



Sustainable Rural  
Development International

## BSST PROGRAM

Operational Guide 2021



---

## How to Use this Guide

The guide is divided into sections for the use of community partners and accommodations. It contains overall standards and rules for the BSST Program operations. We hope that it gives community partners the basic tools to implement sustainable tourism that benefits everyone in the community.

The guide has several purposes: to help the Program, National Offices and Community Organisations in developing and sustaining a productive and successful integrated sustainable tourism system; to document procedures and policies as they relate to Program functions; to provide current Program policies for financial management and team-management procedures; and to serve as a reference for questions and problems as they arise in the day-to-day operations.

## What has Changed

The significant modifications deal with the organisation of the governing structure for the Program. To improve management control and in light of the ultimate public liability of the developer and organiser of the Program, Sustainable Rural Development International Limited (SRDI), the new structure removes the Secretariat as the lead decision-making body. Going forward, the governing structure is SRDI, National Offices and Community Organisations. In the case of National Offices, a determination was also made that only Georgia will operate with a National Office. This is because of the country size, strength of the National Office organisation and capacity to work with various Community Organisations. SRDI will make a determination in the future on national offices for Turkey and Ukraine.

Aside from the changes in organisational controls, the guide now includes annexes that can be modified as circumstances permit. The annexes contain detailed information regarding commissions, pricing, billing and other financial information which should be carefully reviewed.

In addition, the annexes also include the destination criteria that form the basis of the Program and which are used to monitor the progress of communities in meeting sustainability goals. The criteria have been adapted from Global Sustainable Tourism Council Destination Criteria and are a world-wide standard recognized by the United Nations.

## General Considerations

It must be remembered at all times that membership in the Program requires observation of the rules applicable to the Program and its partners and participants.

By taking part in the Program and appearing on the web portal, Community Organisations and any of their participants (local businesses including accommodations, event or activity

organizers, guides and producers of goods and services etc.) agree to the terms, conditions, rights and responsibilities of the Program as they may be amended from time to time.

Accommodations, businesses and Community Organisations may be required to sign a separate agreement for the purposes, among others, of accepting payments and adhering to the rules of the third party payment provider and commitment to adhere to the Program purposes and rules.

Finally, although the Guide aims to be a complete picture of the BSST Program, for partners and participants' additional questions may arise. SRDI welcomes any questions or recommendations to improve the Guide and all questions or recommendations should be directed to SRDI by email.

## What is the BSST Program?

The Black Sea Sustainable Rural Tourism Program is an integrated sustainable tourism social venture around the Black Sea region. It aims to establish and grow a permanent branded business composed of community partners and their accommodations and businesses.

We use GSTC sustainable tourism criteria as our foundation. Partners commit to preserving their ecological and cultural heritage while improving the lives of all residents. The objective: give travellers an in-depth experience into the life and culture of a community.

The “new normal” of post-Covid travel means tourists are interested in longer, in-depth experiences, seeking uncrowded ecological and cultural destinations. We give our partners opportunities to reach the new market at no cost except their effort to improve lives in their community.



## Table of Contents

Section One: Overall Program Administration.....	1
SRDI.....	1
National Offices.....	1
BSST Community.....	1
Web Portal, Publications, Dissemination .....	2
Web Portal.....	2
Written Materials.....	3
Use of the BSST Logo.....	3
Section Two: Program & Team Administration .....	4
Financial Management .....	4
Operating Procedures: Administrative .....	4
SRDI and Local Control .....	4
Community Organisations.....	5
Section Three: National Office & Community Organisations Operations & Management	7
Overview.....	7
Governance.....	7
Community Organisation .....	8
Criteria Application .....	9
Strategic Organisation Plan .....	10
Assessment, and Evaluation.....	10
New Community Partners.....	10
Section Four: Accommodations & Other Participants .....	12
Accommodations and Business Participants.....	12
Payments and Refunds.....	13
Section Five: Community Tour, Activities & Community Fund.....	15
Get to Know the Community Experience Tour .....	15
Activities.....	16
Community Fund .....	16
Annex A: Criteria .....	17
Annex B: Booking & Payment System.....	18
Annex C: Community Tour, Activities & Community Fund .....	19

## Section One: Overall Program Administration

### SRDI

SRDI is the overall governing body of the Program and is responsible for Program policy decisions and general operations and management of the Program. The role of SRDI also includes the international coordination and fundraising. In exercising its responsibilities, it may seek advice and recommendations from Community Organisations to assure local customs, laws, regulations and markets are addressed. Nevertheless, as outlined in this Guide, Community Organisations are in charge of day-to-day community activities, following GSTC guidelines and assuring that all community stakeholders benefit from the community partnership within the Program. SRDI is always available to assist, provide advice and answer any questions that may arise.

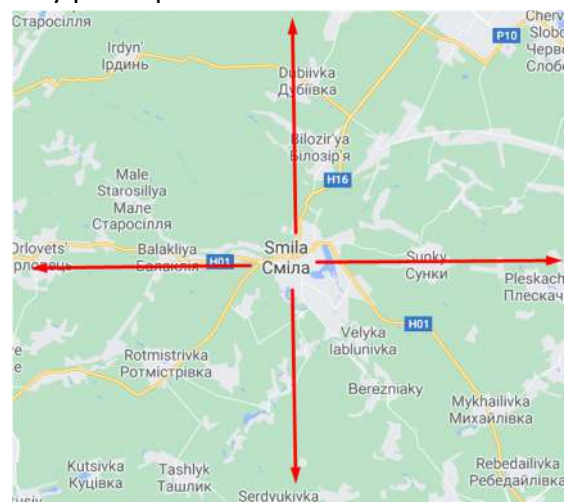
### National Offices

It should be noted that for operational and strategic reasons at this time, only Georgia has a National Office which has a separate strategic working relationship with SRDI and other specific activities. It remains responsible in general for day-to-day country operations and communications with Community Organisations and SRDI. The Georgia National Office is an independent non-profit. As the Program grows, national offices will be established in Turkey and Ukraine.

### BSST Community

A community is an area which can consist of a village, town or groups of villages and towns within 20 kilometre distance. One village or town must be designated as the centre. (See example in photo). It is further defined by the community participants who want to work together to create sustainable tourism in their area, plan for common goals and be part of the Program.

Only communities can be partners in the Program and only accommodations, businesses and groups within the community become participants. A Community Organisation is one of three basic requirements to become part of the Program (see Destination Criteria in Annex A).

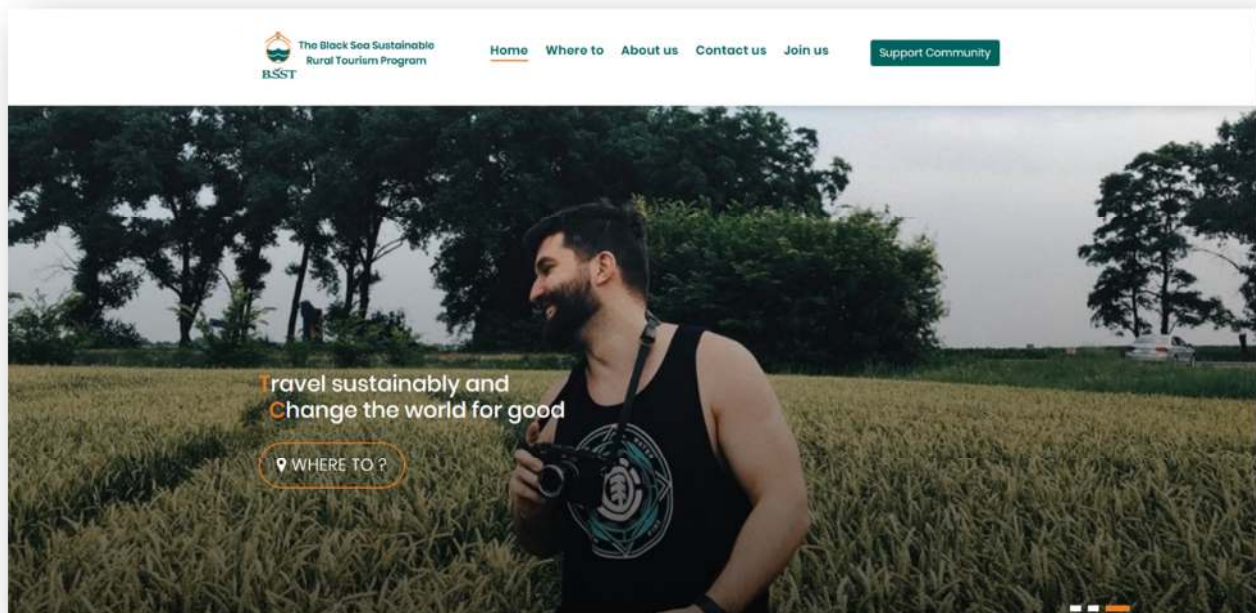


## Web Portal, Publications, Dissemination

SRDI is responsible for the development and maintenance of the BSST travel web-portal. Information from accommodations, activities, “Get-to-Know” community experience tour in the form required should be provided by the Community Organisation to SRDI for review. Although the primary working language is English, the portal has three human translated languages (Ukrainian, Turkish and Georgian). Other languages are available, but they are machine translations.

There is no cost to appearing on the BSST travel portal. The costs of development and maintenance will be covered by the SRDI for the Program.

### Web Portal



The web portal is the principal commercial component for the entire Program and is its public face and is carefully monitored and maintained. Communities, accommodations, activities and events are available to view by travellers and functions as a booking platform.

The portal components include – but are not be limited to - the following:

- Description of the Program
- Communities and their history and activities
- Description of the “Get-to-Know” the community experience tour
- Specific accommodations, promotion of activities and events
- Booking and payment forms
- Promotion of activities and businesses

---

## Written Materials

All written material available to the public, either electronically or on paper and including any advertising or promotional materials, referring to the Program *in any manner whatsoever*, is subject to the approval of SRDI. The objective is to assure that all materials dealing with the Program are consistent and do not misrepresent the Program goals or activities. All materials will be designed in a way to ensure accessibility to the extent practicable.

No member of the Program shall issue a press release that involves the Program without the prior written approval of the content of the press release from SRDI.

The requirement for approval will be strictly enforced as any breach could affect the Program, its members and its legal obligations and may result in serious consequences to any member that does not comply, including removal from the web-portal and a public announcement by SRDI disavowing such materials.

## Use of the BSST Logo

The BSST logo is proprietary and protected by copyright. Only Program partners and participants may use the logo. The logo may not be used by Community Organisations or their members on any competing web site. To remove all doubt, no Community Organisation or participant may use the logo on Booking.com® or similar booking site but may use it on a personal web site so long as the logo provided by BSST is maintained as a link to the BSST web portal. This restriction is required to protect the BSST brand, communities, businesses and accommodations, and also to assure that traveller bookings cover the cost of maintaining the BSST web portal and the percentage contribution to the community fund.

Accommodation owners and other businesses that are approved as participants in the Program as part of a partner community have the right to use the BSST logo as a local designation. For example, “BSST Nukriani” may be used by accommodation owners and businesses on individual web sites and places of business in Nukriani, Georgia. In addition, SRDI is planning to create flags that can be displaced at a local government building or entrance to a community. This will be similar to flags displayed under the Blue Flag program on beaches and marina’s that comply with water quality and cleanliness. This is part of the branding strategy.

The BSST logo is attached as an Annex to this Guide and shall be provided to members in formats suitable for web and signage usage.



## Section Two: Program & Team Administration

### Financial Management



Photo by [Toa Heftiba](#)

This is a business. It is a business for you, SRDI and for traveller customers.

By design, operational expenses have been and will continue to be covered by private sector contributions, donations and where appropriate, international donor financing. However, the business model calls for a self-sustaining, for-profit system funded by traveller fees and sponsorships.

For UK regulatory reasons SRDI is solely responsible for the financial management of the Program. This includes, but is not limited to, business related payments, international financial transactions, grant fund management and direct/indirect costs. As the legal entity responsible for activities of the Program, SRDI retains the sole right to take whatever action it deems necessary to protect the interests of the Program and itself.

SRDI is in charge of funding, financial planning and strategic decision-making for the Program; however, National Offices (where activated) and Community Organisations form the basis of day-to-day activities and promote the interests of the Program. A National Office or a Community Organisation may pursue grant and other funding opportunities so long as such activity is not associated with or impact the Program without prior written consent.

In addition, all booking payments are handled by SRDI's third party payment provider, Stripe<sup>®</sup> and SRDI does not collect or hold any financial information of travellers.

### Operating Procedures: Administrative

#### SRDI and Local Control

SRDI is the overall governing body of the Program and is responsible for Program policy decisions and is headquartered in London, England. The role of SRDI also includes the international operations of the Program, advisory services and fundraising. It may seek advice and recommendations from Community Organisations to assure local customs, laws,

regulations and markets are addressed; nevertheless, should any actions, events or other market considerations affect the activities of the Program locally, Community Organisations are expected to inform SRDI as soon as practicable.

## Community Organisations

Only communities can become BSST Partners, represented through a community organisation as a legal entity or otherwise.

A Community Organisation is a requirement for membership in the Program (See Destination Criteria – Annex 1). The Community Organisation is the foundation for all local activities.

1. Community Organisations are responsible for all activities of the Program in their “community”.
2. The Community Organisation must have a written document that formally establishes the Organisation and its governance structure (eg, chairman, members etc.) identifies members and commits to the Destination Criteria. It is not necessary for it to become a legal entity or NGO although such a designation can be advantageous for fund raising and sponsorships.
3. It should include, at a minimum, a representative from local government, local NGOs, businesses such as accommodation providers and those who provide goods and services. The objective is to include all stakeholders in the process of determining what the community goals and plans should be and implementing those plans. The Community Organisation is expected to develop a written, multi-year strategic plan. The strategic plan should be completed within 6 months from becoming a member of the BSST Program. *Notwithstanding the foregoing, and in recognition of the complexity and difficulty of bringing together a group of representatives at the start of a program, the Community Organisation requirement will be satisfied if a key person in a community commits to and forms the Community Organisation within a period of 90 days.*
4. The Community Organisation is responsible for, at a minimum:
  - a) Working with its members to implement destination criteria;
  - b) Help accommodations and business entities to fulfil criteria;
  - c) Identify appropriate accommodations for the BSST web-portal and assure information provided is accurate at all times;
  - d) Develop a one-day “Get-to-Know” community experience tour, including cost and activities that cover ecological, cultural and social development;
  - e) Have a bank account for the deposit of payments for the “Get-to-Know” community experience tour and distribute funds to multiple vendors on the tour;

- f) Identify and support new destination activities;
- g) Work and exchange ideas with other communities, members and non-members, both within the country and between countries. The objective is to exchange experience and knowledge within Program members wherever located;
- h) Present new ideas and initiatives to SRDI for discussion; and
- i) Designate one point of contact for communications with the SRDI. The point of contact must have a working knowledge of English.

## Section Three: National Office & Community Organisations Operations & Management

### Overview

At the moment, there is only one national office. The Georgian National Office is an independent NGO with a strategic partnership agreement with SRDI that extends beyond the scope of the BSST Program and therefore will not be discussed in the Guide. Nevertheless, in the future as the Program expands, national offices are expected to be established in Ukraine and Turkey. In general, a national office will be the primary contact point with Community Organisations on day-to-day matters and will work directly with SRDI. Outside of Georgia, SRDI

will work directly with partner Community Organisations.

Community Organisations work to fulfil sustainability goals and are responsible for day-to-day matters for the benefit of all community stakeholders. SRDI assists in the development of Community Organisations and their activities. Issues that arise within a community should be resolved by the community and only those issues that cannot be settled or directly involve Program policy and operations should involve SRDI.



The sections that follow need to be read in both the contexts of your overall community goals, Organisation and culture and the Program's overall goals in developing a sustainable Program.

Not all information will be used in the same way by all Community Organisations, and SRDI invites you to submit your own models for Organisation and practice for inclusion in the next edition of this Guide.

### Governance

Community Organisation members should collaborate on deciding the appropriate governance and hierarchy for themselves. SRDI recommends that certain broad governance rules be applied.

## Community Organisation

First, a Community Organisation is one of the prerequisites to take part in the Program as shown in the Criteria in Annex 1.

The following outline is meant to guide and clarify the structure and role of the Community Organisation.

1. The Community Organisation can take any form (legal entity, association etc.) so long as there is a written document outlining rules, regulations, roles and responsibilities and a commitment to the Program criteria. A legal entity is preferred for financial reasons, but not required.
2. Organisations can take the form of an association with an elected executive board drawn from community participants, who then make strategic and policy decisions in concert with input local businesses that choose to join.
3. If the Community Organisation is an existing NGO or other type of legal entity, it must agree to comply with the Program rules and regulation where its work is involved with the Program.
4. It is important to have one point of contact for communications with SRDI
5. A Community Organisation must have one person who is capable of communication in English.
6. There are numerous ways to organize and administer a Community Organisation, and SRDI can assist in the development. However, certain practices that help to guarantee cohesion and sustainability include:
  - a) Provide all members with an organisational chart that shows who is responsible for what, who answers to whom; and the governing relationships for the overall Community Organisation and its various project and communication responsibilities;
  - b) Invite newer Community Organisation members to join conversations about governance and administration;
  - c) Develop clear channels of communication among Community Organisation members and the Community Organisation and SRDI; formalize those communication channels via bi-weekly meeting agendas, or the appointment of an administrative task team to explore options;
  - d) Document all discussions and plans for Community Organisation governance and administration issues where all members can both access them and provide feedback;

- e) Apply any experience by members in management courses to imagine and to implement productive governance and administration procedures;
- f) Visit other Community Organisations and ask about their governance and administration procedures; ask SRDI to provide examples from other communities.

In all of these cases, the need for negotiation and consensus is paramount. No organisation runs smoothly and productively based on informal or undocumented approaches to administration, and this opportunity to design and develop governance possibilities for your Community Organisation will serve you well in both your Program and professional experiences.

Remember, never be afraid to ask for help. It is better to say that something is not understood than to move forward only to be told that the plan is unacceptable.

*If a single person, as a community leader, approaches SRDI with an application and a commitment to form a Community Organisation within 90 calendar days and no other way forward can be found, SRDI will rely on that commitment so long as within that period of time the community leader has created a Community Organisation with members (for example, NGOs, business persons, local government and accommodation owners) committed to the principles of sustainability contained in the Criteria. In the event the Community Organisation cannot be formed within the 90 days, then participation in the Program will be suspended until the requirement is met. It is important, in this type of case, that the community leader provide some explanation of how the Community Organisation will be formed and the prospective members.*

## Criteria Application

There are three criteria that must be implemented to be included in the Program. The most important is the formation of a Community Organisation. The two remaining criteria are a tourism asset inventory and safety/health plans. The creation of rules and procedures regarding health and safety cannot be emphasised any more strongly at this time. The Covid pandemic, travel restrictions and the traveller requirement that a destination, accommodations and businesses have implemented recommended precautions is paramount.

In addition to the three criteria above, it is extremely important that the Community Organisation develop a long-term strategic plan within the first 6 months. Strategic planning should be for a minimum of three years and accompanied by a road map or action plan for at least the first year. However, it should be remembered that this is a community developed plan – not something imposed from the outside – and should reflect the needs and desires of the community as a whole. SRDI has the expertise to assist in the drafting of a strategic plan and is here to help.

Regarding the criteria, these are adapted to local country specific environments from the destination criteria developed by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council. GSTC Criteria have been adopted by SRDI in general as a member of the GSTC.

## Strategic Organisation Plan

Within 6 months, each community must complete (or update) a multi-year strategic plan outlining the governance, goals and objectives of their Community Organisation. Contents should include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Mission Statement
- Goals and Objectives
- Organisational Structure
- Project Timelines, if any
- Present and future community activity Plans
- Operating Procedures: Documentation, monitoring of compliance with criteria, etc.

This should be considered a living document to be updated *as needed* as strategic objectives or procedures change.

SRDI will assist upon request with the development and drafting of a strategic plan.

As a matter of practice, it is recommended that an annual action plan setting forth activities and goals should be prepared in line with the strategic plan.

## Assessment, and Evaluation

No plan is effective unless there is a system to measure success, failure and impediments. Therefore, it is highly recommended that each Community Organisation develop an assessment, monitoring and evaluation plan. The primary assessment should concentrate on the application of criteria. A model form for monitoring and evaluation as well as a form for risk assessment will be provided by SRDI upon request.

Because the Program operates in a very public environment and the management is subject to laws and regulations affecting the Program and the legal entities involved, the Community Organisations need to remain aware of national laws.

## New Community Partners

The BSST Program only admits communities as new members (see Accommodation and Other Participants). A new Community Organisation can be admitted to the Program by submitting an application to SRDI beginning with the application information form available on-line, a

statement declaring its readiness to comply with the rules, principles and objectives of the Program and acceptance of the Criteria and a copy of its organisation documents.

SRDI will review the application and reply within ten (10) business days and may request additional information.

As each country has differing environments, the criteria applied to the selection process will be based on the following:

- a. Existing Community Organisation or demonstrated planned intent and completion within 90 days;
- b. Understanding of and demonstrated willingness to develop sustainable tourism
- c. Existing product(s) and basic skills (ability to work on-line, ability to act in a group)
- d. Communication ability (contact person must speak English, on-line access).
- e. Immediate criteria completed (Community Organisation established or complete within 90 days, inventory of products and skills and health/safety plans)



## Section Four: Accommodations & Other Participants

### Accommodations and Business Participants

The Program is community based and therefore, there must be an existing Community Organisation for any individual accommodation or business to participate in the Program. Subject to this requirement, the following represents what is expected of individual businesses taking part:

1. An accommodation must comply with the Destination Criteria where applicable and work with the Community Organisation to achieve the goals of the Program; specific Accommodation Criteria will be developed from the GSTC Accommodation Criteria in the future;
2. Accommodations, activities and other events may be shown on the web-portal but this is not automatic and SRDI will retain final authority to determine the level of readiness, based on GSTC and business related (price, condition etc.) criteria;
3. Accommodation owners are required to keep their information up-to-date – this means all information must be verifiable at any time;
4. Accommodations must comply with the booking requirements (which will be provided in detail by SRDI) and procedures of the Program and must be able to receive payments through a bank account as payment on arrival is not permitted;
5. The web portal anticipates a section for traveller reviews (subject to moderation to exclude clearly abusive or inaccurate reviews). Reviews that are not found to be abusive or malicious may be published. The owner will be given an opportunity to reply;
6. Repeated poor reviews or complaints that deal with customer satisfaction will be investigated by SRDI and the Community Organisation and owners who do not address legitimate issues may be subject to suspension from the web portal. No such corrective action will be taken so long as the owner makes a best effort to resolve the problem;
7. SRDI will monitor serious complaints and investigate as necessary and will intervene to protect owners from clearly abusive or malicious complaints and may take legal action against travellers as needed;
8. SRDI is the ultimate legally responsible entity for the web portal and shall have the final right to make decisions on its content;

9. Health and safety are important to travellers and SRDI will provide guidelines to help observe requirements;

## Payments and Refunds

SRDI understands that accommodation owners want to be paid promptly. SRDI is responsible for handling all accommodation and community experience tour payments through its payment processor (Stripe®). The preferred method to transfer funds is by bank electronic transfer. SRDI will consider the use of other payment systems upon request except for payment on arrival requests. Since payments both from travellers to accommodations and from SRDI to the Community Organisation and accommodations are centralized it ensures the secure collection of payments from guests to guarantee payment. All payment data such as credit/debit card information is fully secure and protected. SRDI does not maintain any data of payment methods information.

- SRDI has three methods to pay accommodation owners (in order of preference):
  1. International Wire - Your bank can provide you all the necessary details. Bank fees may apply. (preferred)
  2. PayPal - Your account must be active.
  3. Western Union
- Payments to accommodation owners are subject to fees imposed by the payment provider and this should be taken into consideration by the accommodation owner when setting prices.
- The accommodation owner, upon request, will be provided with detailed information on how to set up an account to receive funds. Funds will be transferred before the traveller arrives in most cases, but in light of Covid and frequent cancellations, this cannot be guaranteed.
- A strict refund policy is the responsibility of SRDI and banking rules and will be imposed to protect accommodation owners from late cancellations and/or charge-backs.
- No owner will be held responsible for any issues arising from traveller dissatisfaction unless due to false information or deliberate action or inaction by an owner.
- At this point the web portal does not contain listings for non-accommodations unless it is part of an “additional activity” organised by the Community Organisation. In the future, such business that is not an accommodation which would like to be listed and has joined the Community Organisation, may submit a request to SRDI through the Community Organisation.
- Accommodations will be charged a nominal 3% commission on each booking which will be deducted prior to funds being forwarded to the accommodation. Accommodations do not need to take this into consideration when setting prices as it will be automatically included on the web portal.

- The BSST Program requires travellers to book accommodations for a minimum of two nights, including breakfast. This benefits the accommodation and the community as a whole.
- Accommodations and other business owners by taking part in the Program and appearing on the web portal are deemed to have accepted all rights and obligations of the Program contained in this Guide and may be required to sign an agreement among the Community Organisation, and SRDI that will cover the rights and obligations of accommodations.
- Use of the BSST logo is subject to the section in this Guide regarding the logo, its use and restriction.

Notwithstanding anything contained above, the accommodation owner must be listed on the web-portal to be part of the Program and all bookings must be made on-line. The Program will, in all cases, collect the overhead and contribution surcharge from the traveller.

---

## Section Five: Community Tour, Activities & Community Fund

The following “Get to know the Community” Experience tour, additional activities and the Community Fund are an important part of revenue generation for the community. They are a benefit for local business and accommodations and address the focus of the traveller on genuine experiences outside of the former mass tourism products that were sold pre-Covid.

### Get to Know the Community Experience Tour

It is the responsibility of the Community Organisation to develop a one-day Get-to-Know the Community experience that will introduce the traveller guest to activities undertaken by the community to protect and preserve the environment and culture. It also provides the opportunity for guests to experience daily life through visiting craft shops, learning local cuisines and visiting natural settings.

SRDI can provide examples of the community tours offered in Georgia so that other communities can develop their own one-day tours.

The one-day tour is offered as a part of the two-night minimum stay at accommodations. It provides a reason for the two-night minimum and a full day of activities that benefit the community participants financially.

When travellers book an accommodation, the total price includes the cost of the tour. The Community Organisation, in developing the tour, should consider the small businesses and entrepreneurs who can take part effectively and also determine the cost of each activity, including guides, translators, meals etc.

The portion of the invoice paid by the traveller for the tour is transferred to the Community Organisation for distribution to the various vendors. It is impractical for SRDI to pay vendors separately since the cost of the transfer would be a large portion of the amount transferred.

In order to compensate the Community Organisation for this work, SRDI will add a 10% surcharge to the guest invoice that, upon distribution of the funds to the Community Organisation can be retained to cover administrative costs. If costs exceed the 10% amount, the Community Organisation may request a higher percentage so long as it can be clearly justified. The final decision is solely within SRDI’s discretion as it may affect the competitiveness of the product.

---

## Activities

Every community has activities that can be offered the traveller which will result in longer stays and a more interesting experience.

The Community Organisation should develop additional activities, of whatever length, to offer on the web-portal. These can include cooking classes, bird-watching, trekking etc. experiences all at an extra cost. SRDI will display these activities on the web-portal. At this time, for administrative reasons, SRDI cannot collect these funds in advance and the Community Organisation needs to accept payment on arrival and distribute those funds.

Examples will be provided by SRDI.

## Community Fund

A key component of the BSST Program is the Community Fund. It is what makes the Program different from any other booking site or project and is part of the SRDI commitment to keep the money spent by the traveller in the community. In the past, only 5-10% of traveller “spend” remained in the destination according to the UN World Tourism Organisation. SRDI’s structure allows for between 75 – 80% to remain within the community.

Part of the way this is accomplished is through assuring that the traveller covers the majority of costs and also contributes to a Community Fund. With each booking, SRDI automatically adds an additional 5% to the invoice which is deposited in a separate account for the benefit of the community. Once the aggregate amount reaches the equivalent of \$3,000 (USD) the Community Organisation can request a micro-grant for any project that improves livelihoods in a sustainable manner. For example, if new signage is needed for travellers or nature trails and fences need repair, SRDI will provide the Community Organisation with the funds out of the Community Fund account.

Clearly, the more travellers are satisfied and book through the BSST portal, the more funds will be added to the Community Fund account.

For any questions about how the Community Fund is handled, please write to SRDI.

## Annex A: Criteria

The criteria shown in Green are immediate needs in order to become part of the BSST Program.

SRDI is ready to advise and assist in working with the criteria and can answer any questions upon request.



**Global Sustainable Tourism Council Criteria  
adapted for the  
Black Sea Sustainable Rural Tourism Program**

SECTION A: Demonstrate effective sustainable management			NOTES
CRITERIA	INDICATORS	Approximate time to put criteria into effect Green: Required for membership Short Term: (3-12) Medium Term: (12 – 24) Long Term: (24 – 36)	
<b>A1 Sustainable destination strategy</b>  The destination has written and is implementing a multi-year destination strategy that is publicly available, is suited to its scale; that considers environmental, economic, social, cultural, quality, health, and safety issues; and was developed with public participation.	<p>a. Multi-year destination strategy that includes a focus on sustainability and sustainable tourism and includes environmental, economic, social, cultural, quality, health, and safety issues</p> <p>b. Multi-year destination plan or strategy that was developed with public participation</p>	Short Term – Ideally in 3 months. <b>This can only be started after the community organisation is established</b>	The sections in Green are immediate for membership and to appear on the BSST travel portal.  SRDI can assist in the development of a strategy
<b>A2 Destination management organisation</b>  The destination has an effective organisation group responsible for a coordinated approach to sustainable tourism, with involvement by the private	<p>a. An organisation has been formed that has responsibility for a coordinated approach to the management of sustainable tourism</p> <p>b. The private sector and public sector are involved in the organisation and coordination of tourism</p>	This is a minimum requirement to become a partner community.	The community organisation should be established with a formal agreement with appropriate roles and responsibilities.



<p><b>sector and public sector. This has defined responsibilities, oversight and implementation capability for the management of environmental, economic, social, and cultural issues.</b></p>	<p>c. The tourism organisation is suited to the size and scale of the destination</p> <p>d. Individuals in the tourism organisation have clear roles and responsibilities with implementation guidelines and processes.</p>		
<p><b>A3 Monitoring</b></p> <p><b>The destination has a system to monitor and respond to environmental, economic, social, cultural, and tourism. The monitoring system is reviewed and evaluated periodically.</b></p>	<p>a. Active monitoring and reporting of environmental, economic, social, cultural and tourism issues is implemented</p> <p>b. Monitoring system is reviewed and evaluated periodically</p> <p>c. Tourism impact mitigation procedures active.</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>SRDI can provide a model.</p>
<p><b>A4 Tourism seasonality management</b></p> <p><b>The destination dedicates resources to reduce seasonal variability of tourism to balance the needs of the local economy, community, cultures and environment and to identify year-round tourism opportunities.</b></p>	<p>a. Specific strategy is developed for marketing off-season events and attracting year-round visitors</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>The community should work to assure the web-portal accurately reflects off-season events.</p>
<p><b>A5 The destination has an up-to-date inventory and assessment of its tourism assets and attractions.</b></p>	<p>a. Current inventory and classification of tourism assets and attractions including natural and cultural sites has been collected and reported.</p>	<p>This is a minimum requirement</p>	





<p><b>A6 Access for all</b></p> <p><b>Where appropriate, sites and facilities are accessible to all, including persons with disabilities and others who have access requirements. Where sites and facilities are not immediately accessible, access is afforded through design and implementation of solutions that take into account the integrity of the site and such reasonable accommodations for persons with access requirements as can be achieved.</b></p>	<p>a. Policies supporting access to tourist sites and facilities, including those of natural and cultural importance, for individuals with disabilities and others who have specific access requirements, where appropriate.</p> <p>b. Accessibility solutions are designed to take into account the integrity of the site while making reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities</p>	<p>Long</p>	<p>Accessibility to all should be a goal of the community and each destination.</p>
<p><b>A7 Visitor and community satisfaction</b></p> <p><b>The destination has a system to monitor visitor satisfaction, and to take action to improve it.</b></p>	<p>a. Collection of data on visitor satisfaction is established as a process.</p> <p>b. Public reactions and concerns about visitor satisfaction and overall tourism policy is taken into consideration through periodic surveys.</p> <p>c. A feedback system to take action to improve visitor satisfaction is based on monitoring information.</p> <p>d. A programme of community information and outreach is formalized and implemented.</p>	<p>Short</p>	<p>A system can be a questionnaire that should be completed by visitors. The Program will also periodically check visitor satisfaction and provide results to the community organisation.</p>



<p><b>A8 Sustainability standards</b></p> <p><b>The destination has a system to promote sustainability standards for enterprises consistent with the Criteria.</b></p> <p><b>The destination makes publicly available a list of sustainability certified or verified enterprises.</b></p>	<p>a. A system is established to regularly inform the community and local businesses about sustainability issues.</p> <p>b. Publicly available list of sustainably certified or verified enterprises</p>	<p>Medium</p>	
<p><b>A9 Safety and security</b></p> <p><b>The destination has a system to monitor, prevent, publicly report, and respond to crime, safety, and health hazards.</b></p>	<p>a. Inspections of fire, food hygiene, and electrical safety for tourism properties in effect</p> <p>b. Safety precautions such as first aid stations at tourist attractions and system to respond to crime.</p> <p>c. Implementation of health measures for infectious diseases.</p>	<p>This is a minimum requirement.</p>	<p>SRDI will provide recommendations for health and safety requirements, particularly for accommodations. This is a critical need for the post-Covid environment.</p>
<p><b>A10 Crisis and emergency management</b></p> <p><b>The destination has a crisis response plan that is appropriate. Key elements are communicated to residents, visitors, and enterprises.</b></p>	<p>a. Publicly available crisis and emergency response plan that considers the tourism sector</p> <p>b. Crisis and emergency response plan developed and updated on a regular basis with input from the private sector and includes communication procedures for during and after a crisis or emergency</p>	<p>Medium</p>	
<p><b>A11 Promotion</b></p>	<p>a. Destination promotional messages represent local</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p><b>This is partially handled by the Program at no cost.</b></p>



<p><b>Promotion is accurate with regard to the destination and its products, services, and sustainability claims.</b></p> <p><b>The promotional messages treat local communities and tourists authentically and respectfully.</b></p>	<p>communities and visitors authentically and respectfully</p> <p>b. Destination promotional messages are accurate in their description of products and services</p>		<p>Member communities and destinations must provide accurate information as required which will appear on the web portal and other marketing materials</p>
<p><b><i>SECTION B: Maximize economic benefits to the host community and minimize negative impacts</i></b></p>			
<p><b>B1 Local career opportunities</b></p> <p><b>The destination supports new job opportunities in the tourism sector and promotes equal employment, training opportunities and fair wages for all.</b></p>	<p>a. Policies supporting equal opportunities in employment for all, including women, youth, disabled people, minorities, and other vulnerable populations are in place.</p>	<p>Continuous</p>	<p>This is a cooperative effort that primarily involves the community organisation and individual destinations since it may require new regulations to implement. Training that is identified as a need by the community organisation should be communicated to SRDI so that the Program can develop plans to meet the need.</p>
<p><b>B2 Support entrepreneurs</b></p> <p><b>The destination has a system that encourages tourism spending locally by supporting local businesses in the tourism supply chain.</b></p> <p><b>The community encourages local participation in destination planning and decision making on an ongoing basis.</b></p>	<p>a. System in place for involving public and private community stakeholders in destination management planning and decision making.</p> <p>b. Periodic public meetings to discuss destination management issues each year.</p> <p>c. Assist local businesses such as farmers, artisans and food suppliers with market access and sustainable practices and assure local products are for sale to visitors.</p>	<p>Short</p>	<p>This should be part of the strategic plan so that the plan is established and put into effect. SRDI will assist with this.</p>



<p><b>B3 Local access</b></p> <p><b>The destination monitors, protects, and when necessary rehabilitates or restores local community access to natural and cultural sites.</b></p>	<p>a. Establish programs to monitor, protect, and rehabilitate or restore public access by locals and domestic visitors to natural and cultural sites.</p>	<p>Medium</p>	
<p><b>B4 Tourism awareness and education</b></p> <p><b>The destination provides regular programs to enhance understanding of the opportunities and challenges of tourism, and the importance of sustainability.</b></p>	<p>a. Program to raise awareness of tourism’s role and potential contribution held in communities, schools, and higher education institutions.</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>SRDI can assist with materials.</p>
<p><b>B5 Support for community</b></p> <p><b>The destination has a system to enable and encourage enterprises, visitors, and the public to contribute to community and sustainability initiatives either with donations or volunteer work.</b></p>	<p>a. Programs for enterprises, visitors, and the public to contribute donations to community and biodiversity conservation initiatives and/or infrastructure development</p>	<p>Short</p>	<p>Donations do not necessarily include funding but can be in-kind or other contributions. SRDI can support the achievement of this criteria and the Program can promote contributions on the web portal.</p>
<p><b>SECTION C: Maximize benefits to communities, visitors, and culture; minimize negative impacts</b></p>			
<p><b>C1 Attraction protection</b></p> <p><b>The destination has a policy and system to evaluate,</b></p>	<p>a. Management system developed to protect natural and cultural sites, including heritage and rural and urban scenic views</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Policies to protect local attractions should be established with all destinations within the community playing a role.</p>



<p><b>rehabilitate, and conserve natural and cultural sites, including built heritage (historic and archaeological) and rural and urban scenic views.</b></p>	<p>b. Management system to monitor, measure, and mitigate tourism impacts on sites and attractions</p>		
<p><b>C2 Visitor management</b> <b>The destination has a visitor management system for attraction sites that includes measures to preserve, protect, and enhance natural and cultural assets.</b></p>	<p>a. Administrative mechanism responsible for implementing visitor management plans and operations is in place</p>	<p>Short</p>	
<p><b>C3 Visitor behaviour</b> <b>The destination has published and provided guidelines for proper visitor behaviour at sensitive sites. Such guidelines are designed to minimize adverse impacts on sensitive sites and strengthen positive visitor behaviours.</b></p>	<p>a. Cultural and environmental guidelines for visitor behaviour in sensitive sites developed and available for distribution.</p> <p>b. Code of practice for tour guides and tour operators published and disseminated</p>	<p>Short</p>	<p>SRDI can assist with the development of guidelines and code of practice.</p>
<p><b>C4 Cultural heritage protection</b> <b>The destination has laws, rules and regulations governing the proper sale, trade, display, or gifting of</b></p>	<p>a. Rules and regulations to protect historical and archaeological artefacts including those located under water have been established and enforced.</p> <p>b. Program has been developed to protect and celebrate intangible</p>	<p>Long</p>	<p>Every effort should be made to work with local and national authorities for regulations to protect historical and cultural heritage.</p>



<b>historical and archaeological artefacts.</b>	cultural heritage (e.g., includes song, music, drama, skills and crafts).		
<b>C5 Site interpretation</b>  <b>Accurate interpretive information is provided at natural and cultural sites. The information is culturally appropriate, developed with community collaboration, and communicated in languages pertinent to visitors.</b>	a. Interpretive information is available to visitors in tourist offices and at natural and cultural sites  b. Interpretive information is developed with community collaboration  c. Interpretive information is available in languages pertinent to visitors  d. Tour guide training has been implemented in the use of interpretive information.	Short	Publications must be in at least one other language, preferably English.  SRDI can help by providing review of translations although it cannot directly initiate the translation.
<b>SECTION D: Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts</b>			
<b>D1 Environmental risks</b>  <b>The destination has identified environmental risks and has a system in place to address them.</b>	a. Sustainability assessment of the destination within the last five years, identifying environmental risks  b. System in place to address identified risks.	Short	
<b>D2 Protection of sensitive environments</b>  <b>The destination has a system to monitor the impact of tourism on the environment, conserve habitats, species, and ecosystems, and prevent</b>	a. Maintained and updated inventory of sensitive and threatened wildlife and habitats  b. Management system to monitor impacts and to protect ecosystems, sensitive environments, and species	Medium	The system should be developed as soon as possible with the help of SRDI.



<p><b>introduction of invasive species.</b></p>	<p>c. System in place to prevent the introduction of invasive species.</p>		
<p><b>D3 Wildlife protection</b>   <b>The destination has a system to ensure compliance with local, national, and international laws and standards for the harvest or capture, display, and sale of wildlife (plants and animals).</b></p>	<p>a. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) followed   b. Regulations and standards for controlling harvesting or capture, display, sale, of plants and animals.</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>SRDI can assist in creating standards for community compliance.</p>
<p><b>D4 Greenhouse gas emissions</b>   <b>The destination has a system to encourage enterprises to minimize and mitigate their greenhouse gas emissions from all aspects of their operation (including emissions from service providers).</b></p>	<p>a. Program to assist enterprises to minimize greenhouse gas emissions</p>	<p>Long</p>	<p>SRDI will work with communities to assist in development of a system and ideas for mitigation</p>
<p><b>D5 Energy conservation</b>   <b>The destination has a system to encourage enterprises to reduce energy consumption, and reliance on fossil fuels.</b></p>	<p>a. Policies and incentives to promote energy conservation and reduce reliance on fossil fuels, improve energy efficiency, and encourage the adoption and use of renewable energy technologies.</p>	<p>Long</p>	
<p><b>D6 Solid waste reduction</b>   <b>The destination has a system to encourage enterprises to reduce, reuse, and recycle</b></p>	<p>a. Solid waste management plan that is implemented, has quantitative goals to minimize, and ensure safe sustainable disposal of waste that is not reused or recycled</p>		



<p><b>solid waste, particularly the use of single use plastics. Any solid waste not reused or recycled is disposed of safely and sustainably.</b></p>	<p>b. Program to reduce single use plastic, particularly bottled water by enterprises and visitors</p>		
<p><b>D7 Light and noise pollution</b> <b>The destination has guidelines to minimize light and noise pollution. The destination encourages enterprises to follow these guidelines and regulations.</b></p>	<p>a. Guidelines to minimize noise and light pollution  b. Program to encourage enterprises to follow guidelines and regulations to minimize noise and light pollution</p>	<p>Long</p>	
<p><b>D8 Low-impact transport</b> <b>The destination has a system to increase the use of low impact transportation, including public transportation and active transportation (e.g., walking and cycling).</b></p>	<p>a. Program to increase the use of low-impact transportation  b. Program to make sites of visitor interest more accessible to active transportation (e.g., walking and cycling)</p>	<p>Long</p>	



## Annex B: Booking & Payment System



## Black Sea Sustainable Rural Tourism Booking and Payment System

The following guide is aimed to clarify the overall booking and payment system for accommodations and activities. Questions can be addressed directly to: [bst@vesselkaconsult.com](mailto:bst@vesselkaconsult.com) with “Booking Question” in the subject line.

### Definitions:

- **Community & Community Organisation:** Only communities (as single village or group of villages within 20 kilometres of the central village) can be member partners in the BSST Program. Each community must have a Community Organisation (See the BSST Guide). The Community Organisation is responsible for all matters concerning the BSST Program in the community.
- **Accommodation:** Accommodations are selected and recommended for approval to SRDI. If approved, they are included on the BSST travel portal where guests can book their stays.
- **Community Experience Tour:** A full day experience tour, organised by the Community Organisation, and included in the minimum 2-night booking by the guest. The experience tour must include the ecological and cultural preservation of the community and provide the guest with the experience of daily life in the community. It should include lunch and dinner. All costs should be provided to SRDI.

### Accommodation Price

1. Guests must book a minimum of 2 nights at any accommodation.
2. The accommodation must provide breakfast to each guest.
3. The accommodation should decide on what the price will be per-night and per-room (per-person is not permitted)
4. **Do not** include the commission (3%) charged by SRDI to the accommodation – this will be added to the guest invoice unless you are advised otherwise.
5. Example for pricing is as follows:
  - Price per-room per-night (example: \$25)
  - Price per-breakfast, *per-person*. (example: \$5 per person)
6. Example assuming 2 guests: Room: \$25 \* 2 nights = \$50; Breakfast: \$5 \* 4 (2 persons) = \$20. Total for the room and breakfast for 2 guests is \$70.
7. If extra nights are booked by the guest(s), that amount will be added to their invoice.

### Booking Process

1. There are no automatic bookings. The process is as follows:
  - a. Guests select an accommodation on the web-portal, enter the dates and submit a “Request to Book” to SRDI. The form will be forwarded immediately to the accommodation (if possible) and to the Community Organization.
  - b. The Community Organisation immediately notifies the accommodation (or the accommodation receives the request simultaneously). The accommodation must accept or reject the request in 24 hours. If SRDI receives no reply in that time, the request will be rejected.



- c. If the accommodation accepts the booking, it must immediately block out the time requested.
- d. SRDI will invoice the guest (the timing may vary) and the guest must pay the invoice within 48 hours.
- e. If the invoice is not paid within 48 hours, SRDI will notify the guest, accommodation and Community Organisation that the request has been cancelled; the accommodation will be released from the block.

It is important to note that COVID has created new issues that affect the timing of invoicing the guest by SRDI. The result may be that although payment of the invoice may be delayed, the disbursement of funds in the Payment section below may also be affected. Nevertheless, SRDI will always keep the Community Organisation informed of any changes.

## Payment Disbursement

This section may be modified as a result of COVID restrictions.

1. Accommodations will be paid from one (1) to three (3) days prior to the arrival of the guest. The normal payment will be made three (3) days prior to arrival but COVID related refunds may result in delays. Normally, the SRDI cancellation policy provides for no refund if a booking is cancelled three (3) days or less before arrival.
2. SRDI will only disburse payments for accommodations by electronic (bank to bank) wire transfer or Western Union. The accommodation must select the method of payment in advance. Accommodations may choose to receive payments on a monthly basis.

For any questions, please write to [bst@vesselkaconsult.com](mailto:bst@vesselkaconsult.com)

## Annex C: Community Tour, Activities & Community Fund



## **Black Sea Sustainable Rural Tourism Community Experience Tour, Activities & Community Fund**

The following guide covers the “Get-to-Know” the Community Experience Tour, additional Activities and the unique Community Fund. Questions can be addressed directly to: [bst@vesselkaconsult.com](mailto:bst@vesselkaconsult.com) with “Activities” in the subject line.

### **“Get-to-Know” the Community Experience Tour**

Part of the purpose of the BSST Program is to help the sustainable growth of the community. Sustainable approaches to local ecology, culture and daily life is a marketing point to attract responsible tourists.

The BSST Program requires that guests book a minimum of 2 nights. As part of a package, they also take part in a one-day, “Get-to-Know” the community experience tour.

This full-day experience is designed by the Community Organisation and will include ecological, cultural and daily life experiences, lunches and dinners. The cost of the tour is paid for by the guest at booking. The amount should be calculated by the Community Organisation and include a 10% administration fee for the Community Organisation.

The funds will be sent by SRDI to the Community Organisation at the same time funds are sent to the accommodation and it is the responsibility of the Community Organisation to disburse the funds to the vendors supplying goods and services as part of the “Get-to-Know” the Community Experience tour.

### **Additional Activities**

One objective of the BSST Program is to attract guests for more than the minimum 2-night stay. Therefore, additional activities should be offered and will appear on the web portal with a description and price per-person.

At this time, SRDI will not collect the payments, which are made on arrival.

Additional activities can include, for example, art and culture experiences, trekking in natural settings, cooking classes, crafts, etc.

### **Black Sea Community Fund**

SRDI is committed to assuring that the majority of what a traveller spends stays in the destination.

In addition to all other amounts, SRDI charges an additional 5% to the guest invoice which is placed in a separate Community Fund. These funds, upon reaching a threshold of \$3,000 are available to the community as a micro-grant for any purpose that improves community sustainability, helps the BSST Program or is needed for the repair or replacement of infrastructure

For any questions, please write to [bst@vesselkaconsult.com](mailto:bst@vesselkaconsult.com)