

# DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP STARTER KIT



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# ABOUT GSTC

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The GSTC is an independent and neutral organization, legally registered in the USA as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that represents a diverse and global membership, including national and provincial governments, leading travel companies, hotels, tour operators, NGO's, individuals and communities – all striving to achieve best practices in sustainable tourism. It is a virtual organization without a main office, with staff and volunteers working from all six populated continents. Financial support from donations, sponsorship, and membership fees allows us to provide services at low costs and to create, revise, and make available the GSTC Criteria. GSTC is an ISEAL Community Member.

The GSTC establishes and manages global standards for sustainable travel and tourism, known as the GSTC Criteria. There are two sets: Destination Criteria for public policy-makers and destination managers, and Industry Criteria for hotels and tour operators. They are the result of a worldwide effort to develop a common language about sustainability in tourism. They are arranged in four pillars:

- (A) Sustainable management
- (B) Socioeconomic impacts
- (C) Cultural impacts
- (D) Environmental impacts

Since tourism destinations each have their own culture, environment, customs, and laws, the Criteria are designed to be adapted to local conditions and supplemented by additional criteria for the specific location and activity.

# GSTC DESTINATION CRITERIA

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The GSTC Destination Criteria (GSTC-D) have well proven their value as guides to good destination stewardship. Public sector tourism policy-makers and destination managers throughout the world turn to the GSTC Destination Criteria for guidance in developing policy, raising awareness and conducting training, and for use as a framework for national or localized sustainability standards. Application of the criteria will help a destination to contribute towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

## What are the Criteria for?

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

- Serve as basic guidelines for destinations that 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
- Serve as basic guidelines for education and training bodies, such as hotel schools and universities



[Download the GSTC Destination Criteria](#)



# INTRODUCTION

## Why Destination Stewardship?

Destination stewardship is a process by which local communities, governmental agencies, NGOs, and the tourism industry take a multi-stakeholder approach to maintaining the cultural, environmental, economic, and esthetic integrity of their country, region, or town. In other words, to ensure that the destination retains and enhances the distinctive attributes that appeal to both residents and tourists.

Destination Stewardship requires a clear mandate, measurement of standards, community buy-in, and stakeholder collaboration. Practicing destination stewardship is crucial in ensuring that a destination remains attractive, authentic, and sustainable. Overcrowded, degraded, and unsustainable destinations can lead to a decline in tourism revenue, loss of biodiversity and cultural heritage, and a decreased quality of life for locals. On the other hand, a well-managed destination can attract repeat visitors who appreciate its uniqueness, leading to economic benefits for the local community, as well as protection of cultural and natural assets. Destination stewardship also fosters a sense of responsibility and pride among local residents who play a critical role in sustaining the destination.

The Destination Stewardship Starter Kit was developed to support destinations in their transition towards a stewardship approach. It is intended for destination managers, policymakers, and other stakeholders who are involved in tourism development and management, including private public and private sectors, community members, and non-governmental organizations. It is particularly relevant for destinations where there is external pressure to better manage tourism impacts. It is also useful when a government or destination management organization recognizes a shift to destination stewardship is needed, or when there is a need for resilience and recovery following a shock to the tourism system, such as a global pandemic or a natural disaster. The starter kit provides a practical roadmap to prioritizing governance and management strategy, creating a baseline for measurement, and setting achievable targets for sustainable tourism development.

# GETTING STARTED

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The aim of this starter kit is to provide a set of initial steps that destinations can take to shift towards a stewardship approach. However, it is important to acknowledge that the process is distinctive to each destination. The starting point for each destination may differ based on their specific needs and circumstances.

The steps offered in this starter kit serve as a guide and therefore, it is not mandatory to follow them in a specific sequence.





# GETTING STARTED

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## 1 Build a Team and Identify Leader(s)

Get started by involving one or two individuals. Implementing a comprehensive sustainability program is challenging. There needs to be someone who leads the process and is dedicated to making it successful. Once the leader(s) have been identified, a planning team should be formed. Identify and bring together individuals who are passionate about sustainable tourism and committed to a long-term vision.

**Refer to Criterion A1: Destination management responsibility**



The team should consist of a small group who have a clear role and responsibilities.

Organize the team in a way that allows continuity, even if some members leave and are replaced by others.



## 2 Identify Key Stakeholders

Identify potential stakeholders and partners within the destination, including local government officials, tourism organizations, hospitality businesses, and community leaders. These stakeholders will play a vital role in developing and implementing sustainable tourism practices. Look at potential projects with partners that will have a big impact and are easy to get started.

**Refer to Criterion A1: Destination management responsibility**



This is not a comprehensive list, but rather a baseline of potential stakeholders. Each destination will have a variety of different stakeholders. Conduct stakeholder mapping to identify all the potential stakeholders that exist within your destination.



Establish a stakeholder committee that includes the public & private sectors, NGOs, and the community. Include marginalized stakeholders that may be left out of the planning process.

Many of the elements of sustainability plans are done by people outside tourism. Understand the work being done by those that can have a big influence.



### 3 Define Your Goals and Vision

Define your destination's sustainability objectives, goals, and overall vision. This can involve developing a mission statement, as well as identifying key priorities, opportunities, and areas of improvement. For a holistic focus, ensure that there is long-term vision and commitment. It will probably help to get a number of relevant representatives from across your organization to brainstorm this with you. Think about what you want to achieve socially, environmentally and economically. Align this with the wider goals and objectives of your organization and gain consensus to move forward.

**Refer to Criterion A1: Destination management responsibility**

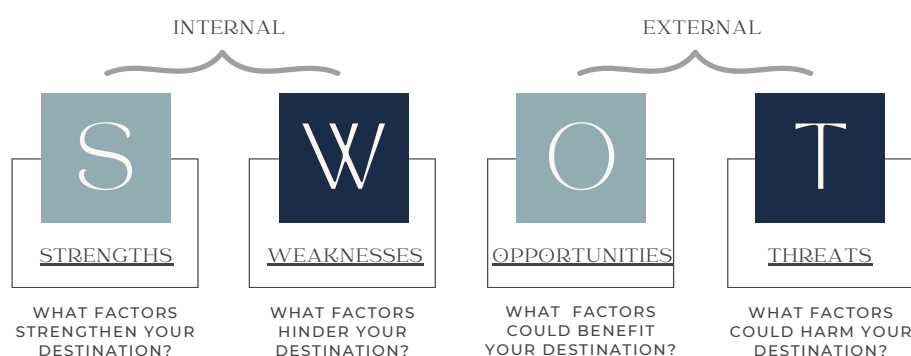


Identify easy objectives and quick victories to make improvements that are visible to the local community, tourism businesses, and stakeholders.

Identify SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, & Time-bound) goals.



Perform a SWOT Analysis to identify what areas to focus on.



## 4 Involve the Local Community and Engage Stakeholders

Raise awareness among the general public to ensure the active participation of the entire community. Involving the local community and relevant stakeholders helps to create a sense of shared responsibility for the long-term sustainability of the destination, which can lead to greater success in achieving sustainable tourism goals.

**Refer to Criterion A4: Enterprise engagement and sustainability standards & A5: Resident engagement and feedback**



Gauge how residents feel about tourism in the community through surveying and/or public forums.

Create a listening advisory council. Engage with a diversity of stakeholders and include specific key players who can bring value.

### Case Study

#### Visit Park City's Resident Sentiment Situation Assessment

A situation assessment on resident sentiment was conducted as part of the destination's planning process. Community buy-in ensures that local residents and stakeholders are aware of the scope. [Read the full report.](#)

## 5 Develop Strategy and an Action Plan

Once goals have been identified, develop a comprehensive strategy and action plan. Include specific steps to achieve each goal. It is important to think in medium and long-term when developing strategies and implementing your action plan. Create a timeline to track your progress. The initial timeline should be short and not more than a few years. Secure adequate funding beyond one project or activity. It's important to solidify the activities and budget, express intent, and have the leader(s) express their commitment to the strategy and action plan.

**Refer to Criterion A2: Destination management strategy and action plan**



Focus on prioritizing activities that are achievable and have a greater impact. Store ideas to be revisited in the future.

Consider partnerships to keep costs low during the initial stages in order to get started.

## 6 Provide Education and Training

Provide training and workshops for internal staff on sustainable tourism for both policies and practices, as well as guidance and encouragement to stakeholders and tourism businesses. Educate residents and visitors (ie. sustainability code of conduct). Create ongoing educational opportunities for local businesses to operate more sustainably (ie. webinars, workshops). If possible, take the opportunity to learn from what others are doing and the impact of their training.



Gain in-depth knowledge by taking a training course, such as the GSTC Sustainable Tourism Course.



## 7 Communicate Your Progress

Develop a plan to create awareness and promote what you're doing. Document the process so the information is accessible. Communicate your progress and successes with stakeholders, residents, businesses, and visitors. Continuous engagement helps to establish trust and transparency, creates momentum in achieving continuous improvement and demonstrates the impact of your initiatives.



Create a staff toolkit to support training and development, while ensuring consistency in communication efforts.

Identify terminology for your organization. Use resources, such as the GSTC Sustainable Tourism Glossary for reference.



## 8 Monitor and Measure Your Progress

To ensure that your sustainability initiatives are effective, you'll need to measure and monitor progress. Often what gets tracked gets accomplished. Establish a baseline by identifying your current sustainability performance then create a monitoring tool for future impacts and results. Consider implementing a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system.

### Implementing an M&E system allows you to:

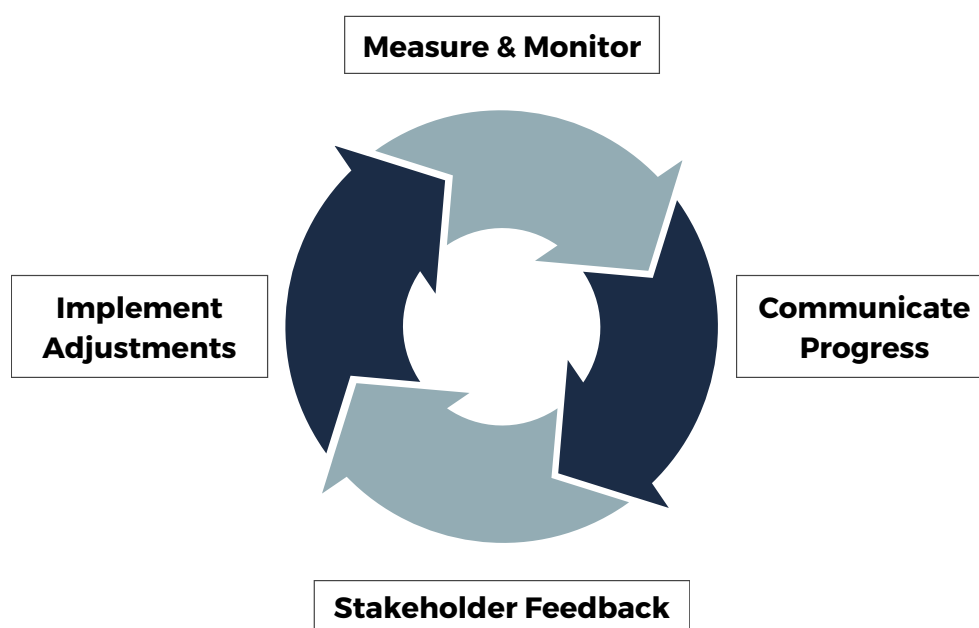
- Build capacity by learning from experience
- Inform strategy regarding policy decisions
- Provide accountability to stakeholders
- Earn credibility through publicly sharing results

### Refer to Criterion A3: Monitoring and reporting

Align your actions with your goals and examine your learnings and experiences. Review, modify, and adapt your plan as necessary.

Share your progress with stakeholders to inform them on planning and development. Alternate between steps 7 & 8 to ensure consistent monitoring and communication of progress.

Make adjustments based on feedback from stakeholders. Adjust your plan on a continuous basis.



## Complete a Self-Assessment

The self-assessment process involves reviewing and evaluating the sustainability practices of your destination against the GSTC Destination Criteria, which includes performance indicators designed to provide guidance in measuring compliance with the Criteria.

### Conduct a self-assessment of the GSTC Criteria in order to:

- Better understand your sustainability performance
- Identify areas for improvement
- Develop action plans to enhance sustainability practices
- Demonstrate your commitment to sustainable tourism practices
- Work towards achieving certification

**The document required for conducting a self-assessment of the GSTC Destination Criteria is included in the annex.**



If possible, have the self-assessment reviewed by the highest level of local authorities.

Consider a GSTC Destination Assessment.

## What is a GSTC Destination Assessment?

GSTC Destination Assessment is designed to introduce the destination management team to the core elements in developing sustainable policies and practices by applying the GSTC Criteria to the specific destination. Examples of GSTC Destination Assessments:

- [Destination Assessment of Summit County, Utah, USA](#)
- [Destination Assessment of Dubrovnik, Croatia](#)
- [Destination Assessment of Heraklion, Greece](#)

Interested in learning about destination assessments? Contact [destinations@gstccouncil.org](mailto:destinations@gstccouncil.org) or [visit our website](#) for more information.

# NEXT STEP

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## 10 Adhere to the GSTC Destination Criteria

Have plan in place to manage destination stewardship efforts and to ensure ultimate compliance with the full set of GSTC Destination Criteria. Against each of the Criteria, one or more of the 17 SDGs is identified, to which it most closely relates.



Start by choosing 5-10 key criterion to examine. Build up slowly by focusing on key areas, such as sustainable management and governance.

Learn from other destinations who have gone through a similar process.

## Case Studies

These case studies offer examples from destinations across the world that have implemented the GSTC Destination Criteria at different stages. They demonstrate how the Criteria can be applied in diverse contexts to promote sustainable tourism practices.

- [Bahamas' Destination Stewardship Council Initiative](#)
- [Jackson Hole's Journey Toward Sustainability](#)
- [Japan Sustainable Tourism Standard for Destinations \(JSTS-D\)](#)
- [Mauritian Standard on Sustainable Tourism](#)
- [Singapore Certified to the GSTC Destination Criteria](#)
- [Moldova Commits to Sustainable Tourism](#)
- [Switzerland's Swisstainable Program](#)
- [Chilenko, Chile Offers Sustainable Tourism](#)



# AREAS OF FOCUS

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There are 38 Criteria within the GSTC Destination Criteria. While they are all important and interrelated, Section A on Sustainable Management is foundational when it comes to holistic approach to destination stewardship.

Criterion A1, which summarizes the importance and composition of a highly inclusive planning group, is essential. It is inclusive in terms of a “whole-government” approach and in terms of ongoing and meaningful engagement with stakeholders from the community and from tourism-related businesses.



## **Criterion A1:**

### **Destination management responsibility**

*The destination has an effective organization, department, group, or committee responsible for a coordinated approach to sustainable tourism, with involvement by the private sector, public sector and civil society. This group has defined responsibilities, oversight, and implementation capability for the management of socio- economic, cultural and environmental issues. The group is adequately funded, works with a range of bodies in delivering destination management, has access to sufficient staffing (including personnel with experience in sustainability) and follows principles of sustainability and transparency in its operations and transactions.*

## **GSTC Criterion A1 Performance Indicators:**

- a.** Documentary evidence showing relevant make-up and responsibilities of the group.
- b.** A financial plan and budget showing current and future funding sources.
- c.** Evidence of links and engagement with other bodies.
- d.** Records of permanent staff and contracted personnel, indicating relevant experience.
- e.** Management guidelines and processes, which demonstrate awareness and adherence to sustainability principles and transparency in operations and letting of contracts.

## What does the governing body look like?

Criterion A1 takes care not to prescribe the structure of a council, whether it be an effective organization, department, group, or committee. A model destination council should comprise an area with permanent inhabitants and multiple stakeholders. It may or may not be the official DMO, but should incorporate DMO participation. Council activities should also involve a diversity of destination stakeholders and encourage the engagement of local communities.

### The ideal governing body would:

<b>Be able to meet the five GSTC A1 indicators</b>
<b>Incorporate representation for all destination assets</b>
<b>Apportion membership by mixing public, private, and civil society</b>
<b>Encompass strong capacity for visitor and destination management</b>
<b>Adopt mission and goals that balance sustainability, authenticity, economic development, and responsible promotion</b>
<b>Conduct activities that help local communities to discover and value their own unique cultural and natural characteristics</b>
<b>Function with a degree of regularity</b>
<b>Withstand changes of government leadership</b>

## What destinations have taken a holistic approach to tourism management and stewardship of their destinations?

### Criterion A1 stories featured in the Destination Stewardship Report:

- Big Bay, Michigan, a remote Upper Peninsula community, inaugurates a destination stewardship council
- Snæfellsnes, Iceland unites the five municipalities of a long skinny peninsula within day-trip range of Reykjavík
- Pennsylvania Wilds, a block of sparsely populated counties in northwestern Pennsylvania, USA
- Community conservancy #Khoadi-≠Hôas, Namibia
- Crown of the Continent region, comprising Rocky Mountain portions of Montana, Alberta, and British Columbia
- Columbia Gorge Scenic Area, Oregon/Washington, USA
- Thompson Okanagan region of British Columbia, Canada
- The historic town of Tequila, Jalisco, Mexico





## Additional Recommendations:

In addition to Criterion A1, A2 and A3 are the additional Criteria we recommend prioritizing when taking a systematic approach to destination stewardship and compliance to the GSTC Destinations Criteria. Note that adhering to Criterion A1 will help with A2 and A3.



### Criterion A2:

#### Destination management strategy and action plan

*The destination has established and is implementing a multi-year destination management strategy and action plan that is publicly available, is suited to its scale, was developed with stakeholder engagement and is based on sustainability principles. The strategy includes the identification and assessment of tourism assets and considers socio-economic, cultural and environmental issues and risks. The strategy relates to and influences wider sustainable development policy and action in the destination.*



### Criterion A3:

#### Monitoring and reporting

*The destination is implementing a system to monitor and respond to socio-economic, cultural and environmental issues and impacts arising from tourism. Actions and outcomes are regularly monitored, evaluated and publicly reported. The monitoring system is periodically reviewed.*

The outlined criteria and steps in the starter kit serve as a starting point for destinations to adopt a stewardship approach. It is important to note that destination stewardship is a continuous process of growth and improvement, and not simply a one-time checklist. Ultimately, prioritizing holistic governance, a multi-year management strategy, and continuous monitoring with adaptations will help kickstart your sustainability journey.

# RESOURCES

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## **Translation of the GSTC Criteria**

The GSTC Industry Criteria and the GSTC Destination Criteria have been translated by volunteers into several languages and are available to the public for education, training, and awareness purposes.

## **GSTC Destination Assessment**

GSTC Destination Assessment is designed to introduce the destination management team to the core elements required for them to develop sustainable policies and practices by applying the GSTC Criteria to the specific destination.

## **Destination Stewardship Report**

The Destination Stewardship Report is a collaboration between the Destination Stewardship Center, Center for Responsible Travel, and the Global Sustainable Tourism Council that provides practical information and insights useful to anyone whose work or interests involve improving destination stewardship.

## **Certification for Destinations**

Achieving certification from a GSTC-Accredited Certification Body signifies that the destination complies with the highest social and environmental standards on the market. This enhances the destination's reputation and credibility among tourists, businesses, and stakeholders. [See here](#) for a map of certified sustainable destinations.

## **Sustainable Tourism Training Program (STTP)**

The GSTC Sustainable Tourism Training Program (STTP) offers practical insights and expert guidance to assist tourism destinations and businesses implement effective steps and achieve tangible performance goals.

## **Glossary of Sustainable Tourism Terms**

Words and phrases can often convey different meanings depending on circumstances, application, and several other factors. This particular glossary clarifies many of the concepts illustrated in the GSTC Criteria.

# TESTIMONIALS

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## **Switzerland:**

"To develop a fruitful sustainability strategy, a multi stakeholder approach is key. No other organization than GSTC stands for such a diverse and global group of sustainable tourism players. Besides consulting with many other stakeholders, the regular exchange with GSTC has significantly helped us to strengthen our approach and to learn from the best practices of the international network GSTC unites. We are very happy to be part of this valuable network," said Samuel Wille, Interim Head of Business Development, Switzerland Tourism.

## **Türkiye:**

"Thanks to our work with GSTC, our visitors will have the chance to enjoy a responsible holiday in Türkiye, and our industry and partners will have the necessary tools to achieve responsible tourism," said Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA).

## **Park City, USA:**

"After inviting GSTC to perform an assessment last year, we launched a community-wide project to develop a Sustainable Tourism Plan. Today, we are thrilled to join GSTC as we move forward with adoption and implementation, a logical and powerful next step in which we are confident will benefit Park City and Summit County," said Jennifer Wesselhoff, President and CEO of the Park City Chamber & Visitors Bureau.

## **Mauritius:**



[Interview: Lindsay Morvan, Director, Mauritius Tourism Authority](#)



# TESTIMONIALS

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## **Sonoma County, USA:**

"Joining the Global Sustainable Tourism Council provides Sonoma County Tourism with valuable resources as we move through our destination master plan," says Claudia Vecchio, President and CEO of Sonoma County Tourism. "Resiliency and sustainability continue to be a key focus as we thoughtfully map out our destination's future and accelerate our industry's recovery."

## **Corfu, Greece:**

"As the majority of generated income comes from tourism, the Municipality is thankful to CLIA, and is encouraging and supporting the cooperation with GSTC in an effort to ensure the sustainability of tourism development in the destination on a long-term basis. Such a perspective will ensure a better living environment and quality in services both to the locals as well as to the visitors and tourists. Our municipality has decided to invest in proper tourism planning and balanced growth for the next generations" - Mayor of Central Corfu and Diapontia Islands, Mrs. Meropi Spyridoula Ydraiou.

## **Lake Llanquihue, Chile:**

"Chile's participation in the GSTC Early Adopter Program is part of our national strategy to position ourselves as a sustainable destination. It is a tremendous challenge for the region and posed an extraordinary opportunity for the four municipalities, the private sector and all Lake Llanquihue stakeholders to lead the development of sustainable tourism," said Fernando Ortúzar, Regional Director of Tourism Los Lagos.

## **Valsugana, Italy**



[Interview: Stefano Ravelli, ATP Valsugana Destination Manager](#)

# CONTACT

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 [Destinations@gstcouncil.org](mailto:Destinations@gstcouncil.org)

 [www.gstcouncil.org](http://www.gstcouncil.org)



[GSTC LinkedIn](#)



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Be an agent of change by fostering increased knowledge, understanding, adoption and demand for sustainable tourism practices



# ANNEX




## GSTC Destination Criteria v2

GSTC Destination Criteria v2			There is a written policy	The policy is being applied	There are good practices implemented
Criteria	Indicators	SDGs			
SECTION A: Sustainable management					
A(a) Management structure and framework					
<b>A1 Destination management responsibility</b>  The destination has an effective organization, department, group, or committee responsible for a coordinated approach to sustainable tourism, with involvement by the private sector, public sector and civil society. This group has defined responsibilities, oversight, and implementation capability for the management of socio- economic, cultural and environmental issues. The group is adequately funded, works with a range of bodies in delivering destination management, has access to sufficient staffing (including personnel with experience in sustainability) and follows principles of sustainability and transparency in its operations and transactions.	a. Documentary evidence showing relevant make-up and responsibilities of the group.  b. A financial plan and budget showing current and future funding sources.  c. Evidence of links and engagement with other bodies.  d. Records of permanent staff and contracted personnel, indicating relevant experience.  e. Management guidelines and processes, which demonstrate awareness and adherence to sustainability principles and transparency in operations and letting of contracts.	  			
<b>A2 Destination management strategy and action plan</b>  The destination has established and is implementing a multi-year destination management strategy and action plan that is publicly available, is suited to its scale, was developed with stakeholder engagement and is based on sustainability principles. The strategy includes an identification and assessment of tourism assets and considers socio-economic, cultural and environmental issues and risks. The strategy relates to and influences wider sustainable development policy and action in the destination.	a. A published document setting out the current destination strategy and action.  b. The strategy/plan clearly visible and available on-line.  c. Evidence of stakeholder consultation, meetings etc. in developing the plan.  d. Reference to sustainability principles and an assessment of assets, issues and risks, contained in the strategy and action plan.  e. Specific references in the strategy/action plan to wider sustainable development policy (including pursuit of the SDGs), and vice versa.				

<p><b>A3 Monitoring and reporting</b></p> <p>The destination is implementing a system to monitor and respond to socio-economic, cultural and environmental issues and impacts arising from tourism. Actions and outcomes are regularly monitored, evaluated and publicly reported. The monitoring system is periodically reviewed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Specific quantifiable socio-economic, cultural and environmental indicators and targets identified.</li> <li>b. Measurement against these indicators, with results recorded and publicised at least annually.</li> <li>c. Written evidence of monitoring and reporting of actions and outcomes.</li> <li>d. Previous reviews of monitoring system and schedule for future reviews.</li> </ul>				
<b>A(b) Stakeholder engagement</b>					
<p><b>A4 Enterprise engagement and sustainability standards</b></p> <p>The destination regularly informs tourism-related enterprises about sustainability issues and encourages and supports them in making their operations more sustainable. The destination promotes the adoption of sustainability standards, promoting the application of GSTC-I Recognized standards and GSTC-I Accredited certification schemes for tourism enterprises, where available. The destination publicizes a list of sustainability certified enterprises.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Evidence of regular communication of sustainability issues to tourism-related businesses (Media, meetings, direct contact etc.).</li> <li>b. Sustainability support and advice to tourism-related business – available and promoted.</li> <li>c. Number and percentage of businesses certified against tourism sustainability standards (and whether GSTC recognised/accredited), with targets for wider outreach.</li> <li>d. Evidence of promotion of certification schemes.</li> <li>e. List of tourism-related certified enterprises, kept up to date.</li> </ul>	 			
<p><b>A5 Resident engagement and feedback</b></p> <p>The destination enables and promotes public participation in sustainable destination planning and management. Local communities' aspirations, concerns and satisfaction with tourism sustainability and destination management are regularly monitored and publicly reported, and action is taken in response to them. The destination has a system to enhance local understanding of sustainable tourism opportunities and challenges and to build the capacity of communities to respond.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Evidence of the promotion and facilitation of public participation in destination planning/management.</li> <li>b. Information on the type and level of such participation.</li> <li>c. Surveys of residents and other systematic feedback mechanisms, covering tourism issues.</li> <li>d. Evidence of action taken in response to residents' feedback.</li> <li>e. Programme of information, education and training on tourism provided for residents.</li> </ul>	 			

<p><b>A6 Visitor engagement and feedback</b></p> <p>The destination has a system to monitor and publicly report visitor satisfaction with the quality and sustainability of the destination experience and, if necessary, to take action in response. Visitors are informed about sustainability issues in the destination and the part that they can play in addressing them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Visitor surveys (and other feedback mechanisms) – carried out and reported.</li> <li>b. Surveys and feedback includes visitor reaction to sustainability issues.</li> <li>c. Evidence of actions taken in response to visitor survey/feedback findings.</li> <li>d. Examples of visitor information that covers sustainability issues and how to respond to them.</li> </ul>	 			
<p><b>A7 Promotion and information</b></p> <p>Promotion and visitor information material about the destination is accurate with regard to its products, services, and sustainability claims. Marketing messages and other communications reflect the destination's values and approach to sustainability and treat local communities and natural and cultural assets with respect.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Current information and promotional material with appropriate content.</li> <li>b. A process exists for checking the accuracy and appropriateness of destination promotion and information.</li> <li>c. Evidence of consultation with local communities and environmental and cultural bodies on communications content and delivery.</li> </ul>	 			
<b>A(c) Managing pressure and change</b>					
<p><b>A8 Managing visitor volumes and activities</b></p> <p>The destination has a system for visitor management which is regularly reviewed. Action is taken to monitor and manage the volume and activities of visitors, and to reduce or increase them as necessary at certain times and in certain locations, working to balance the needs of the local economy, community, cultural heritage and environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The destination management strategy and action plan addresses seasonality and spread of visitation.</li> <li>b. Variation in visitor volumes throughout the year is monitored, including in the most visited locations.</li> <li>c. Impacts of visitor volumes and activities are identified through observation and community and stakeholder feedback.</li> <li>d. Actions taken to manage visitor flows and impacts.</li> <li>e. Marketing strategy and selection of target markets takes account of visit patterns, the impact of activities and destination needs.</li> </ul>	 			
<p><b>A9 Planning regulations and development control</b></p> <p>The destination has planning guidelines, regulations and/or policies which control the location and nature of development, require environmental, economic, and socio-cultural impact assessment and integrate sustainable land use, design, construction, and demolition. Regulations also apply to operations, including</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Specific policies/regulations/guidelines which control development – documented and identified by title and date.</li> <li>b. Impact assessment requirements are set out, covering environmental, economic, and socio-cultural impacts, at sufficient scale to address long term issues for the destination.</li> <li>c. Specific regulations on property rental and operation for tourism, with evidence of their application and</li> </ul>	 			



property rental and concessions for tourism purposes. The guidelines, regulations and policies were created with public participation and are widely communicated and enforced.	<p>enforcement.</p> <p>d. Evidence of public participation in the development of policies/regulations/guidelines.</p> <p>e. Evidence of consultation with, and consent from indigenous people or minority ethnic groups when tourism development has been proposed or has occurred in their territories.</p> <p>f. Evidence of communication and enforcement of the policies/regulations/guidance, at planning, development and implementation stages.</p>				
<p><b>A10 Climate change adaptation</b></p> <p>The destination identifies risks and opportunities associated with climate change. Climate change adaptation strategies are pursued for the siting, design, development and management of tourism facilities. Information on predicted climate change, associated risks and future conditions is provided for residents, businesses and visitors.</p>	<p>a. The destination management strategy and action plan identifies and addresses climate issues.</p> <p>b. Regulations, guidelines and zoning for tourism development and activities accommodate the consequences of climate change.</p> <p>c. A climate risk assessment, covering current and future risks – undertaken and made publicly available.</p> <p>d. Evidence of consideration of impact on, and contribution of, local ecosystems to climate change adaptation.</p> <p>e. Information on climate change that has been made publicly available.</p>				
<p><b>A11 Risk and crisis management</b></p> <p>The destination has a risk reduction, crisis management and emergency response plan that is appropriate to the destination. Key elements are communicated to residents, visitors, and enterprises. Procedures and resources are established for implementing the plan and it is regularly updated.</p>	<p>a. A documented risk reduction, crisis management and emergency response plan for tourism in the destination.</p> <p>b. The plan recognises a wide range of risks, including natural disasters, terrorism, health, resource depletion, and others appropriate to the location.</p> <p>c. Communication procedures identified for use during and after an emergency.</p> <p>d. Programme for local delivery of information and training on risk and crisis management.</p>	 			

# GSTC Destination Criteria v2

Criteria

Indicators

SDGs

There is a written policy

The policy is being applied

There are good practices implemented

## SECTION B: Socio-economic sustainability

### B(a) Delivering local economic benefits

#### B1 Measuring the economic contribution of tourism

The direct and indirect economic contribution of tourism to the destination's economy is monitored and publicly reported. Appropriate measures may include levels of visitor volume, visitor expenditure, employment and investment and evidence on the distribution of economic benefits.

- Programme of economic data gathering.
- Annual reports on the direct and indirect economic contribution of tourism in the destination.
- Data covering a range of measures of economic impact (e.g. volume, expenditure, employment, investment and spread of economic benefit in the destination).



#### B2 Decent work and career opportunities

The destination encourages and supports career opportunities and training in tourism. The destination's tourism enterprises commit to providing equality of opportunity for local employment, training and advancement, a safe and secure working environment, and a living wage for all.

- Provision of relevant skills training programmes/courses, available locally.
- Statements of commitment by tourism enterprises to the provision of decent work/ career opportunities.
- Training and employment opportunities promoted to and taken up by local people, including women, young people, minorities and people with disabilities.
- Channels for checking working conditions and receiving/handling grievances (e.g. involvement of labour unions).













#### B3 Supporting local entrepreneurs and fair trade

The destination encourages the retention of tourism spending in the local economy through supporting local enterprises, supply chains and sustainable investment. It promotes the development and purchase of local sustainable products based on fair trade principles and that reflect the area's nature and culture. These may include food and beverages, crafts, performance arts, agricultural products, etc.

- Advice, finance or other support – available in the destination for tourism-related SMEs.
- Assistance with market access for local tourism-related SMEs.
- Action to encourage and assist local tourism enterprises to purchase goods and services locally.
- Initiatives to help local farmers, artisans and food producers to engage in the tourism value chain.
- Local produce and crafts identified, promoted and available for sale to visitors in the destination.



B(b) Social wellbeing and impacts					
<p><b>B4 Support for community</b></p> <p>The destination has a system to enable and encourage enterprises, visitors, and the public to contribute to community and sustainability initiatives in a responsible manner.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Support for local community and sustainability initiatives by local tourism enterprises is encouraged and facilitated.</li> <li>b. Schemes exist, and are promoted, for visitors to support local community and sustainability initiatives.</li> <li>c. Volunteering and engagement with the community does not involve intrusion or exploitation.</li> </ul>	 			
<p><b>B5 Preventing exploitation and discrimination</b></p> <p>The destination upholds international standards on human rights. It has laws, practices and an established code of conduct to prevent and report on human trafficking, modern slavery and commercial, sexual, or any other form of exploitation, discrimination and harassment of or against anyone, particularly children, adolescents, women, LGBT and other minorities. The laws and established practices are publicly communicated and enforced.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Reference (title, date) to specific laws that pertain in the destination regarding human rights, exploitation, discrimination and harassment.</li> <li>b. Evidence of communication and enforcement of above laws and related good practice (including to tourism enterprises and visitors).</li> <li>c. Risk and impact analysis regarding human rights, including human trafficking, modern slavery and child labour – conducted regularly.</li> <li>d. Destination and key tourism players are signatories to the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism.</li> </ul>	 			
<p><b>B6 Property and user rights</b></p> <p>Laws and regulations regarding property rights and acquisitions are documented and enforced. They comply with communal and indigenous rights, ensure public consultation and do not authorize resettlement without free prior and informed consent and fair and just compensation. Laws and regulations also protect user and access rights to key resources.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Reference (title, date) to specific laws that pertain in the destination regarding property rights and acquisitions and user and access rights to resources.</li> <li>b. Reference in the above laws to communal and indigenous rights, public consultation and resettlement.</li> <li>c. Evidence of enforcement of the above laws in the context of tourism development and activity.</li> <li>d. Evidence of community consultation, consent and compensation.</li> </ul>	 			
<p><b>B7 Safety and security</b></p> <p>The destination has a system to monitor, prevent, publicly report, and respond to crime, safety, and health hazards that addresses the needs of both visitors and residents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Security and health services are well established and active in the destination.</li> <li>b. The needs of visitors are identified and addressed in the delivery of security and health services.</li> <li>c. Tourism facilities are inspected for compliance with safety and hygiene</li> </ul>	 			

	standards.				
<p><b>B8 Access for all</b></p> <p>Where practical, sites, facilities and services, including those of natural and cultural importance, are accessible to all, including persons with disabilities and others who have specific access requirements or other special needs. Where 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. Information is made available on the accessibility of sites, facilities and services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The existence of any regulations and standards regarding the accessibility of visitor sites, facilities and services.</li> <li>b. Consistent application of accessibility standards in public facilities.</li> <li>c. Data on the extent/proportion of visitor sites and facilities that are accessible.</li> <li>d. Evidence of programmes to improve access for people with a range of access needs.</li> <li>e. Information on accessibility included in communications about the destination as a whole.</li> <li>f. Details of accessibility included in visitor information about key sites.</li> </ul>	 			

## GSTC Destination Criteria v2

### Criteria

### Indicators

### SDGs

There is a written policy

The policy is being applied

There are good practices implemented

## SECTION C: Cultural sustainability

### C(a) Protecting cultural heritage

#### C1 Protection of cultural assets

The destination has a policy and system to evaluate, rehabilitate, and conserve cultural assets, including built heritage and cultural landscapes.

- Lists of cultural assets, including evaluation and indication of vulnerability.
- Programme of rehabilitation and conservation of assets.
- Mechanisms for using income from tourism to support conservation of cultural assets.



#### C2 Cultural artefacts

The destination has laws governing the proper sale, trade, display, or gifting of historical and archaeological artefacts. The laws are enforced and publicly communicated, including to tourism enterprises and visitors.

- Reference to relevant laws relating to historical artefacts pertaining in the destination (title, date).
- Evidence of communication of relevant laws to tourism enterprises and visitors.
- Evidence of enforcement of relevant laws.



#### C3 Intangible heritage

The destination supports the celebration and protection of intangible cultural heritage, including local traditions, arts, music, language, gastronomy and other aspects of local identity and distinctiveness. The presentation, replication and interpretation of living culture and traditions is sensitive and respectful, seeks to involve and benefit local communities, and provides visitors with an authentic and genuine experience.

- Identification and listing of intangible cultural heritage.
- Examples of celebration and visitor experiences of intangible cultural heritage (events, distinctive products etc.).
- Evidence of involvement of local and indigenous communities in developing and delivering visitor experiences based on intangible cultural heritage.
- Feedback from visitors and local communities on delivery of intangible heritage experiences.






#### C4 Traditional access

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

- Monitoring of accessibility to natural and cultural sites for the local community.
- Evidence of engagement with the local community regarding traditional access.
- Specific action to protect and/or rehabilitate local community access.





<p><b>C5 Intellectual property</b></p> <p>The destination has a system to contribute to the protection and preservation of intellectual property rights of communities and individuals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Reference to laws on intellectual property pertaining in the destination (title, date).</li> <li>b. Communication of intellectual property rights to tourism stakeholders.</li> <li>c. Evidence that intellectual property rights are protected in the development of cultural experiences for visitors.</li> </ul>				
<b>C(b) Visiting cultural sites</b>					
<p><b>C6 Visitor management at cultural sites</b></p> <p>The destination has a system for the management of visitors within and around cultural sites, which takes account of their characteristics, capacity and sensitivity and seeks to optimize visitor flow and minimize adverse impacts. Guidelines for visitor behaviour at sensitive sites and cultural events are made available to visitors, tour operators and guides before and at the time of the visit.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Monitoring of visitor flows and impact on cultural sites, with results shared across the destination.</li> <li>b. Evidence of action to manage tourism-related impacts in or around cultural sites.</li> <li>c. Existence and distribution of published guidelines on visitor behaviour at sensitive sites and cultural events and periodic monitoring of compliance.</li> <li>d. A code of practice for tour operators and tour guides and/or other engagement with them on visitor management at cultural sites.</li> <li>e. Provision of training for guides.</li> </ul>	 			
<p><b>C7 Site interpretation</b></p> <p>Accurate interpretative material is provided which informs visitors of the significance of the cultural and natural aspects of the sites they visit. The information is culturally appropriate, developed with host community collaboration, and clearly communicated in languages pertinent to visitors and residents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Provision of informative interpretative material on site and in formats that are accessible pre-arrival.</li> <li>b. Evidence that interpretative material has been well researched and is accurate.</li> <li>c. Interpretation material that identifies the significance and sensitivity/fragility of sites.</li> <li>d. Evidence of host community collaboration in preparation of relevant interpretative material.</li> <li>e. Interpretative material available in relevant languages.</li> </ul>	 			

## GSTC Destination Criteria v2

Criteria

Indicators

SDGs

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### SECTION D: Environmental sustainability

#### D(a) Conservation of natural heritage

##### D1 Protection of sensitive environments

The destination has a system to monitor, measure and respond to the impacts of tourism on the natural environment, conserve ecosystems, habitats and species, and prevent the introduction and spread of invasive species.

- List of natural heritage sites and assets, indicating type, conservation status and vulnerability.
- Programmes to conserve biodiversity and natural heritage.
- Programmes to eradicate and control invasive species.
- Action to identify, monitor and mitigate tourism impacts on biodiversity and natural heritage.
- Mechanisms for using income from tourism to support conservation of natural assets.
- Communications with visitors and enterprises on reducing spread of alien species.



##### D2 Visitor management at natural sites

The destination has a system for the management of visitors within and around natural sites, which takes account of their characteristics, capacity and sensitivity and seeks to optimize visitor flow and minimize adverse impacts. Guidelines for visitor behaviour at sensitive sites are made available to visitors, tour operators and guides before and at the time of the visit.

- Monitoring of visitor flows and impact on natural sites, with results shared across the destination.
- Evidence of action to manage and mitigate tourism-related impacts in or around natural sites.
- Existence and distribution of published guidelines on visitor behaviour at sensitive sites, and periodic monitoring of compliance.
- A code of practice for tour operators and tour guides and/or other engagement with them on visitor management at natural sites.
- Cooperation with local conservation bodies to identify environmental risks associated with tourism and measures to reduce them.
- Provision of training for guides.



### D3 Wildlife interaction

The destination has a system to ensure compliance with local, national, and international laws and standards for wildlife interactions. Interactions with free roaming wildlife, taking into account cumulative impacts, are non-invasive and responsibly managed to avoid adverse impacts on the animals concerned and on the viability and behaviour of populations in the wild.

- Reference (title, date) to international, national and local laws that apply in the destination regarding interaction with wildlife.
- Endorsement of international standards for wildlife viewing for both marine and terrestrial species.
- Distribution of a code of practice for wildlife interaction, including viewing, which reflects international standards.
- System for checking compliance with regulations, and code of practice amongst tourism operations.
- Actions to monitor wildlife wellbeing and minimize disturbance, in locations where interactions occur.
- Provision of information to visitors on harmful wildlife interaction, such as touching and feeding.









### D4 Species exploitation and animal welfare



The destination has a system to ensure compliance with local, national, and international laws and standards that seek to ensure animal welfare and conservation of species (animals, plants and all living organisms). This includes the harvesting or capture, trade, display, and sale of wildlife species and their products. No species of wild animal is acquired, bred or held captive, except by authorized and suitably equipped persons and for properly regulated activities. Housing, care and handling of all wild and domestic animals meets the highest standards of animal welfare.

- Reference (title, date) to specific international, national and local laws, standards and guidelines that apply in the destination regarding animal welfare and conservation of species.
- Notification of laws, standards and guidelines to tourism enterprises and guides.
- A system for inspection of the conditions of captive wildlife and domestic animals, including their housing and handling.
- Licensing and checking of qualifications of personnel responsible for captive wildlife.
- Action to promote the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) in the tourism sector and to ensure compliance with it.
- Provision of information to visitors on avoiding trade in endangered species, e.g. in purchase of souvenirs derived from threatened species of wildlife notified by IUCN or CITES.
- Enforcement of legislation to ensure that any hunting activity is part of a scientifically based, properly managed and strictly enforced approach to conservation.





## D(b) Resource management

<p><b>D5 Energy conservation</b></p> <p>The destination has targets to reduce energy consumption, improve efficiency in its use, as well as increase the use of renewable energy. The destination has a system to encourage enterprises to measure, monitor, reduce, and publicly report their contribution to these targets.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Energy consumption targets are publicised and promoted.</li> <li>b. Programme to increase energy efficiency – e.g. promoting and supporting insulation.</li> <li>c. Investment in renewable energy and percent of total provision/consumption.</li> <li>d. Support and incentives for energy monitoring and reduction by enterprises.</li> </ul>				
<p><b>D6 Water stewardship</b></p> <p>The destination encourages enterprises to measure, monitor, publicly report and manage water usage. Water risk in the destination is assessed and documented. In cases of high water risk, water stewardship goals are identified and actively pursued with enterprises, to ensure that tourism use does not conflict with the needs of local communities and ecosystems.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Provision of guidance and support for monitoring and reduction of water usage by enterprises.</li> <li>b. Program to regularly assess water risk.</li> <li>c. Setting, publication and enforcement of water stewardship goals, where water risk has been assessed as high.</li> <li>d. Monitoring and control of sources and volume of water used for tourism purposes and its effect on local communities and ecosystems. Promotion and checking of adherence to goals by tourism enterprises.</li> <li>e. Visitor information on water risk and minimising water use.</li> </ul>				
<p><b>D7 Water quality</b></p> <p>The destination monitors water quality for drinking, recreational and ecological purposes 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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Programme of water quality monitoring.</li> <li>b. Existence of data and reports on water quality.</li> <li>c. Monitoring bathing water, with certification and identification of sites reaching set standards.</li> <li>d. Evidence of actions to improve water quality.</li> <li>e. Information for visitors on quality of local drinking water, to encourage use as alternative to bottled water.</li> </ul>	 			
<b>D(c) Management of waste and emissions</b>					
<p><b>D8 Wastewater</b></p> <p>The destination has clear and enforced guidelines in place for the siting, maintenance and testing of discharge from septic tanks and wastewater treatment systems. The destination ensures that wastes are properly treated and reused or released safely without adverse impacts on the local population and the environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Written guidelines and regulations on wastewater treatment.</li> <li>b. System of enforcing guidelines amongst enterprises.</li> <li>c. Monitoring/testing of released wastewater.</li> <li>d. Provisional of sustainable municipal water treatment systems, for use by the tourism sector, where practical and</li> </ul>	 			

	appropriate.				
<p><b>D9 Solid waste</b></p> <p>The destination measures and reports on its generation of waste and sets targets for its reduction. It ensures solid waste is properly treated and diverted from landfill, with provision of a multiple-stream collection and recycling system which effectively separates waste by type. The destination encourages enterprises to avoid, reduce, reuse, and recycle solid waste, including food waste. Action is taken to eliminate or reduce single-use items, especially plastics. Any residual solid waste that is not reused or recycled is disposed of safely and sustainably.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Waste monitoring programme, with results and targets published.</li> <li>b. Coordinated campaign/advice/support with tourism enterprises on waste management, including food waste.</li> <li>c. Campaign to reduce/eliminate single use items, especially plastics.</li> <li>d. Waste management programme for public offices and facilities.</li> <li>e. Provision of a collection and recycling system, with at least four streams (i.e. organic, paper, metal, glass and plastic).</li> <li>f. Provision of sustainable system for disposal of residual waste.</li> <li>g. Campaign to eliminate dropping of litter, including by visitors, and to keep public spaces clean.</li> <li>h. Adequate bins for separated waste disposal.</li> </ul>	  			
<p><b>D10 GHG emissions and climate change mitigation</b></p> <p>The destination has targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and implements and reports on mitigation policies and actions. Enterprises are encouraged to measure, monitor, reduce or minimise, publicly report and mitigate greenhouse gas emissions from all aspects of their operation (including from suppliers and service providers). Offsetting of any remaining emissions is encouraged.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Published target for percentage of emissions reduction by specified date.</li> <li>b. Annual climate report, including monitoring and mitigation actions.</li> <li>c. Supported campaign or other engagement with tourism enterprises on reduction and mitigation of emissions.</li> <li>d. Action to reduce emissions from public sector operations.</li> <li>e. Information for enterprises and visitors on offsetting schemes that meet recognised standards.</li> </ul>				
<p><b>D11 Low-impact transportation</b></p> <p>The destination has targets to reduce transport emissions from travel to and within the destination. An increase in the use of sustainable, low-emissions vehicles and public transport and active travel (e.g., walking and cycling) is sought in order to reduce the contribution of tourism to air pollution, congestion and climate change.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Investment in more sustainable transport infrastructure, including public transport and low emissions vehicles.</li> <li>b. Information promoted to visitors on alternative transport options to and within the destination</li> <li>c. Data on visitor use of alternative transport modes.</li> <li>d. Improvement and promotion of cycling and walking opportunities.</li> <li>e. Prioritization of visitor markets accessible by short and more sustainable transport options.</li> </ul>	 			



	f. Public sector and tourism enterprises prioritise low-impact transportation in their own operations.				
<p><b>D12 Light and noise pollution</b></p> <p>The destination has guidelines and regulations to minimize light and noise pollution. The destination encourages enterprises to follow these guidelines and regulations.</p>	<p>a. Guidelines on light and noise pollution – produced and promoted to tourism enterprises.</p> <p>b. Identification and monitoring of potential sources of noise and light pollution related to tourism.</p> <p>c. Mechanisms to enable residents to report noise and light pollution, with follow-up action.</p>	 			

### Note on the usage of the GSTC Criteria:

The GSTC encourages broad use and application of the GSTC Criteria, which are available from this website free of charge for their non-commercial use.

However, the GSTC reserves the right to assess and charge fees for the commercial use of the GSTC Criteria.