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GREEN CERTIFICATIONS AND SUSTAINABLE COMPETITIVENESS IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

Miyassarova Dildora Muxiddinovna
Green University

ABSTRACT

This article compares Green Key, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), and the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Hotel Standard at InterContinental Tashkent. A review of official criteria and public property records identifies two existing credentials with distinct scopes. Green Key renewal is the immediate priority, while LEED operations recertification depends on recent building performance data. The GSTC standard can guide a broader review of procurement, employment and cultural practices. The study identifies the records needed for each pathway and proposes a 90-day plan to check readiness and track resource use and corporate bid outcomes.

KEYWORDS

Hotel sustainability, Green Key, LEED, GSTC, certification readiness, Uzbekistan.

Introduction

A hotel can use sustainability certification to demonstrate operating practices to guests and purchasing teams. The value of a credential depends on what was assessed and whether the hotel can substantiate its claims. In a property with restaurants, a spa and a convention centre, the facilities and activities included in an assessment also affect how energy, water and waste figures can be interpreted.

The selected case, InterContinental Tashkent, opened in 2023 in Trilliant Business Park near Amir Temur Square. It has 216 rooms and suites and serves corporate and leisure guests. This study asks which standards apply to the property, how far public evidence supports readiness, and which actions could strengthen its environmental performance and position in corporate and meetings markets. [1, 2]

Green Key and hotel operations



Figure 1. Trilliant Business Park entrance (left), at the complex that houses InterContinental Tashkent, and nearby Amir Temur Square (right). Cropped photographs by Toooza Tv (Pexels) and Tim Adams (CC BY 4.0). [1, 3, 4]

Green Key is a hospitality certification programme developed by the Foundation for Environmental Education. Its 2026–2031 hotel criteria cover management practices and resource use, with document review and an on-site audit under the updated process. The property reports a certificate valid through 7 August 2027. [5, 6, 7]

The Green Key criteria in effect since 1 October 2026 require applicants to meet all applicable imperative criteria. The programme also sets a share of guideline criteria for each renewal stage and provides transition rules for existing holders. The hotel's events and dining operations make the scope check important. The new rules include internally managed accommodation, food and beverage, and conference facilities. The applicable requirements can also extend to externally managed dining that forms part of the core offer, such as breakfast. [5, 8]

InterContinental Tashkent describes its use of IHG Green Engage and reports sending suitable leftovers from its staff canteen to farms for animal feed. These practices give auditors identifiable records to request. The hotel could relate the canteen activity to signed collection records and measured weights, and use the energy and water records from Green Engage to prepare evidence for Green Key criteria 4.1 and 3.1. Those criteria call for monthly energy records by source and monthly total water use. Criterion 1.21 also calls for annual staff training. [5, 9]

LEED and building performance

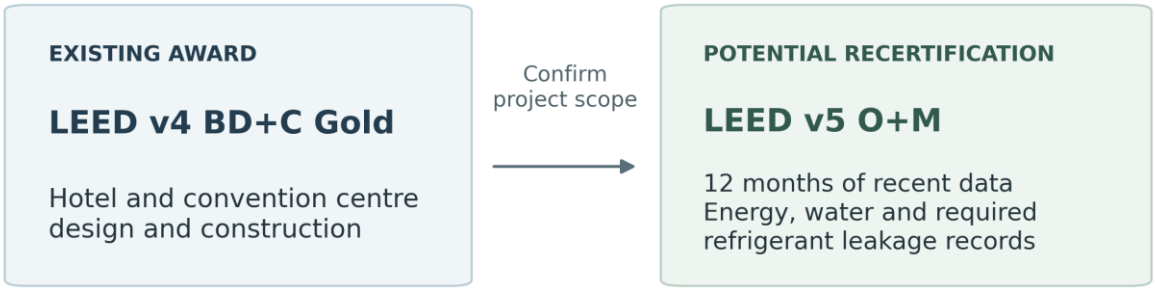


Figure 2. The hotel's existing LEED design-and-construction award and the building operations records needed for a potential LEED v5 O+M recertification. [10, 11]

The project consultant, Altensis, identifies the existing award as LEED v4 Building Design and Construction (BD+C), New Construction, at Gold level for the hotel and convention-centre project. The consultant describes efficient plumbing fixtures, green roofs and electric vehicle charging. These features are part of the design record. The hotel would need recent utility and equipment records to determine how the site performs in operation. [7, 10]

Altensis reports water savings of more than 35% for the specified fixtures against a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reference. This assessment treats the figure as a design comparison. An operating baseline would also capture water used by laundry, kitchens, the spa and events. Engineering could reconcile invoices with meter readings and interpret changes alongside guest-nights and event attendance. [10]

The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) offers LEED v5 Operations and Maintenance (O+M) recertification for occupied properties with prior BD+C certification. Its guidance calls for at least 12 months of recent energy, water and required refrigerant leakage data. The first task at Trilliant is to compare the original certified boundary with current operations and identify any meters or plant shared

with other uses. The applicable project boundary and data would need to satisfy the programme requirements before submission. [11, 12]

GSTC and sustainable tourism practices



Figure 3. Examples of records to assemble for the four areas of the GSTC Hotel Standard v4.0. These are proposed audit records for the hotel. [13]

The GSTC Hotel Standard version 4.0, published in December 2025, covers sustainability management, local social and economic benefits, cultural heritage and environmental impacts. Relevant examples for the Tashkent property include the purchasing policy (A13), fair access to local employment (B2), presentation of local culture (C3), and measurement of solid waste (D6). The standard gives the hotel a way to examine how procurement, recruitment and guest experiences support the destination. [13]

IHG describes one hotel restaurant's concept as drawing on Central Asian culture and produce. The hotel also reports participating in tree planting and local clean-ups. To assess the corresponding criteria, it would need stronger evidence, including dated supplier invoices, records of employee recruitment and progression, and agreements with local artisans or other partners where relevant. Public descriptions of activities help identify what could be reviewed during an audit. [1, 9, 13]

GSTC accredits certification bodies, which can audit a property against the GSTC standard or an applicable GSTC-recognized standard. Recognition concerns a standard's equivalence to GSTC requirements. A property-level claim depends on evidence of the audit and the certificate's scope. The review used version 4.0 as its benchmark. The hotel would need to confirm the version and timetable with a certification body during the transition from version 3.0. [14, 15, 16]

Research methodology

This single-property case study used public records available on 15 November 2026. Sources included official scheme criteria, the hotel's website and venue listing, the design consultant's case record, and the GSTC directory. The review recorded each published credential's scope and any available dates. It selected criteria relevant to the property's accommodation, meetings and dining activities. [7, 10, 17, 18]

Table 1 compares what each pathway assesses and the records required for selected criteria. Table 2 applies that comparison to the hotel. Published credentials and publicly described practices provide different levels of evidence. The review used both to identify the next documents to examine and to

make qualitative readiness judgments. A conformity decision would require internal records and an on-site audit.

Research results

The standards overlap in energy and water measurement. Their purposes differ in ways that affect both the work and the result. Green Key examines how the hospitality establishment operates. LEED v5 O+M evaluates the defined building project in use. The GSTC Hotel Standard also examines the hotel's relationships with workers, suppliers and the local community. Table 1 summarizes the distinctions.

Table 1. Comparison of sustainability standards relevant to the hotel

Standard	Assessment scope	Examples of evidence	Potential relevance
Green Key 2026–2031	Hospitality operations and in-scope services.	Monthly utility records, staff training and audit records. [5]	Maintain a credential that guests and event planners can verify.
LEED v5 O+M	Operational performance of a defined building project.	Energy and water data and refrigerant records for recertification. [11]	Assess the operation of the hotel and convention-centre project.
GSTC Hotel Standard v4.0	Management, community, heritage and environmental impacts.	Policies, purchase records, workforce data and waste logs. [13]	Assess environmental performance and the hotel's contribution to the destination.

Green Key has the clearest near-term task because the hotel has a reported expiry date. The LEED award supports screening the recertification route, subject to the project boundary and performance records. The GSTC directory and public property records reviewed leave a separate property-level GSTC credential unverified. Table 2 identifies what would change each readiness judgment. [7, 11, 18]

Table 2. Certification readiness at InterContinental Tashkent

Pathway	Current public evidence	Readiness judgment	Evidence to review next
Green Key renewal	Reported certificate valid through 7 August 2027. [7, 17]	Renewal preparation is the priority.	Previous audit findings, confirmed scope, training records and two full calendar years of monthly energy and water records, as applicable. [5, 8]
LEED O+M recertification	LEED v4 BD+C Gold for the hotel and convention centre. [10]	Suitable for a preliminary screen.	Original scorecard, boundary plan, meter allocation and the required 12-month performance records. [11, 12]
GSTC-related certification	Green Engage and selected community activities reported. [9]	Assess gaps against v4.0 before applying.	Approved policy, local supplier and workforce records, cultural partnerships and a property-level waste baseline. [13, 14]

Across the three pathways, the most reusable evidence would be a meter and service register, consistent utility records, and logs that connect activities to their results. The hotel should reconcile shared readings with the scope of each application. A source record can serve several assessments if the applicable period, measurement boundary and evidence requirements are documented. [8, 12, 13]

Discussion

Certification may help a hotel qualify for corporate tenders when buyers ask for verifiable sustainability credentials. Cvent displays the property's Green Key certification with its expiry date, making it visible to meeting planners. The demand effect is uncertain. A study of 251 certified hotels in Florida found an advantage in some performance indicators for early adopters, while a Cornell analysis of online bookings found little average change in booking revenue. These studies provide a reason to measure outcomes in Tashkent by market segment and over time. [17, 19, 20]

Resource efficiency and market access should be tracked independently. Engineering can compare monthly energy use per square metre and report total energy alongside occupancy and weather. Operations can record litres of water per guest-night and kilograms of event food waste per cover. Sales can track the share of eligible corporate and event bids won where the buyer requests a sustainability credential. Comparing like seasons and recording changes in rates and demand helps interpret changes in bookings.

Uzbekistan's Cabinet Resolution No. 312 provides for one-time reimbursement of 50% of eligible certification costs per qualifying hotel. Its list includes Green Key International and USGBC. The hotel's finance team should check which proposed expenses qualify and whether the property has already used the reimbursement before counting it in a business case. [21, 22]

Recommended next steps

In the first 30 days, the general manager should assign a lead for Green Key renewal, confirm the renewal timetable with the programme contact and obtain the certificate, scope and previous audit record. Engineering and the property owner should reconcile the LEED boundary plan, meter register and responsibility for shared systems.

In days 31–60, engineering should reconcile utility bills, monthly readings and refrigerant logs. The food and beverage team should log event food waste weights and meals served. Procurement and human resources should assemble supplier, workforce and training records, and housekeeping should collect its inspection records for the Green Key renewal file.

In days 61–90, management should conduct a mock Green Key audit, assign corrective actions and set submission dates. It should decide whether to start LEED v5 O+M recertification after checking the boundary and required data. For the GSTC pathway, management can obtain a quote from an accredited certification body and weigh fees and staff time against the value of tenders that ask for this credential. [6, 11, 14]

Conclusions

InterContinental Tashkent has a documented basis for Green Key renewal preparation and for assessing a LEED operational recertification. The GSTC Hotel Standard is a useful benchmark for extending the assessment to local procurement, employment and culture. The first priority is to assemble the renewal evidence and align the records for the hotel and convention centre with their respective assessment

boundaries. Regular measurement can then show whether resource performance and access to corporate buyers improve.

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