

TECHNICAL CIRCULAR Ref. DC2023OC104

DATE Milan, 18-10-2023

To all accredited and applicant certification bodies
To the associations of conformity assessment bodies
To the assessors/experts of the Dept. of Certification and Inspection

Loro sedi

SUBJECT **Certification and Inspection Department**
Technical Circular DC N° 43/2023 - Provisions regarding accreditation for the scheme GSTC Industry Criteria for Hotels and Tour Operators

INTRODUCTION

In the era in which we live, travel and tourism represent approximately 10% of global economic activity. The sector is growing rapidly, with the arrival of tourists from all over the world.

The sustainable development goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 aim, among other things, to end extreme poverty, to fight inequality and injustice, and address climate change. The importance of tourism for most of the 17 SDGs has been recognized. The UN World Tourism Organization Assembly is working with governments, public and private partners, development banks, international and regional financial institutions, UN agencies and international organizations to achieve the SDGs, with a particular focus on Goal 8 (economic growth), Goal 12 (sustainable consumption and production models) and Goal 14 (marine resources) in which tourism was specifically highlighted.

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

Negative impacts and concerns associated with travel and tourism include:

- its contribution to climate change, being responsible for around 5% of global CO2 emissions which are growing rapidly;
- the depletion of natural and precious resources, such as the use of land and water;
- creation of pollution of all kinds;
- social changes and dislocation of traditional societies;
- pressure on cultural heritage sites, natural environments and biodiversity;
- poor working conditions and exploitation in some parts of the sector.

Travel and tourism can also offer many positive benefits, including:

- a growing opportunity for business development and job creation, with low barriers to entry;
- direct and indirect support to local communities, through the provision of jobs, income, services and infrastructure;
- awareness of natural and cultural heritage and support for its conservation;
- health, wellbeing and educational benefits for tourists and guests, which should be accessible to everyone.

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

Actions that encourage, identify and promote a positive response from businesses are fundamental to the future of the tourism sector and the contribution it can make to sustainable development. The tourism sector is very fragmented.

Although there are some major multinational players, many of the tourism service providers are independent businesses and the majority are small and micro businesses. Tourism businesses of all sizes are responding in different ways and to varying degrees to the need for sustainable tourism.

NORMATIVE CONTEXT

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council GSTC is a multi-stakeholder initiative established in 2007, which includes among its founding partners UNEP, UNWTO, UN Foundation, Saber Holdings and Rainforest Alliance, among others. It was formed in response to the challenges and opportunities of sustainable tourism, merging two previous initiatives. In 2014, the GSTC merged with the Tour Operator Initiative (TOI) whereby TOI member operations entered into the GSTC organization.

Over 250 organizations from the public, private, voluntary, tourism, environmental management and sustainable development sectors have contributed to the work of the GSTC and its two predecessor bodies.

The GSTC's mission is: "To improve tourism's potential to be a driver of positive conservation and economic development for communities and businesses around the world and a tool for poverty alleviation".

SPECIFIC ELEMENTS OF THE PROGRAMME

The GSTC programme is in line with this approach to sustainable tourism and encourages certification schemes to move beyond a more one-dimensional, often environmental focus.

The principles of sustainable tourism underlying the GSTC program are sustainability objectives that should be defined and related actions coordinated by an effective management system.

Tourism should bring the greatest possible social and economic benefits to local communities and any negative impact on them should be minimised.

Local cultural heritage must be respected and opportunities should be taken to strengthen its integrity and richness.

Impacts on the global and local environment, through pollution and depletion of natural resources, should be reduced to a minimum, and support should be given to the conservation of local landscapes and biodiversity.

These principles of sustainable tourism are considered relevant in all parts of the world and can be reflected in many different types of tourism activities. The overall agenda remains the same. However, key concerns about tourism impacts and priorities for improving sustainability will vary from place to place. It is hoped and expected that sustainable tourism standards will be adapted to local and industrial sector conditions and will exceed the minimum program requirements.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) has developed two sets of criteria and associated indicators concerning GSTC-Industry: the Global Sustainable Tourism Industry Criteria (version 3, December 2016).

In the current period, GSTC-Industry is available in two versions, GSTC-Hotel and GSTC-Tour Operator, each with its own set of performance indicators.

The development of GSTC-Industry Criteria allows the GSTC to develop sub-sector specific indicators for this broader set of criteria, e.g. MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions), cruises, attractions.

The aspects that are proposed to companies, as objective bases on which to structure and implement their management system for sustainable tourism, concern aspects of integrity, credibility, impartiality, accessibility, understanding of the socio-economic, cultural and environmental impacts, rigour, effectiveness, transparency, diversity and feasibility, avoiding placing burdens on certification schemes that they could not satisfy.

CERTIFICATION RULES

Programmes	GSTC - Industry - Criteria: Suggested Performance Indicators for Hotels and Accommodations (version 3, 21 December 2016). GSTC - Industry - Criteria: Suggested Performance Indicators for Tour Operators (version 3, 21 December 2016).
Parties which can request certification	The GSTC certification can be requested by hotel and accommodation facilities or by tour operators.
Audit group competence criteria	The knowledge and competence requirements and the qualification maintenance criteria for auditors are defined in § 10 of the document "GSTC Accreditation Manual for Hotel/Accommodation & Tour Operator v.3.1." In particular, auditors must possess: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • general knowledge of audit principles and techniques (ISO 19011) of certification processes, demonstrable through participation in a training activity lasting at least 4-5 days on audit techniques. GSTC accepts formal trainings such as those relating to ISO 9001 quality management system standards, or ISO 14001 environmental management systems or other ISO standards or other relevant standards, provided by internationally and nationally recognized training organizations to meet this requirement;

- specific knowledge of the terminology, practices and processes of sustainability;
- audit experience: performance of at least 5 audits in the Hotels/Accommodations & Tour Operators sectors in the last 3 years.

Auditors shall be able to demonstrate as follows:

- training of at least 4-5 days on audit techniques not linked to the tourism sector. GSTC accepts formal trainings such as those relating to ISO 9001 quality management system standards, or ISO 14001 environmental management systems or other ISO standards or other relevant standards, provided by internationally and nationally recognized training organizations to meet this requirement;
- training of at least 3 days provided by training organizations operating in the tourism sector, which also includes training on the management of environmental and socio-economic aspects applicable to this sector.

In order to be qualified as a GSTC auditor, all auditors must follow and pass a course divided into a theoretical and practical part (for details, refer to Annex B of the document "GSTC Accreditation Manual for Hotel/Accommodation & Tour Operator v.3.1."

The theoretical part is organized into 3 Modules (A, B, E) for audits in the hotel sector; while for the tour operator sector the auditor will have to carry out training on a module (A, C, E).

It will be sufficient for auditors to only follow the course which refers to Module A if they demonstrate that they have completed 3 years of work in the sector of certifications in the tourism sector and have performed at least 10 audits of Hotels/Accommodations/Tour Operators for one of the standards recognized by GSTC.

Competence criteria for reviewers and decision makers

The knowledge and competence requirements and the qualification maintenance criteria for reviewers and decision-makers are defined in § 11 of the document "GSTC Accreditation Manual for Hotel/Accommodation & Tour Operator v.3.1."

In particular, reviewers and decision makers must possess knowledge and competences relating to:

- audit techniques and principles applicable to system audits;
- knowledge of the standard UNI CEI EN ISO/IEC 17065;
- criteria and Indicators on GSTC recognized standards;
- certification processes;
- terminology, processes and principles applicable to the tourism sector;
- terminology, processes and principles applicable to the sustainable tourism sector;
- certification processes for multi-site organizations/groups.

Audit times	Audit times are set according to the overall/annual volume of travel/package transactions by tourists and specifically: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • up to 1 mio€/year = office assessment of 4 days duration + 1 day for the witnessed assessment; • from 1 to 10 mio€/year = office assessment of 6 days + 1 day for the witnessed assessment; • over 10 mio€/year = office assessment of 8 days + 1 day for the witnessed assessment.
Evaluation of multi-site organizations	For the purposes of evaluating a multi-site organisation, the document IAF MD 01 is applicable, both for the method of calculating the number of employees and for the sampling method of sites/legal entities. For further details, refer to the provisions of § 14 and 15 of the document "GSTC Accreditation Manual for Hotel/Accommodation & Tour Operator v.3.1."
Audit performance modalities	For audit methods, refer to the provisions of § 16 of the document "GSTC Accreditation Manual for Hotel/Accommodation & Tour Operator v.3.1." and for the checklist see Annex 1.
Scope of the certificate	The CB will define with the customer the scope of the certificate according to the categories and definitions referred to in § 16 of the document "GSTC Accreditation Manual for Hotel/Accommodation & Tour Operator v.3.1."
Applicable IAF documents	All IAF documents relating to management systems apply, except as clarified previously in the document IAF MD 05.

RULES FOR ACCREDITATION/EXTENSION

Accreditation standard: UNI CEI EN ISO/IEC 17065:2012

Different situations may occur, based on the ACCREDIA accreditations already held by the Certification Body making the application for accreditation or extension.

If the CB already holds accreditations issued by other Accreditation Bodies, a case-by-case evaluation must be carried out, based on the applicable EA/IAF MLA agreements.

The requirements of RG-01 and RG-01-03 for the granting of accreditation and extension remain unchanged, integrated by the following rules.

A	CB accredited against UNI CEI EN ISO/IEC 17065:2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review of 0.5 day (to be done, at least partly, by remote mode). • 1 witnessed assessment of a duration appropriate to the organizational size of the client. ACCREDIA reserves the right to evaluate on a case-by-case basis the suitability of the organizations and audit groups proposed for accreditation and subsequent surveillance activities
----------	---	---

B	CB <u>not</u> accredited against UNI CEI EN ISO/IEC 17065:2012, but already accredited against other accreditation standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review of 1 day (to be done, at least partly, by remote mode). • Assessment at the CB's head office of 2 days + reporting. • 1 witnessed assessment of a duration appropriate to the organizational size of the client. ACCREDIA reserves the right to evaluate on a case-by-case basis the suitability of the organizations and audit groups proposed for accreditation and subsequent surveillance activities.
C	CB <u>not</u> accredited against UNI CEI EN ISO/IEC 17065:2012 and not accredited against other accreditation standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment at the CB's head office of 4 days + reporting. • 1 witnessed assessment of a duration appropriate to the organizational size of the client. ACCREDIA reserves the right to evaluate on a case-by-case basis the suitability of the organizations and audit groups proposed for accreditation and subsequent surveillance activities.

DOCUMENTATION TO BE PRESENTED TO ACCREDIA FOR THE DOCUMENT REVIEW

- Procedure for the selection, qualification and monitoring of auditors, decision makers and contract reviewers.
- Curricula of auditors and decision makers with justification of the individual qualification by means of, e.g., a qualification card.
- Guideline or instruction prepared by the CB for audit teams.
- Certification regulation that provides also the contractual conditions for the purposes of issuing and maintaining certification under accreditation (including the obligations defined by this Circular).
- Technical-commercial procedures for defining the duration of the audits, sampling the sites, defining the commercial offer.
- Example of the certificate issued by the CB.
- List of certificates already issued, and of upcoming audit activities (data necessary to plan the witnessed assessment).
- For CBs not accredited against UNI ISO/IEC 17065, in addition to the documents reported above, it is necessary to send the documentation requested in the accreditation application.

MAINTENANCE OF ACCREDITATION

For the maintenance of accreditation, during the entire accreditation cycle, except in particular situations (e.g. management of complaints and reports, changes to the certification scheme, changes in the structure of the Body or other similar situations), the following assessments shall be conducted:

- if the CB has issued fewer than 50 certificates in the certification scheme, the accreditation maintenance program will include 1 witnessed assessment and 1 assessment at the CB's head office;
- if the CB has issued between 51 and 200 certificates in the certification scheme, the accreditation maintenance program will include 2 witnessed assessments and 1 assessment at the CB's head office.

With kind regards.

Dott. Emanuele Riva

Director Department
Certification and Inspection