

# Transition Planning Guidance for the GSTC Hotel and Tour Operator Standards version 4.0

January 26, 2026

## 1. Purpose and Scope

GSTC published the GSTC Hotel Standard version 4.0 and the GSTC Tour Operator Standard version 4.0 on December 30, 2025.

This document guides the transition from the GSTC Industry Standard version 3.0 to the two separate versions of the GSTC Hotel Standard and the GSTC Tour Operator Standard and supports interested parties in considering transition arrangements before implementing the new versions. The guidance can be referred to by the following parties:

- Certification bodies (CBs);
- GSTC-endorsed accreditation bodies;
- GSTC-Recognized standard owners (RSOs); and
- Tourism enterprises (hotels and tour operators);

The guidance aims to ensure continuity of certification, maintain market confidence, and allow sufficient time for all interested parties to understand, implement, and verify conformity with the revised standards.

## 2. Key Changes

There are two important changes regarding the structure and audit approach.

- The GSTC Industry Standard version 3.0 has been split into two distinct standards: one for hotels and another for tour operators.

- CBs will now conduct audits based on the indicators outlined in the standards, rather than on the criteria.

### **3. Transition**

#### **3.1. Transition Period**

GSTC has determined a three (3) year transition period **from the publication date of the new version to December 30, 2028.**

#### **3.2. Validity of Certification to version 3.0**

- Certifications issued under the previous version of the GSTC Industry Standard for hotels and tour operators will no longer be valid after the three-year transition period ends.
- During the transition period, surveillance and renewal audits may continue to be conducted against version 3.0, unless the certification body and the client agree to transition earlier to version 4.0.
- After the end of the three-year transition period, all surveillance, renewal, recertification, or reinstatement audits shall be conducted exclusively against the revised GSTC Standards (version 4.0).
- After the transition deadline, only certifications issued against the revised GSTC standards shall be considered valid.

### **4. Specific Guidance for Interested Parties Involved in Certification and Accreditation**

#### **4.1. Guidance for Certification Bodies**

GSTC-accredited certification bodies are recommended to:

- Update certification documentation and training
  - Train auditors and relevant personnel on the revised standards and verify competence.
  - Update certification procedures, audit tools, and reporting templates.
- Communicate and plan for Transition
  - Communicate transition arrangements clearly to certified clients at the earliest appropriate stage.
  - Guide clients on transition expectations, timelines, and audit options.

- Encourage early transition where feasible, while recognizing operational constraints in tourism.
- Communicate regularly with the GSTC, relevant accreditation body, and any applicable standard owners.
- Plan for Certification Activities
  - Plan audit activities by considering the following factors:
    - Existing certification cycles;
    - Seasonal tourism operations;
    - The three-year transition deadline.
  - May conduct transition audits:
    - During routine surveillance audits;
    - During recertification audits; or
    - As dedicated transition audits, where necessary.
  - Ensure sufficient audit time is allocated where transition audits are combined with routine audits.
  - Establish clear procedures for cases where clients fail to complete the transition within the defined period, including suspension or withdrawal of certification.
- If a certification issued under the previous version of the standard has a shortened validity due to the application of the transition end date, certification bodies may, in agreement with the client, provide an early transition audit based on the updated GSTC standards.
- Completing an early transition audit successfully may lead to a new certificate issued against the revised standard, starting a new certification cycle following the Certification Body's procedures and relevant accreditation requirements.

#### **4.2. Guidance for GSTC-endorsed Accreditation Bodies**

Accreditation Bodies are recommended to:

- Inform CBs promptly about transition requirements, timelines, and expectations.
- Plan resources for assessor training and assessments related to the revised standards.

- Verify that the CB auditor competence criteria adequately address new and revised requirements.
- Train assessors and verify competence before conducting transition-related assessments.
- Integrate transition assessments into routine scheduled assessments, wherever possible.
- Focus assessments on:
  - Consistent interpretation of revised GSTC Standards;
  - Auditor competence;
  - Reporting quality; and
  - Any necessary changes in audit methodology.

#### **4.3. Guidance for GSTC-Recognized Standard Owners**

GSTC-Recognized Standard Owners shall:

- Revise their standard according to the new updated version and comply with the **“two-year transition period”** specified in Clauses 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 of the GSTC Recognition Manual v6.0.
- Commence with the publication of the application documents, including the equivalency matrix, for Recognition by GSTC within the two-year transition period.
- Follow the requirements outlined in the [Guideline for GSTC-Recognized Standard Owners: Compliance Process for the Revised GSTC Industry Standard – Inclusion of Indicators](#), which is publicly available on the GSTC website.
- Inform GSTC in a timely manner of any significant delays, challenges, or material changes that may affect the RSO's ability to complete the required updates within the two-year transition period.
- RSOs that fail to follow the transition period may lose their GSTC-Recognized status.

#### **4.4. Guidance for Tourism Enterprises (Hotels and Tour Operators)**

Hotels and tour operators that are GSTC-certified or seeking GSTC certification are recommended to:

- Review and understand the revised GSTC standards, focusing on new, strengthened, or restructured requirements.
- Conduct a gap analysis against existing practices, policies, and procedures.
- Provide training and awareness for relevant staff.
- Update management systems and operational practices to meet revised requirements and demonstrate effectiveness.
- Liaise early with the GSTC-accredited certification body to agree on transition arrangements, audit timing, and audit approach.

## **5. End of Transition**

At the conclusion of the three-year transition period:

- All certifications shall be issued against the revised GSTC Hotel or Tour Operator Standards (version 4.0).
- Certifications to previous versions shall no longer be valid.
- Any reinstatement after the transition deadline shall require full conformity assessment against the revised standards.

## **6. Further Information**

For any questions, please contact the GSTC Accreditation Division at:

[accreditation@gstc.org](mailto:accreditation@gstc.org)