OVERVIEW

Sustainable Tourism Certification

Why Certification matters for Zanzibar's tourism establishments

Third-party sustainable tourism certification is the internationally recognised way to verify sustainability performance and demonstrate credibility to guests, travel companies and investors. It can elevate Zanzibar's global standing as a sustainable tourism destination, and can help to attract higher-value, lower impact visitors.

1. INDUSTRY INCENTIVES

- Marketing and promotional visibility
- Aid for backing sustainability awards and promotional support
- Access to technical support and training programmes
- Links to future support programmes and incentives
- Stronger positioning with investors and international tourism partners
- Increase in efficiency of operations and cost savings over time

Training providers such as the Blue Impact Network can help businesses build the knowledge and skills needed before certification, through practical sustainability training in areas such as waste management, community engagement or building impactful conservation partnerships.

2. CERTIFICATION OPTIONS

Tourism businesses are encouraged to work towards **Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)**-accredited certification, or choose other certification bodies which provide independent on-site audits (at least every three years) and which are responding to local needs and which are accepted by major online travel agencies (OTAs), responsible tour operators and international travel partners.

- **Examples include:** Fair Trade Tourism**,** Travelife, Green Key, Green Destinations, EarthCheck, and TourCert (Each of these certification bodies comes with their own set of criteria and some might be more suitable for large rather than small tourism businesses and more adapted to the local context than others).

Working with established certification programmes allows Zanzibar to benefit from proven auditing systems, international recognition, and technical expertise.
Note: There are also several ongoing initiatives and plans in Zanzibar that are aiming to introduce more locally rooted sustainability criteria, such as **HAZ Green** (mandatory from HAZ members from October 2026)

3. IMPORTANCE OF CERTIFICATION

3.1 Why Now?

Since **27 September 2026, the EU Empowering Consumers (EmpCo) for the Green Transition Directive** introduced stricter rules for environmental claims made to EU consumers. Businesses must be able to substantiate sustainability claims with credible evidence.

This means internationally recognised third-party certification is becoming increasingly important for hotels and tourism businesses serving European markets.

3.2 EmpCo Directive

What is no longer allowed: Businesses cannot use broad terms like "eco-friendly" without demonstrating recognised excellent environmental performance, make product "carbon neutral" claims based solely on carbon offsets, or display own sustainability labels
What is required: Any environmental claim must be clear, specific, and supported by reliable, verifiable evidence.

3.3 How the directive applies to Zanzibar

The Directive applies to businesses selling products or services to EU customers, irrespective of their physical location. For a global industry like tourism, it will mean that businesses worldwide will be part of this legislation's scope.

4. GETTING STARTED

Given the current changes happening globally in the certification landscape due to the EmpCo Directive, working with well-established, experienced certification bodies that adhere to the EU requirements and legislation is paramount.

4.1 Sustainability Basics: Measure and Manage Your Impacts

Before starting the certification process, prepare detailed audits of your energy consumption, waste generation and disposal, food sourcing etc.

- Set yourself ambitious yet achievable targets. For example, minimise single-use plastics by offering plastic-free beverages in refillable glass bottles.
- Adopt food waste reduction strategies and increase composting and recycling.
- Train your staff regularly on your sustainability practices.
- Work in close collaboration with local communities.

5. RESOURCES

Businesses do not have to undertake this journey alone. Practical guidance, tools and learning materials are available through the **Blue Impact Network Resource Library**, helping tourism businesses build the knowledge and systems needed before commencing certification.

6. CONCLUSION

Certification is more than a label, it is a pathway to improving business performance, meeting evolving market expectations, and strengthening Zanzibar's position as a leading sustainable tourism destination. Start with the sustainability basics, build your capacity, and take the next step towards certification.

Looking for support to start your certification journey? Contact us at **projectmanager@blueimpactnetwork.co.tz**

Sources: Green Growth Facility, Zanzibar Sustainable Tourism Certification Roadmap (2026); EU, 2024; ATTA, 2025; Sustainable Travel International, 2026