Green Destinations Standard V2

Recognised by GSTC

February 2021

Introduction

The **Green Destinations Standard** is a tool to measure, monitor and improve the sustainability profile of destinations and regions. Destinations worldwide can adapt their sustainability management system and actions to the requirements the Green Destinations standard and obtain recognition of their efforts.

The 1st version of the Green Destinations Standard (2016) originates from the QualityCoast standard (launched 2010) and was inspired by internationally recognised standards such as ETIS, ISO 14001, EMAS and the Global Reporting Initiative. After having achieved "Recognised" status by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) in 2016; during 2020 the GD Standard was updated based on revised GSTC Destination Criteria (V2) and public stakeholder consultation.

The GD standard development, application, and GSTC recognition process is overseen by the Green Destinations Standards Committee – a group of representatives, auditors and other members of the Green Destinations Partnership.

Scope

The geographic scope of the standard is global: it can be applied to any destination. The conceptual scope of the standard refers to the tourism sector of a destination. Hence, the impacts addressed, and stakeholders involved, should be related to the tourism sector.

However, the standard only assesses the destination and the entity managing the destination. Other organisations and companies such as hotels and tour operators in the destination are not part of the scope of the standard and therefore not entitled to use the logo / name of any recognition provided based upon the GD Standard.

Nevertheless, the standard may be applicable to 'Private Destinations': privately owned islands, resorts, game reserves, eco-lodges, etc. which include a valuable area or asset. These enterprises are considered generally as 'destinations'. As general guidelines; Private Destinations should:

- Include tourism facilities on the premises, accommodation, or a resident community
- Include, or manage & control a considerable area or asset which offers ecological, natural, cultural, geological, or landscape values
- Include resident local communities in their supply chain or operations

Application

The Green Destinations Standard is applied for Certification and (pre-certification) Award programs. Current recognitions that apply the standard are:

Certification

- Green Destinations Certified
- Advanced Ecotourism Certification (by Ecotourism Australia)

Pre-certification Awards

- Green Destinations Awards
- QualityCoast Awards
- Slovenia Green (www.slovenia-green.si)
- Nature & Ecotourism Certification (by Ecotourism Australia)

More information about Awards and Certification in our [Program Brochure](). The Award & Certification Programs are operated byt Green Destinations, partners and representatives. Find your nearest GD Representative [here]().

Turn-key solution

The online assessment & reporting system [www.greendestinations.eu]() is set up in such a way that countries, regions and existing or new sustainability certification or development programs can use the Green Destinations standard and its reporting system, branded as their 'own' scheme ('powered by Green Destinations'). See as example [www.slovenia-green.si](). [Contact us]() to discuss how the Standard and online Assessment & Reporting System could benefit your region or organisation.

Organisation and ownership

The Green Destinations standard is owned by the Green Destinations Foundation. The **Green Destinations Standards Committe** is overseeing the Standard's development and revision procedures and decides on developing optional additional modules. The Standards Committee consists of individual experts from the global GD Partnership.

Standard review and revision

The Green Destinations Standard criteria review and revision processes described below are designed to be in line with the requirements and provisions of GSTC Recognised Manual Version 5.0 and other relevant international standard requirements.

Criteria review process

The Green Destinations Standard shall be reviewed on a periodic basis for continued relevance effectiveness in meeting its stated objectives and compliance with any update of the GSTC benchmark criteria for destinations. If necessary, the Standard shall be revised in a timely manner. A review process shall occur at least every five years. The date of any revisions or reaffirmations of the Standard shall be noted in the Standard.

Revision process

The secretariat makes a proposal for the revision of the standards. Such proposal will consider:

- Feedback from certified destinations.
- Feedback from relevant stakeholder groups.
- Feedback from expert organizations.
- Feedback from auditors.
- The secretariat's own observations.
- Newly developed tools (which make implementation more practical / feasible).
- Adaptations of international standards and guidelines on which the Green Destinations standard is based upon (e.g. GSTC).
- Recommendations from the Standards Committee

The revised draft standard will then be submitted for consultation to key stakeholders and further adapted. The final proposal is endorsed by the Green Destinations Standards Committee.

The revisions will be communicated to any bodies that have recognized the standard, such as the Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

Compliance with the new standard

The Green Destinations Secretariat may establish the period within which all destinations will have to comply with the new standard. This period may differ for the various criteria. The minimum period is however six months. The maximum period is 2 years.

Nature of the standard

The Green Destinations Standard V2 consists of 84 criteria (75 mandatory, 9 optional), covering the following 6 main themes:

1. Destination Management
2. Nature & Scenery
3. Environment & Climate
4. Culture & Tradition
5. Social Well-being
6. Business & Communication

The standard has several 'special' criteria:

- **30 "Core Criteria"** considerd essential for achieving basic sustainability performance; used for the annual Top 100 competition.
- **9 "Optional" criteria:** these criteria are not mandatory according to the GSTC Destination Criteria; but we consider them highly recommendable for achieving destination sustainability
- **9 "Not Applicable" criteria:** these criteria may under specific conditions be considered as 'not applicable' to certain destinations.

In order to be fully alligned with the Green Destinations standard, destinations should comply with every criterion except those marked 'Optional' or in case 'Not Applicable' is justified.

Countries or programs that apply the standard may decide to recognise the efforts of destinations that party comply with the standard, by attributing for example Awards to certain levels of compliance.

Details of the standard can be found in Annex I.

The Green Destinations Standards Committee

Leiden, May 2021

Green Destinations Standard V2 (2021)

Type:	
C15:	Primary core criteria (15)
C30:	Secondary core criteria (+15)
O:	Optional criterion
N/A:	'Not Applicable' possible

Type	#	Name	Description
Theme 1: Destination Management			
Commitment & Organisation			
C15	1.1	Sustainable destination coordinator	A person has been assigned the responsibility and authority for the adequate implementation and reporting of sustainable destination management.
	1.2	Management structure	An adequately funded organisation or management structure is responsible for coordinating and promoting sustainable tourism development and management. It works with a range of bodies in delivering destination management and follows principles of sustainability and transparency in its operations and transactions.
	1.3	Trained coordinator/ team	The person or team responsible for destination development and management is sufficiently staffed and adequately trained on and/or experienced in sustainability issues.
	1.4	Stakeholder involvement	The destination management organisation or structure involves civil society and the private and public sector in sustainable destination management.
Planning & Development			
C15	1.5	Inventory of destination assets	The destination has an inventory of its tourism-oriented assets and attractions including natural and cultural sites.
	1.6	Tourism Impact Assessment	The destination has conducted a Tourism Impact Assessment analysing tourism impacts and risks on the natural, cultural and socio-economic environment and on its destination assets.
C15	1.7	Destination Management Policy or Strategy	The destination has an up-to-date, publicly available, multi-year destination management policy or strategy addressing environmental, social, cultural and economic issues. The policy is suited to the scale of the destination, developed with stakeholder engagement and is based on sustainability principles. It relates to and influences wider sustainable development policy and action in the destination.
	1.8	Tourism Action Plan	The destination has developed with stakeholder engagement and is implementing a publicly available multi-year tourism action plan. The plan is suited to the scale of the destination, based on sustainability principles and includes targets, actions, measures, responsibilities and time planning.
	1.9	Transparency and enforcement	The development of destination planning is conducted in close inclusive consultation with stakeholders and the public. Planning regulations and decisions are publicly communicated and enforced.
Visitor Management			
	1.10	Visitor monitoring	The characteristics, volume, activities, and preferences of visitors are monitored and publicly reported.
	1.11	Visitor satisfaction	Visitor satisfaction with the quality and sustainability of the destination experience is being monitored and publicly reported on. If necessary, action is taken in response.

C30	1.12	Managing visitor pressure	The destination has a system for visitor management which is regularly reviewed. Action is taken to manage the volume and activities of visitors, and to reduce or increase them as necessary at certain times and in certain locations, taking into account and balancing the needs of the local economy, community, cultures and environment.
	1.13	Visitor management for destination assets	Adequate management of visitors and visitor flows is applied to optimise tourism impacts within and around the natural and socio-cultural assets of the destination. The management system refers to the characteristics, capacity and sensitivity of these assets.
C30	1.14	Visitor behaviour at sensitive sites	Guidelines for appropriate visitor behaviour at cultural events and at cultural and natural sensitive sites are developed and made available to visitors, tour guides and tour operators before and at the time of the visit.
Monitoring & Reporting			
	1.15	Sustainability Indicators & Monitoring	Relevant destination sustainability indicators including environmental, economic, social and cultural issues and impacts from tourism are regularly monitored and responded to. The monitoring system is periodically reviewed.
	1.16	Review and evaluation	The objectives and targets of the policy and action plan and the outcome of their implementation are regularly monitored and evaluated
	1.17	Public Sustainability Reporting	The key sustainability results are reported to the public at least every two years and are available on the destination's public website.
O	1.18	Complaints against compliance	The destination has a system to deal with internal and external complaints against compliance with the Green Destinations criteria. Complaints are recorded and effective corrective actions are taken to prevent recurrence.
Legal & Ethical Compliance			
O	1.19	Ethical code & corruption	The destination has in place and is implementing an ethical code, including guidelines against corruption and bribery and for whistle-blower protection, for its management and other staff.
O	1.20	Fair competition and procurement	The destination complies with all relevant laws for public procurement and rewards contracts on the basis of quality, price and sustainability aspects.
Theme 2: Nature & Scenery			
Nature & Conservation			
C30	2.1	Nature conservation	The destination has a system to conserve ecosystems, habitats and species.
C15	2.2	Tourism impacts on nature	The destination measures and monitors the impact of tourism on the natural environment. Identified impacts of tourism on nature are adequately responded to.
O	2.3	Natural resource protection	The protection of natural resources is adequately organised and enforced, and unsustainable use is restricted.
	2.4	Invasive alien species	The introduction and spread of invasive alien species is adequately addressed and prevented.
C15 O	2.5	Landscape & Scenery	Natural and rural scenic views are protected; landscape degradation and urban sprawl into scenic landscapes is effectively avoided.
Nature & Animal Experience			
	2.6	Wildlife protection	Conservation of species (animals, plants and all living organisms) is effectively regulated in order to comply with local and national regulations and international conventions and agreements. This includes harvesting, capture, trade, display and sale of wildlife species and their products, ensuring their protection and sustainable management.

N/A	2.7	Nature & wildlife interactions	The destination has a system to ensure compliance with local, national, and international laws and standards for wildlife interactions. Interactions with free roaming wildlife, taking into account cumulative impacts, are non-invasive and responsibly managed to avoid adverse impacts on the animals concerned and on the viability and behaviour of populations in the wild.
C30	2.8	Captive animal welfare	The destination has a system to ensure compliance with local, national, and international laws and standards for animal welfare. Wild animals can only be bred or held captive, by authorized and suitably equipped persons and for properly regulated activities. The housing, care and handling of all wild and domestic animals meets the highest standards of animal welfare and is effectively controlled

Theme 3: Environment & Climate			
Land Use & Pollution			
C30	3.1	Noise	Noise is adequately regulated and minimised; tourism enterprises and visitors are encouraged to minimise noise.
C30	3.2	Light pollution	Impacts of light pollution to wildlife, resident and visitor experience are adequately addressed. Tourism enterprises and visitors are encouraged to minimise light pollution'.
	3.3	Land use & planning	The destination has spatial planning guidelines, regulations and/or policies that require an environmental, economic and socio-cultural impact assessment and that control the location and nature of development and optimise the impacts during planning, design, construction and demolition.
Water Management			
	3.4	Water sourcing	The destination's water resources and usage are adequately managed and monitored. Water risks are assessed and documented. If water risks exist, water stewardship goals are identified and actively pursued with enterprises, to ensure that water use by tourism does not jeopardise the water needs of local communities and ecosystems.
O	3.5	Water consumption reduction	Quantitative goals are set to reduce water consumption within the destination and a strategy with water saving measures is implemented.
	3.6	Water quality monitoring & response	Water quality for drinking, recreation and ecological purposes is adequately monitored, the results are publicly available and there is a system to respond in a timely manner to water quality issues.
C30	3.7	Wastewater treatment	The destination has clear and enforced guidelines in place for the siting, maintenance and testing of discharge from septic tanks and wastewater treatment systems. The destination ensures that wastes are properly treated and reused or released safely without adverse impacts on the local population and the environment.
Waste & Recycling			
C15	3.8	Solid waste reduction	Quantitative goals to reduce solid waste are set, and adequately monitored and reported on. Special attention is paid to eliminating or reducing plastic and single-use items and food waste.
C30	3.9	Waste separation & recycling	Quantitative goals to separate waste are set, and adequately monitored and reported on. All waste including industrial waste is adequately separated and treated in order to divert it from landfills, with provision of a multi-stream collection and recycling system which effectively separates waste by type.
	3.10	Waste disposal	Any residual solid waste that is not reused or recycled is disposed of safely and sustainably.
O	3.11	Littering	Measures are taken to address littering, including by visitors, especially in popular public places and areas.

Energy, Sustainable Mobility & Climate Change

	3.12	GHG emissions and climate change mitigation	The destination sets and monitors targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from public and tourism sectors and implements and reports on mitigation policies and actions to meet these targets.
C15	3.13	Reducing transport emissions from travel	The destination has targets to reduce transport emissions from travel to and within the destination and monitors these in order to reduce the contribution of tourism to air pollution and climate change.
	3.14	Low-impact mobility	The destination has a low-impact mobility strategy to minimise traffic related air pollution and congestion in touristic zones. Walking and cycling, as well as the use of sustainable, low-emissions vehicles, is facilitated and encouraged.
N/A	3.15	Public transportation	Public transportation is adequately organised and a clear effort is made to transition towards sustainable, low-emission vehicles. Use of public transport is encouraged.
C15	3.16	Reducing energy consumption	Quantitative goals are set and measures are taken to reduce energy consumption and improve efficiency in its use in the destination.
C30	3.17	Renewable Energy	Quantitative goals are set and adequate measures are taken to increase the use of renewable energy and to reduce reliance on fossil fuels. Incentives exist to encourage renewable energy technologies.
O	3.18	Effective carbon compensation	The destination promotes and takes appropriate measures aimed at an effective carbon compensation for travel to, from and within the destination.

Climate Change Adaptation

C30	3.19	Responding to climate risks	The destination identifies risk and opportunities associated with the climate change. Climate change adaptation strategies are pursued for the siting, design, development and management of tourism facilities in order to enhance the resilience of the destination.
	3.20	Climate change information	Residents, tourism enterprises and visitors are informed about any predicted climate change, associated risks and future conditions.

Theme 4: Culture & Tradition

Cultural Heritage

C15 N/A	4.1	Tangible cultural heritage	The destinations has a policy and system to evaluate, rehabilitate, and conserve cultural assets such as sites and built heritage, typical or traditional architecture, town design, cultural landscapes and archaeological sites
C30	4.2	Managing tourism impacts on culture	Tourism that appreciates cultural sites, built heritage, culturally important landscapes, and land-use is carefully managed to avoid negative impacts. Any impacts such as damage, disruption of local culture, and degradation are adequately monitored and addressed.
N/A	4.3	Protecting cultural artefacts	Sale, trade, display or gifting of historical and archaeological artefacts is adequately regulated and enforced. The laws are publicly communicated, including to tourism enterprises and visitors.

People & Tradition

N/A C15	4.4	Intangible heritage	Intangible cultural heritage, including local traditions, arts, music, language, gastronomy and other aspects of local identity and distinctiveness, is adequately protected and celebrated.
	4.5	Respecting authenticity	Tourism is sensitive and respectful of the living culture and traditions and not interfering with its practice. The practice of tourism in observing, replicating, and interpreting the living culture and traditions is genuine and authentic while involving and benefiting local communities.

	4.6	Indigenous intellectual property	Intellectual property rights of indigenous people, locals and communities are effectively protected by law and policies.
N/A			

Theme 5: Social Well-Being

Human Respect

	5.1	Resettlement	Resettlement of residents is only possible with free prior and informed consent and fair and just compensation.
	5.2	Property and user rights to resources	Property and water rights and other user and access rights to key resources are adequately registered and protected and are compliant with indigenous and communal rights. Regulations ensure public consultation and are enforced.
	5.3	Traditional access rights	The destination monitors, protects, and when necessary rehabilitates or restores local community access to natural and cultural sites.
C30	5.4	Human rights	The destination upholds international standards on human rights. It has laws, practices and an established code of conduct to prevent and report on human trafficking, modern slavery and commercial, sexual, or any other form of exploitation, discrimination and harassment of or against anyone, particularly children, adolescents, elderly, disabled, women, LGBT+ and other minorities.
	5.5	Public communication of human rights laws	The laws and established practices for the protection of people against exploitation and harassment as described in criterion 5.4 'Human rights' are enforced and publicly communicated.
	5.6	Accessibility	Where practical, sites, facilities and services, including those of natural and cultural importance, are accessible to all, including individuals with disabilities, specific access requirements or other special needs. Where sites and facilities are not immediately accessible, access is afforded through the design and implementation of solutions, whilst taking into account the integrity of the site. Information is made available on the accessibility of sites, facilities and services.

Community Participation

	5.7	Community involvement in planning	The destination enables and promotes public participation in sustainable destination planning and management.
C15			
	5.8	Resident engagement and feedback	The destination has a system to enhance local understanding of sustainable tourism opportunities and challenges and to build the capacity of communities to respond.
	5.9	Stakeholder contributions	Enterprises, visitors and the public are offered opportunities to contribute to community and sustainability initiatives in a responsible manner, as a volunteer, in cash or in kind.
C30	5.10	Inhabitant satisfaction	The aspirations, concerns and satisfaction of local communities with tourism sustainability and destination management is monitored regularly; results are publicly reported; and action is taken in response to them.

Local Economy

	5.11	Monitoring economic impacts	The direct and indirect contribution of tourism to the destination's economy is monitored and publicly reported, and should include appropriate data, such as levels of visitor volume, visitor expenditure, employment and investment data, and evidence on the distribution of economic benefits.
C15	5.12	Supporting local entrepreneurs	The destination encourages the retention of tourism spending in the local economy through supporting local enterprises, supply chains and sustainable investment.

C15	5.13	Promoting local products and services	The destination promotes the development and purchase of local sustainable products that reflect the area's nature and culture and that are based on fair trade principles. . These may include food and beverages, crafts, performance arts, agricultural products, etc.
	5.14	Promoting local tourism employment	The destination encourages and supports career opportunities and training in tourism.
Socio-Economic Impact			
	5.15	Avoiding Overtourism	The social impact of visitors to the local community and other visitors is appropriately monitored.
C30 N/A	5.16	Property exploitation	The destination has planning guidelines, regulations and/or policies to optimise the socio-economic effects of real estate development and operations, including property rental and concessions for tourism purposes.
Health & Safety			
C15	5.17	Health & safety	Crime, safety, and health hazards for visitors and residents are prevented, responded to, adequately monitored, and publicly reported
	5.18	Risk and crisis management	The destination has a risk reduction, crisis management and emergency response plan that is appropriate to the destination. Key elements are communicated to residents, visitors and enterprises. Procedures and resources are established for implementing the plan and it is regularly updated.
Theme 6: Business & Communication			
Business Involvement			
C15	6.1	Promoting sustainability among enterprises	The destination regularly informs tourism-related enterprises about sustainability issues and encourages and supports them in making their operations more sustainable.
C30	6.2	Sustainability standards	The destination promotes the adoption of sustainability standards, promoting the application of GSTC-Industry Recognized standards and GSTC-I Accredited certification schemes for tourism enterprises, where available.
	6.3	Publication of certified enterprises	A list of sustainability certified tourism enterprises or tourism products is maintained and publicly available.
	6.4	Water consumption (enterprises)	Enterprises are encouraged to measure, monitor, manage and publicly report on water usage.
	6.5	Solid waste (enterprises)	Enterprises are encouraged to avoid, reduce, reuse, and recycle solid waste, including food waste. Action is taken to eliminate or reduce single-use items, especially plastics. Any residual solid waste that is not reused or recycled is disposed of safely and sustainably.
	6.6	Energy consumption (enterprises)	Enterprises are encouraged to measure, monitor, reduce, and publicly report energy consumption.
	6.7	Greenhouse gas emissions (enterprises)	Enterprises are encouraged to measure, monitor, and minimise and report greenhouse gas emissions from all aspects of their operation (including from suppliers and service providers). Effective compensation of any remaining emissions is encouraged.
	6.8	Equal and fair employment (enterprises)	The destination's tourism enterprises commit to providing equality of opportunity for local employment, training and advancement, a safe and secure working environment, and living wages for all.

O	6.9	Activity providers code of practice	Activity providers and tour guides have to adhere to a relevant code of practice for responsible and sustainable excursions, in order to optimise the impact of the tour.
Information & Marketing			
N/A	6.10	Respectful & Accurate promotion	Destination promotion, marketing messages, visitor information material, and other communication reflects the destination's values and approach to sustainability. They are accurate in describing products, services and sustainability claims; authentic and treat local communities and natural and cultural assets with respect.
	6.11	Sustainability information to visitors	Visitors are adequately informed about relevant sustainability issues in the destination, including natural, environmental, cultural and social issues, and are encouraged to play a role in addressing them.
N/A	6.12	Interpretive information	Interpretive material is provided at the most important natural and cultural sites which informs visitors of the significance of the sites. The information is accurate, respectful to different cultural values, developed with host community collaboration, and clearly communicated in most relevant languages, including local languages.