SUSTAINABLE TOURISM FOR DESTINATIONS:
INSIGHTS FROM THE GSTC DESTINATION CRITERIA 2.0 FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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INTRODUCTION

Sustainable Tourism is a complicated and complex set of activities. It is complex because there are many people and organizations working, sometimes independently, toward the corresponding goal. It is complicated because there are many activities that must be undertaken. Even so, the benefits of sustainable tourism in destination communities are great. Sustainable tourism is a set of activities designed to increase the benefits and reduce the negative impacts of tourism. As destination communities grapple with tourism - the good and the bad - guidance on how to implement sustainable tourism has never been more important.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), the leading organization on sustainable tourism accreditation, recently released their Destination Criteria 2.0 to provide a common framework for examining destination level sustainable tourism certification. The GSTC criteria are organized in four sections: Sustainable Management, Socio-economic sustainability, cultural sustainability, and environmental sustainability. With these 4 sections there are 38 criteria and 174 indicators that destinations may use to assess their progress on achieving the criteria.

This report will examine the GSTC criteria from a different perspective. By looking at the criteria through a different lens, we believe we can assist leaders within destinations considering the actions required to achieve sustainable tourism with the destination. In this document, the Destination Criteria have been divided into five categories:
- Getting the Team Together,
- Planning for Sustainable Tourism in Destinations,
- Policy Framework for Sustainable Tourism,
- Programs that Support Sustainable Tourism in Destinations and
- Performance Management to Achieve Sustainable Tourism.

Each of these categories are closely integrated and it is fair to recognize that most activities require planning, policy support, programs incorporating a variety of activities, and performance management. Nevertheless, examining each category as it is presented in the criteria provides a new perspective on sustainable tourism in destinations.

Destination Communities are complex systems. In this report, we use the term "Destination" without designating a specific actor. It is important to note that we are not implying that either the Destination Stewardship Organization (A1) or the local Destination Marketing/Management Organization (DMO) is the responsible party.

GETTING THE TEAM TOGETHER

Sustainable tourism in destinations requires a team of people and organization working towards shared goals. Some of the core principles on which sustainable tourism is developed are engagement, cooperation and collaboration. While it must be expected that sustainable tourism activities will involve a large number of stakeholders, the criteria does require the development of an organization to be responsible for destination management.

Destination Stewardship Organization [1]

Establish a designated tourism organization that has responsibility in the destination. The group will have:
- Clear, communicated, and documented responsibilities and authority.
- The group has the capability for management of socio-economic, cultural and environmental issues.
- The group is adequately funded and staffed.
- The organization collaborates effectively with other organizations supporting sustainable tourism in the destination.

It is important to recognize that this organization is expected to undertake all the activities outlined in this report.

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[1] A1: Destination Management Responsibility

PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN DESTINATIONS

The purpose is achieving the benefits of sustainable tourism in a destination based on the careful analysis of the unique circumstances in the destination and engagement with key stakeholders.

Destination Management Strategy and Action Plan [2]

The GSTC criteria require the development of a Destination Management Strategy designed to support the long-term sustainability of the destination. The long-term strategy - and the actions plans to achieve it - should:
- be suited to the scale of the destination
- developed with stakeholders and publicly available
- based on sustainability principles and
- aligned with other sustainability plans in the community.

GSTC criteria encourage destinations to assess their tourism assets - environmental, cultural, social - as a foundation for the planning process. Planning should be collaborative, engaging a range of stakeholders. Planning should also consider broader socio-economic, cultural and environmental issues.

The GSTC criteria also highlight a number of components of sustainable destination management that require dedicated planning. These plans may be integrated into the destination management strategy or stand-alone plans, aligned with the destination management strategy.

The GSTC criteria suggest that each destination should have plans in place to:
- Protect culture and heritage
- Protect the environment
- Mitigate and adapt to climate change.[3] [4]
- Encourage Tourism Businesses to adopt Sustainable Tourism Practices
- Visitor Management
- Risk and Crisis Management
- Safety and Security Plans[5]
- Workforce Development

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[2] A2: Destination Management Strategy
[3] A10: Climate Change Adaptation
[4] D10: GHG emissions and Climate Change Mitigation
[5] A11: Risk and Crisis Management

POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN DESTINATIONS

Destinations require a policy framework to support sustainable tourism practices. Destinations must implement policies to facilitate sustainable development, protect the environment, socio-cultural impacts and economic factors. Policies must include references to international, national, and local laws.

Building and Development Policies[6]

Sustainable destination communities should have laws, policies and regulations that ensure:
- Environmental, social, and economic impact assessment before development is approved
- Sustainable Land use practices
- Sustainable Design and construction standards for new buildings
- Design and construction of buildings to meet community established aesthetic standards
- Building and development policies to protect natural and cultural resources.

Environmental Policies

Sustainable Destination Communities should have laws, guidelines and/or regulations that encourage tourism related businesses to protect the environment by:
- Practicing energy conservation
- Reducing fossil fuel use
- Increasing use of renewables
- Encouraging wastewater reduction
- Encouraging water conservation
- Requiring wastewater management including siting, maintenance and monitoring of discharge
- Minimizing light and noise pollution.

In addition, destinations should have in place laws or regulations that govern interaction with wildlife and align with international laws and standards[7].

Cultural and Heritage Policies [8]

Sustainable tourism destinations will have policies in place to protect cultural assets including built heritage and cultural landscapes. The destination will also have policies to governing the sale, display of archaeological artefacts[9].

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[6] A9: Planning Regulation and Development Control
[7] D3: Wildlife Interaction
[8] C1: Protection of Cultural Assets
[9] C2: Cultural Artefacts

Safety and Security Policies [10]

Sustainable destination communities should have laws, policies and regulations that ensure the well being of visitors in the destination. These policies should address not only crime but safety and hygiene standards.

Eliminating Exploitation and Discrimination [11]

Sustainable destination communities should have laws, policies and regulations that ensure:
- Equal employment opportunities for all, including women, youth, minorities and other vulnerable populations
- Fair wages for all, including women, youth, minorities and other vulnerable populations
- Occupational health and safety rules for tourism businesses
- Elimination of commercial, sexual or other types of exploitation of anyone, particularly women, youth, minorities and other vulnerable populations

Accessibility and Inclusion[12]

Sustainable destination communities should have laws, policies and regulations that ensure:
- Access to tourist sites and facilities for individuals with disabilities and others with specific access requirements.
- Public access by local community members

Property and User Rights Policies[13]

Sustainable destination communities should have laws, policies and regulations that ensure:
- Established property rights are acknowledged
- Property acquisition rights that consider indigenous rights
- Intellectual property rights of individuals and communities[14]
- Local community Access to natural and cultural sites

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[10] B7: Safety and Security
[11] B5: Preventing Exploitation and Discrimination
[12] B8: Access for All
[13] B6: Property and User Rights, C4: Traditional Access
[14] C5: Intellectual Property

PROGRAMS AND SYSTEMS TO ENSURE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Building a Sustainable Tourism "Ecosystem" in the destination[15]

The destination will have a program to encourage the adoption of sustainability practices within the tourism industry. Tourism-related businesses should be given advice and support to operate more sustainably. Examples include:
- Support local businesses and fair-trade operations and connect them with the tourism market
- Inform, educate and train locals and residents regarding the tourism industry
- Visitors be informed about sustainable practices and issues relevant to the destination
- Manage visitor volumes, activities, and patterns of tourists

Engagement Programs

A core principle of sustainable tourism development is engagement. Engagement programs should encourage collaborating and cooperating in the sustainable management of the tourist industry, and foster inclusion and involvement. The GSTC criteria requires programs that engage with:
- tourism businesses
- residents [16]
- visitors [17]

One of the fundamental components of sustainable tourism is that stakeholders have a role in determining how tourism is developed within the destination community.

Visitor Management Systems [18]

Sustainable tourism development includes managing the volume of visitors and their activities. The GSTC requires destinations to limit tourism numbers and to spread visitation to balance the needs of the:
- local economy
- local community
- cultural heritage
- environment

In addition to requiring visitor management in the destination as a whole, the GSTC criteria highlight the need for visitor management at cultural sites and natural sites.

Environmental Programs

Protecting the environment of destination communities is a critical element of sustainable tourism management. Sustainable destination communities should programs that:

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[15] A4: Enterprise engagement and sustainability standards
[16] A5: Resident Engagement and Feedback.
[17] A6: Visitor Engagement and Feedback.
[18] A8: Managing Visitor Volumes and Activities, C6: Visitor Management at Cultural Sites, D2: Visitor management   at natural sites.

- Protection of Natural Sites and Sensitive Environments [19]
- Protect Biodiversity, reduce species exploitation and encourage animal welfare[20].
- Minimizing Light and Noise Pollution [21]
- Encourage the adoption Low Impact Transport[22]

Environmental Resource Management Programs

Sustainable destination communities should have programs that support sustainable use of natural resources. Such programs include:
- Energy conservation[23]
- Water stewardship and Quality[24]:
- Waste Management programs [25]
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation[26]:

Cultural and Heritage Programs

Sustainable destination communities should have programs that recognize the importance of culture and heritage in the destination. These programs include:
- Visitor management at cultural sites that takes into account the characteristics, capacity, and sensitivity of the site and reduces adverse impacts[27].
- Rehabilitation and conservation of culture assets
- Communication of cultural heritage sites, celebration experiences (events, products, etc.) and their significance and importance
- Guidelines and behaviors for visitors at heritage sites and events
- Code of conduct and practices for tour operators/guides at heritage sites and events
- Proper training of operators and guides
- programs supporting the celebration of intangible cultural heritage including local traditions, arts, music, language, gastronomy and other aspects of local identity.[28]

Culturally and Environmentally Appropriate Promotion and Information [29]

The effective promotion of destinations is critical to achieve the benefits of sustainable development. Marketing and advertisements released should have accurate information about the destination, its products and services and sustainability claims. Promotional materials

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[19] D1: Protection of the Environment
[20] D4: Species Exploitation and Animal Welfare
[21] D12: Light and Noise Pollution
[22] D11: Low Impact Transport.
[23] D5: Energy Conservation
[24] D6: Water Stewardship, D7: Water Quality, D8: Wastewater
[25] D9: Solid Waste
[26] A10: Climate Change Program
[27] C6: Visitor Management at Cultural Sites
[28] C3: Intangible Heritage
[29] A7: Promotion and Information, C7: Site Interpretation

should be developed in consultation with local communities, environmental and cultural bodies to ensure proper content and delivery of information. Marketing messages should treat local communities and natural and cultural assets with respect.

Programs that ensure interpretation at cultural sites informs visitors of the significance of the sites they are visiting and is presented in a culturally appropriate manner.

Decent Work and Career Opportunities- Workforce Development Programs [30]

Destinations must encourage and support career opportunities and training possibilities within their tourism sector for the local community. Employment should include:
- provide training and skill courses to enable locals to pursue career opportunities.
- ensure equal opportunity for all including women, young people, minorities and people with disabilities
- ensure safe and secure working conditions
- provide decent and fair living wage

Fair Trade and Local Business Support programs [31]

A core principle of sustainable tourism is retaining the revenue within the local economy. Programs should promote the purchases of local products based on fair trade principles
- Action to encourage and assist local tourism enterprises and visitors to purchase goods and services locally
- Advice and financial guidance be provided to local tourism enterprises for pricing and marketing

Support for the Community [32]

Destinations should encourage and facilitate support for local communities and sustainable initiatives through the local tourism enterprises. This can include encouraging tourism businesses to support local social and/or environmental issues. It can also be achieved through activating visitors to address local issues. One example of such programs is volunteer programs through the tourism industry, such as "voluntourism" trips.

Risk Management and Crisis Response Program [33]

Risk management and crisis management programs are critical for sustainability in destination communities. Destinations face a variety of risk factors including natural disasters, terrorism, public health issues, and others unique to their location. Sustainable Destination communities should have programs to:
- Identify and mitigate risks.
- Crisis response programs including communication protocols and training for stakeholders, including tourism businesses, locals and visitors.

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[30] B2: Decent Work and Career Opportunities
[31] B3: Supporting Local Entrepreneurs and Fair Trade
[32] B4: Support for Community
[33] A11: Risk Management

Safety and Security [34]

The destination will have a program to ensure the safety needs of visitors and residents by developing systems that monitor, prevent, publicly report, and respond to any crime, safety and health hazards.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Measuring progress is critical to achieve sustainability goals. All the activities discussed in the criteria should be monitored, and action taken if goals aren't being achieved. It is important to recognize that each plan, policy, and program requires specific tracking and performance metrics. In some cases, destination level performance will be the aggregate of multiple stakeholders performance and programs will need to be implemented to gather data.

The GSTC Destination criteria provide a comprehensive set of indicators to support the implementation of sustainable tourism programs.

Monitoring Progress towards Sustainable Tourism

The GSTC criteria encourage monitoring socio-economic, cultural and environmental issues and impacts arising from tourism[35]. The best programs will regularly monitor key indicators, evaluate progress and report it to stakeholders and the community.

Measuring the socio - economic contribution of tourism [36]

Destinations should have in place metrics that measure the direct and indirect impacts of tourism. The criteria suggests a range of measures including:
- visitor numbers
- visitor expenditure
- employment
- investment
- evidence of distribution of economic benefits

Safety and Security [37]

Destinations have a system to monitor crime, safety and health hazards associated with visitors and residents.

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[34] B7: Safety and Security
[35] A3: Monitoring and Reporting
[36] B1: Measuring the Economic Contribution of Tourism
[37] B7: Safety and Security

Environmental Performance Measures

Sustainable Destinations communities should have systems in place to monitor key environmental indicators including:
- Water stewardships: monitoring of sources and volume used for tourism purposes and recorded effect on local communities and ecosystems
- Energy consumption
- Data of monitoring and mitigation actions to GHG emissions
- Data on visitor use of alternative transport modes for more sustainable means
- Identification and monitoring of potential sources of pollution related to tourism

Cultural and Heritage Performance Measures

Sustainable Destinations communities should have systems in place to monitor key socio-cultural indicators including:
- Evaluating and indicating level of vulnerability of cultural assets, artefacts and heritage
- Monitoring to ensure the presentation, replication and interpretation of culture ceremonies and traditions are respectful, appropriate, authentic, accepted and approved by local and indigenous communities
- Visitor flows and impact on cultural sites

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council [38] manages the GSTC Criteria, global standards for sustainable travel and tourism. It is the accreditation body for sustainable tourism certification bodies. In 2019, GSTC released Version 2.0 of the GSTC Destination Criteria.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM & RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

The Sustainable Tourism and Responsible Travel Lab is an initiative of the Purdue Tourism and Hospitality Research Center Purdue University's School of Hospitality. For more information on sustainable tourism visit our website: www.sustainabletourismandresponsibletravel.com

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[38] GSTC Logo used with permission