

Sustainable Seychelles Certification Operators' Manual for Tour Operator



SUSTAINABLE SEYCHELLES
Safeguarding Seychelles For Tomorrow

Tourism Department

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Tourism

Botanical House, Mont Fleuri

P.O. Box 1049, Victoria, Mahé, Republic of Seychelles

Tel: 00(248) 467 13 00, Fax: 00 (248) 4324240

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Understanding Sustainability in Tour Operations	3
Efficient Use of Resources.....	3
Environmental Conservation.....	3
Cultural Preservation	3
Supporting Local Communities.....	4
Providing Excellent Guest Experiences	4
Ensuring Fair Treatment of Staff	4
Certification Process	5
1. Self-Assessment.....	5
2. Application.....	5
3. On-Site Evaluation.....	5
4. Verification	6
5. Endorsement by Awards Panel.....	6
6. Certification	6
Achieving Sustainable Seychelles Certification	7
Implementing Sustainable Practices	8
1. Management	8
2. Waste Management.....	8
3. Water Conservation	9
4. Energy Efficiency	9
5. Staff Engagement and Training.....	9
6. Conservation and Biodiversity.....	9
7. Community Involvement.....	10
8. Guest Education and Experience	10
Monitoring, Reporting and Continuous Improvement	10
Support	11

Introduction

Welcome to the Sustainable Tour Operator Manual for the Sustainable Seychelles certification program. This guide is designed to help tour operators implement sustainable practices, improve their environmental performance, and contribute to the overall sustainability of Seychelles' tourism industry.

Understanding Sustainability in Tour Operations

Sustainability in the tour operation industry involves:

Efficient Use of Resources

As a sustainable tour operator, efficient resource use is paramount. This begins with transportation, where the focus is on utilizing fuel-efficient vehicles and optimizing tour routes to minimize fuel consumption. Energy conservation extends beyond vehicles to encompass all aspects of operations, including minimizing energy use in offices and during tours through thoughtful planning and execution.

Material usage is another critical area, with an emphasis on reducing reliance on disposable items and instead opting for eco-friendly, durable materials that can withstand repeated use across multiple tours. By implementing these resource-efficient practices, tour operators can significantly reduce their environmental footprint while often realizing cost savings in the long term.

Environmental Conservation

Environmental conservation lies at the heart of sustainable tour operations in Seychelles. Tour operators play a crucial role in minimizing the impact on natural habitats during excursions by carefully managing group sizes, adhering to designated paths, and implementing 'leave no trace' principles. Beyond passive protection, many operators actively support local conservation efforts, whether through financial contributions, volunteer programs, or partnerships with environmental organizations.

Education is another key aspect, with operators taking on the responsibility of informing guests about local ecosystems and wildlife. This not only enhances the visitor experience but also fosters a deeper appreciation for Seychelles' unique natural heritage, potentially inspiring long-term conservation mindsets among guests.

Cultural Preservation

Cultural preservation is an integral component of sustainable tourism in Seychelles. Responsible tour operators prioritize respecting and promoting local cultures and traditions, integrating cultural elements into their tours in a way that is both authentic and respectful. This involves supporting local heritage sites, not just by including them in itineraries, but by contributing to their maintenance and preservation.

The goal is to offer guests authentic, culturally sensitive experiences that provide genuine insights into Seychellois culture. This approach not only enriches the tourist experience but also helps to maintain and celebrate local cultural identity in the face of globalization.

Supporting Local Communities

Supporting local communities is a fundamental principle of sustainable tour operations. This is achieved through strategic partnerships with local businesses and service providers, ensuring that tourism revenue flows directly into the local economy.

Tour operators also play a vital role in creating job opportunities for local residents, from hiring guides and drivers to administrative staff. Moreover, many operators extend their community support beyond direct employment by contributing to community development projects. These might include infrastructure improvements, educational initiatives, or healthcare programs. By intertwining their operations with local community development, tour operators can foster a mutually beneficial relationship between tourism and host communities.

Providing Excellent Guest Experiences

At the core of sustainable tour operations is the provision of excellent guest experiences. This involves offering high-quality, educational tours that go beyond mere sightseeing to provide deeper, more meaningful encounters with Seychelles' natural and cultural heritage. Ensuring guest safety and satisfaction is paramount, with operators implementing robust safety protocols and responsive customer service.

Additionally, sustainable tours often provide opportunities for meaningful cultural exchange, allowing visitors to interact with local communities in respectful, mutually enriching ways. By delivering exceptional experiences, operators not only ensure guest satisfaction but also cultivate a deeper appreciation for sustainable tourism practices among their clients.

Ensuring Fair Treatment of Staff

Fair treatment of staff is a crucial, often overlooked aspect of sustainable tour operations. This begins with providing fair wages and benefits, ensuring that all employees, from office staff to tour guides, are compensated equitably for their work.

Sustainable operators also invest in their staff through training and career development opportunities, helping employees grow their skills and advance in their careers. Importantly, ensuring safe working conditions for all staff, especially guides who may face various risks in the field, is a top priority. By treating staff fairly and investing in their development, tour operators can build a skilled, loyal workforce that is better equipped to deliver exceptional, sustainable tourism experiences.

By adopting these sustainable practices, your tour operation can reduce environmental impact, enhance guest satisfaction, support local communities, and contribute to the long-term viability of Seychelles as a premier tourist destination.

Certification Process

The Sustainable Seychelles certification process is designed to be thorough, fair, and transparent. Here's a detailed breakdown of each step:

1. Self-Assessment

What it involves: You'll receive a comprehensive self-assessment form that covers all aspects of sustainable restaurant operations.

What you need to do:

- Go through each criterion on the form and honestly evaluate your current practices.
- Gather evidence (documents, photos, records) to support your responses.
- Identify areas where you're already excelling and areas that need improvement.

Why it's important: This step helps you understand the certification requirements and gives you a clear picture of where your restaurant stands in terms of sustainability.

2. Application

What it involves: Submitting your formal application to participate in the certification program.

What you need to do:

- Complete the official application form with your restaurant's details.
- Include your completed self-assessment form.
- Pay the application fee.

What happens next: The Sustainable Seychelles certification team will review your application and self-assessment to ensure you're ready for the on-site evaluation.

3. On-Site Evaluation

What it involves: A visit from a certified assessor who will conduct a thorough evaluation of your restaurant's sustainability practices.

What to expect:

- The assessor will tour your facility, observing your operations and practices.
- They'll review documents, speak with staff, and may even interact with guests.
- The assessment will cover all areas from the self-assessment form.

How to prepare:

- Ensure all relevant staff are available and prepared to answer questions.
- Have all necessary documentation readily accessible.

- Be ready to demonstrate your sustainable practices in action.

4. Verification

What it involves: A thorough review of the assessment results by the Sustainable Seychelles certification team.

What happens:

- The assessor's findings are carefully examined for completeness and accuracy.
- Any unclear points are clarified with the assessor or your restaurant.
- A final score is calculated based on the verified results.

Why it's important: This step ensures that all assessments are conducted fairly and consistently across all applicants.

5. Endorsement by Awards Panel

What it involves: The Sustainable Seychelles secretariat presents the verified results to an independent Awards Panel for final approval.

Who is on the panel: The panel consists of experts in sustainability, tourism and quality assurance.

What they do:

- Review the assessment results and verification process.
- Discuss any exceptional cases or unusual circumstances.
- Make the final decision on whether to award the certification.

Why it's important: This step adds an extra layer of credibility and ensures that the certification maintains high standards.

6. Certification

What it involves: If your restaurant meets or exceeds the required standards, you'll be awarded the Sustainable Seychelles certification.

What you receive:

- An official certificate recognizing your achievement.
- Permission to use the Sustainable Seychelles certification logo in your marketing materials.
- Listing on the official Sustainable Seychelles certification website.

Validity: The certification is valid for two years.

What's next:

- Implement any recommended improvements from the assessment.
- Continue to monitor and improve your sustainable practices.
- Prepare for recertification before the two-year period ends.

Remember, the certification process is not just about getting a label – it's a journey of continuous improvement. Each step provides valuable insights that can help you enhance your restaurant's sustainability, regardless of the final outcome.

If you have any questions at any stage of the process, the Sustainable Seychelles certification team is here to support you.

Achieving Sustainable Seychelles Certification

What is the Sustainable Seychelles certification?

The Sustainable Seychelles certification is a comprehensive, points-based program designed to recognize and promote sustainable practices in the tourism industry. Our independent assessors evaluate your business based on a wide range of sustainability criteria.

How does the certification work?

To earn the Sustainable Seychelles certification, your business needs to demonstrate a commitment to sustainability through both mandatory and optional practices. Here's what you need to know:

1. **Meet the Essentials:** There are 20 "must" criteria that all businesses need to fulfill. These form the foundation of sustainable operations.
2. **Score in Every Area:** Your business needs to achieve a minimum score of 5 points in each of our sustainability themes.
3. **Go the Extra Mile:** Earn an additional 6 points in any area to showcase your commitment to sustainability.

What's the target score?

The total points needed for certification is 46 points out of a total possible 148 points.

Is it achievable for all businesses?

Absolutely! We've designed our criteria to be inclusive and adaptable:

- Some businesses may find they already meet many of our criteria.

- For others, achieving certification may be a gradual process.
- Our program encourages steady improvement in sustainability practices.

Remember, sustainability is a journey. Whether you're just starting out or you're already implementing many sustainable practices, the Sustainable Seychelles certification is designed to recognize and support your efforts towards a more sustainable future.

Implementing Sustainable Practices

The Sustainable Seychelles certification standards are designed to provide a comprehensive framework for assessing and improving sustainability in tourism businesses. To make this process more manageable and focused, we've organized our standards into eight key areas, which we call "themes."

In the following sections, we'll break down each theme. For each theme, you'll find:

- An explanation of why this theme is important for sustainability
- The specific criteria you'll be assessed on within this theme
- Examples of best practices related to the theme
- Key actions will contain tips for improving your performance in this area

By understanding these themes and their requirements, you'll be well-equipped to assess your current practices, identify areas for improvement, and work towards achieving the Sustainable Seychelles certification.

1. Management

- Develop a written sustainability policy
- Set clear, measurable sustainability goals
- Assign responsibility for sustainability initiatives
- Regularly review and update your sustainability strategy

Key Actions:

- *Create a green team with representatives from different departments*
- *Develop a sustainability action plan with short-term and long-term goals*
- *Implement a system to track progress on sustainability initiatives*

2. Waste Management

- Adopt a "Leave No Trace" policy on all tours
- Minimize use of single-use plastics and disposable items
- Implement a comprehensive recycling and composting program
- Partner with local recycling facilities and waste management services

Key Actions:

- *Conduct a waste audit to identify major sources of waste*
- *Train staff and guests on proper waste sorting and recycling procedures*
- *Replace disposable items with reusable or biodegradable alternatives*

3. Water Conservation

- Implement water-saving practices in all aspects of operations
- Partner with accommodations that have strong water conservation policies
- Educate guests about the importance of water conservation

Key Actions:

- *Use water-efficient vehicles and equipment*
- *Provide guests with reusable water bottles*
- *Support local water conservation projects*

4. Energy Efficiency

- Use energy-efficient vehicles for tours
- Optimize route planning to minimize fuel consumption
- Implement energy-saving practices in office operations

Key Actions:

- *Conduct an energy audit of your operations*
- *Switch to LED lighting and energy-efficient appliances*
- *Consider investing in renewable energy sources*

5. Staff Engagement and Training

- Provide comprehensive sustainability training for all staff
- Ensure fair wages and working conditions
- Offer career development opportunities in sustainable tourism

Key Actions:

- *Include sustainability in new employee orientation*
- *Conduct regular sustainability workshops and refresher trainings*
- *Recognize and reward staff efforts in sustainability*

6. Conservation and Biodiversity

- Support local conservation initiatives
- Educate guests about local ecosystems and wildlife

- Develop tours that minimize impact on sensitive habitats

Key Actions:

- *Participate in or sponsor local conservation projects*
- *Offer opportunities for guests to engage in conservation activities*
- *Implement and enforce wildlife viewing guidelines*

7. Community Involvement

- Partner with local businesses for accommodations, meals, and activities
- Hire and train local guides
- Contribute to community development projects

Key Actions:

- *Establish a local purchasing policy*
- *Create internship or training programs for local residents*
- *Regularly seek feedback from local communities*

8. Guest Education and Experience

- Provide pre-trip information on sustainable practices
- Offer high-quality, educational experiences
- Develop tours that highlight local culture respectfully

Key Actions:

- *Create engaging sustainability-themed tour components*
- *Train guides on cultural sensitivity and local customs*
- *Implement a guest feedback system focused on sustainability aspects*

Monitoring, Reporting and Continuous Improvement

Monitoring and reporting form the backbone of any successful sustainability program. By tracking key performance indicators (KPIs) across various sustainability areas, restaurant operators can gain valuable insights into their operations and identify opportunities for improvement. Here are some tips:

- Stay informed about new sustainable technologies and practices
- Regularly reassess and update your sustainability goals
- Seek feedback from staff, guests, and the local community
- Collaborate with other certified businesses to share best practices

Support

Remember, sustainability is a journey of continuous improvement. Every small step counts towards creating a more sustainable future for the tourism industry and for Seychelles.

If you have any questions at any stage of the process, the Sustainable Seychelles certification team is here to support you. Good luck on your sustainability journey!

For more information or support, contact:

Email: sstlgroup@seychelles.com

Phone: +248 4671300