



Opening remarks, Luigi Cabrini, Chair, Global Sustainable Tourism Council

GSTC2024 Singapore, 13th November, 2024

Dear Minister, distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

Welcome to the 2024 Global Sustainable Tourism Council conference!

And welcome to Singapore, one of the most powerful economies in Asia with strong financial and industrial sectors with tourism playing an increasingly important role. Your central location in Southeast Asia, the excellent air-transport facilities and the investments in tourism infrastructure, are key assets of Singapore as one of the world's top destinations.

A key feature in the tourism development of Singapore is the importance and relevance given to sustainability. We are proud and grateful for the confidence that the Singapore Tourism Board, the Sentosa Development Corporation and many other actors have given to GSTC as a partner.

Note that the Conference is being held at the Equarius Hotel, which is certified against GSTC Industry Criteria. The hotel is located within Resorts

World Sentosa, certified to both the GSTC Destination Criteria and GSTC Industry Criteria for Hotels from 2021. Additionally, both Sentosa and Singapore are also certified as sustainable destinations, further enhancing the credentials of this event's setting and underscoring the commitment to sustainable tourism practices.

I also wish to express our gratitude to the Singapore Tourism Board for its valuable support to the development of the GSTC MICE Criteria and GSTC Attraction Criteria.

And finally thank you for hosting the GSTC Conference and for your warm hospitality!

Dear friends,

At the end of this year international tourism is expected to fully recover its pre-pandemic levels with many destinations registering the highest number of visitors ever. Tourism is back as an essential activity, a creator of jobs and a tool for development, providing social, economic, and environmental benefits.

Unfortunately, and as I mentioned in my opening remarks last April in Stockholm, the proliferation of wars, conflicts and human displacement cast a shadow over tourism recovery as these represent the dark side of humanity as opposed to the values embedded in a responsible tourism. In these few months the situation has further worsened with no clear signs of improvement in sight.

We are also reminded of the consequences of climate change, caused by human behaviour, with natural disasters impacting our communities, as

seen in the recent severe flooding in Valencia. Our thoughts are with all affected, and we extend our solidarity and support to our GSTC Member, Visit Valencia, as they face these challenges.

At GSTC we are focusing our efforts to promote and drive a change toward more responsible, respectful, and sustainable ways of traveling.

There is no magic formula but a step-by-step approach to pursue what we define as “continuous improvement”. The challenges are many: the increasing situations of overtourism when the negative impacts are perceived, by the communities where it develops, as overcoming its benefits; the slow progress in reducing tourism contribution to global warming; the working conditions in the sector, often below acceptable standards, food waste, plastic pollution, just to name a few.

It was 16 years ago, in 2008, when the Global Sustainable Tourism Council created and disseminated the first version of the Global Criteria for Hotel and Tour Operators.

Since then, we have published a criteria for Destinations, the Tourism Industry, MICE, and during the conference will formally launch the Attractions criteria. Our aim is to create a comprehensive framework and the tools to progress toward more sustainable tourism by maximizing benefits and reducing unwanted impacts in the whole tourism chain.

Time has shown that GSTC filled a gap by making available a system that can serve both the private and the public sector to achieve higher levels of

sustainability. Our role in establishing and managing global standards is now widely recognized.

Given the transverse nature of tourism and its linkages with many other economic and social activities, the global criteria are also an effective instrument to implement the Sustainable Development Goals.

With the support and engagement of our members we were able to develop several programs and to support destinations and companies to progress toward more sustainable models.

Through our accreditation program (the only one in tourism) we aim at multiplying the number of hotels, destinations and other tourism companies that gain a credible certification, and at making them effectively competitive in the market.

We maintain that tourism certifications must abide by international standards even if our sector is more complex than others, with a supply chain involving many components such as accommodation, transport, excursions, restaurants, handicraft, food production, waste disposal, water management etc.

Many surveys show that the demand of sustainable tourism is higher than the offer, a call to all of us to do more. But dispelling any doubts of greenwashing is essential to build trust and credibility. Our system provides this assurance, and this is why many certifications' programmes are approaching GSTC seeking accreditation. The commitment is also increasing

from the accommodation side as top hotel chains engage in a pathway leading to GSTC certification.

The GSTC membership continues to grow and includes tourism authorities of over 40 countries, together with leaders of the private sectors, NGOs, universities, destinations and many others. We welcome this variety as a strength for GSTC, where the tourism sector is represented in its multiple facets and interests.

Our organization has grown and evolved since its early days when we were able to work thanks to the funding and support of United Nations Agencies. GSTC has since been able to gain self-sufficiency and financial independence, while maintaining and integrating in its DNA the universal values of the United Nations.

The GSTC Secretariat has grown substantially to respond to the increasing requests of support that we are receiving, and we can now count on a strong team of capable, dedicated and committed staff. Most of them are here these days and I invite you to get in touch for a personal acquaintance.

I wish to conclude by warmly thanking STB for the exceptional organization of this event and the warm welcome we received. We have reached more than 500 participants and 55 countries represented.

I wish you all a fruitful, engaging, and active participation and a wonderful time in Singapore! Thank you!

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