

# GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE TOURISM COUNCIL (GSTC) ANNUAL REPORT 2023

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June 2024



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It is with great pleasure that we present our first annual report, underscoring our commitment to transparency and accountability. The GSTC has been at the forefront of promoting sustainable practices in travel and tourism, and while we have made significant progress, the industry has been fraught with numerous challenges that require our continued attention and collaborative efforts.

One of the most pressing hurdles is the need to balance tourism's growth with preserving our natural and cultural resources. As destinations become increasingly popular, the risk of over-tourism and environmental degradation grows. It is imperative that we implement strategies that not only manage tourist numbers but also ensure that tourism activities are conducted responsibly. This includes protecting biodiversity and promoting sustainable consumption patterns within the industry.

Another significant challenge is the socio-economic impact of tourism on local communities. While tourism can be a powerful driver of economic growth and job creation, it can also lead to displacement, cultural erosion, and inequality. Ensuring that tourism benefits are equitably distributed and that local communities are actively involved in decision-making processes is crucial. We must strive to create inclusive tourism models that respect and enhance local cultures, traditions, and livelihoods.

The industry also faces the challenge of fostering resilience in the face of global crises, such as climate change, pandemics, and geopolitical instability. These events can have devastating impacts on tourism, affecting everything from traveler confidence to the viability of tourism businesses. Building resilience requires proactive planning, innovation, and strong partnerships between the public and private sectors. It also seeks a commitment to sustainable practices that can withstand and adapt to these challenges over time.

Looking ahead, I am optimistic about the future of sustainable tourism and the role GSTC will continue to play in addressing these challenges. The GSTC Criteria are and will be essential for implementing sustainable practices across the industry and mitigating these negative impacts.

Our members, partners, and industry stakeholders play an integral part in this collective effort, bringing diverse perspectives and solutions to the table. Together, we can overcome these obstacles and work towards a tourism industry that not only thrives but also contributes positively to the well-being of our planet and its inhabitants. I am confident that with our collective dedication, we can build a more sustainable and resilient future for tourism.

With best wishes,

**Luigi Cabrini**

Chair, Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)



## **Message from our Chair**

As we present our first annual report, I reflect with great pride and enthusiasm on our journey so far. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) has been dedicated to setting global standards for sustainability in travel and tourism since 2007, aiming to foster a thriving and responsible tourism industry. Our core mission “to be an agent of change in the world of sustainable travel and tourism by fostering the increased knowledge, understanding, adoption and demand for sustainable tourism practices” is what propels us forward. This mission is intricately linked with the GSTC Criteria, the global standards for sustainability in travel and tourism, serving as the universal language for sustainability in the sector. The GSTC Criteria are the cornerstone of our efforts, encompassing key aspects such as effective sustainability planning, maximizing social and economic benefits for the local community, enhancing cultural heritage, and reducing negative impacts on the environment.

Our members have played an integral role in our progress and success. From multinational corporations and small enterprises to governmental bodies and NGOs, our diverse membership base is a testament to the widespread recognition and adoption of the GSTC Criteria. Their commitment to sustainability is the driving force behind our collective achievements, and we are immensely grateful for their ongoing support and engagement.

Looking ahead, we are excited about the future of sustainable tourism and the role GSTC will continue to play in this vital movement. Our aim is to further expand our reach and influence, encouraging more organizations and destinations to adopt and implement the GSTC Criteria. With the support of our members, sponsors, partners, accredited certification bodies, and the broader tourism community, we are confident that we can make significant strides towards a more sustainable and responsible tourism industry. Together, we can ensure that tourism not only thrives but also contributes positively to the preservation of our planet and the well-being of communities around the world.

Sincerely,

**Randy Durband**

CEO, Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)



**Message from our  
CEO**

An aerial photograph of a coastal town. The top half of the image shows a sandy beach and the ocean with gentle waves. The bottom half shows a residential area with numerous houses, streets, and parking lots. The houses have various roof colors, including grey, blue, and green. There are many trees and green spaces interspersed among the buildings. A road with a parking lot runs parallel to the beach.

# 02

## 2023 in Numbers

## Webinars

26

webinars in 2023

769

webinar participants  
in 2023

## Trainings

78

courses in 2023

2,145

trainings participants  
in 2023

99.5%

answered very  
satisfied/satisfied with the  
training\*

66.5%

passed the exam  
in 2023

44

authorized trainers  
in 2023

\*71.60% very satisfied, 27.90% satisfied. 90.50% consider taking another GSTC course.

## Auditor trainings

9

auditor trainings  
classes in 2023

177

participants in auditor  
trainings classes in 2023

213

have completed the GSTC  
Hotel Criteria Course  
in 2023

85

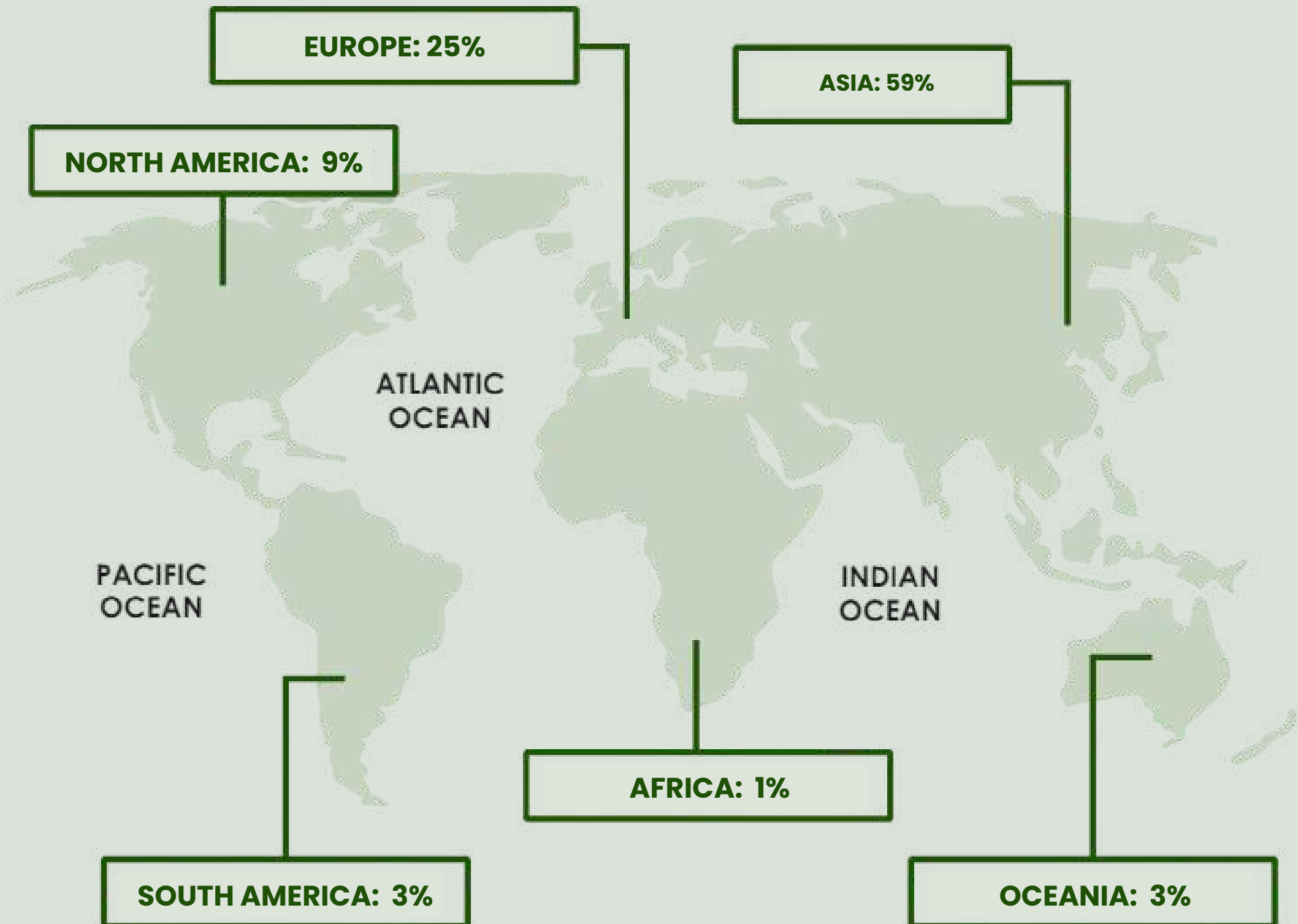
have completed the GSTC  
Tour Operator Course  
in 2023

106

have completed the GSTC  
Destination Criteria Course  
in 2023

**Note:** The number of participants who completed the training for each scope can be overlapped as the training usually takes place with more than one scope.

## The geopolitical scope of public training participants for 2023



## GSTC Recognition\*



## GSTC Certification\*

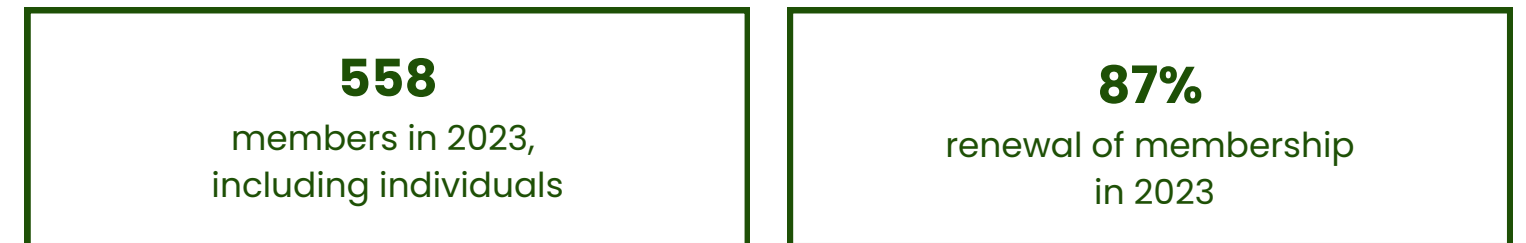


\***GSTC Certification:** Certification is defined as a voluntary, third-party assessment, through an audit, of a tourism enterprise or destination for conformity to a standard.  
**GSTC Recognition:** It is a status GSTC provides to a set of standards that are equivalent to the GSTC Criteria.

## GSTC Criteria



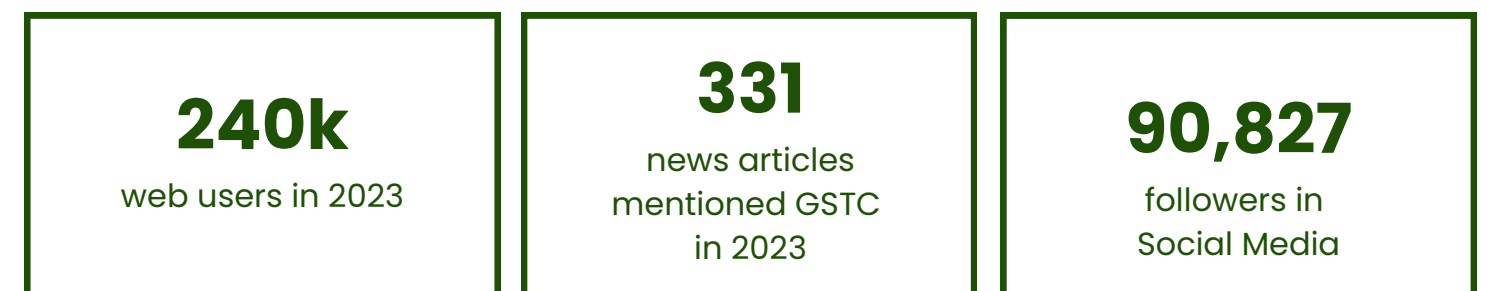
## GSTC Members



## GSTC Global Conferences



## Other Data





**03**

**Who We Are**

About Us

Our Strategy

What We Do

Our Governance

Our History

Our Alignment to the SGDs



# About Us

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council® (GSTC) was established as a strategic coalition of many partners, among which were the **United Nations Foundation, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism).**

The GSTC is the international body that promotes education, understanding, and the adoption of sustainable tourism practices. The organization brings together businesses, governments, non-governmental organizations, academia, individuals and communities striving to achieve best practices in sustainable tourism.

The GSTC establishes and manages global standards for sustainable travel and tourism, known as the GSTC Criteria. Currently, there are three sets: Destination Criteria for public policy-makers and destination managers; Industry Criteria for hotels and tour operators; and MICE Criteria for Venues, Event Organizers, and Events & Exhibitions (published February 2024). In addition, the Attraction Criteria is under development in 2024.

They result from a worldwide effort to develop a common language about sustainability in tourism. The GSTC Destination Criteria, Industry Criteria, and MICE Criteria are arranged in four pillars:

- (A) Sustainable management;
- (B) Socioeconomic impacts;
- (C) Cultural impacts; and
- (D) Environmental impacts.

The GSTC Criteria form the basis for the Accreditation of Certification Bodies that certify hotels/accommodations; tour operators/transport providers; venues, event organizers, and events & exhibitions; and destinations with sustainable policies and practices in place.

GSTC does not directly certify any products or services; but provides an accreditation program to accredit Certification Bodies.

The GSTC, an independent and neutral organization, is legally registered in the USA as a 501(c) non-profit organization. Its diverse and global membership, including national and provincial governments, leading travel companies, hotels, tour operators, NGOs, individuals, and communities, all share a common goal of achieving best practices in sustainable tourism. It is a virtual organization without a main office, with staff and volunteers working worldwide. Financial support from donations, sponsorship, and membership fees allows us to provide services at low costs. This support also allows us to create, revise, and make available the GSTC Criteria. GSTC is an ISEAL Community Member.



# Our Strategy

## Vision

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

## Mission

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

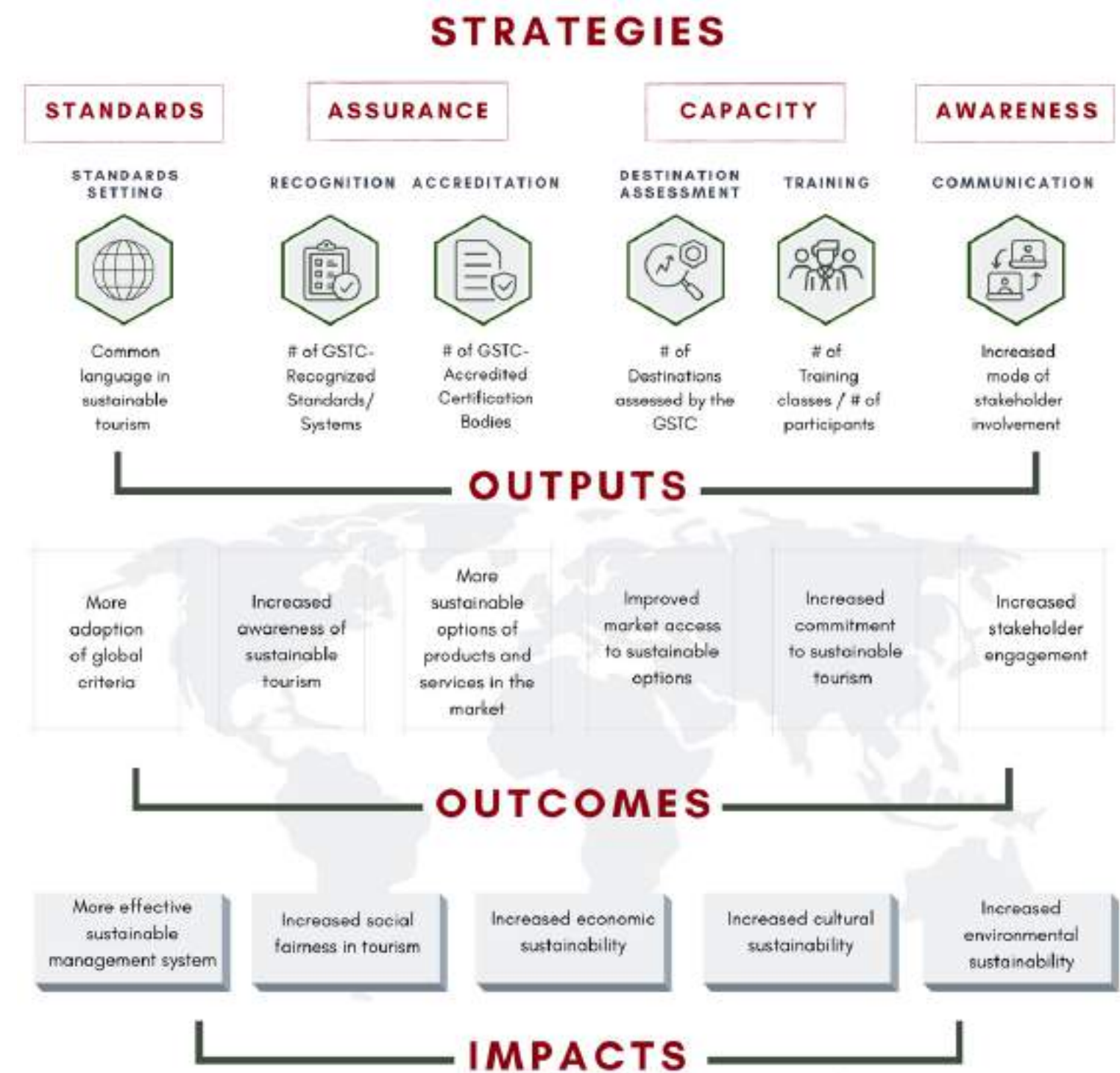
## GSTC Theory of Change

A Theory of Change serves as a comprehensive framework, detailing the desired change an organization or initiative aims to achieve and clarifying the mechanisms by which its efforts facilitate this transformation. This conceptual map traces a causal pathway, linking the strategies employed (the actions taken) to the resulting outcomes (what has been changed), and the underlying assumptions of the process. GSTC's Impact Pathways vividly illustrate these dynamic interconnections.

## Intended Impacts & Outcomes

- Provide guidelines for businesses and destinations of all sizes and all over the world to become more sustainable.
- Provide guidance for travelers and travel providers in choosing suppliers and sustainable tourism programs.
- Provide a common denominator for media to recognize sustainable tourism providers.
- Help certification and other voluntary programs ensure that their standards meet a broadly-accepted baseline.
- Governmental, non-governmental and private sector programs have a framework for developing sustainable tourism requirements.
- Provide guidelines for education and training bodies such as hotel schools and universities.

## Impact Pathways



## 01 Developing International Standards – the GSTC Criteria

The GSTC Criteria are global standards for sustainability in travel and tourism:

- GSTC Industry Criteria – guiding principles for all types of tourism-related business, with detailed guidance for hotels/accommodations and tour operators/agencies
- GSTC Destination Criteria – guidance for policy (national, provincial, etc.) and for destination management
- GSTC MICE Criteria – guidance for venues, event organizers, and events & exhibitions

The GSTC Criteria provide a comprehensive definition of sustainable travel and tourism, arranged to support four pillars of sustainability:

- Managing for sustainability
- Social
- Culture and Community
- Environment

## 02 Providing Assurance for Sustainable Tourism

**GSTC Accreditation:** The GSTC provides accreditation services for certification bodies that certify hotels/accommodations, tour operators, venues, event organizers, and events & exhibitions and destinations as sustainable.

**GSTC Recognition:** Distinct from accreditation of certification, GSTC also offers an Assurance scheme to formally indicate whether another organization’s sustainable tourism standards comply in very technical terms with the GSTC Criteria.

[Read more](#) about the difference between certification, accreditation of certification bodies, and recognition of standards.

## 03 Making Destinations Sustainable

“Destination Stewardship” is our description of the framework whereby the public sector, private sector, and the residents of local communities are engaged jointly to preserve, protect, and benefit from visitors to their tourist destination.

The GSTC Destination Criteria and our destination programs provide support to destinations seeking to manage and operate genuinely sustainable and responsible forms of tourism.

## 04 Promoting Market Access

The GSTC promotes the development of broad market adoption and application of the GSTC Criteria. With the ultimate goal of increasing demand for sustainable travel and tourism offerings and building trust amongst travelers, the GSTC works to identify opportunities and solutions for alignment of greater market potential, working closely with prominent OTAs and large travel providers.

## 05 Increasing Knowledge

The GSTC is committed to ensuring that sustainable tourism best practices are adopted and implemented by the industry and the traveling public. Training courses are relevant for various tourism industry sectors, including hotels, tour operators, destinations, governments, consulting, NGOs, and academic institutions.

# What we do

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# Our Governance

The GSTC is a membership-based, not-for-profit, non-governmental organization representing diverse tourism stakeholders. Its organization and activities are guided bylaws and are conducted through the following organizational structure:





**LUIGI CABRINI**

Chairman of the Board of Director of the GSTC



**DR. KELLY S. BRICKER**

Professor, Sustainable Tourism, Ecotourism & Nature-based Recreation, Arizona State University



**CB (RAM) RAMKUMAR**

Director of Green Dreams for the Planet



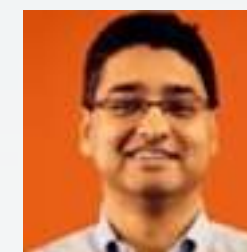
**KOKO TANG**

Co-founder and CEO of Vinetree Tourism



**NATALIE KIDD**

Chief People and Purpose Officer, Intrepid Group



**AMEET KONKAR**

Sustainability Director, Airbnb



**BEATRIZ BARREAL DANIEL**

Founder and CEO of Sustainable Riviera Maya



**CATHY PARSONS**

Accreditation Panel Chair at GSTC



**DR. ELIF BALCI FISUNOĞLU**

Vice General Manager, Tourism Operations and Development, Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA)



**GLENN MANDZIUK**

CEO of the World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance



**HYUN (HUGH) KIM**

Executive Director, Jeonbuk Culture and Tourism Organization (JBCT)



**DR. IOANNIS PAPPAS**

CEO of Green Evolution SA



**INGUNN SØRNES**

Special Adviser, Innovation Norway



**KATE HEINY**

Vice President of Sustainability, Booking Holdings



**KATHRIN MÖLLERS**

Director Sustainability & ESG, TUI Group



**KUNIKO TAKASAKI**

Managing Executive Officer, Chief DEIB Officer, JTB Group



**MATT CALLAGHAN**

Chief Operating Officer at easyJet holidays



**NETSAI BOLLMANN**

Programme Manager, Kavango Zambezi (KAZA) Transfrontier Conservation Area Secretariat



**MATTHIAS BEYER**

CEO, Mascontour



**RANDY DURBAND**

Chief Executive Officer of the GSTC



**RIKA JEAN-FRANÇOIS**

Founder, MissionRespo. Former CSR Commissioner ITB



**DR. YASEMIN BIRO KIRTMAN**

Knowledge and Learning Coordinator at the Policy, Partnerships and Operations Unit, Global Environment Facility (GEF)

# GSTC Board of Directors

The Board of Directors is responsible for governance and oversight of the council's mandate, programming, and operations. An independent Assurance Panel autonomously makes decisions on accreditation of certification bodies as well as recognition standards. GSTC working groups undertake initiatives that support the strategic plan as it relates to their designated program areas and are advisory in nature.

The organization is managed by a Secretariat led by the Chief Executive Officer, Randy Durband, who leads and coordinates the implementation of the organization's objectives and initiatives. This governance structure is established in detail in the GSTC bylaws.

# Team



**RANDY DURBAND**

CEO



**ROI ARIEL**

General Manager



**DR. MIHEE KANG**

Global Assurance Director / Asia Pacific Director



**DR. JISUN KIM**

Training Program Manager



**ESTEFANÍA DEL AZAR**

Communications Manager



**MARIA LIONTAKI**

Accreditation Manager, Lead Assessor



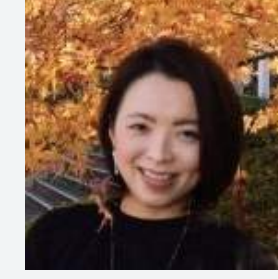
**AYAKO EZAKI**

Online Training Manager



**RITA KUAN**

Market Development Manager



**EMI KAIWA**

Asia Pacific Manager



**JULIETA BATTILANA**

Market Access & Events Coordinator



**ADRIANA PIZZI**

Membership Coordinator



**TATIANA AGUDELO MONGUÍ**

Membership Coordinator



**TIFFANY CHAN**

Destinations Coordinator



**CB RAMKUMAR**

Program Director – South Asia



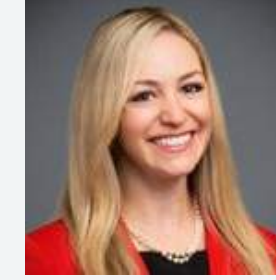
**DR. IOANNIS PAPPAS**

Program Director – Mediterranean Region



**JORGE MOLLER**

Program Director – Latin America



**KATHLEEN PITTMAN**

Program Director – Caribbean, and Special Projects



**MUSTAFA SÖĞÜT**

Accreditation Coordinator, Lead Assessor



**NATALIA SANIN**

Measurement & Reporting Analyst



**HERDI ANDRARILACHI**

Audit Process Analyst, Lead Assessor



**ÖYKÜ ÖZTÜRK**

Assurance Analyst



**JOONSIK SON**

Assurance Planning Coordinator



**DR. SO YOUNG LEE**

Project Manager



**DR. SOOHYUN KWON**

Asia Market Development Manager



**ANE DE MIGUEL MOLINA**

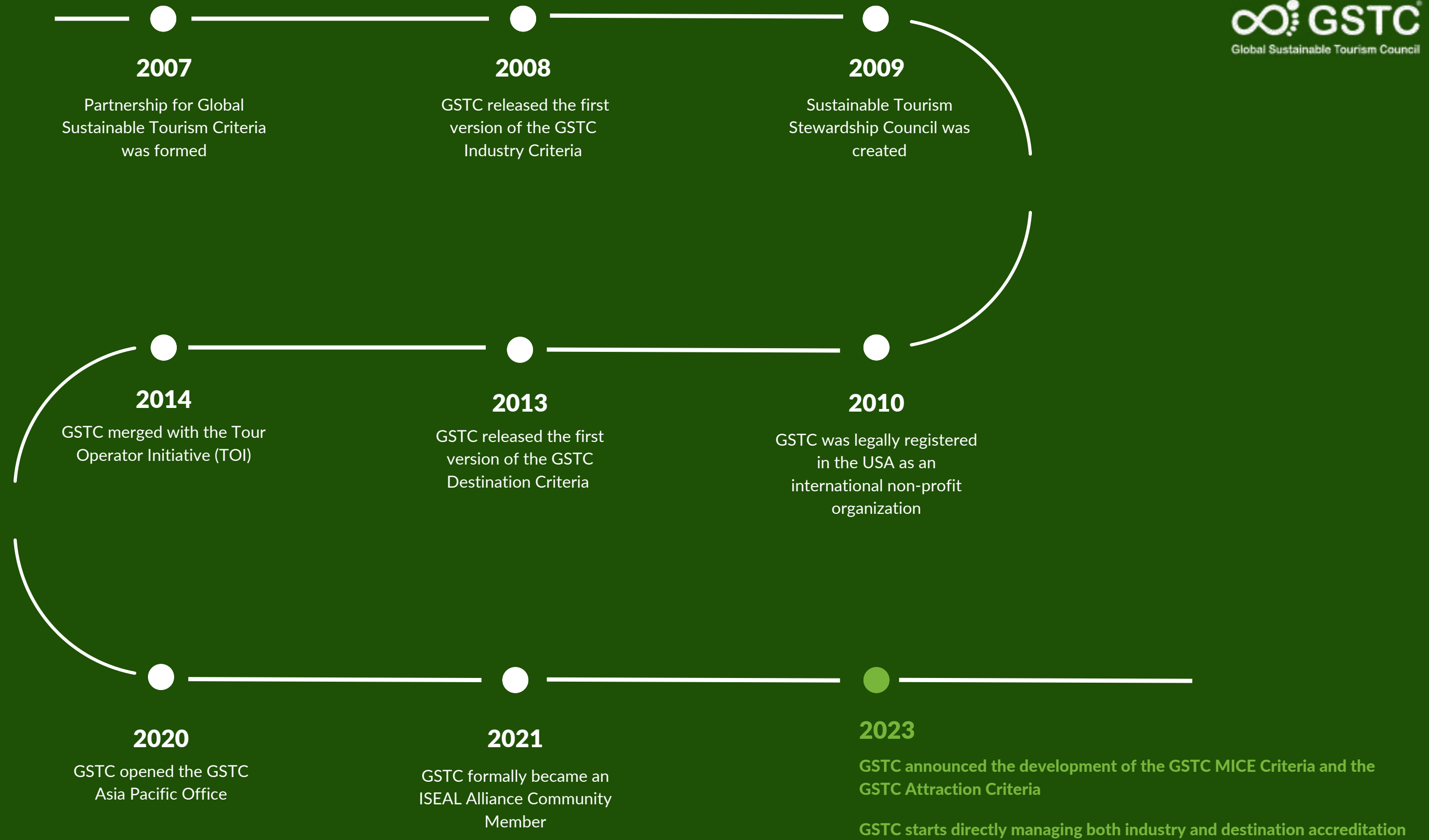
Communications Specialist



**YOKO UEKI**

Japan Training Coordinator

# Our History



Find more detailed information about our history [here](#).

# Our Alignment to the SDGs

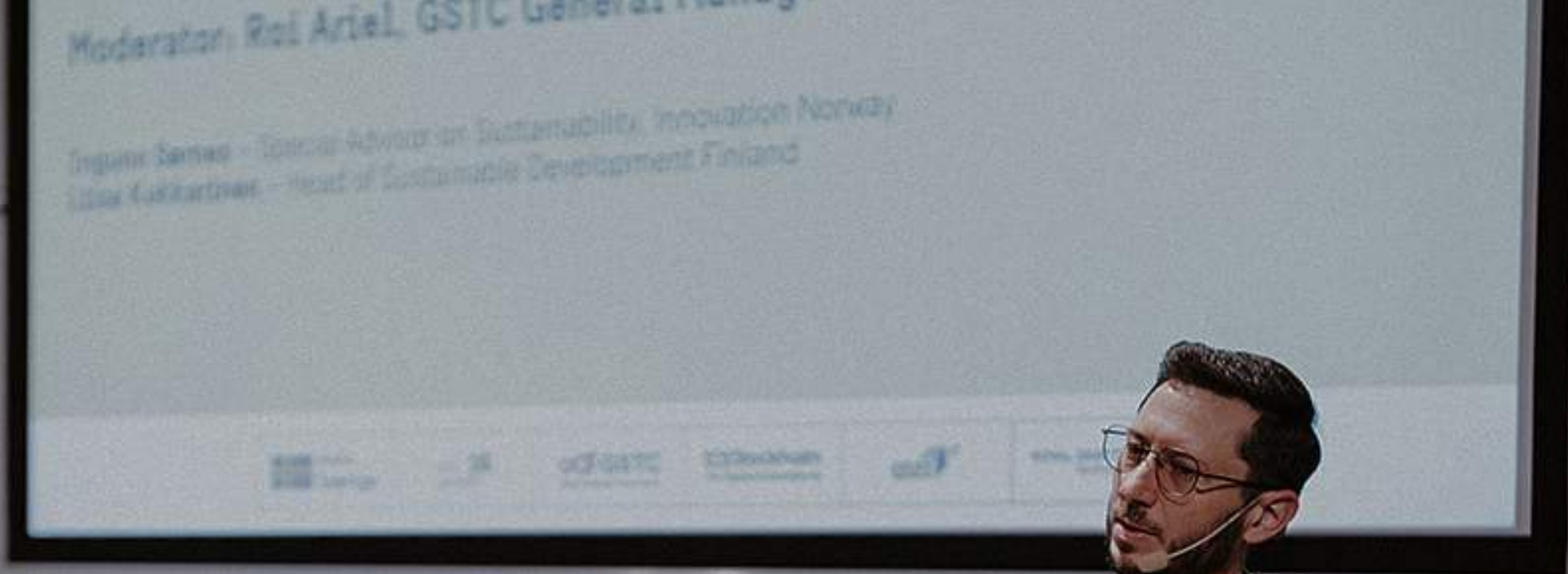
There is a strong relationship between the GSTC Criteria and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By taking the GSTC Criteria, you are helping to meet the UN SDGs. Economic, environmental, and societal dimensions are all addressed by the GSTC Criteria. Destinations and organizations looking to contribute to the SDGs will find that the GSTC Criteria and other GSTC-Recognized Standards provide effective tools to help them rise to the challenge.

Application of the GSTC Criteria will help destinations and businesses contribute towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Against each of the criterion, one or more of the 17 SDGs is identified, to which it most closely relates.

Find more information about the GSTC alignment with the SDGs [here](#).







GSTC Membership

Working Group Activities

GSTC Criteria

GSTC Sustainable Tourism Training Program

Assurance

Destinations Program

ISEAL Landscape Project

**04**  
**Our Performance**  
**in 2023**

# GSTC Membership

Becoming a GSTC member means actively participating in our global community and contributing to GSTC's important work in promoting the widespread adoption of universal sustainable tourism principles. We believe that it is in everyone's interest to ensure that destinations and businesses worldwide are encouraged and capacitated to pursue sustainable tourism development.

There are different membership categories. For organization members, corresponding fees are based on the organization's income level.

See more about GSTC membership [here](#).

## Destination Members



GSTC Destination Membership offers destinations and public agencies a pathway to deeper engagement with global sustainable tourism principles. Members commit to enhancing sustainability performance and elevating the visibility of sustainability efforts. They also gain access to tailored resources and expertise for sustainable destination development and management, including training, capacity building, networking, and assessment options.

## Organization Members



GSTC Organization Membership showcases commitment to sustainable tourism for private-sector and non-profit organizations of all sizes. Members actively promote sustainable tourism policies and practices worldwide, driving demand for responsible travel experiences.

## Individual Members



GSTC Individual Membership supports sustainable tourism practices globally. Members contribute to spreading awareness and implementing sustainable solutions in the travel and tourism industry.

## Highlights 2023

### GSTC 2023 Webinars

The GSTC webinars aim to provide valuable insights and knowledge on sustainable tourism practices to our members and the wider community. These webinars serve as a platform for experts to share their expertise and for participants to engage and learn in discussions on various aspects of sustainability in tourism. Our webinars are an essential part of our mission to promote sustainable practices across the global tourism industry.

### Most Popular Webinars

- 1 Norway's "Sustainable Destination": A program designed for sustainable destination development.**  
Presenters:
  - Knut Perander, Head of Tourism Development, Tourism Department, Visit Norway
  - Magnus Brekke Nygaard, Chief Sustainability Officer, Visit Bergen
- 2 Criterios GSTC - Sustentabilidad aplicada en el valor de mi negocio turístico (Public webinar in Spanish)**  
Presenter: Jorge Moller, Director of Programs in Latin America, GSTC
- 3 Accessible & Inclusive Travel**  
Presenter: Martin Heng, Former Accessible Travel Manager & Editorial Adviser, Lonely Planet

These webinars not only highlighted important initiatives and best practices but also fostered a community of learning and collaboration among participants.

### Destination Members Meetings

We hosted 1 in-person meeting in Antalya with 40 attendees, and 2 online member meetings were conducted with 59 attendees.

## Workshops with GSTC Destination members in 2023

Two workshops were held in 2023 with destination members, contributing to the development process of the GSTC MICE Criteria.

### VisitBerlin

#### Workshop during Bestival in Berlin

In July, Tatiana Agudelo Monguí, GSTC's Membership Coordinator, and Nicola Koschel, GSTC's International Standards Committee & Assurance Panel Sustainable Tourism Consultant participated at the BESTIVAL in Berlin. The event was open to professionals in the MICE industry, sustainability enthusiasts, and anyone curious about innovative approaches to the MICE Industry. This workshop provided an opportunity for participants to contribute to the development of the GSTC MICE Criteria through a game, where they were encouraged to share their comments and vote on the importance of each criterion.



Read more about Bestival workshop in Berlin [here](#).

### Malta Tourism Authority

#### Malta GSTC MICE Criteria Workshop

Maltese MICE experts were invited through a workshop to shape the global sustainable guidelines for the MICE sector. Demonstrating their commitment to make a sector that acknowledges its environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic impacts and is proactive in taking measures to address them. At the event, attendees had the chance to delve into each criterion related to venues, event organizers, and events/exhibitions. They were encouraged to share their comments on each criterion and debate its relevance while envisioning how they could implement them within their events or organizations.



Read more about GSTC MICE Criteria workshop in Malta [here](#).

# Membership Map



# GSTC Organization

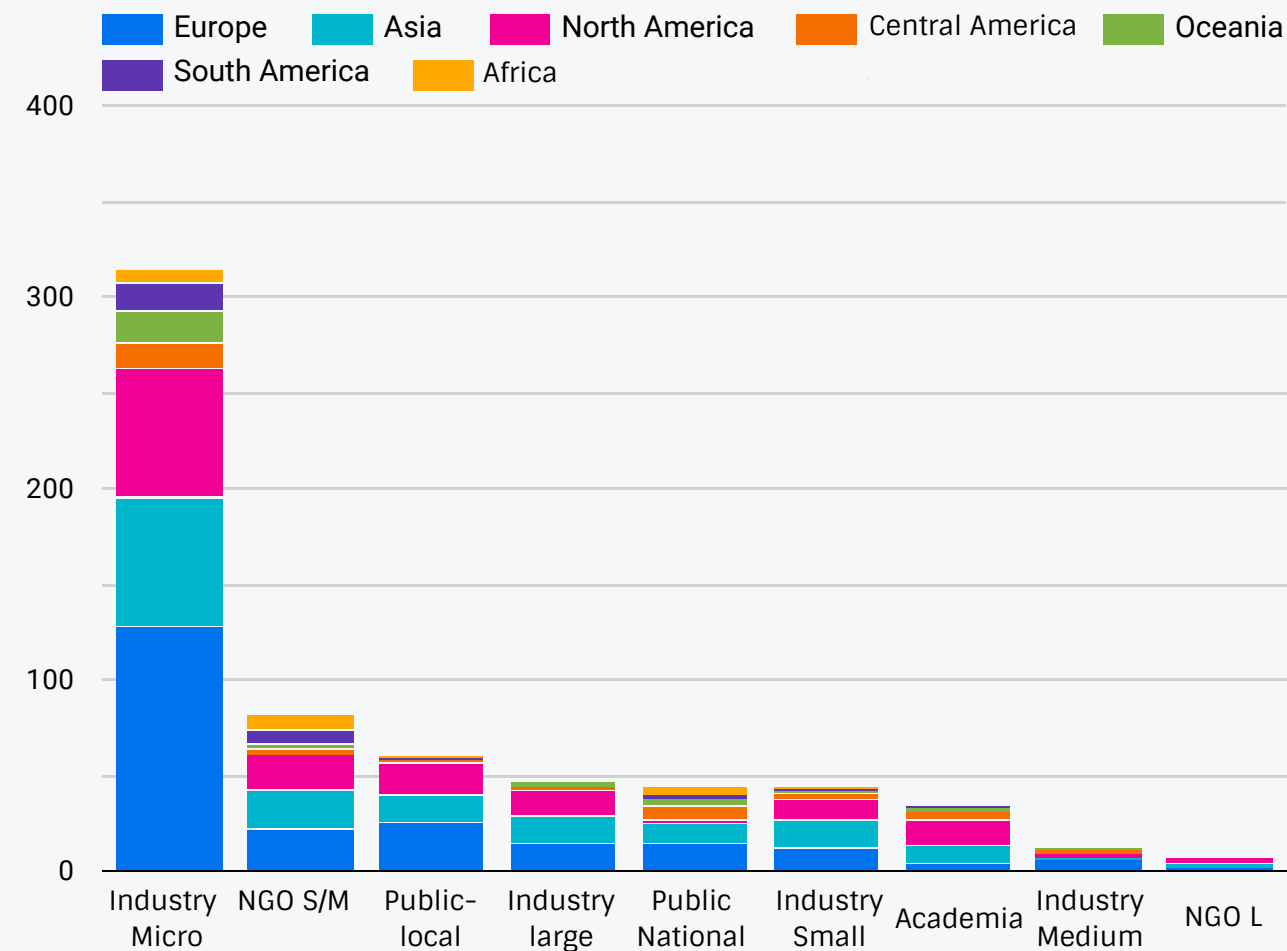
## Members in 2023

The graphs show the total GSTC membership until 2023 per category and per sector. In addition, the continents are also differentiated, with Europe, Asia and North America being the territories with the largest GSTC members.

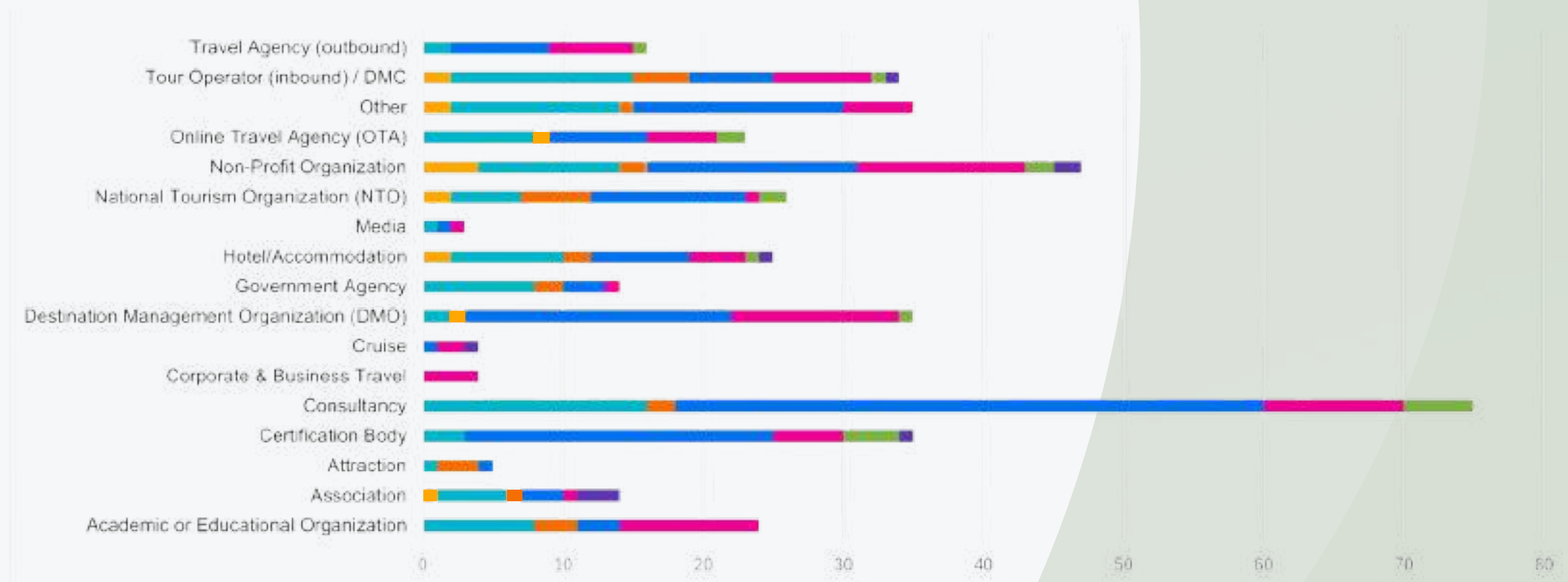
The categories with the highest number of GSTC members are industry micro, NGOs and public local. Concerning the sectors, consultancy and NGOs are the ones with the highest number of GSTC members until 2023.

Number of Total Members in 2023: **417**  
An increase of **10.6%** compared to 2022

### Total Membership by Category by 2023



### Total Membership by Sector by 2023



# Working Group Activities

The Working Groups are made up of GSTC Members working together with a focus on an area that needs special attention. Their efforts are vital to the organization as they prepare an annual action plan, which is followed by actions by the members of the Working Group.

## Destination Stewardship Working Group (DSWG)

The Destination Stewardship Working Group aims to assist destinations in maintaining their cultural, environmental and socio-economic integrity through the implementation of the GSTC Destinations Program. The overall goal is to ensure that destinations retain and enhance their distinctive attributes that make them attractive to beneficial tourism and competitive. See current DSWG members [here](#).

The Destination Stewardship Working Group developed the Destination Starter Kit to help destinations adopt a stewardship approach. A sub-group within the DSWG was formed to create this kit. Once completed, members of the DSWG translated the starter kit into Spanish, French, German, and Greek.

## Research & Academic Working Group (RAWG)

The Research & Academic Working Group (RAWG) supports the GSTC's activities concerning internal and external communications, content curation, knowledge management, and networking. See current RAWG members [here](#).

## Business Travel Working Group (BTWG)

The Business Travel Working Group (BTWG) seeks to reach new audiences and attract membership among Corporate Travel Managers (CTM), Corporate Travel Program (CTP), and suppliers. While most destinations and hotels accommodate tourists and business clients, it is important to acknowledge the specialized needs and opportunities in the business market. The BTWG enables GSTC to address these better and ensure sustainability criteria are relevant in the corporate and business travel sector. See current BTWG members [here](#).

## MICE Working Group (MICE WG)

The MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, Events) Working Group's focus in 2023 was to support the GSTC MICE Criteria development process. The expertise of its members is significant to the process. Other goals are to reach new audiences and attract membership from the MICE world. See current MICE WG members [here](#).

## Italy Working Group (Italy WG)

With many GSTC Members active in Italy working together to promote the GSTC framework, a dedicated working group focused on activities in Italy. See current Italy WG members [here](#).

## India Working Group (India WG)

As the name suggests, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) is truly global. We have a dedicated Director and working group focused on India. More information about India WG India [here](#).



# GSTC Criteria

## Overview of the GSTC Criteria

The GSTC Criteria were created to provide a **common global understanding of sustainable tourism and are the minimum that businesses, governments, and destinations should achieve to approach social, environmental, cultural, and economic sustainability.** Since tourism destinations each have their own culture, environment, customs, and laws, the Criteria are designed to be adapted to local conditions and supplemented by additional criteria for the specific location and activity.

The GSTC Criteria are built on decades of prior work and experience around the world, taking into account the numerous guidelines and standards for sustainable tourism from every continent. The GSTC Criteria are arranged in four pillars.



## GSTC Criteria



**GSTC Destination Criteria**



**GSTC Industry Criteria**



**GSTC MICE Criteria**

Under development in 2023



**GSTC Attraction Criteria**

Under development in 2023

Serve as basic guidelines for businesses of all sizes to become more sustainable, and help businesses choose sustainable tourism programs that fulfill these global criteria

Help consumers identify sound sustainable tourism programs and businesses

Help certification and other voluntary programs ensure that their standards meet a broadly accepted baseline

Serve as basic guidelines for education and training bodies, such as hotel schools and universities



Serve as the basis for certification for sustainability

Provide greater market access in the growing market for sustainable products, serving as guidance both for travelers and for travel agencies in choosing suppliers and sustainable tourism programs

Serve as a common denominator for information media to recognize sustainable tourism providers

Offer governmental, non-governmental, and private sector programs a starting point for developing sustainable tourism requirements

Demonstrate leadership that inspires others to act

With the three sets of Criteria, the GSTC intends to raise awareness and education levels of all travel and tourism players of sustainable tourism concepts to support sustainable consumption and production. Therefore, the GSTC Criteria are publicly available on the website and have been translated into many languages. They are available for the public to download from the GSTC website: [Translations of the GSTC Criteria in other languages.](#)

# Uses of the Criteria





## 2023 Highlights

In 2023, GSTC officially started with the development of **two more Criteria** in addition to the GSTC Destination Criteria and the GSTC Industry Criteria for Hotels and Tour Operators. The GSTC MICE Criteria and the GSTC Attractions Criteria were under development during 2023.

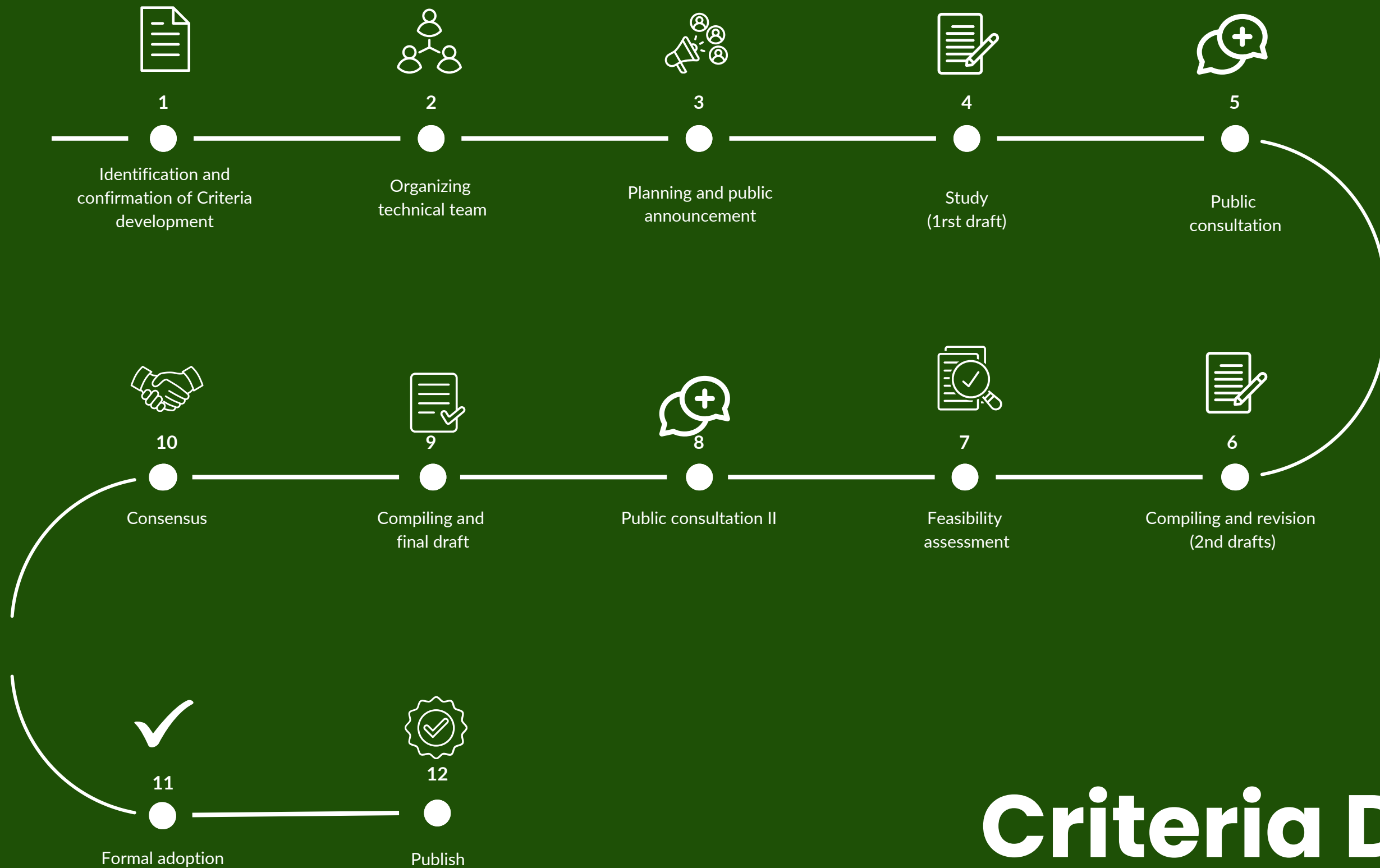
The development of the GSTC **MICE Criteria** (covering Venues, Event Organizers, and Events & Exhibitions) officially began its journey in April 2023 and has covered the voices and opinions of stakeholders from over 40 organizations and nearly all continents. The process lasted 11 months. The draft creation was shared with the Advisory Group, Key Stakeholders group and International Standard Committee for transparency and accountability. It was published on February 29th, 2024.

Alongside this, GSTC fostered collaboration through organized workshops and regular online meetings that allowed participants to discuss the criteria and indicators freely. The workshops, along with the online meetings, opened up the discussion floor for the participants and relevant stakeholders.

In 2024, after the launch of the GSTC MICE Criteria, an Early Adopter Program is planned for relevant stakeholders to adopt the requirements for sustainable events. This program will be a two-year commitment, during which stakeholders will work closely with GSTC, sharing their experiences and knowledge within the network, and simultaneously design a pathway toward sustainability.

The **GSTC Attraction Criteria** development officially started in September 2023 and is planned to finish in November 2024.

However, before the official announcement, two workshops have been held for the MICE and Attraction Criteria.



The GSTC Criteria are built on decades of prior work and experience around the world. They take into account the numerous guidelines and standards for sustainable tourism from every continent. During the development process, criteria were widely consulted globally, in developed and developing countries and several languages. They reflect our goal of attaining a global consensus on sustainable tourism. Potential indicators were screened for relevance and practicality, as well as their applicability to a broad range of destination types. They were field-tested around the world.

The process of developing the Criteria was designed to adhere to the standards-setting code of the ISEAL Alliance, the international body providing guidance for the development and management of sustainability standards for all sectors. The Criteria are also aligned with the United National (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and are revised every five years.

# Criteria Development and Revision Process

- 01 Confirmation of the need for Criteria Development**  
A public announcement is made on the development of the new criteria in collaboration between the GSTC and key contributor(s).
- 02 Organizing the new Criteria Development Technical Team**  
Experts in the relevant field are formed as a group, known as the technical team. GSTC Secretariat reaches out to the members, networks, and members' recommendations to form the team. The team is responsible for drafting the Criteria, which is the basis for public consultations and a feasibility assessment throughout the process. The team is supported by the GSTC Secretariat.
- 03 Planning and public announcement: Developing Term of Reference(TOR) following the ISEAL Standard-Setting Code**  
The Terms of Reference, including proposed scope, objectives, and justification, steps in the standard-setting process, timelines, and identified opportunities, are developed and published simultaneously with the announcement of the Criteria's development.
- 04 Study of the 1st draft: Preliminary study and preparation of a draft outline**  
All relevant standards and guidelines are gathered and compiled to start with the drafting of the Criteria and common elements are determined. The technical team is responsible for creating the first draft of the Criteria.
- 05 Public consultation on the 1st draft**  
The first draft of the Criteria is the basis for online and offline public consultation. Focused group workshops and interviews are held, and emails are sent to relevant stakeholders in the field. To ensure that disadvantaged and underrepresented groups are included in the consultation process, two international NGOs are contacted and given the task of collecting group comments.
- 06 Compiling and revision of 2nd draft**  
All comments from the first public consultation are collected and revised to create the 2nd draft, which forms the basis of the feasibility assessment.

- 07 Feasibility assessment: Applying the 2nd draft to the field, refining it, and preparing 3rd draft development for public consultation**  
The feasibility assessment is a self-assessment for the participating organizations to verify the feasibility, measurability, and readability of the criteria and indicators. It also serves as a systematic analysis and thoughtful evaluation of a potential Criteria's benefits to the field, as well as anticipated impediments to their adoption and implementation by the relevant sector(s). The results of the feasibility assessment are used for the revision of the 3rd Criteria draft.
- 08 Public consultation on the 3rd draft**  
The 3rd draft is used for the second public online consultation. To receive feedback, participants in the first public consultation and workshops are contacted. The results of the feasibility assessment is used for the revising of the 3rd Criteria draft.
- 09 Compilation and final draft: Compiling all comments from the public consultation and refining the final draft**  
The responses received from the second public consultation are collected and revised for the final Criteria draft. By section, highly recognized organizations are contacted for their review and revision of the wording of the criteria and indicators.
- 10 Consensus on the final draft**  
The International Standard Committee reviews the final draft and agrees to accept it as the final version.
- 11 Formal adoption: GSTC Board of Directors' formal adoption of the final draft**  
The final draft, along with a summary of the criteria development process, is sent to the GSTC Board of Directors for approval.
- 12 Publish**  
The new Criteria are published promptly and made available for free in electronic format. A press release on the GSTC Criteria is published.

## 2023 Highlights

### Stakeholder Engagement in GSTC MICE Criteria Development During 2023

#### Advisory Group:

The Advisory Group provided high-level inputs to the Criteria draft. The Group not only participated in the official public consultation but also provided continuous comments to the Criteria draft, gave recommendations on relevant publications and reports, was responsible for promoting the GSTC Attraction Criteria' first public consultation, and gave recommendations on which organizations could be suitable for the feasibility assessment. GSTC had online meetings every four months to discuss and update important timelines while addressing questions or concerns.

The Advisory Group members were Sustainable Hospitality Alliance (Global), Visit Berlin (Europe), Visit Oslo (Europe), Green Key Global (America), Osaka Convention Bureau (Asia), Suwon Convention & Visitor Bureau (Asia), and Singapore Tourism Board (Asia).

#### Key Stakeholders group:

Experts with a strong background in MICE and key industry players currently in the MICE business. They are responsible for giving feedback on the Criteria draft and participating in the feasibility assessment.

The key Stakeholders group members were American Express Global Business Travel (Global), Instituto Costarricense de Turismo (Costa Rica Tourism Board)/ (America), International Congress & Convention Association (Global), Meeting Select (Europe), The Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (Europe-Asia), and Japan Convention Service (Asia).

#### GSTC Conference workshop:

Workshops during GSTC Conferences were held in Gunsan, Korea, and Seville, Spain, in 2022 and Antalya, Türkiye, in 2023. Approximately 30 individuals participated in each workshop and discussed which of the GSTC Industry Criteria and GSTC Destination Criteria would be relevant to include in the new Criteria. The results were useful in enriching the Criteria draft creation.

#### Public group workshop:

With the destination members' support, two public workshops were conducted—at Bestival in Berlin, Germany, in July 2023 and in Malta in September 2023. GSTC staff attended the Berlin festival by creating a standing booth with the first GSTC MICE Criteria draft printed. It included a voting system for participants to vote on the most relevant and least relevant criterion and/or indicator of the MICE industry. Approximately 1,000 people participated in the Bestival, and they freely dropped by the workshop.

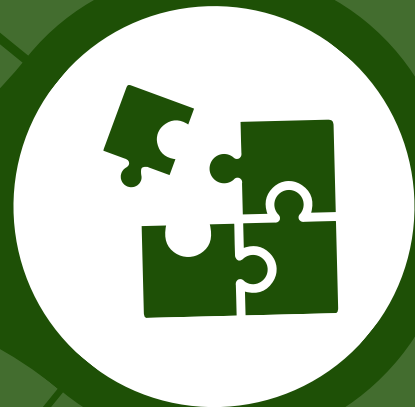
#### Feasibility Assessment:

Participants in the feasibility assessment were the Asia Ecotourism Network (AEN), Costa Rican Tourism Board (ICT), Edinburgh International Conference Centre (EICC), ExpoCité, International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), Japan Convention Services, Malta Tourism Authority, Marina Bay Sands, Osaka Convention Tourism Bureau, Resort World Sentosa, Singapore Association of Convention & Exhibition Organisers & Suppliers (SACEOS), Singapore Exhibition and Convention Bureau (SECB), Sentosa Development Corporation, Suwon Convention Centre, Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA).

#### International Organizations engagement:

Organizations, including Travel Unity and ECPAT (End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism), provided their comprehensive feedback on the first and second drafts. These organizations were contacted once more for their final review after the final draft was completed. The criterion 'Access for all' was consulted with an Accessibility in Travel and Tourism expert, an ambassador in the field. The criterion related to exploitation, human trafficking, and child protection was consulted with an expert in ECPAT (End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism).

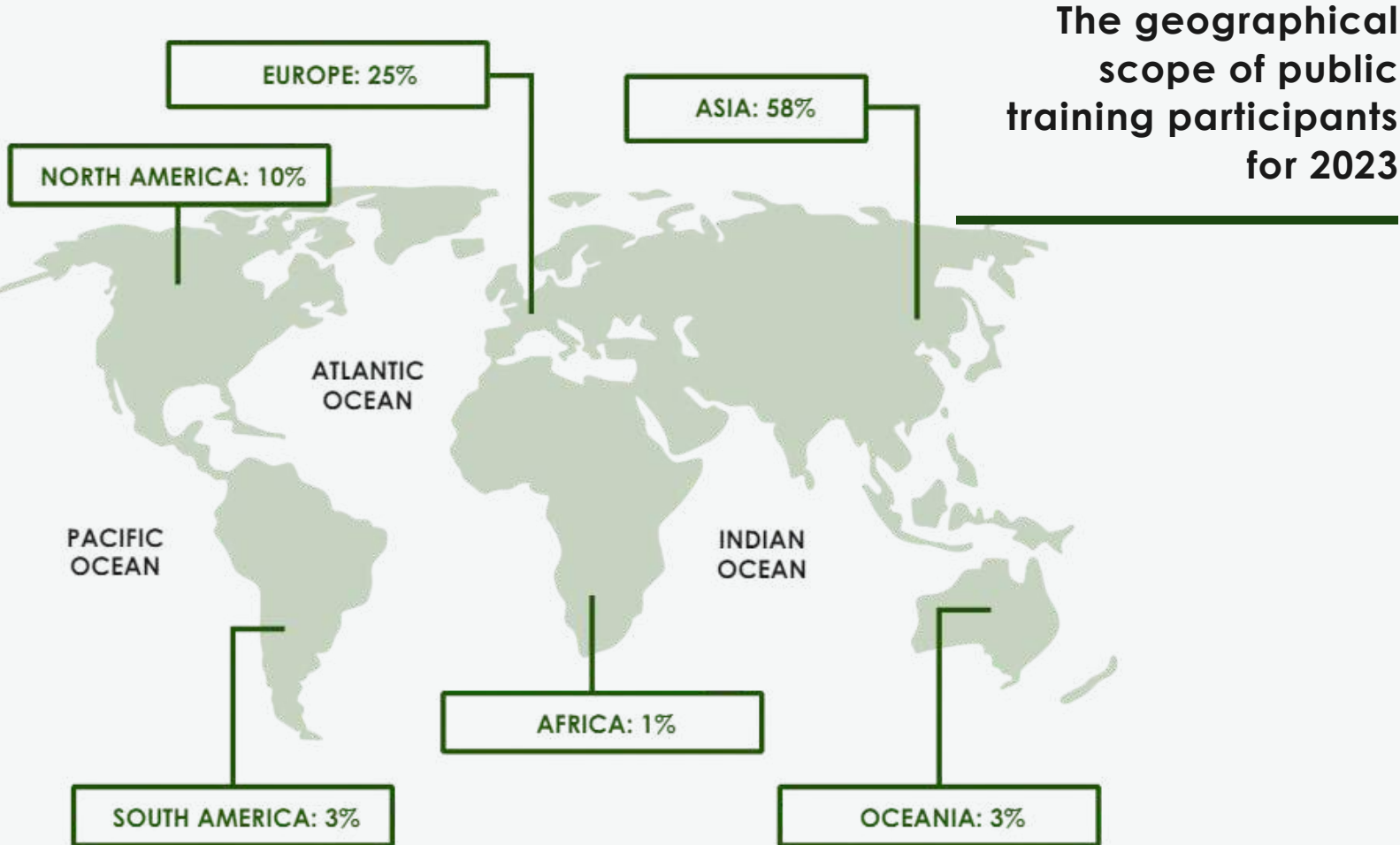
Under development in 2023. Published February 2024.



# GSTC Sustainable Tourism Training Program

GSTC Sustainable Tourism Training Program (STTP) provides the knowledge and tools needed to improve sustainability practices in travel and tourism with GSTC-authorized trainers worldwide. The GSTC STTP is based on the GSTC Criteria and is available in 17 languages: Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia, Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese, English, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, Thai, Turkish, and Vietnamese.

The GSTC STTP offers various specialized courses, including the GSTC Sustainable Tourism Course, Sustainable Hospitality Course, Accessibility and Inclusive Travel Course, Applied DEI in Travel Course, and Sustainable Business Travel Course. Additionally, private and/or customized training is available to meet specific needs.



## Highlights 2023

In 2023, GSTC provided 78 training courses, which were attended by a total of 2,145 trainees. The trainees are geographically distributed as follows: 59% from Asia, 25% from Europe, 9% from North America, 3% from South America, 3% from Oceania, and 1% from Africa.

GSTC has partnered with Ecohotels for the Arab-speaking world and Ascott International Management for Singapore, expanding the available language for training. In addition, GSTC has authorized new trainers based in Malaysia, Italy, France, India, and Jordan to deliver the training in additional languages. The new training partnerships and trainers aim to ensure that the training is more accessible and culturally appropriate.

In February 2023, GSTC provided training for deaf or hard-of-hearing individuals. Two sign language interpreters were present to assist them throughout the training.



## Training Courses under STTP



### **Sustainable Tourism Course**

It provides a comprehensive understanding of both the GSTC Industry Criteria and the GSTC Destination Criteria, along with the best practices for businesses and destinations. This course aims to help companies and destinations make informed decisions about sustainability practices and develop tourism policies focusing on sustainability.



### **Sustainable Hospitality Course**

It is aimed at hospitality and accommodation professionals and offers practical insights on implementing sustainable hotel practices. This course provides industry practitioner examples and insights based on real-life experience to help with self-assessment when applying the GSTC Hotel Criteria to own situations.



### **Sustainable Business Travel Course**

It provides knowledge and tools to improve corporate and business travel sustainability practices. This course examines how to establish a new business travel model that harnesses the value of a sustainable business travel program while respecting the latest travel requirements, using the four pillars of GSTC Industry Criteria.



### **Applied DEI in Travel Course**

In collaboration with Travel Unity, it provides an excellent opportunity to gain knowledge about the best practices in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and engage in meaningful discussions with colleagues globally. This course incorporates a practical application component, enabling trainees to delve deeper into how DEI can be implemented within their organizations and job roles.



### **Accessible and Inclusive Travel Course**

It is designed to help individuals develop a deeper understanding of how to deliver experiences that are accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities and other access needs. This course provides valuable insights into the size and potential of the accessible and inclusive travel market segment. It offers practical tips and guidance on how to better attract, serve, and retain customers with access needs.

In 2023, GSTC launched two new courses that focus on social issues:

Applied DEI in Travel Online Course and Accessible & Inclusive Travel Online Course.

## Highlights 2023

**Traveloka partnered with GSTC** to promote more sustainable initiatives through the GSTC Sustainable Tourism Course to prepare sustainable knowledge and skills for key hotel partners in Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

**easyJet holidays** accelerates sustainability transformation in the industry. In 2023, it sponsored four GSTC Sustainable Tourism Courses for its hotel partners in Spain, Greece, and Turkey in the local languages with customized practical content.

**JTA sponsored the GSTC** sustainable tourism course in Japanese for destination representatives and tourism industry stakeholders in different regions: Tokyo, Kyoto, Gifu, Hokkaido, Kumamoto, Yamagata, and Aomori.

**Partnered with Agoda**, GSTC provided a Sustainable Tourism Course for industry professionals in Thailand and India to support its local hoteliers in gaining the competencies and tools necessary to enhance their sustainability practices.

# Assurance

## Accreditation

Accreditation is a process where a certification body is independently evaluated by an accreditation body to ensure it meets internationally recognized standards and practices. In the context of the GSTC Assurance Program, accreditation verifies that certification bodies assessing businesses against sustainability criteria have undergone rigorous third-party scrutiny. This process guarantees that certified businesses worldwide adhere to high sustainability standards, demonstrating their genuine commitment to sustainable practices. Accredited certification bodies enable tourism businesses to display the GSTC-certified logo, signifying their adherence to these stringent criteria and enhancing their credibility in global markets.

GSTC accredits certification bodies that certify hotels/accommodations and tour operators as sustainable. GSTC also accredits certification bodies that certify destinations as sustainable.

Recognizing the importance of regional cooperation, the GSTC has undertaken initiatives to collaborate with national accreditation bodies in Europe. This collaboration aims to streamline the accreditation process for European businesses while ensuring compliance with relevant European Union regulations. ACCREDIA, a leading Italian accreditation body, is already a valued partner.

Accredited certification bodies for Hotel/Accommodations	Accredited certification bodies for Tour Operators	Accredited certification bodies for Destinations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bureau Veritas</li><li>• Control Union</li><li>• RoyalCert</li><li>• United Certification Systems Limited</li><li>• Vireo Srl</li><li>• Mauritius Standard Bureau: Blue Oasis</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bureau Veritas</li><li>• Control Union</li><li>• RoyalCert</li><li>• United Certification Systems Limited</li><li>• Vireo Srl</li><li>• Mauritius Standards Bureau: Blue Oasis</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• EarthCheck</li><li>• Green Destinations</li><li>• Vireo Srl</li></ul>

## Highlights

In 2023, the GSTC made a strategic decision to bring in-house accreditation for certification bodies certifying to the GSTC Industry Criteria (October 2023). GSTC Destination Criteria was already in-house accrediting certification bodies since 2016. This means the GSTC is directly responsible for assessing certification bodies that adhere to the requirements set by the GSTC accreditation manuals for both industry and destinations.

Moreover, in a landmark collaboration, the GSTC partnered with the Turkish Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA) in 2022 to launch a mandatory national Sustainable Tourism Certification Program for all hotels in Türkiye. This ambitious and mandatory initiative represents the first of its kind globally. Hotels are required to achieve certification through a multi-stage process based on the GSTC Criteria, ensuring a significant and measurable improvement in the sustainability practices of Türkiye's vast hospitality sector. This program positions Türkiye as a leader in sustainable tourism and strengthens its appeal to environmentally conscious travelers.



## Recognition

After the first GSTC Industry Criteria was released, GSTC Recognition was developed to encourage and acknowledge other standards that comply with the four pillars of the GSTC Criteria. It was also in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at the time.

GSTC-Recognized means that a sustainable tourism standard has been deemed equivalent to the GSTC Criteria for sustainable tourism and is administered by a standard owner that meets GSTC requirements. This designation is made by GSTC's Assurance Panel. This means that the GSTC has verified that the standard aligns with the GSTC Criteria and that any additional clauses do not contradict GSTC Criteria requirements.

GSTC-Recognized does not mean that the owner of the standard is accredited or certified. In other words, recognition is given to a standard, not to an organization or a certification scheme.

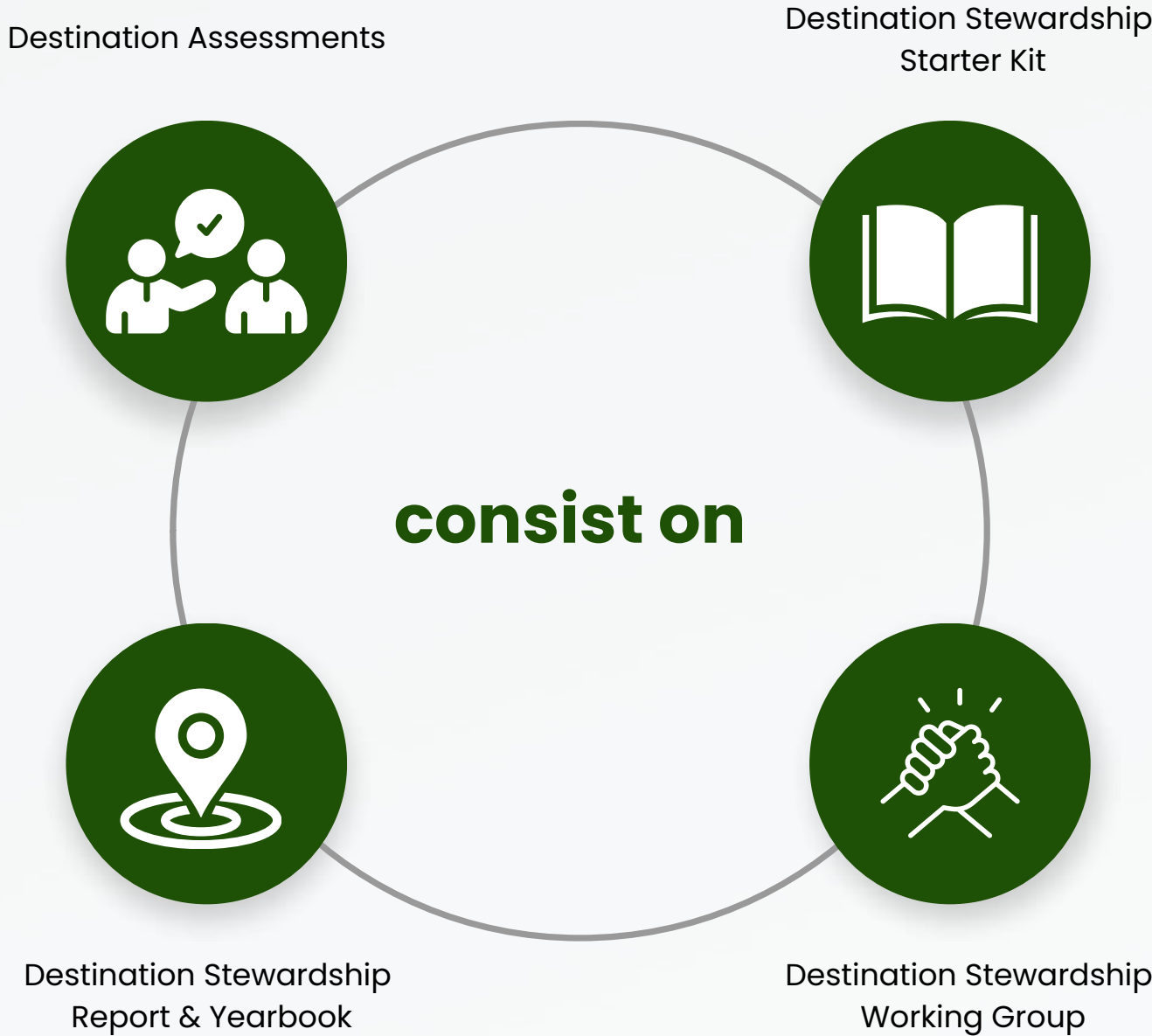
In the past few years, the number of Recognized Standards has increased.

However, misunderstanding of the GSTC Recognition status also increased. To react to the confusion in the market, GSTC announced the new policy to maintain the GSTC-Recognized status in February 2023. The new requirements do not apply to all Recognized Standard Owners, but they apply to most of the organizations in the certification business. The transition time ends on the 31st of December, 2024.

# Destination Program

Through the GSTC destinations program, we continue to foster **collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and sustainable practices** within our network of destination members, driving positive impacts for the communities and environments they serve.

The GSTC actively engages with all **82 destination members**, ensuring a minimum of two interactions per member each year. In 2023, one in-person meeting was held in Antalya with 40 attendees, and two online member meetings were conducted with 59 attendees.





## Destination Assessments

GSTC Destination Assessment is designed to **introduce the destination management team to the core elements required to develop sustainable policies and practices** by applying the GSTC Criteria to the specific destination.

The assessment process allows a destination to participate directly in the application of the GSTC Destination Criteria, to understand the destination’s sustainability status against the world’s leading standard, and to identify areas for improvement based on the criteria.

Prior to 2023, GSTC had completed 41 Destination Assessments, with the most recent in Greece (Heraklion, Athens, Corfu) and the United States of America (Sonoma County, California and Summit County, Utah).

**6**  
Destination Assessments in 2023

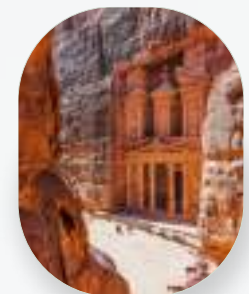
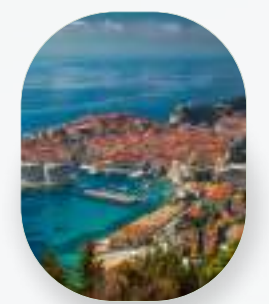
**1**  
Destination Re-Assessment in 2023

## Highlights 2023



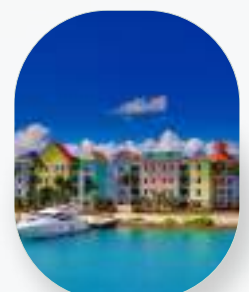
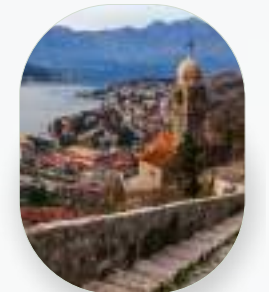
The GSTC conducted a Destination Assessment of The Islands of Tahiti, French Polynesia, from August to December 2023. The Destination Assessment was led by Dr. Mihee Kang, GSTC Global Assurance Director, with the full support of Tahiti Tourisme.

The first GSTC Destination Re-Assessment was conducted in Dubrovnik, Croatia, from February to April 2023. It focused on selected criteria in which Dubrovnik had not previously performed and scored well in the initial 2019 assessment. The Re-Assessment was led by Dr. Ioannis Pappas, GSTC Director Mediterranean Region, and commissioned by the Dubrovnik Municipality, with the support of its Tourism Board.



The GSTC conducted an assessment of current tourism activities and management approaches in Petra, Jordan, from May to August 2023, with the support of Nastadeem/EcoHotels and the Petra Development & Tourism Region Authority (PDTRA). The assessment included a 6-day onsite visit by the assessor who interviewed relevant authorities and stakeholders to verify compliance with the GSTC-D. An introductory opening workshop was also held on May 21, 2023.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), the municipality of Kotor and the port of Kotor in Montenegro cooperated to conduct a destination assessment in the historic port city of Kotor. The assessment process, which included local stakeholder consultation, helped the city identify destination management priorities, as well as potential gaps and key risks.



Regarding Destination Advisory Projects, The Bahamas partnered with GSTC in June 2020 to provide structural support and training to establish Destination Stewardship Councils (“DSCs”), following GSTC Destination Criterion A1. GSTC continued working with the Bahamas to build capacity for the launch of an additional four DSCs in 2023. The Bahamas Destination Stewardship Initiative won the Caribbean Tourism Organization’s Destination Stewardship Award.

## Destination Stewardship Starter Kit

The Destination Stewardship Starter Kit was developed by the Destination Stewardship Working Group (DSWG) to support destinations in their transition towards a stewardship approach.

It is intended for destination managers, policymakers, and other stakeholders who are involved in tourism development and management, including public and private sectors, community members, and non-governmental organizations.

It is particularly relevant for destinations where there is external pressure to manage tourism impacts better. The Destination Stewardship Starter Kit provides a practical roadmap to prioritizing governance and management strategy, creating a baseline for measurement, and setting achievable targets for sustainable tourism development.

Find the Destination Stewardship Starter Kit [here](#).



## Destination Stewardship Report & Yearbook

In partnership with the Destination Stewardship Center (DSC) and Center of Responsible Travel (CREST), one Destination Stewardship Yearbook and three Destination Stewardship Reports (DSR) were published, containing 24 insightful stories.



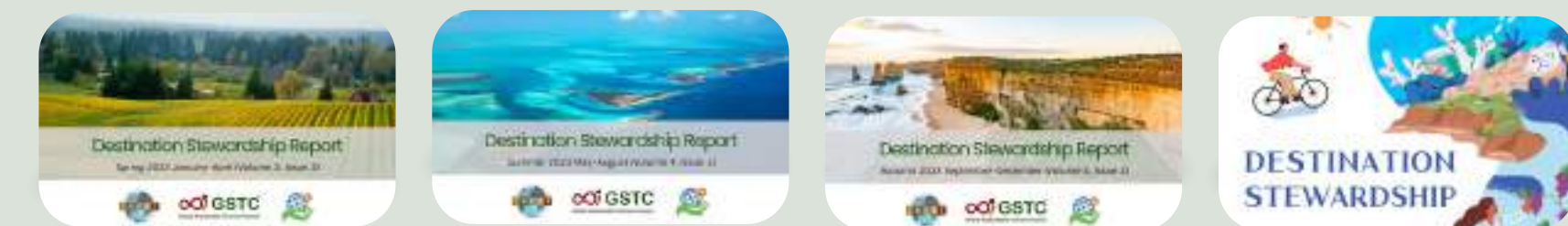
The DSR provides practical information and insights useful to anyone whose work or interests involve improving destination stewardship in a post-pandemic world. It is published every 4 months. In each issue, the DSR features destinations that have embraced effective and holistic management, best practices in sustainable tourism, and insights from tourism leaders on better destination stewardship and development.

Curated into one document, the Destination Stewardship Yearbook is a compilation of articles from the 2021–2022 DSR. It celebrates the efforts and accomplishments of the people behind these destinations. Collectively, their stories showcase how properly managed tourism can be constructive rather than destructive.

The DSR received significant online engagement. It was opened 1,460 times on Mailchimp and viewed 1,187 times on the GSTC website.

The Destination Stewardship Reports are publicly available on our website.

### Highlights 2023



[Destination Stewardship Report – Autumn 2023 \(Volume 4, Issue 2\)](#)

[Destination Stewardship Report – Summer 2023 \(Volume 4, Issue 1\)](#)

[Destination Stewardship Report – Spring 2023 \(Volume 3, Issue 3\)](#)

[Destination Stewardship Yearbook 2021-2022](#)

# ISEAL Landscape Project

The **GSTC has been an ISEAL Community Member since 2021**. Years of dedicated effort have been directed towards aligning with ISEAL's principles and applying them within the travel and tourism industry. Continuous references in GSTC's bylaws underscore this commitment.

From 2022 to 2024, ISEAL led a stream of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) initiatives for landscape and jurisdictional approaches, supporting three sustainability systems and related organizations through pilot project funding. As an ISEAL community member, GSTC received funding to measure landscape-level\* performance change within sustainable tourism. From February to November 2023, GSTC explored the effectiveness of Destination Assessments in measuring change over time by reappraising two popular tourist destinations: the City of Dubrovnik in Croatia and the Sukhothai Historic Park in Thailand.

The main objective was to identify changes at the destination between the original and re-assessments, and determine whether the changes were measured through verified and quality data. Additionally, GSTC sought to refine the data verification process and reappraise the indicators for each criterion for forthcoming destination assessments. Complementing this effort, GSTC conducted quantitative and qualitative assessments to capture the perspectives of those engaged in the region's sustainability journey.

Reassessing both regions has brought learning points and opportunities for improvements in setting up the data verification process of destination assessments. For a more data-verified process, quantitative and objective indicators have facilitated more reliable data collection, enabling direct performance measurement. These indicators have addressed challenges such as incomplete stakeholder knowledge and language barriers. However, enhancing timely and well-executed stakeholder engagement remains crucial, possibly achieved by gathering feedback immediately after destination assessments. Additionally, GSTC emphasizes implementing a monitoring tool for post-assessment to operationalize continuous improvement in destinations.

\*Landscape-level is the equivalent to 'destination-level' in the words of GSTC.

## Highlights 2023

- During 2023, the pilot project allowed GSTC to improve the data verification process for destination assessments.
- As of 2023, the GSTC also follows the ISEAL Standard-Setting Code for our GSTC Standard-setting manual, which is the process we use for our Criteria Development.
- In 2023, we also worked on the improvement plan for the same year against elements of ISEAL's Codes of Good Practice and presented the results for 2023 and our improvement plan for 2024 later in the year to ISEAL.
- In 2023, we also implemented a monitoring and evaluation system that followed the ISEAL Impacts Code of Good Practice and ISEAL members' requirements.





**05**

**Global Sustainable  
Tourism  
Conferences**

GSTC has been organizing Global Sustainable Conferences since (2015) in different locations worldwide, like Antalya (Turkiye, 2023), Sevilla (Spain, 2022), Gunsan (Korea, 2022), Azores (Portugal, 2019), and Maun (Botswana, 2018), among many others.

The **#GSTC2023 Global Sustainable Tourism Conference**, which took place on May 9th-12th in Antalya, Türkiye, brought together 350 delegates from 51 countries and hundreds of viewers who watched the live broadcast. The conference was held at the Nirvana Cosmopolitan Hotel.

Participants included international and regional tourism stakeholders involved in developing and promoting sustainable tourism, including the public sector, hotels, tour operators, academia, development agencies, NGOs, consultants, and more. International participants came from Europe, North America, Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania.

The conference themes focused on Destination Stewardship, Hotel Sustainability, Sustainable Tours, Experiences and Attractions, and Sustainable MICE.

Speakers from across the world shared insights and discussed the following topics: Port Destinations and Sustainability, Sustainable Coastal Destinations, Sustainable Rural Tourism, Hotel digitalization solutions, Sustainability in Resorts, Culture and Nature Experiences, Sustainable Attractions, Booking.com and its Travel Sustainable Program, Tour Operators' Preferred Contracting, Sustainable Tourism in the Balkan Region, and Inclusivity in Tourism.

During the Conference, a special panel discussion by the World Economic Forum addressed how sustainable tourism is a driver for resilient economies and societies. Also, several workshops were carried out for the development of the GSTC MICE Criteria and GSTC Attraction Criteria, and a Data Set workshop as well.

The **#GSTC2023** Conference implemented various sustainable practices, continuing the tradition of previous events. Control Union and Bureau Veritas sponsored carbon footprint measurement and offsetting, with TGA facilitating offsetting post-verification.

The **#GSTC2023** Conference implemented various sustainable practices, continuing the tradition of previous events. Control Union and Bureau Veritas sponsored carbon footprint measurement and offsetting, with TGA facilitating offsetting post-verification.

To reduce environmental impact, paper and plastic usage were minimized. Recyclable paper badges embedded with seeds were provided, encouraging planting after use. Lanyards were reused, and digital communication via the Event Magix GSTC Antalya 2023 app minimized printed materials. Locally sourced products and flavors were prioritized during breaks and dinners, with menus featuring reduced meat options and vegan choices, all supplied by local vendors. In stage installations, printed fabric and paper were avoided, with broadcloth utilized instead. Handmade wallets by "ÇöpMadam," crafted from waste fabrics, were included in promotional bags and will be repurposed into gifts for future events.

The conference venue, Nirvana Cosmopolitan Hotel, and Lara Barut Hotel, where the first day's dinner was hosted, were certified to Türkiye's Sustainable Tourism Program criteria. Waste from Nirvana Cosmopolitan Hotel was repurposed into artwork by Depo Sanat, and presented to conference participants, exemplifying sustainable practices in action.

As with previous GSTC Conferences, the carbon footprint of the event and the travel of all attendees were calculated and offset.

Control Union sponsored the measurement, calculation, and reporting. Bureau Veritas sponsored the verification of this measurement. After the carbon footprint measurement and verification process, the carbon amount resulting from the measurement was offset by the Türkiye Tourism Promotional and Development Agency (TGA).



## Global Conference 2023 in Antalya, Türkiye



## Global Conference 2022 in Sevilla , Spain



**06**

**GSTC**

**Commitment**





GSTC-Committed is a new program that started in late 2023. It refers to an organization's pledge to fully implement the GSTC Criteria in its policy and operational guidelines. This involves engaging with stakeholders, including staff, partners, suppliers, and members. By committing to the GSTC Criteria, an organization can plan and implement internal improvements while influencing its stakeholders and supply chain.

Gaining GSTC-Committed status confirms that an organization has adopted the GSTC Criteria with a documented plan and implementation reviewed by the GSTC. GSTC-Committed does not ensure certification, accreditation, or recognition, but only that the GSTC Criteria are implemented according to the organization's policy, plan, and operation.

The adoption of GSTC Criteria under Recognition has been in place for some time; however, the implementation was not reviewed periodically. GSTC-Committed supports motivated GSTC members in understanding and using GSTC Criteria in their organizations.

To be eligible, the member must have been a GSTC member for more than two years and continuously supported the GSTC's various activities. Prior understanding of GSTC Criteria through the GSTC Sustainable Tourism Training Program or any other formal engagements with GSTC with a record of stability shall be required.

For more information, visit the [GSTC-Committed page](#).



A woman in a white shirt is seated at a conference table, writing in a notebook. She is wearing a headset microphone. Other people are seated at the table in the background, some looking towards the camera and others looking down. The setting appears to be a professional meeting or conference. There are blue lights in the background.

**07**

**GSTC Sponsors**

**2023**



The GSTC plays a vital role in the movement for greater sustainability in travel and tourism. It is a mostly volunteer network, and all paid staff positions are filled by altruistic professional people willing to provide their expertise at well below market rates. As a major sponsor, your organization will provide essential support to GSTC's work and will also demonstrate your organization's commitment to sustainable tourism.

In 2023, GSTC Sponsors were the Türkiye Tourism Promotional and Development Agency (TGA), Visita Sevilla and Visit Sweden.



**08**

**Advancing in the  
Five Pathways of the  
Glasgow Declaration**

The GSTC joined as a signatory and supporting organization of the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism in November 2021.

The Glasgow Declaration encourages the acceleration of climate action in tourism by securing commitments to reduce emissions in tourism by at least 50% over the next decade and achieve Net Zero as soon as possible before 2050.

The signatories of the Glasgow Declaration agree on five shared pathways to ensure climate action is aligned across the tourism sector: Measure, Decarbonise, Regenerate, Collaborate, and Finance.

The Declaration was officially launched at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) 2021.

GSTC Criteria, as fundamental to our organization's work, serves as the global standard for sustainability in travel and tourism. Published early in 2016, we had integrated criteria related to climate actions. [1], we also expand the local network with tourism experts, allowing them to share ideas, and best practices, and create the possibility to collaborate. Furthermore, we extend the spirit of GSTC Criteria to our GSTC Global Conferences [2] and GSTC membership webinars [3]. These two major types of events are confined to specialized players who seek to or already apply sustainability standards in their work. We interact mostly with that community via conference calls and webinars, and we see great value in enhancing the effectiveness of all with occasional in-person gatherings.

Through the GSTC Criteria and training programs, GSTC emphasizes the importance of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and promoting sustainable practices.

Find more information in the APPENDIX 1.

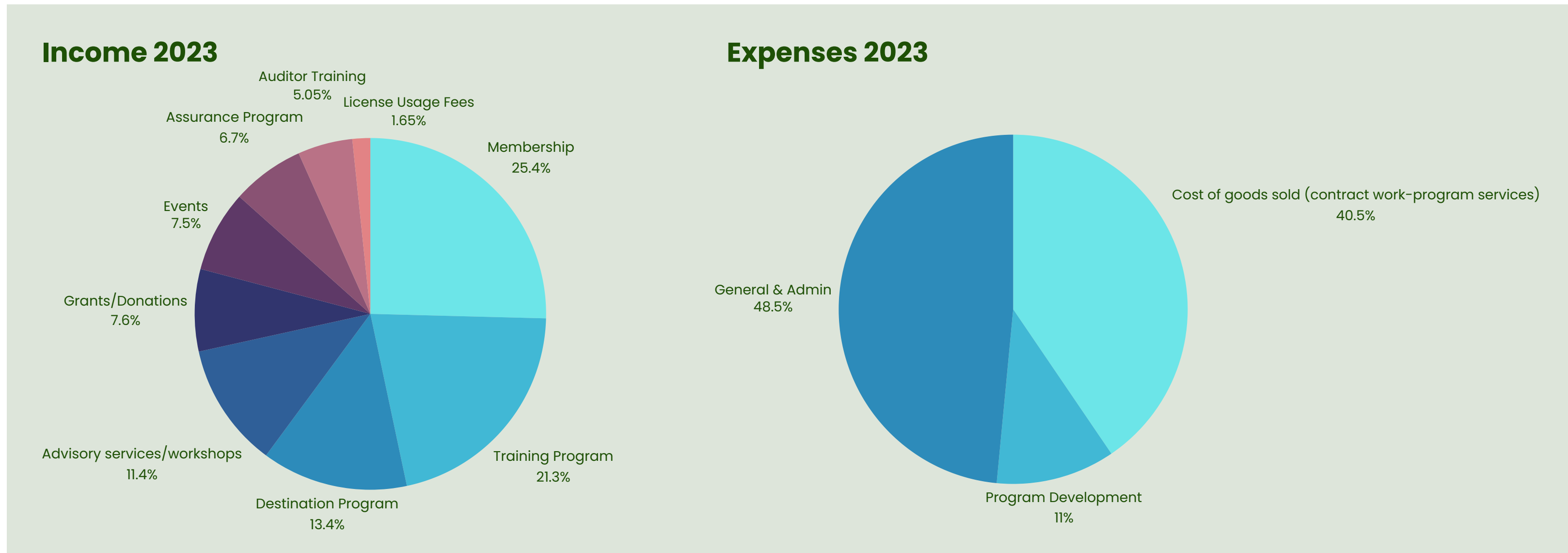




**09**

**Our Finances**

Continued revenue growth post-covid with significant growth of Membership and Training Program. The total revenue marked \$1.6million USD in 2023. Invested more heavily in human resources due to the program growth and managing Accreditation in-house operation since October 1st 2023.



Advisory Services provided by GSTC are limited to entities that are not candidates to gain certification but operate at a higher level than such entities. This includes public sector and industry programs that apply standards and marks (certification, awards, various other forms of verification and market assurance) based on GSTC's unique view of global approaches to applying standards and schemes.



**10**

**Future Directions**



As we conclude the GSTC Annual Report for 2023, we reflect on a year characterized by significant achievements and unwavering commitment to our vision and mission. Our guiding principle remains our vision of tourism realizing its potential as a force for social, cultural, and economic good while removing and avoiding any adverse environmental and social impacts.

GSTC's main core activity of developing international standards will continue, with the development and publication of the GSTC MICE Criteria and GSTC Attraction Criteria in 2024, revision of the GSTC Industry Criteria for Hotels and Tour Operations in 2024-2025, and revision of the GSTC Destination Criteria in 2025. Through that and additional core activities of, providing assurance for sustainable tourism, making destinations sustainable, promoting market access, and increasing knowledge, we have made considerable progress in promoting a more sustainable and responsible travel industry.

Looking forward, we remain steadfast in our dedication to this journey, working in close collaboration with our members, partners, and stakeholders to drive positive change. Our mission to be an agent of change in the world of sustainable travel and tourism continues to inspire our efforts to enhance the knowledge, understanding, adoption, and demand for sustainable tourism practices globally. We will persist in our pursuit of making an impact, ensuring that tourism not only meets but exceeds its potential as a force for global good. We extend our gratitude for your unwavering support and commitment to our shared objectives.

# APPENDIX

# APPENDIX 1

## 1. References to Climate Action in the GSTC Training Program

The GSTC Sustainable Tourism Training Program (STTP) emphasizes education on strategies to minimize negative impacts on the environment; it is one of the four themes related to the GSTC Criteria, the global standards for sustainability in travel and tourism. Teaching participants about the importance of reducing environmental impact, and carbon footprints, implementing energy-efficient practices, and integrating renewable energy sources into tourism operations. Covering sustainable transportation options, waste reduction techniques, and water conservation methods are essential to minimize negative impacts. These practices not only address climate change but also contribute to the overall sustainability of tourism destinations. Moreover, GSTC’s training program underscores the importance of community involvement and policy advocacy in driving environmental change, preparing tourism professionals to be leaders in fostering a more sustainable industry. In 2023 we had a total of 2,145 participants in our STTP.

GSTC, as a non-profit organization, designated employee’s workstyle virtually at an early stage— to minimize the GHG emissions from any office facilities or staff commuting.

## 2. GSTC Conferences

GSTC Conferences are hosted at different locations every year, supporting GSTC Member’s Destinations sustainability efforts and aim to engage major players in sustainability to strengthen the power of partnership via occasional in-person meetings.

The conferences facilitate meaningful exchanges between practitioners from both the public and private sectors in creating or improving collaborative approaches to making their travel services more sustainable. We are confident that those goals are largely met and will have impacts that cascade out widely relative to the numbers of people and carbon emitted from operating a global conference.

As we preach about slow travel (less frequent but longer stays and choosing low-carbon transport), many of our members extend their stay at the destination before and after the conference to appreciate the destination, to provide more personal benefit to the amount of carbon emitted during their flights, and to provide economic support to the residents.

We operate green conferences with paper and string name badges, beef-free menus and vegetarian options as the default, limited food waste (a major contributor to GHG), no single-use plastic, transport by foot or bus, and more. Our conferences’ hosts fund carbon-offsetting activities minimizing that way the environmental impact that our Global Conferences may cause due to business travel.

## 3. References to Climate Action in GSTC Webinars (2022 and 2023)

Since becoming a supporting organization of the Glasgow Declaration, we have included several webinars that directly focus on climate action or touch on this issue in their presentations:

Date	Topic
2023	
30th November 2023	Sustainable Supplies – Action for a Sustainable Future Building a sustainable supply chain at Metaxa Hospitality Group
22nd November 2023	visitBerlin Unleash the Green Potential: Mastering Sustainable Event Planning and Turning SDGs into Practice
16th November 2023	How can a destination engage with its ecosystem towards sustainability?
8th November 2023	Sharing Best Practices: Unveiling the South Tyrol Sustainability Seal – based upon the GSTC Criteria.
26th September 2023	Sonoma County’s Destination Stewardship and Resiliency Master Plan
14th September 2023	Legambiente: Economic alternatives in winter tourism destinations
5th September 2023	Ecomuseos: escenarios para la preservación de tradiciones locales y la naturaleza (Ecomuseums: Venues for the Preservation of Local Traditions and Nature)
24th August 2023	Norway’s “Sustainable Destination”: a program designed for sustainable destination development.
9th August 2023	Open webinar, Criterios GSTC: Sustentabilidad aplicada en el valor de mi negocio turístico. (GSTC Criteria – Sustainability Applied to the Value of My Tourism Business)
20th July 2023	Food Waste Prevention: Sustainable Solutions for Cost Saving and Environmental Impact
20th April 2023	Tricolage’s Journey to Certification as a Sustainable Tour Operator
6th April 2023	Turning Your Linear Business Model to Circular
7th March 2023	Trees4Travel: Carbon Management Technology to Measure and Reduce Emissions Impact
9th February 2023	Regenerative Vanua: Supporting resilient communities and livelihoods through climate-smart regenerative agritourism
25th January 2023	Park City’s Sustainable Tourism Plan
17th January 2023	Advantage: Balkans. “Not Developed, but Preserved” The current state of sustainable tourism in the Balkans
2022	
23rd November 2022	Sustainable destination management through digitization
9th November 2022	Turismo de Portugal: +Sustainable Tourism Plan 20-23
18th October 2022	Current State of Sustainable Tourism in Central Asia
20th September 2022	Sustainability Orientation at GSTC Assessed Destinations
24th August 2022	GSTC in India: Adopting the Sustainability Agenda in the Travel & Tourism Marketplace
10th August 2022	Sustainable Tourism in Japan
20th July 2022	PATA Tourism Destination Resilience (TDR)
16th February 2022	Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism

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