

**Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Hotels and Tour Operators  
Version 2, as approved by GSTC Board of Directors, 23 February 2012**

**Preamble**

Sustainable tourism is on the rise: consumer demand is growing, travel industry suppliers are developing new green programs, and governments 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 efficiency, and fight false claims?

The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria are an effort to come to a common understanding of sustainable tourism, and are the minimum that any tourism business should aspire to reach. They are organized around four main themes: effective sustainability planning; maximizing social and economic benefits for the local community; enhancing cultural heritage; and reducing negative impacts to the environment. Although the criteria are initially intended for use by the accommodation and tour operation sectors, they have applicability to the entire tourism industry.

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

Beginning in 2007, a coalition of 27 organizations – the Partnership for Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria – came together to develop the criteria. They have out to close to 80,000 tourism stakeholders, analyzed more than 4,500 criteria from more than 60 existing certification and other voluntary sets of criteria, and received comments from over 1500 individuals. The first version of the criteria was released in October 2008 and was publicly available for comment until April 2011. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council reviewed all comments received, responded to each, and revised the criteria accordingly. The revised criteria were available for public comment and review from July 15 – October 15, 2011 in English, French, Spanish, and Mandarin. Again all comments were reviewed and addressed, to produce this version 2 of the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for hotels and tour operators. The next revision will take place in 2016.

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

Some of the expected uses of the criteria include the following:

- 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;
- Serve as guidance for travel agencies in choosing suppliers and sustainable tourism programs;
- Help consumers identify sound sustainable tourism programs and businesses;
- Serve as a common denominator for information media to recognize sustainable tourism providers;
- Help certification and other voluntary 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, all of which are an indispensable complement to the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria.

The 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 this is justified. There may be circumstances in which a criterion is not applicable to a specific tourism product, given the local regulatory, environmental, social, economic or cultural conditions. In the case of micro and community-owned tourism businesses which have a small social, economic and environmental footprint, it is recognized that limited resources may prevent comprehensive application of all criteria.

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

## **Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Hotels and Tour Operators**

### **A. Demonstrate effective sustainable management.**

A1 The organization has implemented a long-term sustainability management system that is suitable to its reality and scope, and which addresses environmental, social, cultural, economic, quality, health and safety issues.

A2 The organization is in compliance with all applicable local to international legislation and regulations (including, among others, health, safety, labor and environmental aspects).

A3 All personnel receive periodic guidance and training regarding their roles and responsibilities with respect to environmental, social, cultural, economic, quality, health and safety issues.

A4 Customer satisfaction, including sustainability aspects, is measured and corrective action taken. (1)

A5 Promotional materials are accurate and complete with regard to the organization and its products and services, including sustainability claims. They do not promise more than is being delivered.

A6 Planning, design, construction, renovation, operation and demolition of buildings and infrastructure...

A.6.1 ...comply with zoning requirements and with laws related to protected areas and heritage consideration.

A.6.2 ...respect the natural and cultural heritage surroundings in planning, siting, design and impact assessment.

A.6.3 ...use locally appropriate sustainable practices and materials.

A.6.4 ...provide access for persons with special needs, where appropriate.

A7 Land and water rights, and property acquisition are legal, comply with local communal and indigenous rights, including their free, prior and informed consent, and do not require involuntary resettlement.

A8 Information about and interpretation of the natural surroundings, local culture, and cultural heritage is provided to customers, as well as explaining appropriate behavior while visiting natural areas, living cultures, and cultural heritage sites.

### **B. Maximize social and economic benefits to the local community and minimize negative impacts.**

B1 The organization actively supports initiatives for local infrastructure and social community development including, among others, education, training, health and sanitation. (2)

B2 Local residents are given equal opportunity for employment including in management positions. All employees are equally offered regular training, experience and opportunities for advancement

B3 Local services and goods are purchased and offered by the organization, following fair-trade principles.

B4 The organization offers the means for local small entrepreneurs to develop and sell sustainable products that are based on the area's nature, history and culture (including food and beverages, crafts, performance arts, agricultural products, etc.).

B5 A documented code of conduct for activities in indigenous and local communities has been developed and implemented with the collaboration and consent of the affected community.

B6 The organization has implemented a policy against commercial, sexual or any other form of exploitation and harassment, particularly of children, adolescents, women and minorities. (3)

B7 The organization offers equal employment opportunities to women, local minorities and others, including in management positions, while restraining child labor. (4)

B8 The international or national legal protection of employees is respected, and employees are paid at least a living wage.

B9 The activities of the organization do not jeopardize the provision of basic services, such as food, water, energy, healthcare or sanitation, to neighboring communities. (5)

B10 Tourism activity does not adversely affect local access to livelihoods, including land and aquatic resource use, rights-of-way, transport and housing.

### **C. Maximize benefits to cultural heritage and minimize negative impacts.**

C1 The organization follows established guidelines or a code of behavior for visits to culturally or historically sensitive sites, in order to minimize negative visitor impact and maximize enjoyment.

C2 Historical and archeological artifacts are not sold, traded or displayed, except as permitted by local to international law.

C3 The organization contributes to the protection and preservation of local historical, archeological, culturally and spiritually important properties and sites, and does not impede access to them by local residents.

C4 The organization incorporates elements of local art, architecture, or cultural heritage in its operations, design, decoration, food, or shops; while respecting the intellectual property rights of local communities.

## **D. Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts.**

### **D1 Conserving resources**

D1.1 Purchasing policies favor locally appropriate and ecologically sustainable products, including building materials, capital goods, food, beverages and consumables.

D1.2 The purchase and use of disposed and consumable goods is measured and the organization actively seeks ways to reduce their use.

D1.3 Energy consumption is measured, sources are indicated, and measures are adopted to minimize overall consumption, and encourage the use of renewable energy.

D1.4 Water consumption is measured, sources are indicated, and measures are adopted to minimize overall consumption. Water sourcing is sustainable, and does not adversely affect environmental flows.

### **D2 Reducing pollution**

D2.1 Greenhouse gas emissions from all sources controlled by the organization are measured, procedures are implemented to minimize them, and offsetting remaining emissions is encouraged.

D2.2 The organization encourages its customers, staff and suppliers to reduce transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions.

D2.3 Wastewater, including gray water, is effectively treated and is only reused or released safely, with no adverse effects to the local population and the environment. (6)

D2.4 Waste is measured, mechanisms are in place to reduce waste, and where reduction is not feasible, to re-use or recycle it. Any residual waste disposal has no adverse effect on the local population and the environment.

D2.5 The use of harmful substances, including pesticides, paints, swimming pool disinfectants, and cleaning materials, is minimized, and substituted when available, by innocuous products or processes. All storage, use, handling, and disposal of chemicals are properly managed. (7)

D2.6 The organization implements practices to minimize pollution from noise, light, runoff, erosion, ozone-depleting compounds, and air, water and soil contaminants.

**D3 Conserving biodiversity, ecosystems, and landscapes**

D3.1 Wildlife species are not harvested, consumed, displayed, sold, or traded, except as part of a regulated activity that ensures that their utilization is sustainable, and in compliance with local to international laws. (8)

D3.2 No captive wildlife is held, except for properly regulated activities, in compliance with local to international law. Living specimens of protected and wildlife species are only kept by those authorized and suitably equipped to house and care for them humanely.

D3.3 The organization takes measures to avoid the introduction of invasive alien species. Native species are used for landscaping and restoration wherever feasible, particularly in natural landscapes.

D3.4 The organization supports and contributes to biodiversity conservation, including natural protected areas and areas of high biodiversity value.

D3.5 Interactions with wildlife, taking into account cumulative impacts, do not produce adverse effects on the viability and behavior of populations in the wild. Any disturbance of natural ecosystems is minimized, rehabilitated, and there is a compensatory contribution to conservation management. (9)

- (1) Use UNWTO indicators and GRI criteria for clarifying concept of customer satisfaction in glossary.
- (2) Infrastructure: improvement or maintenance of community public institutions and physical plant (roads, aqueducts, sewage treatment, etc.).
- (3) The signing of the code of conduct from UNWTO, UNICEF, ECPAT, etc. is evidence of implementation of policies (see [www.thecode.org](http://www.thecode.org)).
- (4) Add to glossary: “The term “child labor” is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development.  
*It refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and interferes with their schooling by: depriving them of the opportunity to attend school; obliging them to leave school prematurely; or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work.”* <http://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm>
- (5) Including beachfront and waterfront access
- (6) Define “gray water” in glossary.
- (7) Define “proper management of chemicals”.
- (8) Define “wildlife” and “sustainable use” in glossary.
- (9) Define “viability of populations” and “compensatory contributions” in glossary.