MANUAL FOR GSTC RECOGNITION OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STANDARDS & SYSTEMS

Version 5.0

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The Global Sustainable Tourism Council

www.gstcouncil.org

To make comments on this document, please email the GSTC Technical staff

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Document Control
This version of the GSTC Recognized Manual replaces versions 4.0, 3.2, 2.0 and 1.2 of the GSTC Recognition Manual published in August and February 2017, 2014 and 2012.

Version Notes
This version 5.0 of the GSTC Recognized Manual includes but is not limited to the following revisions. Some content has been moved to the Internal Operational Guidelines (a separate document, available publicly). Clarifications have been made that Recognition applies to both standards and to sustainable tourism systems. GSTC no longer requires that Recognized standards and systems must be used only for certification; other forms of verification and other types of usage are acceptable, with Recognition focused on compliance with the GSTC Criteria and are more inclusive on how the Recognized standard is put into practice.

Contents

1 Introduction - GSTC Recognition of Sustainable Standards and Systems

The GSTC considers it desirable for all sustainable tourism standards and systems to be aligned with the GSTC Criteria to ensure that an overall global baseline is set for sustainable tourism. The GSTC Criteria are developed and maintained according to the principles laid out in the Standards Setting Code of the ISEAL Alliance, utilizing a highly inclusive development process that produces globally-relevant outcomes. This document guides the processes and procedures whereby owners of other sustainable tourism standards voluntarily seek formal verification by GSTC that their standard includes and complies with the GSTC Criteria. GSTC describes standards that attain that formal verification "GSTC Recognized Standards."

The program label "GSTC Recognition of Standards" may be used to serve as shorthand for the Recognition of both of the following:

1. Sustainable tourism standards, where the term "standards" fits the definitions of the ISEAL Alliance codes and ISO standards.
2. "Sustainable tourism systems", *defined herein as activities systematized to implement an assurance program and/or capacity building for sustainable tourism.*

The two are distinguished in this manual where feasible and deemed necessary. See also Section 3.2 on eligibility of applicants for further information. If in doubt, a reference to "standards" only shall be interpreted as referring to both standards and systems.

It is essential to note the distinction between these two GSTC offerings:

● **GSTC Recognized:** GSTC recognizes equivalence of standards against GSTC Criteria (Industry or Destination). This relates merely to the content in the standard and does NOT consider the process by which the standard is applied. As such, this is NOT an endorsement of a certification or awards process or any such process, nor is it an endorsement of the organization that owns the standard. *It is simply a verification relating to the content in a standard.*

● **GSTC Accredited**: Third party accreditation of Certification Bodies that use either a GSTC-Recognized Standard OR certifies directly against GSTC Criteria. See the GSTC-Accreditation Manual.

1.1. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)

GSTC is a multi-stakeholder initiative formed in 2007 under the umbrella of the United Nations, including amongst its founding partners UNEP, UNWTO, UN Foundation, Sabre Holdings and Rainforest Alliance, amongst others. It was formed in response to the challenges and opportunities of sustainable tourism, by merging two previous initiatives.[1] In 2015, GSTC merged with the Tour Operators' Initiative, with TOI's operations now coming within the GSTC organization.

Over 250 organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors and from the world of tourism, environmental management and sustainable development have been contributing to the work of the GSTC and its two predecessor bodies.

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[1] The Partnership for Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria and the Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council

The GSTC is a Membership Council with a Board of Directors. The Board provides the governance of the organization. However, the Council, which elects the Board, has responsibility for the by-laws of the GSTC, for its principles, criteria and operational guidelines, for admittance of members and for resolving disputes.

The mission of the GSTC is:

"To improve tourism's potential to be a driver of positive conservation and economic development for communities and businesses around the world and a tool for poverty alleviation".

The GSTC fulfils its mission by fostering increased knowledge and understanding of sustainable tourism practices and the adoption of universal sustainable tourism principles.

It also works in many other ways to strengthen education, communication, knowledge-sharing and business engagement in the field of sustainable tourism and to achieve improved market access for sustainable tourism products.

1.2. A Common Agenda for Sustainable Tourism

The challenges of sustainable tourism articulated earlier encompass economic, social and environmental impacts. This broad spectrum of concern is increasingly recognized by bodies promoting sustainable tourism. UNEP and UNWTO identified an agenda for sustainable tourism based on twelve functional aims[2] and showed how there are economic, social and environmental dimensions to each of them. The dimensions are seen as interrelated.

In the private sector, in tourism as well as in other economic spheres, enterprises and investment projects are encouraged to consider a triple bottom line. Many companies report on corporate social responsibility policies and actions, which address a broad range of economic, social and environmental impacts and initiatives beyond straight financial reporting. Some companies use the guidelines of the Global Reporting Initiative, the world's most widely used sustainability reporting framework (www.globalreporting.org).

The GSTC program is in line with this broad approach to sustainable tourism and encourages certification schemes to move beyond a more mono-dimensional, often environmental focus.

The principles for sustainable tourism behind the GSTC program are that:

● Sustainability objectives should be defined, and actions coordinated by an effective management system
● Tourism should bring the greatest possible social and economic benefits to local communities and any negative impacts on them should be minimised
● Local cultural heritage must be respected, and opportunities should be taken to strengthen its integrity and richness.
● Impacts on the global and local environment, through pollution and depletion of natural resources, should be minimised and support should be given to the conservation of local landscapes and biodiversity.

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[2] UNEP, UNWTO *Making Tourism More Sustainable, A Guide for Policy Makers, 2005*

These principles of sustainable tourism are seen as relevant in all parts of the world and can be reflected in many different kinds of tourism enterprise. The overall agenda remains the same. However, key concerns about tourism impact and priorities for improving sustainability will vary from place to place. It is hoped and expected that sustainable tourism standards will be adapted to local and industry sector conditions and that they will far exceed the minimum requirements set out in the GSTC Criteria.

1.3. GSTC Criteria

GSTC has developed two sets of criteria and associated indicators:

● GSTC Industry Criteria (version 3, December 2016); serving as guiding principles for all subsectors of travel and tourism, and developed for purposes of assurance including certification, awards, etc. for hotels/accommodations and tour operators each having specific performance indicators;

● GSTC Destination Criteria (version 2, December 2019) with performance indicators; serving as guiding principles for policy-makers at the national, provincial, or municipal/destination levels plus as a management tool for destination management; and developed for purposes of assurance including certification, awards, etc. for destination stewardship.

1.4. GSTC Assurance Panel

The GSTC Assurance Panel is established by the GSTC to make decisions on applications for approval of GSTC's assurance programs.

The Panel's role is to:

1. Establish the requirements for recognizing standards and validating the accreditation of conformity assessment bodies, through Manuals for Recognition and Accreditation; guidance documents, and other documentation of procedures;

2. Determine whether a contractor is qualified to review a standard's conformity with the GSTC Criteria; review certification program procedures and processes; or award accreditation;

3. Declare standards or systems to be "GSTC Recognized";

4. Declare certification programs to be "GSTC Accredited" and validate and provide surveillance of accreditation body;

The Panel operates independently of the GSTC Board and executive staff. While appointed by the GSTC Board, the GSTC Bylaws authorize the members of The Panel to disregard any instructions from the Board or executive staff that they feel may jeopardize their independence and impartiality.

2 The GSTC Criteria

This section explains how the GSTC Criteria were derived and how they will be maintained and updated.

2.1 Introduction

The GSTC Criteria are administered by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). The GSTC standard-setting process is implemented by the GSTC International Standards Committee (ISC), a group of partners representing public, private and voluntary sector interests from different global regions, following a needs assessment and the determination of scope and terms of reference.

The process of establishing and revising the GSTC Criteria takes careful note of the requirements of ISRAEL's Code of Good Practice for Setting Environmental and Social Standards.

The sustainability challenges of tourism and the possible responses available are not static. Pressures, priorities and technologies change over time. The GSTC Criteria are periodically reviewed and updated to reflect this. In addition, lessons from the application of the GSTC Criteria will point to helpful and necessary improvements.

The official language of the GSTC Criteria is English.

2.2 GSTC Industry Criteria

The original Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Hotels and Tour Operators (GSTC-HTO) were developed between 2007 and 2008 by a partnership of 27 organisations. The first version of the criteria was released in October 2008 and was publicly available for comment until April 2011. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council reviewed all comments received, responded to each, and revised the criteria accordingly. The revised criteria were available for public comment and review from July 15 – October 15, 2011 in English, French, Spanish, and Mandarin. Again, all comments were reviewed and addressed, to produce version 2 of the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Hotels and Tour Operators.   The most recent revision of the criteria took place with full consultation in 2016, released as "GSTC Industry Criteria (GSTC-Industry), version 3, December 2016".

Development of the Criteria has involved a broad-based stakeholder consultation process, which included:

- Consultation with the tourism industry and sustainability experts;
- Analysis of more than 4,500 existing criteria in the field of tourism sustainability, used by over 60 certification schemes and other initiatives;
- Preparing draft criteria and inviting comments on them from across the sector;
- Assessing comments received from over 2,000 stakeholders as a basis for amending the criteria;
- Widely disseminating the final criteria and promoting awareness of them.

2.3   GSTC Destination Criteria

The Global Sustainable Tourism Destination Criteria were developed between 2010 and 2013 by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council through a stakeholder consultation process leading to their initial publication on 1st. November 2013. The first revision of the Criteria took place from December 2018 to August 2019 releasing the GSTC Destination Criteria version 2.0 in December 2019. The creation of the GSTC Destination Criteria was driven by the GSTC Destination Stewardship Working Group and the International Standards Committee composed by multidisciplinary experts following IDEAL guidelines for the development of social and environmental standards.

The original development of the Criteria included:

- Preparing draft criteria and performance indicators incorporating the shared principles from over 37 destination guidelines and standards from around the world;

- Public Consultation in English, Spanish, French, Mandarin, German, Catalan, and Russian;

- Pilot test of the Criteria in six Early Adopter destinations in North America, Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, and Asia between May and August 2012;

- Evaluating comments received from tourism experts and early adopters.

The most recent revision of the GSTC Destination Criteria followed a consultation process overseen by the International Standards Committee following the requirements of the ISEAL Standard Setting Code. Two rounds of consultations were carried out inviting stakeholders, partner bodies, destination standard owners and the DSWG members to have their say in the revision and development of the revised criteria. Based on the intended resolution of the comments received, a final version of the GSTC Destination Criteria was proposed, for approval by the International Standards Committee. The ISC approved the final revision of the GSTC Destination Criteria on 18th October 2019 and the definitive version of the GSTC Destination Criteria was formally adopted by the Board of the Directors on 6th December 2019.

2.4   Updating the GSTC Criteria

The GSTC will update the GSTC Criteria from time to time, and at intervals typically of five years, or to correct errors.

The GSTC shall, as far as practicable, follow the ISEAL Alliance Standard Setting Code of Good Practice when updating the GSTC Criteria.

Comments and suggestions on the GSTC Criteria can be submitted at any time via the GSTC's website.

At the start of each review process, the processes to be followed for that revision shall be made available to interested parties through the GSTC's website and in other ways as felt appropriate by the International Standards Committee.

Once issued, any revised GSTC Criteria shall be published promptly, and made freely available in electronic form.

Changes in the Criteria shall be communicated to all known sustainable tourism standard owners by electronic communication and posting on the GSTC website.

The scope of the GSTC Criteria is currently limited to (a) accommodation facilities and tour operators and (b) destinations. There are plans to potentially expand to other sub-sectors, but the present versions should not be interpreted as having a wider scope.

2.5   The GSTC Criteria Components

Components of individual criteria are set out in the GSTC Recognized Application. They do not form part of the published GSTC Criteria. Their purpose is to support technical analysis of each criterion. These components are not to be confused with the performance indicators.

3   GSTC Recognized Framework

All GSTC Recognized procedures are governed in the first instance by the GSTC Bylaws, and in the second instance by the GSTC Recognized Manual.

3.1   Process

Standard Recognition: GSTC shall determine whether a standard is equivalent to the GSTC Criteria, upon which it shall be declared a "GSTC Recognized Standard"

3.2   Eligible Applicant

GSTC shall accept applications for GSTC Recognized Standard status for the following types of standards applied to sustainable tourism. The applicant shall declare to GSTC one of the following categorizations and declare any future changes to GSTC in writing.

3.2.1   Standards used in certification, where "certification" follows the definitions in relevant ISO standards.

3.2.2   Standards used for education and other purposes but not intended for use in certification.

3.2.3   Other sustainability systems, including but not limited to large enterprises with internal sustainability systems that guide the management of multiple sites.

3.2.4   National, provincial/state, or large municipality systems, which may be also known as "programs" or by other terms.

3.3   Formal adoption of the Criteria

Businesses and public agencies may declare their adoption of the GSTC Criteria verbatim to be applied as formal policy. The program using the GSTC Criteria by making formal public declaration and paying the GSTC a usage fee, is eligible for having their program listed in GSTC's public list of Recognized Standards. If a language other than English will be used, the applicant must provide GSTC with a certificate of translation from a reputable translation service.

3.4   Decision Made by the Assurance Panel

The Assurance Panel ("the Panel") declares standards or sustainability systems to be "GSTC Recognized"

4 GSTC Recognized Process

This section describes the process by which a standard or system will be evaluated to determine its equivalency to the GSTC Criteria in order to achieve GSTC Recognized status.[3]

In addition to this section on process, GSTC's Internal Operational Guidelines which provide more detail are available to fully understand the process. Contact GSTC at td@gstcouncil.org for a copy.

4.1 Requirements for Standard Owners

4.1.1   A standard's owner shall demonstrate legal ownership of, or the right to use, the standard to be assessed.

4.1.2   Standard owners are encouraged to have documented rules for the updating of the standard, including how the standard will be reviewed to ensure continued equivalency with the GSTC Criteria if either the standard or the GSTC Criteria are changed.

4.1.3   Any changes in the standard and requirements shall be communicated to the GSTC within a period of 10 days of the formal release of the amended version.

4.1.4   The standard owner may provide guidance on the standard to clients and other interested parties.

4.1.5   The GSTC Recognized Application evaluation report shall have a section which evaluates the conformity of the standard owner with the requirements set out in this section. Should the standard owner not conform to requirements of this section, the areas of non-conformity shall be noted in the evaluation report.

4.2 Requirements for Standards and Systems

4.2.1   The standard or system shall be written in a form that permits a clear decision on whether or not a business or activity complies with each criterion. For systems not formatted in a manner typical of standards, some form of simplified checklist shall be included to easily reference components that correspond to each criterion.

4.2.2   The application for GSTC Recognized shall indicate the scope of the standard (e.g. entire businesses, individual hotels only, destinations, or specific tours, etc.) and its geographic coverage.

4.2.3   Standard owners may go beyond the requirements of the GSTC Criteria in including additional criteria, local adaptation, or sector specificity.

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[3] Equivalent standards might have differences in presentation and even in substance, e.g. in explanatory notes, guidance on how to fulfil the requirements of the standard, preferences for alternatives and varieties. Equivalency for purposes of GSTC Recognized includes harmonized, unified, identical, unilaterally-aligned, and comparable standards. (ISO/IEC Guide 2:2004 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.8, and 6.9)

4.2.4   The content of the standard may take into account local and regional differences, including economic, social and ecological realities or regulatory conditions.

4.2.5   The standard may differ from the GSTC Criteria in the way it is structured and expressed, but should avoid conflicting and inconsistent use of terminology and definitions.

4.2.6   It is not necessary for the criteria of the applicant to follow the same sequence as those of the GSTC Criteria, nor use the same words or language.

4.2.7   Where the wording or intent of a criterion is significantly different from the corresponding criterion of the GSTC Criteria, the applicant will be required to explain in what way application of the criterion corresponds to the intent of the GSTC criterion. This explanation may include any indicators and evaluation guidelines used by the certification program, where relevant.

4.2.8   Standard content shall be informed by any guidance provided by the GSTC to assist standard owners and the GSTC Assurance Panel in considering equivalency between standards and the GSTC Criteria.

4.2.9   Where the GSTC has published indicators or guidance for GSTC Criteria relating to the relevant tourism industry sector(s) to which the standard applies, these indicators or guidance may be taken as non-exclusive interpretative guidance.

4.2.10 For each criterion in the Standard, the applicant shall indicate (in the appropriate field of the matrix in the Application Form) whether or not that criterion is a mandatory requirement for its certification process. The standard can be awarded GSTC Recognized status even if not all relevant criteria are mandatory[4]. However, for a certification programme to be awarded GSTC Accredited status, conformity with at least one of the criteria matching each of the GSTC Criteria shall be mandatory in order to demonstrate that all certified businesses and activities comply with all the GSTC Criteria.

4.3 Non-applicability or Omission of Criteria

4.3.1   Where a standard fails to cover one or more of the GSTC Criteria, the reasons and justification for this omission must be clearly stated and documented.

4.3.2   In certain circumstances, criteria may be omitted without prejudice to the award of GSTC Recognized status. For example, the criterion may not be relevant, given the scope of the standard.   In such cases, convincing evidence must be presented that the criterion is outside the scope of the standard.

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[4] i.e. where a tourism enterprise may not be required to conform to all the standard's requirements in order to be certified (for example by allowing partial conformity or through the use of scores)

4.3.3   A standard (or any guidance attached to it) may also indicate that certain criteria, including those that are equivalent to a particular GSTC criterion, may not always be applicable. In this case, the practice shall be described in the standard, guidelines, or a policy document. The circumstances, reasons and justification for this deemed non-applicability must be clearly stated and documented.

4.3.4   Reasons and justification for omission of criteria or deemed non-applicability may include:

4.3.4.1   Evidence of complete lack of relevance of a particular criterion to local circumstances or industry sector/subsector

4.3.4.2   Evidence that the application of a particular GSTC criterion may be impossible, illegal or unreasonable[5]

4.3.4.3   Evidence of coverage by legislation and regulation that is fully enforced and universally complied with in the countries covered. This is further elaborated in Section 4.4 below.

4.3.5   Reasons and justification for omission or non-applicability may be specific to the particular country or region where the standard is being applied. Separate evidence must be provided and documented for each country or region where the standard is applied to justify any omission or deemed non-applicability of a criterion or criteria.

4.3.6   Standards that are used in more than one country must have criteria that match each GSTC Criterion, except as above.

4.4 Reliance on Legislation

4.4.1   Standards that are used in only one country or a smaller region may be able to demonstrate that a particular criterion is covered by legislation.

4.4.2   In the case of 4.4.1:

4.4.2.1   The specific law(s) must be identified;

4.4.2.2   The standard or the auditors' verification manual must require demonstrated compliance with applicable laws.

4.4.3   Convincing evidence will be required. Acceptable evidence may include:

4.4.3.1   A criterion that fully matches GSTC Criterion requiring compliance with relevant legislation;

4.4.3.2   A requirement for a legally-binding sworn statement by the organization to be certified with respect to compliance with specific, named laws and regulations;

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[5] For example, the requirements for local hiring and purchasing might be considered inapplicable for a certification program applied exclusively in Antarctica

4.4.3.3   Text from the auditors' manual or verification criteria indicating that compliance with specific, named laws and regulations will be verified during the audit.

4.4.4   In the case of reliance on legislation, the award of GSTC Recognized status for the standard will apply only in that area of legal jurisdiction.

4.5 GSTC Recognized Application

4.5.1   Standard owners wishing to have their standard GSTC Recognized shall download the GSTC Recognized Manual and relevant GSTC Recognized Application documents which provide details of the process and application document.

4.5.2   The standard owner shall complete the sections of the form "GSTC Recognized Application" relating to the requirements for ownership and operation of the standard or certification scheme.

4.5.3   The standard owner shall indicate the degree of correspondence between its own standard and the GSTC Criteria, through completing a matrix provided in the application designed to map the requirements of the standard against the GSTC Criteria.

4.5.4   Where a standard owner believes that there is justification for non-inclusion of a GSTC Criteria in its standard, it may indicate this. In all such cases it shall provide a written, evidence-based justification for this non-inclusion.

4.5.4.1   Evidence will be required to demonstrate that the element in question is not an issue for the sustainability of tourism in any of the countries and types of tourism enterprise covered by the certification.

4.5.4.2   Justification shall not be based on a difference in the meaning and coverage of sustainable tourism between the certification scheme owner and the GSTC.

4.5.5   During the application process for "GSTC Recognized", the standard owner shall undertake to:
4.5.5.1   Inform the GSTC of any substantial changes to the ownership of the standard.

4.5.5.2   Give the GSTC any updated version of its standard within 10 days of it being updated.

4.5.6   The application shall be assessed against the version of this Recognition Manual current at the time that payment has been made. Should the GSTC revise or amend this manual during the period of the application process, that version shall remain in effect. The Assurance Panel may consider revisions to the Manual to support an acceptance of the application but not a rejection.

4.6 GSTC Recognized Application Documentation

The following documentation must be completed and sent to the GSTC for recognition of the standard or other sustainability system:

4.6.1 A GSTC Recognized Application. Current versions of the GSTC Recognized Application form are available to download from the GSTC website, or available from the GSTC on request.

4.6.2 The form includes a matrix for comparison of the standard with the GSTC Criteria. The comparison matrix shall be completed in English.

4.6.3 The standard owner shall provide a copy of the standard in its entirety, in its original language. Where the standard's original language is not English, it must be translated to English and a certificate of translation (or equivalent justification of the translation accuracy) must be provided.

4.6.4 All other relevant documents required to show conformity to GSTC requirements.

4.7 GSTC Assessment of GSTC Recognized Applications

4.7.1 The completed application form together with all the documentation requested shall be reviewed for completeness by GSTC technical staff, who may request further information and documentation.

4.7.2 Once satisfied that the application is complete, GSTC will issue an invoice to the standard owner. GSTC will only process the Application once the relevant application fee has been paid.

4.7.3 A member of GSTC technical staff will be appointed to undertake an assessment of the standard against the GSTC Criteria. In cases of conflicts of interest, or the appearance thereof, GSTC shall identify an alternative assessor with appropriate qualifications.

4.7.4 The appointed assessor shall undertake an assessment of the equivalency of the standard against the relevant GSTC Criteria, and whether the application is completed comprehensively with sufficient evidence of compliance for the Assurance Panel to make its determination without seeking further information from the applicant. The assessor(s) shall:

4.7.4.1 Draw the attention of the standard owner to any GSTC Criteria where the standard appears not to be equivalent and ask for further clarification if required.

4.7.4.2 Seek comment from the standard owner on any areas where the standard may appear to have no equivalent criterion and may ask the standard owner to provide further evidence relating to the equivalency of its standard.

4.7.4.3 Write an assessment report based on the assessment of the equivalency of the standard to the GSTC Criteria.

4.7.4.4   Submit the report to the standard owner, with an invitation to amend any areas where equivalency has not yet been established, prior to further consideration by GSTC.

4.7.4.5   Update the assessment report on receipt of the requested information from the standard owner.

4.7.5   The assessor shall forward the application, including the updated assessment, and final versions of support materials to the Assurance Panel for it to make its determination on the merits of the application.

4.7.6   The Assurance Panel shall make its determination based on a simple majority and shall inform the applicant of their decision. The Panel shall determine whether the application is accepted, rejected, or is conditionally accepted by stating a deadline for compliance to specified issues. A fee may be applicable for re-assessments of applications with five or more conditions.

4.8 Assurance Panel Decision

4.8.1   If the decision is to grant GSTC Recognized status with or without conditions, the GSTC shall provide the standard owner with a letter (or similar document) regarding claims that can be made, and the terms upon which they may be made.

4.8.2   GSTC Recognized status applies to the English version of the standard that has been provided by the applicant. A professionally translated version of a GSTC Recognized standard, or the standard in its original language, can subsequently be used in any appropriate country that falls within the declared scope of the standard.

4.8.3   The results of the assessment of the standard shall be confidential, available only to the GSTC Secretariat and Assurance Panel and to the applicant. Only those standards that are GSTC Recognized will be publicly identified.

4.8.4   The GSTC will not reveal the names of those standards that have applied for GSTC-Recognized in any of the following circumstances: for one reason or another the applicant has not completed the process; the standard has been GSTC Recognized (Conditional); the standard has not achieved GSTC Recognized status.

4.8.5   The GSTC will notify all owners known to have applied for a GSTC Recognized standard of any timetable for review and revision of the GSTC Criteria and invite their involvement in the revision process.

5 Renewal Process

5.1 Validity of GSTC Recognized

GSTC Recognized status will apply to a Standard until the earlier occurrence of one of the following:

5.1.1   The Standard owner amends their Standard; or

5.1.2   The GSTC amends the relevant GSTC Criteria.

5.2 Amendment of GSTC Criteria

5.2.1   If the relevant GSTC Criteria have been amended by the GSTC, GSTC will give due notice to GSTC Recognized standard owners of any changes made to the GSTC Criteria and subsequent actions that they may be required to take.

5.2.2   In the event of amendment of the GSTC Criteria, owners of GSTC Recognized standards will be given a period of two years to comply with the new Criteria.

5.3 Amendment of a GSTC Recognized Standard

5.3.1   When the standard is amended, the standard owner shall inform the GSTC within a period of 10 days of the formal release of the amended version.

5.3.2   The standard owner shall indicate the amendments, or the extent of the amendments, which have been introduced in the standard. The GSTC Assurance Panel will provide guidance to standard owner on how to report the amendments.

5.3.3   The GSTC Assurance Panel shall consider all revisions of GSTC Recognized standards submitted to it and, if it feels necessary, shall require any or all steps in the recognition process to be repeated, including re-submission for a renewed GSTC Recognized evaluation.

5.4 Ongoing Conformity of a Standard

Should the GSTC Assurance Panel have reason to be concerned about the ongoing conformity of a standard already recognized as equivalent with the GSTC Criteria, it may require the standard owner to provide further information at any time. As an ultimate sanction, once the standard owner has been offered time to conform and after due consideration, GSTC-Recognition may be withdrawn.

6 Complaints and Appeals Procedures

6.1 Complaints

6.1.1   Any complaints made about matters relating to GSTC Recognized processes shall be submitted to the Secretariat of the GSTC.

6.1.2   The GSTC Secretariat shall forward complaints to the GSTC Assurance Panel, who will discuss the complaint with the complainant and / or standard owner and agree appropriate action.

6.1.3   The GSTC shall record all actions taken and communicate the outcome of the complaint to the complainant.

6.2 Appeal from a standard owner regarding a decision on GSTC-Recognized status

6.2.1   An appeal by a standard owner against a GSTC Recognized decision may only be made in relation to the following events:

6.2.1.1   Refusal by the GSTC to accept its application for GSTC Recognized;

6.2.1.2   Refusal by the GSTC to proceed with a recognition evaluation;

6.2.1.3   A decision to refuse, suspend or withdraw GSTC-Recognition or any other action that impedes the attainment of recognition.

6.2.2   The grounds for an appeal are limited to:

6.2.2.1   Failure of the GSTC to follow its own procedures or meet the requirements of the GSTC Recognition Manual; or

6.2.2.2   The GSTC having incorrectly interpreted the requirements for recognition.

6.2.3   Notifications of an appeal shall be directed to the GSTC Secretariat at td@gstcouncil.com and received within 30 days of the GSTC decision being communicated to the standard owner.

The appeal notice has no set format but shall:
a) Be in writing and signed by the appellant standard owner or its legal representative;
b) Specify the grounds on which the appeal is made;
c) Be accompanied by relevant and objective documented evidence;
d) Indicate what steps were taken to resolve the issue prior to lodging the appeal;
e) Contain an agreement to pay the costs of the appeal process, if and as allocated by the Appeals Panel;
f) Contain an agreement to adhere to all terms and provisions of this procedure.

6.2.4   The GSTC Secretariat shall verify that the conditions for appeal set out above have been met and, if not, shall so advise the appellant.

6.2.5   If and once conditions have been met, the GSTC Secretariat shall formally acknowledge receipt of the appeal.

6.2.6   An Appeals Panel shall be established by the GSTC Board.

6.2.7   The appellant will have the opportunity to object to membership of the Appeals Panel on grounds of conflict of interest. The Appeals Panel shall consider such a challenge, but will not be bound to change its membership.

6.2.8   Terms of Reference for the Appeals Panel and its operating procedures are available in the Internal Operational Guidelines, but may be amended at the sole discretion of the Appeals Panel to suit the nature of the appeal.

6.2.9   The decision of the Appeals Panel shall be binding on all parties and no further appeal on the same matter shall be accepted.

6.2.10 The Secretary of the Appeals Panel shall be responsible for keeping records of the appeal. On the instruction of the Chair of the Appeals Panel, these may be sealed to protect confidentiality.

6.3 Review of Appeals

6.3.1   Records of appeals shall be reviewed at meetings of the GSTC Assurance Panel.

6.3.2   Should the GSTC Appeals Panel request action from the GSTC Secretariat and/or Assurance Panel in addition to that already taken, or actions of a more general nature, then these actions shall be undertaken by the GSTC.

6.4 Functions of the Appeals Panel

6.4.1   The functions of the Appeals Panel will be as follows:

6.4.1.1   To decide on the validity of the appeal made by the owner of a standard or its legal representative (the "Appellant") against a decision of the GSTC on recognition of a standard.

6.4.1.2   To make a binding decision on the appeal.

6.4.1.3   To advise the parties of their final decision(s).

6.5 Costs

6.5.1   The cost of hearing an appeal shall be determined by the GSTC.

6.5.2   The Appeals Panel shall determine the apportionment of the costs of the appeal.

6.5.3   In apportioning costs, the Appeals Panel shall commence with the assumption that costs should be borne equally between the Appellant and the GSTC.

6.5.4   Should the Appeals Panel consider that the appeal is frivolous and without merit, it may require the appellant to pay a proportion up to 100% of the costs.

6.5.5   Should the Appeals Panel consider that the GSTC has acted in a way that does not display all due diligence, it may require the GSTC to pay a proportion up to 100% of the costs.

6.5.6   In the event that the appellant has been ordered to pay the costs, or part of them, the appellant will be under an obligation to pay the amount due to the GSTC within ten days of the date of the decision having been notified.

7   Fees

7.1   GSTC Recognized Application

7.1.1   A standard owner will be required to pay a fee for the process of recognizing its standard.

7.1.2   Fees must be paid upon application and before the GSTC Recognized Application is considered.

7.1.3   Contact the GSTC Technical Team at td@gstcouncil.org for current fees. Consult the website for information on GSTC Recognition, including why and how to apply.

7.2   Pre-Lodgement Advice

7.2.1   A standard owner may (for an agreed fee) request pre-lodgement support/advice by GSTC technical staff. Technical staff may provide comments on a standard, or comment on a draft GSTC Recognized Application.

7.2.2   Such advice is offered to support standard owners in achieving GSTC Recognized status. However, the advice is offered as officer level advice and is not to be considered as GSTC Assurance Panel policy nor a commitment or liability for positive consideration, or otherwise.

7.2.3   Provision of such advice by a member of GSTC technical staff is not a conflict of interest for undertaking the subsequent assessment of a lodged GSTC Recognized Application.

8   Publicity and Promotion

8.1   GSTC Promotion of GSTC Recognized Standards

8.1.1   The GSTC will make publicly available a list of the GSTC Recognized standards together with a brief summary of each recognized standard, approved for publication by the standard owner.

8.1.2   The GSTC will make publicly available and implement a clear policy on claims of GSTC recognition of standards. This will include surveillance of the use of those claims and taking action against incorrect use.

8.1.3   GSTC may arrange publicity and promotion of GSTC Recognized standards and tourism businesses/products certified by a GSTC Recognized standard. However, GSTC gives higher priority and placement to any communications regarding Certification Bodies and their certificate-holders of GSTC Accredited certification programs and bodies than to GSTC Recognized standards.

8.2 Promotion by GSTC Recognized Standard

8.2.1   A GSTC Recognized standard is not entitled to use any specific GSTC logo, but may make general statements that its standard is GSTC Recognized. It may not use the terms "Accredited" or similar implication that GSTC has in any way confirmed the efficacy of the Standards owner's certification policies and procedures.

8.2.2   References in the marketplace by GSTC Recognized Standard-owner and its affiliates to GSTC Recognized designation must clearly state that this is a designation relating to the set of Standards and NOT to any certification processes nor to the Certifying Body's brand.

For example, statements such as the following cannot be made

"Our Certification Body or Certification Program is Recognized by GSTC".

An example of an appropriate statement is "Our sustainable tourism standard is GSTC Recognized for its equivalence to the GSTC Criteria"

Guidance for how to communicate GSTC Recognized status is available in Annex A

8.3 GSTC Promotion and Market Access Benefits

8.3.1   The GSTC publishes a summary of the promotion and market access benefits on www.gstcouncil.org

9 GSTC Glossary of Relevant Terms

9.1.1 A full glossary of sustainability terms used by the GSTC may be found at https://www.gstcouncil.org/gstc-criteria/glossary/

9.1.2 The hierarchy of definitions used is:
1. ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Social & Environmental Standards version 6
2. ISO/IEC 17065
3. ISO/IEC 17067
4. ISO/IEC 17011
5. ISO/IEC 17000
6. ISO Guide 2
7. Standard English dictionaries

Levels of GSTC requirements	
'will'	An entity commits to undertake the specified action
'shall'	An entity must take the specified action to be in compliance
'should'	An entity is expected to take the specified action
'may'	An entity is allowed to take the specified action

Term	Definition
Accreditation	Accreditation is the formal declaration by a neutral third party that the certification program is administered in a way that meets the relevant norms or standards of a certification program.
Accreditation body	An independent entity that operates in conformity with the standard ISO/IEC 17011 and that is technically competent to accredit CBs to perform conformity assessment using a GSTC Recognized standard. Abbreviated "AB".
Audit	A systematic and comprehensive process of investigation through checking documents, conducting interviews, observation and other means
CB	See "Certification Body", also known as conformity assessment body
Certification	Voluntary, third-party assessment, through an audit, of a tourism enterprise for conformity to a standard
Certification body	A body that verifies that specified requirements relating to a product, process, system, person or body are fulfilled.
Certification scheme	A specific, named programme of certification resulting in the granting of a certificate of conformity to a tourism enterprise by a CB along with the right to display a mark associated with the scheme. It is defined by ISO as "[the rules, procedures, and management for carrying out certification] related to specified [services], to which the same specified requirements, specific rules and procedures apply." *After draft ISO/IEC 17067:2013*
Certification scheme owner	A person or other legal entity who owns the intellectual property associated with a sustainable tourism certification scheme
Client	A tourism enterprise that purchases a certification service from a CB
Conflict of interest	A situation where the capacity for objectivity of a person or body is at risk
Conformity assessment	A process of checking and verifying the extent to which a tourism enterprise or certification scheme meets a specified standard and criteria

Consultancy	The provision, for a fee (directly or indirectly), of expertise to a tourism enterprise or CB on the design, management and operation of their services
Equivalent standard	A standard whose requirements have a direct correspondence with the requirements with the GSTC Criteria. The standard may differ in presentation, or even in substance, e.g. in providing guidance on how to meet requirements. Equivalency for purposes of GSTC- Recognized includes harmonized, unified, identical, unilaterally aligned, and comparable standards. (ISO/IEC Guide 2:2004 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.8, and 6.9).
GSTC	Global Sustainable Tourism Council
GSTC Accreditation	Accreditation provided by an accreditation body that is appointed by the GSTC.
GSTC Assurance Panel	An independent body of the GSTC that is technically competent and impartial, that will make decisions on recognizing sustainable tourism standards and approving certification programmes and may endorse accreditation body recommendations to accredit CBs.
GSTC Criteria	GSTC Criteria are a common understanding of sustainable tourism and are the minimum that any tourism business or destination 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. Although the criteria are initially intended for use by the accommodation and tour operator sectors, they have applicability to the entire tourism industry.
GSTC Criteria Components	The elements of each individual GSTC Criterion which are used to assess equivalence of a tourism standard with the principles of sustainable tourism as identified by the GSTC.
GSTC requirements for CBs	The requirements that a CB shall meet in terms of its structure, management and operational procedures
GSTC Recognized standard	A sustainable tourism standard that has been evaluated by the GSTC as being equivalent to the GSTC Criteria.
Impartiality	The ability to make judgements and take decisions that are objective, based strictly on facts and free from other influences

Non-conformity	The absence of, or failure to meet, an element of a standard or performance criteria
Standards	A set of standards or other types of sustainability systems
Standard owner	A person or other legal entity who owns the intellectual property associated with a sustainable tourism standard
Sustainable tourism standard	Sometimes referred herein simply as "standard." A set of rules and guidelines that define the requirements of tourism enterprises in delivering sustainable tourism.
Sustainable tourism system	Activities systematized to implement an assurance program/scheme/etc. and/or capacity building for sustainable tourism.
Third party	Carried out by an individual or body that is independent of the entity being certified or accredited.
Tourism enterprise	An entity providing one or more services to tourists.
Unilaterally aligned standard	A standard that is equivalent or comparable to the relevant GSTC Criteria but contains further requirements not contained in the GSTC Criteria.

Annex A - How to Reference "GSTC Recognized"

GSTC Recognized is a designation that GSTC places on standards for sustainable travel and tourism.

Recipients can and should proudly proclaim that their standards include the global baseline standards for sustainable tourism known as the GSTC Criteria.

However, public messaging about standards being GSTC Recognized sometimes implies that it relates to accreditation or certification. GSTC Recognized does NOT relate to accreditation or certification. Therefore, a need exists to better communicate what GSTC Recognized is and is not. This document provides guidelines for how GSTC Recognized may be accurately described, plus indications on what constitutes inaccurate descriptions of its meaning.

How to Reference GSTC Recognized -- Use wording that accurately points out that the term refers to a set of standards.

How NOT to Reference GSTC Recognized -- Do not say or imply that the designation refers to a company, brand, or product offering, and does not relate to accreditation of your process of certification (or issuance of awards, etc.). Do not use any form of the GSTC logo to indicate or imply that the GSTC has placed a quality mark on the organization that owns the standard or any certification process or other process that organization operates.

Examples of usage:	NOT Acceptable	Acceptable References
by Certification Bodies	"Organizations X is recognized by the GSTC" "Organization X's certification is recognized by the GSTC"	"Organization X certifies with a standard that is "Recognized by the GSTC"
by Hotels and Tour Operators	"Grand Hotel is certified by Ace Certification, which is Recognized by the GSTC"	"Grand Hotel is certified by Ace Certification, whose standard for sustainability is Recognized by the GSTC for being equivalent to the GSTC Criteria"
by Destinations and Government	"Pretty Valley is certified by Ace Certification, which is Recognized by the GSTC"	"Pretty Valley is certified by Ace Certification, whose standard for sustainability is Recognized by the GSTC for being equivalent to the GSTC Criteria"
by large enterprises with internal systems	"Organizations X is recognized by the GSTC"	"The requirements of Organization X's internal sustainability program known as "XXXX" is recognized by the GSTC"