

# GSTC Tour Operator Criteria draft version 3.1

(updated November 15th, 2024)

Criteria	Indicators
<b>SECTION A: Demonstrate effective sustainable management</b>	
<b>A1 Sustainability Management System</b>  The tour operator has implemented a multi-year sustainability management system that is suitable to its size and scope, addresses environmental, social, cultural, and economic management issues, and drives continuous improvement.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The Sustainability Management System(SMS) is documented.</li><li>2. The Sustainability Management System covers environmental, social, cultural, economic issues related to its business operation including quality, human rights, health and safety issues.</li><li>3. The Sustainability Management System includes risk and crisis management of the business operation.</li><li>4. The Sustainability Management System documents evidence for its implementation of the plan.</li><li>5. The Sustainability Management System documents its regular monitoring activity for continuous improvement of its performance and the results.</li></ol>
<b>A2 Legal compliance</b>  The tour operator complies with all applicable local, national, and international laws and regulations within its business scope.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The tour operator keeps an updated list of legal requirements for tour operations in all countries where it operates.</li><li>2. The tour operator files all certificates or other documentary evidence to demonstrate compliance with all applicable legal requirements.</li></ol>
<b>A3 Reporting and communication</b>  The tour operator communicates its sustainability policy, actions, and performance to stakeholders and seeks to engage their support.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The tour operator communicates its sustainability policies with stakeholders, including staff, suppliers, and customers.</li><li>2. The tour operator makes regular reports on its sustainable performance available.</li><li>3. The tour operator regularly reviews stakeholders' sustainability policies and performance to assess the effectiveness of communication.</li></ol>
<b>A4 Staff engagement</b>  The tour operator involves its staff in developing and implementing the sustainability management system.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The tour operator involves staff in developing and implementing the sustainability policies and action plans.</li><li>2. Staff are aware of the sustainability policies.</li><li>3. The tour operator provides training and guidance for staff on how to implement sustainability policies and action plans.</li></ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. The tour operator reviews and documents staff engagement to improve staff involvement.</li> </ol>
<p><b>A5 Customer experience</b></p> <p>The tour operator monitors customer satisfaction and takes corrective action if necessary.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator has a customer feedback system and documents the analysis of the result.</li> <li>2. The tour operator records negative feedback.</li> <li>3. The tour operation takes corrective actions.</li> </ol>
<p><b>A6 Accurate promotion</b></p> <p>The tour operator ensures promotional materials and marketing communications are accurate and transparent with regard to the tour operator and its products and services.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator promotes its products and services using images based on real customer experiences and visited locations.</li> <li>2. The tour operator commits to transparently communicating its offerings, including potential wildlife encounters and cultural experiences.</li> <li>3. The tour operator's sustainability claims used for promotion are based on verifiable records.</li> </ol>
<p><b>A7 Buildings and infrastructure</b></p> <p>The tour operator ensures that all the buildings and infrastructure it uses for its operation, including the office, are legally compliant and accessible.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator complies with laws related to the buildings and infrastructure it owns or rents.</li> <li>2. The tour operator assesses suppliers' compliance with laws for buildings and infrastructure provided for the tour operations.</li> </ol>
<p><b>A8 Access for all</b></p> <p>Where practical and appropriate, site, facilities and services are accessible to people of all abilities. Information is made available on the accessibility of sites, facilities, and services.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator provides tours to people of all abilities, as appropriate to the nature of the operation.</li> <li>2. The tour operator provides information on the level of accessibility.</li> </ol>
<p><b>A9 Information</b></p> <p>The tour operator provides information about the natural and cultural aspects of the visited area, as well as an explanation of appropriate behavior while visiting natural or cultural areas.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator provides customers information about the natural and cultural aspects of the visited area.</li> <li>2. The tour operator provides training for staff, focusing on the natural and cultural aspects of the areas they offer to customers.</li> <li>3. The tour operator provides customers with information about appropriate behaviour in the areas they visit.</li> <li>4. The tour operator provides staff who operate tours with information about appropriate behaviour for the areas they visit.</li> </ol>

**SECTION B: Maximize social and economic benefits to the local community and minimize negative impacts**

<p><b>B1 Community support</b></p> <p>The tour operator supports initiatives for local community and infrastructure development.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator has a written policy to support community infrastructure or other social development.</li> <li>2. The tour operator records the level and nature of contributions to the local community.</li> <li>3. The tour operator makes preferable contracts with suppliers of products and services that support local communities.</li> </ol>
<p><b>B2 Local employment</b></p> <p>The tour operator prioritizes hiring local staff if they meet the qualifications.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator has a policy of prioritizing local employment for individuals who meet the qualifications.</li> <li>2. The tour operator monitors the percentage of local residents it employs and their positions.</li> <li>3. The tour operator makes preferable contracts with suppliers of products and services that provide local employment.</li> </ol>
<p><b>B3 Local Purchasing</b></p> <p>When purchasing and offering goods and services, the tour operator prioritizes local and fair-traded products and services whenever they are available and of sufficient quality.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator regularly audits its sources of supply of goods and services.</li> <li>2. The tour operator prioritizes local, fair-traded products and services whenever they are available and meet the required quality standards.</li> <li>3. The tour operator keeps track of its purchases of local products and services.</li> </ol>
<p><b>B4 Local entrepreneurs</b></p> <p>The tour operators support local entrepreneurs in developing, improving, or selling sustainable products and services that reflect the area's nature, history, or culture.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Where appropriate, the tour operator supports local entrepreneurs to help them develop or improve products and services that reflect the area's nature, history, or culture.</li> <li>2. The tour operator promotes local entrepreneurs' products and services to their customers.</li> </ol>
<p><b>B5 Exploitation, harassment, and human trafficking</b></p> <p>The tour operator has implemented a policy against commercial, sexual, or any other form of exploitation or harassment and human trafficking,</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator has a policy against the exploitation, harassment, human trafficking, and forced labor of anyone.</li> <li>2. The tour operator communicates the policy internally (examples: onboarding or orientation programs, staff handbooks, management policies) and externally to</li> </ol>

<p>particularly of children, youth, women, minorities, and other vulnerable groups.</p>	<p>stakeholders (examples: customer care charter for visitors; purchasing policies, purchasing orders, supplier contracts for suppliers and service providers).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. The tour operator monitors the implementation of the policy.</li> <li>4. The tour operator contracts suppliers of products and services who adhere to this policy.</li> <li>5. The tour operator maintains records of its staff to ensure that no child labor or illegal labor is employed.</li> </ol>
<p><b>B6 Equal opportunity</b></p> <p>The tour operator offers employment opportunities, including management positions, without discrimination based on gender, race, religion, disability, nationality, or other factors.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator has a policy of providing equal employment opportunities without discrimination based on gender, race, religion, disability, nationality, or other factors.</li> <li>2. The tour operator ensures that it monitors equal employment opportunities, including management positions and opportunities for local residents.</li> </ol>
<p><b>B7 Decent work</b></p> <p>Labor rights are upheld by providing a safe and secure working environment, a living wage, regular training, and opportunities for career advancement.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator demonstrates awareness of and compliance with national labor regulations and/or International Labor Organization(ILO) standards and regulations.</li> <li>2. The tour operator regularly monitors wage levels compared to local living wage benchmarks announced by a relevant local public body or international body that provides living wage benchmarks.</li> <li>3. The tour operator ensures that staff receive at least the legal minimum wage set by local and national regulations. In cases where there are no established minimum wages, the tour operator pays staff a fair wage that reflects their skills, competencies, and qualifications, comparable to local wages for similar positions.</li> <li>4. The tour operator maintains training records that demonstrate the extent and regularity of provided training.</li> <li>5. The tour operator has a written contract demonstrating its support for staff by providing healthcare and social security benefits.</li> <li>6. The tour operator ensures that all office and field staffs have a safe and secure working environment in compliance with legal requirements.</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. The tour operator monitors employee satisfaction.</li> <li>8. The tour operator has a system in place for staff to address grievances.</li> </ol>
<p><b>B8 Community impacts</b></p> <p>The tour operator ensures its activities do not adversely impact local community services and livelihoods.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator identifies its current and potential impacts on the communities where it operates.</li> <li>2. The tour operator monitors its impact on the communities where it operates.</li> <li>3. The tour operator has a system in place for local communities to address grievances.</li> </ol>

### SECTION C: Maximize benefits to cultural heritage and minimize negative impacts

<p><b>C1 Cultural interactions.</b></p> <p>The tour operator follows international and national best practices and locally agreed-upon guidance for managing and promoting visits to Indigenous communities and culturally or historically sensitive sites to minimize adverse impacts and maximize local benefits and visitor fulfilment.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator has guidelines for visiting cultural sites, including Indigenous communities and heritage sites, that are aligned with local, national, and international best practices.</li> <li>2. The tour operator ensures the guidelines cover appropriate interaction with children.</li> <li>3. The tour operator determines the size, frequency, and timing of tour groups based on an evaluation of the capacity and fragility of cultural sites and communities.</li> <li>4. The tour operator trains field staff such as guides and drivers about the guidelines.</li> <li>5. The tour operator delivers the guidelines to customers.</li> </ol>
<p><b>C2 Protecting cultural heritage</b></p> <p>The tour operator contributes to protecting and enhancing cultural heritage with historical, archaeological, traditional, and spiritual significance, does not impede and allows access by local residents.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator contributes to the protection and enhancement of cultural heritage in its areas of operation and visits and records its contributions.</li> <li>2. The tour operator ensures that its activities do not impede local access to the heritage.</li> </ol>
<p><b>C3 Presenting culture and heritage</b></p> <p>The tour operator values and integrates authentic elements of traditional and contemporary local culture into its operations while respecting all intellectual property rights.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator identifies traditional and contemporary cultural elements of the areas in which it operates tours.</li> <li>2. The tour operator provides customers with an authentic experience of local culture through site or facility visits, cuisines, events, or other activities.</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. The tour operator respects copyright and intellectual property rights, obtaining permission to have cultural experiences as necessary.</li> <li>4. The tour operator has a system for local communities to address any concerns about the organization's cultural representation in its operations.</li> </ol>
<p><b>C4 Artifacts</b></p> <p>Artifacts are not sold, traded or displayed, except as permitted by local and international law.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator complies with relevant laws when using artifacts.</li> <li>2. The tour operator informs customers about relevant laws concerning artifacts when visiting cultural or archaeological areas.</li> </ol>

## Section D: Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts

### D1 Conserving resources

#### D1.1 Environmentally preferable purchasing

The tour operator has implemented a purchasing policy favoring environmentally sustainable products and suppliers, including capital goods, food, beverages, building materials, and consumables.

1. The tour operator has a purchasing policy favoring environmentally sustainable products and suppliers, including capital goods, food, beverages, building materials, and consumables.
2. The tour operator has records that prove the implementation of the policy in its office and tour operation.
3. The tour operator communicates the policy with suppliers.
4. The tour operator contracts suppliers of products and services who adhere to this policy.
5. Where certified products are not available, the tour operator considers the origin and methods of growing or production.
6. Where certified suppliers of product and service are not available, the tour operator considers the policy and implementation of the suppliers.
7. The tour operators ensure that unregulated, vulnerable, threatened, or endangered species are not used in their tour operations as part of

	<p>food and beverage offerings, souvenirs, or entertainment.</p>
<p><b>D1.2 Efficient purchasing</b></p> <p>The tour operator carefully manages the purchasing of consumable and disposable goods, including food, in order to minimize waste.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator has a purchasing policy favoring reusable, returnable, or recycled goods.</li> <li>2. The tour operator has records that prove the implementation of the policy in its office and tour operation.</li> <li>3. The tour operator communicates the policy with suppliers.</li> <li>4. The tour operator monitors the impact of efficient purchasing on waste reduction.</li> <li>5. The tour operator eliminates all single-use plastic items in its office and performs tour operations where feasible.</li> </ol>
<p><b>D1.3 Energy conservation</b></p> <p>The tour operator measures energy consumption by type, takes steps to minimize overall consumption, and increases its use of renewable energy.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator measures its office and tour operations' directly controlled energy consumption by type.</li> <li>2. The tour operators set goals for reducing energy consumption.</li> <li>3. The tour operator trains staff on minimizing energy consumption.</li> <li>4. The tour operator increases energy-efficient equipment and practices in its office and tour operations.</li> <li>5. The tour operator offers suppliers that offer energy-efficient equipment and practices in their products and services.</li> <li>6. The tour operator communicates with customers about its energy policy and practices.</li> <li>7. The tour operator increases renewable energy in its office and tour operations, where feasible.</li> </ol>
<p><b>D1.4 Water conservation</b></p> <p>The tour operator is aware of the location's water risk, measures water consumption by type, and takes steps to minimize overall consumption.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator is aware of the water risk of the location of its office and tour operations.</li> <li>2. The tour operator measures its office by type.</li> <li>3. The tour operators set goals for reducing water consumption.</li> <li>4. The tour operator trains staff on minimizing water consumption.</li> <li>5. The tour operator increases the amount of water-saving equipment in its office.</li> </ol>



	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. The tour operator offers suppliers that offer water-saving equipment and practices in their products and services.</li> <li>7. The tour operator communicates with customers about its water policy and practices.</li> </ol>
<p><b>D2 Reducing pollution</b></p>	
<p><b>D2.1 Greenhouse gas emissions</b></p> <p>The tour operator identifies greenhouse gas emission sources directly controlled by the organization, calculates the emissions, takes steps to avoid or minimize them, and increases insetting. Offsetting of the organization's remaining emissions is encouraged.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator measures greenhouse gas emissions from its direct operations.</li> <li>2. The tour operator calculates the carbon footprint per day.</li> <li>3. The tour operator takes steps to avoid and minimize emissions from its direct operations.</li> <li>4. The tour operator prefers suppliers of products and services to avoid and minimize emissions.</li> <li>5. The tour operator implements a carbon inset and/or offset mechanism where feasible.</li> </ol>
<p><b>D2.2 Transport</b></p> <p>The tour operator reduces transportation requirements and increases the use of cleaner and more resource-efficient alternatives by customers, staff, suppliers, and its own operations.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator utilizes the most environmentally friendly and efficient transport options for its operations, including tours, whenever feasible and practical.</li> <li>2. The tour operator designs tours that minimize the use of transport whenever feasible.</li> <li>3. The tour operator offers transportation options such as car sharing or pickups to reduce staff's daily commutes.</li> <li>4. The tour operator favors local suppliers of products and services.</li> <li>5. The tour operator favors suppliers that provide environmentally friendly and efficient transport services.</li> <li>6. The tour operator provides customers with information about alternative transport options, where applicable.</li> </ol>
<p><b>D2.3 Wastewater</b></p> <p>The tour operator ensures that all facilities used for its operation treat wastewater, reuse it where feasible, and</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator utilizes facilities that adhere to applicable laws regarding wastewater.</li> <li>2. The tour operator favors suppliers of products and services that reuse wastewater.</li> </ol>



<p>release it without adverse effects on the local population or the environment.</p>	
<p><b>D2.4 Solid waste</b></p> <p>The tour operator measures and reduces waste, including food waste, and reuses and recycles where feasible.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator has a waste management plan for waste directly controlled by its office and tour operations, including reduction, reuse, and recycling.</li> <li>2. The tour operator measures waste by type.</li> <li>3. The tour operator takes steps to avoid and minimize waste by monitoring the results of waste measurements.</li> <li>4. The tour operator trains staff on waste management.</li> <li>5. The tour operator communicates with customers about its waste management practices.</li> <li>6. The tour operator disposes of waste following the relevant laws.</li> </ol>
<p><b>D2.5 Harmful substances</b></p> <p>The tour operator minimizes the use of harmful substances, opting for environmentally friendly products or processes when possible, and follows specific procedures for storing, using, handling, and disposing of chemicals.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator has an inventory of harmful substances used in its office and tour operations.</li> <li>2. The tour operator increases the replacement of harmful substances with environmentally friendly products or processes.</li> <li>3. The tour operator favors suppliers of products and services that use fewer or no harmful substances.</li> <li>4. The tour operator trains staff on harmful substances management for its office and tour operations.</li> <li>5. The tour operator guides customers in advance to select environmentally friendly products such as sunscreens, perfumes, insect repellents, etc.</li> </ol>
<p><b>D2.6 Minimize pollution</b></p> <p>The tour operator implements practices to minimize pollution from its operation, including noise and light pollution.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator identifies the sources of pollution that can be generated by its operations.</li> <li>2. The tour operator takes steps to prevent and reduce pollution.</li> <li>3. The tour operator monitors the pollution generated by its operations.</li> </ol>

### D3 Conserving biodiversity, ecosystems and landscapes

#### D3.1 Biodiversity conservation.

The tour operator contributes to the conservation of biodiversity while minimizing any disruption to natural ecosystems.

1. The tour operator monitors its adverse impact on biodiversity.
2. The tour operator takes steps to avoid and mitigate its adverse impact.
3. The tour operator engages with experts or conservation organizations to prevent or reduce the negative impact of its tour operations on biodiversity.
4. The tour operator contributes to biodiversity conservation through financial, in-kind, or other assistance.
5. The tour operator prioritizes the areas used by its operations in conservation contributions unless urgent conservation activities are required in other areas.

#### D3.2 Invasive species

The tour operator takes measures to avoid the introduction of local invasive species.

1. The tour operator has an inventory of local invasive species relevant to the areas where it operates its tours.
2. The tour operator takes steps to avoid introducing invasive species through its tours.
3. The tour operator trains tour guides and drivers to prevent the introduction of invasive species.
4. The tour operator informs customers in advance about invasive species to minimize the risk of introducing them.

#### D3.3 Visits to natural sites

The tour operator follows appropriate guidelines for the management and promotion of visits to natural sites in order to minimize adverse impacts and maximize visitor fulfillment.

1. The tour operator has guidelines for visiting natural sites, aligned with local, national, and international good practices.
2. The tour operator determines the size of tour groups and the frequency and timing of visits to minimize the impact on the natural environment.
3. If tours include visits to highly protected areas, as required, the tour operator consults with experts or responsible public agencies.
4. The tour operator trains field staff such as guides and drivers about the guidelines.
5. The tour operator delivers the guidelines to customers.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. The tour operator has a system in place for the public, including local communities and conservation organizations, to address grievances.</li> </ol>
<p><b>D3.4 Interactions with wild animals</b></p> <p>Observation of and interactions with wild animals in the wild and in a captive environment are responsibly managed to avoid adverse effects.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operator has guidelines for wildlife interaction, aligned with local, national, and international regulations and good practices.</li> <li>2. The tour operator monitors its adverse impact on wildlife.</li> <li>3. The tour operator determines the size, frequency, and timing of tour groups based on its monitoring results, the advice of wildlife experts and relevant laws, if applicable.</li> <li>4. The tour operator trains field staff, such as guides and drivers, on the guidelines.</li> <li>5. The tour operator delivers the guidelines to customers.</li> </ol>
<p><b>D3.5 Animal welfare</b></p> <p>The tour operator that keeps, owns or manages animals are to be appropriately and duly licensed by a government authority or appointed agency and subject to regular inspections. Housing, care, handling and viewing practice for all animals (wild and domestic animals, irrespective of circumstance) shall meet the highest standards in animal welfare. No species of wild animals will be acquired, bred or held captive, except by authorized and suitably equipped persons and for properly regulated activities in compliance with local and international law and recognized guidelines for animal-based tourism activities.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tour operators are aware of national and international standards and laws that pertain to wild and domestic animals affected by their tour operations.</li> <li>2. The tour operators do not have any captive wildlife unless it is legally permitted.</li> <li>3. The tour operator complies with national and international standards and laws regarding the housing, care, and handling of captive wildlife and domestic animals when they are part of its operations.</li> <li>4. The tour operator ensures that service providers and sites it visits comply with relevant laws and regulations concerning wild and domestic animals.</li> <li>5. The tour operator offers hunting activities, if they are legal, within the context of conservation based on scientific research.</li> <li>6. The tour operator trains staff, including guides and drivers, who are involved in its animal-relevant operations about national and international standards and laws.</li> <li>7. The tour operator provides customers with information about the laws on wild and domestic animals to prevent them from buying illegal products</li> </ol>

	derived from threatened species notified by IUCN or CITES.
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