

DESTINATION GREATER VICTORIA

GREATER VICTORIA BECOMES FIRST CANADIAN URBAN DESTINATION TO EARN BIOSPHERE CERTIFICATION

Globally respected sustainability certification a major step forward for visitor economy

VICTORIA, B.C. (March 16, 2023) – Destination Greater Victoria (DGV) and its members celebrated receiving the Responsible Tourism Institute’s (RTI) prestigious Biosphere Certification today, making Greater Victoria the first urban destination in Canada or the United States to join an elite group of tourism destinations worldwide recognized for their commitment to principles of environmental sustainability, cultural diversity, equity and social responsibility.

Biosphere certification marks the latest milestone in DGV’s ongoing journey as a global leader in sustainable tourism among Destination Management Organizations. In 2021, DGV was certified by Ostrom Climate as the first major destination organization in North America to be Carbon Neutral, and in 2022, the first to be Climate Positive. DGV continues to reduce its carbon footprint and implement sustainability best practices through its collaboration with Synergy Enterprises, a noted corporate sustainability management firm.

While other tourism sustainability certification programs exist, RTI’s Biosphere certification is the most highly sought due to its credibility, its recognition worldwide and its alignment with the United Nations’ [17 Sustainable Development Goals](#), the [World Charter for Sustainable Tourism +20](#) and the [COP21 Paris Agreement](#) to combat climate change. The value of certification is tremendous as travellers and meeting planners are increasingly considering factors like local quality of life, environmental impacts, and how a destination, its DMO and its tourism sector affects and serves local communities, when making decisions about where to travel or locate a conference.

Greater Victoria’s certification is based on a rigorous and collaborative assessment of Destination Greater Victoria and the region in relation to the United Nations’ SDGs and the development and external audit of an action plan outlining how sustainability best practices can continue to be fostered, implemented, monitored and improved within DGV and among its membership. The achievement was marked today with a celebration at The Parkside Hotel and Spa, one of four Greater Victoria hotels with its own individual Biosphere certification.

“The relationship between tourism, visitors and local residents is an important one,” said Paul Nursey, CEO, DGV. “The tourism sector is a massive economic driver which directly or indirectly supports two out of every five working families in Greater Victoria, as well as the many year-round quality of life amenities that make living here so attractive. Given the tourism’s sector’s size and potential impact, it’s important to recognize we have an obligation to operate in a way that respects the environment as well as the social and cultural fabric of our communities. That’s why DGV has always been committed to ongoing innovation in destination marketing and management, and authentically aligning the operations of Greater Victoria’s tourism sector with local community values and needs.

“As an organization that represents Greater Victoria on the world stage and has a mandate to support and grow its visitor economy, the ultimate goal of everything we do is to serve local residents and contribute positively to their quality of life. While Biosphere certification will provide long-term economic benefits to Greater Victoria, just as importantly it provides a platform and action plan for us and our members to continue improving our sustainability practices and maximizing the positive contributions we make every day as community partners.”

Among DGV's other notable commitments and achievements related to social and environmental sustainability (*See backgrounder below*) is co-founding the IMPACT Sustainability Travel & Tourism Conference, which annually attracts some 300 delegates from North America and around the world to explore innovative and collaborative sustainable solutions for positive tourism development across Canada. Delegates include private business operators, DMOs, government officials, clean tech solutions providers, Indigenous tourism leaders and research and academia. The event is held in the City of Victoria-owned Victoria Conference Centre, which is certified Carbon Neutral and marketed worldwide by DGV.

Across Greater Victoria, at least 12 DGV member businesses are participating in the Biosphere program at this initial stage. As the exclusive destination partner for Biosphere throughout Greater Victoria and its 13 municipalities, Destination Greater Victoria is working with its members to have up to 60 businesses Biosphere committed or certified by the end of 2023.

DGV members are able to participate in the Biosphere program for no cost for one year from the date of linking to DGV. Member participation will support the overarching destination-level certification and also provide members with recognition and promotional benefits for the sustainability work they already do as a business. Members are encouraged to visit the DGV website and reach out to DGV's sustainability team for more Biosphere information, including member-only access to online tools and resources to develop and promote their sustainability commitments and practices.

Worldwide, only 45 destinations and their DMOs have earned Biosphere certification, including, in Canada, DGV for Greater Victoria, the Northern BC Tourism Association, Kootenay Rockies Tourism Association, Cariboo Chilcotin Coast Tourism Association, Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association, and Tourism Vancouver Island.

"Today's celebration marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter on our sustainability journey," said Nursey. "Our team at DGV looks forward to working with and learning from our members as well as our municipal, community and Indigenous partners, to maximize the benefits our local tourism sector generates for all residents of Greater Victoria."

QUOTES

The President of the Responsible Tourism Institute, Mr. Tomás de Azcárate Bang, emphasized "the importance of this certification as a first big step towards the adoption of a more resilient, competitive and sustainable tourism model for the survival of the sector's activity in the destination".

"Tourism is the world's largest industry from an economic point of view and belongs to the industries with the greatest impact on the planet on a global scale. Sustainability and tourism will be one in the future, which calls for decisive action." Hand in hand with the Responsible Tourism Institute, through this certification compliance with the SDGs established by the UN is accredited, managing a comprehensive system of management and recognition of the destination through accompaniment and advice on continuous improvement towards sustainability, implementing promotional strategies and developing awareness-raising media for visitors and locals and, as Mr. De Azcárate says, "it has certainly been a priority for the team of Destination Greater Victoria". - **Responsible Tourism Institute**

"Congratulations to the Destination Greater Victoria team for their role in earning Biosphere certification for Greater Victoria. Biosphere certification recognizes not only our collective commitment and achievements regarding sustainability best practices, but our commitment to making further progress as a region and as an international destination. Greater Victoria looks forward to welcoming all travellers who seek authentic experiences in a destination that supports responsible tourism."

- **Stephen Hammond, Councillor, City of Victoria and Board Member, Destination Greater Victoria**

“Biosphere certification marks a significant achievement for Destination Greater Victoria and our local tourism sector. DGV’s work toward sustainability is in line with community values and Saanich’s municipal priorities and will help ensure the tourism economy delivers shared benefits for residents, small businesses, and visitors alike. It’s inspiring to see these collective efforts receive such important recognition.” - **Susan Brice, Councillor, District of Saanich and Board Member, DGV**

"The landscape of the business events sector is evolving, and conferences and major events are increasingly seeking tangible evidence of a destination's dedication to sustainability. Biosphere certification marks a significant achievement for Destination Greater Victoria, providing international recognition of ongoing efforts to enhance sustainability practices, as well as a strong foundation for a local sustainable supplier network to create and attract more sustainable events in and to the destination." - **Emma C. Parston, Partner, Connect Seven Group**

“We are witnessing sustainability at the forefront for meeting and event planners who are looking for stronger initiatives than typical recycling programs, diving deeper into who our partnerships and certifications are with. Our focus has been on sustainability from day one and we encourage other businesses to do the same. Biosphere certification is a great place to start as a trusted program, making it easier to reach a sustainable benchmark to share with planners, providing valuable verification when choosing a company to do business with.” - **Trina White, General Manager of The Parkside Hotel & Spa and Vice-Chair, DGV Sustainability Committee**

“I want to congratulate our Destination Greater Victoria team, as well as our members and partners, for helping us achieve this important milestone. As an organization committed to corporate, environmental and social responsibility, we’re committed to DGV and Greater Victoria’s tourism sector being leaders in sustainability best practices locally, nationally and internationally.” - **Darlene Hollstein, Board Chair, Destination Greater Victoria**

“Biosphere certification is an important achievement for DGV and Greater Victoria, as well as our hotel association members, who are increasingly working with RTI’s Biosphere program to improve the sustainability and positive impact of their operations. Through Biosphere certification, local hotels are distinguishing themselves to an international audience that shares their values and attracting more travellers and meetings to support Greater Victoria’s vital visitor economy.” - **Bill Lewis, Chair, Hotel Association of Greater Victoria**

“I am so proud of the hard work that our committee has done since forming in 2020, and of Destination Greater Victoria’s dedication to sustainability, despite so many challenges our industry faced during this time. It is incredible to see the values of so many tourism stakeholders in Victoria align and commit to a future in which we have the most positive impact on our home community as possible.”
- **Erin Cassels, Chair, DGV Sustainability Committee and General Manager, Huntingdon Manor and Pendray Inn and Tea House**

About Responsible Tourism Institute and Biosphere

Biosphere certification is a globally recognized accreditation program administered by the European-based Responsible Tourism Institute (RTI), an independent body created with the support of UNESCO in 1995, with the aim of promoting sustainable development actions and program in tourism destinations and companies. Biosphere was the first sustainability certification system to incorporate social and cultural issues, the first system able to recognise and value the sustainable efforts of a destination worldwide, and the first to develop an online certification process. In 2021, Biosphere was recognized as the best sustainability certification tool in the world by the University of Sherbrooke, in collaboration with Tourism Durable Quebec. For more information, visit www.biospheretourism.com

About Destination Greater Victoria (DGV)

Destination Greater Victoria is a Biosphere certified and climate positive accredited destination marketing organization (DMO) that has helped Greater Victoria grow to become one of the world's most popular destinations, with a visitor economy contributing \$2.3billion annually to the local economy. DGV inspires the world to experience Greater Victoria's natural beauty, attractions, accommodations, Indigenous culture, culinary offerings, vibrant arts scene and welcoming hospitality, while providing governments, member businesses, travellers, meeting organizers, sports organizers and other tourism stakeholders with a wide array of services and programs. For more information, please visit our [website](#).

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BACKGROUND: Destination Greater Victoria Sustainability Initiatives

- In 2021, DGV was certified by Ostrom Climate as the first major destination organization in North America to be certified Carbon Neutral, and in 2022, the first to be **Climate Positive**. DGV continues to reduce its carbon footprint and implement sustainability best practices through its collaboration with Synergy Enterprises, a noted corporate sustainability management firm.
- Through its carbon management efforts, Destination Greater Victoria supports **The Great Bear Rainforest Project**, helping to conserve the world's largest remaining intact coastal temperate rainforest.
- Destination Greater Victoria is participating in the **Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDS-Index)**, which focuses largely on meetings and conferences. Visit www.gds.earth for more information.
- DGV is a co-founder and annual co-host of the **IMPACT Sustainability Travel & Tourism Conference**, which annually attracts some 300 delegates from North America and around the world to explore innovative and collaborative sustainable solutions for positive tourism development across Canada.
- DGV is using the proceeds of Northwest Deuce Days to purchase and donate an **electric vehicle charging station** to the City of Victoria.
- DGV actively supports **Wear2start Society**, a volunteer-driven non-profit society and registered charity that helps women overcome barriers to success helping unemployed or newly employed women who need a work wardrobe.
- DGV's sustainability initiatives are led and informed by its **Sustainability Advisory Committee** which has been an integral part of its governance framework for years. The committee provides advice and recommendations to the Board of Directors and Executive about environmental, social and cultural sustainability issues, including developments and best practices for the organization, its members, the destination and the tourism industry.