



Global Sustainable Tourism Council

GSTC Industry Criteria

VERSION 3, 21 DECEMBER 2016

WITH

Suggested Performance Indicators for Tour Operators

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. 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.

Performance Indicators

The performance indicators presented here are designed to provide guidance in measuring compliance with the GSTC Criteria for Tour Operators.

This draft set of indicators will be updated periodically, as new information is developed. If you would like to suggest new indicators or other improvements, please send your suggestions to accreditation@gstccouncil.org.

Combined Indicators and Criteria

This document contains the Criteria and the Performance Indicators.

GSTC INDUSTRY CRITERIA	INDICATORS FOR TOUR OPERATORS
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.	a. The Sustainability Management System is clearly documented. b. The SM System covers environmental, social, cultural, economic, quality, human rights, health and safety issues. c. The SM System includes consideration of risk and crisis management. d. Documentary evidence shows implementation of the SM system. e. The SM System includes a process for monitoring continuous improvement in sustainability performance.
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.	a. An up to date list of all applicable legal requirements is maintained. b. Certificates or other documentary evidence show compliance with all applicable legal requirements. c. Legal requirements in all countries of operation are understood and met.
A3 Reporting and communication The organization communicates its sustainability policy, actions and performance to stakeholders, including customers, and seeks to engage their support.	a. Regular reports are made available on sustainability performance. b. Sustainability policies and actions are reported in external and internal communication material. c. Communications contain messages inviting consumer and stakeholder 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.	a. Evidence is available of staff involvement with the SM System. b. Records of courses and on-the-job training, with attendance levels, are available. c. Staff training and guidance materials are available in accessible format (including use of minority languages where needed). d. Staff hold certificates and qualifications in relevant disciplines/skills.
A5 Customer experience Customer satisfaction, including aspects of sustainability, is monitored and corrective action taken.	a. A customer feedback system is in place, together with analysis of the results. b. Negative feedback and responses made to this are recorded. c. There is evidence of corrective actions taken. d. Feedback from customers is provided to tourism businesses and destinations contracted/visited.
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.	a. Images used in promotion are of actual experiences offered and places visited by customers. b. Marketing about wildlife or cultural events does not promise sightings which cannot be guaranteed. c. Sustainability claims are based on records of past performance.

A7 Buildings and infrastructure Planning, siting, design, construction, renovation, operation and demolition of buildings and infrastructure...	Indicators for A7 criteria relate to the buildings and infrastructure owned and operated by the organization or over which they have direct influence/control.
A7.1 Compliance ...comply with zoning requirements and laws related to protected and sensitive areas and to heritage considerations.	a. Awareness of, and compliance with, laws relating to land use and activities in the local area is demonstrated. b. All required licences and permits are up to date. c. Awareness of, and compliance with, non-statutory area management plans and guidance (e.g. for particular zones, design, etc.), is demonstrated.
A7.2 Impact and integrity ...take account of the capacity and integrity of the natural and cultural surroundings.	a. Site selection, design and access have taken account of visual amenity, landscape, cultural and natural heritage. b. Site selection, design and access have taken account of the protection of biologically sensitive areas and the assimilative capacity of ecosystems. c. The integrity of archaeological, cultural heritage, and sacred sites has been preserved. d. The integrity and connectivity of natural sites and protected areas has been preserved. e. Threatened or protected species have not been displaced and impact on all wildlife habitats has been minimized and mitigated. f. Water courses/catchments/wetlands have not been altered and run-off is reduced where possible and any residue is captured or channeled and filtered. g. Risk factors (including climate change, natural phenomena, and visitor safety) have been assessed and addressed. h. Impact assessment (including cumulative impacts) has been undertaken and documented as appropriate.
A7.3 Sustainable practices and materials ...use locally appropriate and sustainable practices and materials.	a. Local materials, practices and crafts have been used in buildings and design where practicable and appropriate. b. Native and endemic plants obtained from sustainable sources have been used in landscaping and decoration, avoiding exotic and invasive species. c. Plants have been selected for their ability to tolerate prevailing or anticipated conditions eg drought tolerant plants d. Sustainable design, materials and construction practices have been used in buildings, with appropriate certification where possible. e. Waste from construction is sorted and disposed of in an environmentally sound manner.
A7.4 Access for all ...provide access and information for persons with special needs, where appropriate.	a. Sites, buildings and activities are accessible to persons with physical disabilities and other special needs, as appropriate to the nature of the operation. b. Clear and accurate information is provided on the level of accessibility. c. Accessibility is certified or checked with relevant experts/user bodies.

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.	a. On sites owned and operated by the organization or over which they have direct influence/control, land ownership and tenure rights are documented. b. User and access rights for key resources, including land and water, are documented where applicable. c. There is documentary evidence of communication, consultation and engagement with local and indigenous communities. d. Evidence of free, prior and informed consent of local communities is documented, where relevant (showing no involuntary resettlement or land acquisition).
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.	a. Information/interpretation material about the natural and cultural heritage of areas visited is available and provided to customers. b. Staff are informed and trained about the natural and cultural heritage of the areas visited. c. Information is provided to customers about appropriate behaviour in the areas visited.
A10 Destination engagement The organization is involved with sustainable tourism planning and management in the destination, where such opportunities exist.	a. The organization is in contact with the local Destination Management Organization or equivalent body in those locations where it is most active. b. The organization engages in the planning and management of sustainable tourism in those destinations where it is most active.

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.	a. The organization supports initiatives with local communities in areas where it is particularly active. b. The level and nature of contributions made to schemes in the local communities is recorded. c. In selecting service providers and products/experiences to feature in programmes, the organization favours those that engage with and support local communities.
B2 Local employment Local residents are given equal opportunities for employment and advancement, including in management positions.	a. The organization seeks to provide employment opportunities for local residents in its operations and activities. b. The organization monitors the level and proportion of employment it provides for local residents. c. Training is offered to local residents to enhance their employment opportunities.

	d. In selecting service providers and products/experiences to feature in programmes, the organization favours those that provide local employment.
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.	a. The organization regularly audits its sources of supply of goods and services. b. In selecting service providers and products/experiences to feature in programmes, the organization favours those that are locally owned and operated.
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.	a. Where appropriate, the organization provides advice and support to local service providers with whom it engages, on the quality and sustainability of their service. b. Opportunities for joint ventures and partnerships with local entrepreneurs are considered and pursued where appropriate.
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.	a. The organization has a documented policy against exploitation and harassment of vulnerable groups. b. Action is taken to communicate and implement the policy. c. The organization engages with the local community, in destinations where it is particularly active, in working against exploitation and harassment. d. Records of employee ages are kept and show absence of any form of child labour (as defined by ILO). e. The organization supports action against child sex tourism. f. Services providers and premises where there is any evidence of possible exploitation are not contracted or visited.
B6 Equal opportunity The organization offers employment opportunities, including in management positions, without discrimination by gender, race, religion, disability or in other ways.	a. The organization has identified groups at risk of discrimination, including women and local minorities. b. The proportion of employees drawn from each of these groups is monitored. c. Internal promotion includes members of these groups.
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.	a. The organization demonstrates awareness of, and compliance with, international labour standards and regulations. b. Wage levels are monitored and regularly reviewed against norms for a living wage in the countries of employment, c. Training records are kept for all staff, showing the level and frequency of training received. d. Employee contracts show support for health care and social security. e. Water, sanitation and hygiene facilities are provided for all onsite workers. f. Employee satisfaction is monitored. g. An employee grievance mechanism is in place.
B8 Community services The activities of the organization do not jeopardize the provision of basic services, such as	a. The organization monitors its impact on the availability of local services in the main areas of operation/visited.

food, water, energy, healthcare or sanitation, to neighbouring communities.	b. A communication/feedback/grievance mechanism is in place for communities in the main areas of operation/visited. c. Any reduction in availability of basic services to local communities, identified as the result of the organization's activities, is addressed.
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.	a. Local access to livelihoods is considered in decisions about development and operations. b. A communication mechanism is in place for local communities to report any instance of reduced access to local livelihoods in the main areas of operation/visited.

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.	a. The organization demonstrates awareness of, and compliance with, existing international, national and local good practice and guidance for tourist visits to cultural sites and indigenous communities. b. The organization engages with communities/sites in reviewing guidance and creating and agreeing additional guidelines as necessary. c. Guidelines are effectively used and communicated. d. Particular measures are in place to avoid inappropriate interaction with children. e. The organization participates in/supports training and use of local guides. f. Consideration is given to the capacity and fragility of sites and communities, and to the levels of pressure on them, in determining the size, frequency and timing of group visits. g. Feedback from local communities and from visitors is encouraged and acted upon.
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.	a. The organization makes and records monetary contributions to the protection of cultural heritage in its main areas of operation/visited. b. The organization provides in-kind or other support for cultural heritage in its main areas of operation/visited. c. The organization ensures that its activities do not impede local access to sites.
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.	a. Sites visited and experiences offered provide an authentic experience of local culture and heritage. b. Living cultural heritage and traditions are evident in cuisine, retail, events and other services offered. c. Copyright and intellectual property rights have been observed and necessary permissions obtained. d. The views of the local community have been sought on the presentation of local cultural heritage.

C4 Artefacts Historical and archaeological artefacts are not sold, traded or displayed, except as permitted by local and international law.	a. Any use of artefacts is transparent and/or documented and reported. b. Where artefacts are used, laws and bylaws have been identified that permit such use. c. Visitors are prevented from removing or damaging artefacts.
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Section D: Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts

D1 Conserving resources

D1.1 Environmentally preferable purchasing Purchasing policies favour environmentally sustainable suppliers and products, including capital goods, food, beverages, building materials and consumables.	a. A documented environmental purchasing policy is in place. b. Preference is given to products and suppliers with environmental certification – notably with respect to wood, paper, fish, other foods, and products from the wild. c. Where certified products are not available, consideration is given to origin and methods of growing or production. d. Threatened species are not used or sold. e. Service providers and other operators selected and featured in tours have environmental/sustainability certification where possible. f. Where certified businesses are not available, the sustainability performance of service providers is considered and required improvements are communicated and implemented.
D1.2 Efficient purchasing The organization carefully manages the purchasing of consumable and disposable goods, including food, in order to minimize waste.	a. Purchasing favours reusable, returnable and recycled goods. b. Purchasing and use of consumable and disposable goods are monitored and managed. c. Unnecessary packaging (especially from plastic) is avoided, with buying in bulk as appropriate.
D1.3 Energy conservation 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.	a. Energy used in the organization's operations and those over which it has direct influence/control is monitored and managed. b. Renewable sources are favoured and the share of renewable energy in total energy supply is monitored and managed. c. Equipment and practices are used that minimize energy use. d. Goals for reducing energy consumption are in place. e. Staff and guests are given guidance on minimizing energy use.
D1.4 Water conservation 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,	a. Water risk in the main destinations visited has been assessed and documented. b. In destinations visited where water risk has been assessed as high, water stewardship goals have been determined. c. Water used in the organization's operations and those over which it has direct influence/control is monitored and managed. d. Equipment and practices are used that minimize water consumption.

context-based water stewardship goals are identified and pursued.	e. Water originates from a legal and sustainable source which has not previously affected, and is unlikely in future to affect, environmental flows. f. Consideration is given to cumulative impacts of tourism in the locality on water sources. g. Goals for reducing water consumption are in place. h. Staff and guests are given guidance on minimizing water use.
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Section D: Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts

D2 Reducing pollution

D2.1 Greenhouse gas emissions 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.	a. Total direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions from the organization's operations and those over which it has direct influence/control are monitored and managed. b. Carbon Footprint per tourist/night is monitored and managed. c. Actions are taken to avoid and reduce significant annual emissions from all sources controlled by the organization. d. Actions are taken to encourage suppliers of products and services to avoid and reduce significant annual emissions. e. Carbon offset mechanisms are used where practical.
D2.2 Transport 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.	a. Where practical and feasible, the cleanest and most resource efficient transport options are used in the provision of tour programmes and excursions. b. Information is provided and promoted to customers on alternative (climate friendly) transport options, where available. c. Alternative transport options (e.g. bike rental, car sharing, pick-ups) for guests and staff are provided or facilitated. d. Markets accessible by short and more sustainable transport options are favoured. e. Local suppliers are favoured and daily operations seek to minimize transport use.
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.	a. The organization is aware of wastewater treatment arrangements in the main destinations visited, and seeks to influence their improvement where necessary and practicable. b. Wastewater resulting from organization's operations and those over which it has direct influence/control is disposed of to a municipal or government approved treatment system, if available. c. If suitable municipal wastewater treatment is not available, there is a system in place on site to treat wastewater (that meets international wastewater quality requirements) and ensures no adverse effects on the local population and the environment.
D2.4 Solid waste	a. The organization is aware of waste management arrangements in the main destinations visited, and seeks to influence their improvement where necessary and practicable.

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.	b. A solid waste management plan is in place for the organization's operations and those over which it has direct influence/control. c. The solid waste management plan includes actions to reduce, separate and reuse or recycle food waste where applicable. d. Waste disposal is to a government run or approved facility and there is evidence that the facility has no negative impact on the environment or local population. e. Solid waste disposed is measured by type and goals are in place to minimize non-diverted solid waste. f. Guidance is given to customers, staff and suppliers of products and services on minimizing waste.
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.	a. An inventory of harmful substances has been made and material safety data sheets (MSDS) are held. b. Action has been taken to source more environmentally friendly alternatives. c. Chemicals, especially those in bulk amounts, are stored and handled in accordance with appropriate standards. d. Visitors are informed in advance to avoid use of personal toiletries and other substances which may be considered harmful to the local environment.
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.	a. The potential sources of pollution covered in the criterion have been reviewed and identified. b. The potential sources of pollution covered in the criterion are monitored. c. Action is taken to minimize and where possible eliminate pollution from the sources covered in the criterion.

Section D: Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts

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.	a. The organization demonstrates awareness of natural protected areas and areas of high biodiversity value in the areas visited. b. The organization provides and records monetary support for biodiversity conservation in its main areas of operation/visited. c. The organization provides and records in-kind or other support for biodiversity conservation in its main areas of operation/visited. d. Properties owned or operated by the organization and those over which it has direct influence/control are actively managed to support biodiversity conservation. e. The organization is aware of, and mitigates, activity with potential to disturb wildlife and habitats. f. Compensation is made where any disturbance has occurred. g. Action is taken to encourage visitors to support biodiversity conservation. h. The organization engages with local conservation NGOs in its main areas of operation/visited.
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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.	a. Properties owned or operated by the organization and those over which it has direct influence/control are monitored for presence of any invasive species. b. Action is taken to ensure invasive species are not introduced or spread. c. A programme is in place to eradicate and control invasive species. d. Landscaping of sites is reviewed to consider use of native species.
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.	a. The organization is aware of, and complies with, existing guidelines for tourist visits to natural sites. b. Guidelines are used when conducting visits and informing guests. c. The organization engages with local conservation bodies to establish/identify issues concerning visits to particular sites. d. The organization participates in/supports training and use of local guides in natural sites. e. Consideration is given to the capacity and fragility of natural sites, and to the levels of pressure on them, in determining the size, frequency and timing of group visits. f. Feedback from local communities and from visitors is encouraged and acted upon.
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.	a. The organization is aware of, and complies with, existing local, national and international regulations and guidelines concerning wildlife interactions, including wildlife viewing. b. The organization engages with the development and implementation of local codes and guidelines for wildlife interactions, including wildlife viewing, as required, based on advice of wildlife experts. c. The organization ensures that all service providers and sites visited comply with existing local, national and international regulations and guidelines concerning wildlife interactions, including wildlife viewing. d. Direct interactions, in particular feeding, should not be permitted, unless specifically sanctioned by internationally accepted standards or, where standards are not available, guided by independent wildlife expert advice. e. Measures are taken to minimize disturbance to wildlife. f. Impacts on wildlife wellbeing are regularly monitored and addressed.
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.	a. The organization is aware of, and complies with, relevant laws and regulations concerning captive wildlife. b. Existing guidelines for specific tourism activities involving captive wildlife are implemented. c. Personnel responsible for captive wildlife have appropriate qualifications and experience and are fully licensed. d. The organization is aware of, and complies with, relevant laws and regulations concerning animal welfare. e. The organization ensures that all service providers and sites visited comply with relevant laws, regulations and guidelines concerning captive wildlife and animal welfare. f. There is regular inspection of conditions of captive wildlife and their housing. g. There is regular inspection of conditions of domestic animals and their housing and handling.

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.

- a. The organization is aware of, and complies with, relevant laws and regulations concerning wildlife harvesting and trade.
- b. The organization ensures that all service providers and sites visited comply with relevant laws and regulations concerning wildlife harvesting and trade.
- c. Visitors and guides are informed of regulations concerning wildlife harvesting, consumption and trade and of the need to avoid buying illegal products/souvenirs derived from threatened species of wildlife notified by IUCN or CITES.
- d. Where hunting activity is legal, it forms part of a scientifically based, properly managed and strictly enforced approach to conservation.

