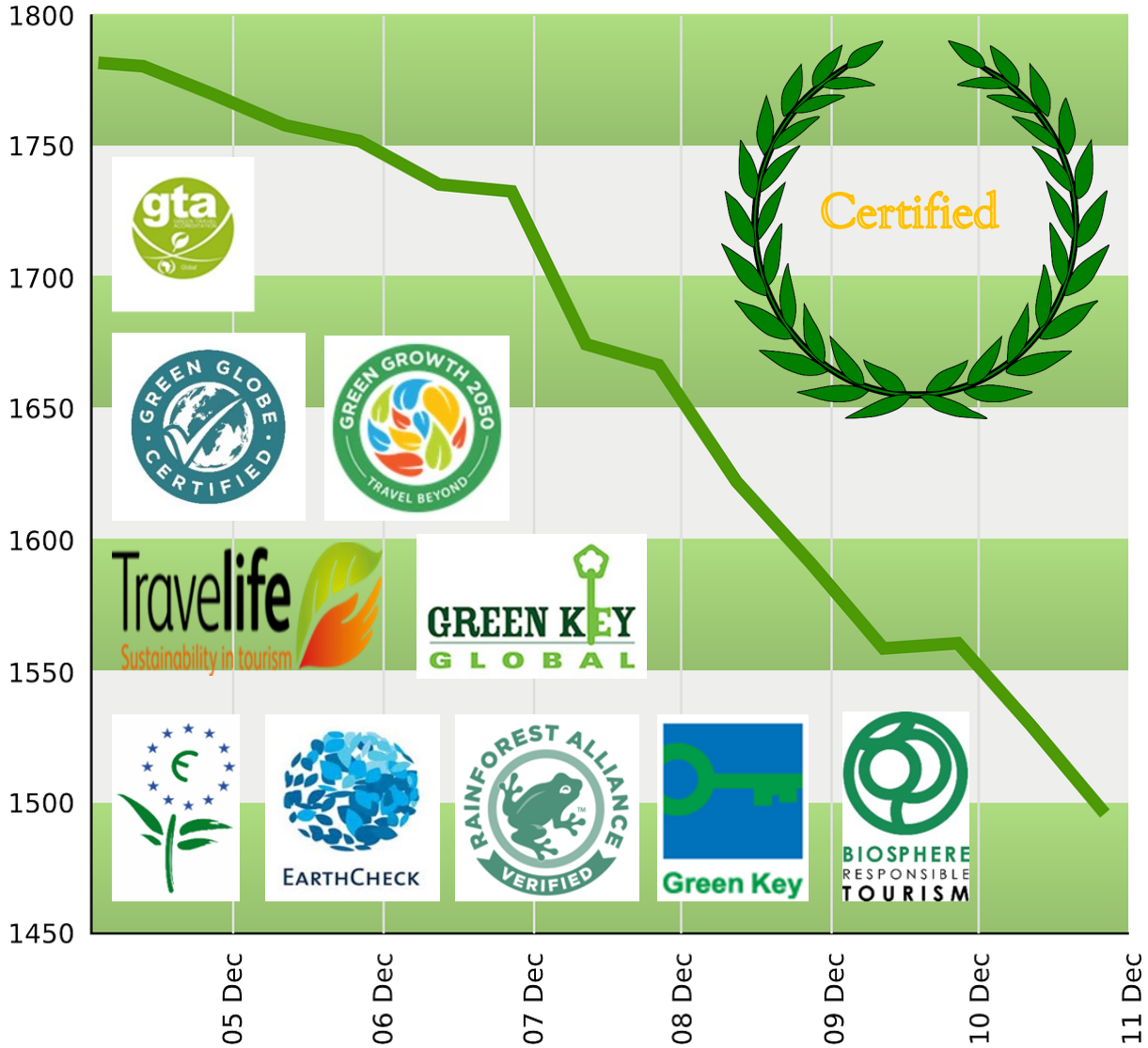


International Tourism Partnership presents

green hotelier



Know How Guide: Sustainable Hotel Certification Schemes

By the International Tourism Partnership, via Green Hotelier

July 2016

International Tourism Partnership

The voice for social and environmental responsibility in the hotel industry

137 Shepherdess Walk | London N1 7RQ | T: +44 (0)20 7566 8782 | itp@bitc.org.uk

www.tourismpartnership.org | www.bitc.org.uk

Business in the Community is registered in England and Wales. Charity No. 297716. Company No. 1619253

A part of

**BUSINESS
IN THE
COMMUNITY**



Know How Guide: Sustainable Hotel Certification Schemes

Introduction

This Know How Guide offers an introduction to sustainability certification for hotels. It will help you understand why you might seek certification and the key performance areas for sustainable hotel certification, as well as giving an overview of some of the most common certifications. In addition, this guide includes a spreadsheet overview of the key facts, and individual listings of the criteria and key details for each certification scheme .

Hotel certification schemes vary in application, region, complexity, price and more. Most include — to a greater or lesser degree — some focus on energy, water, waste, community engagement, heritage and biodiversity conservation, sustainable procurement, accountability and human resources practices, architecture and design, and some incorporate all these areas.

Certification schemes can be developed by non-profit organisations, private tourism organisations, governments or through multi-stakeholder groups. There are many certifications available, and as such there is debate around which of two methods of ‘performance-based’ and ‘process-based’ is the most effective way to measure impact:

- **Performance-based** certification schemes focus on progress and compliance with internal and external goals. Businesses are awarded and benchmarked based on their performance rather than their intent to improve.
- **Process-based** certification schemes are more procedural, focusing on setting up management systems that monitor and improve practices that relate to sustainability impact.¹

Some schemes identified in this Know How Guide incorporate both of these approaches.

In July 2015 GreenHotelWorld.com² published a report on the proportion of hotels with ‘green’ certification. Based on a study of 130,000+ hotels worldwide. 6.2% were certified. The concentration by continent was:

North America 10.1%	Africa 3.7%
Europe 6.1%	South America 2.7%
Oceania 4.8%	Asia 0.9%

With over 140 certification labels globally, it is impossible to summarise all the schemes. This Know How Guide outlines the key points from nine of the most commonly used global certification schemes, and outlines the value of seeking certification.

1. From ‘A Simple User’s Guide to Certification for Sustainable Tourism and Ecotourism, Centre for Ecotourism and Sustainable Development,
2. From GreenHotelWorld.com, ‘Certified Green Hotel Density’ report, 2015

Why get certified?

Certification may help a hotel to:

- Independently assess its environmental and social impact
- Identify ways to improve internal management processes
- Shift toward the use of cost saving sustainable technologies or practices
- Gain a competitive advantage through improving efficiencies and reducing operating costs
- Demonstrate compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements
- Satisfy corporate customers who are increasingly requesting information about their suppliers social and environmental initiatives
- Increase sales by appealing to environmentally conscious customers

The benefit of certification depends upon the scheme pursued. For example, some emphasise environmental resource use, others focus on cultural heritage impact.

In order to help you get to grips with the basics of some of the different certification schemes available, see our handy matrix which details costs, the process of certification and other useful information.

Below follows a short overview of some of the most popular certification schemes for hotels. We do not intend to recommend one certification scheme over another, but rather to offer a flavour of the different schemes. As such, we hope that this Know How Guide will help you decide which certification scheme would fit your business and sustainability goals.

Global Sustainable Tourism Council Criteria for Hotels and Tour Operators

The [Global Sustainable Tourism Council](#) (GSTC) has developed criteria that provide a baseline standard for certification schemes. In October 2016 GSTC will be publishing revised criteria after a public consultation. Until then, the [criteria](#) consider the following themes to be the minimum that any tourism business should aspire to:

- Effective sustainability planning
- Maximizing social and economic benefits for the local community
- Enhancing cultural heritage
- Reducing negative impacts to the environment

GSTC either 'approves' or 'recognises' certification schemes by these standards. Approval means that the criteria, processes and procedures meets the GSTC as well as other international standards of competency and transparency (which is currently under review) This has been applied to two global and one regional certification scheme to date:

- EarthCheck Company Standard
- Biosphere Responsible Tourism
- Ecotourism Australia

Hotels that are approved by the above standards are able to use the GSTC-Approved logo along with the awarded certification scheme's logo.

Recognition means that the certification scheme meets or aligns with the GSTC standard. Many more schemes have achieved this with the following at global level:

- Green Globe
- Green Growth 2050
- Rainforest Alliance
- Travelife Sustainability System
- Green Key
- Green Key Global
- Green Tourism Active

And these at a regional level:

- EU Ecolabel or Eco Flower
- Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST) for hotels – Costa Rica
- Chile Sistema de Distinción en Turismo Sostenable – Chile
- Eco-Certification Malta
- Ecotourism Ireland Certification Programme
- European Ecotourism Labeling Standard (EETLS)
- Fair Trade Tourism – South Africa
- GREAT Green Deal Certification Program – Central America
- Green Star Hotel Certificate – Egypt
- Hoteles + Verdes (AHT) – Argentina
- Japan Environmentally Sustainable Accommodations International Standard (ESAIS)

Certification schemes overview

EarthCheck



Number of questions by compliance area:

Environment – 66

Social – 19

Management – 30

Quality – 16

Ethics - 37

EarthCheck Certified describes itself as the world's leading scientific environmental benchmarking and certification programme designed specifically for the travel and tourism industry. The EarthCheck programme is built on Agenda 21 principles and is currently used by 1,500 members, in 6 languages, across 32 sectors in more than 70 countries across the globe. The scheme is approved by GSTC.

The criteria for certification are publicly available against a fee of AUD175. With a total of over 160 questions and more than 450 data points to complete, the scope and depth of EarthCheck's assessment demonstrates that the certification is a sign of a robust sustainable business strategy and operations. As a performance based scheme, EarthCheck's process begins with benchmarking before certification. This involves analysing the business's sustainability performance quantitatively against a sector baseline and highlighting areas for improvement.

Criteria questions for the programme range across the following areas:

- Corporate governance details
- Activities, services and facilities
- Environmental, social and economic sustainability criteria
- Benchmarking data inclusive of: activity measures, energy consumption (grid electricity, stationary fuels, mobile fuels (air, road and water), onsite waste water treatment, water consumption (potable, recycled, water saving devices), waste production, waste incinerated, waste recycled, chemical usage, pesticide usage, community contributions, CO2 emissions, corporate social responsibility, energy per source and total costs, water per unit and total costs, waste per unit and total cost
- Risk management and action planning
- Communication

Questions assess the environmental and social sustainability policy and management systems to achieve best practice results in the key performance areas (outlined below) as well as return on sustainability investment.

Key Performance Areas:

Greenhouse gas emissions	Land use planning and management
Energy efficiency, conservation and management	Air quality protection
Management of freshwater resources	Wastewater management
Ecosystem conservation and management	Solid waste management
Social and cultural management	Environmentally harmful substances

Applicants have to demonstrate how their employees and senior managers engage with the sustainability policy and whether it is communicated to all stakeholders. The company is expected to record data on the key performance indicators and demonstrate that the business is addressing their baseline performance. Environmental performance is assessed through energy, carbon, water, waste, CSR & community as well as supply chain calculators that are based on accepted methodologies, regulations and international standards, as for example the carbon calculator which is aligned to the IPCC Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories and ISO 14064. The system can produce GHG reports that align with HCMI (Hotel Carbon Measurement Initiative).

Hotels develop or demonstrate the existence of a sustainability approach that addresses the key performance areas, based on the risk assessment of their setting – location, local impacts and size as measured through staff members and room numbers. Consideration must be demonstrated for potential impacts and planned responses to these to benefit the development of an environmental action plan. High-risk hotels require an Environmental Management System that serves to improve performance. EarthCheck assesses the hotel's environmental and social performance based on the key performance areas, with particular emphasis on energy efficiency and water stewardship.

By placing an emphasis on policy and management systems, the scheme encourages a business to put in place the foundations for efficient sustainability practice. EarthCheck's assessment of risk by local context gives relevance to a business's impacts. Certification is given to members when 100% compliance to the EarthCheck company standard is met and third party auditors have reviewed the verified the data submitted. Non-conformances need to be addressed within 90 days for certification to be awarded.

Membership to EarthCheck is paid annually and includes access to the cloud-based platform, a dedicated relationship manager, performance report and sustainability tools, guides and tips.

Process of certification

1. Registration and payment to become EarthCheck member.
2. Collection and submission of benchmarking data to receive performance report.
3. Based on performance results, completion of self-assessment checklist with help of a dedicated Relationship Manager, the My EarthCheck online platform and available resources.
4. Independent third party verification from an EarthCheck approved auditor.
5. When certified, businesses must benchmark annually, maintain the self-assessment checklist and receive an on-site certification audited at least every 2 years. Audit duration is dependent on the size, scope and risk level of a property.

Levels of assessment

Bronze - Benchmarked not certified

Gold - 5 to 9 years of continuous certification

Silver – Certified

Platinum - more than 10 years of continuous certification

Master – more than 154 years of continuous certification.

Certified hotels include:

InterContinental, Hong Kong

The Langham, Boston