Implementation Regulations for the Certification of Destinations

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The sustainability certification of a destination is based on effective cooperation between the key tourism stakeholder, the so-called Destination Management Organization (DMO), and the participating tourism service providers within the destination (e.g. hotels, restaurants, transport companies). The DMO itself implements a sustainability process within the organization and acts as the leading actor for the sustainability process within the destination.

1 General

1.1 Scope: The TourCert Implementation Regulations for Destinations are an accompanying document to the TourCert Certification Guideline and the TourCert Criteria Catalogue. They define the formal framework conditions of the sustainability process and certification and apply to all destinations.

1.2 Deviations: Deviations from the provisions defined in this document are only possible with approval from the TourCert certification body.

1.3 Destination: For the purposes of TourCert, destinations are geographical areas selected by guests or guest segments as travel destinations. As a rule, the destination provides all facilities necessary for accommodation, catering, and entertainment during the stay.

The destination presents itself as a common unit of a tourism segment, both from the provider and demand perspective. This includes landscape, fauna, flora, climatic conditions, and cultural attractions (primary offer). It forms an economic competitive unit. The term includes small-scale structures (resorts, amusement parks – secondary offer), individual locations (e.g. in urban tourism), and entire regions..

1.4 Destination Management Organization (DMO): A destination has a central

organizational unit (Destination Management Organization) that functions both as a tourism service provider and as a coordinating, planning, and marketing body for the tourism offer, e.g. management board, spa administration, or tourism marketing organization.

1.5 If a destination does not have a traditional DMO, the central management functions are carried out by a DMO-like organization. In addition, there are other organizations whose activities and planning influence the tourism offer (primary and secondary), such as economic development agencies, construction authorities, nature conservation authorities, transport providers, or agriculture, which are not considered DMOs.

For sustainability certification, the DMO is the central entity that manages the sustainability and certification process through its management, communication, stakeholders, and cooperation with service providers and other relevant actors in the destination.

Partner Businesses: Partner businesses are tourism service providers within the destination that commit to the destination's sustainability process. Any company meeting the following criteria may become a partner business:

- Services are offered with tourists as the main target group or end consumers. This also includes companies providing consulting services (e.g. marketing or strategic services) aimed at tourists.
- The services offered must constitute part of the overall tourism product "travel".
- Tourism services must account for the majority of total sales.

The partner businesses form the destination's partner network. The DMO coordinates this network and ensures active participation through regular meetings or other activities. The network aims to improve the sustainability performance of tourism service providers.

Compliance with partner business requirements is regularly reviewed through the DMO's internal audit; spot checks are conducted during the external assessment.

Tourism service providers may become recognized partner businesses if they:

a) have completed the TourCert Qualified process and fulfilled the corresponding requirements,

b) or hold one of the following recognized environmental or **sustainability certifications:**

- TourCert Certification
- Blue Flag
- Blue Swallow
- Certified Green Hotel
- DGNB Certification System for Sustainable Building
- Klima-Hotels
- Greentable
- Ecocamping
- Eco Hotels Certified EHC
- EMAS
- EU Ecolabel
- Green Globe
- Viabono CO_2 Footprint
- Green Key
- Green Pearls
- Green Sign / InfraCert
- ISO 14001:2004
- Ökoprofit
- Partner Nationale Naturlandschaften
- Viabono
- Qualitätsmanagement Golf & Natur
- BIO-Hotels
- Tripadvisor Green Leaders with at least Bronze status
- TUI Eco Resorts

- Environmental Quality Label for Alpine Club Huts
- Wellnesshotels & Resorts Quality Standards
- Wellness Stars
- Bioland
- Naturland
- DEHOGA Environmental Check (GOLD only)
- Organic Certification
- EU Organic Certification
- Biokreis
- Demeter
- Fair'n Green
- FairChoice
- SQD only with TourCert Qualified module*Status:*

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Regional or other certifications must meet at least the following requirements in order to be recognized:

- The content focus is on environmental, social, or sustainability aspects (minimum 50% of criteria), distributed across different thematic areas.
- Verification is conducted through an on-site audit or validation by an independent third party (e.g. certification board or awarding commission).
- The certification validity period does not exceed three years.

Recognition of additional certification systems is subject to review by TourCert.

1.6 Sustainability Council: The appointment of a Sustainability Council for the destination is essential. The Sustainability Council is a strategic body that advises on the objectives and measures of the sustainability process, monitors implementation, and contributes to quality assurance and coordination.

2 *Core Indicators*

The core indicators of each destination are presented in the auditor's assessment report together with average values of comparable destinations. The indicators consist of existing destination data and sustainability indices generated through surveys and assessments.

1. Share of recognized partner businesses (%)
2. Share of certified hospitality businesses in tourism (%)
3. Occupancy rate of accommodations (%)
4. Average CO_2 emissions from energy consumption of accommodations (partner businesses) (t)
5. Share of renewable energy (%) in total energy consumption (partner businesses)
6. Destination Assessment Index at DMO level (%)
7. Destination Assessment Index at destination level (%)
8. Product Assessment Index (%)
9. Share of service providers with the "Travel for All" label (%)
10. Share of tourism service providers with a quality certification (%)
11. Share of sustainable products within the DMO (%)
12. Guest information (%)
13. Employee satisfaction (%)
14. Partner satisfaction (%)
15. Tour guide sustainability orientation (%)

3 *Baseline Assessment*

Destinations seeking certification by TourCert must fulfill basic minimum requirements within the baseline assessment. These minimum requirements are prerequisites for admission to certification.

Minimum Requirements for the Baseline Assessment

The baseline assessment includes the indicators defined in the criteria catalogue for destinations.

The development of a mission statement, sustainability report, and improvement programme are mandatory prerequisites for certification. Furthermore, if a tourism strategy already exists, it must include a sustainability component. If no tourism strategy exists, one must be developed with a sustainability focus.

Rating / Survey	Scope
Required evaluations and surveys include	
(0) Complete data collection	
(1) Assessment of sustainability measures already implemented within the DMO and destination - Sustainability Assessment	One-time assessment by a sustainability manager

(2) Evaluation of bids - Bid evaluation	Initial certification: At least one product or offering promoted by the DMO per core business area or product line Recertification: In-depth evaluation of all products or offerings promoted by the DMO within a core business area or a product line
(3) Employee satisfaction survey (minimum 5 employees) - Employee survey	All DMO employees
(4) Assessment of guest information - Guest information assessment	All DMO employees with customer contact
(5) Survey of business partner satisfaction - Business partner survey	Representative selection of the DMO's business partners
(6) Survey of sustainability orientation of tour guides - Tour guide survey	Representative selection of tour guides within the destination

4 *Requirements for Certification*

4.1 Reporting Year: The data collected within the baseline assessment must originate from the last completed financial year. The reference point is the start date of the data collection process.

4.2 Sustainability Manager: To introduce and maintain the TourCert certification system, sustainability managers must demonstrate qualifications in the field of sustainability. This regulation also applies when responsibility is transferred to another person who assumes the role of sustainability manager. In the event of such a change, the new contact person must be communicated to TourCert.

It must be ensured that knowledge related to TourCert certification remains within the DMO. Interns are therefore not permitted to act as sustainability managers.Findet ein

5 *Dates and Deadlines*

The TourCert CSR system is designed to achieve the continuous improvement of the sustainability performance of certified destinations. This objective requires the timely submission of relevant documents and information in order to monitor improvements and developments without delay.

5.1 Certification Cycle: Destinations are considered certified once they receive an official approval letter from the TourCert certification body. Certification begins after a one-month period.Following the initial certification, the certification remains valid for three years. Each year between the (re)certifications, within a one-month deadline, the certified destination must submit an updated improvement programme to the TourCert certification body. TourCert reserves the right to contact the DMO regularly in order to discuss relevant structural and content-related developments within the sustainability process. In addition, updates to the improvement programme are reviewed annually. For DMOs with between 50 and 99 employees (full-time equivalents), TourCert will determine whether an annual surveillance audit is required. For DMOs with 100 or more employees (full-time equivalents), an annual surveillance audit is mandatory..

5.2 Responsibility for Compliance with Deadlines: The documents required for the audit as well as updated improvement programmes must be submitted to the TourCert certification body on time and without reminder.

Responsibility for complying with the relevant deadlines lies with the destinations.

5.3 **Request for Deadline Extensions**: If deadlines for submitting the documents required for certification or the updated improvement programmes cannot be met for justified reasons, the certification body must be informed in due time and a request for an extension of the relevant deadline must be submitted.

Extensions of deadlines do not affect the cycle of the sustainability process. Future deadlines and schedules will continue to be based on the date of the initial certification.

5.4 **Failure to Meet Deadlines**: Failure to meet deadlines for submitting the documents required for certification or the updated improvement programmes, without requesting an extension, may result in the withdrawal of the TourCert seal.

5.5 Under no circumstances may the documents required for recertification or updated improvement programmes be submitted more than three months after the submission deadline.

6 *Certification Provisions*

6.1 **Audit**: Audits are conducted on site at the premises of the DMO, as well as through inspections within the destination (e.g. tourist attractions) and visits to partner businesses.

For the audit, destinations must submit the following documents to TourCert:

- Complete sustainability report
- Improvement programme
- Results of surveys and assessments

6.2 **Recommendations**: The recommendations made by the auditor in the audit report should be incorporated as measures into the improvement programme. If individual recommendations cannot be implemented from the company's perspective, justification must be provided.

6.3 **Conditions**: Following the audit, conditions may be imposed on the destination either by the auditor or by the certification council. These conditions may either:

- be prerequisites for the current (re)certification, or
- need to be implemented during the upcoming certification period.

The conditions stated by the auditor in the audit report must be included as measures in the improvement programme and implemented within the agreed deadline. If individual conditions cannot be implemented from the company's perspective, justification must be provided.

6.4 Use of the Certification Seals: After successful certification, the DMO receives the "Sustainable Destination" seal as well as the TourCert seal. The DMO is permitted to publicly advertise using both seals.

Companies or branch offices associated with the DMO may only use the certification seals if they were actively involved in the sustainability process and were included in the baseline assessment. Shareholders of the DMO do not automatically receive the right to use the certification seals.

Recognized partner businesses may advertise using the "Sustainable Destination Partner" seal. If they have completed the TourCert Qualified programme, they additionally receive this distinction.

The certification of the destination must be communicated externally by the DMO. The following requirements therefore apply to the use of the seals:

- The "Sustainable Destination" seal must be placed prominently on the DMO website and linked to the TourCert website. The TourCert seal should also be published additionally.
- The TourCert seal may only be published in the formats provided by TourCert and exclusively in the colors red or black.
- For the "Sustainable Destination" seal, the specifications set out in the logo manual must be complied with (the logo manual is provided upon successful certification).
- The "Sustainable Destination" seal must also be displayed on DMO publications.
- TourCert is a company and destination certification, not a product certification. References to the certification may only relate to the destination, the DMO, and partner businesses, and not to the products and services offered.

- If the certification is not renewed, all references to the certification must be removed from the DMO's and partner businesses' own media and publications.

Destinations outside German-speaking countries receive only the TourCert seal. If the TourCert Qualified programme has been completed, partner businesses will also receive this distinction.

6.5 External Communication Following Successful Initial Certification: Certified destinations must publish the current sustainability report on the DMO website and display the "Sustainable Destination" seal prominently on the website.

The TourCert certification must be explained appropriately in a suitable location. Further information and templates can be found in the TourCert Toolbox. Upon certification, the company will also receive the corresponding access credentials.

6.6 Suspension of Certification: If a destination is not interested in recertification or does not have the necessary resources available for recertification, the certification expires at the end of the certification period.

6.7 Reapplication for Initial Certification: If a destination is not recommended for certification by the auditor, or if the certification council rejects the certification, the destination may apply for a new assessment.

A minimum of three months must elapse between the first and second assessments. A new data collection is not necessarily required. The reporting year data forming the basis of the assessment will be determined on a case-by-case basis by the responsible auditor or the certification body.

6.8 Reapplication for Recertification: If a destination is not recommended for recertification by the auditor, if the certification council rejects the recertification, if a destination loses the seal due to failure to meet deadlines, or in the event of other circumstances that prevent an assessment from taking place, the destination has the opportunity to undergo reassessment within six months without a new data collection. After six months, a new data collection becomes mandatory, and renewed participation in the introductory workshop is recommended.