



A Guide to Sustainable Travel Certifications—and How They Can Make You a Better Traveler

Checking for a reputable sustainability certification is one of the easiest ways to become a more responsible traveler.



Sustainable travel can mean a lot of things, whether it's lowering your carbon footprint, protecting local wildlife and conserving natural resources, or making a positive impact on the communities you visit.

More and more travelers are prioritizing factors like these when planning trips: A recent Virtuoso survey found that nearly 60% of tourists are willing to pay more for hotels, operators, and travel experiences that support sustainable practices if they know how their contributions are being used. But with a market flooded by language like “certified green” and “climate positive,” how can travelers discern which brands are truly committed to responsible practices?

This is where third-party certifications and credible eco-travel collectives come in. They can offer an essential foundation for travelers looking to make more informed choices. However, not all

<https://www.cntraveler.com/story/sustainable-travel-certifications-guide#beyondgreen>

labels carry equal weight, and they are all awarded based on different criteria and through various methodologies. Put simply: Not every sustainable travel certification is the same.

What types of eco-certifications are there?

International certifications like [Green Globe](#) and [Biosphere Sustainable](#) validate that businesses meet stringent environmental and social standards aligned with frameworks like the UN's [Sustainable Development Goals](#). Membership-based entities such as [Beyond Green](#) offer an alternative pathway, steering eco-minded travelers towards hotels that have undergone rigorous third-party audits and demonstrate measurable, continuous, and positive impact in the destinations where they operate.

[Travalyst](#), a non-profit founded by Prince Harry, The Duke of Sussex (and honoree on *Condé Nast Traveler's* [Bright Ideas in Travel 2024](#)), is also working to make the sustainability certifications space easier to navigate, aiming to increase access to consistent sustainability data and support the certifications industry on its journey towards regulatory compliance. In August 2024, following an independent review process, Travalyst released a list of [49 certifications, standards, and schemes](#) that meet its initial criteria.

Governments, too, are stepping in to drive greater transparency across the travel industry. Starting in 2025, the European Union's new [Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive](#) (CSRD) will require hotels, airlines, and other travel-related businesses of a certain size operating within the EU to publish environmental and social impact reports. While these public reports won't necessarily be consumer-facing, they build on the work of third-party eco-certifications and reputable eco-collectives by introducing consistent, measurable benchmarks for sustainability across the industry and beyond.



Beyond Green certifies high-end hotels like The Leela Palace Udaipur (pictured above) that are verified through onsite inspections by independent auditors.
Courtesy The Leela Palace Udaipur

Which certifications can I trust?

Even though many regions outside the EU lag behind in setting such transparency standards, sustainability certifications and seals can be the most accessible tools for travelers looking to make informed decisions. These labels offer a sense of confidence that the tourism operator is working toward a positive impact on the environment and local communities, even in destinations where sustainability regulations may be limited. Of course, doing your own research on the business in question will help, but these certifications have done a good deal of that foundational work on behalf of the traveler.

The following guide breaks down the six most common sustainable travel certifications—plus, the major hotels, operators, destinations, and other hospitality businesses that have been vetted through the programs.

Jump to the eco-certification you want to learn more about:

- [Biosphere](#)
- [B Corp](#)
- [Beyond Green](#)

<https://www.cntraveler.com/story/sustainable-travel-certifications-guide#beyondgreen>

- [Green Globe](#)
- [Green Key Global](#)
- [Regenerative Travel](#)

Or, if you'd like to independently evaluate the sustainability impact of a hotel, destination, or brand on your own, check out the five questions to ask a travel operator [here](#).

Biosphere

Unlike certifications that focus exclusively on environmental metrics like carbon reduction or waste management, [Biosphere](#) takes a more comprehensive approach by integrating environmental, socio-cultural, and economic dimensions into its framework. It is the only international certification system designed to support continuous improvement by tracking progress in real time against the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 specific targets outlined by the UN.

Participating hotels, destinations, and travel brands: The Spanish city of [Gijón](#), Argentina's [Puerto Iguazú](#), and Portugal's [Alentejo](#) region are among the destinations to receive Biosphere certification. Participating hotels include Spain's [The Ritz-Carlton Tenerife, Abama](#) and Canada's [Entourage sur-le-Lac Resort](#).

B Corp

Similarly, [B Corp](#) measures a company's holistic social and environmental footprint. To become certified, companies undergo a rigorous assessment, where they are scored on multiple categories including employee treatment and "stewardship of its customers." Businesses must achieve an assessment score of at least 80 out of 200 points to be approved; most businesses fail to reach even a score of 51. It can take years to achieve the accreditation, and companies are required to re-certify every three years. This performance data is publicly available on B Lab's platform, providing an extra layer of accountability and transparency.

Participating hotels and travel brands: The adventure company [Intrepid](#) is the largest B Corp in the travel industry. Other certified entities include Washington-based [Adrift Hospitality](#), the UK's [Exclusive Collection](#), and New York's [Turnstile Tours](#).

Beyond Green

[Beyond Green](#) is far more than a portfolio of high-end hotels. Membership requires properties to meet stringent sustainability standards, verified through rigorous onsite inspections led by independent auditors. The hotels are vetted in categories like the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, and its impact on the economic and social well-being of local communities, as well as alignment with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. To retain certification, members are subject to re-inspections every 24 months to ensure they continue to meet Beyond Green's evolving standards and demonstrate long-term commitment to sustainability.

<https://www.cntraveler.com/story/sustainable-travel-certifications-guide#beyondgreen>

Participating hotels and travel brands: All [AndBeyond](#) properties will undergo full Beyond Green inspections throughout 2024-2025; as of now, vetted properties include [AndBeyond Nxabega Okavango Tented Camp](#) and [AndBeyond Sandibe Okavango Safari Lodge](#). Other members include California's [Post Ranch Inn](#), India's [The Leela Palace Udaipur](#), and Italy's [Borgo Pignano](#).



Song Saa Private Island in Cambodia is certified by Regenerative Travel, an eco-collective that requires members submit data annually to keep their status.
Song Saa Private Island

Green Globe

[Green Globe](#)'s standards have been developed over three decades and encompass 44 criteria and 380 indicators that are aligned with international frameworks, including the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). Applicants must meet high standards related to Green Globe's four key pillars: sustainable management, social and economic performance, cultural heritage, and the environment. Certification must be earned annually, and Green Globe requires its members to demonstrate continuous improvement by reaching higher compliance scores during each on-site audit.

Participating hotels and travel brands: Certified entities include small-ship expedition company [Ponant](#) and a large majority of properties in the [Raffles Hotels](#) and [Mövenpick Hotels &](#)

<https://www.cntraveler.com/story/sustainable-travel-certifications-guide#beyondgreen>

[Resorts](#) collections. Other hotels include Panama's [Nayara Bocas del Toro](#), [Brach Paris](#), and Vietnam's [Zannier Hotels Bãi San Hô](#).

Green Key Global

Founded in 1994 by environmentally-minded hoteliers, [Green Key Global](#) aligns with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and emphasizes environmental performance, e.g. land use, water conservation, indoor air quality, and building infrastructure. It's also particularly tailored to properties in North America. It requires hotels to undergo a thorough assessment and audit upon registration, with a re-assessment conducted again in the second year of membership, and thereafter every third year. During this process, properties must provide documentation to support their sustainability claims, ensuring transparency and accuracy in responses.

Participating hotels: Certified properties include the [Fairmont Chateau Whistler](#), [The Savoy](#) in London, and Florida's [Marquesa Hotel](#) in Key West.

Regenerative Travel

[Regenerative Travel](#) certifies hotels with a deep commitment to sustainability, continuous improvement, environmental stewardship, and community and economic resilience. Members are required to commit to annual data collection to keep their status; they submit key data related to the percentage of staff that are local or the percentage of energy generated from clean sources. They must also attend virtual and on-site retreats focused on sustainability and take part in a training program exploring strategies for creating positive feedback loops and effective growth management.

Participating hotels: The collective includes notable hotels like Cambodia's [Song Saa Private Island](#), Malaysia's [The Datai Langkawi](#), and [African Bush Camps](#).

5 questions to ask to evaluate the eco-impact of a travel company

Does the hotel, destination, or travel brand you're interested in not have a certification? No problem. These are the five essential questions you can ask to better understand their sustainability commitments, courtesy of Maudie Tomlinson, director of the award-winning not-for-profit organization [The Conscious Travel Foundation](#), which champions positive tourism practices while supporting grassroots philanthropic projects worldwide. (You can also explore their full list of conscious questions [here](#).)

Do you have an official certification?

Tomlinson says, “While not all certifications are rated equally—and there are hundreds out there—it’s a good indicator that a company is taking action [if they do have a certification or are pursuing it].”

How do you measure your sustainability impacts?

“Data helps you separate fact from fiction, and cut through the greenwashing,” says Tomlinson. “Ask yourself: Is a hotel’s efforts only referred to in glossy marketing terms, or is there quantitative data to support it? Look for data on their carbon footprint, local employment, or the percent of their profits that go into local organizations.”

Do you have, or follow, a responsible wildlife policy? Do you share etiquette guidance for how guests and staff should act around wildlife?

“Here, we’re looking to ensure that a hotel’s wildlife policy isn’t just a tick-box exercise, but a carefully considered initiative,” Tomlinson says. “If you’re headed on a safari, for example, ask the hotel about their protocols for wildlife observation and photo etiquette.”

How does the business support the local community?

“Look for initiatives that go beyond employment from the local community at all levels, and assist with education, healthcare, well-being, and cultural preservation,” she says.

Do you have an inclusivity statement, and where can I find this?

“An inclusivity or accessibility statement shows a commitment to including individuals with disabilities and marginalized identities, helping you choose an experience that aligns with your values,” says Tomlinson.