Introduction to GSTC and GSTC Programs

GSTC
Global Sustainable Tourism Council

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Photo: https://wanderingwheatleys.com/top-things-to-see-do-tashkent-uzbekistan/

The leading global authority in setting and managing standards for sustainable travel & tourism

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How to recognize what is sustainable tourism?

Standards

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How to verify sustainability claims?

Labels

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Jungle of Labels...much confusion...

The logos shown are fictitious and are used for illustrative purposes only.

Global Sustainable Tourism Council 2007

Founding Organizations:

UNITED NATIONS FOUNDATION

+

UNWTO, UNEP

+

a coalition of 32 partners from various stakeholders of industry, NGOs, etc.

GSTC Standards

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GSTC Standard Sets

Six sets of GSTC Standards have been developed:

GSTC Hotel Standard
(2008, 2012, 2016, 2025)

GSTC Tour Operator Standard
(2008, 2012, 2016, 2025)

GSTC Destination Standard
(2013, 2019)

GSTC MICE Standard
(2024)

GSTC Attraction Standard
(2024)

GSTC F&B Standard
(2026)

GSTC Destination v3.0 is under revision and will be published in 2027

Four Pillars of GSTC Standards

(A) Sustainability Management

Demonstrate effective sustainable management.

(A) Social & Economic Benefits

Maximize benefits to the host community and minimize negative impacts

(B) Cultural Heritage

Maximize benefits to communities and culture; minimize negative impacts

(A) Environment

Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts

Providing Assurance

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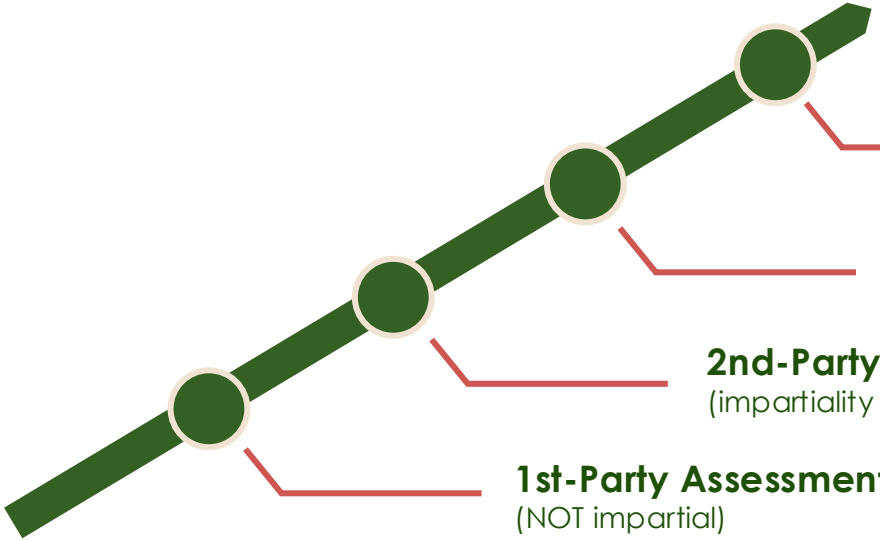
Levels of Assurance



3rd-Party Certification by an Accredited Certification Body

3rd-Party Certification
(supposedly impartial)

2nd-Party verification
(impartiality is not certain)

1st-Party Assessment
(NOT impartial)

Zero verification

GSTC Accredited Certification

Certification

Third-party attestation related to products, processes, **services**, systems or persons.

Certification helps verify claims.

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Accreditation

third-party attestation related to a **certification body conveying formal demonstration** of its competence to carry out specific conformity assessment tasks.

[SOURCE: ISO/IEC 17000:2004]

GSTC does not conduct certifications.
Rather, we accredit the certification bodies that do so.

Using the GSTC Frameworks Examples

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Destinations using the GSTC Frameworks

wonderful indonesia

Malta Tourism Authority

Mauritius Tourism Authority

NEW ZEALAND TOURISM 100% PURE NEW ZEALAND

botswana tourism

Japan Tourism Agency

Switzerland Tourism.

SERNATUR Ministerio de Economía, Fomento y Turismo Gobierno de Chile

Singapore TOURISM BOARD

STO SLOVENIAN TOURIST BOARD | I FEEL SLOVENIA

ICT INSTITUTO COSTARRICENSE DE TURISMO

THE ISLANDS OF THE bahamas

visit estonia

TÜRKİYE ÇEVRESEL VE KÜLTÜREL SÜRDÜRÜLEBİLİRLİK PROGRAMI GSTC Sertifikalı

Visit Finland

Innovation Norway

CBT THAILAND

SÜDTIROL

COOK ISLANDS

The Islands of CABO VERDE From the Heart

Singapore Hotel Sustainability Roadmap

In line with the **Singapore Green Plan 2030**, the roadmap sets out clear targets and strategies for hotels to adopt in their sustainability journey:
over 60% room stock be sustainable certified by 2025.

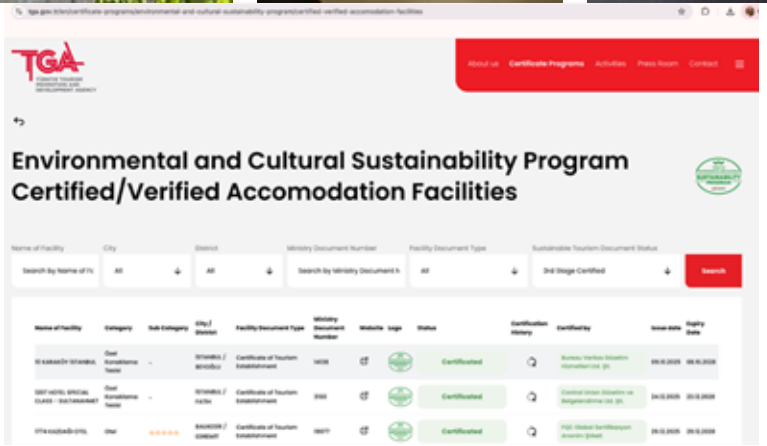
2026: more than 70% of hotel rooms in Singapore obtained sustainability certification, with 90% of GSTC Certification.

Turkiye Environmental and Cultural Sustainability Program

National Program for Hotel/Accommodation Certification (Mandatory)

Stepwise Program: Three stages

- Stage 1 and 2: Time limits/ Verification
- **Stage 3 is "Certification"**
- Due date: 2030
- 2421 Certified as of Aug 25, 2026



Preferring and highlighting certified sustainable hotels

hotelbeds

agoda

AMERICAN EXPRESS GLOBAL BUSINESS TRAVEL

easyJet holidays

traveloka

make my trip

TUI GROUP

Jet2holidays
Package holidays you can trust

Booking.com

Trip.com

Booking.com Travel & Sustainability Report 2026

85% of travelers say that more sustainable travel is important or very important to them

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Travelers plan to make more conscious destination choices: with 43% planning to avoid overcrowded destinations (up 11% year-over-year) and 42% planning to travel outside of peak season.

100M Nights booked by travelers at properties with a third-party certification **on Booking.com in 2025**

Source: https://news.booking.com/download/1d38ba01-14dd-49e4-87ab-2af8fe9edbb3/booking.comtravelampsustainabilityreport2026_newsroomedition4.pdf

TUI Group: Highlights hotels with independent sustainability certification on its booking platforms

Tho. ... eing included in the CDP Climate Change A List once again confirms that our approach delivers measurable progress. Sustainability is a strategic success factor for TUI. Based on ambitious climate targets, clear governance and transparent reporting, we are focused on scaling our impact further across the entire tourism value chain."

Growing demand for sustainably certified hotels

At the same time, demand for hotels with independent sustainability certification is rising significantly. In the financial year 2025, around 15 million TUI guests stayed in certified hotels – compared to 10.5 million in the financial year 2023. This represents an increase of approximately 43 per cent.

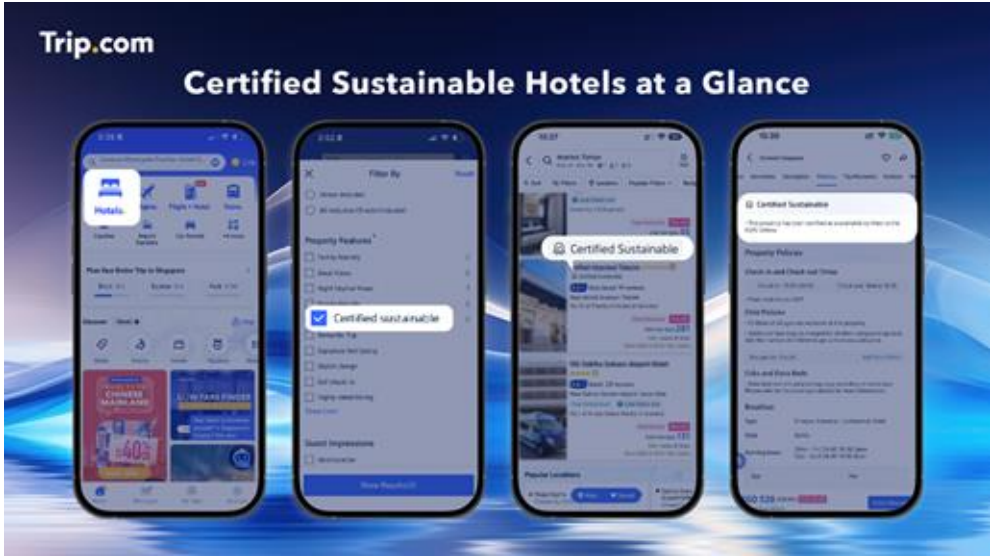
As part of its sustainability strategy, TUI Group actively highlights hotels with independent sustainability certification on its booking platforms and in travel agency consultations. To qualify, certifications must align with the Hotel Standard of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). This includes sustainable management, environmental and climate protection, support for local communities and protection of cultural heritage. Independent audits ensure transparency and credibility and help guests make informed and responsible travel decisions.

https://www.tuigroup.com/en/newsroom/news/tui-group-recognised-by-cdp-for-climate-leadership-certified-hotels-see-strong-growth-in-demand

Trip.com now highlights GSTC-certified hotels and accommodations

This initiative aims to make it easier for travelers to identify and book sustainable hotels/accommodations, promoting responsible tourism choices.

Only hotels and other accommodation facilities that have achieved a GSTC-accredited certification will be eligible for inclusion in this feature.



EU Directive on Empowering Consumers for Green Transition

Directive (EU) 2024/825 (EmpCo)

aims to protect consumers from misleading environmental claims ("greenwashing") and ensure they have better information about product durability and repairability.

Member states must transpose these rules into national law by **March 27, 2026**, with enforcement beginning **September 27, 2026**.

For Hotels | For Tour Operators | For Destinations | For Business Travel | For Certification Bodies | For Consultants | For Travelers

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ABOUT STANDARDS CERTIFICATION ACCREDITATION TRAINING MEMBERSHIP EVENTS RESOURCES English

How GSTC Certification Supports Compliance with the EU EmpCo Directive

Overview of the EmpCo Directive and Why It Matters for Tourism?

The EU's Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition Directive (EmpCo), formally Directive (EU) 2024/825, sets new legal requirements for the environmental claims that businesses make to consumers. It amends the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive (2005/29/EC) and the Consumer Rights Directive (2011/83/EU), and forms part of the EU's broader effort to stop greenwashing across the European market.

For tourism specifically, this means that **sustainability labels, certificates, and green marketing claims must be backed by credible, independently verified evidence**. Vague or unsubstantiated claims such as "eco-friendly" or "sustainable" without supporting evidence will no longer be acceptable under EU law.

EmpCo applies broadly: it covers any business making environmental claims to consumers in the EU, including businesses based outside the EU. Member States were required to transpose the Directive into national law by 27 March 2026, and the new rules become applicable from 27 September 2026.

How GSTC Certification Supports the EmpCo Requirements

GSTC's assurance framework was built around the same principles that EmpCo now requires: certification based on scheme approach founded on **transparency, independence, third-party verification, and ongoing monitoring**. Here is how the GSTC system lines up with the Directive:

- Publicly Available Scheme Requirements
- Standards Developed Through Open, Multi-stakeholder Consultation
- Certification Delivered Independently, Not by GSTC Itself
- Ongoing Monitoring
- Competence of Certification Personnel
- Enforcement and Corrective Measures
- Accreditation Aligned with EU Regulation (EC) No 765/2008
- Built-in Safeguards Against Misleading Claims

EmpCo Requirements At a Glance

EmpCo Requirements for Certified Entities (Traders) | EmpCo Requirements for Certification Schemes

EmpCo Principle for Traders	How GSTC Certification Supports Compliance
Sustainability claims should be based on certification schemes and independent verification.	GSTC certification is delivered through a certification scheme operated by GSTC as the scheme owner and implemented by independent accredited certification bodies.

GSTC Micro and Small Enterprise Certification (Q3 2027)

New Program for MSEs

Micro and Small Enterprises Certification

A separate certification program for MSEs

Guidance for Auditing MSEs

Providing auditing guidance on applying the requirements to MSEs

Supporting MSEs for existing GSTC Hotel and Tour Operator Certifications

Thank you!

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