



# Certification and Awards for Quality and Sustainability



**Guide for Destinations:  
local communities, regions and protected areas**

Version 3.12, February 2018

## For whom is this Guide?

The Green Destinations program for Certification and Awards offers tailor-made solutions to local communities (municipalities), counties, provinces, regions and protected areas (National Parks, UNESCO Geoparks) that are seeking international recognition for *responsible tourism*; for the way they manage heritage, the environment and climate, and the quality of their tourism offering.

The program is especially interesting when you don't primarily consider sustainability for promotion, but rather as a key element in your tourism development policy aimed at strengthening quality, the characteristic values of the destination and consumer policies related to the inhabitants and visitors. In spite of increased consumer interest in sustainability, it still plays a minor role in destination selection compared to price, quality and the specific destination offering. However, travelers increasingly expect their destination to be unpolluted, natural and authentic; that there is waste separation in place and no litter all over the place; and that the natural and cultural heritage is well respected.

Holiday makers do not choose a *sustainable destination*, they expect a destination to be sustainable. We help you to meet that expectation, and to provide a better quality in the process.

## Who are we, and what do we offer?

Experts and organizations from around the world have joined forces in Green Destinations, the world's largest partnership in sustainable tourism, led by the Green Destinations Foundation from The Netherlands. Our goal is to support destinations around the world in improving on the basis of global criteria and goals recognized by the United Nations. Over 120 destinations in 60 countries have joined our programs. You can find general information on Green Destinations in Annex 4.

Green Destinations offers the only program that is used in the market to inform travelers how clean, green and sustainable destinations are, and to support destination selection. This e.g. done by Booking.com affiliate BookDifferent.com.

### We offer you different options:

- 1) **Certification as a Sustainable destination** if your policy and management is in line with all mandatory criteria of the **Green Destinations Standard**. This standard is Recognized by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC, a UN-Endorsed organization), and support the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- 2) **Awards recognizing the quality of your policy and management as well as the visible results thereof**, on the basis of quality and trends indicators. There is **no need** to comply with all criteria of the *Green Destinations Standard*.  
You can choose between:
  - **QualityTourism Awards**: participation is possible for local communities, small regions, islands, or protected areas.
  - **QualityCoast Awards**: similar to QualityTourism, but especially for destinations focusing on their beach, seaside or waterfront character. There is this specific attention to beach and waterfront management and bathing water quality.

All programs have a biannual cycle: every two years progress is assessed in the adherence with the Standard; in between, attention is given to updating indicators monitoring quantitative performance. This way you will be encouraged to progress from year to year, from BasiQ Benchmark to the four Award levels: Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum.

A third Award program is the annual [Sustainable Destinations Global Top 100](#) competition. Destinations can be nominated or can self-nominate free of charge (more information in [greendestinations.org](#)). QualityCoast Platinum, Gold and Silver Quality Award winners are automatically qualified for the Top 100.

At the annual Green Destinations conference (end of September) destinations can learn from each other's experience, and plan to improve their policy and their performance. From 2018, the [Top 100 Global Awards Ceremony](#) is hosted by ITB Berlin, the world's Leading Travel Trade Show.

In some countries QualityTourism and QualityCoast Awards are also presented at national events.

## What are the benefits?

**We offer effective opportunities to improve your sustainability, quality, competitiveness, and marketing, and to get the best possible independent recognition of your efforts.**

By becoming a Green Destinations member, you will immediately benefit from:

- the GD Assessment & Reporting platform offers you a comprehensive dossier; improved monitoring and reporting of relevant sustainability and quality aspects;
- an independent assessment of strengths and weaknesses by specialized experts, based upon a GSTC-Recognized Standard,
- independent suggestions to improve your destination management, especially from partner companies offering innovative solutions;
- free inclusion in the Miami Travel Map, a new approach to present your destination and its unique travel offer to the travel market (to be launched in 2019, see Annex 3)
- enrolment in the Sustainable Destinations Top 100 Awards program
- membership of the Green Destinations Community; your active destination stakeholders can become *Green Destinations Ambassadors*, an active community of destination professionals
- the most affordable destination-level program available in the marketplace.

## Who can participate?

**The program is open for all destinations and protected areas. Cities can also participate and will not automatically have a lower assessment result than rural or nature destinations.**

Destinations participating in Green Destinations' Awards program pay an annual fee which depends on the size of the destination (see Annex 1). The fee will increase once you will start participating in the Certification program.

New participants can claim a 3-months free trial period to use our online assessment platform (or a shorter period when you request active coaching by us).

## Joint participation by a combination of communities

An administrative combination of local communities may request to participate as one destination, providing evidence that the combined destination:

- is a coherent group of municipalities, that is marketed under a common destination brand or name;
- has a common governance, common policies or a common organization promoting sustainable development.

## What are the criteria?

**The criteria of the *Green Destinations Standard* play a key role in the selection of all awards. The Standard makes sustainable development concrete, objective, and measurable. You can easily adapt your sustainability management system and implement actions according to the criteria, in order to obtain recognition of your efforts.**

The standard is [published here](#), and consists of 100 criteria, covering six main themes:

1. Destination Management
2. Nature, Animals & Scenery
3. Environment & Climate
4. Culture & Tradition
5. Social Well-being
6. Business & Hospitality.

The Standard uses qualitative indicators and is compatible with ETIS, ISO 14001, EMAS and Global Reporting Initiative.

## From Criteria to Awards

**As a participant you provide local data for indicators and you summarize what is done to adhere with the criteria.**

**After verification this information leads to ratings (scores 1-10) for:**

- a. Your 'sustainability profile', calculated from the indicator values (our database calculates these ratings after comparing the values with those of 1500 other destinations), for each of the six main themes. This will be your *Indicator Rating*.
- b. Your adherence with the criteria, also for each of the six main themes, and the average for all criteria. This will be your *Policy Rating*.

**The overall average of *Indicator Rating* and *Policy Rating* determines your Award level:**

- from 6/10: Bronze Award
- from 7/10: Silver Award
- from 8/10: Gold Award
- from 9/10: Platinum Award.

**These are benchmark awards in the process towards destination certification.**

Annex 3B gives you some more information on the Awards program, and the role of Audits.

## How does it work? Option 1: “Do it yourself”

As a new participant you appoint a destination coordinator who helps to mobilize political and stakeholder support for sustainable tourism.

A local or regional conference may be considered to help mobilizing support for sustainable tourism among the business sector and the local community. Organizing a conference is optional, but very useful and recommended.

A Letter of Commitment to Sustainable Tourism is signed on behalf of the destination.

The destination coordinator completes a Registration form to choose between QualityCoast or QualityTourism Awards, or certification.

The destination coordinator registers to our online [Assessment and Reporting platform](#).

Annex 3 gives you an idea how it will work in practice.

Your staff members who work with the online platform will automatically gain practical experience with relevant approaches and solutions. Nevertheless, you are advised to offer your staff a training course aimed at managing a sustainable tourist destination. Only in this way can real progress be made. This is why we also offer you the option of specific support during the first year.

## Option 2: Support during the first year

**Making the *Self-assessment* and the *Baseline Assessment*, collecting required data and documents, and filing relevant dossiers during the first year requires ca. 15 work days and specific knowledge. You will need to make internal capacity available or higher than external expert, but you can also ask us for the *Green Destinations Support Service (GDSS)*. This will provide you with active support to all your first year’s tasks on the online platform.**

In this option, the procedure is the same and the same technical coaching is offered as in option 1 (covered by the annual membership fee), but in addition you will be supported by an external trainer-advisor through remote support (Skype, e-mail, telephone), or on-site for the organization of local stakeholder meetings or training and capacity building. This will help the destination coordinator to be well prepared for an audit.

The support service is entirely flexible in the number of hours and in the period of support. A standard online support package may correspond to ca. 60 hours, during the assessment procedure, usually 6-8 weeks, but if needed up to ca. 12 months. A standard on-site support package may be a five days training involving the destination coordinator and a small group of stakeholders.

GDSS-fees are additional to the annual membership fee, and the costs vary per country. Contact Green Destinations for more information.

## From Awards to Certification

It is only useful to seek certification if your *Policy Rating* is 8/10 or higher, because for certification you must comply with all policy criteria that apply, usually ca. 80 of the 100. Certification is only possible after an *on-site audit*, which is repeated every two years. The benefits of our Awards program are included in our certification.

### GSTC Accredited Green Destinations Certification

In 2018 we start with Green Destinations certification as soon as it is Accredited by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). **Green Destinations Certified** is the highest achievable level of certification for tourist destinations. However, the requirements of GSTC accreditation are high. The cost of this certification will therefore be higher than of the Award programs (see Annex 1).

### QualityTourism and QualityCoast Certification

Because of the cost of a GSTC-Accredited certification you may request a lower level certification: **QualityTourism Certified** or **QualityCoast Certified**. These certifications are not accredited by GSTC. You pay a membership fee that is only slightly higher than for the Award program (€1000 extra per year), which is to cover the cost of the biannual *onsite audits*.

#### Overview of the Award and Certification options

	QualityTourism QualityCoast Awards	QualityTourism QualityCoast Certified	Green Destinations Certified
Assessment of indicators (desk audit)	✓	✓	✓
GD Standard assessment (desk audit)	✓	✓	✓
You must comply with all mandatory criteria of the GD Standard		✓	✓
On-site audit (length and frequency of the audit)	1 day, in year 3 or 4	1-2 days, biannual	3-5 days, biannual
Accredited by GSTC			✓
Use of GSTC-logo (GSTC Certified)			✓
Awards included	✓	✓	✓
Selection for Sustainable Top 100	Gold, Platinum	✓	✓
Visibility for consumers	✓	✓	✓
Participation costs per year *	from €2000	from €3.000	from €6.000

\*) see Annex 1.



## Starter options: Assessments, no Awards

If you are not ready for Awards or certification, you may be interested in just taking the first steps: a Basic membership, or a Baseline assessment.

### Basic Membership

The aim of Basic membership is to start the process of improving destination quality and sustainability. Assessment results remain for internal use only. Services and benefits include:

- Access to the online Green Destinations assessment platform.
- Online Green Destinations Indicator Reporting, upload of your data.
- Technical assistance and verification of the criteria of the Quick Scan (these are also used for the nomination of the Sustainable Destinations Top 100).

Results:

- **BasiQ Benchmark** certificate confirming quality and Quick Scan result (valid for 2 years). Destination featured on Viami Travel Map and Ratings listings.

### Baseline Assessment

The aim of this option is to make a first interactive assessment, verified by an independent expert (2nd party desk audit). This will make you aware of your strengths, weaknesses and opportunities re: destination quality and sustainability. Assessment results remain for internal use only.

Services and benefits include Basic membership benefits plus:

- Guidance and tools to help achieve compliance with the Green Destinations Standard.
- Destination Baseline Assessment supported by a Green Destinations coach.

Results:

- Independent desk assessment, the results confirmed in a **Green Destinations Verified** certificate (valid for 2 years).
- Improved visibility and score on the **Viami** Travel Map and in the Sustainable Destinations Top 100.

### The Starter options compared with the Awards program

	BasiQ Benchmarking	Baseline Assessment	Awards program
Assessment of indicators (desk audit)	✓	✓	✓
GD Standard assessment (desk audit)	Quick Scan	✓	✓
Onsite audit (duration and frequency)			1 day, in year 3-4
Result	BasiQ	GD Verified	Awards
Selection for Sustainable Top 100			Gold, Platinum
Visibility for consumers	limited	✓	✓
Participation cost for one year	€ 350	€ 960	from €1.500

## Baseline Assessment of Regions and Countries

Green Destinations developed a unique support tool for country and regional destinations. This tool enables us to assess to what extent the Green Destinations Standard is complied with at national (or regional) as well as local level. This assessment takes place interactively with national experts and stakeholders. [Read more here](#).

## The process step-by-step

“One-size-fits-all” does not apply to destinations: every destination has its own ambitions and restrictions. This is why we offer a stepwise approach as illustrated below. We recommend starting with an Awards program, but any step can be skipped: if you are prepared, you can directly go for Green Destinations certification.



## Further information

Green Destinations: [www.greendestinations.org](http://www.greendestinations.org), [contact@greendestinations.org](mailto:contact@greendestinations.org)

QualityCoast: [www.qualitycoast.info](http://www.qualitycoast.info), [secretariat@qualitycoast.info](mailto:secretariat@qualitycoast.info)

## Our Experts are available all over the world!

Green Destinations has many official representatives and experts around the world, speaking your language! Contact the Secretariat [contact@greendestinations.org](mailto:contact@greendestinations.org), and we will connect you.

Leiden, the Netherlands, February 2018



## Annex 1. Annual membership fees

**Table 1. Annual fees 2018 for destinations** (not being Marine Protected Areas, Nature or National Parks, etc.). Fees are excl. Value Added Tax (VAT).

Number of inhabitants in the destination	QualityTourism and QualityCoast Awards program*	QualityTourism and QualityCoast certification**	GSTC Accredited Green Destinations certification***
Less than 5.000	€ 1.500	€ 2.500	€ 5.000
Less than 25.000	€ 2.000	€ 3.000	€ 6.000
Less than 50.000	€ 2.500	€ 3.500	€ 7.500
Less than 100.000	€ 3.000	€ 4.000	€ 9.000
Less than 250.000	€ 3.500	€ 4.500	€ 10.000
Less than 1 million	€ 4.000	€ 5.000	€ 12.000
More than 1 million	€ 5.000	€ 6.000	€ 15.000

**Table 2. Annual fees 2018 for Protected Areas** (Nature or National Parks, Marine Protected Areas); Resort stewardship areas (eco-resorts with several connected facilities and a natural area for which the resort has a special stewardship) and large Attractions (destinations usually having no resident population). All fees are excl. VAT.

Protected Area: size in km2	QualityTourism and QualityCoast Awards program*	QualityTourism and QualityCoast certification**	GSTC Accredited Green Destinations certification***
Less than 5	€ 1.500	€ 2.500	€ 4.000
Less than 200	€ 2.000	€ 3.000	€ 5.000
More than 200	€ 2.500	€ 3.500	€ 6.000

\*) Membership fee for the **Awards program** includes: access to the GD online Assessment & Reporting System; biannual desk audits; on-site audit in the 3rd or 4th year; membership of the Green Destinations Community. When you request an additional on-site audit, you will be informed on the additional cost (ca. €1000 ex VAT, excl. auditor travel and subsistence cost).

\*\*) Membership fee for **QualityCoast** or **QualityTourism Certification** includes in addition to the Awards program: biannual on-site audits.

\*\*\*) Membership fee for **GSTC Accredited Green Destinations Certification** includes in addition to the program for QualityCoast or QualityTourism certification: a certification procedure according to GSTC requirements; the right to use the GSTC logo; and inclusion in GSTC global map or certified destinations.

## Annex 2. Consumer visibility

After each step (Award level or certification) you can organize a public award ceremony and media event in your destination or in your country, giving you the opportunity to present your successful efforts for sustainability to your citizens.



You can display the Award banners throughout your destination (as below in Noordwijk, a Dutch QualityCoast town).



You can provide visitors with information in relation to the Awards program. Below an example of information provided in QualitySpot San Blas (Gozo, Malta) through a QR-code (created by QualityCoast in the QualitySpots program).



Businesses and services in Awarded destinations can be allowed to use a special Promotion badge if they participate in a destination sustainability program. Ask us for the conditions.





## Promotion through Booking.com affiliate BookDifferent.com

Booking.com affiliate BookDifferent.com promotes *Green Destinations* with the online map [Green Travel Destinations](#) (fig. 1 and 2). The map supports travelers in destination selection. Through participation in our program you will be better visible on this map.

The screenshot displays the BookDifferent.com interface. At the top, there is a search bar with the text "Search hotels". Below it, there are three input fields: "Destination" (with a placeholder "e.g. city, region, hotel name or landmark"), "Check-in date", and "Check-out date". A "Search!" button is located to the right of these fields. Below the search bar, there is a section titled "How green is your travel destination?". This section contains a paragraph explaining the Green Destination Rating (GDR) and its importance for responsible tourism. Below the text is a map of the Lisbon region. A pop-up window for Sintra is open, showing a sustainability score of 7.8. The pop-up also lists four categories: Nature (6.2), Culture (7.4), Economy (6.5), and Future Proof (8.2). A legend at the bottom of the map indicates that green pins represent a high score for sustainability, yellow pins represent a medium score, and red pins represent a low score.

**Search hotels**

Destination: e.g. city, region, hotel name or landmark

Check-in date

Check-out date

**Search!**

### How green is your travel destination?

As a responsible tourist it is important to be informed about the efforts your travel destination has developed towards a green, clean and responsible destination and to be aware of the impact your presence has. Unfortunately, it is hard to know what impact your visit is having on your destination and how you are affecting the environment or the local communities. With the Green Destination Rating (GDR) we have found an easy understandable tool to show you how green and clean your destination is now and in the future. From now on you can now easily contribute to the sustainable development by choosing a green destination.

**7.8 Sintra**

[View destination page \(open in new tab\)](#)

- 6.2 NATURE
- 7.4 CULTURE
- 6.5 ECONOMY
- 8.2 FUTURE PROOF

**Legend:**

- High score for sustainability
- Medium score for sustainability
- Low score for sustainability

**Fig. 1.** BookDifferent.com enables its clients to compare destinations with information from the GD database. This screenshot shows the example of the Portuguese Lisbon region, where Cascais, Sintra and the Oeste region (from Torres Vedras and S. Cruz up to Peniche and Nazaré) make a true green belt along the sea.

[www.bookdifferent.com/en/green-travel-destinations/](http://www.bookdifferent.com/en/green-travel-destinations/)

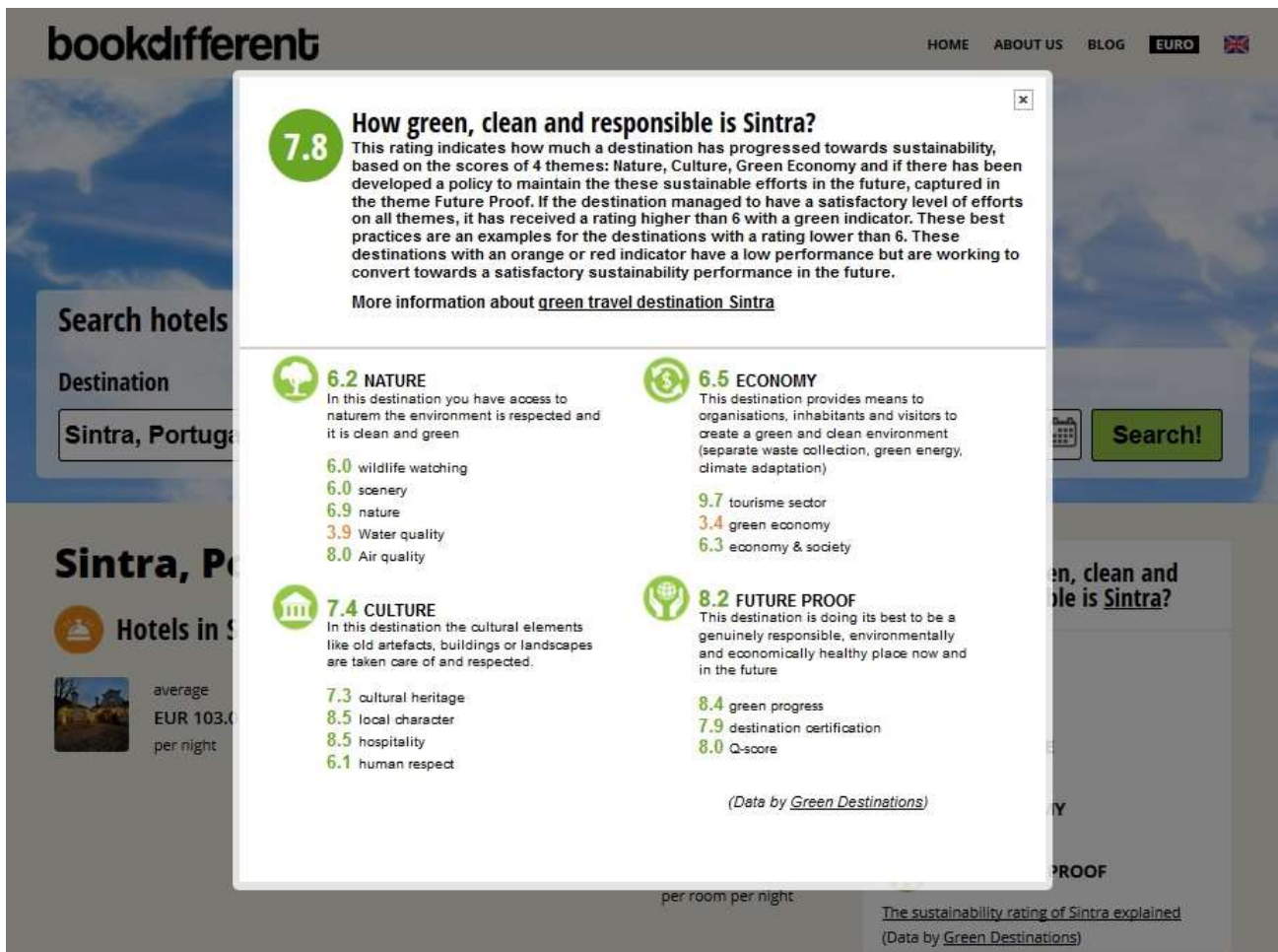


Fig. 2. BookDifferent.com adds information from the Green Destinations database and assessments on its hotel booking platform. After assessment, destinations will be better visible. This screenshot shows the example of Sintra (Portugal). [www.bookdifferent.com/en/green-travel-destinations/pt/city/-2176842/](http://www.bookdifferent.com/en/green-travel-destinations/pt/city/-2176842/)

## Online in 2019: the *Viami* Green Travel Map

Participating destinations will also be featured in the new [Viami Travel Map](#). This new approach will be launched in 2019 to present destinations and their quality offer to the travel market. Destinations participating in the Green Destinations program are offered free inclusion in the Travel Map before the official launch.

We will ask you to appoint a few [Green Destinations Ambassadors](#). Together with them...

- we will identify services and businesses that comply with the Green Destinations' criteria
- we will help you promote and sell services B2B and B2C
- we will share ideas and needs relating to the travel market
- we will feature you and your businesses and share Ambassadors' stories in our social media.

## Annex 3A. Working in the Online Platform

When you start working in the Green Destinations Online Platform, we recommend starting with the GD Indicator Report. For some indicators there are already data in our database, from external sources. You can always correct these values. The result of the Indicator Report is the **Indicator Rating**. The first technical check of the indicators is the **Baseline Assessment**, resulting in a **BasiQ Benchmark**.

At any time, you can proceed with the criteria (*Green Destinations Standard*). For each criterion you make a self-assessment of your adherence: complete, partial, or none.

The destination coordinator will receive technical online support by a Green Destinations coach on how to start on the online platform and will answer any questions about the procedure. The coach will advise when the self-assessment is complete, and when the desk audit can start.

For each criterion, the desk auditor will assess whether sufficient evidence of compliance is provided, considering criteria and indicators. This defines the final Indicator Rating (0-10), the Policy Rating (0-10) and the appropriate Award level. You will be informed on this before the Awards presentation. The result of the first year of your participation will be a BasiQ Benchmark certificate and possibly an Award.

You will be advised by your coach when it is useful to request additional *on-site audit*, and what the cost of this will be (costs vary per country). On the basis of a *desk audit* a Bronze Award can be awarded; Silver, Golden and Platinum can only be awarded on the basis of an *on-site audit*.

After the first award, you are expected to report important changes to your strategy and action plans within two months on the platform. This also applies to decisions of your board focused on the development of projects that could have an impact on nature, landscape, environment, climate, culture or local identity.

In the 2nd year of your participation we ask you to update the indicators whenever possible. This can result in a higher score and even a higher Award level.

In the 3rd year you update the information for the criteria where necessary, in preparation for the *onsite audit* in year 3 or 4. In case of significant improvements a higher Award level may be assigned.

## Annex 3B. Some more details about Audits and Awards

- Every two years we hire an independent external expert (auditor) who checks your adherence with the criteria. This is the way the Policy Rating is adjusted.
- The first audit is an online audit (or desk audit). In case of an onsite audit the auditor will visit you, check evidence, and interview the sustainability coordinator, stakeholders, and a council member. Online and onsite audit alternate, so an onsite audit takes place in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> year.
- A Bronze Award can already be assigned after a desk audit. Higher Award levels can only be assigned after at least one onsite audit. When you request an extra onsite audit, extra costs will apply.
- It is not possible to perfectly comply to all criteria in just a few years. Therefore, the coaching we provide aims at stepwise strengthening your capacity in policy and management.
- Annual or biannual Awards provide a recognition of progress made.
- You can take advantage of the annual Award presentations in your marketing. Our Awards and the stories re: your achievements are more interesting for travelers than destination certification.



## Annex 4. General information on Green Destinations

**Green Destinations is a non-profit organization for sustainable tourism, leading a global Partnership of expert organizations, companies, and academic institutions. We work for the benefit of the Green Destinations Community: destination representatives and stakeholders. Together with them we try to make their places better and more sustainable.**

### Green Destinations' core values

What does it mean, better and more sustainable places? It means that we support destinations in adopting the following core values:

- **Genuine and authentic:** supporting the celebration of local culture and tradition;
- **Responsible:** defending people against exploitation, human rights violation, and disruptive mass tourism (*over-tourism*);
- **Economically sustainable:** involving the local business community and enhancing local community employment during and beyond the holiday season;
- **Environmentally friendly:** ensuring public health, safety and sound environmental management;
- **Nature, scenery & animal friendly:** protecting scenic views, habitats and wildlife, and respecting animals that are used in tourism.

Adopting these GREEN values will help destinations to enhance their quality, attractiveness and competitiveness. It will help attract '*green travelers*', visitors who are respectful, and will spend more in the destination. These core values are the basis of our programs for policy improvement, Destination Awards and certification.

Green Destinations works together with tourism business and media partners to make the green offer of destinations better visible in the marketplace.

### Destination Assessments, Awards and Certification

Green Destinations developed a complete, affordable and easy-to-use Assessment, Awards & Certification program that meets the needs of both small and larger destinations. It is operated through an online [Assessment & Reporting](#) platform based upon the GSTC-Recognized [Green Destinations Standard](#) and the GD Database with data from 2000 destinations. The platform helps destinations to improve sustainability management and performance, best price guaranteed. For more information, read more about our [Awards & Certification](#). Destinations that subscribe to the GD Assessment & Reporting platform become member of the [Green Destinations Community](#).

### Green Destinations Community

Tourism destinations, regions and countries are connected to the world's largest sustainable destinations community through their [Green Destinations Ambassadors](#). Green Destinations Ambassadors share knowledge and experiences with colleagues from around the world. Together with [Experts and solution providers](#), GD Ambassadors help their destination to improve by promoting [Sustainability solutions](#).

## The 'Sustainable Top 100' and Green Destinations Days

The Green Destinations Community was launched at ITB Berlin 2015, and had successful meetings and presentations at ITB 2016, at **Global Green Destinations Day 2016** in Ljubljana (Slovenia), and the Global Green Destinations Event 2017 in Cascais (Portugal). The Ljubljana event was the largest global sustainable destinations meeting ever held, convening 350 people from 36 countries.

Members of the GD Ambassadors Community are encouraged to nominate their destination for the [Sustainable Destinations Top 100 competition](#), which was first organized in 2014, and repeated annually since 2016. The aim of the competition is to highlight success stories in destination management, and to exchange good practices between destinations, for example at Green Destinations Days.

[The 2017 Top 100 Winners can be seen here.](#)

