



Global Sustainable Tourism Council

**A GUIDE FOR DESTINATIONS  
ON HOW TO BECOME CERTIFIED**

# Becoming Certified as a Sustainable Destination

## What is the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)?

The **Global Sustainable Tourism Council** establishes and manages **global sustainable standards**, known as the **GSTC Criteria**. It also provides an assurance framework for sustainable tourism certification.

It was formed in 2007 as a coalition of 32 partners, initiated by the Rainforest Alliance, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Foundation (UN Foundation), and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The purpose was to foster an increased understanding of sustainable tourism practices and the adoption of universal sustainable tourism principles.

There are two sets: **GSTC Destination Criteria** for public policy-makers and destination managers, and **GSTC 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; and (D) Environmental impacts.

Currently, the **GSTC Mice Criteria** and **GSTC Attractions Criteria** are under development. The **GSTC Criteria** form the foundation Accreditation for Certification Bodies that certify hotels/accommodations, tour operators/transport providers, and destinations as having sustainable policies and practices in place.

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, NGOs, individuals and communities – all striving to achieve best practices in sustainable tourism.

**GSTC does NOT certify anything. GSTC provides Accreditation to Certification Bodies. Certification and Accreditation are different things.**

# Becoming Certified as a Sustainable Destination

As public concern grows about the harmful effects and the positive impacts of travel and tourism, certification provides you with a credible solution to complex environmental and social issues.

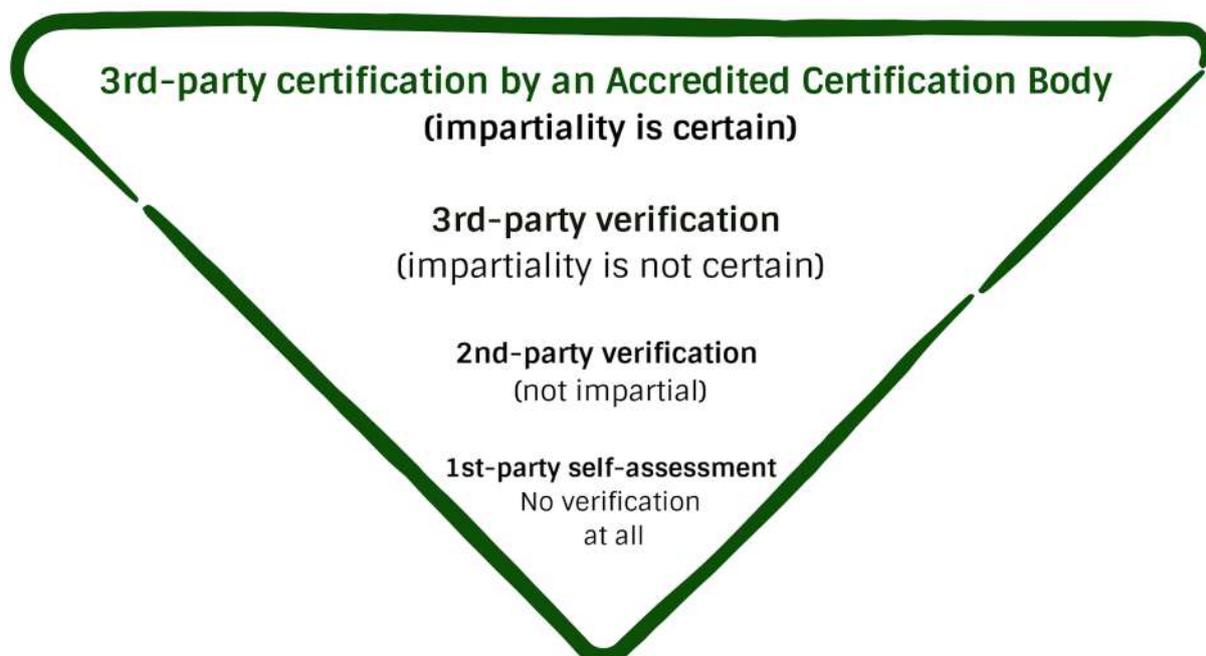
## Why GSTC-Accredited?

Being certified sustainable by a Certification Body that is Accredited means that your destination complies with the highest social and environmental standards on the market.

**Businesses certified by a GSTC-Accredited Certification Body, meeting all the GSTC Criteria (or a GSTC-Recognized Standard), have the highest level of assurance\* and credibility available.**

With an accredited certification, it is assured that the destination was certified in a credibly verified procedure in a transparent, impartial, and competent manner.

## \* General assurance levels:



# Becoming Certified as a Sustainable Destination

## How to get started?

GSTC can assist destinations in the early stages of your journey to sustainability before you are ready to apply for certification.

Check out the GSTC Destination Program here:  
[www.gstcouncil.org/for-destinations/destinations-program](http://www.gstcouncil.org/for-destinations/destinations-program)

To become certified, tourist destinations must **Choose a Certification Body (CB) from our website**. All the CBs listed there have gained Accreditation to certify Destinations as sustainable.

After working with a CB towards achieving full GSTC requirements compliance, your operation will receive its GSTC Certificate.



# Becoming Certified as a Sustainable Destination

## My Destination is certified

Destinations should proudly display information regarding their certificate and the certification body that issued it. Doing so informs travelers that your destination is operated with sound management that looks to the future and not merely at today.

Being certified by an Accredited Certification Body (CB) means that your destination complies with the highest social and environmental standards on the market.

Those destinations certified by a GSTC-Accredited Certification Body can display a unique GSTC logo with a traceable code



To view destinations that have been certified by a GSTC-Accredited Certification Body, see the GSTC Sustainable Destinations Map: [www.gstcouncil.org/certified-sustainable-destinations](http://www.gstcouncil.org/certified-sustainable-destinations)

The management teams at these destinations understand that “sustainability” is a journey and the work to implement the GSTC Criteria is never complete.

Sustainable destination management requires continuing commitment and ongoing collaboration among wide-ranging stakeholders in everyday decision-making. However, these destinations have traveled a long way down the path of sustainability. They are to be commended, and they should be promoted as destinations worthy of travelers’ support.



Question? Contact us:  
[info@gstcouncil.org](mailto:info@gstcouncil.org)

 GSTC<sup>®</sup>

Global Sustainable Tourism Council