



SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

From Principles to Practice
Training seminars – GoSaimaa, Finland
24–25 November 2026

Summary

Sustainable tourism development is not simply about reducing environmental impacts or meeting the requirements of a particular certification scheme. It is about understanding how tourism businesses, destinations, local communities and visitors interact, and how tourism can contribute to the long-term development of the places where it takes place.

These two training seminars explore sustainable tourism development from two different but closely connected perspectives.

The first day focuses on tourism businesses and how international sustainability principles can be translated into practical, relevant and proportionate action. The second day takes a broader destination and municipal perspective, exploring tourism as part of wider place and community development.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) standards provide the common foundation for both seminars. Practical examples, discussion and reflection will help participants connect the framework to their own organizations and the GoSaimaa region.

Jeppe Klockareson

Sustainability Advisor, Auditor
and Trainer

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BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Tourism affects, and is affected by, a wide range of issues beyond the tourism sector itself. Local economic development, employment, culture, nature, infrastructure, community wellbeing and environmental management all influence how a destination develops and how tourism contributes to that development.

Sustainable tourism therefore requires action at several levels. Tourism businesses need to understand and manage their own impacts, opportunities and responsibilities. At the same time, municipalities, destination organizations and other stakeholders need to create the conditions for businesses and communities to develop together.

The training builds on the learning visit to Destination Järvsö in September 2026, where participants were introduced to sustainable destination development, the GSTC framework and the Responsible Tourism Program (RTP) approach.

The November seminars take this work further, while also welcoming participants who did not attend the Järvsö visit.

The overall purpose is to strengthen understanding of sustainable tourism development and provide participants with knowledge, perspectives and practical approaches relevant to their own businesses, organizations and destinations.

The seminars combine presentations, practical examples, dialogue and reflection. The emphasis is not on providing ready-made solutions, but on understanding existing strengths, identifying relevant development needs and creating a foundation for continued improvement.



24 NOVEMBER – FROM SUSTAINABILITY PRINCIPLES TO PRACTICAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

09:00 – 15:00

TOURISM BUSINESSES

Tourism businesses play a central role in sustainable destination development. They provide the services, experiences and activities through which visitors encounter a destination, while also being part of the local economy, community and environment.

Sustainability is therefore not a separate activity alongside normal business operations. It concerns how a business is managed, how it treats employees and suppliers, how it relates to local communities and culture, how it uses natural resources and how these considerations are reflected in the visitor experience.

This training day explores how the GSTC standards can be understood and applied in everyday business practice.

Following a short introduction to establish a common foundation, the main focus will be on the practical interpretation of the criteria, using the Responsible Tourism Program (RTP) approach as a structure for guidance, discussion and reflection.

UNDERSTANDING AND APPLYING THE CRITERIA

The training explores the four main sustainability perspectives:

- **Sustainability management:** How sustainability is integrated into business decisions, responsibilities, objectives, routines and follow-up.
- **Socio-economic sustainability:** Employment, working conditions, local purchasing, accessibility, community relationships and contribution to the local economy.
- **Cultural sustainability:** Respect for local heritage, cultural identity, traditions and the role of tourism businesses in communicating and strengthening the character of a place.
- **Environmental sustainability:** Resource use, energy, water, waste, climate impacts, biodiversity and responsible interaction with the natural environment.

Rather than treating the criteria of the standard as a checklist, we will explore what they mean for different types and sizes of tourism businesses.

Particular attention will be given to recognizing existing good practices, identifying gaps and development opportunities, and understanding how businesses can establish realistic priorities for continuous improvement.

The training will also address the importance of credible sustainability communication and the growing expectations that businesses should be able to substantiate the claims they make.



RTP – FROM FRAMEWORK TO PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

The Responsible Tourism Program (RTP) approach will be used to demonstrate how the GSTC framework can support a structured dialogue with tourism businesses.

The methodology focuses on understanding the individual business, identifying strengths and development needs, discussing relevant criteria and establishing practical priorities.

It is an approach based on guidance, analysis and continuous development rather than certification, auditing or pass/fail assessments.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION – SCANDIC PATRIA

During the latter part of the day, Scandic Patria in Lappeenranta will serve as a practical business example.

The hotel manager will participate in the training alongside the other businesses. Building on the criteria and perspectives explored throughout the day, Scandic Patria will then take part in a facilitated reflection on its own sustainability work.

The discussion will consider questions such as:

- What is already being done, and where are the business's existing strengths?
- Which aspects of sustainability are already integrated into daily operations?
- What new perspectives or questions have emerged during the training?
- Where might there be gaps or opportunities for further development, thus ?
- What could be relevant priorities for continued improvement?

The exercise is not an audit or formal assessment of Scandic Patria. Its purpose is to demonstrate how a real tourism business can use a broad sustainability framework to reflect on its current position and possible next steps.

Other participants will be encouraged to consider the same questions in relation to their own businesses.

EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the day, participants should have a clearer understanding of sustainability perspectives set by the GSTC standard, how these relate to their own operations and how structured reflection and prioritization can support continued sustainability work.

The ambition is for participants to leave with a better understanding of both what they already do well and what they may need to develop further.



25 NOVEMBER – TOURISM AS PART OF SUSTAINABLE PLACE AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Half-day seminar

MUNICIPALITIES, DESTINATION ORGANIZATIONS AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT
STAKEHOLDERS

Tourism is not an isolated sector operating separately from wider society. It influences, and is influenced by, municipal planning, infrastructure, local business development, environmental management, culture, community wellbeing and the use of natural and public resources.

A sustainable destination is therefore not created solely through tourism strategies, marketing or individual business initiatives. It depends on how the destination functions as a whole and how different actors contribute to a shared direction.

This seminar explores tourism as part of wider sustainable place and community development, with the GSTC Destination Standard as a central framework.

UNDERSTANDING THE DESTINATION AS A SYSTEM

A destination is more than a destination management organization. It is a place where people live, work, operate businesses and welcome visitors.

The seminar examines how different parts of this system interact, including the roles of municipalities, destination organizations, businesses, residents, associations and other stakeholders.

We will explore how tourism can contribute to broader economic, social, cultural and environmental objectives, while also recognizing the impacts, competing interests and responsibilities that need to be managed.

GSTC AND SUSTAINABLE DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

The GSTC Destination Standard provides a structured way of understanding the different dimensions of sustainable destination development.

Through selected criteria and practical examples, we will explore issues such as:

- Destination management, leadership and coordination.
- The relationship between tourism development and wider municipal and regional objectives.
- Local economic benefits, employment and community wellbeing.
- Cultural heritage, local identity and the relationship between tourism and place.



- Environmental management, climate impacts, nature and resource use.
- Stakeholder involvement, responsibilities and collaboration.
- Monitoring, evaluation and continuous improvement.

Particular attention will be given to the distinction between the destination as a place and the organizations responsible for coordinating its development.

FROM SHARED AMBITIONS TO PRACTICAL DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable destination development requires more than a strategy or a set of ambitions. It also requires clarity about who is responsible for different issues, what structures already exist and how different stakeholders can contribute.

The seminar will therefore explore questions such as:

- How is tourism connected to wider municipal and regional development?
- Which responsibilities belong to municipalities, destination organizations, businesses and other actors?
- How can collaboration strengthen both the destination and its businesses?
- What existing structures and initiatives can be built upon?
- Where might responsibilities, knowledge or coordination be missing?
- How can a destination establish a clearer understanding of its strengths, challenges and development priorities?

Examples from sustainable destination development in Sweden will be used to support discussion and reflection in the GoSaimaa context.

The seminar will also introduce how a structured GSTC-based destination analysis can help establish a common understanding of a destination's current position, identify development gaps and support more informed decisions about future priorities.

EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants should leave with a broader understanding of tourism as part of sustainable place development, greater clarity about the different roles involved and new perspectives on how tourism can contribute to municipal and regional objectives.

The ambition is not to produce a completed destination strategy during the seminar, but to strengthen the common understanding needed for continued dialogue, cooperation and development.



THE COMMON THREAD – FROM BUSINESS ACTION TO DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

Although the two seminars address different audiences, they are based on the same understanding of sustainable tourism development.

24 November – The business perspective

How can individual tourism businesses understand their sustainability responsibilities, recognize existing strengths and translate international criteria into practical development?

25 November – The destination perspective

How can municipalities, destination organisations and other stakeholders create the conditions for businesses, communities and tourism to develop together in a sustainable way?

The two perspectives are interdependent.

A destination can never be more sustainable than the businesses within it. At the same time, individual businesses cannot create a sustainable destination on their own.

Sustainable tourism development requires both individual action and shared responsibility, supported by knowledge, collaboration, clear priorities and continuous improvement.



ABOUT FAIR TRAVEL AND JEPPE KLOCKARESON

Fair Travel was founded by Jeppe Klockareson in 2008, after many years of traveling and a growing conviction that tourism can both be a strong positive force and at the same time create significant negative consequences for the places and people affected.

This starting point still characterizes the business. Fair Travel works with sustainable tourism development through advice, training, analysis and auditing, with destinations, organizations and companies in Sweden and internationally. The work is based on a combination of practical experience from the tourism industry, international standards and methods, and a fundamental conviction that sustainable development needs to be based on the place as a whole.

TWO SYMBOLS – ONE FOUNDATION FOR FAIR TRAVEL

Fair Travel's logo is based on two traditional Adinkra symbols from West Africa that together represent much of the basic view that Fair Travel rests on.

Bi Nka Bi – peace, harmony and respect

Bi Nka Bi can be translated as "NO ONE SHOULD BITE THE OTHER" and symbolizes peace, harmony, respect and the importance of being able to live and develop together.



For Fair Travel, the symbol represents the people and the relationships between them. Sustainable tourism development cannot be created by a single organization or sector. It requires dialogue, cooperation and respect between residents, companies, associations, visitors, the public sector and other actors who together form a place.

Asase Ye Duro – the earth has weight

Asase Ye Duro can be translated as "THE EARTH HAS WEIGHT" and symbolizes the importance of the earth and our responsibility to respect and manage nature and its resources.



For Fair Travel, the symbol represents the other fundamental dimension of tourism: the place and the natural and cultural values that make it possible. Tourism is dependent on functioning communities, living culture, nature, ecosystems and resources and therefore needs to be developed within the conditions that the place actually provides.

Together, the two symbols reflect Fair Travel's view of sustainable tourism development: **respect for people and respect for the place.**

It is therefore not just about making tourism more sustainable. The starting point is to contribute to places where people can live, live and work in a long-term sustainable way – and where tourism can be a positive part of that development.



JEPPE KLOCKARESON

Jeppe Klockareson has worked professionally in tourism since 2004, combining operational experience from the travel industry with more than two decades of involvement in sustainable tourism development.

He has previously served as GSTC Country Representative for Sweden and has extensive experience in applying the GSTC standards at both business and destination level.

Today, Jeppe works as a Sustainable Tourism Advisor, Trainer and independent EarthCheck Auditor, supporting tourism businesses, destinations, municipalities and regional organizations in Sweden and internationally.

A central principle of his work is that sustainable tourism cannot be developed in isolation from the places where it takes place. Long-term development depends on cooperation between businesses, the public sector, destination organizations, local communities and visitors.



IN-DEPTH AND USEFUL LINKS

Below is a selection of links for those who want to deepen their knowledge before or after the training.

GSTC Standards – overview

GSTC compiled international standards for sustainable tourism. Here you will find standards for destinations, hotels, tour operators, MICE, attractions and other parts of the tourism industry.

<https://www.gstc.org/gstc-criteria/>

GSTC Destination Standard

The standard that constitutes the main starting point for the destination perspective of education. The standard includes criteria and proposed indicators in the areas of sustainable governance and management, as well as social, economic, cultural and environmental dimensions.

<https://www.gstc.org/gstc-criteria/gstc-destination-criteria/>

GSTC Hotel Standard

GSTC standard for hotels and other accommodation establishments.

<https://www.gstc.org/for-hotels-accommodations/>

GSTC Tour Operator Standard

GSTC standard for tour operators and one of the standards that can be used to understand the link between the destination level and the activity level.

<https://www.gstc.org/gstc-criteria/gstc-tour-operator-standard/>

Responsible Tourism Program – Region Västerbotten Tourism

RTP is a way of working for sustainable tourism development where companies, destinations, municipalities and the region work together. The program offers information, tools and support for sustainability work, business development and communication and is based on the GSTC standard.

<https://www.regionvasterbotten.se/turism/hallbar-besoksnaring/responsible-tourism-program>

Responsible Tourism Program – program website

Here you can find more information about how RTP works in practice and about the program's work with both tourism businesses and destinations.

<https://www.responsibletourism.se/>

Sustainable Travel Finland (STF)

Finland's national sustainable tourism program, providing relevant context for participating Finnish tourism businesses.

<https://www.visitfinland.fi/>

