

## Global Sustainable Tourism Destinations Criteria

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### Preamble

Sustainable tourism is on the rise: consumer demand is growing, travel industry suppliers are developing new green programs, governments and international agencies are creating new policies to encourage sustainable practices in tourism. But what does “sustainable tourism” really mean? How can it be measured and credibly demonstrated, in order to build consumer confidence, promote business prosperity, foster community benefits, and fight false claims?

The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria are an effort to come to a common understanding of sustainable destinations, and are the minimum that any tourism management organization which wishes to be sustainable should aspire to reach. To satisfy the definition of sustainable tourism, destinations must take an interdisciplinary, holistic and integrative approach which includes four main objectives: to (i) demonstrate sustainable destination management; (ii) maximize social and economic benefits for the host community and minimize negative impacts; (iii) maximize benefits to communities, visitors and cultural heritage and minimize impacts; and (iv) maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts. The criteria are designed to be used by all types and scales of destinations.

The criteria are part of the response of the tourism community to the global challenges of the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals. Poverty alleviation, gender equity and environmental sustainability, including climate change, are the main cross-cutting issues that are addressed through the criteria.

The criteria and indicators were developed based on already recognized criteria and approaches including, for example, the UNWTO destination level indicators, GSTC Criteria for hotels and tour operators, and other widely accepted principles and guidelines, certification criteria and indicators. They reflect certification standards, indicators, criteria, and best practices from different cultural and geo-political contexts around the world in tourism and other sectors where applicable. Potential indicators were screened for relevance and practicality, as well as their applicability to a broad range of destination types.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria are administered by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

Some of the expected uses of the criteria by tourism management organizations include the following:

- Serve as basic guidelines for destinations which wish to become more sustainable
- Help consumers identify sound sustainable tourism destinations;
- Serve as a common denominator for information media to recognize destinations and inform the public regarding their sustainability;
- Help certification and other voluntary destination level programs ensure that their standards meet a broadly-accepted baseline;
- Offer governmental, non-governmental, and private sector programs a starting point for developing sustainable tourism requirements; and
- Serve as basic guidelines for education and training bodies, such as hotel schools and universities.

The criteria indicate what should be done, not how to do it or whether the goal has been achieved. This role is fulfilled by performance indicators, associated educational materials, and access to tools for implementation from public, NGO and private sector providers all of which are an indispensable complement to the Destination Level Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria.

The Destination Level Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria were conceived as the beginning of a process to make sustainability the standard practice in all forms of tourism.

### **Application**

It is recommended that all criteria be applied to the greatest extent practical, unless for a specific situation the criterion is not applicable and justification is provided. There may be circumstances in which a criterion is not applicable to a specific tourism destination or destination management organization, given the local regulatory, environmental, social, economic or cultural conditions. In the case of smaller destinations and communities, it is recognized that limited resources may prevent comprehensive application of all criteria.

Because destinations are comprised by many different enterprises, organizations and individuals, the application of these criteria should include thorough consideration of the cumulative effects of activities. Measurement at the destination scale will usually capture the net result of cumulative effects at the individual scale. However monitoring of impacts is not an end in itself; it should be viewed as a tool for improving the sustainability of the destination.

Further guidance on these criteria may be found from the supporting indicators and glossary, which will be published by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

## Global Sustainable Tourism Destination Criteria

A. DEMONSTRATE SUSTAINABLE DESTINATION MANAGEMENT
<p><b>A1 Sustainable tourism strategy</b></p> <p>The destination has established and is implementing a multi-year sustainable tourism strategy that is publicly available, suited to its scale, and that considers environmental, sociocultural, quality, health and safety issues, including cumulative impacts.</p>
<p><b>A2 Tourism management organization</b></p> <p>The destination has a functioning organization responsible for a coordinated approach to sustainable tourism with involvement by the tourism sector, local government and community stakeholders with assigned responsibilities to accountable parties for managing environmental, socio-cultural, and sustainable tourism issues.</p>
<p><b>A3 Sustainable tourism monitoring</b></p> <p>The destination has a program to monitor, publicly report and support response to the cumulative environmental, socio-cultural, and sustainable tourism issues at the destination level.</p>
<p><b>A4 Tourism seasonality management</b></p> <p>The destination has programs designed to reduce the effects of seasonal variability of tourism where appropriate, while recognizing the ecological and cultural impacts of such programs.</p>
<p><b>A5 Climate change adaptation</b></p> <p>The destination has a program to identify risks associated with climate change and to encourage adaptation in development, siting, design and management that will contribute to the sustainability and robustness of the destination in the face of potential changes</p>
<p><b>A6 Inventory of attraction sites</b></p> <p>The destination has an ongoing process to identify its key tourism assets and attractions, as well as the key potential impacts (positive and negative) on them.</p>
<p><b>A7 Design and Construction</b></p> <p>The destination has planning requirements and laws related to planning, siting, design, construction, materials, renovation, demolition and</p>

<p>impact assessment to protect natural and cultural heritage.</p>
<p><b>A8 Site accessibility</b></p> <p>Key tourist attraction sites with infrastructure and facilities in the destination, including accommodations, food &amp; beverage facilities, as well as means of transportation to the site, are accessible to persons with special needs, where appropriate; all legal requirements regarding access are met.</p>
<p><b>A9 Local property rights</b></p> <p>Property acquisitions are legal, comply with local communal and indigenous rights, including their free, prior and informed consent, and do not require involuntary resettlement.</p>
<p><b>A10 Tourist satisfaction monitoring</b></p> <p>The destination has a program and policy to measure and report on tourist satisfaction, perceptions, behaviors and concerns.</p>
<p><b>A11 Private sector sustainability</b></p> <p>The tourism sector in the destination has implemented specific sustainable tourism policies or credible certification programs and quality assurance programs.</p>
<p><b>A12 Tourist safety and security</b></p> <p>The destination has a program in place to combat tourism-related crime, safety and health hazards.</p>
<p><b>A13 Crisis preparedness</b></p> <p>The destination has established and provided resources for a crisis preparedness plan that is available to tourists and tourism enterprises and organizations, and the local communities.</p>
<p><b>A14 Marketing for sustainable tourism</b></p> <p>The destination has a program to develop and promote sustainable products and services compatible with its ecological, social, and cultural circumstances.</p>
<p><b>A15 Promotional materials</b></p> <p>Promotional materials are accurate and complete with regard to the destination and its products and services, including sustainability claims.</p>

They do not promise more than is being delivered.

**B. MAXIMIZE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS TO THE HOST COMMUNITY AND MINIMIZE NEGATIVE IMPACTS**

**B1 Economic Benefit**

The economic contribution of tourism to the destination’s economy is monitored and publicly reported.

**B2 Local career opportunities**

The destination provides fair and equal employment opportunities and training for women, youth, minorities, and other vulnerable populations in tourism, including paying a fair wage and providing training in management positions, while restraining child labor.

**B3 Public participation**

The destination has a program to encourage and facilitate public participation in tourism planning and decision-making on an ongoing basis.

**B4 Local satisfaction**

Communities’ aspirations, concerns, and satisfaction with tourism are regularly monitored and publicly reported by the destination.

**B5 Local access**

The destination protects local access to natural, historical, archaeological, religious, spiritual and cultural sites and attractions, including land and aquatic resource use, rights-of-way, transport and housing.

**B6 Tourism awareness**

Tourism awareness programs are regularly offered for residents of the destination.

**B7 Preventing exploitation**

The destination has implemented a policy against commercial, sexual or any other form of exploitation and harassment, particularly of children, adolescents, women and minorities

**B8 Local community support**

Tourism sector and all stakeholders are actively involved in developing and supporting adequate community and infrastructure development initiatives.

**B9 Fair trade Principles**

The destination has a program in place to support local small entrepreneurs and promote local sustainable products and services and fair-trade principles that are based on the area’s nature, history and culture (including food and beverages, crafts, performance arts, agricultural products, etc.).

**B10 Tourism enterprise performance**

The destination has programs to support economic sustainability in small and medium sized tourism-related enterprises.

**C. MAXIMIZE BENEFITS TO COMMUNITIES, VISITORS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE, AND MINIMIZE NEGATIVE IMPACTS**

**C1 Attraction protection**

The destination has a policy and program to conserve key cultural and natural tourist attractions to ensure that landscapes, ecosystems and habitats are identified. Threats to them are identified and assessed, and access and use is managed to be sustainable.

**C2 Visitor management plans**

The destination has a visitor management plan for key attraction sites including measures to preserve and protect key natural and cultural assets.

**C3 Visitor behavior and interpretation in sensitive sites**

The destination has developed guidelines for interpretation and codes of behavior for visits to culturally or ecologically sensitive sites, in order to minimize visitor impact and maximize enjoyment.

**C4 Cultural heritage protection**

Historical and archaeological artifacts are not sold, traded or displayed, except as permitted by local to international law.

**C5 Site interpretation**

Information about and interpretation of the natural surroundings , local culture and cultural heritage is provided to visitors in various languages as well as explaining appropriate behavior while visiting natural areas, living cultures, cultural heritage sites and communities.

**C6 Protection of community property and rights**

The destination contributes to the protection and preservation of the intellectual property rights of local communities and of property rights to local historical, archaeological, culturally and spiritually important properties and sites.

**C7 Travelers Philanthropy**

The destination facilitates tourist contributions to community development and biodiversity conservation, including supporting protected areas and areas of high cultural and biodiversity value.

**D. MAXIMIZE BENEFITS TO THE ENVIRONMENT AND MINIMIZE NEGATIVE IMPACTS**

**D1 Environmental Assessment**

The destination has identified its key environmental challenges and has policies and processes in place to address these.

**D2 Ecosystem Protection**

The destination has a system in place to measure the impact of tourism and manage intensive tourism impacts on landscapes and ecosystems, including sensitive and threatened wildlife and habitats.

**D3 Energy conservation**

The destination has a program to promote energy conservation, measure and reduce reliance on fossil fuels and encourage tourism enterprises to monitor and conserve energy and use renewable energy sources.

**D4 Greenhouse Gas Reduction**

The destination has a program in place to assist tourism operators to measure and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and encourage the tourism sector to participate in local carbon offset and abatement initiatives.

**D5 Water Conservation**

The destination has a program to monitor and conserve water use at the destination level and to encourage tourism enterprises monitor and conserve water.

**D6 Water Consumption**

The water supply for tourism used at the destination is sustainable ecologically and does not adversely affect community uses, taking into account the overall cumulative impacts or all local surface and groundwater use.

**D7 Surface and sea water quality**

The destination has a system in place to monitor water quality in aquatic areas and sources of drinking water.

**D8 Waste management**

The destination has systems in place to ensure wastes from tourism sites and enterprises are properly treated and reused or released safely, with no adverse effects to the local population and the environment.

**D9 Solid waste pollution reduction**

The destination has systems in place to ensure waste from tourism sources is minimized, reused or recycled. Any residual solid waste disposal for tourism and supporting community is sustainable, with quantitative goals to minimize waste that is not reused or recycled

**D10 Pollution reduction**

The destination implements practices to minimize pollution from wastewater, runoff, erosion, noise, light, harmful substances, ozone-depleting compounds, and air, water and soil contaminants and requires tourism enterprises to adhere to these practices.

**D11 Local transportation**

The destination has a policy and plan in place to increase the use of low-impact transport, including public transport, in the destination.

**D12 Environmental management**

The destination requires tourism enterprises to have an environmental management plan which includes vegetation, runoff, avoidance of the introduction of invasive species and other pollution control measures.

**D13 Conserving biodiversity, ecosystems and landscapes**

The destination has in place a program to comply with international standards regarding the protection, harvesting, and captivity of wildlife (fauna and flora, habitats) and the management of impacts of tourism on wildlife.