



Global Sustainable Tourism Council



**A GUIDE FOR TOUR OPERATORS
ON HOW TO BECOME CERTIFIED**



Becoming Certified as a Sustainable Tour Operator

What is the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)?

The **Global Sustainable Tourism Council** establishes and manages global sustainable standards, known as the **GSTC Criteria**. It also provides an assurance framework for sustainable tourism certification.

It was formed in 2007 as a coalition of 32 partners, initiated by the Rainforest Alliance, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Foundation (UN Foundation), and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The purpose was to foster an increased understanding of sustainable tourism practices and the adoption of universal sustainable tourism principles.

There are two sets: **GSTC Destination Criteria** for public policy-makers and destination managers, and **GSTC Industry Criteria** for hotels and tour operators. They are the result of a worldwide effort to develop a common language about sustainability in tourism. They are arranged in four pillars: (A) Sustainable management; (B) Socioeconomic impacts; (C) Cultural impacts; and (D) Environmental impacts.

Currently, the **GSTC Mice Criteria** and **GSTC Attractions Criteria** are under development. The **GSTC Criteria** form the foundation Accreditation for Certification Bodies that certify hotels/accommodations, tour operators/transport providers, and destinations as having sustainable policies and practices in place.

The GSTC is an independent and neutral organization, legally registered in the USA as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that represents a diverse and global membership, including national and provincial governments, leading travel companies, hotels, tour operators, NGOs, individuals and communities – all striving to achieve best practices in sustainable tourism.

GSTC does NOT certify anything. GSTC provides Accreditation to Certification Bodies. Certification and Accreditation are different things.

Becoming Certified as a Sustainable Tour Operator

Increasingly, travelers are seeking confirmation that sustainability practices are in place. Also, travel companies are looking for a product that is not only certified sustainable but certified sustainable by a Certification Body that is GSTC Accredited.

Why GSTC-Accredited?

Being certified by an Accredited Certification Body means that your tourism product or service complies with the highest social and environmental standards on the market.

Businesses certified by a GSTC-Accredited Certification Body, meeting all the GSTC Criteria (or a GSTC-Recognized Standard), have the highest level of assurance* and credibility available.

With an accredited certification, customers and buyers are assured that the business was certified in a credibly verified procedure in a transparent, impartial, and competent manner.

* General assurance levels:



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How to get started?

1. Compare and Select a Certification Body (CB) from our website or “Certification Schemes” that are committed to partnering exclusively with Accredited Certification Bodies.

www.gstcouncil.org/certification/become-certified-tour-operator

2. Register and/or Contract with a Certification Body. The CB may require tour operators to officially register, fill out an application and pay a one-time fee. Some may require tour operators to enter into a contract with the CB. Prior to starting the certification process, some offer the option to conduct a short self-evaluation to determine if certification is worth the time, money and effort. Costs may be associated with this step.

3. Submit Application/Documentary Evidence to the Certification Body. The length of this process can vary depending on the extent of the tour operator’s documented policies.

4. Onsite Audit. The CB will visit the tour operator’s office to see how its policies are put into action.

5. Certification issued. After working with a CB towards achieving full GSTC requirements compliance, your operation will receive its Certification by an Accredited CB. Tour operators should check with the CB to see when the certification renewal process should begin. It generally is between 4-6 weeks prior to the expiration of certification.

All the Certification Bodies listed on our website have gained Accreditation to certify Tour Operators as sustainable.

Becoming Certified as a Sustainable Tour Operator

My Tour Operator is certified

Tour Operators should proudly display information regarding their certificate and the certification body that issued it. Doing so informs your stakeholders — from customers to ownership and to your supply chain — that your business is operated with sound management that looks to the future and not merely at today.

Being certified by an Accredited Certification Body (CB) means that your operations comply with the highest social and environmental standards on the market.

Those businesses certified by a GSTC-Accredited Certification Body can display a unique GSTC logo with a traceable code




Increasingly, travel companies are looking for a product that is not only certified sustainable but certified sustainable by a certification program that is GSTC Accredited.

For example, **Royal Caribbean Cruises** give preferential buying treatment, when feasible, to operators of shore excursions that are certified by a GSTC-Accredited Certification Body.

MSC Cruises follow a similar model. Other travel providers give preferential buying treatment to suppliers that are certified sustainable.





Question? Contact us:
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