Türkiye's Sustainable Tourism Transformation: An Overview

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Abstract
Türkiye has initiated a paradigm shift in its tourism industry, marked by a collaboration with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), renowned for setting robust sustainability standards. The agreement, initiated in 2022, prioritizes sustainability commitment, commencing with formulating national program criteria and certification bodies training. The initial phase is targeted for completion by the end of 2023, with subsequent stages progressively implemented by 2025, ultimately aiming to meet all international standards by 2030.

This strategic move aims to position Turkey prominently in sustainable tourism, aligning with the goals of The Paris Agreement. Turkey has proactively steered its tourism industry towards sustainability, enhancing global competitiveness and aligning with international trends through collaboration with GSTC. Simultaneously, the nation introduced the Safe Tourism Certification Program in 2020, certifying nearly 12,000 facilities and extending its focus to include sustainability standards in accommodation facilities from April 2022.

Central to Türkiye's sustainable tourism development is the Türkiye Sustainable Tourism Industry Criteria (TR-I), obligating adherence from the Turkish tourism industry. Developed collaboratively with domestic and international stakeholders, TR-I aligns with cultural and global sustainable tourism standards. The certification program, consisting of 42 criteria across three stages, has seen substantial progress, with 15,178 of Türkiye's hotels verified/certified as of January 2024.

Keywords
Türkiye, Sustainable, Tourism, GSTC, Certification
Extended Abstract

1. Türkiye’s Sustainability Move

The Turkish tourism industry is set to undergo a comprehensive restructuring through a 3-year agreement with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), an organization renowned for establishing robust standards in sustainable tourism (1). Emphasizing the commitment to sustainability, the agreement’s initial phase involves determining national program criteria and training for inspection firms. Turkish tourism stakeholders are expected to participate in the program from the first week of February, with the entire first stage scheduled for completion by 2023 and the subsequent stage progressively implemented by 2025. The overarching goal is to meet all international standards by 2030.

The agreement positions Turkey prominently in sustainable tourism and aligns with the objectives of The Paris Agreement, signed by the country the previous year. Since 2022, Turkey has been proactively steering its tourism industry towards sustainability, with the collaboration with GSTC enhancing its global competitiveness and ensuring alignment with international tourism trends.

In a parallel initiative, Turkey implemented the Safe Tourism Certification Program in 2020, a pioneering effort globally. Nearly 12,000 facilities have been awarded the Safe Tourism Certification, demonstrating the nation's dedication to ensuring the well-being and health conditions of passengers, guests, and employees. The program will extend its focus to encompass both safety and sustainability standards within the tourism industry, particularly in accommodation facilities, with the implementation of sustainable practices slated to commence gradually from April 2022.

2. Sustainable Tourism Program

Türkiye is actively working towards sustainable tourism development, aiming to leverage its resources while balancing conservation and utilization. The country has established the Türkiye Sustainable Tourism Industry Criteria (TR-I) in collaboration with domestic and international stakeholders.

TR-I encompasses criteria aligned with both Türkiye's cultural context and globally recognized sustainable tourism standards. The standard is structured around sustainable management, socio-economic impacts, cultural impacts, and environmental impacts. It is obligatory for the Turkish tourism industry to adhere to TR-I, incorporating principles and practices outlined by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The TR-I standard was introduced with the cooperation of various industries and international institutions under the guidance of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Türkiye Tourism, Promotion, and Development Agency (TGA). The TGA, dedicated to positioning Türkiye as a premier destination, conducts promotional activities to boost tourism capacity, attract investments, and enhance service quality.

The development of TR-I aligns with the criteria set by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), and the standard will undergo periodic revisions to stay in accordance with GSTC updates. Interested parties can contribute to future revisions
through the TGA website. The website also provides information on the criteria
development process and its historical progress (2).

References: