

The 2014 Sustainable Destinations Global Top 100



For the first time, a Sustainable Destinations Global Top 100 has been created to celebrate the management efforts of hundred most sustainable destinations on Earth. The Top 100 is the result of open calls in the social media, and of a selection process by 30 international experts in tourism sustainability. The Sustainable Destinations Global Top 100 is an initiative of TravelMole.com, VISION on Sustainable Tourism, Totem Tourism, and Green Destinations. Green Destinations has taken full responsibility for the selection process.

We aim to recognise tourism destinations that have worked hard to make a difference and take sustainability seriously. Nevertheless, no destination is sustainable for the full 100%. This is why the authors present ratings of overall destination sustainability according to the only available global assessment tool for this purpose: the Global Sustainable Tourism Review (GSTR). The publication also presents the scores that the Green Destinations Selection Panel members have given to destinations' performance on six key criteria: Nature, Environment, Culture & Tradition, Social well-being, Green Economy and certified Green Tourism Policy. The latter criterion, corresponding to certification using the GSTC destination criteria, is given the highest weight of all criteria.

We also aim to encourage public and private stakeholders in all destinations worldwide to adopt more sustainable tourism practices. By publishing an annual list, the initiators acknowledge the best initiatives, making tourism destinations greener, cleaner, more responsible and better from a perspective of authenticity, and from a social and economic point of view.

Selection of a destination in the Top 100 does not mean it is 100% sustainable. It means that it has made good effort towards sustainability, which is a process rather than a situation.

It should also be stressed that visiting these destinations does not make a holiday sustainable. This would require at least the following main elements:

- Choose a destination that is accessible from your place of departure by train, bus, ferry or a short flight. And in any case, compensate the CO2 emission of your travel.¹
- Choose a destination making serious efforts for sustainability; avoid destinations with self-claims on sustainability that cannot be proved.
- Choose an accommodation with a low carbon footprint, or an eco-label accommodation.

TIP: An accommodation booking website that highlights destination sustainability (GSTR-scores), GSTC Recognised hotel eco-labels, and the accommodation's carbon footprint, is Booking.com affiliate BookDifferent.com. As far as we are aware, this is the only accommodation booking website with all this information.

The 2014 list is compiled by Albert Salman and Valere Tjolle, in consultation with the "Green Destinations Selection Panel", consisting of 30 international experts on tourism and sustainability. Randy Durband, CEO of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), is Special Adviser in the creation of the Top 100. The Top 100 list is the result of the following three mechanisms:

¹ Compensation is actually shifting the climate mitigation burden to someone else. If you really want to visit a country at a longer distance, than make it a long stay and choose the most sustainable destination in the area you want to visit.

- **Strand A - Awarded and certified destinations.** Destinations that have been awarded or certified after a third party assessment of the [Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations \(GSTC-D\)](#) and other criteria. Also destinations that have at least BasIQ status in the Global Sustainable Tourism Review (GSTR). These 28 destinations were given 1st priority in the selection process.
- **Strand B - Destinations that were nominated and selected by the Panel;** after an open call for nominations through international networks and in various LinkedIn Groups (VISION for Sustainable Tourism, GSTC, a.o.), all 81 nominated destinations were tested against the criteria by the Green Destinations Selection Panel. 58 Destinations were selected and given 2nd priority in building the Top 100.
- **Strand C - Destinations with high scores in the GSTR.** These destinations were given lowest priority, only to fill the remaining places within the Top 100.

Eligibility of destinations

A destination is considered a city, town, small region, national park, or lake destination with a local resident community and with accommodation (at least camping facilities), and where the majority of visitors spend at least one full day.

Accommodations, single buildings, attractions and theme parks were considered not eligible.

Countries or states were only eligible when they are comparable in size to a small region.

Strand A - Awarded and certified destinations

Only awarded destinations were included on the basis of award and certification programmes that include the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations (GSTC-D): Biosphere Tourism, QualityCoast, and EarthCheck. The following indications can be found in the tables:

- **Biosphere Tourism:** Biosphere Tourism certified destination. www.biospheretourism.com.
- **GSTR Verified:** destination check on the basis of the GSTR-Green Destinations Standard, subject to 3rd-party verification. www.greendestinations.info.
- **EarthCheck:** EarthCheck Community programme. www.earthcheck.org.
- **QualityCoast BasIQ:** destination assessment on the basis of the GSTR, mainly reflecting visible sustainability. www.qualitycoast.info/alldestinations.htm.
- **QualityCoast Platinum/Gold/Silver/Bronze:** destination award & certification on the basis of the GSTR-Green Destinations Standard, subject to 3rd-party auditing. www.qualitycoast.info.
- **VISTAS:** Visions on Innovation for Sustainable Tourism Awards. www.vistawards.com.

Strand B - Destinations that are nominated

Nominations could be made through a standard nomination form, enabling experts and others nominating destinations to provide their “Personal assessment” on the following criteria (corresponding to the six themes of the GSTR):

Criteria for selection of destinations
1. Quality of nature, wildlife experience and landscape in the destination
2. Environmental quality (air, water, ...) and environmental care in the destination
3. Cultural heritage, local identity and tradition
4. Social issues - People & Hospitality, incl. human rights situation, human respect
5. Green Economy: business involvement & innovation, green & clean energy, climate adaptation, waste & water management
6. Green Policy: Certified GSTC-D compliance*, and successful green benchmarking)
Specific reason for nomination, special effort, innovation, best practice, ...

*Certified by a programme using the GSTC-D.

“Personal assessments” were done in the form of a rating from 1 to 5 (“5” expressing an ideal situation / performance, corresponding to the 20% best destinations in the continent; “1” expressing an unfavourable situation / performance, corresponding to the 20% worst destinations in the continent), for each of the above selection criteria, with the possibility to add texts to clarify the nomination. The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations (GSTC-D) are considered of major importance in compiling the list. For this reason, the nomination form also asked experts to indicate whether nominated destinations have been assessed on the GSTC-D (by an independent body) or have been certified through an independent 3rd-party auditor procedure. The call for nominations resulted into 81 single nominations, usually with marks given for the six selection criteria. Members of the Green Destinations Selection Panel were asked to give marks (again in the form of a rating from 1 to 5) and comments to the destinations that they know well. And they were asked whether they agreed or disagreed to the inclusion of each nominated destination in the Top 100. The conversation of the Panel resulted into a final evaluation of all 81 nominated destinations, including average ratings and indications of agreement or disagreement to inclusion in the Top 100. As a result, 20 nominated destinations were excluded by the Panel due to lack of compliance to the criteria. Three nominated destinations in the same region were combined into one.

Strand C - Global Sustainable Tourism Review (GSTR)

A very important source for the publication are the destination sustainability scores calculated by Global Sustainable Tourism Review (GSTR), that includes data for 1200 destinations, mostly collected from independent internet sources such as maps, databases and statistics. www.greendestinations.info, www.qualitycoast.info/alldestinations.htm. GSTR reports on destinations from a client's point of view.

The GSTR is not an eco-label or a certification system, but a destination sustainability support system that has been developed to make the GSTC-D operational, and to communicate the content of any destination assessment or certification towards the public and the tourism sector, in a harmonised way. The GSTR is a transparent tool to measure, monitor and improve the sustainability profile of destinations. It is being developed into the “Green Destinations Standard”. GSTR uses all 41 GSTC Destination criteria, and a set of status and trends indicators to assess the sustainability profile in six different themes (Nature; Environment; Culture & Tradition; People & Hospitality; Green Economy; and Green Policy). For all criteria several indicators exist for which the destination is quantitatively assessed.

GSTR scores of any destination can be between zero and 10 points. Points are awarded for increasing levels of involvement in sustainability assessment, in the following sequence:

1. BasiQ Assessment from neutral sources (Internet, databases, Google Earth): up to 6 points.
2. GSTR Verification of a Self Assessment and of data provided by the destination: up to 2 points.
3. Certification in line with GSTR and GSTC: up to 2 points.

The Green Destinations Partnership offers tailor-made tools to destinations seeking to improve their sustainability, and hence their GSTR score. At every level, GSTR scores will increase with active destination involvement.

GSTR scores are displayed in an increasing number of Online Travel Agents, including BookDifferent.com and Griekenland.net.

The present limitation of the GSTR database is that it mainly holds data on 40-60 indicators reflecting visible sustainability (from a range of other databases and maps), whilst the local situation and the GSTC-D compliance to the GSTC Criteria for Destinations (GSTC-D) is only 3rd-party audited for some 60 destinations.

GSTR destination verification

Destination compliance to individual GSTC destination criteria is possible through the GSTR verification process (see above), leading to a higher GSTR-score for each of the criteria that is met by the destination.

This GSTR verification process prepares destinations for certification, or for the QualityCoast or Quality-Destination Awards (the only certifications in line with both GSTC and GSTR).

The implications of the GSTR verification for the Top 100 GSTR destination scores are as follows:

- Without a verification process, GSTR destination scores cannot be higher than 6/10.
- Through a verification process, GSTR destination scores can increase up to 8/10.
- GSTR Scores higher than 8/10 are only possible through appropriate destination certification.

The sustainability assessment of destinations

Unlike in a hotel where everything is manageable by a director, a destination has hundreds of actors that are all responsible for their own behaviour; therefore, there is a greater need for transparency in a destination, on any element, compared to a hotel. In our view the yes/no approach of a destination certification is too limited. Green Destinations would like to add transparency to this certification, through assessments for all criteria (using a scale from 1 to 5). We have adopted this transparency throughout GSTR and in the Top 100. We think that this transparency is fundamental to make certifications more credible and meaningful to the consumer.

In addition to this, we are aware of the sustainability implications of the distance between the place of departure and destination. As this list is worldwide, it is not possible to add the impacts of transport to a destination because the tourist may come from very different places and distances. However, we will continue to explore ways to make this aspect visible through additional indicators, e.g. through an access criterion that enables the accessibility for major markets to the destination. This basically should be based on rail, bus, ferry access and a criterion that gives the minimum travel distance by air if that is the only access. Another criterion could still be to assess the modal split (shares of car/air/public transport & coach). But that requires local information. The discussion will be continued in 2015...

Maximum selection per continent

The lists per continent were maximised in order to be able to present a truly global Top 100. So lists were compiled for each continent, the length of the lists corresponding to the relative number of international arrivals in each continent.

For our Top 100 the following numbers were chosen:

- European destinations: 50.
- African destinations (incl. The African part of the Middle East): 10
- Asia-Pacific destinations (incl. the Asian part of the Middle East): 25.
- American destinations: 15.

The compilation and publication of this Sustainable Destinations Global Top 100 has been a unique collaborative effort of the leading international organisations and programs for tourism sustainability. It is intended to be repeated and to be improved every year.

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