

Pathways to GSTC Destination Certification

Pathways for destinations toward GSTC Certification

GSTC Accreditation Division

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Introduction

GSTC offers flexible, different pathways to support destinations in progressively aligning with the GSTC Destination Standard and achieving GSTC Certification.

Destinations may start with Candidacy, progress to Sustainable Management System (SMS) Verification, and ultimately achieve GSTC Certification, depending on their readiness.

The detailed framework and requirements of each stage can be found in the [GSTC Accreditation Manual for Certification Bodies: Destination Version 2.1](#).

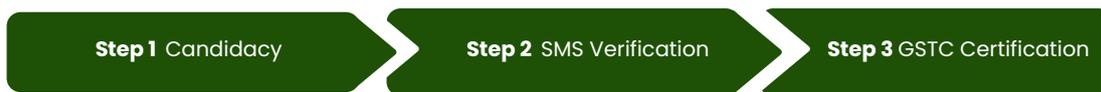


Table 1. Summary of Each Status Description

Status	Description
Candidacy	The entry point for destinations beginning their sustainability journey. Candidacy confirms that the destination has met preliminary eligibility requirements and completed the online GSTC Candidacy Course .
SMS-verified (Sustainable Management System-verified)	Status of destinations that have implemented a Sustainable Management System that meets the requirements of Pillar A of the GSTC Destination Standard . This step demonstrates operational commitment to sustainability practices.
Certified	The highest level of assurance. Certification confirms that the destination fully conforms with the GSTC Destination Standard.

 **Notes:**

- The status described above are verified through evaluations carried out by GSTC-accredited certification bodies (ACBs).
- The term "**GSTC-certified**" is a shorthand for "Certified to the GSTC Standard by a Certification Body that is GSTC-accredited."

Pathways

Destinations can select from various certification pathways that align with their current level of readiness and system maturity.

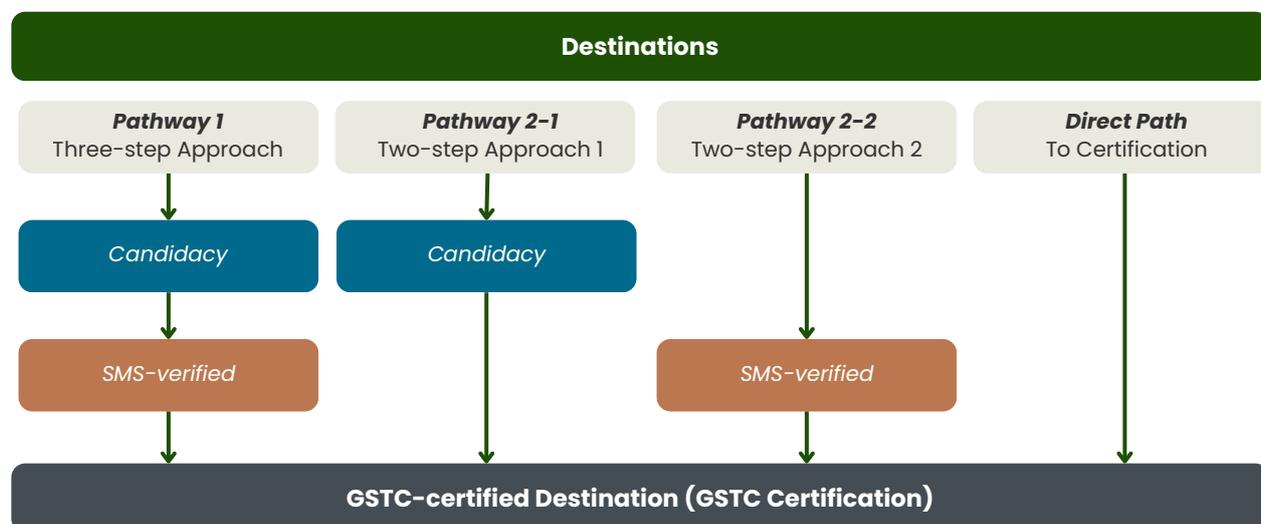


Figure 1. Four pathways to GSTC Certification

Table 2. How to start your journey from a Candidacy to GSTC SMS-verified and GSTC-certified

Pathway	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Reference Clauses	Time Limit for certain status
Pathway 1 (3-step)	Candidacy	SMS-verified	Certified	12.3 → 13 → 14	2 years for candidacy (Step 1-2) 3 years for SMS-verified (Step 2-3)
Pathway 2-1 (2-step)	Candidacy	-	Certified	12.3 → 14	2 years for candidacy
Pathway 2-2 (2-step)	-	SMS-verified	Certified	13 → 14	3 years for SMS-verified (Step 2-3)
Direct Path	-	-	Certified	14	-

Notes:

- Destinations may initiate the process, following any pathway, depending on their readiness.
- "Reference Clauses" are provided in the [GSTC Accreditation Manual for Certification Bodies – Destination v.2.1](#)
- Only GSTC-accredited certification bodies are authorized to verify Candidacy and SMS-verified status, and to conduct GSTC Certification.

Table 3. Full Descriptions of Each Status

Category	Candidacy	SMS-verified	Certified
Purpose	Entry stage confirming eligibility and readiness for GSTC Certification.	Verification of the destination’s Sustainable Management System (Pillar A).	Full certification verifying conformity with all GSTC Destination Standard (Pillars A–D).
Mandatory	OPTIONAL step (not required for certification).	OPTIONAL step (not required for certification).	-
Eligibility Prerequisite	Completion of the free online GSTC Destination Candidacy Course.	Completion of the free online GSTC Destination Candidacy Course.	-
Required Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Destination description and tourism business inventory. • Organizational chart and lead person identified. • Strategic and financial plans. • Governance and stakeholder engagement information. 	Evidence of meeting Pillar A of the GSTC Destination Standard.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of meeting all four pillars of the GSTC the Destination Standard. • Records of sustainability performance according to Section 14 of the Accreditation Manual: Certified tourism businesses, renewable energy, green transport (from Year 2030).
Evaluating Body	GSTC-accredited certification body.	GSTC-accredited certification body.	GSTC-accredited certification body.
Evaluation Type	Desk assessment.	Desk assessment .	Desk assessment + On-site audit.
Duration Limit	Maximum of 2 years before advancing to GSTC-verified or GSTC-certified status.	Maximum 3 years before advancing to GSTC-certified status.	-
GSTC Destination Standard Compliance Requirement	Partially required: Destination management responsibility (A1).	Partially required. Sustainability Management compliance (Pillar A only).	Fully required.

Category	Candidacy	SMS-verified	Certified
External Communication on the status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The stage where a destination officially begins its journey toward GSTC Certification. No logo, but a Certificate. Any external communication is permitted only to indicate that the entity has initiated its path toward a sustainable destination with a good destination management organization. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The stage where a destination's Sustainable Management System is reviewed and verified. No logo, but a Certificate. Any communication shall be limited to describing only the criteria included in the Pillar A. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The stage at which the destination achieves full GSTC Certification. GSTC-certified logo and Certificate. The right to communicate its achievement externally in accordance with GSTC guidelines.



Notes:

- GSTC applies a grace period regarding the requirements described in Section 14 of the Manual. For more information, please see [Guidance on the Grace Period for Three New Requirements for GSTC Destination Certification](#).
- ACBs will guide destinations in claiming their Candidacy and GSTC SMS-verified status.
- The official GSTC Certification certificate is granted only to destinations that have completed the full certification process.

GSTC-accredited certification bodies for Destination Certification

The list below includes all certification bodies currently accredited by GSTC to deliver GSTC Destination Certification.

[Find the list of Destination ACBs here](#)



Please note that the list is subject to periodic updates. For the most up-to-date information, visit the GSTC website: www.gstc.org.