

# Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations (GSTC-D)

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## Preamble

Sustainable tourism is on the rise: consumer demand is growing, travel industry suppliers are developing new green programs, governments and international agencies are creating new policies to encourage sustainable practices in tourism. But what does “sustainable tourism” really mean? How can it be measured and credibly demonstrated, in order to build consumer confidence, promote business prosperity, foster community benefits, and fight false claims?

The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria are an effort to come to a common understanding of sustainable destinations, and are the minimum undertakings that any tourism management organization which wishes to be sustainable should aspire to reach. To satisfy the definition of sustainable tourism, destinations must take an interdisciplinary, holistic and integrative approach which includes four main objectives: to (i) demonstrate sustainable destination management; (ii) maximize social and economic benefits for the host community and minimize negative impacts; (iii) maximize benefits to communities, visitors and cultural heritage and minimize impacts; and (iv) maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts. The criteria are designed to be used by all types and scales of destinations.

The criteria are part of the response of the tourism community to the global challenges of the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals. Poverty alleviation, gender equity and environmental sustainability, including climate change, are the main cross-cutting issues that are addressed through the criteria.

The criteria and indicators were developed based on already recognized criteria and approaches including, for example, the UNWTO destination level indicators, GSTC Criteria for Hotels and Tour Operators, and other widely accepted principles and guidelines, certification criteria and indicators. They reflect certification standards, indicators, criteria, and best practices from different cultural and geo-political contexts around the world in tourism and other sectors where applicable. Potential indicators were screened for relevance and practicality, as well as their applicability to a broad range of destination types.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria are administered by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

Some of the expected uses of the criteria by tourism management organizations include the following:

- Serve as basic guidelines for destinations which wish to become more sustainable
- Help consumers identify sound sustainable tourism destinations;
- Serve as a common denominator for information media to recognize destinations and inform the public regarding their sustainability;
- Help certification and other voluntary destination level programs ensure that their standards meet a broadly-accepted baseline;
- Offer governmental, non-governmental, and private sector programs a starting point for developing sustainable tourism requirements; and
- Serve as basic guidelines for education and training bodies, such as hotel schools and universities.

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 from public, NGO and private sector providers all of which are an indispensable complement to the Destination Level Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations were conceived as the beginning of a process to make sustainability the standard practice in all forms of tourism.

## 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 justification is provided. There may be circumstances in which a criterion is not applicable to a specific tourism destination or destination management organization, given the local regulatory, environmental, social, economic or cultural conditions. In the case of smaller destinations and communities, it is recognized that limited resources may prevent comprehensive application of all criteria.

Because destinations are comprised by many different enterprises, organizations and individuals, the application of these criteria should include thorough consideration of the cumulative effects of activities. Measurement at the destination scale will usually capture the net result of cumulative effects at the individual scale. However monitoring of impacts is not an end in itself; it should be viewed as a tool for improving the sustainability of the destination.

Further guidance on these criteria may be found from the supporting indicators and glossary, which will be published by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

### Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations

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

##### **A1 Sustainable destination strategy**

The destination has established and is implementing a multi-year destination strategy that is publicly available, is suited to its scale, that considers environmental, economic, social, cultural, quality, health, and safety, and aesthetic issues, and was developed with public participation.

##### **A2 Destination management organization**

The destination has an effective organization, department, group, or committee responsible for a coordinated approach to sustainable tourism, with involvement by the private sector and public sector. This group is suited to the size and scale of the destination, and has defined responsibilities, oversight, and implementation capability for the management of environmental, economic, social, and cultural issues. This group's activities are appropriately funded.

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### **A3 Monitoring**

The destination has a system to monitor, publicly report, and respond to environmental, economic, social, cultural, tourism, and human rights issues. The monitoring system is reviewed and evaluated periodically.

### **A4 Tourism seasonality management**

The destination dedicates resources to mitigate seasonal variability of tourism where appropriate, working to balance the needs of the local economy, community, cultures and environment, to identify year-round tourism opportunities.

### **A5 Climate change adaptation**

The destination has a system to identify risks and opportunities associated with climate change. This system encourages climate change adaptation strategies for development, siting, design, and management of facilities. The system contributes to the sustainability and resilience of the destination and to public education on climate for both residents and tourists.

### **A6 Inventory of tourism assets and attractions**

The destination has an up-to-date, publicly available inventory and assessment of its tourism assets and attractions, including natural and cultural sites.

### **A7 Planning Regulations**

The destination has planning guidelines, regulations and/or policies that require environmental, economic, and social impact assessment and integrate sustainable land use, design, construction, and demolition. The guidelines, regulations and/or policies are designed to protect natural and cultural resources, were created with local inputs from the public and a thorough review process, are publicly communicated, and are enforced.

### **A8 Access for all**

Where appropriate, sites and facilities, including those of natural and cultural importance, are accessible to all, including persons with disabilities and others who have specific access requirements. Where such sites and facilities are not immediately accessible, access is afforded through the design and implementation of solutions that take into account both the integrity of the site and such reasonable accommodations for persons with access requirements as can be achieved.

### **A9 Property acquisitions**

Laws and regulations regarding property acquisitions exist, are enforced, comply with communal and indigenous rights, ensure public consultation, and do not authorize resettlement without prior informed consent and/or reasonable compensation.

### **A10 Visitor satisfaction**

The destination has a system to monitor and publicly report visitor satisfaction, and, if necessary, to take action to improve visitor satisfaction.

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### **A11 Sustainability standards**

The destination has a system to promote sustainability standards for enterprises consistent with the GSTC Criteria. The destination makes publicly available a list of sustainability certified or verified enterprises.

### **A12 Safety and security**

The destination has a system to monitor, prevent, publicly report, and respond to crime, safety, and health hazards.

### **A13 Crisis and emergency management**

The destination has a crisis and emergency response plan that is appropriate to the destination. Key elements are communicated to residents, visitors, and enterprises. The plan establishes procedures and provides resources and training for staff, visitors, and residents, and is updated on a regular basis.

### **A14 Promotion**

Promotion is accurate with regard to the destination and its products, services, and sustainability claims. The promotional messages treat local communities and tourists authentically and respectfully.

## ***SECTION B: Maximize economic benefits to the host community and minimize negative impacts***

### **B1 Economic monitoring**

The direct and indirect economic contribution of tourism to the destination's economy is monitored and publicly reported at least annually. To the extent feasible, this should include visitor expenditure, revenue per available room, employment and investment data.

### **B2 Local career opportunities**

The destination's enterprises provide equal employment, training opportunities, occupational safety, and fair wages for all.

### **B3 Public participation**

The destination has a system that encourages public participation in destination planning and decision making on an ongoing basis.

### **B4 Local community opinion**

Local communities' aspirations, concerns, and satisfaction with destination management are regularly monitored, recorded and publicly reported in a timely manner.

### **B5 Local access**

The destination monitors, protects, and when necessary rehabilitates or restores local community access to natural and cultural sites.

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### **B6 Tourism awareness and education**

The destination provides regular programs to affected communities to enhance their understanding of the opportunities and challenges of tourism, and the importance of sustainability.

### **B7 Preventing exploitation**

The destination has laws and established practices to prevent commercial, sexual, or any other form of exploitation and harassment of anyone, particularly of children, adolescents, women, and minorities. The laws and established practices are publicly communicated.

### **B8 Support for community**

The destination has a system to enable and encourage enterprises, visitors, and the public to contribute to community and sustainability initiatives.

### **B9 Supporting local entrepreneurs and fair trade**

The destination has a system that supports local and small- and medium-sized enterprises, and promotes and develops local sustainable products and fair trade principles that are based on the area's nature and culture. These may include food and beverages, crafts, performance arts, agricultural products, etc.

## ***SECTION C: Maximize benefits to communities, visitors, and culture; minimize negative impacts***

### **C1 Attraction protection**

The destination has a policy and system to evaluate, rehabilitate, and conserve natural and cultural sites, including built heritage (historic and archaeological) and rural and urban scenic views.

### **C2 Visitor management**

The destination has a visitor management system for attraction sites that includes measures to preserve, protect, and enhance natural and cultural assets.

### **C3 Visitor behavior**

The destination has published and provided guidelines for proper visitor behavior at sensitive sites. Such guidelines are designed to minimize adverse impacts on sensitive sites and strengthen positive visitor behaviors.

### **C4 Cultural heritage protection**

The destination has laws governing the proper sale, trade, display, or gifting of historical and archaeological artifacts.

### **C5 Site interpretation**

Accurate interpretive information is provided at natural and cultural sites. The information is culturally appropriate, developed with community collaboration, and communicated in languages pertinent to visitors.

### **C6 Intellectual property**

The destination has a system to contribute to the protection and preservation of intellectual property rights of communities and individuals.

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### **SECTION D: Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts**

#### **D1 Environmental risks**

The destination has identified environmental risks and has a system in place to address them.

#### **D2 Protection of sensitive environments**

The destination has a system to monitor the environmental impact of tourism, conserve habitats, species, and ecosystems, and prevent the introduction of invasive species.

#### **D3 Wildlife protection**

The destination has a system to ensure compliance with local, national, and international laws and standards for the harvest or capture, display, and sale of wildlife (including plants and animals).

#### **D4 Greenhouse gas emissions**

The destination has a system to encourage enterprises to measure, monitor, minimize, publicly report, and mitigate their greenhouse gas emissions from all aspects of their operation (including emissions from service providers).

#### **D5 Energy conservation**

The destination has a system to encourage enterprises to measure, monitor, reduce, and publicly report energy consumption, and reduce reliance on fossil fuels.

#### **D6 Water Management**

The destination has a system to encourage enterprises to measure, monitor, reduce, and publicly report water usage.

#### **D7 Water security**

The destination has a system to monitor its water resources to ensure that use by enterprises is compatible with the water requirements of the destination community.

#### **D8 Water quality**

The destination has a system to monitor drinking and recreational water quality using quality standards. The monitoring results are publicly available, and the destination has a system to respond in a timely manner to water quality issues.

#### **D9 Wastewater**

The destination has clear and enforced guidelines in place for the siting, maintenance and testing of discharge from septic tanks and wastewater treatment systems, and ensures wastes are properly treated and reused or released safely with minimal adverse effects to the local population and the environment.

#### **D10 Solid waste reduction**

The destination has a system to encourage enterprises to reduce, reuse, and recycle solid waste. Any residual solid waste that is not reused or recycled is disposed of safely and sustainably.

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### **D11 Light and noise pollution**

The destination has guidelines and regulations to minimize light and noise pollution. The destination encourages enterprises to follow these guidelines and regulations.

### **D12 Low-impact transportation**

The destination has a system to increase the use of low-impact transportation, including public transportation and active transportation (e.g., walking and cycling).