



GSTC ACCREDITATION MANUAL
FOR CERTIFICATION BODIES - INDUSTRY:
HOTEL/ACCOMMODATION & TOUR OPERATOR
Version 4.1

February 10, 2025

Document Control

This is version 4.1 of the GSTC Accreditation Manual and replaces any and all previous versions.

Document Approval

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GSTC Chief Assurance Officer

Version Notes

Key updates include changing the term “Assurance Panel” to the Accreditation Decision Making Committee (AMDC) and Recognition Decision Making Committee (RMDC), and the revision of the Clause 7.7, 8.13.3, and 10.9.1.3.

To make comments on this manual, please email the GSTC at: accreditation@gstc.org

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The Global Sustainable Tourism Council

www.gstcouncil.org

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PART I: SCHEME OVERVIEW

Introduction

Accreditation to certify to the GSTC Criteria is designed to be applicable to all schemes certifying tourism enterprises for their sustainability management and performance. Relevant certification schemes and the bodies that run them vary from sizable international operations or national schemes, some with support from government agencies, to small schemes covering local areas or particular types of tourism businesses.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) intends to build a long-term relationship with all certification bodies (CBs) and certification schemes (CSs). GSTC aims to continually increase the percentage of schemes that are accredited to certify to the GSTC Criteria or the GSTC-Recognized standards .

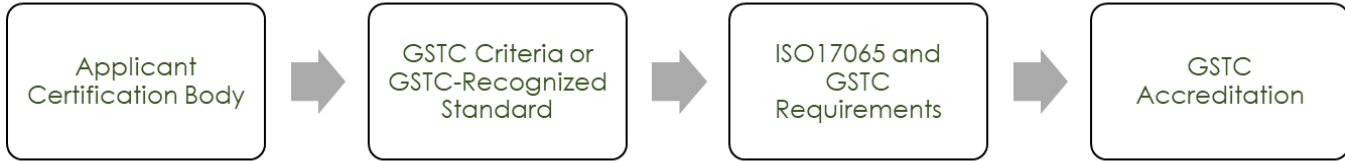
CBs may be accredited to certify with the GSTC Criteria or use a standard that maintains "GSTC-Recognized" status for its equivalence with the GSTC Criteria.

GSTC Recognition Program	The GSTC recognizes the equivalence of a CB's standard against the GSTC Criteria (Hotel/Accommodation, Tour Operator, Destination, and MICE). See the GSTC-Recognized Manual. <i>Please refer to the GSTC Recognized-Manual for further details. <u>"GSTC-Recognized Manual"</u></i>
GSTC Accreditation Program	Accreditation of a CB that either uses the GSTC-Recognized Standards OR certifies directly against the GSTC Criteria.

Not all CSs address all aspects of sustainability: economic, social, cultural and environmental. For example, a number are solely covering environmental matters and may grant the use of an eco-label.

These schemes would only be eligible to become accredited after they revise their standard to comply with the GSTC Criteria and gain "GSTC-Recognized" status for their standard.

The diagram below provides a graphical depiction of the option for gaining accreditation to either certify directly to the GSTC Criteria or to the GSTC-Recognized Standard, which is to say, a standard that is equivalent to the GSTC Criteria. The CB may request the scope of their accreditation to include certification to both the GSTC Criteria plus one or more GSTC-Recognized Standards.



Additionally, CSs that commit to subcontracting the certification to the GSTC-Accredited CBs shall enter into the GSTC Licensing Agreement.

The GSTC Marks – Summary and Benefits

Background: The Need for Sustainability of Tourism

Travel and tourism account for around 10% of the world's economic activity. It is a rapidly growing sector, with international tourist arrivals forecast to continue to grow.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015 are aimed at, among other things, ending extreme poverty, fighting inequality and injustice, and tackling climate change. The significant relevance of tourism to most of the 17 SDGs has been recognized. UN Tourism (formerly United Nations World Tourism Organization - UNWTO-) is working with governments, public and private partners, development banks, international and regional financial institutions, UN agencies, and international organizations to achieve the SDGs, with a special focus on Goal 8 (economic growth),

Goal 12 (sustainable consumption and production patterns) and Goal 14 (marine resources) where tourism has been specifically featured.

The impact of travel and tourism on global and local environments and on host communities can be both positive and negative, providing both opportunities and responsibilities.

Travel and tourism can deliver many positive benefits, including:

- A growing opportunity for enterprise development and employment creation, with low barriers for entry;
- Direct and indirect support for local communities through the provision of jobs, income, services, and infrastructure;
- Awareness of natural and cultural heritage and support for their conservation; and
- Health, wellbeing and educational benefits for tourists and hosts, which should be accessible to all.

However, alongside these positive impacts, tourism also has negative consequences for development. Negative impacts and concerns associated with travel and tourism include:

- Its contribution to climate change, being responsible for an estimated 5% of global CO₂ emissions;
- Depletion of natural and precious resources, such as the use of land and water;
- Creation of pollution of all kinds;
- Social changes and dislocation of traditional societies;
- Pressure on cultural heritage sites, natural environments, and biodiversity; and
- Poor labor conditions and exploitation in parts of the sector.

Sustainable tourism requires an approach to tourism development and management that recognizes and responds to these responsibilities and opportunities.

Actions that encourage, identify, and promote a positive response from enterprises are crucial for the future of the tourism sector and the contribution it can make to sustainable development. The tourism

sector is highly fragmented. While there are some important multinational players, many of the suppliers of tourism services are independent businesses and the majority are small and micro-enterprises. Tourism enterprises of all sizes respond in different ways and to different degrees to the need for sustainable tourism.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)

The GSTC is a multi-stakeholder initiative formed in 2007, including amongst its founding partners United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), UN Tourism, UN Foundation, Sabre Holdings, Rainforest Alliance, and others. It was formed in response to the challenges and opportunities of sustainable tourism, by merging two previous initiatives. In 2014, The GSTC merged with the Tour Operator Initiative (TOI) with TOI's operations and members joining the GSTC organization.

Numerous organizations from the public, private, and voluntary sectors, as well as from the tourism, environmental management, and sustainable development fields, have contributed to the work of the GSTC.

The GSTC is a Membership Council governed by a Board of Directors, of whom 2/3 are elected by the general membership and 1/3 are appointed by the Board.

The mission of the GSTC is:

“To be an agent of change in the world of sustainable travel and tourism by fostering the increased knowledge, understanding, adoption and demand for sustainable tourism practices”.

The GSTC fulfils its mission by fostering increased knowledge and understanding of sustainable tourism practices and adopting universal sustainable tourism principles.

It also works in many other ways to strengthen education, communication, knowledge-sharing, and business and destination engagement in the field of sustainable tourism and to achieve improved market access for sustainable tourism products.

A Common Agenda for Sustainable Tourism

The challenges of sustainable tourism articulated earlier encompass economic, social and environmental impacts. This broad spectrum of concerns is increasingly recognized by bodies promoting sustainable tourism. UNEP and UNWTO identified an agenda for sustainable tourism based on twelve functional aims and showed how there are economic, social, and environmental dimensions to each of them. The dimensions are seen as interrelated. In the private sector, in tourism as well as in other economic spheres, enterprises and investment projects are encouraged to consider a triple bottom line. Many companies report on corporate social responsibility policies and actions, which address a broad range of economic, social, and environmental impacts and initiatives beyond straight financial reporting. Some companies use the guidelines of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), the world's most widely used sustainability reporting framework.

The GSTC program aligns with this broad approach to sustainable tourism and encourages certification schemes to move beyond a more mono-dimensional, often environmental focus. The principles for sustainable tourism behind the GSTC program are that:

- Sustainability objectives should be defined, and actions coordinated by an effective management system;
- Tourism should bring the greatest possible social and economic benefits to local communities and any negative impacts on them should be minimized;
- Local cultural heritage must be respected, and opportunities should be taken to strengthen its integrity and richness; and
- Impacts on the global and local environment, through pollution and depletion of natural resources, should be minimized and support should be given to the conservation of local landscapes and biodiversity.

These principles of sustainable tourism are seen as relevant in all parts of the world and can be reflected in many different kinds of tourism enterprises. The overall agenda remains the same. However, key concerns about tourism impacts and priorities for improving sustainability will vary from place to place. It

is hoped and expected that sustainable tourism standards will be adapted to local and industry sector conditions and that they will far exceed the minimum requirements outlined in this manual.

GSTC Criteria

The GSTC has developed the following sets of Criteria and associated indicators:

- GSTC Industry Criteria (GSTC-I): version 3, December 2016. The GSTC-I is available in two versions, GSTC Hotel Criteria and GSTC Tour Operator Criteria.
- GSTC Destination Criteria (GSTC-D): version 2, December 2019.
- GSTC MICE Criteria (GSTC-M): version 1, February 2024.
- GSTC Attraction Criteria (GSTC-A): version 1, November 2024.

GSTC Accreditation Decision Making Committee (ADMC)

The GSTC Accreditation Decision Making Committee (ADMC) and the GSTC Recognition Decision Making Committee (RDMC) are appointed by the GSTC and are responsible for performing the following functions:

- ADMC
 - Grant, pause, or withdraw accreditation status of certification bodies on behalf of the GSTC.
- RDMC
 - Declare standards to be “GSTC-Recognized Standard”

Principles for the implementation of the GSTC Accreditation

The following principles apply to all aspects of the GSTC program – including work performed by CSs and CBs:

1	Integrity	Integrity should be demonstrated in every aspect of the process, requiring honesty, fairness and consistency throughout.
2	Credibility	The process should spread confidence in certification as a meaningful way of identifying and stimulating good sustainability practice in the tourism sector.
3	Impartiality	The process should not be open to any forms of influence which might raise doubts about the objectivity of the decisions taken.
4	Accessibility	Recognition of standards and accreditation should be as accessible as possible to all relevant certification schemes and certification should be as accessible as possible to all tourism enterprises. There should be no discrimination on grounds of size and location and financial barriers should be minimized.
5	Comprehensiveness	All recognized sustainable tourism standards covering sustainable tourism should address all aspects of sustainability, including socio-economic, cultural, and environmental impacts.
6	Rigorousness	Accreditation and certification should be robust processes and require high standards and levels of sustainability to be met.
7	Effectiveness	The process should be impacts-driven and shaped to help as many tourism enterprises as possible achieve maximum change towards sustainability. The accreditation program should strengthen the impact of certification schemes.
8	Transparency	The standards required and processes adopted should be transparent and available for scrutiny by stakeholders.
9	Diversity	The process should recognize and encourage the diversity of local, regional, and sectoral certification schemes, including their criteria and standards, provided there is no loss of sustainability outcomes.
10	Achievability	The accreditation process must be practicable and sustainable over time and not place burdens on certification schemes that they could not meet.

Stakeholder Engagement in Continuous Review and Improvement of the GSTC Accreditation

Accredited CBs and those interested in accreditation, along with other stakeholders interested in the GSTC Accreditation Program, are welcome to share their comments on any aspect of the program and this manual. GSTC facilitates public consultations in alignment with revisions to the Accreditation Manual and has established a formal grievance mechanism to address issues raised by stakeholders. Additionally, if there are any requirements addressed in this manual that need to be clarified, or further information or answers to questions are needed, please submit requests or email accreditation@gstc.org.

Definitions

Refer to the latest version of the GSTC Accreditation Glossary published on the GSTC website.

Level of Requirement

In this document the following verbal forms are used:

- **“shall”** indicates a requirement, that is the body must take the specified action to be in compliance;
- **“should”** indicates a recommendation, that is the body is expected to take the specified action;
- **“may”** indicates a permission, that is the body is allowed to take the specified action;
- **“can”** indicates a possibility or a capability, that is the body commits to undertake the specified action.

PART II: OVERVIEW OF ACCREDITATION

1. Manual Structure

The Manual provides requirements and instructions for both the GSTC accreditation system, and the certification process that CBs will have to comply with in order to gain and maintain accreditation.

This Manual is arranged in four parts:

- Part I introduces an overview of the GSTC, GSTC Criteria, and GSTC Accreditation;
- Part II sets out the manual structure, normative reference, and requirements for GSTC in the accreditation of CBs; and
- Part III sets out the requirements for CBs to become accredited and the market access benefits.

2. Normative Reference

The following documents contain provisions that, through reference in this text, become part of the GSTC Accreditation Manual. For documents that specify a date or version number, later amendments or revisions of that document do not apply as a normative requirement. Readers are encouraged to review the most recent editions and any guidance documents available to gain further insight into how the document has changed and to consider whether or not to implement the latest changes. For documents without dates or version numbers, the latest published edition of the document referred to applies.

- ISO / IEC 17065:2012 Conformity Assessment Requirements for bodies certifying products, processes, and services
- ISO 19011:2018 Guidelines for quality and/or environmental management system auditing

- IAF MD 1:2023 IAF Mandatory Document for the Audit and Certification of a Management System Operated by a Multi-Site Organization
- IAF MD 4:2023 IAF Mandatory Document for the Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Auditing/Assessment Purposes
- IAF MD 5: 2023 Determination of Audit Time of Quality, Environmental and Occupational Health & Safety Management System
- ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems v1.0

3. GSTC Requirement for GSTC-Endorsed Accreditation Bodies

3.1 The GSTC shall administer the accreditation for CBs for Industry certification. However, the accreditation of CBs located in the mutually agreed countries, including the countries inside of the European Union (EU), shall be administered by the GSTC-Endorsed National Accreditation Body (NAB).

PART III: ACCREDITATION – REQUIREMENTS FOR CERTIFICATION BODIES

This section sets out requirements for CBs certifying that clients conform to a GSTC-Recognized Standard and/or GSTC Criteria. In addition to GSTC-specific requirements for certification of sustainable tourism, this section uses ISO 17065:2012 as a basis with additional or specific GSTC requirements set out against specific clauses of ISO 17065:2012.

4. Introduction

- 4.1. To become GSTC Accredited Certification Body to certify to the GSTC Criteria and/or GSTC-Recognized Standard, a CB shall:
 - 4.1.1. Gain accreditation from the GSTC or the GSTC-Endorsed NAB; and
 - 4.1.2. Enter into a licence agreement as set out in Part III for the use of the GSTC name, marks and/or logo.
- 4.2. All CBs are required to meet the requirements that are set out in Part III of this Manual.
 - 4.2.1. All CBs will be subject to an assessment of their conformity to these requirements by the GSTC.
- 4.3. For initial GSTC accreditation, a CB shall demonstrate practical experience in operating its conformity assessment system. This includes having conducted at least one internal audit, one management review, and one complete conformity assessment activity.
 - 4.3.1. If a CB has not yet performed conformity assessments for actual clients, then the required conformity assessment activity can be simulated. A simulated conformity assessment involves carrying out the full certification process for an organization - from initially receiving the certification application through to potentially issuing a certificate. This allows the CB to assess the effective application of its procedures.

5. Scope of Accreditation

5.1. The applicant CB shall specify the scope of accreditation, based on the following aspects:

5.1.1. Tourism Activity:

5.1.1.1. Hotel/Accommodation (H/A).

5.1.1.2. Tour Operator (TO).

5.1.1.2.1. Tour Product (TP).

Note: Only tour products operated by GSTC-Certified Tour Operators are eligible for GSTC Tour Product Certification.

5.1.2. Reference Standard:

5.1.2.1. The GSTC Criteria (**Alternative A**). In this case, all the criteria in the GSTC Criteria are requirements and therefore mandatory for compliance.

5.1.2.2. The GSTC-Recognized Standard (**Alternative B**). In this case, all the requirements in the standard that allow for its Recognition by the GSTC are requirements and therefore mandatory for compliance.

5.1.2.2.1. For applying for accreditation and maintaining the accredited status, the identifier of the GSTC criterion shall be given next to the criterion or indicator of the Recognized standard that is equivalent to the GSTC criterion.

Example: Recognized standard criterion/indicator identifier(GSTC criterion identifier) - C2.5(GSTC B7).

5.1.2.3. A CB can be accredited for Alternative A, Alternative B or both alternatives. In the case of Alternative B, a CB can be accredited for more than one GSTC-Recognized Standard.

- 5.1.2.3.1. The GSTC-Recognized status shall be granted following the [GSTC-Recognized Manual](#).
- 5.1.2.3.2. A CB can be accredited for one or more GSTC-Recognized Standards upon submission of a scope extension request to the GSTC, according to its rules.
- 5.1.2.3.3. The CB shall follow the GSTC Checklist: Certification Scheme - Certification Body Framework when applying for the scope extension to provide auditing and certification services against the GSTC-Recognized Standard owned by a Certification Scheme.

Note: When solely the GSTC Criteria is mentioned as a Reference Standard, the GSTC-Recognized Standard in the relevant tourism activity also applies.

Note: The GSTC Checklist: Certification Scheme-Certification Body Framework is presented in Annex A.

5.1.3. Geographic area:

- 5.1.3.1. A CB can be accredited to grant certification worldwide or to a reduced geographical scope. In this case, the geographical coverage to which the accreditation is valid shall be clearly defined.
- 5.1.3.2. The geographic area of a CB accredited to certify against the GSTC-Recognized Standard shall be aligned with the geographic coverage of the GSTC-Recognized Standard.
- 5.1.3.3. CBs operating under the same brand name or belonging to the same headquarters with overlapping geographical scopes shall implement clear policies and procedures to manage potential conflicts and ensure consistent service delivery within shared locations.

5.2. In its communication to the public and to tourism organizations, a CB shall clearly describe its accreditation scopes.

5.3. Reliance on Legislation:

5.3.1. Reliance on Legislation is applicable to a CB that certifies against the GSTC-Recognized Standard;

5.3.2. Where a CB operates only in one country, or a region that can be considered as one legal jurisdiction, it may demonstrate that:

5.3.2.1. Accreditation Requirements are covered by legislation;

5.3.2.2. The specific law(s) shall be identified; and

5.3.2.3. The laws are enforced.

5.3.3. Acceptable evidence may include:

5.3.3.1. A requirement for a legally binding sworn statement by the organization to be certified with respect to compliance with specific named laws and regulations; and

5.3.3.2. Text from the CB's manual or standard indicating that compliance with specific, named laws and regulations will be verified during the assessment.

5.3.4. When a CB operates only in one country, or a region considered as one legal jurisdiction, the GSTC-Accredited status will only apply to the CB's area of operation.

6. Languages

6.1. Language for Accreditation

6.1.1. The language used for the GSTC accreditation service is English. All information requested by the GSTC shall be submitted in English.

6.1.2. If a CB wishes to receive accreditation services in a language other than English, the CB shall provide interpretation and translation services, and the CB shall ensure that the

services are fair and impartial. It is the responsibility of the CB to cover the expenses of translation and interpretation services.

6.2. Language for Certification

6.2.1. CBs shall certify using languages for which the GSTC Criteria or the GSTC-Recognized Standard are formally translated.

6.2.1.1. The audit team shall be proficient in that language.

6.2.2. In the event that there is a Reference Standard for the business language of an enterprise being certified, but a sizable proportion of the staff of the tourism organization being audited speak mainly another (local) language, the audit team may undertake the audit accompanied by a capable translator (who shall not be a staff member of the enterprise being audited). The sizable proportion of the staff shall be defined by the CB.

6.2.3. If the enterprise uses local language documents, these may be translated to the language of the GSTC Criteria and/or the GSTC-Recognized Standard by the enterprise for the auditors' review.

6.2.4. When the audit team does not speak the language of the client, an audit may be completed only with a certified translation of documents and using a capable translator during the audit (who shall not be a staff member of the enterprise being audited).

6.2.5. Where CBs are working in a language other than English, they will provide translated documents in English as required for initial accreditation and ongoing requirements by the GSTC.

6.2.5.1. If the CB audits clients against translated GSTC Criteria and the GSTC-Recognized Standard into the local language, the translation shall be a certified translation.

6.2.6. Any required reporting and correspondence with the GSTC shall be in English.

Note: Certified translation of documents is a translation of documents by an authorized legal translator who states that translated documents are an accurate representation of the original text.

7. Accreditation Expiration and Renewal

- 7.1. Accreditation status will apply to a CB until the earliest of the following occurs:
 - 7.1.1. The majority ownership of the CB changes;
 - 7.1.2. The CB becomes insolvent, bankrupt, or enters receivership, dissolution, or liquidation;
 - 7.1.3. The CB is in breach of the GSTC License Agreement;
 - 7.1.4. The standard which is used by the GSTC-Accredited CB, is no longer GSTC-Recognized; or
 - 7.1.5. Five years from the initial GSTC-Accredited status.

Amendment of the Accreditation Requirements

- 7.2. The GSTC shall give due notice (at least 90 calendar days) of any changes to its requirements for accreditation. The GSTC takes into account the views expressed by interested parties before deciding on the precise form and effective date of the changes.
- 7.3. Following a decision on, and publication of, the changed requirements, the GSTC shall verify that each GSTC-Accredited CB conforms to the changed requirements within the transition time determined by the GSTC.

Amendment of the GSTC Criteria

- 7.4. The GSTC shall inform all applicants and the GSTC-Accredited CBs of any changes in the requirements of the GSTC Criteria:
 - 7.4.1. The GSTC shall establish a transition implementation plan for GSTC-Accredited CBs. The transition implementation plan shall include:

- 7.4.1.1. The dates when the revised GSTC Criteria will enter into force;
 - 7.4.1.2. The measures adopted to inform society, the GSTC-Accredited CBs and current applicants for accreditation;
 - 7.4.1.3. Prescriptions on how and when to conduct assessments for accreditation and certification purposes; and
 - 7.4.1.4. How to deal with eventual nonconformities.
- 7.4.2. The transition implementation plan shall be established in consultation with the GSTC-Accredited CBs and other relevant interested parties.
- 7.4.3. GSTC-Accredited CBs shall inform their certified clients in a timely manner on the transition implementation plan.

Amendment of the GSTC-Recognized Standard

- 7.5. When the GSTC-Recognized Standard is amended by the standard owner, the GSTC shall be informed following the procedures outlined in the GSTC-Recognized Manual:
- 7.5.1. Once the GSTC confirms the maintenance of the Recognition status of the revised standard, the GSTC shall inform the GSTC-Accredited CBs that have in their accreditation scope that standard, in order to establish the process to set up a transition period;
 - 7.5.2. The GSTC shall establish a transition implementation plan for accredited certifications according to the GSTC-Recognized Standard. The transition implementation plan shall include:
 - 7.5.2.1. The dates when the revised version will enter into force for accredited certification purposes;
 - 7.5.2.2. Prescriptions on how and when to conduct assessments for accreditation and certification purposes; and
 - 7.5.2.3. How to deal with eventual nonconformities.

- 7.5.3. The transition implementation plan shall be established in consultation with the standard owner, the GSTC-Accredited CBs and other relevant interested parties.

Ongoing Suitability of a Certification Program

- 7.6. If at any time, should the GSTC have reason to be concerned about the ongoing conformity of an already GSTC-Accredited CB against the GSTC-Accredited requirements, it may require the CB to provide further information, and may, as an ultimate sanction, withdraw the GSTC-Accredited status.

Extension, Reduction, Suspension, or Withdrawal of Accreditation

- 7.7. The extension, reduction, suspension, or withdrawal of accreditation shall be administered by the GSTC, according to the latest version of the GSTC Accreditation Procedure.
- 7.8. In the event of noncompliance with the obligations assumed by the applicant or the GSTC-Accredited CB and depending on the severity in terms of compromising the system in terms of quality and credibility of accreditation-related activities, sanctions can be established by the GSTC.
- 7.9. A CB can request an extension or reduction of its accreditation scope. In this case, the CB shall make a formal request to the GSTC. The request shall indicate the reasons for the extension or reduction requested. The request shall be processed as an accreditation application. The assessment of the CB may be simplified and processed in conjunction with the surveillance activities of the accreditation process:
- 7.9.1. The GSTC-Accredited CB shall apply for an extension of its scope to provide auditing and certification services to the GSTC-Recognized Standard owned by a certification scheme.
- 7.10. A CB can voluntarily request the withdrawal of its accreditation.

8. GSTC Requirement

- 8.1. CBs shall comply with the requirements in ISO 17065:2012.
- 8.2. CBs shall be accredited with a defined scope as in Section 5:
 - 8.2.1. The GSTC and the GSTC-Endorsed NAB may further limit the technical or geographical scope of certification based on the justification provided or upon request by CBs.
- 8.3. Certification Agreement
 - 8.3.1. CBs shall, through legally enforceable arrangements, require that the certified client:
 - 8.3.1.1. does not make or permit any misleading statement regarding its certification;
 - 8.3.1.2. does not use or permit the use of a certification document or any part thereof in a misleading manner;
 - 8.3.1.3. amends all advertising matters when the scope of certification has been reduced;
 - 8.3.1.4. does not imply that the certification applies to activities and sites that are outside the scope of certification; and
 - 8.3.1.5. does not use its certification in such a manner that would bring CBs, the GSTC and/or certification system into disrepute and lose public trust.
- 8.4. License, Certificates, and Marks of Conformity
 - 8.4.1. Upon certification, CBs shall issue their client with:
 - 8.4.1.1. GSTC Logo; and
 - 8.4.1.2. GSTC Logo Terms of Use; in accordance with the GSTC Logo Terms of Issuance.
 - 8.4.2. CBs shall require their client to use the GSTC Logo in accordance with the GSTC Logo terms and conditions.

8.5. Management of Impartiality

8.5.1. Personnel who have provided consultancy services for a client shall not be used for auditing or decision making for that client for a period of a minimum of two years.

8.5.2. If within a period of two years following an initial audit the CB's personnel involved in the audit or certification decision making become involved with the client as staff, contractors or consultants, the CB shall review the audit and all decisions arising from it to ensure that there was no conflict of interest at the time of the audit and/or certification decision.

8.6. Publicly Available Information

8.6.1. CBs shall also maintain public information about;

8.6.1.1. Technical scopes in which it is accredited;

8.6.1.2. Geographical areas in which it is accredited; and

8.6.1.3. Dispute mechanisms, including complaints and appeals procedures, available in the languages used by the CBs.

8.7. Certification Requirement

8.7.1. CBs shall define the scope of the certification, specifying the services and locations that have been assessed against the Reference Standard:

8.7.1.1. In cases where the client owns majority equity in a supplier or is under common ownership with that business and that supplier's products and services are promoted or used frequently by the client, it is strongly recommended that the client arrange for that business to be either;

a. included within the scope of certification; or

b. certified under a separate and distinct certification.

8.7.1.2. In case this business is not certified, a clear distinction and/or exclusion shall be made.

8.7.1.3. During this five-year period, the scope described in the certification documentation shall adequately describe the exclusion of such services that are not within the scope of the GSTC certification. Further, if the client jointly advertises its GSTC certification along with such out-of-scope services, the advertising material shall clearly differentiate between those services that are included within the scope of the GSTC certification and those services that are not included.

8.7.2. When the Reference Standard is the GSTC-Recognized Standard, CBs shall have legal authorization to provide auditing and certification services to the GSTC-Recognized Standard.

8.7.3. When a certification scheme is owned by a third party, CBs shall have legal authorization to use the Reference Standard, marks and logos and any other intellectual property rights as well as other rules of the scheme.

8.7.4. All the requirements in the GSTC criteria-equivalent criteria or indicators of the GSTC-Recognized Standard are mandatory and shall be assessed for conformity.

8.8. Certification Application

8.8.1. CBs shall obtain all the necessary client information to allow proper planning of audits in accordance with the relevant certification scheme. This information shall include, at a minimum:

8.8.1.1. Information about the client's sustainability management system and performance;

8.8.1.2. The Reference Standard (standards and/or other normative documents established by the certification scheme) for which the client is seeking certification;

- 8.8.1.3. The general information of the client, including its name and the address(es) of its physical location(s), description of its process and operations and other information, and any relevant legal obligations;
- 8.8.1.4. General information concerning the client relevant to the certification for which the audit is conducted, such as the client's activities, its human and technical resources, and its functions and relationship in a larger corporation, if any; and
- 8.8.1.5. Information concerning all outsourced processes used by the client that will affect conformity to requirements.

Note: A variety of media and mechanisms can be used to collect this information at various times, including an application form. Such information gathering can be in conjunction with or separate from the completion of the legally binding agreement (the certification agreement) specified in Clause 4.1.2 of ISO/IEC 17065:2012.

8.9. Application Review

- 8.9.1. CBs shall use the tourism activities outlined in Clause 5.1.1 to describe the audit scope.

8.10. Audit Plan

- 8.10.1. CBs shall ensure that an audit plan is based on documented requirements of the CB as well as requirements described in this manual.
- 8.10.2. An audit plan shall be developed following ISO 19011:2018 Clause 6.
- 8.10.3. The audit plan shall include the type of audit, such as an initial audit, a surveillance audit, and a recertification audit in the third year before certification expires.
- 8.10.4. The certification cycle shall be three years, and the audit program shall establish, as a minimum, a surveillance audit every year and a recertification audit that shall be conducted prior to the expiration of certification.
- 8.10.5. The three-year certification cycle begins with the certification or recertification decision.

8.10.6. The determination of the audit plan and any subsequent adjustments shall consider the size of the client organization, the scope and complexity of its sustainability management processes and products as well as demonstrated level of effectiveness and the results of any previous audits.

8.10.7. The audit plan shall include the roles and responsibilities of the auditor and audit team.

8.11. Auditor or Personnel Requirements

8.11.1. CBs shall assign an auditor and/or audit team in conformity with the requirements set out in the GSTC Auditor Qualification, Knowledge and Skills in Section 10.

8.11.2. CBs and the audit team assigned shall communicate and approve the audit plan with the client.

8.11.3. The CB auditor shall follow the guidance on auditing provided in ISO 19011:2018. In this case, the recommendations in that standard (ISO 19011:2018) shall be understood as obligations.

8.11.4. During the audit, information should be collected through appropriate sampling methods. Guidance on sampling techniques for interviewing personnel and collecting information is necessary for CBs to ensure an effective and representative audit process.

8.11.5. The auditor may undertake interviews with external stakeholders to the client in order to clarify aspects of the client's activity and performance. The auditor shall undertake such interviews where there is significant doubt about the sufficiency, quality, or veracity of information supplied by a client.

8.11.6. The client shall be informed in writing about any stakeholder interview undertaken but shall not be informed of any information that stakeholders request to remain confidential.

8.12. Evaluation Tools

8.12.1. CBs shall have an assessment tool that shall be used by auditors to evaluate all GSTC criteria. The evaluation tool shall include:

- 8.12.1.1. Guidance for conducting the audit and the types of evidence required;
- 8.12.1.2. All additional criteria or indicators specific to a recognized GSTC standard, when applicable;
- 8.12.1.3. The additional evaluation requirements for use of the GSTC name, marks and logos as they relate to certification; and
- 8.12.1.4. If CBs operate within specific jurisdictions, countries or areas, specific guidance on local application of the criteria may be included within the evaluation tool.

8.13. Risk Assessment

- 8.13.1. CBs shall define the client's risk level through risk assessment and each scope classification to determine audit frequency and duration.
- 8.13.2. Two primary risk factors which shall be considered by CBs when conducting the risk assessment are:
 - a. The likelihood that the client's location and/or operations cause negative environmental, social, economic, or cultural impacts; and
 - b. The *Rule of Law index* of the country in which the client operates.

Note: [World Justice Project](#) provides the updates to the Rule of Law Index.

- 8.13.3. The client may be considered low risk if:
 - a. The client's location and/or operations have a minimal likelihood of causing negative environmental, social, economic, and cultural impacts; and
 - b. The Rule of Law Index for the country where the client operates is 0.60 points or higher.
- 8.13.4. In addition to two primary risk categories, CBs shall ensure the client's location and/or operations in a sensitive area are considered in defining the level of risk.
 - 8.13.4.1. CBs shall use the following lists and categories to determine sensitive areas:

- a. UNESCO World Heritage List.
- b. IUCN Protected Areas Category I to IV.
- c. List of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar List).

8.13.4.2. When the lists of sensitive areas are unavailable, CBs should rely on the national legislation where the client operates to determine the sensitive areas.

8.13.5. CBs may consider other secondary data and define risk level based on the following:

- a. Media monitoring check of the business (news classified as 'negative' will be prioritized when reviewing many overall results).
- b. Any other information gathered through online searches, social media, or networks.
- c. Any other relevant information already within the knowledge of the CB personnel.

8.13.6. CBs shall ensure that the determination of risk along with potential mitigation practices are documented.

8.14. Audit Time

8.14.1. CBs shall develop documented procedures for determining the audit time in conformity with the audit frequency and duration upon the technical scope of certification based on the determined risk.

8.14.2. Travel time to and from audited sites and time spent for the pre-assessment in order to gather information (review of documentation to define level of risk shall not be included in determining the audit time).

8.14.3. Initial and re-certification audits shall be conducted on-site.

8.15. Non-conformities

8.15.1. CBs shall inform the client of all nonconformities in writing. There are 2 classifications for the non-conformities:

8.15.1.1. Major nonconformity; and

8.15.1.2. Minor nonconformity.

8.15.2. When major nonconformities have been issued:

8.15.2.1. CBs shall provide a period of 90 days from the issue date for the closing of nonconformity.

8.15.2.2. For the closing to be accepted by CBs, adequate root cause analysis, correction, corrective, and/or preventive action, shall be provided by the client.

8.15.2.3. Evidence for correction and corrective actions shall be documented.

8.15.2.4. In case that the closing is not sufficient, CBs shall implement sanctions.

8.15.3. When minor nonconformities have been issued:

8.15.3.1. CBs shall provide a period of 90 days from the issue date for the closing of nonconformity.

8.15.3.2. For the closing to be accepted by CBs, adequate root cause analysis, correction, corrective, and/or preventive action, shall be provided by the client.

8.15.3.3. Evidence for correction shall be documented.

8.15.3.4. Corrective actions shall be verified during the next audit.

8.15.3.5. In case that the closing is not sufficient, CBs shall upgrade to major nonconformities and follow the procedure outlined in the Clause 8.15.2.

8.16. Technical Review and Certification Decision

8.16.1. CBs shall designate at least one person for the technical review and certification decision who has not participated in the evaluation process.

8.16.2. CBs shall ensure that the individual assigned to make the certification decision is under a formal contract.

8.16.3. CBs shall maintain a documented system and procedures for the technical review process and be able to demonstrate their implementation.

8.16.4. CBs shall confirm, prior to making a certification decision, that:

8.16.4.1. The information provided by the audit team is sufficient with respect to the certification requirements and the scope for certification;

8.16.4.2. It has reviewed, accepted and verified the effectiveness of correction and/or corrective actions, for all nonconformities that represent:

a. Failure to fulfill one or more requirements of the Reference Standard; or

b. Situations that raise significant doubt about the ability of the client's sustainability management processes to achieve its intended outputs; and

8.16.4.3. It has reviewed and accepted the client's planned correction and/or corrective action for any other nonconformities.

8.17. Certificates Requirements

8.17.1. CBs shall provide the client with formal certification documentation that clearly conveys, or permits identification of the following:

a. The full name and legally registered address of the certified business, along with the name of the legal entity of the organization or individual owning the business. The legally registered address of the headquarters and the legally registered addresses of all sites within the scope of a multi-site organization (See Section 14);

b. The Reference Standard, including an indication of issue status (e.g., revision date or number) used for the assessment of the certified business;

- c. The scope of certification with respect to the type of activities, products and services as applicable at each site without being misleading or ambiguous;
 - d. In the case of Tour Product Certification, the name of the Tour, its destination country, principal regions, cities, and its main destinations or attractions;
 - e. The full name, legally registered address, the logo of the CB, and GSTC Logos (GSTC-Accredited Certification Body Logo and GSTC-Certified Logo which contains unique identification code);
 - f. The logo of the GSTC-Recognized standard owner may be included under the CS-CB Framework; and
 - g. Any other information required by the GSTC Guidelines for the Certification Certificate.
- 8.17.2. Certificate shall be issued no later than 6 months from the last day of the audit. If this timeframe is exceeded, CBs shall consider the need for extra audit and document the justification.
- 8.17.3. CBs shall have rules for certified businesses that jointly advertise other tourism services that have not been certified by the Reference Standard. The advertisement of those other tourism services shall not imply that the product, process or service is certified by the Reference Standard.
- 8.17.4. CBs shall maintain an up-to-date publicly available database of certification of clients including:
- a. Full name and address of the certified businesses;
 - b. For the scope of Tour Product, name of Tour, its main destinations and attractions, along with the name of TO;
 - c. Scope of certification; including the Reference Standard if applicable; and
 - d. Validity and duration of the certificate.

8.18. Surveillance Activities

8.18.1. Surveillance activities shall be established in the audit program and shall include periodic audits to assure ongoing validity of the demonstration of fulfillment of the Reference Standard requirements.

8.18.2. Surveillance audits shall be conducted annually. The first surveillance audit following initial certification shall be conducted no later than 12 months from the certification decision date.

8.18.3. Surveillance audits are not necessarily full sustainability management processes audits. Surveillance audits may focus on key processes, a portion of the client's organization, and/or sensitive issues. In the 3-year certification cycle, all requirements shall be covered.

8.18.4. Remote audits for Surveillance Activities

8.18.4.1. Surveillance audits may be performed on-site, remotely, or in a hybrid format (combination of on-site and remote) based on the CB's risk assessment of the client.

8.18.4.2. For high-risk situations, on-site audits shall occur annually.

8.18.4.3. For low-risk or extremely low-risk clients, as determined by the CB's risk assessment, surveillance audits may be performed remotely or in a hybrid format.

8.18.4.4. In addition to the overall risk assessment, CBs may consider other relevant factors when determining the modality (remote, on-site, or hybrid) for conducting surveillance audits. These factors include but are not limited to nonconformities identified in previous audits, changes in the client's operations, and client readiness.

8.18.5. Additional Requirements

8.18.5.1. CBs shall follow the GSTC Remote Audit Guidelines and IAF MD 4:2023 for conducting remote or hybrid audits.

8.18.5.2. CBs' decisions on conducting on-site, remote, or hybrid audits shall be documented.

8.18.5.3. CBs may undertake random unannounced monitoring visits.

8.18.5.4. CBs shall maintain certification based on the demonstration that the client continues to comply with the Reference Standard.

8.19. Termination, Reduction, Suspension or Withdrawal of Certification

8.19.1. When a nonconformity with certification requirements is established, the CB shall define the actions needed to address the following:

- a. Continuation of certification under specified conditions (e.g. extra audit)
- b. Reduction in the scope of certification
- c. Suspension, withdrawal, or termination of the certification

8.19.2. Appropriate action taken for the suspension, withdrawal, or termination of the certification shall be documented.

9. Personnel Competence Criteria

9.1. CBs shall comply with the requirements in ISO 17065:2012 6.1 Certification Body personnel.

9.2. The GSTC Requirements to ISO 17065:2012 Clause 6.1:

9.2.1. All personnel involved in audit or certification decision making activities shall meet the criteria set out for the relevant role undertaken.

9.2.2. Personnel shall possess the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve the intended results of the roles they are expected to perform. Personnel shall possess generic knowledge and skills (see Clauses 10.3 and 10.4 of this manual) and shall also be expected to possess discipline and sector-specific knowledge and skills described in this section.

9.2.3. Specific requirements for the GSTC auditors, reviewers, and decision makers are described in Sections 10 and 11, respectively.

10. Auditor Qualifications, Knowledge and Skills

10.1. Individuals engaged to undertake audits (which may have one or more members) shall meet the following criteria.

Personal Attributes

10.2. Auditors shall possess personal attributes to enable them to act in accordance with the following principles of auditing stated in ISO 19011. Auditors shall exhibit professional behavior during the performance of audit activities, including being:

10.2.1.	Ethical	Fair, truthful, sincere, honest, and discreet;
10.2.2.	Open-Minded	Willing to consider alternative ideas or points of view;
10.2.3.	Diplomatic	Tactful in dealing with people;
10.2.4.	Observant	Actively aware of physical surroundings and activities;
10.2.5.	Perceptive	Aware of and able to understand situations;
10.2.6.	Versatile	Adjusts readily to different situations;
10.2.7.	Tenacious	Persistent and focused on achieving objectives;

10.2.8.	Decisive	Reach timely conclusions based on logical reasoning and analysis;
10.2.9.	Self-reliant	Acts and functions independently while interacting effectively with others;
10.2.10.	Firm	Able to act with fortitude; acts responsibly and ethically, even though these actions may not always be popular and may sometimes result in disagreement or confrontation;
10.2.11.	Open to Improvement	Willing to learn from situations;
10.2.12.	Culturally Sensitive	Observes and respectful to the culture of the auditee; and
10.2.13.	Collaborative	Interacts effectively with others, including members of the audit team and auditee's staff.

Knowledge and Skills

10.3. Generic knowledge for auditing:

10.3.1. Knowledge of audit principles, practices, and techniques. Auditors shall have knowledge of generic audit principles, practices, and techniques, as specified in this manual sufficient to conduct certification audits and to evaluate internal audit processes.

10.3.2. Knowledge of the CB's process. Auditors shall have knowledge of a CB's process sufficient to perform audits in accordance with the CB's certification process.

- 10.3.3. Communication skills appropriate to all levels within the client organization. Auditors shall be capable of communicating effectively with persons at any level of an organization using appropriate terminology and expressions.
- 10.3.4. Note-taking and report-writing skills. Auditors shall be capable of reading and writing with sufficient speed, accuracy, and comprehension to record, take notes, and effectively communicate audit findings and conclusions.
- 10.3.5. Presentation skills. Auditors shall be capable of clearly presenting audit findings and conclusions.
- 10.3.6. Interviewing skills. Auditors shall be capable of interviewing to obtain relevant information by asking open-ended, well-formulated questions and listening to understand and evaluate the answers.
- 10.3.7. Audit-management skills. Auditors shall be capable of conducting and managing an audit to achieve the audit objectives within the agreed timeframe.

10.4. Specific knowledge of sustainability:

- 10.4.1. Auditors shall have knowledge of the terminology, practices, and processes common to sustainability sufficient to understand the context of the client's operations, including:
 - 10.4.1.1. Sustainability terminology;
 - 10.4.1.2. Aspects and impacts of sustainability;
 - 10.4.1.3. Ability to interpret laws and regulations;
 - 10.4.1.4. Techniques for identification and evaluation of sustainability aspects and impacts and their sustainability significance;
 - 10.4.1.5. Needs, expectations, and concerns of the local community, workforce and other relevant stakeholders, including heritage, cultural customs and religious sensitivities; and

- 10.4.1.6. Social, environmental, economic and political context in which the client operates.

Education and Work Experience

- 10.5. Auditor competence can be acquired using a combination of the following:

- 10.5.1. Education or training that covers generic auditor knowledge and skills under the supervision of an experienced auditor; and

- 10.5.2. Experience involving the exercise of judgement, decision making, problem-solving and communication with managers, professionals, peers, customers, and other interested parties.

- 10.6. Education:

- 10.6.1. Auditors shall have formal education sufficient to acquire the knowledge and skills described in Clause 10.3. A secondary education certificate is the minimum level required for auditors.

- 10.7. Work and Audit experience:

- 10.7.1. Lead auditor qualification in any internationally recognized certification programs (such as IRCA, ASQ, etc.) in sectors relevant to tourism; or

- 10.7.2. At least 2 years experience in the hospitality tourism industry, environmental management, or social sector.

- 10.8. Training on Auditing:

- 10.8.1. The auditor shall complete the following via online or offline and CBs shall document the auditor qualification including the evidence of the training below:

- 10.8.1.1. Audit techniques and practices based on ISO19011.

- 10.8.1.2. Auditing to the Reference Standard(s) for GSTC Certification.

10.9. The GSTC Auditor Training:

10.9.1. The auditor shall successfully complete the GSTC Auditor Training.

Note: This shall be "GSTC Auditor Training" distinct from other the GSTC Sustainable Tourism Training Programs for other tourism stakeholders:

10.9.1.1. Auditors for H/As shall attend Module A, Module B, and Module E. Completion of these is sufficient for auditing H/As.

10.9.1.2. Auditors for TOs shall satisfy Module A, Module C, and Module E. Completion of these is sufficient for auditing TOs and Tour Products.

10.9.1.3. Auditors satisfying the following requirements shall only attend Module A via online or offline as a mandatory training course:

10.9.1.3.1. Having over 3 years of work experience in tourism certification;
and

10.9.1.3.2. Completed at least 10 audits of Hotel/Accommodation and Tour Operator against a GSTC-Recognized Standard or the GSTC Criteria completed within the previous 3 consecutive years.

10.9.1.3.3. If some or all of the 10 audits were completed prior to the GSTC's Recognition of the standard, the decision to accept those audits will be based on how similar the standard was before and after GSTC's Recognition. The final decision lies solely with the GSTC and is at the GSTC's discretion.

Note: The outline of the content of the GSTC Auditor Training course is presented in Annex D. Questions on GSTC Auditor Training should be directed to the GSTC.

10.9.2. Evaluation of the GSTC Auditor Training. Auditors shall successfully pass the approved GSTC Auditor Training evaluation, which is divided into online written exam and field performance test evaluations:

10.9.2.1. Online evaluation. Passing marks for the written exam on the contents and application of the GSTC Criteria shall be 85%+. The exam may be re-taken once, with the same requirement of 85%+ for passing marks. If failed a second time, the entire training course shall be repeated prior to additional testing.

10.9.2.2. Field evaluation. Passing marks for the field performance test on the ability to apply the GSTC Criteria to the field and the audit skills shall be 75%+. In the case of failure to pass the field performance test, the auditor shall observe at least five (5) field audits as a trainee auditor or conduct supplementary mock-audits and be evaluated internally by both qualified staff within the CB and GSTC.

Note: GSTC provides details of the supplementary mock-audits.

10.9.2.3. The auditors satisfying Clause 10.9.1.3 shall take the online exam but shall be exempted from the field evaluation for the applicable scope. Passing marks for the online evaluation shall be 85%+.

10.9.2.4. Auditors are allowed to retake the exam one time, with the same requirement of 85%+ for passing marks. If failed a second time, the training course shall be repeated prior to additional testing.

10.10. CBs shall determine whether or not personnel are competent to undertake audits, review audit reports, and make certification decisions in each country covered by its accreditation scope, considering that there may be significantly different regulatory, cultural, and language issues.

10.11. Auditors of CBs whose accreditation scope includes the certification with a GSTC-Recognized Standard shall be trained on that full standard. This is not included in the GSTC Auditor Training and shall be provided by the Standard Owner or the CB.

Maintenance and Improvement of Competence

10.12. The GSTC-qualified auditors and audit team leaders shall continually improve their competence. Auditors shall maintain their auditing competence through regular participation in sustainability audits and continual professional development. Continual professional development involves the maintenance and improvement of competence. This may be achieved through means such as additional work experience, training, private study, coaching, attendance at meetings, seminars and conferences or other relevant activities.

10.13. Auditors shall demonstrate their continuing professional development.

10.14. Records of auditors' competence. Up-to-date records shall be maintained at all times to demonstrate auditors' competence. The record of auditors newly qualified for sustainable tourism auditing shall be submitted to the GSTC Accreditation Team for reviewing and managing the GSTC's list of qualified auditors.

10.15. Verification mechanisms:

10.15.1. Periodical Evaluation. Auditors' competence shall be evaluated at least every three years through a combination of an observed on-site audit, shadow audits and feedback from different sources such as review of audit reports or client feedback.

10.15.2. Revised GSTC Criteria Examination. Auditors shall pass an appropriate examination within six months of issue of revised GSTC Criteria or certification requirements. The type of examination (e.g., online, field performance, or both) shall be managed and communicated by the GSTC.

11. Reviewers and Certification Decision Makers: Qualification, Knowledge and Skills

11.1. The personnel appointed by CBs as reviewers and certification decision makers shall collectively possess the following knowledge and skills:

11.1.1. Auditing principles, practices and techniques: knowledge of generic management systems audit principles, practices and techniques, sufficient to understand a certification audit report;

11.1.2. Knowledge of the GSTC Criteria and Indicators used as Reference Standard: Successful completion of the GSTC Auditor Training;

11.1.3. Knowledge of the GSTC-Recognized Standard used as Reference Standard: knowledge of the Reference Standards being specified for certification sufficient to make a decision based on a certification audit report, including the understanding of local, social, cultural, and business contexts;

11.1.4. CB processes: knowledge of the CB's processes sufficient to determine if expectations of the CB have been fulfilled based on the information submitted for review;

11.1.5. Tourism business sector: knowledge of the terminology, practices and processes common to a client's business sector sufficient to understand an audit report in the context of the Reference Standard;

11.1.6. Terms, definitions and processes in sustainable tourism: knowledge of the terms, definitions and processes related to sustainable tourism sufficient to understand a certification audit report;

11.1.7. Language understanding to allow them to use the relevant language version of the GSTC Criteria and if applicable the GSTC-Recognized Standard:

11.1.7.1. Should comfortably read and speak the language used by the majority of personnel in the tourism business and in which the reports are written; and

11.1.7.2. This only applies to audits and certifications not undertaken in English. See Section 6 of this Manual regarding languages for audits and auditors.

11.1.8. Knowledge of multi-site and group certification (if applicable): understanding and applying requirements and guidance for multi-site and group certification.

12. Ineligibility for Certification

12.1. An organization is ineligible for certification if:

12.1.1. It has had its certificate withdrawn within the last 2 years and no remedial action has been taken; and

12.1.2. It has had its certificate suspended within the last 6 months and no remedial action has been taken

12.2. CBs shall require the client (both during the periods of application and while actively certified) to declare any association with entities that have been successfully prosecuted for forced labor and/or environmental violations.

12.3. If an entity belonging to, or currently contracted by, a client has been successfully prosecuted for violations of laws related to forced labor and/or environmental violations in the last 2 years, the organization applying for certification shall not be allowed to continue with the GSTC certification process.

12.4. A CB may transfer a GSTC Certification to another GSTC-Accredited CB upon request from a client. Where a transfer has been requested, the CB accepting the transfer shall:

12.4.1. Record the reason(s) for the transfer and its legitimacy;

12.4.2. Verify and close any open minor nonconformities;

12.4.3. Determine whether an on-site or off-site audit is required to complete the transfer;

12.4.4. Inform the GSTC within five calendar days from the client's request to transfer; and

12.4.5. Apply the requirements of IAF MD 02: Transfer of Accredited Certification.

12.5. The certification shall not be transferred when the client has any outstanding major nonconformities or is suspended, or the client is subject to an ongoing complaint that is under process by the current CB.

13. Certification Program with Multilevel Award System

13.1. The certification scheme working with the GSTC-Accredited CBs may allow multiple levels of compliance with its GSTC-Recognized standard. However, CBs shall ensure that the minimum level meets the GSTC Criteria and the certification process for any level shall comply with the requirements stated in this Manual, as long as the level is referred to as certification.

Note: For instance, a certification scheme categorizes hotels into three levels: Bronze, Silver, and Gold. For a hotel to be referred to as "certified at the Bronze level," it shall meet all GSTC Criteria or its criteria or indicators equivalent to the GSTC criteria and have a valid GSTC-Recognized status.

14. Multi-site Certification

Introduction

14.1. CBs shall comply with the requirements of IAF MD 1:2023 when applying for multi-site certification.

14.2. As in the general market, there are large enterprises in the tourism sector that operate and deliver tourism services at several different sites. When this happens in such a way that the tourism activities and their management are carried out in a similar manner at different sites, all under a single management system, the multi-site certification can apply.

14.3. A multi-site organization is an organization with a central office in which certain activities are performed or managed within a network of sites, and at which such activities are fully or partially carried out. All sites have a direct legal or contractual link with the central office of the organization and are subject to a common sustainability management system (SMS). A multi-site organization is defined as an organization having:

14.3.1. An identified central office at which certain activities are planned, controlled, or managed; and

14.3.2. A network of local offices or branches (sites) at which such activities are fully or partially carried out.

14.4. Such an organization need not be a unique legal entity, but all sites shall have a legal or contractual link with the central office of the organization and be subject to a common quality system which is established and subject to continuous surveillance by the central office. This means that the central office has the right to implement corrections or corrective actions when needed at any site. This shall be specified in the contract between the central office and the sites.

Examples of possible multi-site organizations are:

14.4.1. Organizations operating with franchises with common SMS, (for example, hotel management groups);

14.4.2. Tourism service companies with multiple sites offering a similar service; and

14.4.3. Tourism companies with multiple branches.

Eligibility for a multi-site certification

14.5. The requirements of Clause 5 of IAF MD 1:2023 shall apply.

14.6. All the sites (including the central office) shall be under the multi-site organization's internal audit program and all shall have been assessed in line with that program before the organization applies for the certification.

- 14.7. The tourism services provided by the multi-site organization shall be managed by the same organization.
- 14.8. The multi-site organization shall demonstrate that its central office has an established SMS in line with the Reference Standard under assessment and that the whole organization meets the requirements of the standard. This shall include consideration of relevant regulations.
- 14.9. Factors affecting the eligibility of a multi-site organization to be eligible for sampling:
- 14.9.1. The multi-site certification process shall not be applied where site sampling is not appropriate to gain sufficient confidence in the effectiveness of the management system under assessment. Such considerations shall include:
- 14.9.1.1. The scope of the SMS and if applicable sub-scopes for each site; and
- 14.9.1.2. Size of sites eligible for multi-site assessment.

Specific requirements applicable to multi-site certification

- 14.10. Information Required:
- 14.10.1. To properly evaluate if the organization complies with the requirements of a multi-site organization, besides the information usually required for the application, it shall also include the evaluation of:
- 14.10.1.1. Results of internal site audits and management reviews or previous certification audits;
- 14.10.1.2. Records of complaints and other relevant aspects of corrective and preventive action;
- 14.10.1.3. Significant variations in the size of the sites/services;
- 14.10.1.4. Variations in shift patterns and work procedures;

- 14.10.1.5. Complexity of the management system and processes conducted at the sites;
- 14.10.1.6. Modifications since the last certification audit;
- 14.10.1.7. Maturity of the management system and knowledge of the organization;
- 14.10.1.8. Environmental and social issues and extent of aspects and associated impacts for sustainability management systems;
- 14.10.1.9. Differences in culture, language and regulatory requirements; geographical dispersion; and
- 14.10.1.10. Whether the sites are permanent, temporary or virtual.

14.10.2. CBs shall have procedures to conduct the certification of a multi-site organization. These procedures shall be made available to the clients.

14.11. Audit Program for Multi-site Certification

- 14.11.1. CBs shall follow mandatory requirements set out in clause 6.2 of IAF MD1:2023 for determining the audit program.
- 14.11.2. CBs shall ensure that the multi-site certification audit plan covers all sites over the course of the 3-year certification cycle.
- 14.11.3. Reductions in audit time per each site may be applied following the requirements of IAF MD 01.

14.12. Management of Nonconformities:

- 14.12.1. The requirements in Clause 7.7 of IAF MD 1:2023 shall be met.
- 14.12.2. CBs shall monitor the multi-site organization's review and corrective action process and may need to increase the size of the sample until it is clear that control is re-established.

14.13. Certificates:

- 14.13.1. CBs shall issue a single certificate identifying the name and address of the central office of the multi-site organization with a list of the sites to which the certificate relates. If the certification scope of any site(s) is only part of the general scope, this will be clearly shown in the certificate.
- 14.13.2. The list of sites shall be kept updated. CBs shall require the multi-site organization to inform CBs of any changes in the sites, including the closure of any of the sites.
- 14.13.3. Additional sites can be added to an existing certificate as part of surveillance or recertification audits. When adding a new group of sites to join an already certified multi-site organization, the new sites shall be considered as an independent set for the determination of the sample size. After adding the new group to the certificate, CBs shall add the new sites to the previous total to work out the sample size for future surveillance or certificate renewal audits.
- 14.13.4. The certificate shall be suspended or withdrawn in its entirety if the central office or any of the site(s) does not/do not fulfill the necessary criteria for maintaining the certificate. Clause 8.19 shall apply for suspension or withdrawal.

15. Group Certification

Introduction

- 15.1. Several individual tourism enterprises may form a group to implement a Reference Standard and seek certification together. The purpose is to share the cost of implementation and certification. Group certification is a well-established good practice within sustainability standards and is particularly practiced by small and medium businesses.
- 15.2. Group certification is a practice of organizing individual enterprises into structured groups to implement a Reference Standard in a common manner and under a common leadership and

commitment and achieve effective sustainable performance according to the Reference Standard. Group certification shall not be confused with multi-site certification which can be applied to a single enterprise.

Requirements Applicable to Group Certification

- 15.3. When a certification scheme accepts the practice of group certification, the following shall be required:
 - 15.3.1. Group members shall be individual organizations that offer similar tourism services;
 - 15.3.2. Group members shall operate in the same country and with the same language;
 - 15.3.3. The group shall have a mechanism to manage the implementation and maintenance of the same Reference Standard;
 - 15.3.4. The group shall establish and maintain a SMS;
 - 15.3.5. The SMS shall have a mechanism to ensure and assess systematically the conformity and performance of each individual enterprise of the group, including internal audits;
 - 15.3.6. A group manager shall be appointed who shall be responsible for the operation of the SMS. The group manager may be a cooperative of group members, an association, a consultant or an external auditing body, but shall not be the CB itself;
 - 15.3.7. All the members of the group are formally committed to comply with the rules and management of the group and the requirements of the Reference Standard and the certification obligations; and
 - 15.3.8. Group members are legally established entities, with their own name or brand.
- 15.4. CBs shall ensure that the GSTC's requirements for groups are followed.
- 15.5. Annex B presents the requirements applicable to the operation of a group certification.

Communication Between CB and Group

- 15.6. CBs shall clearly communicate the certification requirements and any relevant revisions, including timelines for integration, for group certification, including these requirements and any additional scheme-specific requirements (regardless if these are set by CB or the standard owner) to the group manager.
- 15.7. There shall be a contract between the group and CB, including a commitment by the group manager to meet the Reference Standard and certification requirements for group certification.
- 15.8. The group manager shall report annually to CB on relevant changes in the group's production and management practices, and provide comments and actions regarding any shortcomings in the system.

Note: The annual report can be a narrative or in the form of a template provided by the scheme or CB.

Evaluation of the Sustainability Management System (SMS)

- 15.9. CBs shall audit the group's SMS in order to evaluate its functioning and effectiveness and to ascertain whether the SMS results in conformity with the Reference Standard and certification requirements for group certification.
- 15.10. CBs shall audit the SMS to the same Reference Standard at least annually while the group members are audited according to the sampling described in Clause 15.15 of this manual.
- 15.11. CBs' audit of the SMS shall include an assessment of the conformity with the requirements outlined in this document and, in particular, that:
- 15.11.1. All internal procedures are in place;
 - 15.11.2. The group members know and access the Reference Standard and certification requirements for group certification;
 - 15.11.3. A risk assessment, appropriate to the nature, scale and complexity of the tourism activity, is carried out by the group;

- 15.11.4. The frequency of the internal audit shall be justified and include all group members;
and
- 15.11.5. To include a new group member in the Group Certificate, CBs shall evaluate the new member either by including in the sample audited during normal audit or by conducting an extra audit and confirm the following:
 - 15.11.5.1. Record keeping requirements are fulfilled;
 - 15.11.5.2. An internal audit is conducted and the records are maintained;
 - 15.11.5.3. All nonconformities are closed; and
 - 15.11.5.4. Instances of nonconformity are dealt with by the group manager.
- 15.12. CBs shall carry out a risk assessment of all aspects of the group and its members, as well as of the SMS, to identify risks to the integrity of the certification. The risk assessment shall function as a basis for the audit and certification activities.
- 15.13. CBs shall assess the competence of the group's internal auditor(s), according to ISO 19011:2018 and GSTC Criteria.
- 15.14. The outcome of the external audit of group members shall be compared with the outcome of the group's internal audit.
- 15.15. Sampling for group certification
 - 15.15.1. The sample size shall be based on the results of the risk assessment. The minimum number of group members to be audited annually by CBs shall be the square root of the total number of members in the group.
 - 15.15.2. The members to be audited shall be selected in a way that represents the whole group, based on a combination of a risk-based and random selection of the sample.
 - 15.15.3. CBs shall ensure that the group certification audit plan covers all group members over the course of the 3-year certification cycle.

Certificates

- 15.16. CBs shall issue a single certificate identifying the name and address of all the members of the group to which the certificate relates.
- 15.17. The list of group members shall be kept updated. CBs shall require the group manager to inform CBs of any changes in the membership, including the closure of any of the group members.
- 15.18. The certificate shall be suspended or withdrawn in its entirety if the group manager or any of the group members does not/do not fulfill the necessary criteria for maintaining the certificate.

16. Licensing Agreement & Market Access

16.1. Licensing Agreement:

- 16.1.1. A GSTC-Accredited CB shall operate in accordance with a Certification Body Licensing Agreement (CBLA) with the GSTC.
- 16.1.2. The CBLA establishes the terms of licensing for the GSTC-Accredited CB to use the GSTC trademarks specific to the agreement (including the GSTC-Certified Logo for businesses and the GSTC-Accredited Certification Body Logo). The agreement delineates terms and conditions of use, ownership and application of the trademarks, duties and usage guidelines. It outlines the duration, termination conditions, and licensing logo fees.
- 16.1.3. A certification scheme subcontracting auditing and certification services with one or more GSTC-Accredited CBs shall operate in accordance with a Certification Scheme Licensing Agreement (CSLA) with the GSTC.
 - 16.1.3.1. The CSLA establishes the terms of licensing for the Certification Scheme (CS) owner to use the GSTC trademarks specific to the agreement (including the GSTC-Certified Logo for businesses). The

agreement delineates terms and conditions of use, ownership and application of the trademarks, duties and usage guidelines. It outlines the duration, termination conditions, and licensing logo fees. The use of GSTC-Accredited Logo by the CS owner is not permitted.

- 16.1.3.2. The CS shall not state or imply in its marketing or operational material or instructions that it is a GSTC-Accredited CB. Further guidance in this regard is provided within the CSLA.

16.2. Market Access for Certified Businesses

- 16.2.1. The GSTC shall make publicly available a list of the GSTC-Accredited CBs together with a summary of each CB, authorized for publication by the CB.
- 16.2.2. The GSTC may arrange publicity and promotion of the GSTC-Accredited CB and tourism businesses certified by the GSTC-Accredited CB.
- 16.2.3. The GSTC-Accredited CBs shall provide a list of certified tourism businesses to the GSTC upon request.
- 16.2.4. The certificate holders of GSTC-Accredited CBs and CSs (those with a GSTC CSLA in effect) may receive various market access opportunities and promotions directly by the GSTC (subject to available resources). Engagement in those programs and activities shall adhere to the terms of the CBLA and CSLA with the GSTC, or any separate Trademark Licensing Agreement and Non-disclosure Agreements as required by the GSTC.
- 16.2.5. The GSTC Logo Usage relating to the GSTC Tour Product Certification shall comply with the terms of the CBLA with the GSTC.

16.3. Certification Body Licensing Agreement Authorization Timeframe

- 16.3.1. The CBLA will be shared with the CB following the ADMC's Accreditation Decision.

- 16.3.2. Upon signing of the CBLA by both parties, the Accreditation Certificate shall be issued and delivered to the CB.

Annex A - GSTC Checklist: Certification Scheme – Certification Body Framework (Normative)

This document outlines the steps for implementing the Certification Scheme - Certification Body Framework (CS-CB Framework) for accreditation described in Clause 5.1.2.3.3 of this manual. The CB and the CS shall comply with the Checklist and steps below, when the CB applies for the scope extension of accreditation to provide auditing and certification services against the GSTC-Recognized Standard on behalf of the GSTC-Recognized standard owner (RSO) as the RSO has decided to be a CS.

A1. Checklist and Steps

A1.1. The CS signs a service agreement with an Accredited CB:

- The CS agrees to no longer manage/provide auditing and certification services.
- The agreement sets out the rules for carrying out auditing and certification services on behalf of the CS.
- The CS and CB agree on the role of CS auditors in the accredited process, in line with the main principle that the CS shall not be involved in the certification and the entire process shall be carried out only by the CB on behalf of the CS. If CS auditors continue to audit under the CB-CS Framework arrangement, these auditors will have to qualify as the GSTC auditor following the respective GSTC-Accreditation Manual requirements and no conflict of interest shall be secured.
- The CS can sign a service agreement with one or more GSTC-Accredited CBs to perform all the auditing functions and certification decisions for the certification of clients.

A1.2. Licensing Agreement GSTC-CS / GSTC-CB:

- Enter into a CSLA with the GSTC, which provides rules of engagements for the GSTC logo and trademark usage.

- Enter into a CBLA with the GSTC, which provides rules of engagement for the GSTC logo and trademark usage for its own clients and for clients of any and all certification schemes that contract with the CB to conduct certification/auditing functions on their behalf.

A1.3. The GSTC-Accredited CB submits an application for extension of technical sub-scope to GSTC:

- The CB shall indicate and provide the evidence regarding the GSTC-Recognized Standard owned by the respective CS.
- The Standard of the CS shall be the GSTC-Recognized Standard. If the GSTC-Recognized status is expired, the CS shall re-apply or renew the GSTC-Recognized status of the standard in accordance with the GSTC-Recognized Manual v5.0.
- Tour Product is a part of the technical scope of the TO and does not require additional technical scope and separate application process, if the Recognized standard is for tour operators and the certification scheme covers tour operator certification.

A1.4. GSTC reviews the application:

- To determine the duration and type of assessment needed.
- For technical scope extensions, a desk review shall be always required. Whether witnessing is necessary will be determined based on structural similarities between the GSTC Criteria and the Recognized standard. This review shall be conducted by the GSTC.
- The extension of the geographical scope of the Recognized standard shall be applied separately by the RSO and the CB's capacity with the extended geographical scope shall be assessed after the approval of the CS-CB Framework.

A1.5. GSTC carries out a desk review to assess the CB's readiness of the certification using the CS's GSTC-Recognized standard:

- Major nonconformities resulting from the desk review shall be satisfactorily closed before the witness assessment can be scheduled.
- A1.6. GSTC carries out a witnessing to assess the CB's capability of auditing to the GSTC-Recognized standard:
- Major nonconformities resulting from the witness assessment shall be satisfactorily closed by the agreed due date or within 90 days.
- A1.7. Upon a positive GSTC decision to extend the scope of accreditation, the CB will be entitled to carry out certification services on behalf of the CS.
- A1.8. The CB carries out the certification audit and makes the certification decision against the GSTC-Recognized Standard owned by the CS, while the CS remains the owner of the standard but shall not be involved in any part of the certification process.

A2. Associated documentation

- A2.1. The GSTC Accreditation Manual for Certification Bodies - Industry:Hotel/Accommodation & Tour Operator in its latest version.
- A2.2. GSTC Accreditation Procedure in its latest version.
- A2.3. GSTC Certification Scheme and Certification Body (CS-CB) Framework in its latest version.

Annex B - Requirement applicable to a Group of Tourism enterprises that cooperatively implement a Reference standard and seek certification.

CBs shall provide information about the specific requirements applicable to Group Certification. At least, these requirements shall include the following:

B1. Sustainability Management System (SMS):

- B1.1. The group shall establish, implement, maintain and continuously improve a SMS that complies with the Reference Standard requirements.
- B1.2. The SMS shall be documented.
- B1.3. The SMS shall include written rules on:
 - Responsibilities and authorities: Clearly define roles and responsibilities for the successful implementation and maintenance of the SMS, including those of the group manager, staff, contractors, elected persons and committees;
 - Approval and rejection of membership: Procedure for approving or rejecting new members within the group;
 - Record-keeping requirements: Maintaining records by both group members and the group manager;
 - Internal audits: Conducting internal audits to ensure compliance with the Reference Standard or other requirements in their operation;
 - Internal inspector qualification: Qualification requirements for the internal inspectors;
 - Sanctions and appeals: Process for applying sanctions and handling appeals related to their operation; and
 - Document control: Creating, updating and controlling documented information.

B2. Resources:

B2.1. The Group SMS shall determine and provide the resources needed, including staffing, competency, training, infrastructure, technology and finance for the establishment, implementation, maintenance and continual improvement of the SMS and ensure conformity of individual members with the Reference Standard and specific certification requirements applicable to group certification in an objective and transparent manner.

B3. Group Manager:

B3.1. The group manager shall be responsible for the implementation of the SMS, including verifying group member conformity with the requirements of the Reference Standard and specific certification requirements applicable to group certification.

B3.2. The group manager shall appoint one person or group (e.g. committee) in charge of the SMS.

B3.3. The group manager shall manage potential and actual conflicts of interest in a manner appropriate to their scale and conditions. Individuals shall disclose potential conflicts of interest and shall not take part in work or decisions related to their potential conflict.

B3.4. All persons in the group, including management, committees, internal auditors, and others shall be competent for their tasks. The group manager shall determine the necessary competencies for various positions and provide training or take other actions to satisfy these needs. This shall include appropriate training for new staff and elected people where needed for them to fulfill their tasks.

B3.5. Records of education and training shall be maintained.

B4. Group Members:

B4.1. Group members shall each sign (or commit by a practical alternative) to a contract/agreement with the group manager. The group manager shall make sure that group members understand the implications of the contract. The contract shall contain at least:

- a commitment by the group member to fulfill the requirement of the Reference Standard and specific certification requirements applicable to group certification;
- a commitment by the group member to provide the group manager with required information;
- a commitment by the group member to comply with group manager instructions;
- acceptance by the group member of internal and third-party inspection;
- an obligation for the group member to report nonconformities;
- the right of members to terminate membership; and
- a description of the processes to be followed if membership of the group is to be suspended or terminated.

B4.2. All group members shall have access to the requirements of the Reference Standard and specific certification requirements applicable to group certification.

- The Reference Standard requirements may be in any form or media; and
- Documents can be an internal standard based upon an external standard developed by the group or an external standard.

B4.3. Documents such as contracts and internal standards that the group members need to understand shall be written in a way that is appropriate to their local language, culture and knowledge.

B4.4. Group members shall have adequate knowledge about standards, requirements and production methods, based on appropriate education, training, skills and experience.

B4.5. The group shall determine the necessary competence for group members and provide training or take other actions to satisfy these needs. Records of member training shall be maintained by the group.

B5. Continuous Improvement

B5.1. The group manager shall determine and implement plans for improving the SMS and group members' performance against the Reference Standard and specific certification requirements applicable to group certification. These plans shall be informed by various sources of data, including;

- Findings from internal audits;
- Findings from external audit; and/or
- Complaints and appeals.

B5.2. When setting up the SMS, the group manager shall carry out a risk assessment to evaluate compliance with the Reference Standard and specific certification requirements applicable to group certification. The risk assessment shall include at least identification of risks at the level of group member operations and performance of the SMS.

B5.3. The group manager shall implement appropriate measures to prevent or mitigate identified risks to an acceptable level and address nonconformities, with a focus on allocating resources to these priority areas.

B6. Service Integrity

B6.1. Group members shall only provide services within the scope of the certification in conformity with the requirements of the Reference Standard and specific certification requirements applicable to group certification.

B6.2. Safeguards shall be in place to ensure that services outside the scope of the certification are not provided by group members in a way that may imply that they are certified.

B7. Internal Audit

B7.1. Internal audits shall take place to allow group managers to determine whether or not an individual group member is meeting the requirements of the Reference Standard and specific certification requirements applicable to group certification.

- B7.2. Each group member shall undergo an internal audit annually except in circumstances that are defined by an individual certification scheme. Justifications for less frequent internal audits can be based on different factors including the results of risk assessments. Internal audits should take place at different times of the year and not be so regular as to become predictable.
- B7.3. New group members shall always be inspected and found to be in conformity before their services can be included in the certification.
- B7.4. Internal auditors may provide advice to group members but they shall not audit those members to whom they have provided advice. Auditors shall remain independent of management and shall not audit their own work.
- Note: General training activities provided for awareness do not constitute conflict of interest.*
- B7.5. The group manager shall annually decide on the status of individual group members:
- This decision shall be based on internal audits and other relevant information; and
 - Safeguards shall be in place to ensure that internal auditors are not unduly influenced in their findings by group managers or group members.
- B7.6. Group members should have the right to dispute any finding that leads to their suspension or removal from the group.
- B7.7. The SMS shall include the procedure of application and enforcement of sanctions to individual group members who do not comply with the standards or other requirements.
- B7.8. The consequences of nonconformity and sanctions shall be clearly communicated to all group members.
- B7.9. Sanctions shall include, but are not limited to, exclusion from sales of certified services.
- B7.10. Records of sanctions shall allow for the easy identification of sanctioned group members.

B8. Records:

B8.1. The group manager shall maintain up-to-date records documenting the relationship between the group manager and group members. At least, these records shall include:

- Contracts between the group and individual group members;
- Group member list;
- Records for selling certified services;
- Internal audit reports;
- Records of nonconformities, sanctions and follow-up action arising from both internal audits and external audits; and
- Documentation of complaints and appeals.

B8.2. When a group member is not able to create and maintain records, the group manager shall take responsibility for maintaining those records on their behalf.

B8.3. A comprehensive list of all group members shall be maintained and updated as necessary. At least, this list shall include the following information for each member:

- Name of the member or code assigned to the member;
- Address(es) and activities that are provided at each address;
- Certification status;
- Dates of internal audits; and
- Any scheme-specific data needed.

Annex C - Requirement Specific to Each Scope of Tourism Activity

Annex C outlines the specific requirements to be followed by CBs, applicable to each scope of tourism activity outlined in Clause 5.1.1.

C1. Requirements Specific to Hotel/Accommodation Certification

Introduction

C1.1. The term "Accommodation" is the business that regularly provides overnight lodging for travellers in the form of a room or other type of unit and may provide limited or full services such as food and beverage, housekeeping, recreational and/or fitness activities, amongst others. The term "Hotel" is used as a term treated in a generic way to refer to accommodation.

Note: See the definition in the Glossary.

The Scope/Eligibility of Hotel/Accommodation For Certification

C1.2. CBs shall evaluate how the H/A selects and prioritizes suppliers.

C1.3. CBs shall ensure that the H/A conducts due diligence on its suppliers and subcontractors using an evaluation tool regarding their compliance with the GSTC Hotel Criteria. The minimum activities for the H/A to fulfil this requirement shall be recorded and shall include:

C1.3.1. Communicating the requirements listed in an evaluation tool to the suppliers and subcontractors; and

C1.3.2. Performing assessments of the suppliers and subcontractors' compliance using an evaluation tool for ensuring their sustainability performance. The evaluation tools used by the H/A shall ensure it measures the sustainability performance of the suppliers and subcontractors.

Requirements for Preparing An Audit Plan for Hotel/Accommodation Based On Risk Assessment

- C1.4. CBs shall be aware of the scope, characteristics, ownership structure, and outsourced businesses to ensure that the audit plan is adapted to each client's context.
- C1.5. CBs shall provide sampling procedures for the H/A audits.
- C1.6. The H/A complying with the following will be categorized as extremely low-risk:
 - C1.6.1. Twenty (20) or fewer guest rooms and five (5) or fewer staff;
 - C1.6.2. With no meetings, weddings, or function spaces and activities;
 - C1.6.3. Locally owned but not belong to a multi-site organization;
 - C1.6.4. Not located in sensitive areas defined in Clause 8.13.4.; and
 - C1.6.5. With access to the internet and/or broadband for using information and communication technology when participating in remote audits, when appropriate.

Note: Locally owned means the hotel/accommodation is owned by a person or organization registered legally in the local area. See the definition in the Glossary.

Surveillance Audit for Hotel/Accommodation

- C1.7. Audit duration shall be more than one (1) day for high-risk situations. Exceptions are allowed for extremely low-risk cases.

Communication between the CB and the client

- C1.8. The CB shall clearly communicate the certification requirements for H/A including these requirements and any additional scheme specific requirements (regardless if these are set by the CB or the standard owner) to the client.

C2. Requirements Specific to Tour Operator Certification

Introduction

- C2.1. The term "Tour Operator" is the business/organization that plans, operates and delivers a complete package tour to a traveller. The term Tour Operator involves a large diversity of types of packages, transport operators and sellers of travel that can be combined amongst them and vary according to the set of product/service offerings, ownership structure and/or geographical location of their operations. For the purpose of certification, Tour Operators comprise outbound Tour Operator, inbound Tour Operator, Land Transport Suppliers, and any combination of the 3 categories.
- C2.2. The main TO sustainability impacts occur outside their premises and arise by their third-party suppliers such as accommodation, transportation, guiding, food services, attractions of many types, catering, entertainment and other services. Effective TO management systems are essential for these varied and complex businesses and shall include sustainability and monitoring of performance on sensitive sustainability issues within the supply chain.

The Scope/Eligibility of Tour Operator for Certification

- C2.3. The TO shall register legally as a TO providing inbound, outbound or domestic tour services to be eligible for TO Certification.
- C2.4. CBs shall define the scope of certification with the client by identifying the type and business scope of the TO per the following categories and corresponding definitions:
- C2.4.1. Type of Tour Operator:
- C2.4.1.1. Outbound Tour Operator: Businesses that operate outbound tourism comprising for a visitor who resides outside the country of reference, either as part of an outbound tourism trip or as part of a domestic tourism trip.

- C2.4.1.2. Inbound Tour Operator: Businesses that operate inbound tourism activities for a non-resident visitor within the country of reference on an inbound tourism trip.
- C2.4.1.3. Domestic Tour Operator: Businesses that operate domestic tourism comprising the activities of a resident visitor within the country of reference, either as part of a domestic tourism trip or as part of an outbound tourism trip.
- C2.4.1.4. Destination Management Companies (DMCs): They may also be called Ground Handlers and other similar descriptions. Businesses arrange and operate tours for incoming tourists on behalf of overseas TOs.

Note: The GSTC TO certification currently excludes the scope of outbound TO.

C2.4.2. Business Scope of the Tour Operator:

- C2.4.2.1. A wholesale tour operator is a travel professional that creates travel packages to be sold to travellers directly or through travel agencies at a discount.
 - C2.4.2.2. As a seller of their services on a retail basis.
 - C2.4.2.3. As an owner of their own transport vehicles, or lease from others, or a combination of the two.
- C2.5. CBs shall evaluate how the TO selects and prioritizes suppliers. This evaluation shall be completed before the onsite assessment. The sampling process shall identify tours with the highest volume and those in higher risk categories.
- C2.6. In cases where a TO manages more than one of the categories described in C2.4, CBs shall determine whether the scope of certification should include all the categories or whether each TO category should apply for separate certifications.
- C2.7. If all TO categories are subject to a common SMS, then all the categories shall be considered in the scope of certification.

C2.8. The TO shall conduct due diligence on its suppliers and subcontractors regarding their compliance with the Reference Standard. The minimum activities for the TO to fulfil this requirement shall be recorded and shall include:

C2.8.1. Communicating the Reference Standard to the suppliers and subcontractors;
and

C2.8.2. Monitoring the sustainability performance of suppliers and subcontractors.

C2.9. In cases where the TO owns majority equity in a supplier or is under common ownership with that business, and the supplier's products and services are promoted or used frequently by the TO, the TO shall be required to follow Clause 8.7.1.1.

Requirements for Preparing an Audit Plan For Tour Operator Based On Risk Assessment

C2.10. CBs shall be aware of the scope, characteristics, ownership structure, degree of ownership of suppliers and the type of TO product to ensure that the audit plan is adapted to each client's context.

C2.11. CBs shall understand that the TO may operate with a diverse set of product/service offerings, but the focus of the audit process should be based on considering which of those categories serve as the primary business unit by volume.

C2.12. CBs shall specify the type of TO products to be included in the audit:

C2.12.1. Multi-day packages that include accommodation.

C2.12.2. Excursions: Single-day tour packages without any overnight accommodation. These include city tours, local tours, regional tours, or shore excursions from cruises while in port.

C2.13. CBs shall have documented procedures for determining the sampling of tour and audit duration following GSTC's Guidance on Sampling for Tour Operator Certification.

C2.14. In case the TO has a hierarchical system of offices (head or central office and local offices), CBs shall have a documented procedure for determining the sample size for local offices.

- C2.15. CBs shall include in the audit process the review of the TO management system from the head office and relevant local offices, of performance records relating to the requirements of the management system and suppliers contracts.
- C2.16. The sampling of contracted services does not constitute certification of the suppliers nor of its products. The TO shall not state or imply that suppliers or products are certified, unless the products are awarded Stand alone certification.
- C2.17. Suppliers that are being sampled for the purpose of auditing may be interviewed remotely if these are considered low risk by the CB.
- C2.18. The TO complying with the following will be categorized as extremely low-risk:
- C2.18.1. Five (5) or fewer staff;
 - C2.18.2. Operating tours in a small geographical area like a village, town, or city with a limited population and businesses; or
 - C2.18.3. Operating ten (10) or fewer fixed tours using a small number of suppliers.

Surveillance Audit for Tour Operator

- C2.19. CBs shall document the surveillance audit plan and procedure.
- C2.20. CBs shall conduct head office surveillance audits annually.
- C2.21. CBs may conduct local office surveillance audits according to its plan and procedure.
- C2.22. The surveillance audit of head or local office shall be conducted onsite, remotely, or in a hybrid format according to the CB's risk assessment.

Communication between the CB and the client

- C2.23. CBs shall clearly communicate the certification requirements for TOs, including these requirements and any additional scheme specific requirements (regardless if these are set by the CB or the standard owner) to the client.
- C2.24. CBs shall ensure that there is evidence of an increase in the number of certified suppliers if there are relevant certification programs for the suppliers.

C2.25. CBs shall ensure that the following main supplier components are monitored in the TO management system:

C2.25.1. Assessment of the overall quality of sustainable supply of key product and service categories, such as:

C2.25.1.1. Hotels/Accommodations

C2.25.1.2. Transport Suppliers

C2.25.1.3. Attractions

C2.25.2. The TO SMS per Criterion A1 shall encompass the evaluation and reporting of supply chain performance.

C2.26. Aviation components not directly managed by the TO are not covered by this Accreditation Manual. However, CBs shall assess the TO's conformity with the GSTC Criterion D2.1 Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHG) from the following perspectives to determine if aviation components need to be included in the scope of certification:

C2.26.1. Whether specific aviation components are necessary in place of lower-GHG-emitting transport options such as trains or other land-transport vehicles.

C2.26.2. Whether the aviation booking is directly managed by the TO.

C3. Requirements Specific to Tour Product Certification

Introduction

C3.1. Only tour products operated by GSTC-Certified Tour Operators are eligible for GSTC Tour Product Certification.

C3.2. When certifying a Tour Product, CBs shall evaluate conformity with the GSTC Tour Operator Criteria or GSTC-Recognized Standard.

C3.3. CBs may rely on previous evaluations of GSTC Tour Operator Criteria, provided that the CB obtains evidence that (i) the management system that was previously evaluated also applies to the Tour Product to be separately certified, and (ii) the management system continues to operate effectively in conformity with the GSTC Tour Operator Criteria. However, for criteria where Product-Specific Evidence is required, the CB cannot rely solely on evidence from previous evaluations.

C3.4. When certifying a Tour Product, CBs shall specifically evaluate the following the GSTC Tour Operator Criteria at each audit, and shall obtain evidence of conformity with each criterion that is directly attributable to the Tour Product to be certified (Product-Specific Evidence). CBs shall evaluate and record Product-Specific Evidence for each of the following criteria of the GSTC Tour Operator Criteria:

- A5 Customer experience;
- A6 Accurate promotion;
- A7.4 Access for all;
- A9 Information and interpretation;
- B2 Local employment;
- B3 Local purchasing;
- B4 Local entrepreneurs;
- B5 Exploitation and harassment;
- B7 Decent work;
- B8 Community services;
- B9 Local livelihoods;
- C1 Cultural interactions;
- C3 Presenting culture and heritage;
- C4 Artefacts;
- D1.1 Environmentally preferable purchasing;
- D2.2 Transport;
- D2.4 Solid waste;

- D3.3 Visits to natural sites;
 - D3.4 Wildlife interactions;
 - D3.5 Animal welfare; and
 - D3.6 Wildlife harvesting and trade.
- C3.5. For the criteria of the GSTC Tour Operator Criteria where Product-Specific Evidence is not required, CBs shall evaluate the criteria, but may choose to do so either at an aggregated level or at a product-specific level.
- C3.6. Certificates shall be cancelled immediately in the case where the TO certification expires or is revoked.

Eligibility for Tour Product Certification

C3.7. Eligibility for Product Certification:

C3.7.1. The GSTC Tour Product Certification is only applied to excursions.

Certification of Excursion

C3.8. Definition of Excursion:

C3.8.1. "Excursion" is defined as a day-trip of any number of hours, without overnight accommodation, and consisting of at least one or more of the following: attractions, guide services, transport vehicles, food and beverage.

C3.9. Eligibility for Certification of Excursions:

C3.9.1. An excursion shall be certified only if it is operated by a TO that is certified by an Accredited Certification Body, as set out in this Accreditation Manual. It may include excursions where elements are operated by external suppliers, provided that the certified TO maintains overall responsibility and oversight of the excursion.

C3.9.2. Excursions shall be certified only if the product operates in largely the same manner for a full calendar year, with minimal changes to land transport suppliers and vehicles, attractions, and the itinerary. When alternate key suppliers are provided to replace the regularly used suppliers, the TO selects

them as a matter of standard operating procedure from their approved list within their management system.

C3.9.3. Customized excursion packages shall not be certified.

C3.10. Requirements for Certification of Excursions:

C3.10.1. Specific excursions shall be clearly defined and documented for auditing by the CB, indicating its marketed name plus key features including places visited and types of land transport vehicles used.

C3.10.2. Changes to the standard itinerary of the excursion shall conform to the requirements of the management system and all other elements of C3 in this Annex C.

C3.10.3. The excursion suppliers shall be controlled by the TO management system, including but not limited to:

C3.10.3.1. Attractions are selected and monitored with a focus on avoidance of visits that are harmful to the environment as follows:

C3.10.3.1.1. High risk attractions located in the areas having high natural and/or cultural conservation value or high risk activities with wildlife or sensitive cultural site visits like marine mammal parks/shows and indigenous communities shall have documentation to explicitly demonstrate compliance with each criterion and each aspect of the indicators applicable to that criterion (See Clause 8.13.4).

C3.10.3.1.2. The documentation shall be updated annually with historical evidence to demonstrate continued conformity over the previous year.

C3.10.3.2. Clean energy vehicles shall be required in the contracting process over higher-GHG emitting vehicles except where reasonable procurement of such vehicles is not possible.

C3.10.3.3. Sustainably procured food service shall be provided as much as reasonably possible.

C3.11. Cancellation of Certificate:

C3.11.1. Certifications of excursions shall be cancelled immediately in the case the TO certification expires or is revoked.

Requirements for Preparing An Audit Plan For Tour Product Based On Risk Assessment

C3.12. The TP complying with the following will be categorized as extremely low-risk:

C3.12.1. Not include any sensitive areas defined in Clause 8.13.4;

C3.12.2. All suppliers have been certified/verified sustainable by third parties; and

C3.12.3. The tour duration is four (4) hours or less.

Surveillance Audit for Tour Product

C3.13. The duration of on-site audits is one (1) day, with a minimum duration of half a day (4 hours). The CB shall provide justification whenever it assigns less or longer duration audits.

C3.14. In case of extremely low-risk, the surveillance audit may be conducted remotely or in a hybrid format.

Annex D - Outline of GSTC Auditor Training (Normative)

Annex D outlines the GSTC training modules, evaluation criteria, and sanctions protocol applicable to GSTC Auditors.

D1. Training modules, evaluation, and time

D1.1. Table D.1.1 and Table D.1.2 describe the details of the GSTC Auditor Training.

Table D.1.1 The GSTC Auditor Training Modules and Evaluation

Auditor Training		Hotel/Accommodation (H/A)	Tour Operator (TO)	H/A + TO
Module A	Understanding of sustainable tourism	Online or in person training attendance	Online or in person training attendance	Online or in person training attendance
	Overview of the the GSTC	Online or in person training attendance	Online or in person training attendance	Online or in person training attendance
Module B	GSTC Hotel Criteria	In person training attendance	-	In person training attendance
Module C	GSTC Tour Operator Criteria	-	In person training attendance	In person training attendance
Module D	GSTC Destination Criteria	-	-	-
Module E	Field exercise	Mock-Audit training exercise with H/A(s)	Mock-Audit training exercise with Tour Operator(s)	Mock-Audit training exercise with H/A(s) and TO(s)
Evaluation	Written exam on the contents of the GSTC Criteria	85%+ achievement	85%+ achievement	85%+ achievement
	Field performance test on the ability to apply the GSTC Criteria to the field and the audit skills	75%+ achievement	75%+ achievement	75%+ achievement

Note: All training sessions are arranged and managed by the GSTC.

Table D.1.2. Example of Auditor Training Time required for each Module

Auditor Training		H/A	TO	H/A + TO
Module A (offline)	Understanding of sustainable tourism ¹	2 hours	2 hours	2 hours
	Overview of the GSTC (mission & programs)	1 hour	1 hour	1 hour
Module B (offline)	Hotel Criteria ²	6 hours	1 hour	3 hours
Module C (offline)	Tour Operator ³	-	5 hours	3 hours
Module D (offline)	Destinations Criteria ⁴	-	-	-
Module E (offline)	Field exercise and Performance test ⁵			
Evaluation⁶ (offline)				
Total training time required		9 hours lecture and self field exercise	9 hours lecture and self field exercise	9 hours lecture and self field exercise

¹ The length of the lecture may be subject to change according to the understanding/experience level of the trainee. Questions on the GSTC Auditor Training should be directed directly to the GSTC.

^{2,3,4} are based on the assumption of no group discussion(s) and guest speech(es) time.

⁵ The duration of the field exercise depends on the trainee's ability to complete a mock-audit within the given scope. After submitting the mock-audit report, the trainee shall be tested on their performance. The deadline for submitting the report shall be guided by GSTC based on the training scope.

⁶ Online exam time is not mentioned here as it is taken by an individual trainee within a maximum 2-week period.

Note 1: Total training time required is subject to change by the GSTC.

Note 2: The GSTC may provide online training on Modules A-D in exceptional circumstances such as Covid-19 or other high risk situations.

D2. GSTC Auditor Training Sanction

D2.1. GSTC may sanction those who cheat during the test. For auditors, GSTC may issue a 2-year sanction prohibiting them from participating in GSTC Auditor Training.

D2.2. If, on the second chance, the auditor is again caught cheating, the auditor will be prohibited from attending GSTC Auditor Training.

D3. Sanction protocol for GSTC Auditors

D3.1. Sanction protocol for GSTC Auditors is designed to uphold the integrity and standards of the auditing process to ensure accountability and professionalism. Sanctions will be imposed on GSTC Auditors who violate accreditation requirements related to:

- Conflict of Interest;
- Impartiality; and/or
- Fraud.

D3.2. Violation or misbehavior of Auditors can be recognized (or identified) via grievances, complaints, compliance assessment, or oversight activities, and shall be verified through the GSTC's investigation and documentation.

D3.3. In case of misbehaviour by GSTC Auditors, the following disciplinary actions shall be implemented:

D3.3.1. Initial warning: The auditor shall be formally given a warning letter from the GSTC and shall be suspended as the authorized GSTC Auditors from the GSTC Certification for a period of 3 months.

D3.3.2. Subsequent warning: Upon recurrence of misbehaviour, a second warning shall be issued. The information will be published on the GSTC website, and the CB hired or contracted the auditor will be suspended for 3 months accompanied by a suspension of the authorized GSTC Auditors from the GSTC Certification for a period of 6 months. The auditor shall retake GSTC Auditor Training Course after the period of three months to be authorised again. The CB shall have additional training and monitoring activity.

D3.3.3. Final warning: In the event of further misbehaviour, the auditor's authorization will be withdrawn and relevant sanctions shall be imposed to the CB.