

Sustainable Seychelles certification Assessors' Manual



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1. INTRODUCTION

The Seychelles archipelago belongs to one of the major biodiversity hotspots in the world. Approximately 47% of the country's landmass, and some 228km² of its ocean territory, are under some form of protected status. However, Seychelles' biodiversity remains at risk from a variety of human induced pressures; this makes the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity of vital importance for the country's sustainable development.

The concept behind the development of the Sustainable Seychelles certification previously known as the Seychelles Sustainable Tourism Label (SSTL) originated from the Ministry of Environment work in the preparation of *Vision 21*.¹ The Seychelles Ministry of Tourism (through the Seychelles Tourism Board) adopted the SSTL project in 2004, and with the help of two students from the University of Zurich, conducted preparatory research on sustainable tourism Labels.² A committee of key stakeholders was established and developed a set of preliminary criteria. The draft criteria were piloted by STB but the Label was not implemented.

The project was revived towards the end of 2009 through a UNDP-GEF supported initiative to mainstream biodiversity management into production sector activities. As a result of this programme, a series of consultancies were undertaken to further develop the label. Key achievements include: a review of international best practice in sustainable tourism labelling, a review of the criteria, draft marketing plan, draft assessors manual and operators manual, a scoring review document, assessment forms, and the development of training materials for assessors.

The purpose of the Assessors' Manual is to be a source of information and guidance for those involved in the assessment and management of the Sustainable Seychelles certification. This is Version of the Assessors Manual, it is expected that the manual will be a living document, added to overtime as the label matures.

The manual has five sections:

- **Section One** is the introduction
- **Section Two** reviews the purpose and concept of the Sustainable Seychelles Certification
- **Section Three** concerns the Sustainable Seychelles certification process. This is the process that starts with application and ends with an award
- **Section Four** is about the scores given to each criteria
- **Section Five** discusses the achievement of the certificate, and contains the tables listing the criteria, scoring system

¹ Government of Seychelles (2000) *Vision 21: Tourism Development in Seychelles*, STB, Mahé

² Schneider, U. (2004) *Sustainable Tourism in Seychelles*, Master Thesis, University of Zurich.

Purpose

A sustainable tourism labelling system is a procedure that evaluates the performance of a business against a set of agreed sustainable tourism practices. The Label is proof that the business has achieved the required level of sustainability.

The purpose of the Label is to provide a set of standards to guide sustainability improvements in the tourism industry in Seychelles.

The Sustainable Seychelles certification is voluntary, user-friendly, and designed to inspire more efficient and sustainable ways of doing business. The vision of the Sustainable Seychelles certification is:

Every tourism enterprise in Seychelles integrates sustainability practices in their business operations.

The mission of the Sustainable Seychelles certification is:

To encourage tourism enterprises in Seychelles in mainstream sustainability practices into their business operations to safeguard the biodiversity and culture of Seychelles.

Role of the Assessor

The role of an assessor is to:

- **Assist** operators to improve the sustainability of their operations with useful tips and advice
- **Motivate** operators to improve the sustainability of their operations by providing tangible incentives to be certified
- **Reward** operators for improving the sustainability of their operations through the award of the Label.

The Sustainable Seychelles certification seeks to encourage and guide improvements in sustainability outcomes. It is vital that assessors keep in mind that Sustainable Seychelles certification is as much an educational process as an examination process.

Some enterprises choosing to participate in the Sustainable Seychelles certification will have no difficulty in meeting all the criteria. For others, sustainability will be a longer journey. The criteria have been designed to be inclusive and encourage an incremental approach to sustainability.

2. LABEL PROCESS

The Label process consists of five steps.

- Step 1: Communication
- Step 2. Application
- Step 3. Assessment
- Step 4. Verification
- Step 5. Award

Step 1. Communication

The first step toward uptake of the Sustainable Seychelles certification is to communicate the label message and the benefits of the certification process to accommodation managers and owners. This will involve communication, stakeholder engagement, and awareness-raising. The result of successful communication is businesses signing up for assessment or technical assistance.

Tourism businesses make decisions based on return on investment (ROI). To convince enterprises of the benefits of the Sustainable Seychelles certification, ROI must be demonstrated. There are two main benefits of Sustainable Seychelles certification which need to be communicated to tourism enterprises: marketing and cost savings.

Marketing

- Certification will provide operators with a competitive advantage over uncertified enterprises
- Certified properties will be highlighted in the Tourism Department stay guide
- Responsible hotels will be promoted at trade fairs
- Certified properties will be listed on the Sustainable Seychelles certification website
- Guest satisfaction is likely to increase with the communication of sustainability achievements of the enterprise

Cost savings

- Utility costs are likely to decrease due to increase awareness, monitoring and use of improved technology
- Staff replacement costs are likely to decrease as research shows sustainability initiatives build staff motivation and increase retention rates

During an initial visit, the Sustainable Seychelles certification staff will provide information about the “must” criteria and how to conduct a self-assessment.

- Enterprises that are confident that they can achieve at least the “must” criteria are recommended for application.
- Enterprises that are not yet able to meet the “must” criteria are recommended for technical assistance.

Step 2. Application

Interested enterprises submit to Sustainable Seychelles certification secretariat an application form with a statement of their compliance with the must criteria, and with a copy of their self-assessment results. The self-assessment form is the same form used by assessors only instead of points, the enterprise manager notes Yes/No for each criteria based on whether they want to be assessed on this criteria.

The Sustainable Seychelles certification secretariat will review the self-assessment form to ensure the enterprise has selected sufficient criteria to be able to pass the assessment. To maximize the chance of success, enterprises should aim to be assessed on 25% more points than they actually need to pass.

Payment must follow within two weeks. Assessment must follow within two months of the date of payment.

Step 3. Assessment

The Sustainable Seychelles certification secretariat reviews the application and statement of compliance. If the application is complete, an assessor is identified.

To ensure neutrality of the assessment, the assessor must declare any friend, colleague, family, business connection or any other conflict that he or she has to the enterprise. Sustainable Seychelles certification secretariat reserves the right to select a different assessor for the property if a conflict of interest is identified.

Prior to the assessment the assessor must:

- Review the self-assessment form and prepare the agenda for the assessment based on the criteria to be assessed
- Investigate with the appropriate authority if there are any current community, labour, noise, land, refrigerator, or environment disputes
- Review the enterprise promotional materials: website, brochures, and any other collateral that is publicly available

Each assessment starts with an interview of the manager or series of managers responsible for different parts of the property.

The interview provides an opportunity to review policies and documentation requirements of the Standard.

The assessors need to then see evidence of compliance of all the “must” criteria and additional other criteria that an enterprise has marked on their self-assessment. The standard response is, “can you show me?”

Each criterion is allocated 0 to 3 points depending on the manual guidelines. Most of the criteria have yes/no answers. If the criterion is met, and evidence is sighted, the

allotted points are received. **If the criterion is not met, no points are received and the assessor notes down a “corrective action”.** Corrective actions are things that the operator needs to do to comply with the assessment guidelines.

When the assessor is unsure, they must make a careful note of the feature or criteria for a follow-up discussion with the Sustainable Seychelles certification office.

Following the interview, the assessor should ask the manager to guide him or her to specific areas of the property for evaluation.

The assessor needs to complete and submit the assessment form to the Sustainable Seychelles certification office within 14 days of the assessment except in special circumstances.

Step 4. Verification

The Sustainable Seychelles certification secretariat will review the completed assessment form and, if necessary, contact the assessor for further clarification.

When the Sustainable Seychelles certification secretariat is satisfied with the completeness of the assessment, he or she will total the points scored in each section and make one of two possible recommendations to the Awards Panel. These are:

- Operator is recommended for an award—“approved”
- Operator is recommended for reassessment within six months—“pending”

Step 5. Award

The Awards Panel meets when required to review the recommendations of the Sustainable Seychelles certification secretariat. During the meeting, the panel are provided with a copy of assessment report for those enterprises which are recommended for an award. The Sustainable Seychelles certification secretariat explains the business and the reason for the recommendation. Any points of clarification are made.

The Awards Panel confirms the award recommendation unless some irregularity is identified or further information is required.

3. SCORING

This Section explains the principles behind the allocation of scores to criteria.

Scoring Principles

The scoring threshold is designed to strike a balance that ensures the Label is credible, achievable, locally applicable, and incorporates an element of innovation and continuous improvement.

In order to be credible the scoring level for the Sustainable Seychelles certification has to ensure certified operators are meeting a level of industry good-practice that sets them apart from most non-certified businesses. Furthermore, the standard has been designed to be credible in an international context so that international tour operators view it positively.

In order to be achievable, the total points needed to pass are different for large, medium, and small properties. All tourism enterprises should be able to achieve certification given some time, effort, and investment in line with the scale of the business.

Each of the main themes of the standard includes extra points for “other” innovative practices. This means that credit can be given to enterprises going above and beyond the standard in certain areas. Points are also given for improvement over time. It is important that even once the certification has been achieved tourism enterprises still strive to improve their performance.

Score Values

In consideration of the principles described above, each of the Label’s criterion has been assigned a value from zero to three. In nearly all cases the point value for the criteria is pre-assigned in the standard. For innovative features, assessors will need to use their own judgement based on the principles in the table below.

Table 1: Principles of Assigning Points to Criteria in the Sustainable Seychelles certification

Score	Description
Zero (a YES or NO indicated)	Required or “must” practices are the minimum standards that all businesses are required to undertake but do not receive points for
1 point	A single practice that requires a moderate amount of effort and/or investment (relative to the size of the business) and that has a moderate impact on the sustainable performance of the enterprise
2 points	A practice that requires a significant level of effort and/or investment (relative to the size of the business) and that has a significant impact on the sustainability performance of the enterprise
3 points	A practice that requires an outstanding level of effort and/or investment (relative to the size of the business) to implement and which has an outstanding impact on the sustainability performance of the enterprise

Required Criteria

Out of the total 108 criteria, the Sustainable Seychelles certification has 22 required “must” criteria. Having a set of required criteria ensures that all certified businesses have the most important sustainability features in place.

Minimum Points Method

In addition to required criteria, all businesses have to score a minimum number of points across the standard depending on their size. The minimum points method helps ensure businesses adopt the full range of sustainability criteria rather than gaining all their points from one area.

Achieving the certificate

There are three basic criteria that a participating enterprise must meet to achieve the Sustainable Seychelles certification. They must:

- Fulfil all the “must” criteria
- Achieve a minimum score for each theme (5 points for small, 6 for medium, 7 for large)
- Score an additional six points in any area

Small enterprises need 46 points to be certified

Medium-sized enterprises need 54 points to be certified

Large enterprises need 62 points to be certified

Table 2: Minimum Points Required

Total possible points (black) and total required points (in red) by section and size of enterprise			
Standard, by themes	Small (1-24)	Medium (25-50)	Large (51+)
Theme 1. Management	5	6	7
Section 1: Policy	15	15	15
Section 2: Monitoring	5	5	5
Section 3: Health and Safety Standards	6	6	6
Theme 2. Waste	5	6	7
Section 4: Waste water	2	2	2
Section 5: Reducing Waste	15	15	15

Total possible points (black) and total required points (in red) by section and size of enterprise			
Standard, by themes	Small (1-24)	Medium (25-50)	Large (51+)
Section 6: Recycling Waste	6	6	6
Section 7: Avoid Harmful Chemicals	12	12	12
Section 8: Other waste practices	3	3	3
Theme 3. Water	5	6	7
Section 9: Conserving Water	8	8	8
Section 10: Reusing Water	7	7	7
Section 11: Other Water Conservation Practices	3	3	3
Theme 4. Energy	5	6	7
Section 12: Conserving Energy	10	10	10
Section 13: Renewable Energy	6	6	6
Section 14: Greenhouse Gas	7	7	7
Section 15: Other Energy-Related Practices	3	3	3
Theme 5. Staff	5	6	7
Section 16: Staff Pay and Opportunities	2	2	2
Section 17: Staff Working Conditions	11	11	11
Section 18: Staff Training	7	7	7
Section 19: Other staff-related practices	3	3	3
Theme 6. Conservation	5	6	7
Section 20: Conserve Habitats and Species	3	3	3
Section 21: Garden and Design	10	10	10
Section 22: Other Conservation Practices	3	3	3
Theme 7. Community	5	6	7
Section 23: Community Relations	4	4	4
Section 24: Community Economy	5	5	5
Section 25: Other Community Practices	3	3	3
Theme 8. Guests	5	6	7
Section 26: Guest	14	14	14
TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS	173	173	173
TOTAL Required points	40	48	56
Total additional points	6	6	6
TOTAL to be certified with Sustainable Seychelles certification	46	54	62

4. THE STANDARD

It is imperative that assessors have a thorough understanding of the assessment criteria. The criteria balance environmental, social, and economic priorities and are grouped into eight themes. Each theme has a number of sections. There are 26 sections in total.

Unless otherwise indicated, **all assessment guidelines** must be fulfilled to receive the full points.

Theme 1: Management

Objective: To encourage enterprise operators to adopt formal management practices to guide their sustainability initiatives in the short and longer term

Sound management is the foundation of a sustainable business. This section includes a Sustainability Policy, health and safety standards, monitoring and any other formal (written) practices that contribute to the enterprise's sustainability performance. Management objectives of the Sustainable Seychelles certification are:

- To encourage enterprise operators to adopt formal management practices to guide their sustainability initiatives in the short and longer term

Notes:

The benefits of formal management practices include that they:

- Help to ensure that sustainability measures are well-planned and systematically implemented
- Help to communicate sustainability to staff within the business, even in a small business
- Enable a business to clearly communicate their sustainability practices to their guests

- To monitor resource use, chart improvements, and communicate progress

Notes: Monitoring enables enterprises to see the results of their efforts to become more efficient, and to communicate these results

- Monitoring should be at least monthly. If bills are less than monthly they are adjusted to show average monthly usage. Monitoring records the appropriate measure of activity, e.g., weight or volume (waste); kilowatts (energy); or litres (water).
- Records should be normalised using a secondary variable (per bed-nights) to monitor efficiencies over time

- To ensure safe and hygienic surroundings for guests and staff

Notes: Health and safety of staff and guests is a precondition for sustainability and consistent with international standards. Observance of health and environmental standards:

- Creates and conveys a sense of professionalism
- Ensures safety of guests and staff
- Reduces likelihood of fines and legal costs
- Health and safety requirements are included in training CD

Theme 2: Waste

Objective: To monitor resource use, chart improvements, and communicate progress

Waste is a key area where small, low-cost changes can have a significant impact on establishment sustainability and can lead to reduced costs. This section includes ideas for wastewater, waste reduction, waste recycling, and the avoidance of harmful chemicals. Waste objectives of the Sustainable Seychelles certification are:

- To ensure that waste water is effectively treated prior to discharge or reuse

Notes: Enterprise operators should seek advice from the Public Health Department before changing wastewater systems. Seepage of wastewater poses a serious public health and ecosystem risk. Appropriate disposal of waste water results in:

- Clearer water and better beach health
- Reduced risk of odours, algae bloom, and/or public disputes

- To reduce the amount of waste that is produced and sent to the landfill

Notes: Waste is a key issue for a small island's sustainability. Assessor needs to see evidence of all initiatives undertaken and exercise appropriate discretion to ensure the enterprise is accurately accounting for their sustainability practices. Assessor should take care to only award higher scores if they are confident that the enterprise is actively undertaking practices in line with scoring guidelines.

- To recycle all possible waste products

Notes: Composting non-cooked vegetable and organic garden waste is the single most effective way to reduce the amount of waste sent to the landfill. Composting correctly does not result in odours or attract animals or insects. It can provide useful nutrients for enterprise garden.

- Unused cooking oil can be converted into biodiesel.
- There is a glass recycling project in Seychelles. Engagement in either of these activities qualifies as an innovative additional practice

- To prevent harmful chemicals from leaching into the environment

Notes: Composting non-cooked vegetable and organic garden waste is the single most effective way to reduce the amount of waste sent to the landfill. Composting correctly does not result in odours or attract animals or insects. It can provide useful nutrients for enterprise garden.

- Unused cooking oil can be converted into biodiesel.
- There is a glass recycling project in Seychelles. Engagement in either of these activities qualifies as an innovative additional practice

- To give credit to operators implementing any additional waste management practices

Notes: Each of the main themes of the standard includes extra points for “other” innovative practices. This means that credit can be given to enterprises going above and beyond the standard in certain areas. Points are also given for improvement over time. It is important that even once the certification has been achieved tourism enterprises still strive to improve their

Theme 3: Water

Objective: To re-use water to reduce overall use of water in enterprise

Water is a valuable resource that needs to be monitored, conserved, and reused where possible, particularly on small islands where resources are limited. This section includes criteria for conserving and re-using water, Sustainable Seychelles certification water objectives are:

- To reduce the use of potable water

Notes: Conserving water reduces the strain on reticulated water services and can also result in one or more of:

- Reduced water bills (where water is charged for)
- Less frequent water shortages
- Longer life for bathrooms

Operations managers should do a complete check of taps and toilets weekly

The amount of water used in toilets can be reduced by placing a solid object in the toilet tank. Note that

- To re-use water to reduce overall use of water in enterprise.

Notes: Each of the main themes of the standard includes extra points for “other” innovative practices. This means that credit can be given to enterprises going above and beyond the standard in certain areas. Points are also given for improvement over time. It is important that even once the certification has been achieved tourism enterprises still strive to improve their performance.

Theme 4: Energy

Objective: To conserve energy and reduce energy bills

Electricity production and use generates carbon emissions and is a costly utility for hotel owners. This section includes tips for energy conservation, renewable energy, greenhouse gas reduction, and other energy-related practices. Energy objectives of Sustainable Seychelles certification are:

- To conserve energy and reduce energy bills

Notes: Energy-use is an important contributor to the 'carbon footprint' of any business. Energy in the Seychelles is almost entirely generated using fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas), so efforts to reduce energy use are likely to have a direct impact on the sustainable performance of the region. It combines significant environmental benefits with economic savings and therefore should receive considerable attention

- To reduce power use by using alternative or renewable energy systems

Notes: Energy use is an important area of sustainability practices, as outlined above. Alternative or renewable energy technology offers a means of availing the enterprise to the benefits of energy-use reduction through investment. The use of renewable energy sources is also a universally understood and visible sustainability practice. It offers an opportunity to be visibly engaging in good practice and can be an exciting 'point of difference' for enterprises

- To monitor and offset greenhouse gas emissions

Notes: Having a systematic approach to GHG monitoring and reduction, and ability to communicate this to the market can be a powerful point of difference and demonstrates considerable commitment to reducing environmental impacts of the enterprise concerned. It is, however, also a contentious area that must be embraced with appropriate caution. As a rule, reducing emissions is preferable to offsetting

- To give credit to operators implementing any additional energy-related practices

Theme 5: Staff

Objective: To ensure equal opportunities for all members of staff

Ensuring staff have safe working conditions, are treated fairly and are well trained for their jobs, increases job satisfaction, improves staff retention, and enhances the guest's experience. Staff practices include staff pay and opportunities, safe working conditions, staff training and other practices. Staff objectives of the Sustainable Seychelles certification are:

- To ensure equal opportunities for all members of staff

Notes: Fair staff conditions result in good community relationships, higher guest satisfaction, and more sustainable operations. See training material for important information on the Employment Act.

Notes: Training of staff contributes to staff and guest satisfaction, and advances staff and community prospects. Well-trained staff also provides higher guest satisfaction and improved sustainability. Staff training is a means of contributing to the longer-term sustainability of an enterprise in its community by raising knowledge and skills. Training schedules should be kept noting which staff are due for which courses.

- To ensure employees feel comfortable and safe while working in the establishment
- To give credit to operators implementing any additional staff-management

Theme 6: Conservation

Objective: To give credit to operators implementing any conservation practices

Protecting the beach environment, conserving endangered plants and animals, maintaining a clean garden and surroundings and minimizing the use of harmful chemicals, give the hotel a higher quality environment, reduces the risk of costly clean-ups and an increase in guest satisfaction. This section has practices for the conservation of habitats, garden and design, and other conservation practices. Conservation objectives of the Sustainable Seychelles certification are:

- To make a positive contribution to the biodiversity of the Seychelles and the enterprise's local area

Notes: Seychelles is a global biodiversity hotspot. This means that conservation is particularly important. Due to their location, tourism enterprises often have the ability to contribute to the conservation of habitat. This presents an important opportunity for tourism enterprises to engage in sustainability measures that are different from the traditional 'impact minimisation' measures associated with energy, water and waste. Conservation can include historical sites, as

- To create and maintain sustainable gardens and buildings

Notes: In the Seychelles, where so much produce is air-freighted in, purchasing or growing locally-grown produce has impacts on the carbon footprint of the tourism industry generally. Using native species encourages native birds and is more compatible with the island ecosystem. Great care should be taken to avoid introducing invasive species into the property.

- To give credit to operators implementing any additional conservation practices

Theme 7: Community

Objective: To maintain good relationship with the local community

Having a close and mutually beneficial relationship with the community is key to sustainable tourism. This section has practices on community relations and community economy. The Sustainable Seychelles certification objectives on community are:

- To maintain good relationship with the local community
- To increase the local community (economic) benefits of tourism
- To give credit to operators implementing any additional community-related practices

Notes: Social and community initiatives offer an opportunity for the tourism industry to act beyond harm-minimisation. Fostering good community relations, beyond simply employing local people, can provide short and long-term benefits to the tourism enterprise and can genuinely contribute to the long-term sustainability of tourism in an area. Assessors should be prepared to provide examples of existing local community initiatives that an enterprise might want to become involved in.

Theme 8: Guests

Objective: To ensure that guests are involved in and informed of sustainability initiatives and are satisfied with their stay

The viability of a hotel depends on a good guest experience. Adding cultural and environmental components to the product, for example, enhances guest experiences. This section outlines practices related to guest satisfaction. The guest objectives of the Sustainable Seychelles certification are:

To ensure that guests are involved in and informed of sustainability initiatives and are satisfied with their stay.

Notes: Monitoring customer feedback is good business practice and can identify any areas where guests are less satisfied. Involvement of guests in sustainability initiatives can increase their awareness of the need to behave sustainably. There are effective ways of communicating sustainability to guests in an appropriate manner. It is important to gain a sense of the tolerance for sustainability among guests and to design communications around this.

Next steps

This manual is designed as a framework for further development over time. Many elements of the Sustainable Seychelles certification can only be operationalized 'on the ground' by working with local businesses. The manual should be updated on an annual basis using feedback gathered from assessors and certified businesses.

Useful References

International Tourism Partnership (ITP) (2009) Going Green: Minimum Standards Towards a Sustainable Hotel, ITP, London.

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Twining-Ward, L. (2009) Best Practice in Sustainable Tourism Labelling: An International Review, Tourism Resource Consultants, Wellington.

Useful Websites

www.green-business.co.uk

www.iblf.org

www.responsibletourism.co.nz

www.gstcouncil.org

www.carboNZero.co.nz