

**BLUE FLAG
TOURISM BOAT CRITERIA AND EXPLANATORY NOTES
2024**



INTRODUCTION

The Blue Flag programme for beaches, marinas and tourism boats is run by the international, non-governmental, non-profit organisation FEE (the Foundation for Environmental Education). The Blue Flag programme was started in France in 1985. It has been operating in Europe since 1987 and in areas outside of Europe since 2001 when South Africa joined. Today, Blue Flag has become a truly global programme with an ever-increasing number of countries participating in the programme.

The Blue Flag programme promotes sustainable tourism development in freshwater and marine areas. It challenges local authorities, site operators and tourism boats to achieve high standards in a total of six categories: water quality, environmental management, environmental education and information, safety and services, social responsibility and responsible operation around wildlife. The criteria for tourism boats are divided into the five categories of: environmental management, environmental education and information, safety and services, social responsibility and responsible operation around wildlife. Over the years, the Blue Flag has become a highly respected and recognised award working to bring together the tourism and environmental sectors at local, regional and national levels to ensure sustainable tourism.

The explanatory notes given in this document make up the common and shared understanding of the Blue Flag tourism boat criteria and the requirements for the implementation thereof. The explanatory notes provide details on the measurement and management of compliance with the Blue Flag tourism boat criteria.

The criteria are categorised as either imperative or guideline. Most tourism boat criteria are imperative, i.e. the tourism boat must comply with them in order to be awarded Blue Flag accreditation. If they are guideline criteria, it is preferable that they are complied with, but not mandatory. In the case that a tourism boat cannot comply with one or more of the imperative criteria, the tourism boat can apply for a dispensation. Appendix A gives further information about dispensation cases.

It must be emphasised that the Blue Flag tourism boat criteria in this document are the minimum criteria. A national programme can choose to have stricter criteria than what is outlined here.

These tourism boat criteria and explanatory notes are to be used by all Blue Flag applicants in order to understand the requirements that must be met before a tourism boat can receive Blue Flag accreditation. For guidance purposes, this document should also prove valuable for the management of those tourism boats already accredited with Blue Flag status. The tourism boat criteria and explanatory notes also serve as a guide for the National, Regional, and International Blue Flag Juries when making decisions about a Blue Flag tourism boat candidate.

The tour operator is able to make a Blue Flag Award application for one or several of its boats should they be compliant with award criteria. It is important to recognise that it is individual boats

that have gained the award, not the tour operator as a whole.

Furthermore, only charter boat companies that offer crewed charter boat tours can apply for the Blue Flag to ensure the compliance of the criteria.

Tour operators with the sole purpose of offering ferry services cannot apply for the Blue Flag.

During the Blue Flag awarding period the flag must be present on all of the tour operators' awarded tourism boats. If not all tourism boats from a tour operator are awarded, the list of the awarded boats must be clearly indicated on the website and all other PR documentation from the boating operator, as well as in the ticket office. The flag is both a symbol of the programme being run by the tourism boat but also an indication of compliance.

If a tourism boat that has Blue Flag accreditation does not comply with the Blue Flag criteria, the flag may be permanently or temporarily withdrawn. There are several degrees of non-compliance:

1. A **minor non-compliance** occurs when there is a problem with only one imperative criterion, which is of little or no consequence to visitor health and safety and the site environment.

Should the non - compliance be to the detriment of visitor health and safety or the site environment, it must be treated as major non - compliance.

When minor non-compliance occurs and can be immediately rectified, the flag is not withdrawn, and the non-compliance is only registered in the control visit report. If, however, a minor non-compliance cannot be rectified immediately, the site is given 10 days in which to comply fully with all criteria. The flag is withdrawn until all problems are rectified, and this is noted on the Blue Flag national and international websites.

2. **Multiple non-compliance** relates to non-compliance with two to three imperative criteria which are of little or no consequence to visitor health and safety and the site environment.

Should any on the non - compliance be to the detriment of visitor health and safety or the site environment, it/they must be treated as major non - compliance.

When multiple non-compliances occur, the site is given 10 days in which to comply fully with all criteria, the flag is withdrawn until all the problems are rectified, and the national and international websites are updated accordingly.

3. **Major non-compliance** occurs when the site does not comply with one or several criteria, with a consequence for the health and safety of the site user or to the environment, as well as the general perception of the site and therefore the Programme.

When detecting a major non-compliance, the flag is withdrawn immediately and for the rest of the season. The site information board must clearly indicate that the Blue Flag

award has been withdrawn. The national and international websites are updated accordingly.

In all cases of non-compliance, the National Operator must immediately inform the tourism operator about the observed areas of non-compliance for its tourism boat. The tour operator must inform the National Operator of re-compliance with the criteria and present the appropriate documentation needed. The National Operator should also consider a follow-up control visit to check that the tourism boat does comply. In the event that the tourism boat does not ensure and document re-compliance with the criteria within 10 days, the National Operator must ensure that the Blue Flag is withdrawn for the rest of the period of validity.

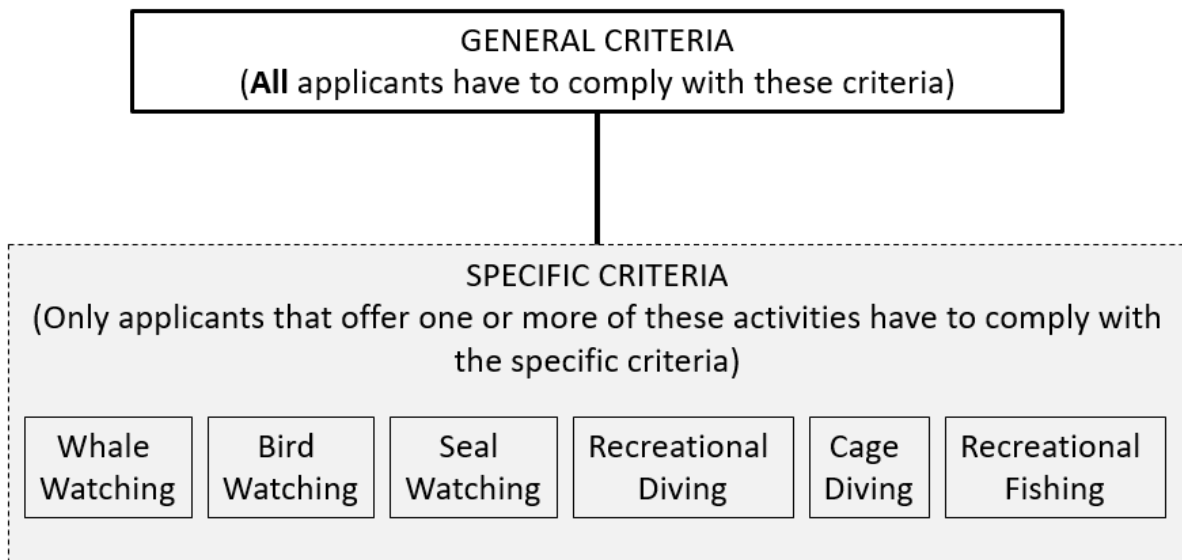
In the event that conditions within the tourism boat change and the flag has to be temporarily withdrawn, the tour operator must inform the National Operator that the flag has been temporarily withdrawn, along with details as to why, and the international website must be changed accordingly.

Apart from updating the Blue Flag website of the status of the tourism boat, the National Operator must inform Blue Flag International about the non-compliance. If non-compliance is noted by an International Controller, the National Operator has to give feedback to Blue Flag International within 30 days after receiving the report from Blue Flag International

All Blue Flag accredited tourism boats have to comply with the **general Blue Flag criteria** for tourism boats. If the tour operator offers bird watching, cage diving, recreational diving, recreational fishing, seal watching or whale watching, the tour operator has to comply with the general criteria **and** the specific criteria for the activity on that tourism boat.

If the tour operator offers two or more activities for which additional criteria are available, all of the respective additional criteria have to be complied with. However, for all activities that are not mentioned above it is sufficient if the tour operator only complies with the general criteria.

Furthermore, the tour operator's ticket offices/ticket booths and other buildings that **are open to the public** are also subject to the criteria (In the following 'buildings' refer only to those that are accessible to the public).



The period of validity for tourism boats is one year from the date of the bestowal of the award.

FEE, and the National Operator in a country, reserves the right to refuse or withdraw Blue Flag accreditation from any tourism boat where the tour operator is responsible for violations of national environmental regulations or otherwise acts in discord with the objectives and spirit of the Blue Flag programme. Blue Flag tourism boats are subject to announced and/or unannounced control visits by FEE International and the National Operator.

DEFINITION OF A BLUE FLAG TOURISM BOAT

All tourism boats from a tour operator that offer **boat-based** tourism activities on **motorised and wind-powered boats that are steered by a qualified captain** and that embrace sustainable practices in line with the Blue Flag criteria are eligible for application to become a Blue Flag accredited tourism boat. This includes:

- Seeing environmental education as an integral part of the tourism products
- Assessing and making an effort to reduce negative impacts on the economic, social and natural environment
- Considering the needs of tourists, its employees and the environment
- Contributing to the development and distribution of sustainable practices

Depending on the size of the boats used for the tours, alternative criteria apply. The explanatory notes include alternative criteria for **small boats** which include motorised rubber boats (e.g. rigid inflatable boats, zodiacs), open motorboats and any other type of boat that is too small to comply with the criteria. All **small boats** have to comply with the alternative criteria to be awarded the Blue Flag.

It is intended that all boats that provide tours comply with the Blue Flag criteria. If at the time of application, they are not all compliant the tour operator must provide an action plan indicating

- which boats are not in compliance, referencing them by the name they are registered under which criteria they are not compliant with when and how they plan to be in compliance

The action plan is sent to the National and International Juries who decide whether the non-compliances

- pose any danger to the health and safety of the boat passengers, of the staff or to the environment and/or
- harms the image of the Blue Flag programme

If the National or International Juries find that one of the points above is answered with yes, the tour operator will not be awarded. If the International Jury approves the action plan, the National Operator is then in charge of ensuring the action plan is rolled out.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
GENERAL CRITERIA FOR TOURISM BOATS	7
ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND INFORMATION	7
ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT	12
SAFETY AND SERVICES	24
SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY	29
RESPONSIBLE OPERATION AROUND WILD ANIMALS	31
APPENDICES	35
ADDITIONAL CRITERIA FOR BIRD WATCHING BOATS	45
ADDITIONAL CRITERIA FOR CAGE DIVING BOATS	47
ADDITIONAL CRITERIA FOR RECREATIONAL DIVING BOATS	49
ADDITIONAL CRITERIA FOR RECREATIONAL FISHING BOATS	53
ADDITIONAL CRITERIA FOR SEAL WATCHING BOATS	56
ADDITIONAL CRITERIA FOR.....	58
WHALE WATCHING BOATS	58

GENERAL CRITERIA FOR TOURISM BOATS

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

Criterion 1. Information relating to local eco-systems and environmental phenomena must be available to tourists. The tour operator must also provide a map and information about the area of operation and, if applicable, about the protected area they are operating in.

The aim of this criterion is to make sure that tourists are well informed and educated about the natural and/or cultural assets seen during the tour so that they are encouraged to learn about and experience the environment in a responsible way. Depending on the operating area, this includes relevant local environmental phenomena, cultural sites, local ecosystems or sensitive areas in the surrounding environment.

Depending on the size and design of the boats, several methods are acceptable in providing information. These include:

- (Electronic) Information boards
- Posters
- Leaflets
- Video presentations
- Books
- Audio guides and announcements

The map of the area of operation and, if applicable, of the protected area must be displayed either in the ticket office of the tour operator, on the boat or in the tour operator's promotion leaflet that is provided for tourists. Tourist should get a clear idea of the characteristics of the area.

The provision of information and information materials must be available at no further costs than the ones which passengers have paid for the activity.

*If there is no space for any of the named sources of information on **small boats**, the provision of a guide (see criterion 7) is sufficient to comply with this criterion. The decision whether the boat is too small to provide additional information materials lies with the Blue Flag National Operator and Blue Flag International. However, additional information materials should be available in the ticket office if this is open to the public.*

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All boating operators	

Criterion 2. A code of conduct for tourists that reflects appropriate rules governing the behaviour onboard must be displayed. The tour operator must also be able to provide relevant information about the appropriate behaviour in the harbour area.

The code of conduct should address tourists and their conduct on the boat. The code of conduct must be displayed on the boat. It is also recommended that the code of conduct is displayed in the ticket office and on the website.

The code of conduct for the boat must at least include rules about:

- the adequate disposal of litter
- the smoking policy onboard
- safety advices (how to move safely around the boat, do's and don'ts)
- the adequate behaviour during an encounter with wild animals (e.g. no feeding and touching, avoidance of loud noises, use of flashlight etc.), if applicable

The code of conduct has to be easily understandable and should preferably include graphics. In destinations with many international tourists, it is recommended to translate the code of conduct in relevant languages as well.

In addition, the tour operator must be able to provide all information about the harbour area, which is relevant for the safety of the tourists and the safety for the environment. This information could include rules about the use of vehicles and parking areas, no-swimming or diving areas, the use of fire (etc.).

Please see appendix B for an example of an acceptable code of conduct.

*On **small boats**, the code of conduct does not have to be displayed onboard, but it must be communicated to the tourists by the guide, captain or another staff member.*

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All boating operators	

Criterion 3. Information about the Blue Flag programme and the Blue Flag for tourism boats must be displayed on the boat and in the ticket office.

Information about the Blue Flag programme must be available in the tour operator's office, on the boats and on the website of the tour operator. The correct International Blue Flag logo must be used, in accordance with the FEE branding guidelines. The essence of each of the five categories of the Blue Flag tourism boat criteria must be explained in this information. It must also be explained that the Blue Flag award is only valid for one year at a time. Contact details for the national and international Blue Flag representatives must be available as well.

In areas of international tourism, it is recommended that the information be provided in relevant languages.

In the event that the flag is temporarily withdrawn, information must be provided on the tour operator's website and the ticket office informing the public as to the reasons why the flag was withdrawn.

Blue Flag tourism boats can promote the Green Key programme as another FEE eco-label programme with a message such as: "Along with the Blue Flag, the Foundation for Environmental Education also develops another eco-label for accommodations: Green Key."

Appendix C provides an example of how the Blue Flag information can be presented.

*On **small boats**, the information about Blue Flag does not have to be displayed onboard, but it has to be*

posted in the ticket office and on the tour operator's website.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All boating operators	

Criterion 4. The boating operator is responsible for offering at least one environmental education activity to the tourists, employees or local community within the Blue Flag awarded year.

Environmental education activities promote the aims of the Blue Flag programme by:

- increasing the awareness of, and care for, the local environment by recreational users and residents.
- training personnel and tour operators in environmental matters and best practice methods.
- encouraging the participation of local tour operators in environmental management within the area.
- promoting sustainable recreation and tourism in the area.
- promoting the sharing of ideas and efforts between the Blue Flag programme and other FEE programmes (YRE, LEAF, Eco-Schools and Green Key).

The tour operator is obliged to offer at least one environmental education activity within the year to its employees or to the general public. Educational activities that are offered on standard tours (including tailor-made tours) do not comply with this criterion. In addition, activities that are offered to comply with other criteria do not comply with this criterion. The activities should focus on the environment, environmental issues, Blue Flag issues or sustainability issues.

The activities can be carried out on the boat as well as in the office of the tour operator, at the harbour or in other public places (town hall, school, etc.). Depending on the average number of tourists per season, the tour operator must offer one to five educational activities per season:

Below 2500 tourists per year	- 1 activity
Between 2500 and 4999 tourists per year	- 2 activities
Between 5000 and 7499 tourist per year	- 3 activities
Between 7500 and 9999 tourist per year	- 4 activities
From 10000 and more tourists per year	- 5 activities

The planned environmental education activities must be included in the application documents, as well as a report on activities carried out during the previous year (if the tour operator has been awarded before).

The environmental education activities should be effective and relevant, and each year, the tour operator should re-evaluate the activities that were implemented and work towards constantly improving them.

Where the planned environmental education activities are of interest to and involve, the general public or tourists, these activities must be promoted in good time to inform the public about these opportunities. Furthermore, these activities must be offered for free. However, a small

participatory fee is accepted if needed to cover costs such as lunches, water, etc. but no business benefits can be made out of these environmental education activities.

Tour operators are encouraged to implement and/or support sustainable development projects in which public participation is a key element, e.g. Local Agenda 21 initiatives or action days. The activities can also be linked to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

If specific sensitive natural areas (including protected areas) lie within the area of operation of the tour operator (e.g. mangroves, coral reefs or seagrass beds), it is imperative that some of the educational activities address these sensitive natural areas.

Appendix D provides further background on the environmental education activities.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All boating operators	

Criterion 5. All staff must be trained on the environmental undertakings of the operator.

An essential precondition for offering environmentally friendly tourism products is environmental education within the company. Only if the employers and employees have a clear understanding of the impacts their operation has on the environment, they can adjust their behaviour and make more sustainable decisions. It is therefore important to educate the staff about the environmental undertakings of the operator and to actively engage them. For this purpose, the management of the operator must organise at least one annual meeting.

The information includes issues of environmental management (water, energy, waste, cleaning, food and beverage, etc.), other sustainability issues, but also issues of awareness-raising of guests, staff, suppliers and the surrounding community. Furthermore, if the company is operating in a protected area, the employees must be informed about the respective laws and regulations which are in place.

Keeping the staff updated about existing and new environmental initiatives give the staff a better understanding of their role in the work but also enables the staff to properly inform and answer questions from guests on the matter. The staff is not only informed about the environmental initiatives but also has the possibility to contribute with ideas and suggestions.

When planning the meetings, consideration is taken regarding seasonal employees in order to ensure as much participation of the staff as possible.

During the application, minutes from the held meetings between the management and staff is presented. During the control visits, it is also possible to engage staff to know their level of knowledge on environmental initiatives of the establishment.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All boating operators	

Criterion 6. The staff of the tour operator must receive training on the local environment and/or other environmental and sustainability issues at least once a year.

The tour operator must offer information to its staff about one of the following issues at least once a year:

- The local ecosystems: characteristics and threats they are facing
- Local flora and fauna
- Local culture
- Developments in the local community that linked to the activities of the tour operator
- Sustainable consumption
- Responsible tourism
- Environmental management
- Health and well-being
- The United Nation's 17 Sustainable Development Goals

The training can be both external and internal. External training could hold the form of training courses by consultants, experts, guides, product suppliers, field trips to museums, national parks etc., participation in seminars, webinars and other online courses and studies, networks, etc.

Internal trainings can be organised by the management or by other staff members and could be held in the form of presentations, film screenings, workshops etc.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All boating operators	

Criterion 7. The tour operator must provide a qualified guide who is in charge of the safety instructions and the environmental education onboard for each tour.

The tour operator must provide a qualified guide on each tour to ensure that tourists respect and are educated about natural and cultural assets as well as about the environment and how to behave responsibly during the tour. The guide should provide sufficient information about possible wildlife sightings and educate tourists about appropriate behaviour during an encounter with wild animals.

All guides have to complete a training which is either conducted by another guide who has been working for the tour operator for at least 6 months, by the person who is in charge of organising the tours or which is conducted by a third party which has expertise in guiding tours and/or environmental education. This third party could be environmental NGOs, research institutes, accredited naturalists, etc. The tour operator has to keep records about these trainings.

Blue Flag recommends that the guides have at least one of the following qualifications:

- they study or have a degree in a field of study that is relevant for the activity (biology-related fields of study, earth sciences, environmental sciences, tourism)
- they have work experience in guiding nature-related tours
- they have a qualification in guiding which is accredited by the national authorities

- They have work experience in the field of nature conservation, sustainable tourism or sustainable development
- they are locals that prove to have sufficient knowledge about natural phenomena and wildlife

The information given to tourists by the guide must include:

- information about the local nature, wildlife and if applicable culture
- Responsible behaviour onboard during encounters with wildlife and local communities/residents
- Code of conduct
- Safety instructions

If the activities don't require a guide, the tour operator can ask for a dispensation from this criterion. The decision whether the activity requires a guide lies with the Blue Flag National Operator and Blue Flag International. A possible way to replace the guide is to provide audio information (either through loudspeakers or individual headphones). However, the recording must include the same information as usually given by a guide and must be approved by the Blue Flag National Operator or Blue Flag International.

See Appendix E for a detailed list of information guides have to provide to the tourists.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All boating operators	

Criterion 8. Tour operators that transfer tourists to land-based excursions, or that offer ferry services next to other tourism activities must provide information about the environment at the destination and inform tourists about their possible impact on the local ecosystems.

Land-based excursions include all excursions that are reached by boat but are conducted by foot, bike or other transportation means at the destination. Tourism boats which offer transfers to land-based excursions, that offer tours which include a land-based excursion, or which offer ferry services next to other tourism activities are asked to educate the tourists about nature and if relevant, culture at the destination prior to their visit. This could include the geography, wildlife, monuments or other natural or cultural assets. The aim of this criterion is to minimise the possible negative impact of the tourists on sensitive areas once they have disembarked the boat.

Tour operators with the sole purpose of offering ferry services cannot apply for the Blue Flag.

See the explanatory notes on criterion 1 for examples of how to provide this information to tourists.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All boating operators that transfer tourists to land-based excursions	

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Criterion 9. A management committee should be established, with responsibility for instituting environmental management systems and conducting regular environmental control visits of the tourism boat, the buildings of the tour operator and the tours.

The management committee should be responsible for ensuring compliance with all environmental management criteria, including protected area requirements where appropriate. It should also be responsible for assessing the quality of the tour, both regarding the information provided to tourists, and the level of responsibility exhibited by those conducting the tour.

The committee should consist of relevant stakeholders at the local level. Relevant stakeholders might include: local authority representatives; educational representatives; local or international NGOs; community representatives; special user groups; protected area representatives; representatives of the boating industry and other Blue Flag tourism operators.

The management committee should co-operate with and support the tour operator and should conduct environmental control visits of the boat, the buildings and the tours.

Where appropriate, a management committee may operate over a number of Blue Flag tourism operators within a local authority or an area/region. There is no need for a separate management committee for each individual Blue Flag tourism operator.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
	All boating operators

Criterion 10. Each boating operator must have an environmental policy and an environmental plan which includes concrete environmental goals. All employees must be informed and educated about the plan.

This criterion encourages the tour operator to investigate the environmental impacts their boats and buildings have on the environment, to plan and perform improvements of the environmental conditions on the boats and buildings, and, finally, to document these improvements. The criterion, therefore, not only aims to encourage tour operators to appraise their environmental situation, but also to focus on the actions that need to be taken to improve this situation. Planning and improving the environmental conditions on the boats and in the buildings can, at the same time, have a positive effect on the economy of the tour operator. The environmental goals could address the water management, the waste and energy consumption, health and safety issues, and the use of environmentally friendly products wherever possible.

The tour operator has to produce a list of environmental goals every year. The tour operator should aim at reaching at least 3 environmental goals in each year. It must be clear what the tour operator wants to achieve with the goal, when it will be achieved and who is responsible for the goal. If the tour operator wants to be awarded in the following year, a report has to be produced which assesses the implementation of the goal, as well as the outcomes.

Furthermore, each tour operator must have an environmental policy which is a general statement describing the overall aims and ambitions of the company to operate sustainably. All staff must be aware of the environmental policy.

See Appendix F for two suggestions on how to develop an environmental plan.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All boating operators	

Criterion 11. The boating operator must comply with all regulations pertaining to the location and operation of the tourism boat and offered services. All buildings must be properly maintained and be in compliance with national legislation.

Regulations pertaining to the harbour, the operations of the tours, the services provided as well as the tourism boat must be met for the tourism boat to receive and maintain its Blue Flag status. The tour operator must assure that the tourism boat and the activities under its responsibility comply with all relevant international and national regulations. These regulations may include environmental legislation, wastewater legislation, safety regulations, operation licenses, licences and permits concerning the preparation and offering of food, among others. Every boat must be registered, and the crew must hold valid skipper and captain's licences, if applicable.

In addition, the ticket office and other buildings must be clean, well-maintained and in compliance with legislation. No unauthorised pollution from the buildings or facilities is to enter the marine land, water or surroundings.

At the time of application for Blue Flag status, the applicant must provide written evidence from all relevant departments that the boat, buildings and crew meet international and national regulations.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All boating operators	

Criterion 12. Hazardous waste generated on the tourism boat and in the buildings must be stored and disposed of responsibly.

Hazardous waste (e.g. paints, solvents, boat scraping, antifouling agents, used batteries, waste oil, flares, light bulbs, ink cartridges etc.) must be stored in segregated containers and must be disposed of at respective reception facilities or returned to the seller.

The containers for storing hazardous waste must be clean and environmentally-safe. The containers must be suitable to contain the hazardous waste in question, and the floor or surface on which the containers stand must be made of a material which is not affected by the hazardous waste and which is easy to clean if leakage occurs.

The waste must be prevented from leaking, igniting, exploding, etc. It must be separated from other facilities and must not pose a danger to children. Wherever possible, the containers should not be located close to the water. In the event of an accidental spillage, the area around the containers must be cleaned up immediately and rehabilitated as a matter of priority.

Hazardous waste must be removed from the boats as soon as possible and must be disposed of or delivered to a licensed disposal facility.

Licensed disposal facilities are facilities approved by authorities on the basis of environmental requirements. To ensure the correct collection, sorting, storage and disposal of the waste, the tour operator must comply with national and international waste management plans and standards.

The duty of a tourism boat receiving Blue Flag accreditation is to ensure that all waste is properly disposed of.

*If hazardous waste is produced on **small boats** (e.g. batteries, defective light bulbs), it must be temporarily stored in a secure place and container on the boat, where it does not pose any danger to either the passengers or the environment. It must be removed from the boat immediately after the tour.*

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All boating operators	

Criterion 13. Adequate and well-managed litter bins and/or garbage containers must be in place on the boats and in the buildings of the tour operator. The wastes must be disposed of at a licensed facility that is handled by a licensed contractor. This can be done through the harbour.

Litter bins and/or garbage containers must be placed in areas where they are in easy reach of tourists and staff members. The size and number of the bins/containers should be adequate for the number of users, and there should be clear signage on each bin regarding the kind of litter it accepts. The litter bins should be emptied and maintained regularly.

Litter bins, preferably with covers, should also be of a suitable design and appearance. It is recommended that bins made of environmentally friendly products be used (e.g. bins made of recycled composite plastics or wood). It is further recommended that recyclable trash bags be used.

The collected waste should only be disposed of in licensed facilities that are approved by authorities on the basis of environmental requirements. Waste must not be discharged into the water. Food waste should also be disposed of onshore, but if discharged into the water, it has to be done in line with national and international regulations. It is the duty of the tour operator receiving the Blue Flag to ensure that the waste is properly disposed of.

*If there is no space for (separate) litter bins on **small boats**, the tour operator must provide an alternative (e.g. separate trash bags), separate the trash after the tour or advise passengers to keep their litter until the end of the tour.*

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All boating operators	

Criterion 14. Facilities for receiving recyclable waste materials such as bottles, cans, paper, plastic and organic material must be in place on the tourism boat and in the tour operator's buildings.

On the boat and in the buildings of the tour operator, emphasis should be placed on waste minimisation. Waste should, to the largest possible extent, be separated into different categories and recycled.

Separated categories might include glass, cans, paper, plastic, organic material, etc. The boats and buildings must be equipped with facilities for receiving different kinds of recyclable waste materials. To facilitate their use, the containers must be well labelled, in various languages where appropriate.

Non-biodegradable and non-recyclable waste must be strictly separated from other kinds of waste, and properly disposed of in licensed facilities.

The tour operator receiving the Blue Flag accreditation has a duty to ensure that its recyclable waste is properly recycled.

*If there is no space for (separate) litter bins on **small boats**, the tour operator must provide an alternative (e.g. separate trash bags) or advise passengers to keep their litter until the end of the tour.*

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All boating operators	

Criterion 15. Single-use products used in connection with food and beverages must be avoided. If single-use products are used, recyclable products and products made of biodegradable materials must be used.

Wherever safe and possible, the tour operator must equip its boats and its buildings with reusable plates, cups, glasses and cutlery. If single-use products are used, they have to be recyclable in the respective country or made of biodegradable materials such as wood or corn starch, e.g.. Furthermore, single-serving packages for food products such as sugar, milk, sauces, jam etc. must be avoided. If single-dose packages have to be used, they should be packaged in recyclable packaging.

Recyclable, single-use products should be disposed of in line with criterion 14.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 16. 50% of food and beverages offered to tourists must be or contain local products, organic products, eco-labelled products or fair-trade products.

If the tour operator offers food and/or beverages on the boats and/or in the buildings to the tourists, consideration must be given to local products (produced within a radius of 100 km from the tour operator), organic products, eco-labelled products or fair-trade products. This includes, e.g. hot and cold beverages, sweets, pastries, other salty or sweet snacks as well as whole meals offered before, during or after the tour. National and local dishes are to be offered preferably. At

least 50% of the offered products must comply with these requirements. If the meals are prepared by the tour operator, each ingredient counts as one product. In the case of finished products (e.g. beverages, single-serving packages), each finished product counts as one product.

In addition, tour operators are not allowed to sell or prepare food and beverages that contain products from endangered species.

If the tour operator offers meals to the staff, it is highly recommended that the food and beverages provided also comply with this criterion.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
	All tourism operators

Criterion 17. In EU countries, paper towels, facial tissues and toilet paper must be made of non-chlorine bleached paper or awarded with an eco-label. Tour operators operating in non-EU countries are strongly encouraged to follow this criterion.

International or nationally recognised eco-labels for paper towels, facial tissues and toilet paper are evidence for a lower environmental footprint through a more environmentally friendly production process. Alternatively, it can also be checked if the products are produced from non-chlorine bleached paper (as bleaching of paper causes additional use of energy and chemicals). The requirement is obligatory for tour operators located in EU countries, while it is strongly encouraged that tour operators in countries outside the EU also implement and comply with this criterion.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All tourism operators	

Criterion 18. Smoking should be prohibited on the tourism boat. If smoking is allowed on the boat, it must have special facilities for the disposal of cigarette butts.

Cigarette filters which are made of cellulose acetate, a kind of plastic which takes years to degrade, are one of the most found items in marine litter. It is therefore recommended to prohibit smoking on the boat to prevent the filters entering the marine or freshwater environment. If smoking is allowed on the boat, adequate disposal containers must be available in the smoking areas. Clear signage must indicate these areas and the disposal containers. The staff is obliged to inform tourists about the smoking policy on board, and to advise tourists of where to dispose of their cigarette butts.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 19. If bilge water pumping facilities are available in the harbour, the tour operator should make use of them. Untreated bilge water must not be released into the water.

Every tour operator that receives the Blue Flag accreditation for at least one of its boats should ensure that the bilge water on its boats is properly treated and removed. The tourism boat should be either equipped with bilge water holding tanks or a bilge water treatment system.

Bilgewater pumping facilities in the harbour should be able to separate the oily bilge water or water extraction from oily residues. If there are no bilge water pumping facilities available in the harbour, the tour operator should encourage the responsible authorities to install such facilities. The tour operator could also seek an agreement with a neighbouring harbour that owns such facilities.

During the application, the tour operator has to explain how bilge water is handled. If the bilge water is released into the water, the tour operator has to explain why it is not removed on land and how it is treated before releasing it into the water.

If the bilge water must be released into the water, it must only be done in line with national or international regulations, considering among others the MARPOL regulations for preventing oil pollution from ships if applicable to the respective kind of boat (Annex I of MARPOL 73/78).

It is also recommended that the tour operator uses oil absorbent products in the bilge room (e.g. bilge socks, bilge booms, bilge pads or bilge pillows) to absorb oil and fuel contaminated water.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 20. Sewage disposal must be controlled and directed to a licensed sewage treatment facility. Untreated water from toilets must not be released into the sea or freshwater bodies, nor close to sensitive areas.

The tour operator is responsible for the correct disposal of the sewage that is produced on its boats and in its buildings. It must ensure that untreated sewage or effluents from the toilets in the buildings do not enter the ground or the water.

On the tourism boat, black and grey water should be stored in holding tanks and appropriately disposed of ashore, whenever possible. However, if it must be released into the water, it has to be done in line with national or international regulations, considering among others the MARPOL regulations for the prevention of pollution by sewage from ships if applicable to the respective kind of boat (Annex IV of MARPOL 73/78).

During the application, the tour operator has to explain how black and grey water is handled on the tourism boat. If the black and grey water are released into the water, the tour operator has to prove that a) there are no respective reception facilities in the harbour or b) that the tanks do not have the capacity to hold the black and/or greywater until the end of the tour or c) That the boat is too small to have holding tanks.

If the black and/or greywater has to be released into the water, Blue Flag asks that at a minimum the following standards are followed:

- black and grey water must never be released in stagnant water bodies, in sensitive areas, close to the shore, in estuaries or in the harbour
- black and grey water must not be released into the water when people are swimming around the boat
- Greywater should be as less contaminated as possible. To reduce contamination, the following rules must be followed:
 - o Cooking and kitchen oils must never be drained
 - o food scraps must always be removed before cleaning the dishes
 - o soaps, shampoos and cleaning products must be biodegradable
- The black and greywater must be treated before it is released to minimise the environmental impact

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 21. When selecting products such as paints, paint remover, detergents, cleaning products, etc., the tour operator must source environmentally friendly versions, where available and effective. Special precautions must be taken when using detergents on the outside sections of the tourism boat. Cleaning products that enter the greywater produced on the boat must be biodegradable.

The tour operator is responsible for the purchase and use of products which have been proven to be environmentally friendly, and which are labelled accordingly, where these options exist for the product group in question. This applies for products used in the buildings of the tour operator, as well as on the tourism boat.

Cleaning products that are used on a daily basis must either have a nationally or internationally recognised eco-label or cannot contain compounds listed in the blacklist in appendix G. Cleaning products that end up in the greywater of the boat must be biodegradable unless the grey water tank is **always** emptied on land.

In line with the EU regulation (EC) No 782/2003 on the prohibition of organotin compounds on ships, biocides containing TBT (Tributyltin) must not be used as anti-fouling agents.

Tour operators that apply for the Blue Flag must remove respective anti-fouling agents, or coat them to prevent the leaching of harmful compounds, within 5 years of obtaining the Blue Flag. This removal or coating must be recorded in the environmental plan of the boat (see criterion 10), and the tour operator must prove its efforts to comply with this criterion during every awarding period.

When the tour operator applies new anti-fouling agents on the tourism boat, it has to be included in the environmental plan, and the name of the anti-fouling agent has to be mentioned in the documentation.

See Appendix G for a blacklist of cleaning products.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 22. Repair and painting works on the tourism boat must be limited to specifically designated areas in the harbour or locations where there is no danger that toxic substances might enter the water or the ground.

The tour operator must ensure that all repair and painting works are done in appropriate areas and facilities so that the environment is not negatively affected.

Regular maintenance works must only be done in designated areas with collection filters, gutters or equivalent systems that catch toxic residues and contaminated water from washing, painting or removing (antifouling) paint.

Larger repair activities (e.g. grinding, polishing or sandblasting, spray-painting and larger paint works which cause dust pollution) must take place under cover or indoors under controlled conditions. Collected waste must be handled as hazardous waste.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 23. The tour operator must provide to employees and tourists only environmentally friendly toiletries. All toiletries on the tourism boat must be biodegradable.

All personal care products that are used on the tourism boat and in the buildings (e.g. soap, shampoo, lotions, etc.) must be environmentally friendly. On the boat, all toiletries must be biodegradable. It is furthermore recommended to install dosing systems to limit the use of these products.

On tours that include activities in the water, environmentally friendly sunscreen should be provided to tourists.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

24. Sustainable means of transportation must be promoted whenever advising tourists and staff as to how to get to the tourism boat or the ticket office.

The tour operator must encourage the use of sustainable transportation to and from the harbour where the boat is located. It should therefore provide tourists and staff with the necessary information (e.g. bus schedules, group pick-up services, etc.) Information regarding sustainable transportation must also be available on the website of the tour operator.

Sustainable transportation can also be promoted through the availability of bicycles for rent and the provision of a bike rack.

Since this criterion is in accordance with Local Agenda 21 activities, the tour operator is encouraged to collaborate, or work with, local authorities and/or local Agenda 21 groups regarding compliance with this criterion.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 25. The relevant authorities must be notified immediately regarding accidents that might cause environmental damage.

If an accident does occur on the boat, or if the crew notices an accident on another boat or facility, which might cause environmental damage, it must be reported immediately to the relevant authorities to minimise the negative impacts on the environment.

Relevant authorities include local authorities, fire-fighting brigade, Red Cross, environmental authorities, port authority, etc.

An emergency plan for accidents onboard that might negatively affect the environment must be available on the boat in line with criterion 32.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 26. Speed and engine maintenance must be aimed at maximising energy efficiency and minimising pollution.

The tourism boat must be operated in such a way as to use as little energy as possible. To meet this criterion routes should be planned prior to each tour to avoid unnecessary detours. The engine should be switched off whenever appropriate (depending on the engine system and the condition at sea) and unnecessarily increase in speed should be avoided.

Engines must be maintained on a regular basis to ensure their efficiency.

The use of electric engines in addition to propane outboard engines is recommended for boats with outboard engines. Furthermore, propeller guards should be used whenever possible.

It is also recommended to use filtering systems for oil and other liquids which allow their reuse.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 27. Anchoring restrictions must be respected. If available, mooring buoys must be used to protect the seabed. If no mooring buoys are available, the tourism boat must only anchor in insensitive grounds.

Incautious anchoring may have severe effects on the seabed, especially if sensitive seafloors like coral reefs or seagrass meadows are affected. Therefore, the crew must be well-informed regarding the characteristics of the sea bed, and any anchorage must be carefully chosen. International and national laws and regulations must be respected, and any violation of these by other boats should be reported to the responsible authorities.

Mooring buoys are a safe and environmentally friendly alternative to individual anchoring. When available in the area of operation of the boat, therefore, they should be given preference.

If no mooring buoys are available, the boat should always prefer to anchor in insensitive grounds like sand, mud, etc. The tour operator is responsible for encouraging the relevant local authorities or sanctuary managers to install mooring buoys.

Furthermore, to prevent the anchor chain from dragging over the seabed, fenders can be attached to buoy the chain and to lift the anchor chain from the seabed.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 28. After the life service of a tourism boat has been reached, it must be disposed of in accordance with national regulations.

The tour operator is responsible for the correct and environmental sound disposal of its boats that have reached the end of their life service. Until the boat is transported to a licensed recycling facility, the tour operator must ensure that it is maintained in such a condition that it does not have any negative effects on the environment (e.g. there are no oil leaks while it is still in the water). If the condition of a boat poses danger to the environment, it must be removed from the water and stored in a safe area.

If the boat is not regularly monitored, the tour operator must ensure that it is inaccessible to unauthorised persons and that all hazardous wastes and substances are removed.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

29. Noise pollution from the tourism boat must be minimised.

The tour operator is responsible for keeping the noise level under and above the water surface at a minimum so as not to disturb wildlife, residents or other users in the operating area. All national and local laws and regulations on noise pollution must be strictly followed.

In certain areas and situations all music, audio announcements or other noises should be reduced or completely switched off, for example in densely populated areas, in direct vicinity of wild animals, during certain times of the day etc. The tour operator has to assess all of its tours and activities in regard to noise nuisance and determine when and where the reduction of noise or the complete prohibition of noise is necessary. The assessment could be done together with relevant

stakeholders like local resident associations, scientists, nature conservation organisations, tourism associations etc.

During the assessment, both the actual noise level (measured in decibel) and the perceived noise level (expressed by passengers, residents etc.) should be used as indicators to assess if the noise level on the boat is tolerable.

To keep the underwater noise at a minimum, the engine or the engine room should be equipped with soundproofing material and/or mufflers. Unnecessary speeding up of the engines must be avoided.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 30. Best environmental practice should also be adopted in the tour operator's buildings and facilities that are not open to the public.

Blue Flag accredited tour operators should aim to make all of their facilities and operations environmentally friendly. For that reason, it is highly recommended that the tour operator also apply all criteria regarding the equipment and maintenance of the publicly accessible buildings to those that are not open to the public.

If the tour operator chooses to comply with this criterion, there has to be an environmental plan for each building in line with criterion 10.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
	All operators

SAFETY AND SERVICES

Criterion 31. Adequate and well-signposted lifesaving, first-aid and fire-fighting equipment must be present on the tourism boat. This equipment must be approved by relevant national authorities.

When addressing good safety practices on the boat, it is valuable to distinguish between the different roles and the different types of action to be taken:

- The tourists versus the crew
- Prevention measures versus rescue/emergency measures

Accident prevention is paramount for safety. To help prevent accidents, the tour operator must ensure that all its the boat facilities are properly maintained, that national legislation is followed, and that staff and tourists are well informed and/or trained around safety issues. Each crew member must know which role he or she should take in an emergency situation on board.

It is also recommended that a risk assessment of the boats is undertaken to examine potential safety issues (e.g. for the determination of emergency gathering points on board).

The tour operator should provide life vests for every passenger on board. They should always be offered to children.

The boats must be equipped with the necessary technical means and equipment to deal with any accident that might occur on board. For large boats with more than two decks it is recommended that every crew member is equipped with a radio to facilitate the communication if an accident occurs.

Lifesaving equipment

The following general guidelines must be followed when considering water safety on the boats:

- A person who falls in the water should be able to get out of the water.
- A person must be able to help or rescue a distressed person in the water without risking his or her own life.

The lifesaving equipment on board must include an adequate number of man overboard rescue devices, like lifebuoys or safety ladders, as well as an adequate number of rescue boats, if applicable.

The lifesaving equipment must comply with national or international standards and should be approved by the national lifesaving body. The equipment must be available in adequate numbers, easy to identify (well-signposted) and easily accessible from all over the boat. The placement of equipment on the boat must be in compliance with national or international legislation.

Fire-fighting equipment

The fire-fighting equipment on the boat must, at the least, include fire extinguishers, but could also include water hoses, fire carpets, etc. The fire-fighting equipment must be approved by the

national firefighting association/organisation/authority, or comply with national or international standards.

The equipment must be available in adequate numbers, easy to identify (well-signposted) and easily accessible from all over the boat. The placement of equipment must also be in compliance with national legislation.

First aid equipment

The content of a first-aid equipment box must comply with national legislation or meet the standards set by a national or international lifesaving association. The contents of the first-aid box must be regularly checked, and items must be replaced when necessary. The availability and location of the first aid equipment must be very clearly signposted on the boat.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 32. Emergency plans for different possible kinds of accidents must be produced. The crew must be trained on these emergency plans on a regular basis.

If an accident or emergency does occur, the tour operator must have the necessary organisational means or emergency plans on hand to deal with it.

The tour operator must have an emergency plan available that states what to do in cases of pollution (e.g. oil leaks), fire, man overboard situations, stranding, leaking or other possible accidents affecting the safety of the passengers, the crew and the environment. The crew onboard must be informed about the emergency plans.

The emergency plan should (at least) include the following:

- Identification of the people to contact in case of an accident
- Involvement of administration services and necessary intervening persons
- Procedures for the protection, rescue or evacuation of people on the boat or in the water
- Procedures of public warning and information

The emergency plans should be revised yearly. Emergency trainings should be offered to the crew at least once per month. New employees must be educated about the emergency plans prior to the commencement of work.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 33. Safety precautions and information must be presented on the tourism boat.

Accident prevention is paramount for safety. In most cases, accidents that occur could have been prevented by the people involved. Thus, safety information and education for the crew and passengers are very important.

Safety advices that address the general behaviour on board (how to move safely around the boat, what to do when feeling seasick, responsible behaviour during hot weather, guidance regarding the consumption of alcohol onboard) must be presented verbally by the guide or another crew member and must be included in the code of conduct (see criterion 2).

In addition, the following safety precautions have to be presented by the guide or another crew member and must include (at least) the following:

- Information about the location of lifesaving, fire-fighting and first-aid equipment
- Details on how to warn other people about an unsafe / man overboard situation and how to help
- Information about the location of the sanitary facilities
- Information about the location of gathering points in case of an emergency

*On **small boats**, it is sufficient if the guide educates the passengers regarding the safety precautions.*

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 34. If the tour operator offers alcohol on its tourism boats, it has to be done in a responsible manner.

Tour operators that offer alcohol during their tours have to have the necessary permissions, if applicable and respect national legislation on the minimum legal drinking age. Staff serving alcohol must not permit intoxication of consumers to the extent that it could compromise the safety of themselves or any other person on the boat.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 35. Sanitary facilities must be available to the tourists. They must be clean, well-signposted and the access must be safe. Drinking water must be provided on the tourism boat.

The sanitary facilities onboard and in the tour operator's buildings must be in good condition and well-signposted. They must be equipped with washbasins, soap and either clean towels (paper or cloth) or a hand-dryer. The sanitary facilities must be kept clean at all times. The frequency of monitoring and cleaning of the facilities must reflect the intensity of their use. Access to the sanitary facilities must be safe.

In the case that a tourist is in urgent need of drinking water (e.g. for the preparation of baby food, in case of dehydration, seasickness etc.), it must be made available free of charge. If the tap water

in the sanitary facilities is not potable, water dispensers or bottled water should be available for that case.

If there are no sanitary facilities on the boat, the tour operator must inform passengers of this prior to their booking. In that case, there must be sanitary facilities nearby the point of departure that passengers may use (public toilets at the harbour, in the ticket office, etc.) Additionally, if the size of the boat does not allow the transportation of drinking water, passengers should be allowed to bring their own non-alcoholic beverages and should be informed about it prior to the booking.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 36. Facilities for people with disabilities should be in place.

Dependent on the design and size of the boat and the place of embarkation, facilities for people with disabilities should be available.

They should include:

- Access to the boat for people with disabilities
- Special car parking facilities for people with disabilities
- Access to sanitary facilities for people with disabilities

All access and facilities for people with disabilities must comply with all national and international regulations/standards. Toilets should be designed for wheelchair users and other users with disabilities. It is recommended that a local disability organisation assess these facilities to ensure that they are sound.

If access to the boats for people with disabilities is limited, the tour operator should inform its customers of this prior to booking. The tour operator is obliged to refuse to take people with disabilities on board if there are major safety concerns.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
	All operators

Criterion 37. Adequate signage indicating the location of the different facilities must be posted on the tourism boat.

Adequate signage indicating the facilities onboard the boat must be posted on the boat. The signage should be of good quality, easy to read and properly orientated. Pictograms should preferably be used. The required elements (where applicable) should show the location of:

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| - Lifesaving equipment | - Toilets (including toilets for people with disabilities) |
| - First aid equipment | - Access points (including access points for people with |
| - Emergency gathering points | |
| - Emergency exits | |

- Firefighting equipment
- Smoking areas
- disabilities)
- Recycling facilities
- Catering facilities

For larger boats, a map indicating the location of the named facilities is also recommended.

Small boats are exempted from this criterion.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Criterion 38. Discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, origin or religious affiliation should not be accepted within the tour operator.

This criterion aims at promoting equality and encouraging the tour operator to foster the rights of all social groups. In an international economic environment, of which tourism is a part, it is important to respect other cultures and to promote positive encounters between all kinds of people.

Discrimination should be particularly avoided:

- in the hiring of new employees
- among employees
- in interaction with tourists

The head of the tour operator or company should encourage his/her employees to report any cases of discrimination and to facilitate the resolution of the situation.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 39. The tour operator is in compliance with international and national labour legislation.

The tour operator ensures that it follows all national and international conventions and regulations on labour, including conventions and recommendations of the International Labour Organization. At a minimum, the following requirements must be met:

- All employees receive information in writing (contract) stating the employment conditions, including information about working hours, insurance and salary
- All employees are paid at least a living wage, and the salary must not be below the legal minimum salary in the country
- The tour operator must adjust the salaries of its employees to their level of experience and responsibility. The gender of the employees must not be relevant to the determination of salaries
- All employees receive information about the working code of conduct/policies of the tour operator, and employees also receive information about the procedure for raising concerns/complaints
- no person younger than the legal working age can be hired

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 40. The tour operator should support the local economy by choosing to buy and use local products.

The tour operator should try to contribute to the local socio-economic environment in which they operate, whenever possible. By choosing to buy and use local products, they not only support the local economy, and therefore increase the welfare of the community in situ, but also make an environmentally responsible choice in terms of shorter transportation routes of products, etc.

Therefore, crew and staff members are also encouraged to promote only local products and services to tourists, which are considered to be sustainable and beneficial to the local community.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
	All operators

41. The tour operator actively supports local sustainability activities or initiatives of environmental/social organisations or of other groups in the local community.

To support and promote sustainable development in the local community, the tour operator cooperates with environmental/social organisations or special interest groups.

This includes, e.g.:

- Conservation organisations
- Humanitarian organisations
- Disability organisations
- Local schools or other educational institutions
- Indigenous groups
- Local producers
- Restoration activities
- Clean-ups organised by a local stakeholder

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
	All operators

42. Materials, equipment and furniture that are no longer used are collected and donated to charitable organisations

In case of the refurbishment of the boats and/or the buildings, or whenever materials, equipment or furniture are no longer needed, the tour operator explores what is still in good condition/usable, and donates it to a charitable organisation or persons in need.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
	All operators

RESPONSIBLE OPERATION AROUND WILD ANIMALS

Criterion 43. Vulnerable and protected areas must be respected.

Boating operators must be aware of, and well-informed about, any protected or sensitive areas which lie within its area of operation. All regulations in place must be followed, and any violations of these by other boats must be reported to the relevant authorities. Fees incurred through the use of the protected area or sanctuary must be respected.

In some protected areas or sanctuaries, closing seasons are imposed to respect the breeding or mating seasons of certain species. If the area of operation lies within a sanctuary or protected area that employs such closing seasons, the tour operator must respect these periods and adjust its activities accordingly.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 44. Any wildlife must be approached at a slow speed and in a manner that allows the wild animal(s) to evaluate the situation. They must not be encircled, trapped or chased.

Any boat from the tour operator should always approach wild animals very cautiously. They should approach them with a slow, constant, no-wake speed, which generally does not exceed 5 knots, and hold a steady course without abrupt changes in direction.

Furthermore, the boats should:

- try to make sure that all boats present stay on the same side of the wild animal(s)
- avoid trapping wild animals between boats and any other physical barriers (e.g. islands, coastline, reefs, etc.)
- not chase after wild animals, but let them approach the boat voluntarily
- not approach wild animals directly from behind or from the front
- not cut off a wild animal's path, or force them in a particular direction

The boats should maintain a minimum distance from all wild animals encountered during a tour. The minimum distance from the wild animals is defined in the additional criteria for wildlife watching activities (see below). If Blue Flag does not provide guidelines in one of the other sets of criteria for tourism boats, the appropriate minimum distance from other species should be determined with the advice of scientists, local environmental organisations, local or national guidelines, the protected area management, etc.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 45. Special precaution must be taken in the vicinity of breeding wild animals. Young animals must not be separated from their group.

When approaching a group of wild animals, it should be assessed whether there are any juveniles or breeding individuals present. If this is the case, the boat should increase its distance from the group and observe whether there are any signs of disturbances while present. If the breeding individuals or parents do show a change in behaviour in response to the presence of the boat, the area should be left immediately.

In general, breeding grounds should be avoided whenever possible. The crew should be well-informed about breeding seasons, breeding areas, and the distinct behaviour of breeding individuals so that they can identify them quickly.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 46. When in the direct vicinity of any wildlife, noise must be reduced to a minimum and the engine should be put into neutral whenever appropriate.

Loud and/or sudden noises may alarm the wild animals and may lead to their fleeing. Therefore, all sources of noise should be switched off during a close encounter whenever possible.

The guides onboard should advise tourists not to shout or to make any other noises in the direct vicinity of the wild animals, prior to the encounter.

The engine should be put into neutral or switched off whenever possible during an encounter.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 47. The tour operator is responsible for advising tourists not to touch or collect living wild animals and plants.

Tour operators carry the responsibility for instructing their tourists not to make physical contact with wild animals or plants. The staff of the tour operator isn't allowed to make physical contact with wild animals and plants either.

There are three exceptions to this criterion:

- Recreational fishing boats (see the additional criteria for recreational fishing boats for further information).
- During the rescue of wild animals
- Physical contact for research purposes (tagging, sampling, etc.). However, only accredited researchers and their assistants are permitted to touch or collect the objects of investigation.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 48. Tourists and employees must not feed wild animals.

The feeding of wild animals can severely influence their natural feeding behaviour and lead to their conditioning. This can potentially affect not only the specific animal or group but the entire ecosystem by unbalancing the food web. Furthermore, the association of humans with food might lead to an increase in aggressive behaviour, which could threaten the safety of staff and tourists.

The tour operator is therefore obliged to advise tourists not to feed wild animals or to throw anything overboard that could be assumed to be food by the wild animals.

The use of fish oil or similar attractants like minced fish meat (known as chum), as well as other baiting methods that do not actually provide for the alimentation of the wild animals, however, are allowed. Tour operators that make use of such attractants must inform their tourists about this practice, and must record the amount and type of attractants used in the environmental plan.

Only recreational fishing boats are excluded from this criterion. See further information about the baiting on these boats in the additional criteria for recreational fishing boats.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 49. If there are any signs of disturbance, the boat must increase its distance to the wild animals.

Different species of wild animals will react differently to the presence of boats. If an animal's behaviour shows signs of disturbance, the boat should increase its distance significantly or leave the area.

Depending on the species, signs of disturbance may include:

- exclamation of warning sounds
- abrupt changes in direction
- unusual diving behaviour
- abandonment of resting or breeding grounds

The guide and captain of the boat must be aware of the specific signs of disturbance of the respective species that can be spotted in the observation area and should be able to distinguish the wild animals' natural behaviour from reactions caused by the presence of boats.

If signs of disturbances are observed, the boat should increase its distance until the individuals resume their usual behaviour. Otherwise, the boat should leave the area completely.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

Criterion 50. The tour operator should be open to cooperation with research institutions. The company's boats might function as a research platform, and collected data of wildlife sightings should be made available to researchers.

Research is a key instrument for developing and managing responsible wildlife watching activities. The tourism industry can only better its practices and products to make them more environmentally friendly and sustainable if there is sufficient evidence on how human interactions affect the environment and the local wildlife.

The tour operator is therefore encouraged to cooperate with universities and other research institutions. This cooperation may encompass:

- allowing researchers to use tour boats as research platforms
- creating databases of sightings (photos, countings, etc.) and making them available to scientists and the public

However, the tour operator must also ensure that its tourists are not negatively affected by the presence of researchers or research equipment.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
	All operators

Criterion 51. Injured, entangled, stranded or dead wild animals must be reported to the local authorities.

If an injured, entangled, stranded or dead animal is spotted, a crew member should report the sighting to the responsible authorities immediately. It is recommended to have a list of the contact details of these authorities available and easily accessible onboard.

Possible responsible authorities could include local environmental authorities, the port authority, the management of the protected area, etc.

Injured, entangled or stranded wild animals must not be touched or collected. Only authorised persons should take care of them.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All operators	

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Dispensation cases

All imperative criteria must be complied with in order to obtain the Blue Flag. In the event of discussions arising out of the National Jury processes, or cases in which an applicant has failed to fulfil the imperative criteria, the National Jury can forward a tourism boat to the International Jury as a dispensation case. In the case of an application requiring a dispensation, the National Jury must forward the case to the International Jury with the necessary background documentation and an explanation as to what imperative criteria have not been fulfilled, giving reasons as to why a dispensation is requested.

A tourism boat can apply for dispensation when:

- facilities are under construction at the time of the application but will be completed by the start of the operating season.
- the size and/or design of the boat does not allow for compliance with a criterion.
- The activity offered on the boat does not require the presence of a guide.
- the waste management in the respective country does not allow for the recycling of different kinds of waste.
- the facilities in the harbour where the tour operator is located do not allow for compliance with a criterion.
- the tour operator shares the ticket office with other companies/organisations, such that their influence on the environmental management of the building is limited.

If there are national third party entities that check the existence of the licences mentioned under criterion 11, a statement from the respective entity can be delivered as a proof of compliance. The National Operator, as well as the International Jury, have to approve this statement and the way that the checks are handled by the national third party. References to national and local laws are not sufficient to prove compliance with this criterion.

APPENDIX B: Guideline and template for the code of conduct

[Criterion 2]

General comments:

- Preferably use pictograms, graphics and cartoons where possible to get the attention of the tourists.
 - In destinations with many international tourists, it is recommended to translate the code of conduct in relevant languages
 - All information must be included in ONE code of conduct.
 - Use the correct Blue Flag logo
 - The four points below have to be included in the code of conduct. However, you are welcome to add more points which are of importance to you.
- **the adequate disposal of litter**
 - where are the bins?
 - Remind customers not to throw anything overboard
 - Explain which kind of recycling you have (maybe add a picture of the symbols on the bins and explain them)
 - Encourage tourists to reuse cups and plates, if applicable
 - **The smoking policy onboard**
 - Preferably use international pictograms
 - If smoking is allowed, add where to find the smoking areas and where to put the cigarette butts
 - Add information about the impact of cigarette butts on the environment like, e.g. "Cigarette butts are made out of plastic (cellulose acetate) and need 1-5 years to degrade. Unknowing marine animals might consume them and die due to choking or starvation. Please dispose of your cigarette butts responsibly."
 - **Safety instructions**
 - How to behave in an emergency situation (e.g. throwing a life ring to people who fell overboard)
 - How to move safely on the boat (walking down the stairs backwards, holding on to rails in heavy sea conditions etc.)
 - What to do when feeling seasick
 - If boat operates in locations with a lot of sun, remind people to drink enough and sunbath responsibly
 - **Appropriate behaviour during an encounter with wild animals, if applicable**
 - No feeding
 - No touching
 - No collecting
 - Depending on the species, add more advices



Reduce, reuse, recycle!

We at (Company Name) do our best to keep our environment clean. Please help us to do so and protect nature!

- Please never throw anything over board! You find our litter bins (Location)
- We recycle (Name types of recycling, insert pictures or use colour code):

Paper

Plastic

General Waste

- (if applicable) You want a refill? Please reuse your cup!



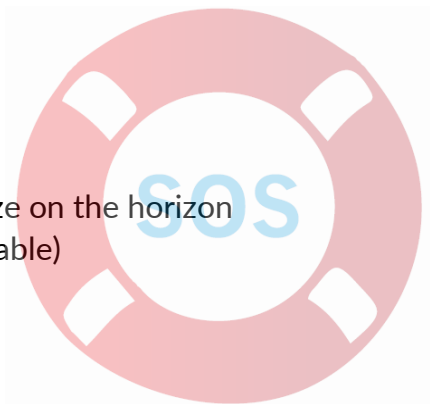
Our smoking policy

Smoking is not allowed on our boats
(Otherwise explain where to find the smoking area)



Safety first! (add all relevant info, e.g.):

- Move carefully around the boat, the floor might be slippery!
- Hold on the rails in heavy weather conditions!
- Please go down the steep stairs **backwards**!
- Feeling seasick? Go on deck, breathe deeply, and fix your gaze on the horizon
- The consumption of **alcohol is not allowed** on board (if applicable)
- All children under (years) have to wear life vests!



Meet our neighbours – responsibly

We would like to offer you the most authentic encounter with our wildlife while having the least negative effect on it. For that reason please:

- Don't feed wild animals
- Don't touch wild animals
- Don't collect any wild animals, plants, rocks or other things you find during the tour
- During close encounters, don't scream, shout, or try to get the attention of the wild animals in other ways
- (Depending on the species, add more advices)



APPENDIX C: Information about the Blue Flag programme must be displayed.

[Criterion 3]

THE BLUE FLAG PROGRAMME

This tour operator has been awarded the Blue Flag. The Blue Flag is a voluntary award, given to tourism boats that make a special effort to protect the environment. To attain the Blue Flag, the tour operator must fulfil a number of criteria covering:

- Environmental Education and Information
- Environmental Management
- Safety and Services
- Social Responsibility
- Responsible Operation around Wild Animals
-

By choosing a Blue Flag awarded tourism boat you contribute to the sustainable use of marine and freshwater environments, and encourage the wider tourism sector to put more efforts in minimising the negative effect recreational activities can have on the environment.

Facts about the Blue Flag:

The Blue Flag is awarded by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), a non-governmental environmental organisation, and is represented by such national organisations in each of the participating countries.

The Blue Flag is an environmental award for beaches, marinas and tourism boats. The criteria for Blue Flag tourism boats cover five main areas: a) Environmental Education, b) Environmental Management, c) Safety and Services, d) Social Responsibility and e) Responsible Operation around Wild Animals, as well as additional special criteria tailored for different boat-based tourism activities.

The criteria of the Programme are developed over time, such that participating tour operators must continually work to solve relevant environmental problems to attain the Blue Flag. Blue Flag accreditation is only given for one year at a time, and the award is only valid as long as the criteria are fulfilled. When this is not the case, the responsible persons at the local level are obligated to take the Blue Flag down.

The national FEE organisation, as well as the international FEE head-office, checks the Blue Flag sites and tourism boats during the season by conducting both announced and unannounced control visits.

You can also help the Programme by taking actions to protect the environment:

Use the litter bins provided and recycle waste if possible.

Use public transport, walk or rent a bike to get to your destination.

Enjoy nature and treat it with respect.

Choose a holiday destination that cares for its environment, and, if possible, and environmentally friendly hotel. Along with the Blue Flag, the Foundation for Environmental Education also administers an eco-label specifically for accommodations: Green Key.

Local, National and International Blue Flag responsible parties:

The name and address of the local responsible person, national Blue Flag operator and Blue Flag International must be posted.

Text to accompany the names and addresses could be the following: "These are the names and addresses of the local, national and international Blue Flag contacts. You are welcome to contact us to give us feedback about your experience with this Blue Flag awarded tourism operator. By doing so, you can help to ensure that Blue Flag remains an award of excellence.

All activities organised by the tour operator must have an environmental educational background. They must focus on environmental issues and the communication of sustainable and responsible behaviour and practices. The environmental background of the activities should be evident to the participants.

Types of Activities within the operating season (at least one organised in each operating season)

There must be a mixture of different types of environmental educational activities provided for different user groups if more than one activity has to be offered during the year. The different types of activities can be divided into four categories:

Activities for Passive Participation: This could include changing environment-related exhibitions; films; presentations; slide shows; conferences; debates; presentations by international experts; etc.

Activities for Active Participation: This includes educational games in the harbour/on the website; theatre/plays; cleaning days; guided underwater clean-ups; photography or drawing contests; nature reconstruction projects; green technology projects; etc.

Training Activities: This could include training for teachers; people in charge of children or students groups; specific national training programmes; educational visits to schools/universities; etc.

Publishing and Media: This category includes interviews with regional, national or international radio or television stations about environmental issues or nature protection; the production of books or information brochures about local environmental issues; the publishing of educational online games and quizzes; etc.

Target groups

The activities provided should target a wide range of different groups. It is important that the tour operator organises a programme to educate and raise awareness within the many different interest groups that influence the use of the local environment. These interest groups could be visitors, locals, tourism employees, fishermen, local industries, etc. The number and kind of activities and groups targeted should be appropriate to the situation and local context. For example, in a major tourist destination, more than one activity per season should be available to the general public.

Connection with existing programmes

The activities can be incorporated into pre-existing environmental education programmes, held either on-site or in the local community (Local Agenda 21 activities, Eco-Schools activities, etc.). It is also recommended that the tour operator works together with local NGOs in establishing and running educational activities.

Information about Activities

Information about publicly accessible activities must be made available at the ticket office, on the website of the tour operator, and preferably also in tourist offices and tourism newspapers/magazines. The published information should include: what kind of activities are available, when and where are they are to take place, who the target audiences are, etc.

Not Acceptable

Activities that are not acceptable for meeting this criterion are:

- Activities that are run purely in order to meet other Blue Flag criteria
- Activities focusing only on tourism without a specific focus on sustainable tourism
- Activities focusing only on the promotion of the tour operator

APPENDIX E: List of information the guide must provide before or during a tour

[Criterion 7]

The following topics must be included in the information the guide presents before or during a tour. These are only the minimum requirements of Blue Flag.

- Safety advices
 - How to move safely on the boat
 - What to do when feeling seasick
 - Responsible behaviour in hot weather (if applicable to the location)
 - guidance regarding the consumption of alcohol on board
- Safety precautions
 - Where to find the sanitary facilities
 - Where to find safety equipment
 - How to behave in a man overboard situation
 - Where to find the emergency gathering points
- Code of conduct
 - Smoking policy
 - Appropriate behaviour during an encounter with wild animals, if applicable (no feeding, no touching, reduction of noise, etc.)
 - Appropriate behaviour when approaching residential areas (no shouting, no music etc.), if applicable
 - Location of litter bins and recycling policy on board
- Information about the operating area/environment
 - Information about the marine protected area (if applicable)
 - Special natural characteristics of the area (topography, vegetation, etc.)
 - Cultural assets in the operating area
 - Detailed information about the species which might be seen during a tour
- Information about human-caused threats to the local environment and species, if applicable
 - Special focus on marine litter (e.g. the degradation time of different materials)

APPENDIX F: Tools for establishing environmental goals**[Criterion 10]**

To comply with criterion 9, the tour operator has to fill in the following sheet:

Goal	Name of the boat/building	Timeframe	Responsible person	Expected outcome
To replace plastic cups with paper cups	Seaflower	Week 24	Anna	Reduction of the use of plastic
Install water-saving taps	Office building	June 2016	Chris	Reduce water consumption

This Blacklist is prepared by the consultant organisation, Ecoconso. It covers multi-purpose and sanitation products (typically cleaning products). For cleaning any other specific areas that require special products, one must check for compliance with national legislation.

Surfactants:

Surfactants that are not readily biodegradable under aerobic conditions.

Surfactants that are not biodegradable under anaerobic conditions and that are classified as H400/R50 (Very toxic to aquatic life), Alkylphenol ethoxylates (APEOs), only phenol ethoxylates (NPEOs) and derivatives Quaternary ammonium compounds that are not readily biodegradable.

Sequestering or anti-scaling agents:

EDTA (ethylenediamine tetraacetate) and its salts, phosphates

Acids:

Phosphoric acid, hydrochloric acid, sulphuric acid

Bases:

Ammonium hydroxide

Solvents:

Detergents containing more than 6% by weight of VOCs with a boiling point lower than 150°C

Chlorine:

Reactive chloro-compounds (such as sodium hypochloride)

Conservators:

Formaldehyde

Antimicrobial or disinfecting ingredients added for other purposes than preservation.

Bioaccumulable preservatives classified as H410, H411, R50/53 or R51/53. Preservatives are not regarded as bioaccumulable if BCF < 100 (bioconcentration factor) or logK_{ow} < 3 (log octanol/water partition coefficient).

In addition, Blue Flag recommends the use of the SIN List for hazardous chemicals of ChemSec to check the toxicity of certain ingredients: <http://sinlist.chemsec.org/>

ADDITIONAL CRITERIA FOR BIRD WATCHING BOATS

Criterion 52. Boats must not drive through clusters of birds.

A minimum distance of 50m should be maintained from flocks of concentrated birds with boats 25m or greater and 30m for smaller boats. When within 100m of the targeted birds, the speed should be reduced to a no-wake speed and noise should be kept to a minimum. This will minimise disturbance of the birds and reduces stress.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All bird watching boats	

Criterion 53. It is not allowed to use playbacks of bird calls to attract them.

Playbacks can disrupt natural behaviour and lead to the abandoning of nests. Therefore, tour operators with the Blue Flag accreditation are not permitted to use any bird call playbacks.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All bird watching boats	

Criterion 54. Flash photography must be avoided.

Mass flash photography should be avoided as it may distract the observed birdlife, especially during feeding.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All bird watching boats	

Criterion 55. Birds must not be spotlighted with torches or other illuminants.

Strong illumination, especially of nesting birds, should be avoided during times of low light. This may cause birds to leave their nests and induce egg failure. However, the guide and the crew on the boat are responsible for informing the tourists that this practice is not allowed on the boats that are awarded the Blue Flag.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All bird watching boats	

Criterion 56. It is not allowed to flash birds to get a better view of them.

It is prohibited to throw any objects at birds, to splash them with water or to use loud noises to receive their attention or to make them take flight to get a better view on them.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All bird watching boats	

ADDITIONAL CRITERIA FOR CAGE DIVING BOATS

Criterion 57. The cage used for cage diving must be designed in such a way that it neither poses a danger to the people in the cage nor to the sharks outside the cage. The gaps between the railings must be so narrow that no shark of any size is able to enter the cage.

The tour operator has to ensure that neither the users nor the wild animals which approach the boat can hurt themselves on the cages. Sharp parts or edges of the cage should be covered or rounded off, and it should be ensured that no person or shark becomes entangled in ropes or chains that trail from the cage. There must not be any object in the cage that is not needed during a dive. It also has to be ensured that sharks do not get caught between the boat and the cage. Cage diving tour operators furthermore have to make sure that their cages are designed in a way which makes it impossible for the sharks to enter the cage. Juvenile sharks should not be able to swim through the railings. Therefore, the gaps between the railings should not exceed 350mm.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All cage diving boats	

Criterion 58. It must be secured that the cage is properly attached to the boat.

The cage must be attached to the boat with suitable equipment. Prior to every dive, the crew has to check if the connecting elements are intact and that the mechanisms to place the cage into the water work properly.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All cage diving boats	

Criterion 59. All entry points to the cage must be lockable with a door or portal. The access to the cage must be safe.

To prevent that sharks enter the cage accidentally by jumping out of the water, all entry points must be covered and locked during the dive.

Furthermore, it must be ensured that the users have safe access to the cage and that it is easy to leave the cage in the case of an emergency.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All cage diving boats	

Criterion 60. Protected species must not be used for baiting.

It is not allowed to use protected species or parts of protected species for the baiting of sharks. The tour operator has to take records about the type and amount of bait used to prove that no protected species are processed for the production of bait.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All cage diving boats	

Criterion 61. Decoys used for attracting sharks have to be designed in such a way that they do not pose a danger to the wild animals.

Tour operators who use man-made decoys to attract sharks have to ensure that they do not hurt the wild animals. They should be made out of soft materials and must not have sharp edges. The decoy should only be used for a limited time, which should not exceed 20 minutes per shark. Furthermore, the decoy should not be pulled directly to the cage to avoid that sharks strike the cage or the boat.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All cage diving boats	

Criterion 62. In a predation situation, the boat must not cut off the path of the prey. It is not allowed to approach any predation closer than 50m. No more than two boats are allowed to be within 100m of a predation.

It must be ensured that the boat does not interfere with the natural hunting behaviour of the sharks. For that reason, they have to keep their distance and reduce their speed in the vicinity of a predation situation. It is recommended to approach a predation at a speed which does not exceed 10 knots when within 100m of such an event.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All cage diving boats	

Criterion 63. If there is more than one cage diving boat within a radius of 300m of a shark, the boat has to slow down to a speed which should not exceed 10 knots.

To minimise the chance of boat strikes with sharks that have been attracted by other cage diving boats, the speed should be reduced to 10 knots or less within a radius of 300m of a shark or a group of sharks.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All cage diving boats	

ADDITIONAL CRITERIA FOR RECREATIONAL DIVING BOATS

Criterion 64. Only qualified dive masters with a valid certification must be hired to conduct diving tours.

All dive masters have to hold a valid dive master licences which has been issued by an accredited training organisation and which is recognised by the local authorities. If the dive master is not a local resident, he/she has to familiarise his-/herself with the dive site and the dive equipment before guiding dive groups.

If the tour operator offers beginner's courses, only certified diving instructors are allowed to run them.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All recreational diving boats	

Criterion 65. Prior to the dive, the divers have to be briefed on the dive site and about environmentally friendly diving techniques.

Divers have to be informed about the characteristics of the dive site, about possible encounters with marine wildlife and about environmentally friendly diving techniques and behaviours.

Environmentally friendly diving techniques which should be recommended to the tourists encompass (in addition to criteria 44-49):

- to make sure that no diving equipment gets in contact with the living or dead environment
- not to hold onto any natural object in the water. To support this, divers shouldn't wear gloves which may encourage them to hold onto sharp objects like rocks or corals.
- not to stir the seabed with the fins.
- not to leave any objects or litter at the dive site. Furthermore, divers should be encouraged to collect any waste they find during their dive and bring it to the boat where the crew takes care of the correct disposal
- not to pursue, trap or cut off the way of any animal and let the wild animals approach them voluntarily
- to avoid flash photography

If the dive trip includes visits to sensitive cultural heritage, the divers have to be briefed on the correct, acceptable behaviour during the visit of these sites. Dives to cultural heritage like submerged ruins or statues as well as shipwrecks should be prepared carefully, and the dive masters should educate the divers about the distance they have to keep from the objects and how to move in or around the objects. In addition, they should tell them to respect all safety measures which are in place to protect the cultural heritage.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All recreational diving boats	

Criterion 66. All divers must prove their level of experience with a valid diving certification and have to complete the appropriate liability and medical statement documents before going on a dive trip.

The tour operator has to check that all participants in a dive trip carry a valid diving license and that they meet all necessary entry requirements for the particular dive trip including health condition and experience. All divers have to prove their medical fitness to dive by filling in a medical statement document. They must also sign a statement of liability which informs them about the possible risks while diving.

Participants without a diving certification have to take part in a beginner's course which is supervised by a certified diving instructor.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All recreational diving boats	

Criterion 67. The size of the diving group must be limited, and diver's level of experience must be considered when choosing the dive site and when forming the diving groups.

The tour operator is responsible for organising its dive trips in such a way that it suits the level of the participants. Prior to the dive, divers should be asked about the number of dives they have done as well as about the different types of conditions they have previously experienced and trained for.

The dive master then carries the responsibility to determine the appropriate size of the diving group during a dive trip. Considerations about the age and the medical condition of the participants, the level of experience and the conditions at the dive site should be taken into account when determining the size of the group. There must always be an adequate number of dive masters on board.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All recreational diving boats	

Criterion 68. Dive sites must be switched on a regular basis to prevent their overuse. Dive operators should choose their diving spots in cooperation with the local authorities and local environmental experts.

The sustainable use of sensitive dive sites is vital for their subsistence. Tour operators should put the greatest possible effort in preventing them from being overused by cooperating with local experts and other diving companies and by taking responsible decisions concerning their choice of dive sites. Tour operators must inform the local authorities about the diving territories they frequent and have to follow any advice concerning the use of their dive sites. They should also coordinate their diving activities with other diving companies which visit the same dive spots to reduce diving pressure on these sites.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All recreational diving boats	

Criterion 69. Water entry points must not be located above sensitive sea beds.

When arriving at the dive site, the boat should not be placed above sensitive sea beds like reefs or seagrass meadows to prevent them from being destroyed when the divers enter the water. The dive master must ensure that every diver enters the water with caution.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All recreational diving boats	

Criterion 70. The diving equipment has to be fully operative and must be inspected regularly.

All national regulations concerning the inspection of diving gear have to be respected. The tour operator has to make sure that the diving equipment offered to divers is fully operative, in the best possible condition and purchased from an authorised retailer. Before and after every dive trip, the equipment has to be checked for possible defects. Defective equipment has to be removed from the boats and has to be replaced by properly functioning diving gear.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All recreational diving boats	

Criterion 71. A risk assessment has to be conducted for every dive site. Dive masters have to brief the divers on possible risks prior to every dive trip.

Before offering dive trips to a certain dive location, the tour operator is in charge of conducting a risk assessment for each site. Dive masters, as well as the rest of the crew, must familiarise themselves with the natural characteristics on-site as well as with possible hazards which are in place, e.g. currents, dangerous wild animals, confusing cave systems etc. The information must be recorded and updated whenever changes in conditions occur. Prior to every dive trip, the dive master has to check the weather conditions and the state at sea. If there are any doubts regarding the conditions at the dive site the tour operator has to cancel the dive trip. The dive master is also in charge of educating the divers about possible risks at the dive spot and about the appropriate behaviour if they encounter a risky situation.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All recreational diving boats	

Criterion 72. The dive master and the crew onboard must be able to administer first aid in case of an emergency. First aid training and refresher courses should be repeated at least once a month.

On every diving boat which has Blue Flag accreditation, at least the dive master must be able to administer first aid and CPR (Cardiopulmonary resuscitation). However, it is recommended that all crew members go through a first aid training with a certified training agency. The tour operator has to take records about all first aid trainings which have been absolved by its staff members and should organise refresher trainings at least once a month.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All recreational diving boats	

Criterion 73. The boat must be equipped with suitable oxygen units and surface signalling devices according to national regulations. The oxygen and signalling equipment must be accessible at any time, and the crew onboard must be familiar with the use of the equipment.

All diving boats which have Blue Flag accreditation must be equipped with an adequate number of emergency and lifesaving equipment in line with criterion 28. In addition, diving boats must provide oxygen first aid equipment which should only be filled with oxygen in approved facilities. Divers should be equipped with surface signalling devices (audible and visual) like, e.g. air horns, whistles, signal lights, inflatable signal tubes etc. so that they can call attention to themselves if they are in an emergency.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All recreational diving boats	

Criterion 74. Diver propulsion vehicles must only be used by divers who carry a respective certification.

It is not allowed to offer diver propulsion vehicles to divers which do not carry a valid license for these devices. Furthermore, only dive masters who have an appropriate license are allowed to use DPVs during a dive trip to guide and retain control over the group of divers.

Diver propulsion vehicles include all devices that give divers motorised propulsion underwater. If not used correctly, divers may lose buoyancy control if they move too quickly upwards or downwards. Furthermore, they are not beneficial for observing wildlife as the noises and movements may frighten off wild animals. The use should, therefore, be restricted to diving activities where these devices are highly beneficial for the safety of the divers.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All recreational diving boats	

ADDITIONAL CRITERIA FOR RECREATIONAL FISHING BOATS

Criterion 75. All international and national regulations for recreational fishing practices have to be respected.

The tour operator has to ensure that all the equipment and activities offered to tourists comply with international and national legislation. This includes the use of fishing gear, the offered fishing techniques, catch and release practices, the species of aquatic animals that can be taken, the size and amount of aquatic animals taken as well as the choice of the operating area among other. If recreational fishing licenses are required in the respective country, the tour operator has to check if the tourists are in possession of all relevant licences or certifications prior to the tour.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All recreational fishing boats	

Criterion 76. Endangered and protected species must not be caught.

Species, which are listed as vulnerable, endangered or critically-endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Speciestm must not be caught. If an endangered or protected species is caught accidentally, it has to be released carefully in line with criterion 80.

The tour operator must provide a list of species that are commonly caught during their trips to prove their knowledge about the status of their targeted species and to prove the compliance with this criterion.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All recreational fishing boats	

Criterion 77. No-take zones in marine protected areas and nursery grounds have to be respected.

The tour operator has to ensure that all offered fishing activities only take place in areas in which taking aquatic animals is permitted. Information about no-take zones, nursery grounds and other vulnerable zones in protected areas should be obtained from the marine protected area management or other local environmental agencies. Employees must be briefed on the respective zones.

To prove the compliance with this criterion, the tour operator has to present a map which indicates the no-take and vulnerable zones in its operating area.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All recreational fishing boats	

Criterion 78. No more aquatic animals than needed for the private use must be caught.

The taking of fish and other aquatic animals should be restricted to a reasonable amount. Furthermore, it should be possible for the tourists to take home all of their catch safely. For that reason, the tour operator should provide adequate storage for the transportation of the catch like cool boxes, bags or wrapping materials.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All recreational fishing boats	

Criterion 79. The choice of bait must not pose a danger to the local ecosystems.

The introduction of alien species may have severe effects on the local ecosystem as they could transfer diseases or interfere with the local food web if they spread. For that reason, the tour operator should only provide bait that is locally obtainable. They should also tell tourists not to use their own bait, especially if the origin or the species of the bait is unknown.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All recreational fishing boats	

Criterion 80. Caught aquatic animals must be handled in a humane way.

Regardless if the aquatic animal is killed or released after catching it, it has to be treated in a way that minimises stress and pain. This includes landing the catch as soon as possible and using nets to lift the catch out of the water.

If it is intended to kill the catch, it has to be done as soon as possible after landing it and by using humane methods.

If the catch is to be released again, the handling time should be reduced to a minimum. It should only be touched with wet hands or wet cloths and placed on soft and wet surfaces. If feasible, hooks should be removed when the catch is still in the water to shorten the time it is out of the water. The catch should never be exposed to direct sunlight. When releasing the catch, it has to be placed gently into the water. If a fish shows signs of tiredness, it has to be revived by placing it into the water and moving it forward. In the case that the catch shows severe injuries, it must not be released but killed in a humane manner.

The staff that is conducting the tours has to be briefed on the humane handling of aquatic animals and must assist tourists during the trips whenever possible and necessary.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All recreational fishing boats	

Criterion 81. Fishing equipment must not be abandoned at the fishing sites. Defective fishing equipment must be recycled.

Fishing equipment that cannot be used anymore must be properly recycled. Defective fishing equipment must never be thrown into the water as it represents a major threat to marine wildlife.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All recreational fishing boats	

Criterion 82. Fish waste must be disposed of responsibly.

When cleaning the catch onboard, the fish remains must be disposed of in accordance with national or local regulations, but never into stagnant water, harbour water or in bathing areas. The disposal of big amounts of fish waste at one time must be avoided. If suitable, fish waste should be used as bait for the next fishing trips.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All recreational fishing boats	

Criterion 83. Artisanal, subsistence and commercial fisheries must be respected.

The recreational fishing activities offered must not interfere with local fishing practices that are exercised for commercial or cultural purposes. The tour operator must adjust its activities and its operating area accordingly. Respective information should be obtained from the national fishing department or other relevant authorities.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All recreational fishing boats	

ADDITIONAL CRITERIA FOR SEAL WATCHING BOATS

Criterion 84. Personal watercraft are not permissible for seal watching.

Tour operators offering seal watching tours must not use personal watercraft like jet skis or other types of water scooter for their tours.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All seal watching boats	

Criterion 85. Seals must not be approached closer than 50m. If a seal voluntarily approaches the boat any closer, the engine should be put into neutral until the seal leaves the vicinity of the boat.

The tour operator should be interested in offering tourists the most authentic encounters with wildlife possible. For that reason, the boat should stay within a minimum distance of 50m from any seal on land and in the water to not influence their natural behaviour.

If an individual appears closer than 50m to the boat or if it approaches the boat voluntarily, the engine should be put into neutral to give the animal the possibility to assess the situation. When leaving the individual, it should be ensured that the propellers are free from any wildlife and speed should be kept to a minimum until a distance of 50m between the boat and the individual has been reached.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All seal watching boats	

Criterion 86. The boat must always approach seals which are in the water from an oblique angle. They shouldn't approach them directly from the back or the front.

To make sure that the seals can evaluate the situation, the boat must always try to travel parallel to the animal. Seals must never be approached directly from the front to prevent collisions and not to cut off their path.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All seal watching boats	

Criterion 87. Within a radius of 300m haul-out sites must be approached at a no-wake speed.

When entering the observation radius, the boat must slow down to reduce noise emission and to minimize the danger of collisions with individuals who are not resting. Only when the boat leaves the observation radius, it may increase its speed. However, the boat must maintain a slow speed as long as it is in the area which is highly frequented by seals.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All seal watching boats	

Criterion 88. Flash photography must be avoided in the vicinity of seals.

Mass use of flash photography may distract the seals from their natural behaviour so that tourists must be advised to keep the use at a minimum.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All seal watching boats	

Criterion 89. Decoys to attract seals are not permitted.

Playthings such as ropes, plastic decoys etc. are not permitted on boats of Blue Flag awarded tour operators. By encouraging seals to play with man-made objects, the probability of getting entangled or hurt in marine litter rises for them.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All seal watching boats	

ADDITIONAL CRITERIA FOR WHALE WATCHING BOATS

Criterion 90. Personal watercraft are not permissible for whale watching.

Whale watching tour operators offering whale and dolphin watching tours must not use personal watercraft like jet skis or other types of water scooter for their tours.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All whale watching tour operators	

Criterion 91. Cetaceans must be approached from an oblique angle. They must not be approached directly from the back or the front.

To make sure that the whale watching boat does not surprise an individual or cut off its path, it must always try to travel parallel to the cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises). To prevent collisions, it is recommended not to approach them directly from behind or from the front.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All whale watching tour operators	

Criterion 92. Within a radius of 300m of the cetaceans, whale watching boats must slow to a no-wake speed, which should not exceed 5 knots.

When entering the observation radius, the whale watching boat must slow down to reduce noise emission and to minimise the danger of collisions. Only when the boat leaves the observation radius may it increase its speed. However, the boat must continue to maintain a slow speed as long as it is in any area highly frequented by cetaceans.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All whale watching tour operators	

Criterion 93. When approaching cetaceans, the recommended distance to leave between the boat and the individual (s) is 100m. When safe to do so, the engine should be put into neutral during such an encounter. Irrespective of this recommendation, the national legislation concerning the allowed approach distance to cetaceans stands above this recommendation and must be respected. No boat, however, is permitted to approach a cetacean closer than 50m.

The whale watching operator should be interested in offering tourists the most authentic encounters with cetaceans possible. For that reason, it is recommended to stay at a minimum distance of 100m from any whale, dolphin or porpoise, so as not influence the animal's natural behaviour.

If an individual appears closer than 100m from the boat or if it approaches the boat voluntarily, the engine should be put into neutral, whenever possible and safe to do so, so as to give the animal

the opportunity to assess the situation. When leaving the individual, it should be ensured that the propellers are free from any wildlife, and speed should be kept to a minimum until a distance of 100m between the boat and the individual has been reached. In the case of bow-riding dolphins, the boat has to comply with criterion 96.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All whale watching tour operators	

Criterion 94. No more than two boats must be present within an observation radius of 300 to 100m. Boat must be in contact with one another via radio to coordinate their movements. Additionally, they should stay on the same side of the cetacean or group of cetaceans to prevent them from feeling encircled.

Crowding of boats may increase the disturbance of the cetaceans. Therefore, the whale watching boat has a responsibility to assess the situation and leave the area if there are already more than two boats present in the observation radius (300-100m). It is recommended that all boats stay on the same side of the cetacean(s) so that they do not feel entrapped.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All whale watching tour operators	

Criterion 95. Time spent with one individual or group of cetaceans must be kept to a maximum of 30 minutes per boat, per tour. If more than one boat is within the observation radius (300-100m), this time must be reduced to 15 minutes per boat, per tour.

To minimize the disturbance of the cetaceans caused by the whale watching activity, the boat must set a time limit of 30 minutes watching time per individual or group of cetaceans during each tour.

If another boat is present in the observation radius of 300m, the whale watching boat should limit that time to 15 minutes.

If a second boat arrives in the observation radius after the first boat has already spent more than 15 minutes with the animal(s), the first boat must leave immediately.

Furthermore, it is recommended that the tourism boat does not return to the same individual/group of individuals within one hour after the encounter during the previous tour.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All whale watching tour operators	

Criterion 96. In the case of bow-riding dolphins, the whale watching boat must not change its direction or speed abruptly. If the boat has to stop or change its course, speed must be slowed down gradually.

Dolphins can be attracted by the waves created by the whale watching boat, and on some occasions, they will follow the boat by riding the bow waves or the wake. In this case, the boat should avoid changing its speed or direction until the dolphins have left the boat. If the boat must stop or change its direction, extreme caution must be taken to ensure that the dolphins are not harmed. Speed should not be reduced abruptly, and changes in direction should be conducted very slowly.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All whale watching tour operators	

Criterion 97. It is not permissible to use sonar to detect cetaceans.

Any underwater sound propagation system that has been proven to cause injuries or deaths to cetaceans are not permissible for detecting whales and dolphins.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All whale watching tour operators	