National Sustainable Tourism Certification (NSTC)

Hotels and Accommodation Sector Handbook

Contents

1. Sustainable Tourism Background

Tourism has become a vital part of many economies, with the number of travelers on the rise. It has the potential to bring numerous benefits and opportunities, yet it must be managed sustainably in order to avoid negative consequences. If not carefully planned, tourism can lead to the degradation of the very resources it relies on, as well as social and environmental harm. In order to avoid these negative repercussions, it is important to prioritize sustainability in the development of the tourism industry.

The concept of sustainable tourism has gained significant attention in recent years and is now considered an essential aspect of both national and international tourism policies. Sustainable tourism is a form of tourism that takes into consideration the economic, social, and environmental impacts of tourism, both currently and in the future. It aims to meet the needs of all stakeholders, including visitors, the tourism industry, the environment, and host communities. To achieve this, sustainable tourism should make the most efficient use of natural resources, respect host communities, and ensure long-term economic viability, distributing benefits fairly among all those involved. (Making Tourism More Sustainable - A Guide for Policy Makers, UNEP and UNWTO, 2005). Tourism has the potential to stimulate economic development and protect the environment, and is referenced in three of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): economic growth, decent employment, and sustainable production and consumption. In addition, it is also related to the conservation and sustainable use of oceans. Therefore, tourism is a key industry that can contribute to the achievement of a range of important global goals.

Sustainable development, which seeks to balance economic growth, social development, and environmental protection, has been a major focus since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a global blueprint for achieving a more sustainable future. In 2017, Sri Lanka passed the Sustainable Development Act, which requires every ministry and department to create a sustainable development strategy for all industries and government programs. Tourism has long been a sustainable industry in Sri Lanka, with the Tourism Strategic Plan 2017-2020 incorporating sustainability into its core strategies. The private sector in the tourism industry has also taken steps towards sustainability, with many hotels earning international awards and certifications such as Trave life, Earth Check, US Green Building Council LEED, Green Globe for their sustainable practices. As consumers increasingly turn to digital platforms that promote sustainable tourism options like Bookdifferent.com, it is clear that there is a willingness to pay for trips that support the planet, people, and cultures.

2. Sustainable Tourism Certification

One way to improve the sustainability of a destination is through certification. Certification schemes establish standards and provide a quality mark, label, or logo that can be used in marketing and promotions to distinguish genuine sustainable tourism businesses from others. There are over 150 certification schemes globally, with some being more well-known in the industry than others. Certification can help to raise the sustainability standards of a destination, making it more attractive to environmentally and socially conscious travelers.

Some businesses make false or misleading claims about their sustainability practices in order to attract customers, a practice known as "greenwashing." This can make it difficult for consumers to identify truly sustainable businesses. Certification can help to address this issue by providing assurance to both the industry and consumers that a business has met a set of minimum sustainability standards. To become certified, a business typically needs to pay a fee to the certifying agency, fill out a series of documents and questionnaires, and undergo an inspection and evaluation by an auditor. If the business meets the required standards, it will be considered certified and may use the certifying agency's logo. Sustainable tourism certification is more common in Europe and is often focused on the accommodation sector. Certification helps to stop greenwashing and gives consumers confidence that the businesses they patronize are genuinely committed to sustainability. There are several commonly used certifications for sustainable tourism that can be used to demonstrate a commitment to sustainable practices in the tourism industry. These certifications include:

CSR Tourism

"CSR-Tourism" is the leading certification and management system for the social, ecological and economic responsibility of tour operators in Europe. As of 2012, the CSR Tourism Label will also be awarded to travel agencies.

Internet	www.tourcert.org
Certifying Organisation	TourCert
Partner Organisation/s	German Protestant Church Development Service; Naturefriends International; KATE Center for Ecology & Development; HNE Eberswalde
Scope	Germany, Austria, Switzerland und other European countries
Certified Businesses	55
Sustainability Areas	Environment, Social Issues, Economy
Transparency	Standard published
Verification Procedure	On-site third-party verification every 2–3 years

Green Globe Certification

Green Globe certifies hotels, resorts, tour operators, car rentals, exhibition centres and other tourism companies.

Internet	www.greenglobe.com
Certifying Organisation	Green Globe
Partner Organisation/s	TSC, EVVC, GCB, Atmosfair, emendo 4, World Travel & Tourism Council, Obmi, Bisa spa, Pata, UNWTO, Skal
Scope	International, 83 Countries
Certified Businesses	300
Sustainability Areas	Environment, Social Issues, Economy, Cultural Heritage
Transparency	Standard published
Verification Procedure	On-site third-party verification every 2 years

The Green Key

The Green Key is awarded to hotels, campgrounds and attractions. The leading organisation also awards the international "Blue Flag label" to beaches and marinas.

Internet	www.green-key.org
Certifying Organisation	Foundation of Environmental Education (FEE)
Partner Organisation/s	UNEP, UNWTO
Scope	International, 28 Countries
Certified Businesses	1539
Sustainability Areas	Environment
Transparency	Standard published
Verification Procedure	On-site third-party verification every 3 years

EarthCheck

The EarthCheck certification programme focuses on environmental management for the travel and tourism industry and also assists the businesses in their cost and risk management.

Internet	www.earthcheck.org
Certifying Organisation	EC3 Global
Partner Organisation/s	Ecolab, Travelocity, Useeka, Expedia, SAI Global, Rainforest Alliance, Singapore Polytechnic, Greenfleet, WWF, GRI, GSTC, PATA and other organizations
Scope	International, 70 Countries
Certified Businesses	Over 700
Sustainability Areas	Environment, Social Issues, Cultural Heritage
Transparency	Standard only available for members
Verification Procedure	On-site third-party verification every year

Travelife Awards

Travelife works with major international and small independent tour operators from different countries. Participating hotels and apartment buildings can attain the certification levels bronze, silver or gold. The system is currently developing a travel companies' certificate.

Internet	www.travelife.org
Certifying Organisation	ABTA Ltd.
Partner Organisation/s	Over 15 travel associations, mostly in Great Britain, Scandinavia, The Netherlands, Germany, Brazil and Thailand
Scope	International, 36 Countries
Certified Businesses	500
Sustainability Areas	Environment, Social Issues, Economy
Transparency	Standard published
Verification Procedure	On-site verification every 2 years (as of 2012 by third-party auditors)

European Ecolabel

In the field of tourism, the official European Union label is awarded to accommodation establishments and campsites. The verification process and assignment of the certificate is performed by the national partner organisations, e. g. environmental ministries.

Internet	www.ec.europa.eu/environment/ecolabel
Certifying Organisation	European Commission
Partner Organisation/s	Environmental Ministries of the EU Members States
Scope	Europe
Certified Businesses	506
Sustainability Areas	Environment
Transparency	Standard published
Verification Procedure	On-site third-party verification every 3–5 years

Blaue Schwalbe

The Blaue Schwalbe was the first eco-label for tourist accommodations worldwide. It was created in 1989 and certifies ecologically-oriented hotels, guesthouses, inns and camping sites in Europe. Most Blaue Schwalbe accommodations are located in travel areas that can be easily reached without air transport or private cars.

Internet	www.vertraeglich-reisen.de/biohotels
Certifying Organisation	Fairkehr GmbH
Partner Organisation/s	Cooperation established inter alia with Austrian Ecolabel for Tourism, Steinbock Label, BIO Hotels
Scope	Europe, 10 Countries
Certified Businesses	Around 150
Sustainability Areas	Environment, Social Issues, Economy
Transparency	Standard published
Verification Procedure	Desk-top reviews and first-party verification

Viabono

Viabono was established in 2001 as an initiative of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment and the Federal Environmental Agency. The certificate is awarded to hotels, apartments, conference centres, campgrounds, hostels, restaurants, holiday packages as well as canoe rental services, nature parks and tourism municipalities.

Internet	www.viabono.de
Certifying Organisation	Viabono GmbH
Partner Organisation/s	BMU, BMWi, UBA, BfN
Scope	Germany
Certified Businesses	300
Sustainability Areas	Environment, Economy
Transparency	Standard published
Verification Procedure	Desk-top reviews and first-party verification

Österreichisches Umweltzeichen :: Tourismus

The Austrian Ecolabel was the first national eco-label for tourism worldwide. The label was introduced in 1996 for hotels and restaurants and since 2008, it has also been applied to travel packages in Austria and other countries.

Internet	www.umweltzeichen.at
Certifying Organisation	Austrian Federal Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management (BMLFUW)
Partner Organisation/s	Austrian Consumer Association (VKI)
Scope	Austria
Certified Businesses	Around 220
Sustainability Areas	Environment
Transparency	Standard published
Verification Procedure	On-site third-party verification every 4 years

Steinbock-Label

The Steinbock-Label is awarded to hotels and hostels, youth hostels and convention centres. As of 2012, it operates under the label „Ibex - fair stay" and is awarded at three levels (bronze, silver & gold). An extension to Austria, South Tyrol and Germany is planned.

Internet	www.steinbock-label.ch
Certifying Organisation	Steinbock-Label
Partner Organisation/s	–
Scope	Switzerland, Liechtenstein
Certified Businesses	58
Sustainability Areas	Environment, Social Issues, Economy
Transparency	Standard published
Verification Procedure	On-site third-party verification every 2–3 years

Green Tourism Business Scheme (GTBS)

GTBS is officially recognised by all the national tourism offices in Ireland and Great Britain. The certificate is awarded in bronze, silver or gold to all types of accommodation, restaurants, attractions, offices, conferences and event venues, tour operators, boats and shops.

Internet	www.green-business.co.uk
Certifying Organisation	Green Business UK Ltd.
Partner Organisation/s	Shetland Environmental Agency Ltd.
Scope	Great Britain, Ireland
Certified Businesses	2231 (awaiting grading, bronze, silver, gold)
Sustainability Areas	Environment, Social Issues, Cultural Heritage
Transparency	Standard partially published
Verification Procedure	On-site third-party verification every 2 years

Legambiente Turismo

The environmental association Legambiente closely cooperates with the tourism destinations in Italy, coordinating the criteria together with them. Travellers can view the services offered by certified hotels, campsites, guesthouses and agro-tourism farms online.

Internet	www.legambienteturismo.it
Certifying Organisation	Legambiente Turismo
Partner Organisation/s	National, regional and local organisations and tourism authorities
Scope	Italy
Certified Businesses	426
Sustainability Areas	Environment, Economy, Cultural Heritage
Transparency	Standard published
Verification Procedure	On-site third-party verification every year

Nordic Swan

The Nordic Swan certifies hotels, youth hostels, restaurants, supermarkets, car washes and laundries. The national partner organisations are official agencies and as such are also responsible for examining and awarding the EU Ecolabel.

Internet	www.svanen.se
Certifying Organisation	SIS Ecolabelling AB
Partner Organisation/s	–
Scope	Sweden, Norway, Danemark, Finland, Iceland
Certified Businesses	331
Sustainability Areas	Environment
Transparency	Standard published
Verification Procedure	On-site third-party verification every 3–4 years

Sistema de Turismo Responsable (STR)

The Biosphere Responsible Tourism label certifies accommodations as well as restaurants, amusement parks, golf courses, attractions, and entire destinations, e. g. biosphere regions and cities.

Internet	www.biospherehotels.org
Certifying Organisation	Instituto de Turismo Responsable
Partner Organisation/s	Advanced Leisure Services, Fundación Eurochile, Epysa, Desosturcan, TÜV Rheinland, TUI, Instituto de la Hospitalidade, Reserva de Biosfera de la Palma
Scope	Spain, Dominican Republic, Peru, Chile, Germany, Mexico, United Kingdom, Portugal
Certified Businesses	73
Sustainability Areas	Environment, Social Issues, Cultural Heritage
Transparency	Standard partially published
Verification Procedure	On-site third-party verification every year

Ecotourism Australia – ECO Certification Program

The certificate is awarded to accommodations, tourist attractions as well as to trips and tours offered by local tour operators in Australia. It is to be extended in the future to other countries.

Internet	www.ecotourism.org.au
Certifying Organisation	Eco Tourism Australia
Partner Organisation/s	–
Scope	Australia
Certified Businesses	548
Sustainability Areas	Environment, Social Issues, Economy
Transparency	Standard published
Verification Procedure	On-site third-party verification

Green Leaf Foundation

The Green Leaf Foundation awards up to five "green leaves" to hotels, spas and holiday resorts. An extension of the standard to the entire tourism industry in Thailand is under preparation.

Internet	www.greenleafthai.org/en/ green_found
Certifying Organisation	Green Leaf Foundation
Partner Organisation/s	Tourism Authority of Thailand, Thai Hotels Association, UNEP and other organisations in the field of energy, water and environment
Scope	Thailand
Certified Businesses	224
Sustainability Areas	Environment
Transparency	Standard partially published
Verification Procedure	On-site second-party verification every 2 years

Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa (FTTSA)

FTTSA is the first label initiative under which accommodations, excursions and other tourism products in South Africa are certified on the basis of the internationally accepted Fair Trade criteria. The first fairly traded travel packages to South Africa have been launched under the "Fair Trade Travel" label FTTSA in cooperation with European tour operators.

Internet	www.fairtourismsa.org.za
Certifying Organisation	Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa
Partner Organisation/s	–
Scope	South Africa
Certified Businesses	63
Sustainability Areas	Environment, Social Issues, Economy
Transparency	Standard published
Verification Procedure	On-site third-party verification every 2 years

Ecotourism Kenya's Eco-rating scheme

The Kenyan certificate is awarded in the categories of bronze, silver and gold to hotels, lodges and camps. Bronze is also awarded to businesses in neighbouring Tanzania. A separate certification standard is applied to local tour operators.

Internet	www.ecotourismkenya.org
Certifying Organisation	Eco Tourism Kenya
Partner Organisation/s	–
Scope	Kenya
Certified Businesses	57
Sustainability Areas	Environment, Social Issues, Economy
Transparency	Standard not published
Verification Procedure	On-site second-party verification every 2 years

Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST)

This certificate is awarded at five levels, from entry level to the maximum level of coverage of the sustainability criteria in all areas. Besides hotels, local tour operators and car rentals can also be certified.

Internet	www.turismo-sostenible.co.cr
Certifying Organisation	Costa Rican Tourism Board
Partner Organisation/s	Comisión Nacional de Acreditación, ICT, UCR, Canatur, INBIO, INCAE, MINAET, UICN
Scope	Costa Rica
Certified Businesses	139
Sustainability Areas	Environment, Social Issues, Economy
Transparency	Standard published
Verification Procedure	On-site third-party verification

Smart Voyager

Besides hotels and eco lodges, Smart Voyager certifies boats and ships offering excursions along the Amazon River or around the Galapagos Islands. Moreover, the Ecuadorian certificate is available to social institutions and initiatives which collaborate with tourism businesses.

Internet	www.smartvoyager.org
Certifying Organisation	Conservación y Desarrollo
Partner Organisation/s	Global Compact, GSTC, Sustainable Tourism Network of the Americas, Sustainable Agriculture Network, American Ecuadorian Chamber, BrandOscope, Ekobai.com
Scope	Ecuador, Colombia, Honduras, Chile
Certified Businesses	45
Sustainability Areas	Environment, Social Issues, Economy
Transparency	Standard published
Verification Procedure	On-site third-party assessment every year
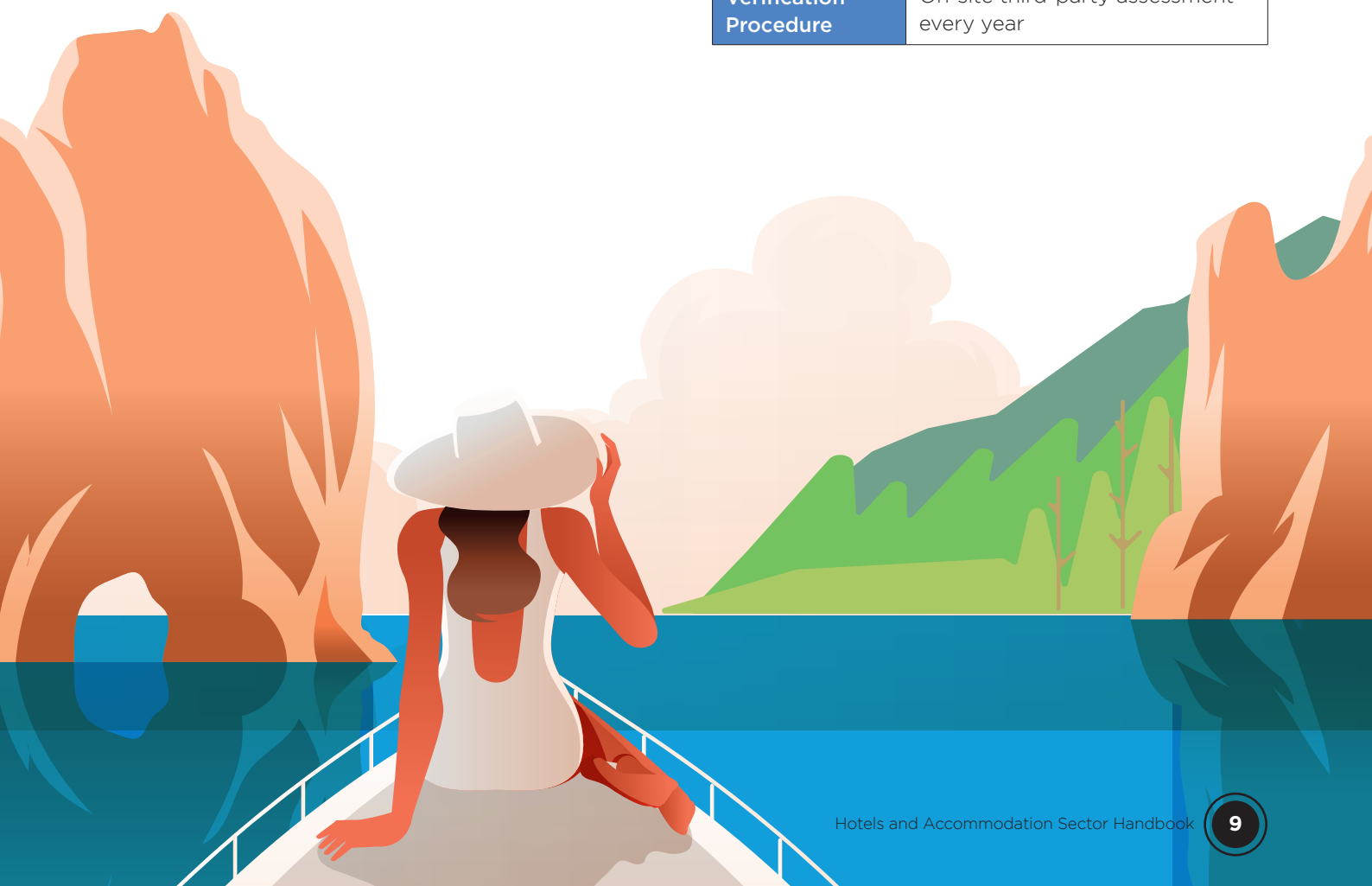
Label	Sustainability areas				Transparency			Credibility		
	Environment	Social Issues	Economy	Cultural Heritage	Published	Partially published	Not published	On-site third-party verification	On-site second-party verification	First-party desk-top verification
Smart Voyager	●	●	●		●			●		
CST	●	●	●		●			●		
Ecotourism Kenya's Eco-rating	●	●	●				●		●	
FTTSA	●	●	●		●			●		
Green Leaf Foundation	●						●		●	
Ecotourism Australia	●	●	●		●			●		
STR	●	●		●		●		●		
Nordic Swan	●				●			●		
Legambiente Turismo	●		●	●	●			●		
Green Tourism Business Scheme	●	●		●		●		●		
Steinbock-Label	●	●	●		●			●		
Österreichisches Umweltzeichen	●				●			●		
Viabono	●		●		●					●
Blaue Schwalbe	●	●	●			●				●
European Ecolabel	●				●			●		
Travelife	●	●	●		●			●		
EarthCheck	●	●		●			●	●		
The Green Key	●				●			●		
Green Globe	●	●	●	●	●			●		
CSR Tourism	●	●	●		●			●		

3. Introduction to National Sustainable Tourism Certification (NSTC)

The National Sustainable Tourism Certification was created to help Sri Lanka compete as a highly sought-after destination by promoting sustainability in the tourism industry. The first phase of this certification program was launched in 2018, with a focus on hotels and accommodation. The criteria for this certification were based on guidelines from the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, a globally recognized accreditation body. Under this program, 37 hotels were recognized for their sustainable practices and awarded Platinum, Gold, Silver, and Bronze status. Certificates for participation were also given out, as well as special awards in the areas of sustainable management, social, cultural, and economic sustainability. This certification program is a key initiative by the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority to promote sustainability in the tourism sector.

4. Benefits of National Sustainable Tourism Certification

Sustainable tourism certification, which was previously limited to developed countries with the necessary resources and technology, is gaining increasing interest from developing countries. There are numerous benefits of obtaining National Sustainable Tourism Certification (NSTC) for hotels and other accommodation providers. Some of these benefits include:

- Brand Sri Lanka as a sustainable tourism destination.

- Raising destination sustainable standards through certification. Attract increased consumer demand by featuring NSTC label in product offers

- Minimal and managed impacts on natural, cultural environment and greater appreciating of these resources

- Protecting Sri Lanka's natural environment by contributing to conservation causes. It lowers the regulatory costs of environmental protection

- Optimum use of natural resources and energy efficiencies resulting in cost savings and improved business operations.

- Efficient use of natural resources- using water wisely through conservation and management and reducing and managing waste

- Efficient use of energy - reducing electricity, gas and fuel used and adoption of alternate and renewable energies

- Certification raises industry standards in health, safety, environment, and social stability

- Climate change mitigation

- Supporting local communities with tourism livelihoods and in return, increased support from local communities for tourism

- Increased awareness and understanding of natural and cultural heritage for staff, communities, operators and guests. Better communication between stakeholders creating education and awareness on sustainability issues

- A new source of competitive advantage, increased marketability/ brand loyalty

- Build customer confidence and affinity towards Sri Lanka

- Qualify to win international sustainability awards

- Advantages of a common an unbiased national scheme for the entire industry and expected cost savings for other certifications

- Links to international standards and recognition.

- By trickling down economic benefits to communities, certification can help reduce poverty, especially in rural areas.

- Will also help Sri Lanka to make comparisons with other destinations

5. Expected Outcomes of National Sustainable Tourism Certification

- Establishing a National Sustainability Certification Scheme enabling SLTDA to certify sustainable tourism businesses in Sri Lanka

- Sri Lanka tourism is working toward its vision of being recognized as the world's finest island for memorable, authentic and diverse experiences. In order to achieve this, the country will need to obtain a national certification. This certification will help Sri Lanka to provide extraordinary experiences that reflect its natural and cultural heritage, are socially inclusive and environmentally responsible, and provide economic benefits to communities and the country.

- The National Sustainable Tourism Certification Scheme (NSTCS) would provide incentives for tourism businesses to adopt environmentally and culturally sensitive practices. This would make them more competitive locally and internationally.

- Minimizing the negative impacts of tourism on the environment and local culture is essential to preserving the country's resources for future generations. In addition, it generates income, provides skilled employment opportunities, and creates a positive development experience for local people, tourism companies, and tourists themselves. This maximizes the positive contribution of tourism, including its contribution to poverty reduction.

- Promoting sustainable tourism is essential to protecting the environment while still allowing for development. It is also essential for enhancing the competitiveness of individual tourism businesses and promoting Sri Lanka as a sustainable tourism destination. The certification scheme will help reduce the negative impacts of tourism and incentivize businesses to transition to more environmentally responsible practices.

- Tourism has a strong connection to several of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs). Specifically, there are three UNSDGs that have a particularly close relationship with the tourism industry: By contributing to these goals, the tourism industry can play a significant role in promoting sustainable development and improving the lives of people around the world.

6. Global Sustainable Tourism Council

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) is a non-profit organization that aims to promote sustainability in the tourism industry. To help achieve this goal, the GSTC has developed the GSTC Criteria, which are guidelines for sustainable tourism practices that can be customized to fit the specific needs of a particular destination. The GSTC Criteria are organized into four main categories:

Sustainable management: This category covers issues related to the management of a tourism destination, including governance, planning, and decision-making processes.

Socioeconomic impacts: This category focuses on the ways in which tourism affects the local economy, including job creation, income generation, and distribution of benefits.

Cultural impacts: This category covers the ways in which tourism affects the culture and traditions of a destination, including the preservation of heritage sites and cultural practices.

Environmental impacts: This category addresses the environmental impacts of tourism, including issues related to natural resource management, waste management, and greenhouse gas emissions.

The GSTC Criteria are designed to be flexible and adaptable to the specific needs and conditions of a particular destination. They are intended to serve as a foundation for the development of more detailed guidelines and standards for sustainable tourism practices at the local level. In addition to developing the GSTC Criteria, the GSTC also provides accreditation to Certification Bodies that certify hotels, tour operators, and destinations as having sustainable policies and practices in place. This accreditation program is administered in partnership with ASI/Assurance Services International.

The GSTC is a virtual organization with staff and volunteers working from around the world. It is funded through donations, sponsorship, and membership fees, and represents a diverse and global membership including governments, travel companies, hotels, NGOs, and individuals. There are two sets of criteria:

- GSTC Industry Criteria – guiding principles for all types of tourism-related business, with detailed guidance for hotels/accommodations and tour operators/agencies

- GSTC Destination Criteria – guidance for policy (national, provincial, etc.) and for destination management

The GSTC Criteria provide a comprehensive definition of sustainable travel and tourism, arranged to support four pillars of sustainability:

- Managing for sustainability
- Social
- Culture and Community
- Environment

Some of the uses of the criteria include the following:

- Serve as the basis for certification for sustainability

- Serve as basic guidelines for businesses of all sizes to become more sustainable, and help businesses choose sustainable tourism programs that fulfill these global criteria

- Provide greater market access in the growing market for sustainable products, serving as guidance both for travelers and for travel agencies in choosing suppliers and sustainable tourism programmes

- Help consumers identify sound sustainable tourism programs and businesses

- Serve as a common denominator for information media to recognize sustainable tourism providers

- Help certification and other voluntary programs ensure that their standards meet a broadly-accepted baseline

- Offer governmental, non-governmental, and private sector programs a starting point for developing sustainable tourism requirements

- Serve as basic guidelines for education and training bodies, such as hotel schools and universities

- Demonstrate leadership that inspires others to act

7. Applying for NSTC

7.1. Who can apply for the certification?

All registered hotels in Sri Lanka are eligible to apply for certification through the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority.

7.2. How to become certified?

7.2.1. Apply for the certification

The Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) will announce the opening of certification for hotels and other accommodation providers in the tourism industry. Those interested in obtaining certification can apply by completing and submitting the initial application form provided by the SLTDA.

7.2.2. Submit application/documentary evidence to SLTDA

After receiving the initial application, SLTDA requests for information and various business documents to see how the practices and procedures comply with the NSTC standards. All the relevant documents should be submitted within the deadline stipulated by SLTDA.

7.2.3. Desktop assessment and consultation

SLTDA will review all the documentation submitted by the applicant during the certification process. They may also reach out to the applicant to clarify any questions or concerns about their operations.

7.2.4. Onsite audit

SLTDA will visit the Hotel to see how its policies are put into action. During this visit SLTDA audit team will ensure whether the claims on sustainability are actually practiced by way of observations and interviews. The applicant can provide any supporting information to support certification.

7.2.5. Audit reports

After the onsite audit a report on the Hotel will be submitted to the evaluation committee and a rating will be given.

7.2.6. Issuing Certification

Certification will be issued once the SLTDA has confirmed that the Hotel complies with the NSTC standard. A formal certificate will be issued by SLTDA.

7.2.7. Certification renewal

Hotels should check with the SLTDA to see when the certification renewal process should begin. Generally, the certification is valid for a period of two years.

8. The process of NSTC

The following flow chart provides a general overview of the process of NSTC.

Stakeholders Consultation/ Workshop for Tourism Stakeholders

⌄

Call for applications by SLTDA

⌄

Submission of application

⌄

Submission of relevant documents

⌄

Desktop assessment

⌄

Onsite audit

⌄

Submission of audit report

⌄

Evaluation of the Audit report and rating

⌄

Awarding of certificate
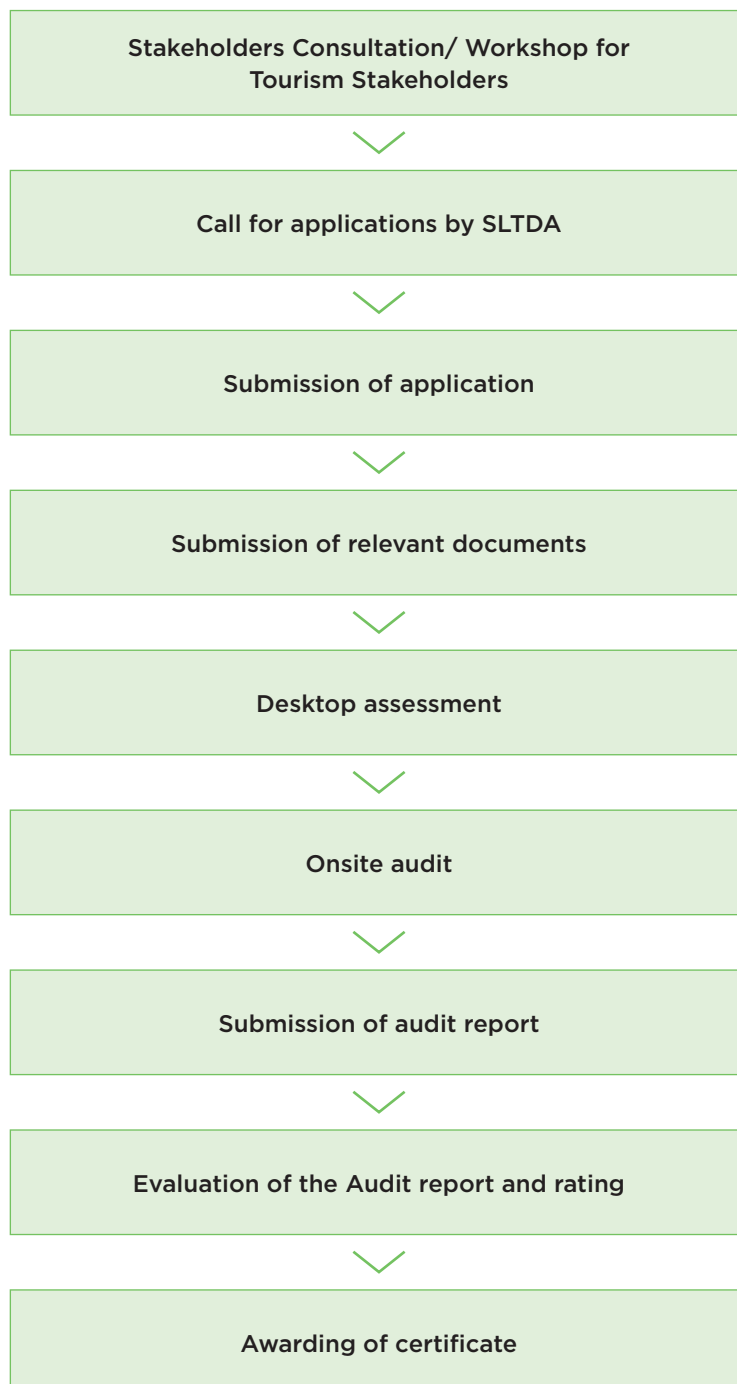
9. How to get ready for the Certification?

Upon submitting an application for certification, the applicant should be prepared to provide documentation, photographs, and other evidence to support their claims of sustainable practices. These materials will be carefully evaluated during a desktop assessment and may also be checked during an onsite audit. The applicant will be informed of the onsite audit and should prepare necessary documents and presentations and assign relevant staff in advance.

The self-checklist for certification is a list of criteria that hotels must fulfill in order to be considered for certification. It also serves as a guide for applicants to assess their current sustainability standards and identify any areas that need improvement in order to meet all the requirements of the checklist.

The checklist for the accommodation sector broadly covers the following areas,

- Demonstration of effective sustainable management

- Maximize social and economic benefits to the local community and minimize negative impacts

- Maximization of benefits to cultural heritage and minimization of negative impacts

- Maximization of benefits to the environment and minimization of negative impacts

- Conservation of biodiversity, ecosystems and landscapes

Hotels applying for the National Sustainable Tourism Certification (NSTC) should ensure that they are fully prepared for the audit process, paying special attention to the key areas that will be assessed. It is important to thoroughly review the self-checklist and address any deficiencies in order to successfully pass the audit.

10. Self-Check List for the preparation/ submission of documentary and other evidence

Criteria	Indicators	Availability
SECTION A: Demonstrate effective sustainable management		
A1 Sustainability management system The organization has implemented a long-term sustainability management system that is suitable to its size and scope, addresses environmental, social, cultural, economic, quality, human rights, health, safety, risk and crisis management issues and drives continuous improvement.	a. The Sustainability Management System is clearly documented. b. The SM System covers environmental, social, cultural, economic, quality, human rights, health and safety issues. c. The SM System includes consideration of risk and crisis management. d. Documentary evidence shows implementation of the SM system. e. The SM System includes a process for monitoring continuous improvement in sustainability performance.	
A2 Legal compliance The organization is in compliance with all applicable local, national and international legislation and regulations including, among others, health, safety, labour and environmental aspects.	a. An up-to-date list of all applicable legal requirements is maintained. b. Certificates or other documentary evidence show compliance with all applicable legal requirements.	
A3 Reporting and communication The organization communicates its sustainability policy, actions and performance to stakeholders, including customers, and seeks to engage their support.	a. Regular reports are made available on sustainability performance. b. Sustainability policies and actions are reported in external and internal communication material. c. Communications contain messages inviting consumer and stakeholder support.	
A4 Staff engagement Staff are engaged with development and implementation of the sustainability management system and receive periodic guidance and training regarding their roles and responsibilities in its delivery.	a. Evidence is available of staff involvement with the SM System. b. Records of courses and on-the-job training, with attendance levels, are available. c. Staff training and guidance materials are available in accessible format (including use of minority languages where needed). d. Staff hold certificates and qualifications in relevant disciplines/skills.	
A5 Customer experience Customer satisfaction, including aspects of sustainability, is monitored and corrective action taken.	a. A customer feedback system is in place, together with analysis of the results. b. Negative feedback and responses made to this are recorded. d. There is evidence of corrective actions taken.	

Criteria	Indicators	Availability
A6 Accurate promotion Promotional materials and marketing communications are accurate and transparent with regard to the organization and its products and services, including sustainability claims. They do not promise more than is being delivered.	a. Images used in promotion are of actual experiences offered and facilities provided. c. Sustainability claims are based on records of past performance.	
A7 Buildings and infrastructure Planning, siting, design, construction, renovation, operation and demolition of buildings and infrastructure.	d. Indicators for A7 criteria relate to the buildings and infrastructure associated with the accommodation being certified	
A7.1 Compliance Comply with zoning requirements and laws related to protected and sensitive areas and to heritage considerations.	a. Awareness of, and compliance with, laws relating to land use and activities in the local area is demonstrated. b. All required licences and permits are up to date. e. Awareness of, and compliance with, non-statutory area management plans and guidance (e.g. for particular zones, design, etc.), is demonstrated.	
A7.2 Impact and integrity Takes account of the capacity and integrity of the natural and cultural surroundings.	a. Site selection, design and access have taken account of visual amenity, landscape, cultural and natural heritage. b. Site selection, design and access have taken account of the protection of biologically sensitive areas and the assimilative capacity of ecosystems. c. The integrity of archaeological, cultural heritage, and sacred sites has been preserved. d. The integrity and connectivity of natural sites and protected areas has been preserved. e. Threatened or protected species have not been displaced and impact on all wildlife habitats has been minimized and mitigated. f. Water courses/catchments/wetlands have not been altered and run-off is reduced where possible and any residue is captured or channeled and filtered. g. Risk factors (including climate change, natural phenomena, and visitor safety) have been assessed and addressed. Impact assessment (including cumulative impacts) has been undertaken and documented as appropriate.	

Criteria	Indicators	Availability
A7.3 Sustainable practices and materials Use locally appropriate and sustainable practices and materials.	a. Local materials, practices and crafts have been used in buildings and design where practicable and appropriate. b. Native and endemic plants obtained from sustainable sources have been used in landscaping and decoration, avoiding exotic and invasive species. c. Plants have been selected for their ability to tolerate prevailing or anticipated conditions eg drought tolerant plants d. Sustainable design, materials and construction practices have been used in buildings, with appropriate certification where possible. e. Waste from construction is sorted and disposed of in an environmentally sound manner.	
A7.4 Access for all Provide access and information for persons with special needs, where appropriate.	a. Sites, buildings and activities are accessible to persons with physical disabilities and other special needs, as appropriate to the nature of the operation. b. Clear and accurate information is provided on the level of accessibility. c. Accessibility is certified or checked with relevant experts/user bodies.	
A8 Land, water, and property rights Acquisition by the organization of land and water rights and of property is legal, complies with local communal and indigenous rights, including their free, prior and informed consent, and does not require involuntary resettlement.	a. Land ownership and tenure rights are documented. b. User and access rights for key resources, including land and water, are documented where applicable. c. There is documentary evidence of communication, consultation and engagement with local and indigenous communities. d. Evidence of free, prior and informed consent of local communities is documented, where relevant (showing no involuntary resettlement or land acquisition).	
A9 Information and interpretation The organization provides information about and interpretation of the natural surroundings, local culture, and cultural heritage, as well as an explanation of appropriate behavior while visiting natural areas, living cultures, and cultural heritage sites.	a. Information/interpretation material about the natural and cultural heritage of the local area is available and provided to customers. b. Staff are informed and trained about the natural and cultural heritage of the local area. c. Information is provided to customers about appropriate behavior in the local area.	
A10 Destination engagement The organization is involved with sustainable tourism planning and management in the destination, where such opportunities exist.	a. The organization is a member of the local Destination Management Organization or equivalent body, where such an organization exists. b. The organization participates in partnerships between local communities, NGOs and other local bodies where these exist. c. The organization participates in planning and management meetings and activities concerning sustainable tourism in the destination.	

Criteria	Indicators	Availability
SECTION B: Maximize social and economic benefits to the local community and minimize negative impacts		
B1 Community support The organization actively supports initiatives for local infrastructure and social community development. Examples of initiatives include education, training, health and sanitation and projects which address the impacts of climate change.	a. The organization engages with the local community in identifying needs and opportunities for support and evaluating their potential benefit/impact. b. The level and nature of contributions made to schemes in the local community is recorded. c. The local community is offered the opportunity to access the tourism facilities and services provided.	
B2 Local employment Local residents are given equal opportunities for employment and advancement, including in management positions.	a. The proportion of total employment from persons already residing in the local community is measured and managed. b. The proportion of employment in management positions from persons already residing in the local community is measured and managed. c. Training is offered to local residents to enhance their employment opportunities.	
B3 Local purchasing When purchasing and offering goods and services, the organization gives priority to local and fair-trade suppliers whenever these are available and of sufficient quality.	a. The organization regularly audits its sources of supply of goods and services. b. The proportion of goods and services purchased from locally owned and operated businesses is measured and managed. c. The proportion of non-locally owned or operated suppliers that are fair trade is measured and managed.	
B4 Local entrepreneurs The organization supports local entrepreneurs in the development and sale of sustainable products and services that are based on the area's nature, history and culture.	a. Locally owned businesses are given access to premises and customers for commercial activity. b. Where appropriate, the organization provides advice and support to local service providers with whom it engages, on the quality and sustainability of their service. c. Opportunities for joint ventures and partnerships with local entrepreneurs are considered and pursued where appropriate.	
B5 Exploitation and harassment The organization has implemented a policy against commercial, sexual or any other form of exploitation or harassment, particularly of children, adolescents, women, minorities and other vulnerable groups.	a. The organization has a documented policy against exploitation and harassment of vulnerable groups. b. Action is taken to communicate and implement the policy. c. The organization engages with the local community in working against exploitation and harassment. d. Records of employee ages are kept and show absence of any form of child labour (as defined by ILO). e. The organization supports action against child sex tourism.	

Criteria	Indicators	Availability
B6 Equal opportunity The organization offers employment opportunities, including in management positions, without discrimination by gender, race, religion, disability or in other ways.	a. The organization has identified groups at risk of discrimination, including women and local minorities. b. The proportion of employees drawn from each of these groups is monitored and is commensurate with local demographics. c. Internal promotion includes members of these groups.	
B7 Decent work Labour rights are respected, a safe and secure working environment is provided, and employees are paid at least a living wage. Employees are offered regular training, experience and opportunities for advancement.	a. The organization demonstrates awareness of, and compliance with, international labour standards and regulations. b. Wage levels are monitored and regularly reviewed against national norms for a living wage. c. Training records are kept for all staff, showing the level and frequency of training received. d. Employee contracts show support for health care and social security. e. Water, sanitation and hygiene facilities are provided for all onsite workers. f. Employee satisfaction is monitored. g. An employee grievance mechanism is in place.	
B8 Community services The activities of the organization do not jeopardize the provision of basic services, such as food, water, energy, healthcare or sanitation, to neighbouring communities.	a. The organization monitors its impact on the availability of local services. b. A communication/feedback/grievance mechanism is in place for local communities. c. Any reduction in availability of basic services to local communities, identified as the result of the organization's activities, is addressed.	
B9 Local livelihoods The activities of the organization do not adversely affect local access to livelihoods, including land and aquatic resource use, rights-of-way, transport and housing.	a. Local access to livelihoods is considered in decisions about development and operations. b. A communication mechanism is in place for local communities to report any instance of reduced access to local livelihoods.	
SECTION C: Maximize benefits to cultural heritage and minimize negative impacts		
C1 Cultural interactions The organization follows international and national good practice and locally agreed guidance for the management and promotion of visits to indigenous communities and culturally or historically sensitive sites in order to minimize adverse impacts and maximize local benefits and visitor fulfilment.	a. The organization demonstrates awareness of, and compliance with, existing international, national and local good practice and guidance for tourist visits to cultural sites and indigenous communities. b. The organization engages with communities/sites in reviewing guidance and creating and agreeing additional guidelines as necessary. c. Guidelines are effectively used and communicated. d. Particular measures are in place to avoid inappropriate interaction with children.	

Criteria	Indicators	Availability
C2 Protecting cultural heritage The organization contributes to the protection, preservation and enhancement of local properties, sites and traditions of historical, archaeological, cultural and spiritual significance and does not impede access to them by local residents.	a. The organization makes and records monetary contributions to the protection of cultural heritage. b. The organization provides in-kind or other support for cultural heritage. c. Provision is made for local access to sites.	
C3 Presenting culture and heritage The organization values and incorporates authentic elements of traditional and contemporary local culture in its operations, design, decoration, cuisine, or shops, while respecting the intellectual property rights of local communities.	a. Local art/craft is reflected in design and furnishings. b. Living cultural heritage and traditions are evident in cuisine, retail, events and other services offered. c. Copyright and intellectual property rights have been observed and necessary permissions obtained. d. The views of the local community have been sought on the presentation of local cultural heritage.	
C4 Artefacts Historical and archaeological artefacts are not sold, traded or displayed, except as permitted by local and international law.	a. Any use of artefacts is transparent and/or documented and reported. b. Where artefacts are used, laws and bylaws have been identified that permit such use. c. Visitors are prevented from removing or damaging artefacts.	
Section D: Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts		
D1 Conserving resources		
D1.1 Environmentally preferable purchasing Purchasing policies favour environmentally sustainable suppliers and products, including capital goods, food, beverages, building materials and consumables.	a. A documented environmental purchasing policy is in place. b. Preference is given to products and suppliers with environmental certification – notably with respect to wood, paper, fish, other foods, and products from the wild. c. Where certified products and suppliers are not available, consideration is given to origin and methods of growing or production. d. Threatened species are not used or sold.	
D1.2 Efficient purchasing The organization carefully manages the purchasing of consumable and disposable goods, including food, in order to minimize waste.	a. Purchasing favours reusable, returnable and recycled goods. b. Purchasing and use of consumable and disposable goods are monitored and managed. c. Unnecessary packaging (especially from plastic) is avoided, with buying in bulk as appropriate.	

Criteria	Indicators	Availability
D1.3 Energy conservation Energy consumption is measured by type and steps are taken to minimize overall consumption. The organization makes efforts to increase its use of renewable energy.	a. Total energy used is monitored and managed. b. Energy used per tourist/night for each type of energy is monitored and managed. c. Renewable sources are favoured and the share of renewable energy in total energy supply is monitored and managed. d. Equipment and practices are used that minimize energy use. e. Goals for reducing energy consumption are in place. f. Staff and guests are given guidance on minimizing energy use.	
D1.4 Water conservation Water risk is assessed, water consumption is measured by type, and steps are taken to minimize overall consumption. Water sourcing is sustainable and does not adversely affect environmental flows. In areas of high water risk, context-based water stewardship goals are identified and pursued.	a. Water risk has been assessed and documented. b. Where water risk has been assessed as high, water stewardship goals have been determined. c. Water used per tourist/night per source is monitored and managed. d. Equipment and practices are used that minimize water consumption. e. Water originates from a legal and sustainable source which has not previously affected, and is unlikely in future to affect, environmental flows. f. Consideration is given to cumulative impacts of tourism in the locality on water sources. g. Goals for reducing water consumption are in place. h. Staff and guests are given guidance on minimizing water use.	

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

D2 Reducing pollution

Criteria	Indicators	Availability
D2.1 Greenhouse gas emissions Significant greenhouse gas emissions from all sources controlled by the organization are identified, calculated where possible and procedures implemented to avoid or to minimize them. Offsetting of the organization's remaining emissions is encouraged.	a. Total direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions are monitored and managed. b. Carbon Footprint per tourist/night is monitored and managed. c. Actions are taken to avoid and reduce significant annual emissions from all sources controlled by the organization. d. Carbon offset mechanisms are used where practical.	
D2.2 Transport The organization seeks to reduce transportation requirements and actively encourages the use of cleaner and more resource efficient alternatives by customers, employees, suppliers and in its own operations.	a. Information is provided and promoted to customers on alternative (climate friendly) transport options, for arrival, departure and during their visit. b. Alternative transport options (e.g. bike rental, car sharing, pick-ups) for guests and staff are provided or facilitated. c. Markets accessible by short and more sustainable transport options are favoured. d. Local suppliers are favoured and daily operations seek to minimize transport use.	

Criteria	Indicators	Availability
D2.3 Wastewater Wastewater, including grey water, is effectively treated and is only reused or released safely, with no adverse effects to the local population or the environment.	a. Wastewater is disposed of to a municipal or government approved treatment system, if available. b. If suitable municipal wastewater treatment is not available, there is a system in place on site to treat wastewater (that meets international wastewater quality requirements) and ensures no adverse effects on the local population and the environment.	
D2.4 Solid waste Waste, including food waste, is measured, mechanisms are in place to reduce waste and, where reduction is not feasible, to reuse or recycle it. Any residual waste disposal has no adverse effect on the local population or the environment.	a. The amount of solid waste disposed per tourist/night is monitored and managed. b. A solid waste management plan is in place. c. The solid waste management plan includes actions to reduce, separate and reuse or recycle food waste. d. Waste disposal is to a government run or approved facility and there is evidence that the facility has no negative impact on the environment or local population. e. Solid waste disposed is measured by type and goals are in place to minimize non-diverted solid waste. f. Guidance is given to customers and staff on minimizing waste.	
D2.5 Harmful substances The use of harmful substances, including pesticides, paints, swimming pool disinfectants, and cleaning materials, is minimized, and substituted when available by innocuous products or processes. All storage, use, handling, and disposal of chemicals are properly managed.	a. An inventory of harmful substances has been made and material safety data sheets (MSDS) are held. b. Action has been taken to source more environmentally friendly alternatives. c. Chemicals, especially those in bulk amounts, are stored and handled in accordance with appropriate standards. d. Visitors are informed about personal use of substances which may be considered harmful to the local environment (such as toxic sunscreens and repellants).	
D2.6 Minimize pollution The organization implements practices to minimize pollution from noise, light, runoff, erosion, ozone-depleting substances, and air, water and soil contaminants.	a. The potential sources of pollution covered in the criterion have been reviewed and identified. b. The potential sources of pollution covered in the criterion are monitored. c. Action is taken to minimize and where possible eliminate pollution from the sources covered in the criterion.	

Criteria	Indicators	Availability
Section D: Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts		
D3 Conserving biodiversity, ecosystems and landscapes		
D3.1 Biodiversity conservation The organization supports and contributes to biodiversity conservation, including through appropriate management of its own property. Particular attention is paid to natural protected areas and areas of high biodiversity value. Any disturbance of natural ecosystems is minimized, rehabilitated and there is a compensatory contribution to conservation management.	a. The organization demonstrates awareness of natural protected areas and areas of high biodiversity value. b. The organization provides and records monetary support for biodiversity conservation in the local area. c. The organization provides and records in-kind or other support for biodiversity conservation in the local area. d. The property is actively managed to support biodiversity conservation. e. The organization is aware of, and mitigates, activity with potential to disturb wildlife and habitats. f. Compensation is made where any disturbance has occurred. g. Action is taken to encourage visitors to support biodiversity conservation. h. The organization engages with local conservation NGOs.	
D3.2 Invasive species The organization takes measures to avoid the introduction of invasive species. Native species are used for landscaping and restoration wherever feasible, particularly in natural landscapes.	a. Sites are monitored for presence of any invasive species. b. Action is taken to ensure invasive species are not introduced or spread. c. A programme is in place to eradicate and control invasive species. d. Landscaping of sites is reviewed to consider use of native species.	
D3.3 Visits to natural sites The organization follows appropriate guidelines for the management and promotion of visits to natural sites in order to minimize adverse impacts and maximize visitor fulfilment.	a. The organization is aware of, and complies with, existing guidelines for tourist visits to natural sites. b. Guidelines are used when conducting visits and informing guests. c. The organization engages with local conservation bodies to establish/identify issues concerning visits to particular sites.	

Criteria	Indicators	Availability
D3.4 Wildlife interactions Interactions with free roaming wildlife, taking into account cumulative impacts, are non-invasive and responsibly managed to avoid adverse effects on the animals concerned and on the viability and behavior of populations in the wild.	a. The organization is aware of, and complies with, existing local, national and international regulations and guidelines concerning wildlife interactions, including wildlife viewing. b. The organization engages with the development and implementation of local codes and guidelines for wildlife interactions, including wildlife viewing, as required, based on advice of wildlife experts. c. Direct interactions, in particular feeding, should not be permitted, unless specifically sanctioned by internationally accepted standards or, where standards are not available, guided by independent wildlife expert advice. d. Measures are taken to minimize disturbance to wildlife. e. Impacts on wildlife wellbeing are regularly monitored and addressed.	
D3.5 Animal welfare No species of wild animal is acquired, bred or held captive, except by authorized and suitably equipped persons and for properly regulated activities in compliance with local and international law. Housing, care and handling of all wild and domestic animals meets the highest standards of animal welfare.	a. The organization is aware of, and complies with, relevant laws and regulations concerning captive wildlife. b. Existing guidelines for specific tourism activities involving captive wildlife are implemented. c. Personnel responsible for captive wildlife have appropriate qualifications and experience and are fully licensed. d. The organization is aware of, and complies with, relevant laws and regulations concerning animal welfare. e. There is regular inspection of conditions of captive wildlife and their housing. f. There is regular inspection of conditions of domestic g. Animals and their housing and handling.	
D3.6 Wildlife harvesting and trade Wildlife species are not harvested, consumed, displayed, sold, or traded, except as part of a regulated activity that ensures that their utilization is sustainable, and in compliance with local and international laws.	a. The organization is aware of, and complies with, relevant laws and regulations concerning wildlife harvesting and trade. b. Visitors are informed of regulations concerning wildlife harvesting, consumption and trade and of the need to avoid buying illegal products/souvenirs derived from threatened species of wildlife notified by IUCN or CITES. c. Where hunting activity is legal, it forms part of a scientifically based, properly managed and strictly enforced approach to conservation.	

- The audits will be carried out by a qualified team of auditors of SLTDA, who have obtained a specialized training by GSTC.

- SLTDA request your fullest cooperation in supporting the team of auditors in securing your claims with acceptable evidence for each criterion.

- The audit will be commenced with a meeting (pre-briefing) with the head of the establishment (e.g. General Manager) and the team of heads of each department. You may decide who should be made available in addition, for this meeting (e.g. Sustainability Officer, President of the staff welfare association etc.)

- Please note that photographs will be taken as evidence by the team and audio and/ or video recording also may be done. SLTDA assures that confidentiality of those evidence will be secured and those materials will be utilized only for the purpose of NSTC certification.

- The team of auditors have the right to conduct interviews with any staff member individually and also may make inquiries from the surrounding community, suppliers, guests etc.

- SLTDA requests that you have the following documents available in order to avoid delays and disruptions in the certification process. These documents pertain to some of the criteria outlined above.

  » The organization's Sustainability policy/ strategy

  » Environmental Protection License (EPL)

  » UDA approved building Plan

  » Certificate of Conformity

  » SLTDA License

  » Hotel specific Impact assessment studies that have been conducted

  » Up to date list of Health & Safety legislation

  » Certificates, Permits, Licenses or other documentary evidence showing compliance with all applicable legal requirements

  » Documents denoting land ownership and tenure rights

  » Documents denoting legal rights for key resources, including land, and water, electricity

» Attendance list of trainings on sustainability

» Qualifications & certificates of relevant staff in sustainability disciplines

» Evidence for customer complaints and corrective actions made for customer complaints

» Promotional material in sustainability claims

» Records of contributions made to local community development projects & programmes

» Local procurement policy if available

» Proof of joint ventures or partnerships with local entrepreneurs

» Policy against exploitation and harassments

» Employment policy

» Proof of general trainings to members of the staff & information on training schedules

» Proof of social security for staff

» Guidelines for tourists/guests specially for visiting cultural sites and natural sites and wildlife

» Proof of contribution to the protection of cultural heritage

» Environment purchasing policy

» Water consumption records with goals on reduction/ Water quality reports

» Electricity consumption reports

» Reports on Carbon Footprint

» Waste management plan Inventory of harmful substances/MSDs

» Records of in kind or other support for bio diversity conservation

11. Rating system

Based on the marks received above the benchmark score, the certification will be awarded under four levels recommended by GSTC.

- 50%-59%: Certificate

- 60%- 69%: Bronze

- 70%- 79%: Silver

- 80% – 89%: Gold

- Above 90: Platinum

12. Validity and renewal

The National Sustainable Tourism Certification (NSTC) is valid for a period of two years from the date of certification. After this time, the accommodation is required to re-apply and go through the certification process again in order to renew their certification.

13. References

- Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) (2022) GSTC. Available at: https://www.gstcouncil.org/ (Accessed: December 2, 2022).

- Tourism Strategic Plan (no date). Available at: https://storage.googleapis.com/sltda-cdn/tourism-strategic-plan-2017-to-2020.pdf (Accessed: December 2, 2022).

- Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (2018) NSTC Project Document.

- Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (2018) National Sustainable Tourism Certification (Handbook). SLTDA.

- Naturefriends International (2012). Sustainability in Tourism: A Guide through the Label Jungle :VIenna

- United Nations Environment Programme and World Trade Organization (WTO) (2005) Making Tourism more Sustainable: A Guide for Policy Makers. Available at: https://wedocs.unep.org/20.500.11822/8741 (Accessed: 2 December 2022)

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