



Global Sustainable Tourism Council Monitoring & Evaluation Report 2024

May 2025

Contents

01 Remarks from CEO

06 GSTC Monitoring
and Evaluation
System

02 About the GSTC

07 GSTC Activities
and Impacts

03 Executive Summary

08 Impact Report:
Evaluating the
Impacts of GSTC
Certification:
Insights from the
Türkiye Sustainable
Tourism Program

04 Performance

05 Plans for 2025

09 Lessons from the
Year 2024

Remarks from our CEO

Over the past year, the GSTC Standards have continued to shape and inspire more sustainable practices across the travel and tourism sector. This second edition of our Monitoring & Evaluation Report highlights the tangible progress and valuable insights gained through our collective efforts.

Throughout this past year, we have witnessed both measurable and intangible impacts resulting from the application of the GSTC Standards. Our internal evaluations reveal encouraging progress, but we also recognize that many of the positive changes influenced by the Standards extend beyond what data alone can show, reinforcing the broader movement toward sustainability that we are proud to support.

This report reflects not only our commitment to transparency and continuous learning but also the collective efforts of a diverse and dedicated community. I am deeply grateful to all who contribute their expertise, passion, and time to advancing sustainable practices across the travel and tourism sector.

To those already part of this journey, a heartfelt thank you for your unwavering dedication. And to those yet to join, we warmly invite you to connect with us and harness the power of the GSTC Standards to drive meaningful and lasting change in your own organizations. Together, we can make sustainability the true foundation of our industry.

Randy Durband

Chief Executive Officer,
Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)



02 About the GSTC

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council® (GSTC®) establishes and manages global sustainable standards, the GSTC Standards, also known as the GSTC Criteria. The GSTC Destination Standard for public policy-makers and destination managers, GSTC Hotel Standard & GSTC Tour Operator Standard, GSTC MICE Standard for Venues, Event Organizers, and Events & Exhibitions, and the GSTC Attraction Standard for tourist attractions such as theme parks, museums, and national parks. These are the guiding principles and minimum requirements that any tourism business or destination should aspire to reach in order to protect and sustain the world's natural and cultural resources while ensuring tourism meets its potential as a tool for conservation and poverty alleviation.

The GSTC Standards form the foundation for GSTC's assurance role for Certification Bodies that certify hotels/accommodations, tour operators, and destinations as having sustainable policies and practices in place. GSTC does not directly certify any products or services but provides accreditation to those that do.

GSTC is an independent and neutral USA-registered 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. The GSTC is an ISEAL Community Member, a global membership organization for ambitious, collaborative, and transparent sustainability systems.



Vision

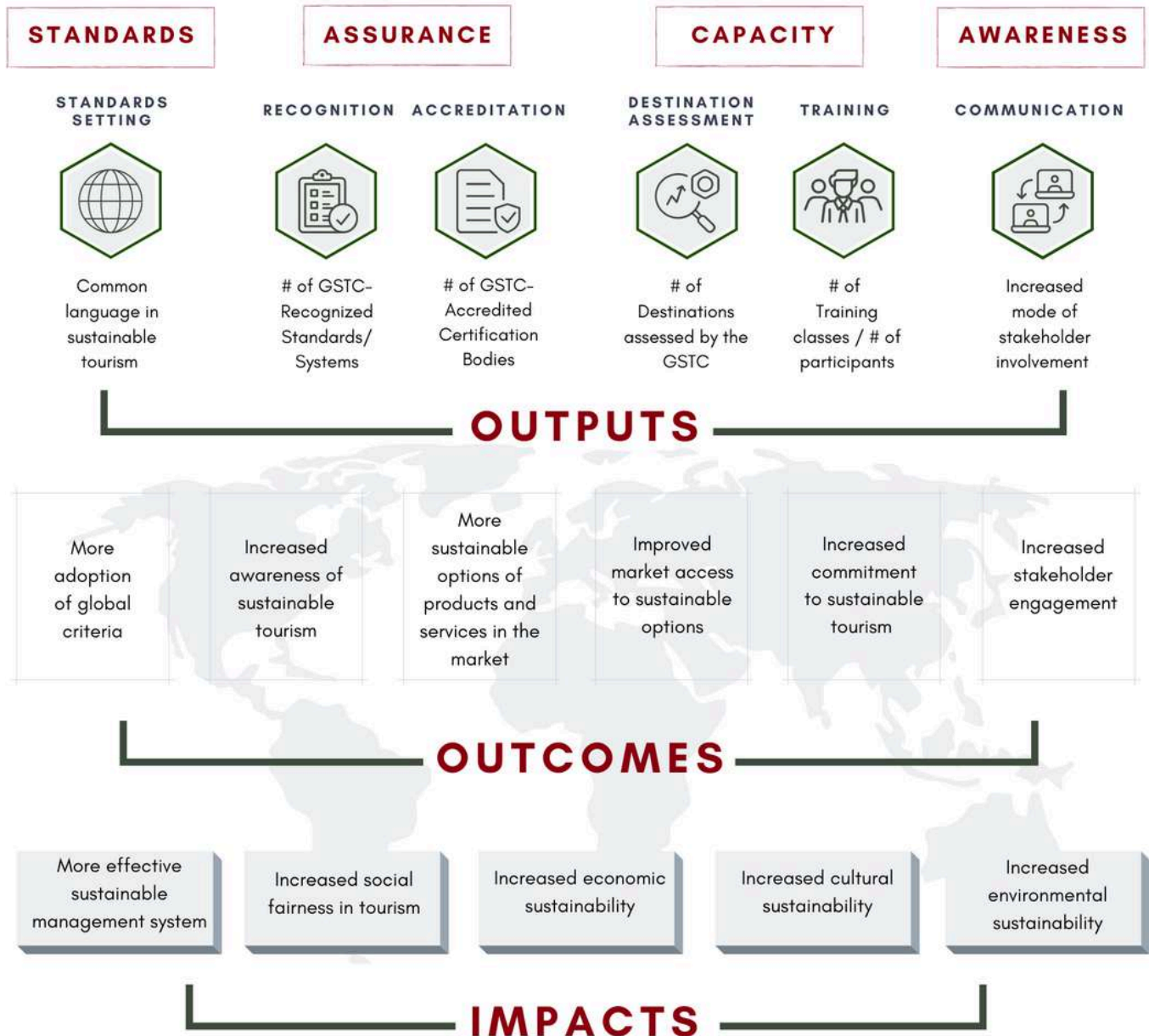
Tourism fulfills its potential as a vehicle for social, cultural, and economic good while reducing any negative environmental and social impacts.

Mission

To be an agent of change in the world of sustainable travel and tourism by fostering the increased knowledge, understanding, adoption and demand for sustainable tourism practices.

IMPACT PATHWAYS

STRATEGIES



03 Executive Summary

The Monitoring and Evaluation System helps the GSTC evaluate and improve its effectiveness and impact in all its diverse activities. It also enables GSTC to be accountable to its stakeholders and ensure credibility by providing transparent and verifiable information.

In this second monitoring and evaluation report, we present the results of indicators each area has monitored but in a way that compares them with the results from 2023 to show the changes and, hopefully, the improvements in our numbers and our reach. GSTC conducted an impact study on the GSTC Certification in 2024, and the results are shared in this report.

04 Performance

Based on the improvement plan we presented in the first Measurement & Evaluation (M&E) Report 2023, we accomplished the following:

- Impact Study: The first impact study related to the Türkiye certification program was conducted.
- Internal Workshop: On January 22, 2025, GSTC staff members participated in an online M&E workshop to share their understanding, lessons learned, and challenges.

05 Plan for 2025

GSTC assurance activity-specific impact measurements based on the indicators.



06 GSTC Monitoring and Evaluation System

Membership and Engagement

Members, webinars, web users, followers on social media, conferences.

Auditor Training

Participation, number of classes, completion of courses.

Public Training

Number of courses, participants, satisfaction, authorized trainers.

Standards

Number of standards developed.

Recognition

Number of recognized standards for each standard.

Accreditation

Number of accredited certification bodies (ACBs), businesses and destinations certified by ACBs, number applicant CBs.

Destinations

Assessed destinations, number of Destination Stewardship Reports published.

Impact Study

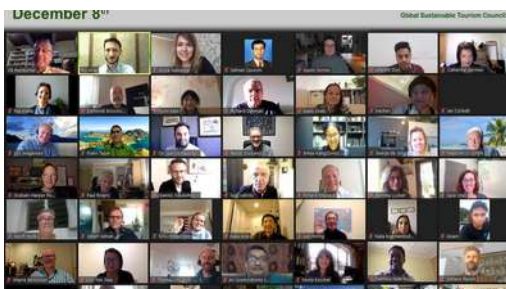
Impacts of GSTC Certification: Insights from the Türkiye Sustainable Tourism Program.

07 GSTC Activities and Impacts

GSTC Membership and Engagement

When comparing the monitoring indicators from 2023 to 2024 for GSTC's membership and engagement activities, we observe growth across all areas. There has been an increase in membership numbers, the number of webinars held, webinar participation rates, and attendance at GSTC Global Conferences.

These positive results demonstrate our ongoing success in expanding awareness and promoting universal sustainable tourism principles. The rise in membership and participation reflects stronger stakeholder engagement – a key objective that GSTC continually strives to achieve.



	2023	2024	Variation	Percentage Increase
Organization members	437	491	⬆️	12.36%
Renewal of membership	87%	88%	⬆️	1.15%
Members participation in webinars	16.20%	57.26%	⬆️	253.46%
Satisfaction with GSTC understanding of member's needs	43.21%	—	—	—
Number of webinars	26	28	⬆️	7.7%
Number of webinars participants	634	1,261	⬆️	98.9%
	2023	2024	Variation	Percentage Increase
Satisfaction with webinars	43%	—	—	—
Web users	236k	276k	⬆️	16.95%
Followers on Social Media	90,827	101,109	⬆️	11.32%
News articles published	330	350	⬆️	6.06%
Participants in the GSTC Global Conference*	351	1,027	⬆️	192.6%
Satisfaction with the GSTC Global Conference	87%	88%	⬆️	1.15%

**In 2023, we had one global conference in Türkiye. In 2024, we had two global conferences, one in Sweden and one in Singapore. More details of the GSTC conference interannual comparisons are on the next page.*

GSTC Conferences Data Comparison – Type of participating organization

	GSTC2024 Sweden	GSTC2024 Singapore	Variation	Percentage Increase
Destination Management Organizations (DMOs)*	24.60%	8.59%	⇓	-16.01%
National Tourism Organizations (NTOs)	13.70%	9.18%	⇓	-4.52%
Consultancy	9.70%	11.33%	⇓	1.63%
Tour Operators	4.60%	3.91%	⇓	-0.70%
Hospitality**	4.20%	13.28%	⇓	9.08%
Certification Body (CB)	2.10%	9.96%	⇓	7.86%
Online Travel Agency (OTA)	1.79%	3.71%	⇓	107.26%
Attraction	1.98%	3.13%	⇓	58.08%

***Reason for a higher number of DMOs and NTOs in GSTC2024 Sweden:** A higher number of our GSTC Destination Members are based in Europe and Sweden. Also, the topics and sessions had a stronger focus on destination stewardship in the GSTC2024 Sweden edition.

****Reason for a higher number of hospitality in GSTC2024 Singapore:** A strong focus on hospitality in the conference themes.

GSTC Training

Auditor Training

The indicators that measure key issues from the GSTC auditor training program, which you can see below, show an increase in awareness of sustainable tourism practices.

Participants who have completed the training are on their way to becoming competent (depending on the requirements from the certification bodies they work with, if that is their case) to audit GSTC Standards.

As the indicator for auditor training classes shows, there has been an increase of 20% in those. GSTC plans to keep increasing that number and give auditor training classes in more regions worldwide in 2025.



	2023	2024	Variation	Percentage Increase
Auditor training classes	10	12	⬆️⬆️	20%
Participants in auditor training classes	170	350	⬆️⬆️	105.88%
Auditors completed the GSTC Hotel Standard Course (From 2016 to December 31 2024)	143	345	⬆️⬆️	141.26%
Auditors completed the GSTC Tour Operator Course (From 2016 to December 31 2024)	44	136	⬆️⬆️	209.1%
Completed the GSTC Destination Standard Course (From 2016 to December 31 2024)	56	106	⬆️⬆️	89.29%

Public Training

Although there was a reduction in the number of regular courses offered, the number of training participants grew by 31%. Additionally, we saw an 11% increase in the number of authorized trainers, which will help expand the availability of regular courses in the future.

These positive results highlight the progress GSTC is making toward one of its key objectives: enhancing stakeholders' understanding of the breadth and depth of sustainability. Through our training efforts, we are strengthening their capacity to implement sustainable tourism practices effectively.



	2023	2024	Variation	Percentage Increase
Regular courses	78	73	⌵	-6.41%
Training participants	1,810	2,365	⌴	30.66%
Participants who are satisfied with courses	99.5%*	99%**	⌵	-0.5%
Participants who passed the exam	57%	81%	⌴	42.12%
Authorized trainers	44	49	⌴	11.36%

*190 survey respondents: 71.6% marked "very satisfied" and 27.9% marked "satisfied".

**393 survey respondents: 71% marked "very satisfied" and 28% marked "satisfied".

Story From Our Impactful Public Training Program From Japan

In 2023, Japan Tourism Board (JTB) conducted its first Sustainability Training Course (STC). Following this, employees who had participated in the STC formed a **voluntary working group**. Each group identified potential actions within their respective work areas and began visualizing them. They started **implementing initiatives** that individuals could quickly adopt, **focusing on achievable, everyday changes**. This included bringing personal water bottles called 'My Bottle,' setting up 'sustainable boxes' for sharing unwanted items, and setting small, practical sustainability goals.

JTB also surveyed its business partners, such as hotels and ryokans, regarding their sustainability practices and showcased their efforts on its website.


In 2024, **JTB launched the Sustainability Partnership Cooperation Declaration**, encouraging partner companies to engage in sustainability efforts. This initiative will expand beyond accommodation to include airlines and other businesses in various sectors. JTB also introduced **guidelines for creating Sustainable products** and took the lead in initiatives that could be shared across the entire group.

Additionally, JTB conducted two STC in 2024 for key employees nationwide, extending beyond the headquarters to promote the regional implementation of these initiatives. JTB's efforts demonstrate how the impact of STC training initiated by a single department can ripple throughout the company and influence destinations. Ultimately, **JTB was successful in obtaining the certification** in 2024.

GSTC Standards

GSTC has developed two more standards for another sustainable tourism industry sectors, apart from Industry: the MICE Standard (for Venues, Event organizers, and Events/Exhibitions) was released in March 2024 and the Attraction Standard was released in November 2024.

This wider range of standards helps to ensure that both the public and private sectors have a framework for developing sustainable tourism requirements, improves the chance that there is a common language in sustainable tourism, and helps to increase the number of tourism businesses adopting global standards, all of which GSTC strives to accomplish.

	2023	2024	Variation	Percentage Increase
Number of GSTC Standards	2	4		100%



GSTC Recognition

Through the GSTC Recognition program, GSTC provides a formal indication that a standard is equivalent to the relevant GSTC Standards. By 31 December 2024, owners of existing GSTC-Recognized Standards used for certification needed to either (1) formally open an application to pursue accreditation by GSTC; or (2) enter into a formally documented arrangement with GSTC whereby they act as a “Certification Scheme”.

From January 2025, failing to either open an application to pursue accreditation or enter into a CS-CB Framework means that the GSTC-Recognized Standard status shall be immediately terminated. Through these measures, the GSTC aims to clarify the sustainability landscape in tourism, promoting genuine adherence to sustainable practices and enhancing consumer confidence in certified entities. More information can be found [here](#).

	until December 2023	until December 2024	Variation	Percentage Increase
GSTC-Recognized Standards for Hotel	38	52	↑↑	36.84%
GSTC-Recognized Standards for Tour Operator	20	21	↑↑	5%
GSTC-Recognized Standards for Destination	15	16	↑↑	6.67%
Certified Hotels to GSTC-Recognized Standards	11,030	15,784	↑↑	43.1%
GSTC Recognized MICE Standards*	0	1	↑↑	100%

*The recognition of the GSTC MICE Standard started in 2024.

GSTC Accreditation

The indicators that measure key issues from the GSTC accreditation program have seen increases from 2023 to 2024, which are detailed below.

Accreditation is essential to our core mission and gives us confidence that, through our accreditation program, we continue to accomplish the desired outcomes of:

- Providing assertion to sustainable tourism;
- Supporting more tourism businesses and destinations in adopting global standards; and
- Supporting more sustainable options (Certified businesses and destinations) to the buyers including tourists.



	2023	2024	Variation	Percentage Increase
GSTC-accredited certification bodies	8	11	⬆️	37.5%
GSTC-certified* hotels	947	1,760	⬆️	85.85%
GSTC-certified* destinations	33	46	⬆️	39.4%
GSTC-certified* tour operators	7	12	⬆️	71.43%
Applicant Certification Bodies	8	14	⬆️	75%

*"GSTC-certified" is shortened to "Certified by a GSTC-accredited certification body." GSTC does not directly certify any products or services; but provides an accreditation program to accredit certification bodies.

GSTC Destination Program

	2023	2024	Variation	Percentage Increase
Destinations assessed	6	8	⬆️	33.33%
Destination Stewardship Reports published*	3	3	—	0%

**The last 2024 Destination Stewardship Report was published in January 2025 but the content cover Sept-Dec 2024.*

Our destination assessment program, which saw an increase from 2023 to 2024, works toward achieving the following outcomes GSTC has:

- Improved market access to sustainable options.
- Increased awareness and commitment to sustainable tourism.
- Increased stakeholder engagement.

The regularly published Destination Stewardship Report helps to raise awareness of sustainable tourism practices in the different committed destinations.



08 Impact Report: Evaluating the Impacts of GSTC Certification: Insights from the Türkiye Sustainable Tourism Program

GSTC conducted research that aims to examine hotels' attitudes toward GSTC Certification, along with the benefits and challenges encountered throughout the certification process. The findings derived from the Türkiye sample are expected to contribute to a comprehensive evaluation of the impacts of GSTC Certification. A mixed-methods approach has been adopted, consisting of two phases: quantitative and qualitative. The results presented here are from a qualitative approach: Focus Group Interviews, which provide valuable insights into the impacts of GSTC Certification.

In 2022, the Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA), official tourism board of Türkiye operating under auspices of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, signed a collaboration agreement with the GSTC and adopted the GSTC Industry Standard, which serves as the cornerstone of Türkiye's Sustainable Tourism Program and forms the basis for nationwide sustainable tourism certification across the industry. The same year, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism announced a national program and made sustainability certification mandatory for all hotels in the tourism sector.

According to the Türkiye program requirements, approximately 22,000 hotels operating in Türkiye shall obtain GSTC Certification by 2030. Thus, Türkiye stands out as an essential case in understanding the impacts and outcomes of GSTC certification. Therefore, in the context of this study, the sample was selected from the Türkiye case.

All the conclusions and results presented here are direct quotations in the form of a summary of the "Impact Report: Evaluating the Impacts of GSTC Certification: Insights from the Türkiye Sustainable Tourism Program". (There are slight changes in the wording for the sake of clarity and conciseness.)

Methodology

GSTC conducted two focus group interviews to understand the experiences, perceptions, and difficulties faced by the hotels within the scope of the Türkiye Sustainable Tourism Program regarding the sustainability certification process.

The interviewees are hotel managers and employees directly involved in the certification process.

The questions for the focus group interviews were created based on the requirements determined by ISEAL (2023) as follows:

- Scheme Effectiveness (whether components of the scheme are working as intended).
- Scheme Sustainability Performance (whether the scheme contributes to its intended sustainability outcomes and impacts).
- Client Performance (whether clients demonstrate improved practices and/or sustainability outcomes and impacts in alignment with the scheme's objectives)
- Unintended Negative Impacts (occurrence of unintended negative effects).

The qualitative data obtained were evaluated using the thematic analysis method.

Results

The findings are organized according to the themes presented above.

Scheme Effectiveness

Important findings for this theme can be categorized as:

- The audits were a learning process through certification preparation, helping hotels understand and implement sustainability practices effectively, contributing to continuous improvement in compliance.
- The GSTC Standards offers clear and structured guidance for implementing sustainable practices.
- This structured framework helps hotels to navigate sustainability requirements more efficiently and align their operations with global best practices.
- These elements demonstrate how well the certification scheme works in practice, ensuring that certified organizations meet sustainability requirements and benefit from a structured and supportive process.

Scheme Sustainability Performance

Important findings for this theme can be categorized as:

- GSTC Certification significantly contributed to sustainability outcomes and impacts.
- The awareness about sustainability among the employees and guests, which has positively impacted the supply chain and enhanced overall operations, has increased.
- The visibility of good practices supported a change in mindset, contributing to more responsible behavior among staff and visitors.
- GSTC Certification increases the competitive advantage of hotels through their commitment to sustainability.

These outputs from interviewees indicate that **certification** is more than just compliance; it is **a tool that promotes economic resilience, environmental responsibility, and social interaction.**

Client Performance

Important findings for this theme can be categorized as:

- In terms of client performance, key improvements stated by interviewees include improved employee rights, which indicate a stronger focus on ethical practices, contributions to the local economy through more sustainable business practices, and enhanced risk management strategies.
- The certification process has contributed to the increase in hotels' awareness of sustainability-related risks, such as water scarcity.
- The GSTC Certification has contributed to the improvement in measuring and tracking energy and water consumption required to obtain certification. The implementation of data-driven strategies to monitor consumption has led to better resource optimization and financial benefits.

Unintended Negative Impact

Important findings for this theme can be categorized as:

- Challenges in meeting specific sustainability requirements, as certain auditor expectations may be difficult to implement in practice due to guest service demands.
- Challenges from the perceived conflict between luxury hospitality and sustainability requirements. Some certification-related sustainability measures may not fully align with the expectations and preferences of luxury hotel guests, creating potential barriers to implementation. For example, some guests may perceive sustainability measures, such as reduced towel changes and the removal of single-use plastics, as service deficiencies, leading to dissatisfaction.
- Challenges from repeatedly implementing the same sustainability practices can reduce employees' motivation over time. While it is positive that hotels continue to prioritize sustainability, this also highlights the need for effective strategies to maintain the engagement and interest of both employees and guests.

The study is intended to be repeated in a longitudinal manner annually to more comprehensively examine the long-term perceptions of hotel managers, employees, and guests regarding GSTC Certification and the effects of this process on financial continuity.

09 Lessons from the Year 2024

On January 22, 2025, the GSTC gathered for a lesson-learned meeting on each area's monitoring and evaluation activities. The team broadly discussed what has worked, what hasn't worked, our work related to impacts, and what needs to be done better for the future.

Below, we share the main lessons learned from last year:

What worked

- The membership team shares that measuring their current data is suitable for them and that measuring their activities is a helpful exercise.
- The auditor training team shared that the number of trainees has dramatically increased. They are satisfied with their measurements to measure the auditor training process.

“Effective communication isn't just about what we say—it's about how well it resonates and drives action. By measuring our communications at GSTC, we can adapt our approach, expand our reach, and maximize the impact of each message in promoting responsible and sustainable tourism worldwide.”

— Estefanía del Azar, GSTC Communications Manager



Challenges

- Due to our software constraints, some data is difficult to know and measure.
- The training department also faces some challenges with tracking data for a training impact study it wants to develop soon.

“

"The GSTC Standards is a measurable tool to help guide organizations in their sustainability journey. We all envision sustainability, but we must try to speak the same language and work toward a common framework. The challenge of the standard development lies within this diversity; encompassing everyone's opinion from all five continents but then writing it down into one language. The GSTC Standards development is a culmination of months of an inclusive and rigorous process."

— Dr. So Young Lee, GSTC Project Manager

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Impact

- The communications team considers that the overall social media channels of GSTC experienced growth, which means that we are connecting with more individuals about sustainable tourism. The GSTC website has tracked more users than last year. These growths mean more interest in our work, and additionally, we got more articles on the internet mentioning GSTC, which enhances our brand visibility.
- The events coordination team considers it interesting to track the impact of GSTC events. It is very useful to them to look back at the feedback they receive and the increase in the number of attendees from one year to the next. Events have a big component of networking and partnerships, not just between us and other stakeholders but also among stakeholders.

“

Over the past year, the training program has been dedicated to enhancing the accessibility of the GSTC Standards, empowering participants to take significant and impactful actions. Our scope has expanded beyond training managers to delivering practical, hands-on training tailored to all staff across the tourism sector. To further promote inclusivity, we have provided multilingual training sessions in collaboration with local trainers. For example, in Takayama City, Japan, three sustainable tourism courses were delivered in Japanese, leading to a measurable improvement in participants' comprehension of the GSTC Standards.

These sessions incorporated field visits to accommodation facilities, where participants shared their experiences in implementing initiatives aligned with the GSTC Standards. These real-world examples served as both a source of inspiration and a catalyst for motivation among attendees. Notably, one participant, representing an accommodation business, expressed a firm commitment to embarking on the path to certification. They also voiced their intention to collaborate with the local tourism department and the Destination Management Organization (DMO) to explore how their accommodation could contribute more meaningfully to the local community. This underscores the program's success in inspiring local stakeholders to take proactive and constructive steps toward sustainable tourism.

— Dr. Jisun Kim, GSTC Training Program Manager

For the future

Over the next year, we aim to upgrade our software to streamline and strengthen our internal processes.

There is also a recognized need to establish unified indicators and shared goals across all teams, rather than setting them individually.

Furthermore, each team will be tasked with identifying potential risks and developing proactive strategies to address them.



The GSTC Team appreciates all stakeholders working with us to make more sustainable tourism and we look forward to having more positive impact in 2025!



Global Sustainable Tourism Council

May 2025