



# Sustainable Travel Activities Programme

## Responsible choices for sustainable future

As one of the fastest-growing economic sectors, tourism is one of the focal areas at Preferred by Nature. Our contribution to this sector aims to help the shift towards harnessing innovation, embracing local values and communities, and creating decent job opportunities for all.

Preferred by Nature's travel programme helps businesses improve their operations and competitiveness, protect communities and ecosystems and reach international travellers who are increasingly demanding sustainable travel services.

The Sustainable Travel Programme is built on a tourism standard that has gained "Recognition by the **Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)**". The Standard comprises a comprehensive framework for tourism organisations that wish to promote responsible and sustainable ecotourism while investing in nature, people and climate to secure the long-term viability of their business and the resources that depend on it.

The Standard for Sustainable Travel Activities is divided into four principles, designed to assess any tourism organisation's performance regarding their business, sociocultural, environmental and climate practices.

This structure is adapted from the **Preferred by Nature Sustainability Framework**, which is our definition of sustainability, setting the bar for sustainable activities across sectors and used as the basis to develop sector-specific adapted standards for companies seriously committed to sustainable business practices.



The hummingbird seal is available for use by any organisation complying with the criteria of the Preferred by Nature Certification Programme, which is based on our Sustainability Framework.

70+

**certified tourism businesses** in Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean and South America

29,400+

**verified employment contracts** and conditions at all certified operations

Nearly  
15,000

**hectares managed** responsibly for tourism activities

14,000+

**hectares reserved** for strict conservation

30

destinations where **local economies benefitting** from the implementation of sustainable practices applied by certified businesses

13.5m

**million people** (guests and passengers) participating in educational activities aimed at raising awareness and teaching sustainable choices and habits\*



\*Figures as of October 2023



## Why work with us?



We offer sustainability certification services in the forestry, agriculture, biomass, carbon footprint, ecosystem restoration, and tourism sectors in over 100 countries all over the world for 30 years.



We work with small businesses, large corporations, communities, Indigenous People, state forests and environmental NGOs - all of them are equally important to us.



The Preferred by Nature Certification for Sustainable Travel Activities offers ways for organisations to communicate about and gain recognition for their progress towards meeting their sustainability commitments.



By working with Preferred by Nature, you can differentiate your business from competitors. Attract eco-conscious travellers and tap into growing market segments seeking sustainable tourism experiences.



Tourism businesses that have earned the Preferred by Nature certification are well-positioned in global markets and offer effective and high-quality sustainable services.

## Sustainability principles

Sustainable Travel Activities Standard is based on the Sustainability Framework's four principles and 31 criteria that can support tourism organisations and businesses to achieve the following objectives through their true and guided efforts:



- 1 Enhanced position and reputation in the travel market.
- 2 Social well-being, development, and human rights of people and communities are being protected.
- 3 Cultural heritage and values are being safeguarded.
- 4 Environments and ecosystems are being protected and preserved.
- 5 Gain recognition for making genuine efforts to mitigate climate impact.

## Scope

The Preferred by Nature Standard for Sustainable Travel Activities has been designed to be applicable to any tourism organisation or activity seeking to evaluate, measure and improve its sustainability performance. This covers both, large-scale and small-scale operations including:

Accommodations

Tour Operators



## Certification process in brief:

Here are the **steps to become certified**:



Once we receive your request for information, our team will contact you and send the application form.

Based on the information you share; we will provide you with a technical and pricing proposal. Following its approval, we will assign a contact person to follow up and arrange the audit process with you.



After accepting the proposal and signing the Service Agreement, you need to prepare for the audit based on the requirements of the applicable Sustainable Travel Standard.



An assessment will be conducted on the agreed dates to check your compliance with the Sustainable Travel Standard requirements.

It is done either fully on-site or via a partially remote process. The audit average duration is 3 days, depending on the size and characteristics of your business's operations.



Once the field audit process is completed, the audit team will prepare a preliminary audit report and after an internal review, it will be sent for your review.



If the audit outcome is positive, a certification decision is made, and your certificate is issued.

## Certification cycle:

Preferred by Nature Certificate for Sustainable Travel Activities will be issued for a three-year term or period if the tourism organisation is found to be in compliance with the eligibility requirements.

By verifying against the Preferred by Nature Sustainable Travel Certification, your company will be able to promote itself in a credible way, as a responsible tourism service provider within the global tourism sector and the growing responsible tourism market worldwide.





## Why Sustainable Travel Certification

We can support accommodations, tour operators and other travel activities around the world to position themselves as a sustainability leader within the tourism industry by guiding their efforts to design and implement a responsible business model, in harmony with nature and true commitment to the people and communities where its activities happen. Through our certification system and standards, tourism businesses can earn several advantages.



### Technical benefits

- Integrate sustainability into Management Systems to improve sustainable performances.
- Acquire and update knowledge about sustainable development issues related to the travel industry through informative activities and audit processes.
- Supports the interpretation of standards and performance of companies in adoption and implementation.
- Integrate, monitor, and report on actions to achieve the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals.



### Promotional benefits

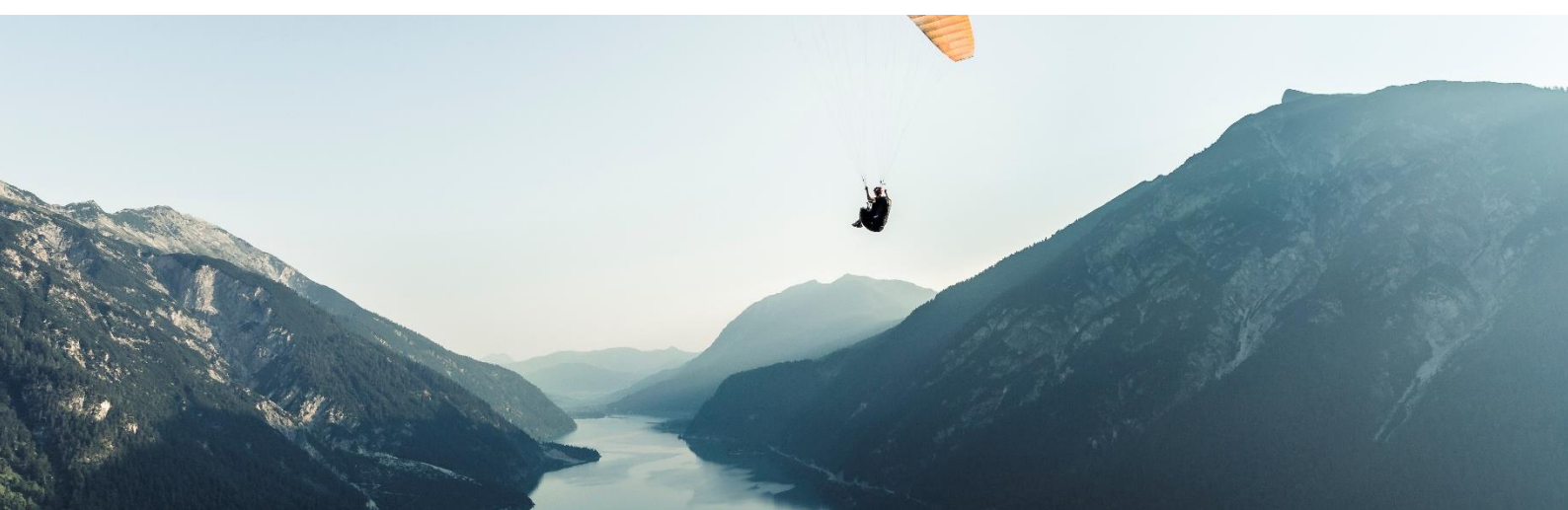
- Gain additional benefits by acquiring two Certifications in one- Preferred by Nature – Travelife for Accommodations.
- To be recognised as the "greenest choice" on bookdifferent.com.
- Opportunity to join Tourism 2030 to make tourism more sustainable.
- Participate in the largest virtual travel community in the world through Preferred by Nature Travel and Trip Advisor.
- Presence in Preferred by Nature Social Networks and Platforms.



### Other benefits

- Be on third-party listings in the travel industry.
- Opportunity to share your story and learn about other success stories through our organisational networks.

Along with sustainable travel certification services provided for over a decade, we also support capacity building, tool design and technical assistance services to integrate sustainability into the travel industry. We are in constant cooperation with various entities such as the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), among others, to combine efforts and share knowledge to promote sustainability in the tourism sector.







## Certification Q&As

### Which certification standards apply to my organisation?

Preferred by Nature Standard for Sustainable Travel Activities (V1.0) applies to any tourism organisation or activity seeking to evaluate, measure, and improve its sustainability performance. This covers both large-scale and small-scale operations including accommodations, tour operators, touristic centres, attractions, and multisite organisations and/or groups.

### What about confidentiality?

To check correct accounting for certified volumes, our auditors will need access to confidential information, including commercial information. The confidentiality of your data is secured, and strict confidentiality requirements bind our staff and auditors.

### What is the cost structure?

The cost varies depending on the size and complexity of the business. The price quote you receive will cover auditors' fees, including the costs related to the onsite evaluation, the review of the audit report conducted by the authorised independent reviewers and the certificate decision. The price will also cover administrative fees charged for audit planning, certification management, database management and certificate issuance. Some expenses related to auditors' travel to and from the audit, lodging and food might be excluded if the audited organisation is able to provide it.

### Which trademark can we use?

Tourism organisations that meet all the applicable Indicators of the Preferred by Nature Standard for Sustainable Travel Activities and offset all of their carbon emissions (including most relevant scope 3 emissions) may use the Preferred by Nature Seal and make related off- and on-product claims.

### What is the validity of my certification?

The Standard for Sustainable Travel Activities certificate is valid for three years. Annual audits during the validity period are required to maintain

certification. Once the validity period ends, you need to undergo a re-assessment to renew your certificate.

### How do I maintain my certificate?

You need to comply with the certification requirements to remain certified. It is verified through annual audits. Preferred by Nature helps you stay up to speed on the requirements by providing regular updates on system changes. If nonconformities are identified in your system, you must take appropriate and effective action to address these.

If the tourism organisation is found to comply with the eligibility requirements, a Preferred by Nature Certificate for Sustainable Travel Activities will be issued for a three-year term or period.

During these three years, the certified organisation will be subject to undergo two mandatory annual surveillance audits and at the end of the process, a voluntary reassessment for renewal of the certificate. Annual audits (or annual surveillance audits) are evaluations conducted once every calendar year of the certification cycle to monitor continuous conformity of the auditee to the requirements of the applicable standard. Annual audits must occur within 60 days prior to the certificate issuing anniversary date (the day and month that the certificate was issued). In each annual audit, it is essential to ensure that the organisation's Sustainability Management System and practices are maintained in adherence to the criteria included in the four principles of this standard.

### When can the certification be refused?

Certification is refused when Preferred by Nature concludes that the audited company does not meet the standard's requirements.

### When is the certification suspended?

Your certification may be suspended for the following reasons: 1. minor nonconformities that represent 25% of the applicable criteria are found during an annual audit, 2. major nonconformities are found during an annual audit, 3. failure to address non-conformities of any type by the specified timeline, 4. serious breaches of the certification requirements, 5. lack of payment of applicable fees and invoices, 6. lack of willingness to plan and undergo scheduled audits, 7. Force Majeure



(e.g. natural disasters that affect the destination, the political unrest that forces to operation shut down, etc.) situation.

A suspended certificate may be reinstated when the company has addressed the issues that led to the suspension, and we have conducted an audit verifying compliance within the required timeline.

### When is the certification terminated?

Your certificate may be terminated for the following reasons: 1. failure to sufficiently address the issues leading to suspension within six months, 2. deliberate fraud or serious breaches of the certification requirements, and 3. failure to undergo reassessment once the suspension period has reached its deadline. If a certificate has been terminated, the company needs to undergo a renewed assessment to have a new certificate issued. It is not possible to reinstate the previous certificate.

After a certificate has been suspended or terminated, the company may not make any claims about conformance with the certification standard(s) and may not sell or promote previously labelled products until certification trademarks are removed.

### Can I change the certificate scope?

As a certificate holder, you may expand or change the scope of your certification in conjunction with your annual audit or in between audits. An additional audit is usually required for scope changes outside the scheduled annual/certification audits. Depending on the nature of the change, it may be either an on-site or/and desk audit.

### What are the rights and duties of applicants and clients?

To learn about Preferred By Nature's clients' rights and duties, please check the [Certification Agreement](#).



### What is the procedure for complaints and appeals?

For complaints management, all complaints and appeals will be processed using the Preferred by Nature's [Dispute Resolution Policy](#).

### What about impartiality and confidentiality?

Preferred by Nature's Quality Management System includes several [policies](#) and procedures that allow our organisation to provide assurance services credibly in compliance with accreditation requirements. These include the [Impartiality Policy](#), which ensures impartiality, transparency and independence in all of our activities, and the [Confidentiality Policy](#), describing our rigorous approach to safeguarding confidential data and information our clients provide.

