

## **An introduction of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council and Criteria**

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### **Abstract**

#### *Purpose*

The purpose of this presentation is to introduce the Global Sustainable Tourism Council and Criteria, in an effort to encourage the Criteria as part of a framework for sustainable tourism education. The history of the GSTC and Criteria will be provided as well as an overview of various programs and educational resources available.

#### *The Global Sustainable Tourism Council*

In a global effort to address the meaning of sustainable tourism and finding common ground in measuring its effectiveness, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) was established in August of 2010. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) is a global Membership Council and will serve as the international body for promoting the increased knowledge, understanding and adoption of sustainable tourism practices. The GSTC fosters sustainable tourism through the adoption of universal sustainable tourism principles; compiling, adapting and creating the tools and training to engage in sustainable tourism practices; and increasing the demand for sustainable tourism products and services. The GSTC is intended to serve as an umbrella organization, endorsed by the United Nations (UN), hosting businesses, governments, non-governmental organizations, academia, and communities engaged in and striving to achieve sustainable tourism (GSTC, 2010).

The GSTC initiated a process to form criteria that are the minimum requirements that any tourism business should aspire to reach in order to protect and sustain the world's natural and cultural resources while ensuring tourism meets its potential as a tool for conservation and poverty alleviation. **To develop these criteria**, the partnership consulted with sustainability experts and the tourism industry and reviewed more than **60 existing certification and voluntary sets of criteria** already being implemented around the globe. In all, more than **4,500 criteria** have been analyzed and the resulting draft criteria have received comments from over **1000 stakeholders**. The partnership was dedicated to engaging all tourism stakeholders – from purchasers to suppliers to consumers – to adopt the criteria.

The outcome was the development of 37 sustainable tourism criteria, which set a baseline set of guidelines for sustainable tourism.

The criteria are organized around the four pillars of sustainable tourism:

- Effective sustainability planning;
- Maximizing social and economic benefits to the local community;
- Reduction of negative impacts to cultural heritage; and,
- Reduction of negative impacts to environmental heritage.

Presently, the expected uses of the criteria include the following:

- Serve as basic guidelines for businesses of all sizes to become more sustainable, and help businesses choose sustainable tourism programs that fulfill these global criteria;
- Serve as guidance for travel agencies in choosing suppliers and sustainable tourism programs;
- Help consumers identify sound sustainable tourism programs and businesses;
- Serve as a common denominator for media to recognize sustainable tourism providers;
- Help certification and other voluntary programs ensure that their standards meet a broadly-accepted baseline;
- Offer governmental, non-governmental and private sector programs a starting point for developing sustainable tourism requirements; and
- Serve as baseline guidelines for education and training bodies such as hotel schools and Universities (Partnership for Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria, 2009).