

# Attention all adventurers

## Adventure tourism gets good practice



by *Graham Derrick and Brian Such*

The beginning of work on a new ISO standard for adventure tourism, marked by a first meeting of its working group ISO/TC 228/WG 7, *Adventure tourism*, makes this a good time to review previously published material on this subject. Have the industry's practices and prospects changed substantially in recent years?

In the July 2008 issue of *ISO Focus* issue, Claudio Guerreiro, in his article entitled, "Adventure tourism comes of age", accurately depicted the challenge of introducing standardization to a complex field that, in its encouragement of a healthier more liberated lifestyle,

essentially majors on freedom of action and exposure to risk.

The article clearly raised the profile of a rapidly growing industry, and the assertion that standardization in this area should be founded on the management of inherent risk remains true. This is particu-

larly important because risk exclusion is not an option and therefore risk management is a requirement that will frequently have to be provided across a variety of locations, climates and time zones. Yet, risk management is a complex task for adventure providers.

To ensure that clients are correctly informed and competently led, and that the adventurous activities are appropriately delivered, providers need to place the inherent risk in its proper context. Participants can then still achieve a sense of adventure through exposure to managed risk without unduly compromising their safety.

Since the article's publication in 2008, there have been a number of changes in the adventure tourism landscape, some of which merit further consideration.

### Risk assessment

A future standard in the industry should be based on a risk assessment approach, rather than a list of specific activities. Not only would a risk approach assess the activity itself, but it would also ensure the standard's applicability to all ages of participants and to every style of provider.

One example is "charity treks", a field that is seeing significant growth now, and which has wide variations in the standard of provision. Charities solicit positive exposure and fund-raising opportunities by arranging treks to major mountain ranges, often reaching high altitudes.

Because many of these treks are one-off arrangements, they may not be as well managed as they should be. Potential clients often receive only a limited explanation of the rigours and potential risks involved. Equally important is that it may not be clear who the true provider is, leading to confusion over roles and





Of concern to any standard addressing adventurous activities is the aspect of third-party provision. More often than not, this relates to the supply of a specific service or element of the venture by individuals or organizations in the country hosting the activities.

Adventure tourism's contribution to employment and income is likely to be significant. Because standards for the industry aim to improve the overall quality of service, they are of vital importance to the full realization of the international market potential.

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*Adventure tourism should be approached through the nature of provision.*

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responsibilities. Such outings clearly fall within the scope of adventure tourism and would benefit from standardization.

Across Europe and other parts of the world, an expanding field is the supply of large off-shore sailing craft, often with a professional crew, for sailing holidays around coastlines and islands. Such ventures are often advertised from a conservation perspective, to view species on the fringe of endangerment. These activities, like safaris to observe and photograph wild game, are not always defined as adventure tourism, which means they may fall outside package travel regulations that govern other aspects of tourist provision.

It is imperative that any ISO standard for adventure tourism embraces such activities. Adventure tourism should be approached through the nature of provision, rather than through standards related to specific activities, which are often already well regulated by their governing bodies.

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*Risk management is a complex task for venture providers.*

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### **Encompass all providers**

In this context, service provision by charitable trusts and other organizations that manage activities through a volunteer workforce is another area that will require our attention. This is especially prevalent in the world of youth adventure, as exemplified by Scouts, Guides and other "uniformed" organizations. Such providers, just as the sole traders and corporate organizations referred to in the 2008 article,

need to operate to a universally accepted standard of good practice.

But adventure tourism is not just for these young persons' organizations or for the fit and able young adult. More and more retirees have time unencumbered by work-related restraints, allowing them to engage in adventurous activities, albeit in a gentler more leisurely style.

Perhaps of greater economic importance for the industry as a whole, this group also has the disposable income to pursue adventurous tourism. They will often use higher-end and, therefore, inevitably more costly, accommodation, transport and service provision than their younger counterparts can afford. International Standards for adventure tourism need to encompass provision for all ages.



Risk management is a key factor. However it is essential to recognize that risk is but one aspect of good practice for adventure tourism. It is important that any new standard in this field should reflect current good practice as demonstrated by preeminent providers. It should also address:

- The quality of provision in terms of enabling potential participants to make fully informed decisions
- The selection, terms of reference and competence of the leadership team
- The planning associated with the management of any crisis that may occur.

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It is encouraging to see that the remit of the new ISO working group for adventure tourism also includes these important aspects of provision. It is essential that all who engage in adventurous activities fully understand the level of risk involved and that they have a right to know what the provider proposes to do if and when things go wrong.

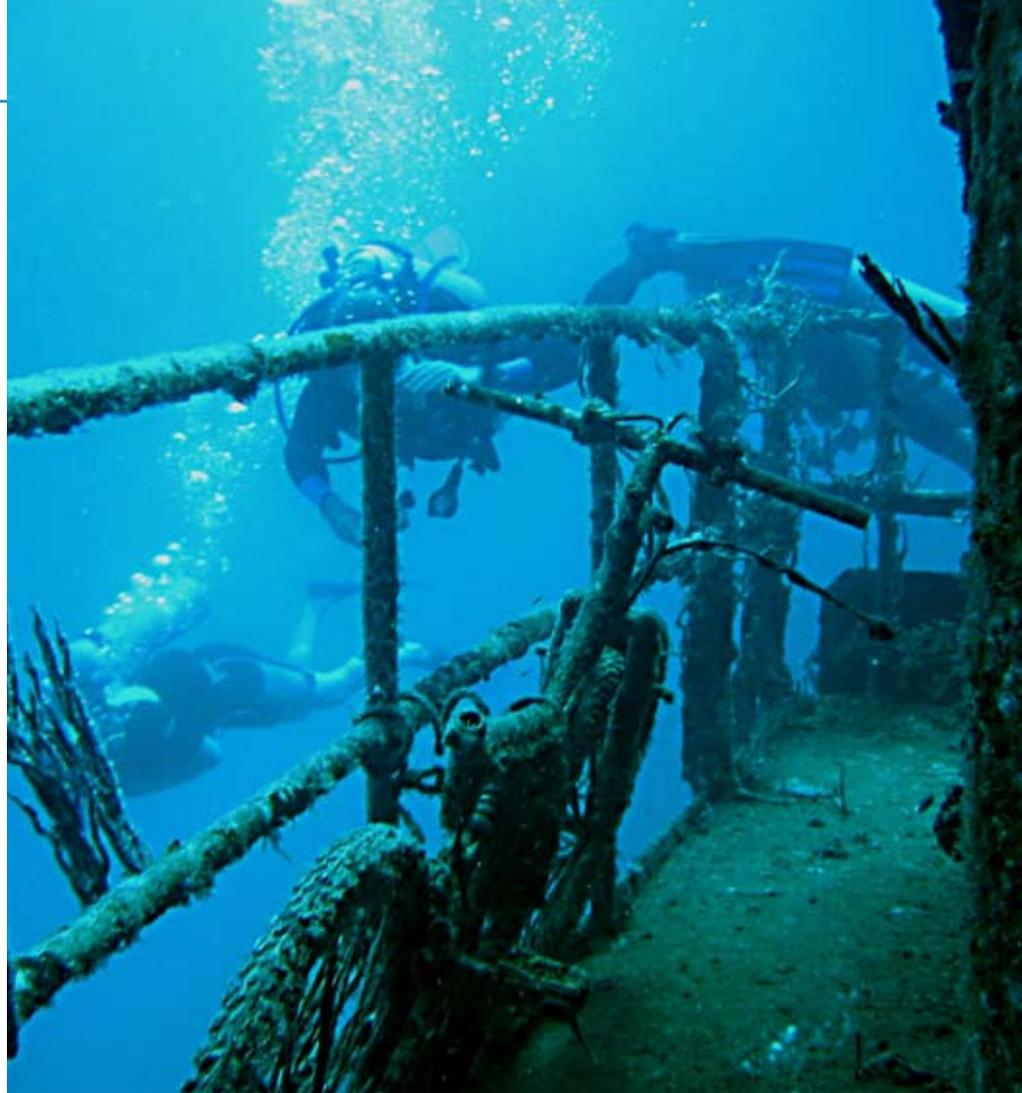
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*These new standards can help to ensure the provision of safe activities.*

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## What, not how

At first sight, this may appear somewhat dictatorial for an industry that is primarily about freedom, challenge and adventure. But by unambiguously specifying required outcomes rather than setting out potentially restricting procedures (*what* a provider needs to deliver and not *how* it has to be done). These new standards can help to ensure the provision of safe activities, without sacrificing originality, spontaneity and a sense of adventure.



Finally, although these International Standards for adventure tourism will be valuable, an associated mechanism to help providers demonstrate their conformity could be particularly useful. Consideration should therefore be given in the preparation of such a mechanism, including implementation instructions, so as to boost confidence of potential participants in adventure tourism. This will help enable the industry to grow and mature in a framework of trust.

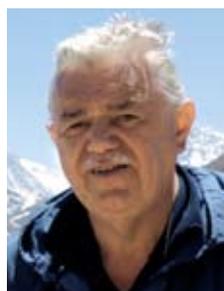
The national experts embarking on this new work realize that there is a need for

standards with global relevance, and that an ISO standard is likely to prove the most effective means of its achievement. But much good work has already been done at the national level and it is important that this be taken into account as the new work progresses.

The engagement of a broad cross-section of this nationally developed expertise will be essential to the ultimate success of this project, and every effort should be made to encourage that engagement. The authors hope that this article will contribute to this effort. ■

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## About the authors



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