirements in the pyramid shown earlier: sustainable tourism products and services are intended to take Austria as a holiday destination closer to one of the three **visions** set out below.

For the tourism industry, these visions are described in terms of three areas of activity – technology, regionality and identity culture – and with regard to effective visitor-host relations. They describe aspirational conditions that are not to be achieved without effort, and whose **objectives are to be pursued as a priority**.

Sustainable tourism products and services can take us a step in the direction of the three visions. For this, the kinds of offers outlined in Chapter 2.2. need to focus on the core business of tourism.

Adopting the slogan “the path is the destination“, we shall describe these offers in fuller detail below.

### 2.3.1. Technology Vision

The Technology Vision is aimed at a zero balance sheet for all emissions (mobility, heating/refrigeration, waste, etc.) and optimum circuits for energy and resources.

The following are model indicators for a destination which defines measures as part of the Technology Vision:

- A greenhouse gas balance sheet that is viable for the future
- Use of the latest technologies with high resource and energy efficiency
- Intelligent ad system-oriented solutions for optimising energy systems
- Distribution transport volumes across various modes of transport, with soft mobility and public transport being promoted over motorised personal transport
- Social and organisational innovations through involving users
- Use of opportunities for realisation through early involvement of investors

Tourism, as is demonstrated by numerous examples, is not starting from a blank page in this area, and can assume a lead role in Austria as part of this vision. In terms of buildings/facilities, mobility, and energy supply/logistics, we can come close to the Technology Vision via the measures listed below.

#### Improvement measures for buildings/facilities:

- More energy is produced than consumed (plus-energy buildings, photovoltaic units, etc.).
- Easy deconstruction and conversion potential (e.g. continuous floorings, lightweight construction partition walls, ducting and installations only in load-bearing parts of the building, etc.)
- Resource consumption is reduced (use of wood, tiles etc.).
- Value is produced at the regional level (e.g. local trades).

#### *Boutiquehotel Stadthalle , Wien*

The Boutiquehotel Stadthalle is the first hotel in the world with a zero energy balance sheet in an urban context. It is constructed to passive house quality, and meets its heating requirements via groundwater heat pumps (combined with a thermal solar facility) and its electricity requirements via a PV unit.  
[www.hotelstadthalle.at](http://www.hotelstadthalle.at)

#### Improvement measures for mobility:

- Business-related mobility (by owners and employees, with a focus on public transport)
- Mobility in the regions (offer of Regio-Cards, hire of city bikes/trekking bikes/mountain bikes, hire cars, electric vehicles)
- Mobility in relation to travel to and from the destination
- Integrated approaches (total mobility, from travel to and from the destination through to movement in the destination area)

##### *E-Mobilität Lech-Warth*

Visitors can hire e-bikes and e-cars, and are provided with all the necessary information about this in hotels and public buildings. In addition, the communities of Lech and Warth source 75% of their heating requirements via regional biomass heating plants.  
<http://www.klimaundenergiemodellregionen.at/start.asp?ID=242642>

#### Improvement measures in energy supply and logistics

- Switching energy supply to hydro, biomass, solar thermal and photovoltaic, bio-gas or wind
- Energy distribution (intelligent electricity grids connecting producers, consumers and storage)
- Use of goods and logistics (minimising and recycling bio-waste, eliminating waste, waste recycling and disposal)

##### *Villa Vita Pannonia, Pamhagen*

In 2009, the hotel was awarded the national prize for tourism for its “Eco-Tourist Centre for Renewable Energies” project.  
In the “Eco-Tourist Centre”, visitors can learn about sourcing alternative energy, visit the biomass heating plant and get information about photovoltaic systems and solar collectors.  
[http://www.vilavitahotels.com/rw\\_vv/main.asp?WebID=vv\\_annonia3](http://www.vilavitahotels.com/rw_vv/main.asp?WebID=vv_annonia3)

## 2.3.2. Regionality and Identity Culture Vision

The “Regionality and Identity Culture” Vision relates to preserving:

- The material heritage (cultural landscapes, original structures, building materials, cultural assets etc.)
- The intangible regional heritage (customs, craft techniques, culture etc.).

In addition, it relates to preserving their influence on the present-day and the future.

The impulses arising from this contribute to strengthening the sense of identity; and what is involved are intelligently-managed processes in the area of ***economic circulation, identity culture and the countryside as a cultural asset***.

#### Regional economic circulation

Regional craftsmen cooperate with architects and designers and cultural creatives to mark out the image of the region as having international appeal. The intangible regional heritage is exploited in a forward-looking manner to add value and to introduce a valuable sustainable experience into the holiday.

##### *Building culture in southern Styria, Gamlitz*

The landscape of southern Styria is characterised by wine-growing. The natural park, local communities and the Styrian Land authorities launched the “Building with the Landscape” (“Bauen mit der Landschaft”) initiative. It offers comprehensive advice to developers, with the aim of preserving the collective impact of the cultural landscape.  
[http://www.gamlitz.eu/fileadmin/Dokumente/Leitbild\\_Baukultur\\_Gamlitz.pdf](http://www.gamlitz.eu/fileadmin/Dokumente/Leitbild_Baukultur_Gamlitz.pdf)

When it comes to farming, too, cooperations can have a sustainable impact (demand-oriented production, organic farming, certification systems) or improve the relations for exchange (produce markets, logistics solutions). This generates an added value which the visitor can experience. Sustainability also takes in offers which ensure the preservation and survival of farming

structures, for instance by offering high-quality guest rooms (as offered by the farm experience grouping “Urlaub am Bauernhof”) where visitors can share in farming life.

### Identity culture

Cultural self-determination and diversity are characteristic of a developed identity culture. Regions with an active discourse over identity (rediscovery of the notion of ‘homeland’ (Heimat) and cultural identity) are classed as more attractive than others by visitors.

Questions such as “who are we?”, “Where do we come from?”, “What are our roots and what skills have we developed?”, „What has changed?“, „Where do we want to go?“ etc. then lead to an intensification of regional identity which adds value.

Austria has outstanding identity-forming offers, via the Festival of the Regions (in Upper Austria), the Viertelfestival (in Lower Austria), and also the New Year’s Day Concert (Vienna) and the Salzburg and Bregenz Festspiele. Folk art, customs and museums could place a similar role. The host’s role in this is to interest his or her visitors in the art and culture of the country and of the region, to include them in it and to communicate to them the philosophy of companies, regions or cooperations.

#### *The artists’ town of Gmünd*

This small, medieval town has built on its artistic and cultural links over the past 20 years. To date, the town has managed to bring new life to 15 buildings in the old town that were previously standing empty: they have been converted into galleries, craft workshops, international guest studios, artists’ studios and special exhibition spaces such as sculpture gardens, which now typify the image of the town.  
<http://www.stadtgmueund.at/kuenstlerstadt-gmueund>

The notion of sustainable culture, however, is significantly different from cultural and entertainment offers which serve solely to entertain visitors, without making reference to regional identity.

### The landscape as cultural asset

Austria’s landscapes offer visitors major incentives to keep coming back for more. This acknowledges the fact that a large part of the country consists of magnificent cultural landscapes: meadow orchards with trees laden with fruit, mixed forestry in its autumn colours, river landscapes fashioned in ancient times, and well-kept Alpine meadows. The pleasant emotions that these stir in people have a doubly positive benefit in terms of sustainability: on the one hand they heighten the visitor’s sense of well-being, and on the other hand they secure the preservation of these landscapes – visitors want to encounter them again next year.

#### *“Mostbarone” – the Cider Barons*

The present-day renaissance of cider is something which that part of Lower Austria known as the Cider Quarter (Mostviertel) owes to innovative thinkers like the Cider Barons; they are bringing traditions back to life and, with the aid of the latest cellar technology, are producing exquisite, generally pure varietal pear ciders, in a surprisingly wide range of tastes. A major concern for the Cider Barons and many other fruit wine producers is to preserve the typical cultural landscape along the cider road, or Moststrasse.  
<http://www.mostbaron.at>

### 2.3.3. Vision for effective visitor-host relations

To enable visitors to “arrive and revive”, hosts are called on to acquire various core competencies, depending on the offer. Naturally, this challenge primarily affects hosts who come into direct contact with visitors.

On the one hand, this is about competencies for living, which enrich all staff in their professional commitment, their creativity and their love of life – something which visitors sense directly. On the other hand, it is about the host’s ability to motivate, convince and guide visitors towards taking responsibility themselves for the enjoyment and the happiness they get out of their holiday and to act accordingly.



### *The Bad Blumauer manifesto*

The Austrian entrepreneur Robert Rogner jun. (Rogner Tourismusbetriebe), Johannes Gutmann (Sonnentor) and Josef Zotter (Zotter Schokoladen Manufaktur) developed the 'Bad Blumauer Manifesto' with its ten commandments for sustainable conduct of business.

The manifesto outlines that "social and ecological growth in value needs to be assessed more highly than financial profit, and we need new assessment criteria." The manifesto is not simply an action manual for the participating enterprises. Instead, it is much more of a value-oriented basis for the relationship between host and visitor.

<http://www.badblumauermanifest.com>

To take up sustainability as an issue, it needs to be made visible and communicated. In addition to the ethical level, the challenge in this lies in placing the benefit to the visitor, in gains in pleasure, adventure and experience, at the forefront, with a view to enriching the visitor's holiday. It is about communicating the added value for visitors – whether this can be experienced while on holiday or back home. Austria's hosts are particularly experienced in passing on distinctive regional characteristics, and not simply due to the country's long tradition of hospitality. The typically Austrian mentality also makes them exceptionally talented guides on the path to enriching experiences.

The spectrum ranges from information for visitors through personal story-telling and settings to sustainability reports used as a management tool. In this respect, the communication and emotional appeal of products and services with a view to sustainability succeeds better if it is associated with stories, faces, events or regional traditions.

In achieving this vision, particular relevance attaches to tourism projects that particularly facilitate the experience of holiday happiness for the visitor, that are authentically lived by the host and that address sustainability competence or make it directly visible.



### 3. Summary and prospects



In times of change, new values become exceptionally important. Marked by the social and economic uncertainties of the present, new standards are being established in connection with decisions on travel, including for holidays – and particularly amongst the lead tier which ranks above average for its love of travel.

Sustainability, as a theme embracing competencies and values, with all the facets outlined here, is becoming a profiling issue for Austrian tourism and therefore an opportunity to define new impulses in product development and in securing the economic success of the sector. Sustainable products and services should not, however, be reduced to the ecological viewpoint. It is only the interplay of social and economic sustainability which guarantees the long-term success of such impulses.

But sustainability should not only be viewed as an added value in communicating the travel offer, but needs to be integrated into the core business of tourism. Focussing on facilitated experiences and consistent integration in marketing are key requirements in the development of such products and services. Only in this way will it be possible to position Austria as a tourist destination to stand out from the competition when compared internationally.

The visions outlined in relation to technology, regionality and identity culture and the effective visitor-host relationship represent situations to be aspired to, and serve as an orientation in product development. Numerous examples from Austrian tourism already illustrate impressively how sustainable facilitated experiences are being implemented successfully today and are contributing to the visions outlined.

Austria has established an excellent basis for occupying this key area of profiling for attractive target groups, via serious approaches at creating solutions. If it succeeds in developing more far-reaching projects and implementing these in the market, this will see a further, significant step in migrating from a purely 'rest and relaxation'-oriented holiday to a holiday that delivers experiences which represent long-term value for the visitor too and provide orientation for the time beyond the holiday. Enthusiasm and a high level of loyalty are the logical consequences of such a commitment.

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