



# GSTC Industry Criteria

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## Preamble

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Criteria were created to provide a common understanding throughout the world of “sustainable tourism”, and are the minimum that any tourism business should aspire to reach. They are organized around four main themes: effective sustainability planning, maximizing social and economic benefits for the local community, enhancing cultural heritage, and reducing negative impacts to the environment. They have applicability to the entire tourism industry.

The Criteria have been developed and revised while striving to adhere to the Standard-Setting Code of the ISEAL Alliance, the body recognized to provide guidance on international norms for developing sustainability standards in all sectors. The Criteria are revised every 3 to 5 years. Plans for revisions plus advance sign-up for public input into future revisions are available on [www.gstccouncil.org](http://www.gstccouncil.org). The website also provides information on the process and history of the Criteria development.

Some of the uses of the criteria include the following:

- Serve as the basis for certification for sustainability
- Serve as basic guidelines for businesses of all sizes to become more sustainable, and help businesses choose sustainable tourism programmes that fulfill these global criteria
- Provide greater market access in the growing market for sustainable products, serving as guidance both for travellers and for travel agencies in choosing suppliers and sustainable tourism programmes
- Help consumers identify sound sustainable tourism programmes and businesses
- Serve as a common denominator for information media to recognize sustainable tourism providers
- Help certification and other voluntary programmes ensure that their standards meet a broadly-accepted baseline
- Offer governmental, non-governmental, and private sector programmes a starting point for developing sustainable tourism requirements
- Serve as basic guidelines for education and training bodies, such as hotel schools and universities
- Demonstrate leadership that inspires others to act

The Criteria indicate *what* should be done, *not how* to do it or whether the goal has been achieved. This role is fulfilled by performance indicators, associated educational materials, and access to tools for implementation, all of which are an indispensable complement to the GSTC Criteria.

## Criteria Application

It is recommended that all criteria be applied to the greatest extent practical, unless for a specific situation the criterion is not applicable and this is justified. There may be circumstances in which a criterion is not applicable to a specific tourism product, given the local regulatory, environmental, social, economic or cultural conditions. In the case of micro and community-owned tourism businesses which have a small social, economic and environmental footprint, it is recognized that limited resources may prevent comprehensive application of all criteria. Further guidance on these criteria may be found from the supporting indicators and glossary, published by the GSTC.



## **GSTC INDUSTRY CRITERIA**

### **SECTION A: Demonstrate effective sustainable management**

#### **A1 Sustainability management system**

The organization has implemented a long-term sustainability management system that is suitable to its size and scope, addresses environmental, social, cultural, economic, quality, human rights, health, safety, risk and crisis management issues and drives continuous improvement.

#### **A2 Legal compliance**

The organization is in compliance with all applicable local, national and international legislation and regulations including, among others, health, safety, labour and environmental aspects.

#### **A3 Reporting and communication**

The organization communicates its sustainability policy, actions and performance to stakeholders, including customers, and seeks to engage their support.

#### **A4 Staff engagement**

Staff are engaged with development and implementation of the sustainability management system and receive periodic guidance and training regarding their roles and responsibilities in its delivery.

#### **A5 Customer experience**

Customer satisfaction, including aspects of sustainability, is monitored and corrective action taken.

#### **A6 Accurate promotion**

Promotional materials and marketing communications are accurate and transparent with regard to the organization and its products and services, including sustainability claims. They do not promise more than is being delivered.

#### **A7 Buildings and infrastructure**

Planning, siting, design, construction, renovation, operation and demolition of buildings and infrastructure...

**A7.1 Compliance**

...comply with zoning requirements and laws related to protected and sensitive areas and to heritage considerations.

**A7.2 Impact and integrity**

...take account of the capacity and integrity of the natural and cultural surroundings.

**A7.3 Sustainable practices and materials**

...use locally appropriate and sustainable practices and materials.

**A7.4 Access for all**

...provide access and information for persons with special needs, where appropriate.

**A8 Land water and property rights**

Acquisition by the organization of land and water rights and of property is legal, complies with local communal and indigenous rights, including their free, prior and informed consent, and does not require involuntary resettlement.

**A9 Information and interpretation**

The organization provides information about and interpretation of the natural surroundings, local culture, and cultural heritage, as well as an explanation of appropriate behaviour while visiting natural areas, living cultures, and cultural heritage sites.

**A10 Destination engagement**

The organization is involved with sustainable tourism planning and management in the destination, where such opportunities exist.

**SECTION B: Maximize social and economic benefits to the local community and minimize negative impacts**

**B1 Community support**

The organization actively supports initiatives for local infrastructure and social community development. Examples of initiatives include education, training, health and sanitation and projects which address the impacts of climate change.

**B2 Local employment**

Local residents are given equal opportunities for employment and advancement, including in management positions.

**B3 Local purchasing**

When purchasing and offering goods and services, the organization gives priority to local and fair trade suppliers whenever these are available and of sufficient quality.

**B4 Local entrepreneurs**

The organization supports local entrepreneurs in the development and sale of sustainable products and services that are based on the area's nature, history and culture.

**B5 Exploitation and harassment**

The organization has implemented a policy against commercial, sexual or any other form of exploitation or harassment, particularly of children, adolescents, women, minorities and other vulnerable groups.

**B6 Equal opportunity**

The organization offers employment opportunities, including in management positions, without discrimination by gender, race, religion, disability or in other ways.

**B7 Decent work**

Labour rights are respected, a safe and secure working environment is provided and employees are paid at least a living wage. Employees are offered regular training, experience and opportunities for advancement.

**B8 Community services**

The activities of the organization do not jeopardize the provision of basic services, such as food, water, energy, healthcare or sanitation, to neighbouring communities.

**B9 Local livelihoods**

The activities of the organization do not adversely affect local access to livelihoods, including land and aquatic resource use, rights-of-way, transport and housing.

**SECTION C: Maximize benefits to cultural heritage and minimize negative impacts**

**C1 Cultural interactions**

The organization follows international and national good practice and locally agreed guidance for the management and promotion of visits to indigenous communities and culturally or historically sensitive sites in order to minimize adverse impacts and maximize local benefits and visitor fulfilment.

**C2 Protecting cultural heritage**

The organization contributes to the protection, preservation and enhancement of local properties, sites and traditions of historical, archaeological, cultural and spiritual significance and does not impede access to them by local residents.

**C3 Presenting culture and heritage**

The organization values and incorporates authentic elements of traditional and contemporary local culture in its operations, design, decoration, cuisine, or shops, while respecting the intellectual property rights of local communities.

**C4 Artefacts**

Historical and archaeological artefacts are not sold, traded or displayed, except as permitted by local and international law.

<b>Section D: Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts</b>
<b>D1 Conserving resources</b>
<p><b>D1.1 Environmentally preferable purchasing</b></p> <p>Purchasing policies favour environmentally sustainable suppliers and products, including capital goods, food, beverages, building materials and consumables.</p>
<p><b>D1.2 Efficient purchasing</b></p> <p>The organization carefully manages the purchasing of consumable and disposable goods, including food, in order to minimize waste.</p>
<p><b>D1.3 Energy conservation</b></p> <p>Energy consumption is measured by type and steps are taken to minimize overall consumption. The organization makes efforts to increase its use of renewable energy.</p>
<p><b>D1.4 Water conservation</b></p> <p>Water risk is assessed, water consumption is measured by type, and steps are taken to minimize overall consumption. Water sourcing is sustainable and does not adversely affect environmental flows. In areas of high water risk, context-based water stewardship goals are identified and pursued.</p>
<b>D2 Reducing pollution</b>
<p><b>D2.1 Greenhouse gas emissions</b></p> <p>Significant greenhouse gas emissions from all sources controlled by the organization are identified, calculated where possible and procedures implemented to avoid or to minimize them. Offsetting of the organization's remaining emissions is encouraged.</p>
<p><b>D2.2 Transport</b></p> <p>The organization seeks to reduce transportation requirements and actively encourages the use of cleaner and more resource efficient alternatives by customers, employees, suppliers and in its own operations.</p>

**D2.3 Wastewater**

Wastewater, including grey water, is effectively treated and is only reused or released safely, with no adverse effects to the local population or the environment.

**D2.4 Solid waste**

Waste, including food waste, is measured, mechanisms are in place to reduce waste and, where reduction is not feasible, to reuse or recycle it. Any residual waste disposal has no adverse effect on the local population or the environment.

**D2.5 Harmful substances**

The use of harmful substances, including pesticides, paints, swimming pool disinfectants, and cleaning materials, is minimized, and substituted when available by innocuous products or processes. All storage, use, handling, and disposal of chemicals are properly managed.

**D2.6 Minimize pollution**

The organization implements practices to minimize pollution from noise, light, runoff, erosion, ozone-depleting substances, and air, water and soil contaminants.

**D3 Conserving biodiversity, ecosystems and landscapes**

**D3.1 Biodiversity conservation**

The organization supports and contributes to biodiversity conservation, including through appropriate management of its own property. Particular attention is paid to natural protected areas and areas of high biodiversity value. Any disturbance of natural ecosystems is minimized, rehabilitated and there is a compensatory contribution to conservation management.

**D3.2 Invasive species**

The organization takes measures to avoid the introduction of invasive species. Native species are used for landscaping and restoration wherever feasible, particularly in natural landscapes.

**D3.3 Visits to natural sites**



The organization follows appropriate guidelines for the management and promotion of visits to natural sites in order to minimize adverse impacts and maximize visitor fulfilment.

**D3.4 Wildlife interactions**

Interactions with free roaming wildlife, taking into account cumulative impacts, are non-invasive and responsibly managed to avoid adverse effects on the animals concerned and on the viability and behaviour of populations in the wild.

**D3.5 Animal welfare**

No species of wild animal is acquired, bred or held captive, except by authorized and suitably equipped persons and for properly regulated activities in compliance with local and international law. Housing, care and handling of all wild and domestic animals meets the highest standards of animal welfare.

**D3.6 Wildlife harvesting and trade**

Wildlife species are not harvested, consumed, displayed, sold, or traded, except as part of a regulated activity that ensures that their utilization is sustainable, and in compliance with local and international laws.