



GSTC Tour Operator Standard

v.4.0¹

with
Performance Indicators and SDGs

December 30, 2025

© The Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2025, All Rights Reserved

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council
PO Box 96503 - #51887
Washington, DC 20090 USA
standard@gstc.org
www.gstc.org

¹ In its fourth revision of the GSTC Industry Standard, the standard has been separated to GSTC Hotel Standard and GSTC Tour Operator Standard. This document is the GSTC Tour Operator Standard.

Preamble

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) standards provide a common understanding of “sustainable tourism” and represent the minimum level of performance that any tourism business should aspire to achieve. The standard is designed for tour operators, is organized around four main sections addressing sustainability management; enhancing social and economic benefits for stakeholders; cultural heritage benefits and impacts; and environmental benefits and impacts.

Section A, Demonstrate Effective Sustainable Management, is organized into three categories—Effective Sustainable Management and Communication; Stakeholder Engagement; and Responsible Procurement and comprises 8 criteria organized around management, compliance, engagement, communication, and accessibility principles. Collectively, these criteria require a documented and implemented Sustainability Management System (SMS); full legal compliance, including human rights, child protection, and animal welfare; transparency in reporting and marketing; staff participation and training; customer engagement; accessibility for all; and accurate promotion of products and destinations. These criteria also emphasize that risk assessment and crisis management procedures focus exclusively on sustainability-related risks that may impact the environment, communities, staff, or business continuity. Other categories of risk, such as health, safety, and security, fall under the responsibility of specialized authorities and are outside the scope of this standard set.

Section B, Maximize Social and Economic Benefits to Local Communities and Minimize Negative Impacts is divided into two categories— Social and Economic Benefits to the Community and Human Resources and Ethical standard and is composed of 9 criteria that address community support; local employment and entrepreneurship; equitable purchasing; zero tolerance for exploitation; equal opportunity; decent work; and community well-being. Collectively, these criteria require tour operators to prefer local procurement and employment, support community-led businesses and social initiatives, ensure decent and equitable working conditions, prevent exploitation and trafficking, uphold labor rights, and promote inclusive participation across genders, minorities, and vulnerable groups. Operators are expected to demonstrate their contributions to community welfare through transparent records and grievance systems accessible to local stakeholders.

Section C, Maximize Benefits to Cultural Heritage and Minimize Negative Impacts, includes 4 criteria that ensure that tour operators respect and promote cultural heritage, particularly through collaboration with Indigenous peoples and community businesses. The criteria require operators to follow internationally and locally agreed best practices when managing visits to culturally or historically sensitive sites; protect both tangible and intangible heritage; respect intellectual property rights; and handle artifacts in full compliance with applicable laws. This section emphasizes cultural authenticity, community empowerment, and safeguarding of traditional knowledge and cultural expressions.

Section D, Maximize Environmental Benefits and Minimize Negative Impacts is divided into three main categories—Conserving Resources; Reducing Pollution; and Conserving Biodiversity, Ecosystems and Landscapes—and comprises 14 criteria. These criteria collectively address responsible purchasing and

consumption, energy and water conservation, greenhouse gas reduction, sustainable transportation, waste and chemical management, pollution prevention, and biodiversity protection. Particular attention is given to responsible wildlife tourism through criteria related to visits to natural sites, avoidance of invasive species, ethical wildlife observation, and rigorous standards for animal welfare based on the Five Domains model.

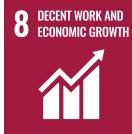
The 35 criteria of the GSTC Tour Operator Standard states what should be done—not how to do it or whether the goal has been achieved. That role is fulfilled by the performance indicators, supporting educational materials, and tools for implementation. All criteria should be applied to the fullest extent possible. For certain criteria, the standard includes guidance that may be particularly useful for micro, small or medium-sized tour operators ([Annex: Guidelines](#)).

Uses of the standard include:

- Define sustainability in a holistic manner
- Increase awareness of the breadth and nature of sustainability
- Serve as the foundation for certification for sustainability
- Provide practical guidance for tour operators seeking to become more sustainable
- Guidance for identifying sustainable suppliers and service providers
- Provide greater market access in the growing market for sustainable businesses, serving as guidance for the tour operators in choosing suppliers and partners
- Help consumers identify credible sustainable tour operator
- Provide a common reference point for information media recognizing sustainable tour operator
- Offer both the public and private sectors foundational guidance for developing sustainable tour operator
- Serve as a basis for education and training on sustainable tour operator by universities, hospitality schools, or associations
- Demonstrate leadership that inspires others to act

The standard has been developed and revised in accordance with the GSTC Standard Setting Manual v3.0, which references the ISEAL Alliance Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems and is informed by stakeholder consultation and academic expertise in line to international norms for sustainability standards across sectors. The standard is reviewed every five years, at which point a decision is made regarding the need for revision. Plans for future revisions and opportunities for public input are available on www.gstc.org. This website also provides detailed information on the process and history of standard development.

GSTC Tour Operator Standard

Criteria	Indicators	SDGs
SECTION A: DEMONSTRATE EFFECTIVE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT		
Effective Sustainable Management and Communication		
A1 Sustainability Management System <p>The tour operator operates under a documented sustainability management system proportional to its size and scope, ensuring that sustainability is managed in a systematic manner and continuous improvement is pursued.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The tour operator has a written sustainability policy that sets out its main guiding principles and commitments across the pillars of sustainability defined in this standard. (See Guidelines) The policy is officially approved and communicated to all staff. The tour operator has a sustainability management plan appropriate for its size and operations. (See Guidelines) The tour operator sets qualitative and/or quantitative targets for social, cultural, and environmental sustainability indicators. Targets are reviewed annually and updated as needed. The tour operator identifies potential sustainability risks as part of the sustainability management plan. (See Guidelines) The tour operator allocates appropriate financial and human resources to support the implementation of its sustainability management plan. The tour operator reviews the implementation of its sustainability management plan annually and updates it as needed. (See Guidelines) 	 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH  12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION  13 CLIMATE ACTION
A2 Legal Compliance <p>The tour operator complies with all relevant laws and regulations concerning social, cultural, and environmental matters in its operational scope, including health and safety standards, labor rights, child protection, the prevention of human trafficking and modern slavery, and animal welfare.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The tour operator maintains an up-to-date register of all applicable legal requirements in all countries and supranational jurisdictions where it operates. (See Guidelines) The tour operator establishes and enforces internal policies and procedures to ensure compliance with all key legal requirements. (See Guidelines) 	 16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

A3 Reporting and Communication <p>The tour operator communicates its sustainability policy, actions, and performance to stakeholders, including customers, and seeks to engage their support.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The tour operator publishes an annual sustainability report outlining its sustainability policy, goals, actions, and performance. (See Guidelines) The tour operator communicates its sustainability policy to stakeholders, including staff, suppliers, and customers. The tour operator's sustainability report is prepared and presented in a format appropriate to its size, capacity, and intended audience. (See Guidelines) The tour operator ensures that its sustainability report is publicly accessible, either online (e.g., website, social media) or through offline channels. (See Guidelines) The tour operator collects and monitors sustainability data at intervals appropriate to its operations (e.g., monthly, quarterly, or semiannually) to ensure accurate reporting and to support continuous improvement. (See Guidelines) The tour operator provides opportunities for stakeholders—including customers, staff, suppliers, and local communities—to give feedback on its sustainability practices. (See Guidelines) 	 
A4 Accurate Promotion <p>The tour operator ensures that all promotional materials and marketing communications are transparent and verifiable, accurately representing its products and services without any misleading claims.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The tour operator uses images that accurately represent real customer experiences and locations visited. The tour operator's sustainability claims in promotional materials are based on verifiable records and documentation. (See Guidelines) The tour operator transparently communicates its offerings, providing accurate and complete information about nature-based, cultural, and wildlife-related experiences, including any limitations, risks, or conditions associated with them. 	
A5 Information Sharing and Guidance <p>The tour operator provides information on the natural and cultural characteristics of the areas visited and explains appropriate behavior when visiting natural or cultural sites.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The tour operator provides staff with training on the natural environment, local culture, and heritage of the areas included in its tours, to ensure accurate and respectful communication with customers. The tour operator provides customers with accurate, respectful, and culturally appropriate information about the natural environment, cultural heritage, and local traditions of the areas visited. The tour operator provides customers with clear guidance on appropriate behavior in the areas they visit. The tour operator provides staff who operate tours with guidance on appropriate behavior to avoid and minimize environmental and cultural impacts, ensures this information is communicated to customers, and includes considerations for child protection, nature protection, and animal welfare. 	  

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The tour operator prioritizes environmentally responsible methods for sharing information, including the use of digital formats. (See Guidelines) 	
<h2>Stakeholder Engagement</h2>		
A6 Staff Engagement <p>The tour operator involves its staff in the development, implementation, and continuous improvement of its Sustainability Management System. Staff receive structured training, ongoing support, and recognition for their contributions to sustainability.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The tour operator engages staff in developing and implementing the sustainability policy and related action plans. (See Guidelines) Staff have clearly defined roles and responsibilities for implementing the tour operator's sustainability policy and action plans. (See Guidelines) The tour operator provides staff with training on the sustainability policy and the operator's role and impacts (positive and/or negative) on destination communities. The tour operator provides staff with training and guidance on implementing the sustainability policy and action plans. The tour operator maintains records of training and guidance, such as attendance lists and training materials. The tour operator ensures that training and reference materials are available in languages understood by all relevant staff to ensure inclusivity and accessibility, particularly for those who are not fluent in the primary working language. The tour operator supports staff in obtaining the necessary job-related certifications, qualifications, or equivalent training needed for their roles and responsibilities. The tour operator regularly reviews and documents staff engagement to strengthen staff participation and continuous improvement. 	 
A7 Customer Experience <p>The tour operator monitors customer satisfaction, including sustainability and responsible practices, and strives for continuous improvement.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The tour operator maintains a customer feedback system. The tour operator regularly collects and reviews both positive and negative feedback using methods appropriate to its size and operations. The tour operator takes corrective actions and documents them in response to identified issues, complaints, or non-conformities. The tour operator notifies customers of the corrective actions that have been taken. The tour operator engages customers in sustainability practices by providing clear guidance and opportunities for participation. 	

Responsible Procurement

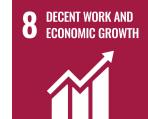
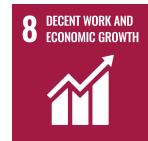
A8 Procurement

The tour operator implements a responsible procurement policy that gives preference to local, fair-trade, and environmentally friendly products and services, thereby minimizing environmental impacts and maximizing local community benefits throughout the procurement process.

1. The tour operator has a written procurement policy that gives preference to fair, local, and environmentally friendly products and services used in its office and tour operations.
2. The tour operator gives preference to products that are locally produced and/or supplied by businesses located within or near the destination where it operates, whenever they are available, legally compliant, and of sufficient quality.
3. The tour operator gives preference to contracts with community tourism businesses (owned, led, and managed by communities) to provide services such as accommodation, transportation, meals, experiences, and souvenirs.
4. When local procurement is not possible, the tour operator gives preference to products sourced from fair-trade suppliers, cooperatives, or other vendors that demonstrate ethical and responsible sourcing practices. ([See Guidelines](#))
5. The procurement policy follows circular economy principles by prioritizing reusable, returnable, and recycled materials—including takeaway food and beverage packaging or plastics—and giving preference to disposable items made from recycled and/or recyclable materials when they cannot be avoided.
6. The tour operator eliminates single-use plastics in its offices and, where feasible, ensures its tour operations are conducted without them.
7. The tour operator's marketing materials and promotional items are either electronic, reusable, or printed on recycled or recyclable materials, ensuring that they are environmentally friendly and, where possible, locally sourced.
8. The tour operator ensures that vulnerable, threatened, or endangered species are not used in its tour operations as part of food and beverage offerings, souvenirs, or entertainment, in compliance with applicable local and national laws and internationally recognized conservation standards.
9. The tour operator monitors procurement practices using key performance indicators, such as the percentage of goods and services sourced locally, those that are environmentally friendly, or those obtained through fair-trade and other verified responsible channels.
10. The tour operator communicates the policy to suppliers and informs customers about its environmentally preferable purchasing commitments.



	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. The tour operator integrates sustainability indicators into supplier evaluation processes. 12. The tour operator gives preference to suppliers who take and document steps to reduce their environmental impact. (See Guidelines) 13. The tour operator's agreements with suppliers, where applicable, include sustainability-related requirements appropriate to the products or services being provided. (See Guidelines) 14. The tour operator reviews supplier compliance at a minimum during the supplier selection process and at each contract renewal, where applicable. (See Guidelines) 15. The tour operator conducts due diligence to ensure that suppliers providing products sourced from the wild comply with all applicable local, national, and—where relevant—international regulations related to wildlife harvesting and trade. 	
--	---	--

Criteria	Indicators	SDGs
SECTION B: MAXIMIZE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AND MINIMIZE NEGATIVE IMPACTS		
Social and Economic Benefits to the Community		
B1 Community Support <p>The tour operator supports the local community through structured initiatives that address community needs, foster inclusive development, and promote sustainable economic and social benefits including through its supply chain.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The tour operator provides ongoing financial or in-kind support to local community projects. (See Guidelines) 2. The tour operator records and monitors the level and nature of contributions made to the local community. (See Guidelines) 	 
B2 Local Employment <p>The tour operator gives preference to hiring local staff, particularly for products and services that highlight local culture and nature, provided they meet the required qualifications.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The tour operator has a written policy that gives preference to local employment for individuals who meet job-related qualifications, including the required skills, experience, or certifications. 2. The tour operator has a written policy and documented practices to promote the hiring, training, and advancement of local staff into management and leadership roles. 3. The tour operator monitors the proportion of local staff within its overall workforce, including those in management and supervisory positions. 4. The tour operator gives preference to suppliers who support local employment. 	 
B3 Local Entrepreneur Support <p>The tour operator supports local entrepreneurs and community- or nonprofit-owned businesses in developing, improving, or selling their products and services in the destinations where it operates. This initiative aims to strengthen the local economy and promote sustainable business practice.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Where appropriate, the tour operator supports local entrepreneurs and community- or nonprofit organization-owned businesses in developing or improving products and services that reflect the destination's nature, history, or culture, and it maintains a list of the products and services it supports. 2. The tour operator promotes the products and services of local entrepreneurs and community- or nonprofit organization-owned businesses to its customers. 	 

<p>B4 Community Services and Livelihoods</p> <p>The tour operator ensures that its activities do not adversely impact local community services and livelihoods or access to essential resources and seeks to create positive benefits through community tourism and business relationships with local communities.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The tour operator identifies its current and potential impacts on community services and livelihoods in the destinations where it operates, with priority given to its most visited or highest-impact destinations. (See Guidelines) 2. The tour operator monitors and reports its impact on community services and livelihoods, and documents proposed improvements to address negative impacts and enhance positive contributions. 3. The tour operator has a system in place for local communities to address grievances. (See Guidelines) 4. The tour operator documents reported issues and addresses them promptly, sharing outcomes with relevant stakeholders as needed. 	
<p>B5 Access for All</p> <p>The tour operator ensures that its site, facilities, and services are accessible to people of all abilities to the greatest extent possible, committing to progressive improvements that meet their needs. Comprehensive, accurate, and reliable information on accessibility features, limitations, and services is provided.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The tour operator provides inclusive, accessible tours for people of all abilities, where feasible and appropriate to the nature of the operation. 2. The tour operator demonstrates ongoing accessibility enhancements for individuals with diverse needs by maintaining plans or strategies for continuous improvement. (See Guidelines) 3. The tour operator provides accurate, detailed, clear, comprehensive, and trusted details about accessibility features and limitations, and how customers can request additional accessibility services prior to booking. 4. The tour operator provides communication materials in accessible formats for customers with diverse abilities to ensure clarity and usability. 5. The tour operator provides regular role-specific accessibility training for staff and maintains records of all training sessions. 6. The tour operator includes people with disabilities in the creation, execution, and improvement of products and services. 	

Human Resources and Ethical Standards

B6 Code of Conduct

The tour operator has a written code of conduct to guide the behavior and actions of staff, suppliers, and customers.

1. The tour operator maintains a written code of conduct that includes a Zero Tolerance Policy toward any form of exploitation, harassment, abuse, or human trafficking, in line with internationally recognized frameworks. ([See Guidelines](#))
2. The code includes clear guidelines on respectful communication for both verbal and non-verbal behavior.
3. The code contains clear guidelines and safeguards to prevent inappropriate interactions with minors, including guest and community children, youth, students, and interns. ([See Guidelines](#))
4. The code provides clear guidance to ensure respectful, non-discriminatory interactions with vulnerable or marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities, older adults, or those experiencing social exclusion. ([See Guidelines](#))
5. The code is communicated to all staff and regularly updated.
6. The tour operator provides regular training and guidance on the code of conduct to all staff, maintaining records for review and verification. ([See Guidelines](#))

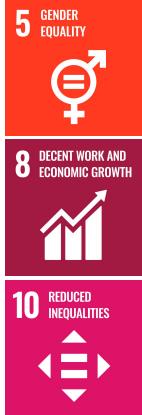


B7 Exploitation, Harassment, and Human Trafficking

The tour operator implements a comprehensive zero-tolerance policy against all forms of exploitation, harassment, and human trafficking—including forced labor—and provides enhanced protection for vulnerable groups such as children (minors), adolescents, women, Indigenous peoples, minorities, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable populations.

1. The tour operator has a written policy outlining procedures for identifying, monitoring, reporting, confidential disclosure, and responding to exploitation, harassment, human trafficking, and the prevention of child labor ([See Guidelines](#))
2. The tour operator communicates this policy both internally and externally to stakeholders, including staff, customers, and suppliers directly involved in tour operations. ([See Guidelines](#))
3. The tour operator monitors the implementation of the policy and the procedures to ensure compliance.
4. The tour operator provides staff with guidance and training on recognizing and reporting incidents of exploitation and harassment.
5. The tour operator maintains records demonstrating that no child labor or illegal labor is employed.
6. The tour operator requires suppliers to comply with this policy and incorporates these requirements into supplier selection, contracts, communications and ongoing evaluations.



<p>B8 Employment Inclusion and Equality</p> <p>The tour operator provides inclusion and equal employment opportunities at all levels and for all positions. Its employment policy explicitly prohibits discrimination on the basis of any non-merit-based characteristics.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The tour operator has a written inclusive employment policy that explicitly prohibits discrimination based on gender, age, race, nationality, ethnicity, color, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital or family status, genetic traits, disability, or any other non-merit-based factor. The tour operator regularly reviews and updates the policy as needed. The tour operator identifies and documents groups at risk of discrimination and reflects this in its employment and HR practices, acknowledging all relevant non-merit-based characteristics. (See Guidelines) The tour operator provides training to staff on recognizing, preventing, and addressing bias and discrimination in the workplace and in customer interactions. The tour operator monitors the implementation of equal employment opportunities across all positions — including management roles. 	 <p>5 GENDER EQUALITY 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES</p>
<p>B9 Decent Work</p> <p>The tour operator upholds labor rights by ensuring a safe and secure working environment, providing a living wage, and offering regular training and opportunities for career advancement. This commitment applies to both directly employed staff and outsourced workers, with measures in place to protect vulnerable workers from exploitation.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The tour operator complies with all relevant national labor regulations, ensuring a safe and secure working environment for all staff, and adheres to International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions and standards where applicable. The tour operator provides all directly employed staff access to health, medical, and social security benefits in line with national legislation. (See Guidelines) The tour operator ensures that all staff, including contract and temporary staff, receive at least the legal minimum wage required by national or local labor laws. (See Guidelines) The tour operator conducts an annual review of staff wages to provide adjustments based on measurable criteria such as performance, tenure, and skill development. (See Guidelines) The tour operator maintains training records showing the extent and regularity of the training. The tour operator monitors and records staff satisfaction through regular surveys or feedback mechanisms. The tour operator has a system in place for staff to raise and address grievances safely and confidentially, with explicit safeguards to ensure there is no retaliation or negative consequences for using the system. 	 <p>1 NO POVERTY 4 QUALITY EDUCATION 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH</p>

Criteria	Indicators	SDGs
SECTION C: MAXIMIZE BENEFITS TO CULTURAL HERITAGE AND MINIMIZE NEGATIVE IMPACTS		
C1 Cultural Interactions <p>The tour operator follows international and national best practices and locally agreed-upon guidance for managing and promoting visits to Indigenous communities and culturally or historically sensitive sites, to minimize adverse impacts and maximize local benefits and visitor fulfillment. A communication mechanism is in place to address concerns from local communities and Indigenous peoples, with corrective actions implemented as needed.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The tour operator has guidelines for visiting cultural sites, including Indigenous communities and heritage sites, that are aligned with local, national, and international best practices. (See Guidelines) 2. The tour operator ensures the guidelines cover appropriate interaction with minors and promote respectful interaction with all people, cultures, and religions. 3. The tour operator determines the size, frequency, and timing of tour groups based on an evaluation of the capacity and fragility of cultural sites and communities. 4. The tour operator provides training for field staff, including guides and drivers, on the established guidelines. 5. The tour operator delivers the guidelines to customers. 6. The tour operator maintains a communication channel through which local communities or Indigenous peoples can raise concerns or report negative impacts related to the tour operator's operations or customers' activities. 7. The tour operator reviews and addresses all feedback on cultural interactions. (See Guidelines) 	  
C2 Protecting Cultural Heritage <p>The tour operator contributes to protecting and enhancing cultural heritage with historical, archaeological, traditional, and spiritual significance and does not impede local residents' access.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The tour operator contributes to protecting and enhancing cultural heritage in its areas of operation and visiting destinations by providing financial contributions, in-kind resources, and/or by engaging in collaborative efforts with relevant stakeholders. 2. The tour operator ensures that its operations do not impede local residents' access to cultural heritage sites. 	

<p>C3 Presenting Culture and Heritage</p> <p>The tour operator values and integrates authentic elements of traditional and contemporary local culture into its operations while respecting all intellectual property rights.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The tour operator identifies traditional and contemporary cultural elements relevant to the destinations where it operates. 2. The tour operator provides customers with an authentic experience of local culture through site or facility visits, cuisine, events, or other activities, and through the involvement of local organizations. (See Guidelines) 3. The tour operator respects intellectual property rights by obtaining the necessary permissions for cultural experiences. 4. The tour operator has a system for local communities to raise any concerns about the tour operator's cultural presentation in its operations. 	 
<p>C4 Artifacts</p> <p>Artifacts are not sold, traded or displayed except as permitted by applicable local and international laws.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The tour operator complies with all relevant local and international laws and conventions when using artifacts. (See Guidelines) 2. The tour operator informs customers about applicable laws and regulations concerning artifacts, particularly when visiting cultural or archaeological sites, to prevent their removal, purchase, or inappropriate handling. 3. The tour operator communicates clear requirements and conducts due diligence with its suppliers to ensure they are not involved in the illegal sale, trade, or unauthorized display of artifacts, and to confirm their compliance with applicable local and international laws. 	

Criteria	Indicators	SDGs
SECTION D: MAXIMIZE ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS AND MINIMIZE NEGATIVE IMPACTS		
Conserving Resources		
D1 Energy Conservation <p>The tour operator measures and monitors its energy use and implements measures to reduce consumption across all operations, while increasing the use of renewable energy and requiring that key service providers—such as accommodations, transportation, and restaurants—demonstrate their commitment to monitoring and reducing their energy consumption as well.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The tour operator measures the energy consumption of its directly controlled office and tour operations by energy type. (See Guidelines) The tour operator sets targets to reduce overall energy consumption and increase the share of renewable energy and tracks its progress annually. Targets specify energy use across its offices and tour operations. (See Guidelines) The tour operator provides training or guidance on energy-saving practices to on-site contractors and staff. The tour operator adopts and expands the use of energy-efficient equipment and practices in its office and tour operations. The tour operator gives preference to suppliers that use energy-efficient equipment and apply energy-efficient practices in the delivery of their products and services. The tour operator communicates with customers about its energy policy and practices. 	 7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY
D2 Water Conservation <p>The tour operator measures and monitors its water use and implements measures to reduce consumption across its operations, pursuing appropriate stewardship goals particularly in areas of high-water risk by collaborating with key service providers—particularly accommodation and food service suppliers—to reduce water use and improve water efficiency, with a focus on destinations facing high water risk.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The tour operator identifies and documents the water risk level in the locations of its offices and tour operations, using credible sources or frameworks. (See Guidelines) The tour operator measures water consumption in its offices and facilities under its direct control by source (e.g., municipal supply, groundwater, seawater). The tour operator sets annual targets to reduce water consumption and tracks its progress annually. The tour operator trains staff on water-saving practices. The tour operator adopts the use of water-saving equipment in its offices and facilities under its direct control. The tour operator gives preference to suppliers that use water-efficient equipment (e.g., low-flow fixtures, efficient irrigation) and implement water-saving practices. The tour operator communicates its water policy and practices to customers. 	 6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

Reducing Pollution

D3 Greenhouse Gas Emissions <p>The tour operator identifies, measures, and takes steps to avoid or minimize greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from its operations, and makes an official, public commitment to reducing emissions in support of global decarbonization targets and local strategies.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The tour operator makes a public commitment to reduce GHG emissions supported by clear targets. (See Guidelines) The tour operator measures GHG emissions from its direct operations. (See Guidelines) The tour operator calculates its carbon footprint per operating day. The tour operator takes steps to avoid and minimize GHG emissions from its direct operations. The tour operator prioritizes reducing and offsetting GHG emissions. Credible carbon offsetting is used only for residual emissions that cannot be avoided or minimized. (See Guidelines) 	
D4 Transportation <p>The tour operator minimizes transportation needs and increases the use of cleaner and more resource-efficient alternatives by customers, staff, suppliers, and its operations.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The tour operator utilizes the most environmentally friendly and efficient transportation options for its operations, including tours, whenever feasible and practical. The tour operator designs tours that minimize transportation whenever feasible. The tour operator provides transportation options such as car sharing or pickups to reduce staff members daily commutes. (See Guidelines) When transportation is required, the tour operator gives preference to suppliers that offer environmentally friendly, resource-efficient transportation services. The tour operator provides customers with information about alternative transportation options, where applicable. (See Guidelines) 	 
D5 Wastewater <p>The tour operator ensures that its facilities properly treat and safely release wastewater, and gives preference to key suppliers (such as accommodation, restaurants, and boats) that have effective wastewater treatment and reuse systems to avoid adverse impacts on the local population and the environment.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The tour operator uses or contracts facilities that comply with applicable laws regarding wastewater. The tour operator gives preference to suppliers of products and services that safely reuse treated wastewater, when allowed by applicable law. The tour operator verifies that key suppliers have functioning wastewater treatment systems appropriate to their scale and context and ensures that these suppliers document evidence of safe discharge in line with legal and environmental requirements. (See Guidelines) 	 

<p>D6 Solid Waste</p> <p>The tour operator manages solid waste in line with the Waste Hierarchy, aiming to reduce generation, eliminate food waste and single-use plastics, and maximize reuse, recycling, or recovery, while giving preference to suppliers that implement effective waste management practices. Residual waste is managed through legally authorized and environmentally responsible pathways to ensure it does not adversely affect the local community or the environment.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The tour operator has a written waste management policy that commits to reducing the amount of waste. The tour operator has a solid waste management plan according to the Waste Hierarchy. The plan includes actions to reduce overall waste from its directly controlled office and tour operations and prioritizes reuse, recycling, or recovery of materials. The tour operator measures total solid waste generated by its directly controlled office and tour operations by type. (See Guidelines) The tour operator sets annual targets to reduce solid waste generation and tracks progress in line with its waste management plan. The tour operator monitors its use of single-use items and implements actions to eliminate or reduce them, prioritizing high-impact items such as single-use plastics, disposable packaging, and non-reusable customer gifts. The tour operator ensures that all waste from its offices and tour operations is disposed of in compliance with all applicable local and national laws. The tour operator provides regular training and guidance to staff involved in waste-management operations on minimizing waste generation and properly categorizing, sorting, and disposing of waste. Training records and related documentation are maintained. The tour operator provides guidance and information to customers regarding waste minimization practices, as well as proper waste sorting and disposal during the tour, using written instructions, the guide's explanations, and/or digital communications. The tour operator gives preference to suppliers of products and services that minimize waste through packaging and delivery. 	 
---	--	--

D7 Harmful Substances <p>The tour operator minimizes harmful substances in its operations by choosing environmentally friendly products and processes, and ensures that key service providers (e.g., accommodations, transportation, restaurants) follow safe procedures for storing, handling, and disposing of chemicals.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The tour operator maintains an updated inventory of harmful substances used in its offices and tour operations. The tour operator replaces harmful substances with alternatives certified by recognized sustainability standards when available. The tour operator gives preference to suppliers of products and services that use minimal or no harmful substances. The tour operator provides staff with training and clear guidance on the management of harmful substances across its offices and tour operations. The tour operator guides customers in advance to choose products that are less harmful to the local environment, such as reef-safe sunscreens, environmentally friendly perfumes, and biodegradable insect repellents. 	 
D8 Minimize Pollution <p>The tour operator implements practices to minimize pollution (including noise, light, air, water, and soil pollution) in its own operations and gives preference to suppliers that demonstrate pollution reduction practices.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The tour operator identifies potential sources of pollution from its operations. (See Guidelines) The tour operator takes measures to prevent and reduce pollution from identified sources. The tour operator regularly monitors and reviews pollution levels to evaluate the effectiveness of these measures and to support continuous improvement. The tour operator gives preference to suppliers of products and services that demonstrate pollution reduction practices. 	 
<h3>Conserving Biodiversity, Ecosystems and Landscapes</h3>		
D9 Biodiversity Conservation <p>The tour operator contributes to biodiversity conservation while minimizing any disruption to natural ecosystems.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The tour operator identifies and monitors its potential and actual adverse impacts on biodiversity. The tour operator takes steps to avoid and mitigate its adverse impacts on biodiversity. The tour operator collaborates with experts or conservation organizations to mitigate the adverse impacts of its tour operations on biodiversity. The tour operator contributes to biodiversity conservation through financial, in-kind, or other assistance, participates in destination-wide biodiversity initiatives relevant to its business, and records these contributions. The tour operator prioritizes supporting biodiversity conservation in the areas where it operates, unless urgent conservation needs are identified elsewhere. 	 

D10 Invasive Species <p>The tour operator takes measures within its control to prevent the introduction or spread of invasive species, particularly through its supply chain, transportation, and tour operations.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> When operating in biodiversity-sensitive destinations, the tour operator is aware of and consults existing inventories or lists of local invasive species relevant to the areas visited. The tour operator takes appropriate steps to prevent the introduction of invasive species through its tours. The tour operator trains tour guides and drivers on preventing the introduction of invasive species. The tour operator informs customers about invasive species risks in advance to minimize the risk of introducing invasive species. 	
D11 Visits to Natural Sites <p>The tour operator follows appropriate guidelines for the management and promotion of visits to natural sites, incorporating risk management and local knowledge to minimize adverse impacts and maximize visitor fulfillment.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The tour operator has guidelines for visiting natural sites, aligned with local, national, and international best practices, and integrates risk assessment (e.g., weather, terrain, safety) and local knowledge into decision-making. The tour operator determines the size of tour groups and the frequency and timing of visits to minimize impacts on the natural environment. If tours include visits to protected or conserved natural areas, the tour operator consults with qualified experts or relevant public authorities to ensure compliance with conservation requirements and minimize adverse impacts. The tour operator trains field staff, such as guides and drivers, on the guidelines. The tour operator provides the guidelines to customers. The tour operator has a system in place for the public, including local communities and conservation organizations, to raise grievances. 	
D12 Close Proximity with Animals <p>The tour operator ensures that all wildlife viewing activities and any permitted animal interactions are conducted responsibly and safeguarded from practices or conditions that could cause harm to animals and people.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The tour operator ensures that animal-based activities comply with relevant laws and regulations and internationally recognized standards. (See Guidelines) The tour operator monitors its operational impacts on animals in human care and managed environments, whether on land or below water, and takes appropriate measures to reduce them. The tour operator maintains viewing distances, avoids feeding or disturbing wildlife, and prevents any chasing, touching, or manipulation of animals. (See Guidelines) The tour operator manages tour group sizes, noise levels, and the duration of encounters to minimize stress and disruption to animals, ensuring that all experiences support their welfare and respect natural behaviors. 	

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. The tour operator gives preference to suppliers that engage field staff, such as guides and drivers, who are knowledgeable about the wildlife featured in the tour, can recognize if an animal is distressed, and follow guidelines on appropriate viewing and interaction practices. 6. The tour operator provides customers with guidelines for appropriate behavior and best practices for wildlife viewing practices. 	
D13 Animal Welfare <p>The tour operator ensures the highest standards of animal welfare for all animals it keeps, owns, or manages. This commitment is in accordance with relevant laws, regulations, and industry best practice guidelines, ensuring that all suppliers and service providers adhere to the same standards.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The tour operator follows national and international standards and regulations governing animals in managed environments, as applicable to its contracted suppliers and operations. (See Guidelines) 2. The tour operator does not contract with or promote any suppliers that keep or display wild animals under human care unless such activities are permitted, fully compliant with all required licenses. 3. The tour operator ensures that all contracted tour service providers and animal facilities comply with relevant local and international regulations, including adherence to species-specific animal welfare standards and the principles of the Five Domains of Animal Welfare. (See Guidelines) 4. The tour operator trains its staff, guides, and drivers, and ensures that its suppliers are also trained on animal welfare standards, evidence-based best-practice guidelines, and responsible wildlife viewing protocols. (See Guidelines) 5. The tour operator provides information to customers on illegal wildlife products in line with IUCN and CITES listings and works to prevent their purchase. 	
D14 Wildlife Harvesting and Trade <p>The tour operator commits to ensuring that wildlife species are not harvested, consumed, displayed, or traded in any illegal or unsustainable manner.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The tour operator does not contract with or promote suppliers that acquire, breed, or keep animals unless such activities are explicitly authorized by competent authorities, fully regulated, and conducted in accordance with international standards. 2. The tour operator does not offer or promote hunting activities unless they are fully legal, strictly regulated, and demonstrably justified for legitimate conservation purposes. Any such activities must comply with international standards and be conducted in a manner that gives preference to ecological sustainability, species protection, and the humane treatment of animals. 	

Annex: Guidelines

A1. Sustainability Management System

1. The policy serves as the foundation for sustainability planning and actions.
3. The plan is aligned with the tour operator's annual budget and staffing capacity, ensuring that sufficient resources are dedicated to implementing sustainability actions and achieving targets.
6. The risks include environmental, social, and cultural factors that may affect the tour operator or that the tour operator may influence. The analysis specifies preventive measures and potential mitigation efforts for the identified sustainability risks.
8. The review of implementation is conducted to assess progress and identify areas for improvement.

A2. Legal Compliance

1. The laws and regulations encompass human rights, labor rights, health and safety, land and property rights, environmental protection, waste management, child welfare, prevention of human trafficking and modern slavery, cultural heritage protection, and animal welfare.

The legal register is kept in digital form, where possible, to support accessibility. Compliance is reviewed periodically and updated as required.

2. The policies and procedures are supported by staff training, documented compliance checks, and corrective actions where necessary.

A3. Reporting and Communication

1. The report includes available quantitative data on key indicators such as energy and water use, solid waste generation, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and responsible procurement practices, while ensuring that any information deemed a trade secret or commercially sensitive remains confidential.

The annual sustainability report presents year-over-year comparisons of sustainability performance using qualitative and quantitative data and stakeholder feedback, highlighting progress and challenges. In the first year of implementation, or where baseline data is not yet available, the report establishes an initial baseline for future comparison.

3. Larger tour operators are encouraged to align their reporting with recognized frameworks such as GRI or CSRD, while smaller operators may adopt simplified approaches consistent with their scale and regional context. Where reporting is conducted at the portfolio or corporate level, the individual performance of each property, including franchises, is presented clearly and distinctly to support conformity with the standard.

4. The information is accessible to customers, staff, suppliers, local community members, and other stakeholders upon request.
5. Data is stored in written or digital form, and confidentiality—as well as all applicable legal requirements—is upheld when information is shared with third parties.
6. These mechanisms may be included in the tour operator's annual sustainability report and/or may take various forms (e.g., email, online forms, comment boxes, or post-tour surveys).

A4. Accurate Communication

2. Claims do not exaggerate, generalize, imply commitments, or reference actions that are not actively being implemented.

A5. Information Sharing and Guidance

5. Digital formats include QR codes, online guides, and mobile apps where appropriate. In situations where digital solutions may not enhance the customer experience, low-impact alternatives such as personal briefings or the use of durable, reusable materials are encouraged.

A6. Staff Engagement

1. Engagement may take place through consultation methods such as feedback sessions, informal meetings, structured committees, or digital communication platforms (e.g., staff mobile apps or corporate feedback systems), depending on the tour operator's size and organizational structure.
2. In larger tour operators, this involves assigning specific sustainability tasks to dedicated staff or departments, with roles reviewed periodically based on the sustainability management plan. In smaller tour operators, these responsibilities may be integrated into existing roles, with at least one person designated to oversee implementation of the sustainability management plan.

A8. Procurement

Note. “Local” refers to the destination and its surrounding area, with boundaries defined by relevant local authorities, development agencies, or commonly accepted regional practice. Traders or resellers that primarily provide goods from outside the destination are not considered local suppliers.

4. Examples of fair-trade products include tea, coffee, cocoa, cotton, sugar, spices, fruit, or similar items.
12. The steps may include minimizing packaging, conserving energy, or using low-impact delivery methods. These indicators are reflected in supplier evaluation procedures and considered in supplier selection priorities.

13. These requirements cover environmental, social, and ethical aspects such as resource use, fair labor, and responsible practices.

14. The review can be conducted through basic screening methods—including sustainability considerations—or through evaluations based on sampled data.

B1. Community Support

1. Community support can be provided in areas such as infrastructure, cultural rehabilitation, education, training, small business development, health, sanitation, or emergency response. These contributions form part of sustained relationships or programs rather than one-time donations or events.

2. The support may be guided by the tour operator's sustainability policy, which outlines objectives and priority initiatives aligned with the needs of the local community, as determined through community feedback.

B4. Community Services and Livelihoods

1. Essential livelihoods may include, but are not limited to, access to land and aquatic resources that allow community members to maintain their daily and traditional practices.

3. Examples of grievances may include, but are not limited to, concerns related to access to public paths, beaches, roads, or culturally important sites.

B5. Access for All

2. Individuals with diverse needs include, but are not limited to: people with mobility, visual, or hearing impairments; individuals with cognitive, sensory, or neurodivergent conditions; those with temporary impairments such as injuries or post-surgery limitations; individuals with allergies or specific dietary requirements; pregnant or nursing mothers; and elderly customers.

B6. Code of Conduct

1. Internationally recognized frameworks may include the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ILO Conventions on Forced and Child Labor, and the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

3. The tour operator contributes to efforts to prevent all forms of exploitation and abuse of children (defined as individuals under the age of 18), with particular attention to protecting those below the legal working age from child labor. Support may include financial or in-kind contributions to prevention programs, participation in awareness campaigns, or staff training on child safeguarding. In line with national regulations, the tour operator also verifies the identification of all customers, including children and accompanying adults, and retains records in accordance with applicable legal and privacy requirements.

4. The guidelines exist to ensure respectful conduct, adherence to safeguarding practices, and appropriate personal interactions.

6. Behavioral expectations, anti-discrimination standards, and safeguarding principles are communicated to customers through appropriate channels and incorporated into supplier agreements to ensure that all staff, customers, and suppliers are informed.

B7. Exploitation, Harassment, and Human Trafficking

1. The policy ensures that barriers to reporting are addressed and that swift action and accountability are applied in all cases of violation. The policy may reference internationally recognized frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ILO Conventions on Forced and Child Labor, and the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as voluntary initiatives such as The Code (The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism), which provides tools and support for implementing child protection measures.
2. Internal communication may occur during onboarding or through staff handbooks and management policies; external communication may include customer care charters, purchasing policies, and supplier contracts.

B8. Employment Inclusion and Equality

3. Risk groups may include women, persons with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, local minorities, and others depending on the local context.

B9. Decent Work

2. Where health, medical, or social security provisions are not provided through public systems, staff contracts may include required provisions.
3. In contexts where no legal minimum wage exists, the tour operator seeks to align compensation practices with recognized living wage benchmarks (e.g., the IDH Salary Matrix), based on employees' skills and qualifications.
4. The review process may include staff career preferences and job performance. The process is documented and used to support continuous improvement in staff remuneration.

C1. Cultural Interactions

1. The tour operator may collaborate with local or Indigenous communities to co-create and validate the representation of their culture and heritage in customer experiences, storytelling, and promotional materials.
7. This mechanism serves both to identify potential impacts and to address known issues, with all feedback reviewed and responded to appropriately and respectfully.

C3. Presenting Culture and Heritage

2. Where possible, the tour operator supports local artisans and communities in safeguarding and securing protection for their traditional knowledge and cultural expressions.

C4. Artifacts

1. The artifacts policy outlines procedures for verifying the legal origin of cultural items and is communicated to relevant staff and suppliers. Where required, official permits or licenses are obtained, documented, and made available upon request.

D1. Energy Conservation

1. The examples are gas, electricity, and transportation fuel, limited to directly managed hotel operations.
2. The targets identify opportunities for on-site renewable energy projects where practical and document constraints (e.g., building structure, location, or ownership model) where adoption is not currently possible. Renewable energy consumption is measured and reported in the annual sustainability report.

The tour operator increases the use of renewable energy in its offices (e.g., electricity supply, heating/cooling) and in tour operations (e.g., renewable-powered vehicles, accommodation sourcing), where technically and financially feasible.

D2. Water Conservation

1. The frameworks can be informed by organizations such as WWF Water Risk Filter, WRI Aqueduct, CDP Water Security, or national or local authority assessments.

D3. Greenhouse Gas Emissions

1. This may include adopting science-based targets or joining recognized climate action initiatives at national or international levels, such as the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism. The tour operator ensures that its own role and contribution are clearly reflected in the annual sustainability report.
2. Where feasible, the tour operator works with its suppliers (primarily accommodations) and estimates its Scope 3 greenhouse gas emissions in line with the GHG Protocol classification. Scope 3 includes indirect emissions from upstream activities (e.g., suppliers, procurement, business travel) and downstream activities (e.g., customer and staff transportation, waste disposal). Estimates may be based on available data—such as expenditure, volume, or supplier input—and are shared with third parties only in compliance with confidentiality and legal requirements.
5. Offsets are purchased through carbon offset projects certified by recognized national or international sustainability standards (e.g., Gold Standard, Verra, UNFCCC), based on local availability. Offsets are applied only as a complement to a comprehensive emissions-reduction strategy, not as a substitute for it.

D4. Transportation

3. The tour operator may provide incentives for staff, such as public transit subsidies, where feasible.

5. Transportation information includes locally relevant public transit routes, shared mobility options, and active mobility (walking, cycling). Customers are informed about environmental benefits arising from alternative transport options. Collaboration with local transportation providers or authorities is encouraged.

D5. Wastewater

3. Examples of key suppliers include accommodations, restaurants, and boats.

D6. Solid Waste

3. At a minimum, waste is categorized into recycled materials, food waste, and waste sent to landfill or incineration. Additional categories (e.g., paper, metal, plastic, glass) are applied if local regulations require them or if operational practices align with the waste management plan. Measurement results are tracked as key performance indicators and reported annually.

D8. Minimize Pollution

1. Examples of pollution include noise, light, air, water, and soil.

D12. Close Proximity with Animals

1. As a minimum, direct contact with wild animals is prohibited. Internationally recognized standards may include, but are not limited to, the ABTA Animal Welfare Guidelines, WAZA, and the Global Humane Society.

3. Measures can include maintaining an appropriate distance from animals, not following or chasing them, reducing noise and light pollution, and preventing collisions.

Examples include turning engines off to reduce noise, limiting viewing time, keeping to designated trails, roads, or areas, maintaining a gradual, consistent speed, and not approaching mothers with young or nesting sites.

D13. Animal Welfare

1. Compliance aligns with the Five Domains of Animal Welfare and meets available science-based, species-specific welfare standards.

3. This includes standards for housing, care, handling, and viewing of animals. All contracted facilities must demonstrate responsible management, high standards of animal welfare, and ongoing monitoring to ensure compliance with legal requirements.

4. Training also equips personnel to recognize, report, and avoid suppliers or partners that do not comply with legal requirements or recognized animal welfare standards, ensuring that all operations seek to uphold the welfare of animals.