

Sakura Quality An ESG Practice

Rank Display under the Former System

(Certificates issued through September 30, 2026; certification validity through September 29, 2029)

Overview of the Former System

The former system was a rating system that assessed the status of accommodation facilities' initiatives relating to the environment, local communities, culture, and sustainable operations against prescribed assessment criteria, and presented the results as a rank.

Relationship with GSTC

In 2022, the Sakura Quality An ESG Practice Standard used under the former system achieved GSTC-Recognized Standard status from the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). This status indicates that the assessment standard was aligned with the GSTC Criteria.

However, this Recognition applied only to the assessment standard; it did not constitute GSTC accreditation or approval of the assessment and decision-making process under the former system.

What the 1–5 Gyoiko Sakura Ranks Represent

Under the former system, facilities were assigned one of five ranks, from 1 Gyoiko Sakura to 5 Gyoiko Sakura, based on their achievement of the applicable assessment items and the decision criteria prescribed by the system.

The rank indicated, on a graduated scale, the status of the facility's initiatives at the time of assessment. The award of a rank did not mean that complete environmental and social conformity had been verified across all of the facility's activities. The rank and other information for each facility are available in the Former System Facility List on this website.

Communications Directed at EU Consumers

The European Union adopted Directive (EU) 2024/825, commonly referred to as the Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition Directive (the EmpCo Directive), to address unfair commercial practices that hinder consumers from making sustainable choices. EU Member States are required to apply the national provisions implementing the Directive from September 27, 2026.

The Directive regulates practices including the display of sustainability labels that are neither based on a certification scheme nor established by public authorities, as well as generic environmental claims that lack an adequate basis. It does not impose a blanket prohibition on the words "certified," "certification," or "certificate" themselves. The specific requirements and their application may vary according to each Member State's national law and the intended audience, medium, and context of the communication.

For websites, online travel agencies (OTAs), advertisements, and other media directed at EU consumers, SQM is reviewing communications under the former system, including the use of these terms, to ensure that the operator of the former system, the subject and scope of the assessment, and the meaning of the rank are accurately conveyed. Accordingly, ranks under the former system may be described differently in Japanese-language communications for the domestic market and in communications intended for audiences outside Japan.

Previously Awarded Ranks and Issued Certificates

The review of terminology used in communications outside Japan does not alter or revoke any rank or assessment result previously awarded under the former system. Certificates already issued under the former system remain valid under the rules of that system until the expiry date stated on each certificate. However, such certificates do not indicate that the facility was GSTC-Certified.

We remain committed to providing clear information about the assessment criteria, the meaning of the ranks, and the manner in which they are presented, so that users can properly understand the system.

Official Reference

GSTC: [Recognition of the Sakura Quality An ESG Practice Standard](#)

Sakura Quality An ESG Practice

The New System Following GSTC Accreditation

1. Main Areas of Assessment

The assessment covers all applicable requirements, focusing on four principal areas: sustainable management; contributions to local communities and the local economy; protection of cultural heritage and respect for local culture; and reduction of environmental impacts and environmental conservation.

2. Certification Process

Step	Stage	Description
1	Preliminary Review and Self-Assessment	The facility reviews the applicable standard and assesses the current status of its own practices.
2	Application and Agreement	The facility confirms the audit scope, fees, schedule, and other conditions, applies to SQM, and enters into a certification agreement.
3	Document Submission	The facility submits policies, procedures, records, and other evidence demonstrating conformity with the standard.
4	Document Review	SQM reviews the submitted documentation, assesses conformity with the standard, and identifies matters to be verified on site.
5	On-Site Audit	An auditor visits the facility to verify implementation, records, on-site conditions, and information obtained through interviews with relevant personnel.
6	Draft Report and Factual Review	The facility reviews the draft audit report and may submit supporting evidence if it disputes any factual matter.
7	Corrective Action for Nonconformities	If nonconformities are identified, the facility implements corrective actions and submits evidence demonstrating their effective implementation.
8	Technical Review and Certification Decision	A qualified person who was not involved in the audit reviews the results, after which SQM makes the certification decision.
9	Certificate Issuance and Maintenance	A certificate is issued after conformity with the requirements has been confirmed. Required surveillance and recertification audits are conducted during the certification cycle.

Meaning and Representation of Certification under the New System

Differences from the Former System and Transitional Arrangements

3. Meaning of Certification under the New System

Certification under the new system signifies that, at the time of the certification audit, SQM, as a GSTC-accredited Certification Body, independently verified that the accommodation facility met the applicable certification standard and certification requirements. Following certification, the facility is required to maintain conformity with the standard and continually improve its sustainability practices.

4. Certification Claims and Use of Logos

Accommodation facilities certified under the new system may use a GSTC-Certified logo bearing a traceable identification code when they meet the relevant certification requirements, in accordance with the rules governing logo use and certification claims and other conditions established by SQM and GSTC. Certification claims must not be misleading and must accurately communicate the certification scope, validity period, Certification Body, and applicable standard.

5. Key Differences between the Former and New Systems

Aspect	Former System	New System Following GSTC Accreditation
Nature	A rating system that indicated the level of achievement of sustainability initiatives	A certification system that verifies conformity with the applicable certification requirements
Result Presented	A rank from 1 to 5 Gyoiko Sakura	A certification decision and certificate
Relationship with GSTC	The assessment standard used under the former system was GSTC-Recognized	SQM conducts audits and certification as a GSTC-accredited Certification Body
Decision Method	Level of achievement and the decision criteria prescribed under the former system	Verification of conformity with all applicable certification requirements
After Certification	Validity managed in accordance with the rules of the former system	Certification maintained through surveillance audits, verification of corrective actions, and recertification audits