

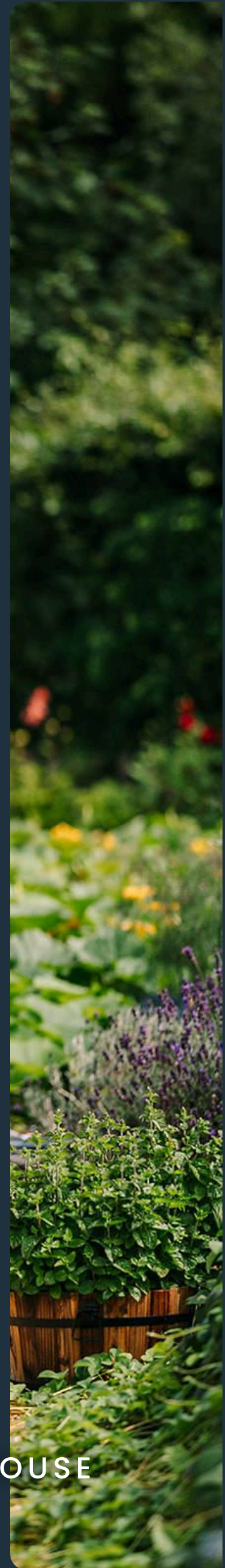


Sustainable Hospitality Certification Matrix

Comparing assessment criteria and audit rigour across leading certifications. For travellers, event planners and corporate buyers.



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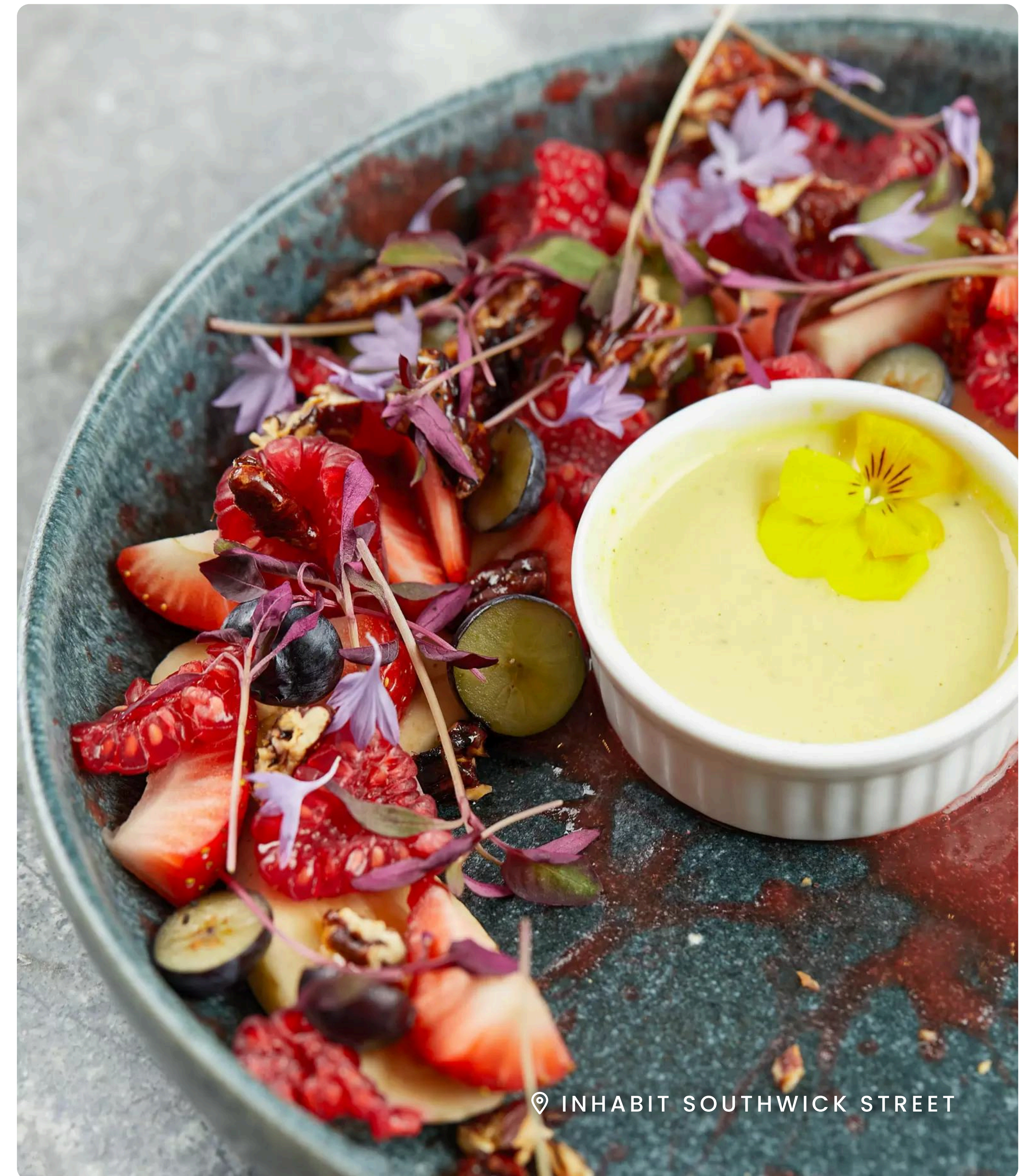


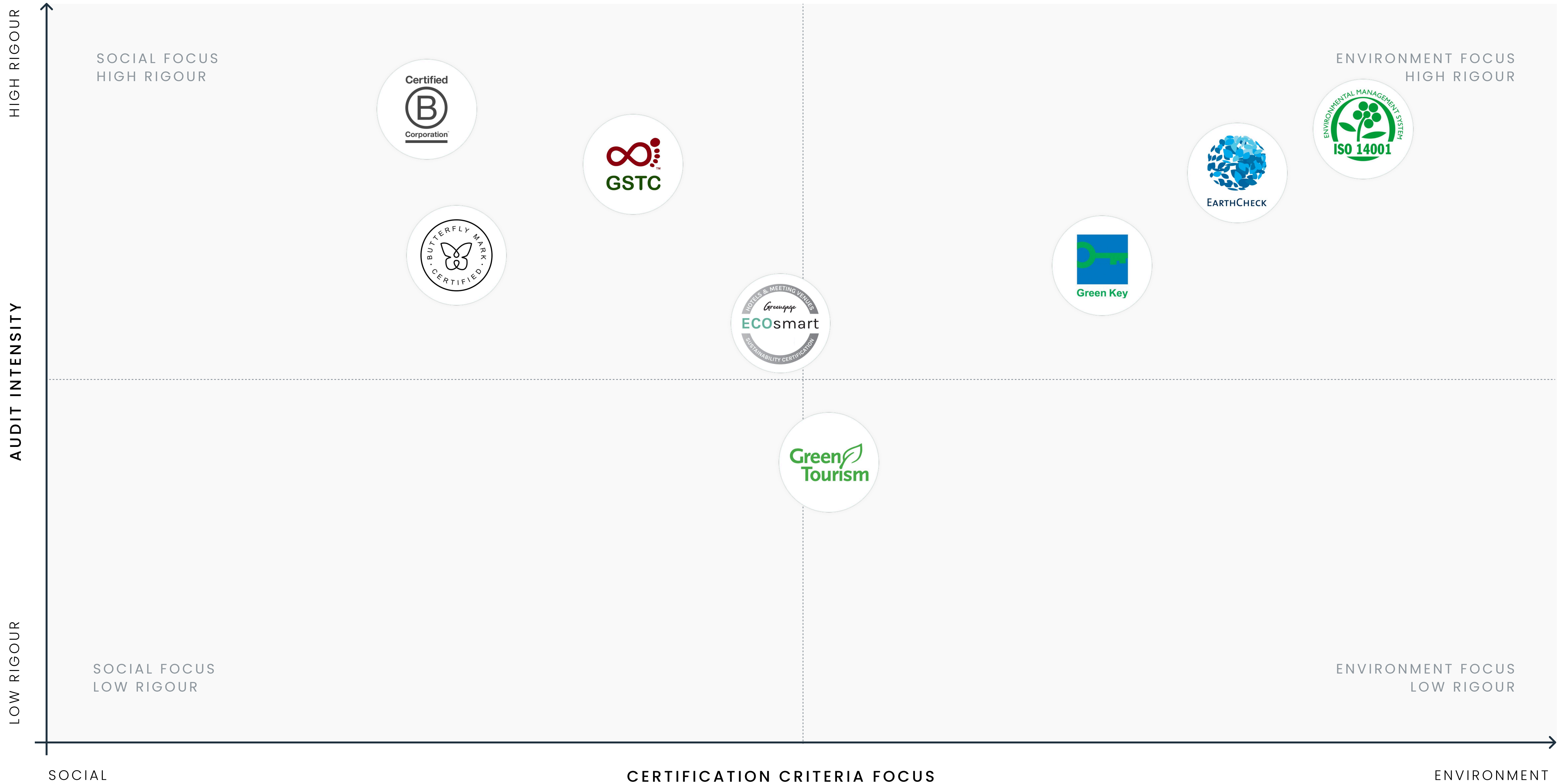
Introduction

Sustainability certifications are everywhere in hospitality right now – and that's a good thing. But for anyone trying to make genuinely informed decisions about where to stay, meet, or direct spend, the landscape can feel more confusing than clarifying. Is a Green Key hotel more sustainable than an EarthCheck one? Does ISO certification mean the same thing as B Corp? And what does any of it actually mean for your organisation's ESG commitments?

At GSI, we believe that understanding the difference between certifications is just as important as recognising that they exist. Not all standards are built the same. Some prioritise rigorous third-party auditing; others are more self-assessed. Some focus almost entirely on environmental performance; others give equal weight to social impact, governance, and community. Knowing which is which helps you ask better questions, make smarter choices, and avoid the greenwashing trap.

We've mapped seven of the most widely recognised sustainability certifications in hospitality across two dimensions that matter most to procurement teams and sustainability leads: the balance between social and environmental criteria, and the intensity of the auditing process.

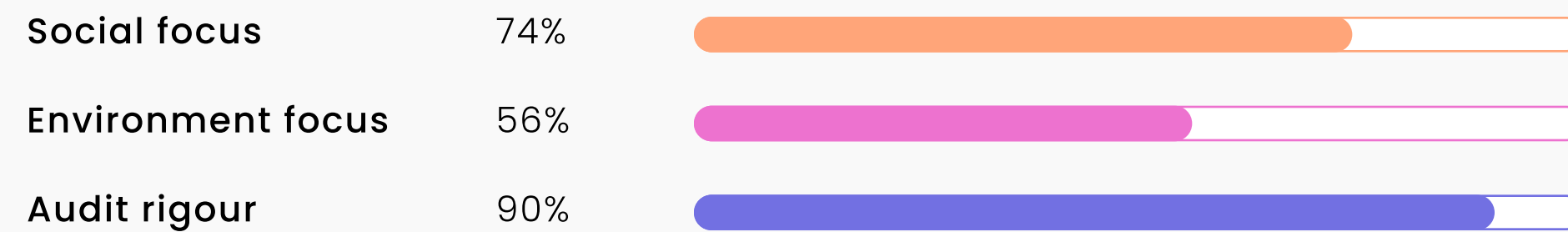




B Corp

Business as a force for good

- ✓ Travellers
- ✓ Corporate buyers
- ✓ Event planners



Scope	Whole company (not individual properties)
Audit type	Accredited third-party (ISO 17021-1)
Frequency	3-year cycle; escalating requirements at Year 0, 3 and 5
Pass threshold	Mandatory minimums across 7 impact topics

B Corp assesses the entire organisation across seven impact topics: Purpose & Stakeholder Governance, Climate Action, Fair Work, Human Rights, JEDI, Environmental Stewardship & Circularity, and Government Affairs & Collective Action. Companies must meet a baseline in every area.

Third-party audits are mandated under ISO 17021-1 and companies must amend their articles of association. The newest V2.1 standards (2025) strengthen human rights and living wage requirements.

Best matched for

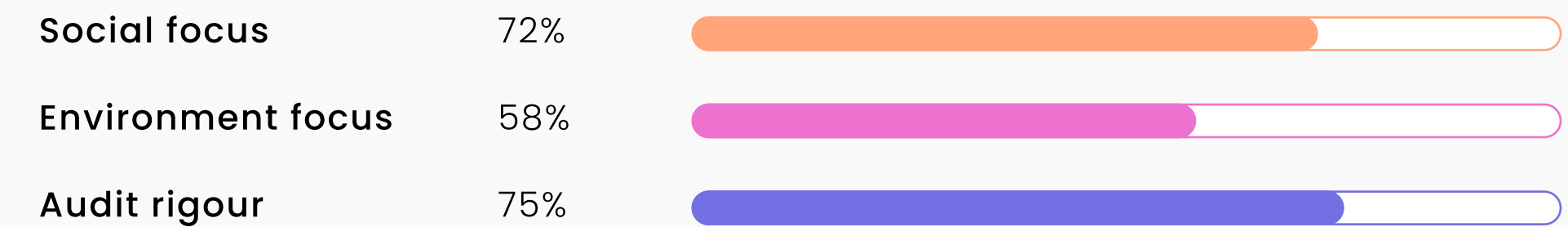
- Corporate buyers seeking whole-business ESG integrity.
- Travellers choosing values-led hotels.

Watch out for

- Does not certify individual properties
- 12-18 month process
- Renewal every 3-5 years

PL Butterfly Mark

The luxury industry's leading ESG+ trust mark



Scope	Whole company – luxury brands, retailers and suppliers
Audit type	BSI-verified online assessment; evidence review
Frequency	Every 2 years – mandatory full reassessment
Pass threshold	50%+ in all pillars: Environmental, Social, Governance, Innovation

The Butterfly Mark is Positive Luxury's proprietary ESG+ certification, designed exclusively for the luxury industry. Its four-pillar framework is built on UN SDGs and the UN Global Compact, with assessment criteria developed in consultation with BSI, UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge Sustainability Institute, and MIT. A Digital Butterfly Passport gives consumers transparent access to a brand's performance scores. Of the four pillars, Social and Governance criteria together carry greater weight than Environmental alone, reflecting the luxury industry's particular social and governance material risks.

Best matched for

- Luxury hotel groups, travel brands
- Premium buyers looking for luxury services

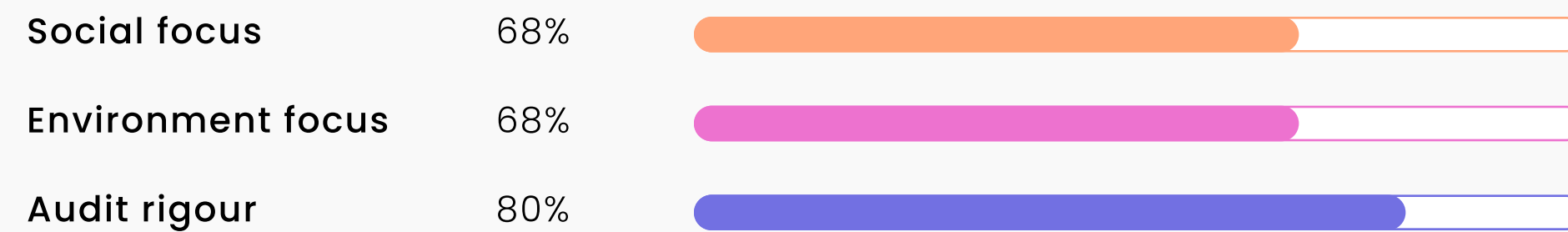
Watch out for

- Not hospitality-specific
- Assessment is primarily online
- Less recognised in mainstream hospitality procurement

GSTC

Global baseline standard & accreditor

- ✓ Travellers
- ✓ Corporate buyers
- ✓ Event planners



Scope	Accredits certifiers; direct certification via partners
Audit type	Third-party on-site via GSTC-Accredited body
Frequency	Annual surveillance; 3-year recertification
Pass threshold	Criteria-based across 4 pillars

The GSTC criteria are organised across four genuinely equal pillars: sustainable management, socioeconomic impacts, cultural heritage, and environmental responsibility. Human rights, child protection, and labour standards are explicit criteria. GSTC does not directly certify hotels – it accredits certification bodies and issues direct certification through approved partners. Endorsed by UNEP and UNWTO.

Best matched for

Corporate travel programmes needing internationally recognised baseline assurance. Event planners whose RFPs reference GSTC.

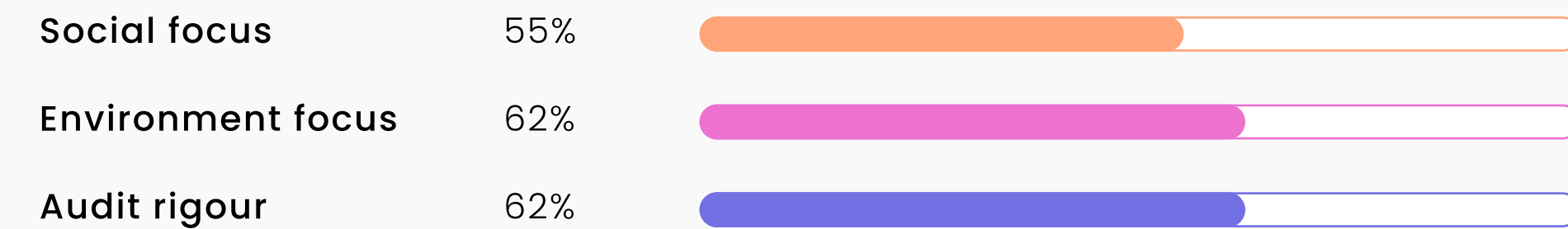
Watch out for

Not a consumer-facing label. Direct GSTC certification is primarily a procurement tool.

Greengage (ECOsmart)

UK meetings & events focused

- ✓ Travellers
- ✓ Corporate buyers
- ✓ Event planners



Scope	Individual hotel or meeting venue
Audit type	Independent on-site audit; live platform reassessment
Frequency	Continuous reassessment; annual reviews
Pass threshold	Bronze > Silver > Gold > Platinum

ECOsmart by Greengage is the dominant UK certification for meetings and events venues. Its criteria span 5 SDG-aligned categories covering environmental and social/operational sustainability. A live API-connected platform continuously reassesses venues – badges are dated, avoiding staleness. Well-designed for corporate RFPs and procurement teams.

Best matched for

- Corporate travel buyers and event planners in the UK.
- Procurement teams building RFP sustainability shortlists

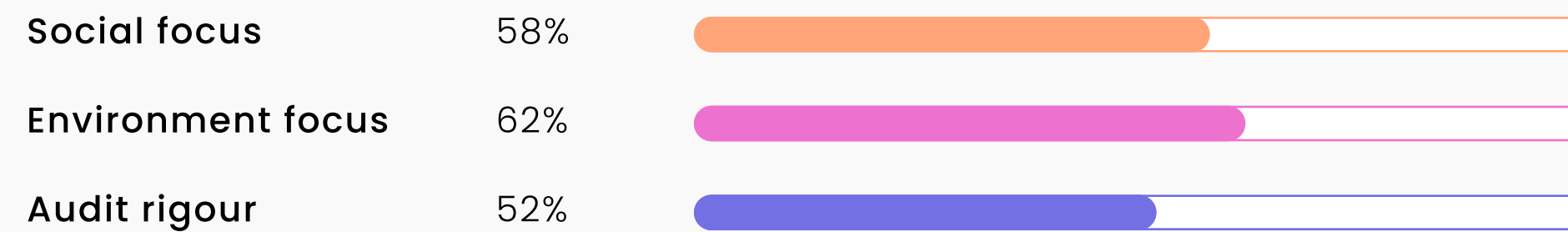
Watch out for

- UK-centric.
- Not globally recognised at the level of EarthCheck or GSTC.

Green Tourism

Accessible UK sustainability benchmark

- ✓ Travellers
- ✓ Corporate buyers
- ✓ Event planners



Scope	Individual property (wide range of business types)
Audit type	Remote evidence review + 2-yearly assessed visits
Frequency	Annual membership; on-site visit every 2 years
Pass threshold	Bronze (40%+) Silver (65%+) Gold (80%+)

One of the longest-running UK hospitality sustainability programmes (30+ years), assessing properties against 15 sustainability goals spanning environmental, social, and economic criteria. Accessible for small independents. A forthcoming UKAS- accredited standard (September 2026, audited by Control Union) will significantly raise rigour.

Best matched for

- Independent UK properties.
- Leisure travellers and event bookers seeking vetted UK properties.

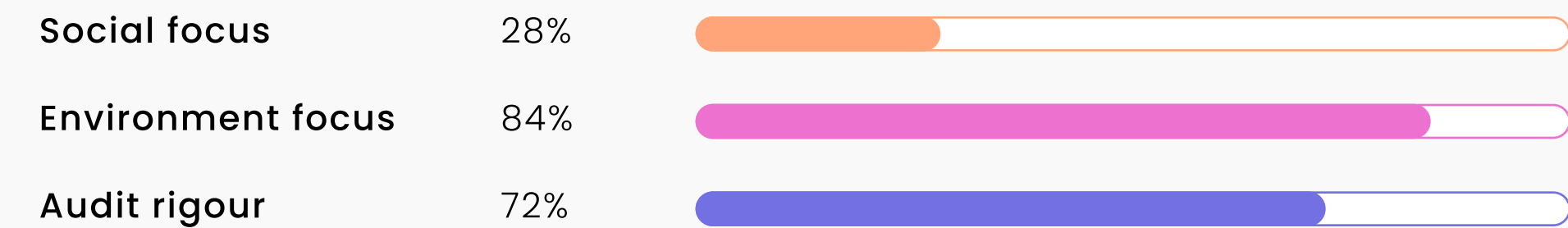
Watch out for

- UK-focused.
- Current third-party audit rigour lighter than EarthCheck or B Corp.
- UKAS version launching 2026.

Green Key

Global eco-label for hospitality

- ✓ Travellers
- ✓ Corporate buyers
- ✓ Event planners



Scope	Individual property (hotels, restaurants, campsites)
Audit type	Mandatory on-site audit at first cert; annual doc review
Frequency	Annual renewal; periodic re-audit
Pass threshold	100+ criteria – most are mandatory

Managed by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), Green Key is one of the largest global eco-labels with 7,500+ certified properties in 80+ countries. Its 100+ criteria span 13 categories – energy, water, waste, chemicals, biodiversity, and more. Social criteria are limited to staff training and guest sustainability education.

Best matched for

- Eco-conscious leisure travellers wanting a simple, globally recognised eco-label.
- Hotels seeking broad international recognition.

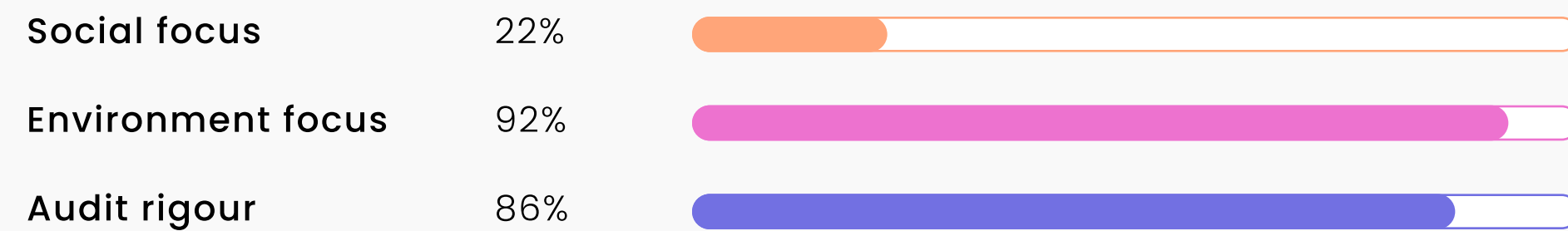
Watch out for

- Very limited social criteria.
- Less suited to demonstrating labour standards or community impact.

EarthCheck

Science-based operational sustainability

- ✓ Travellers
- ✓ Corporate buyers
- ✓ Event planners



Scope	Individual property or destination
Audit type	Mandatory independent on-site audit + annual benchmarking
Frequency	Annual benchmarking; audit at each tier upgrade
Pass threshold	Bronze > Silver > Gold > Platinum tiers

Developed with the Australian Government and grounded in Agenda 21, EarthCheck is one of the most scientifically rigorous hospitality-specific certifications globally. Properties must complete quantitative benchmarking before achieving certification. Aligned to SDGs, EU Energy Directive, and GSTC criteria. Tiered progression from Bronze to Platinum.

Best matched for

- Corporates and event planners requiring measurable, science-backed environmental data.
- Eco-conscious travellers.

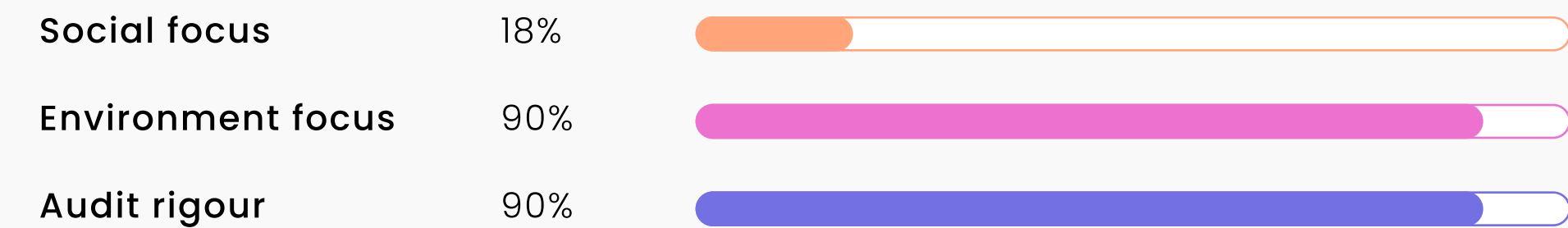
Watch out for

- Primary emphasis is environmental – social criteria are limited.
- Cost and complexity can be high for smaller properties.

ISO 14001 / 21401

Systems-based management standard

- ✓ Travellers
- ✓ Corporate buyers
- ✓ Event planners



Scope	Organisation (ISO 14001) or property (ISO 21401)
Audit type	Accredited certification body; two-stage audit; annual surveillance
Frequency	Annual surveillance; 3-year recertification
Pass threshold	Conformance-based – all clauses must be met

ISO 14001 is the world's most widely adopted Environmental Management System standard, requiring systematic identification of environmental impacts and continuous improvement – verified by an accredited third-party body annually. ISO 21401 (2018) is the hospitality-specific standard adding socio-cultural dimensions but remaining predominantly process and environmentally focused.

Best matched for

- Corporate buyers requiring internationally recognised, legally defensible environmental management evidence.
- Large hotel groups.

Watch out for

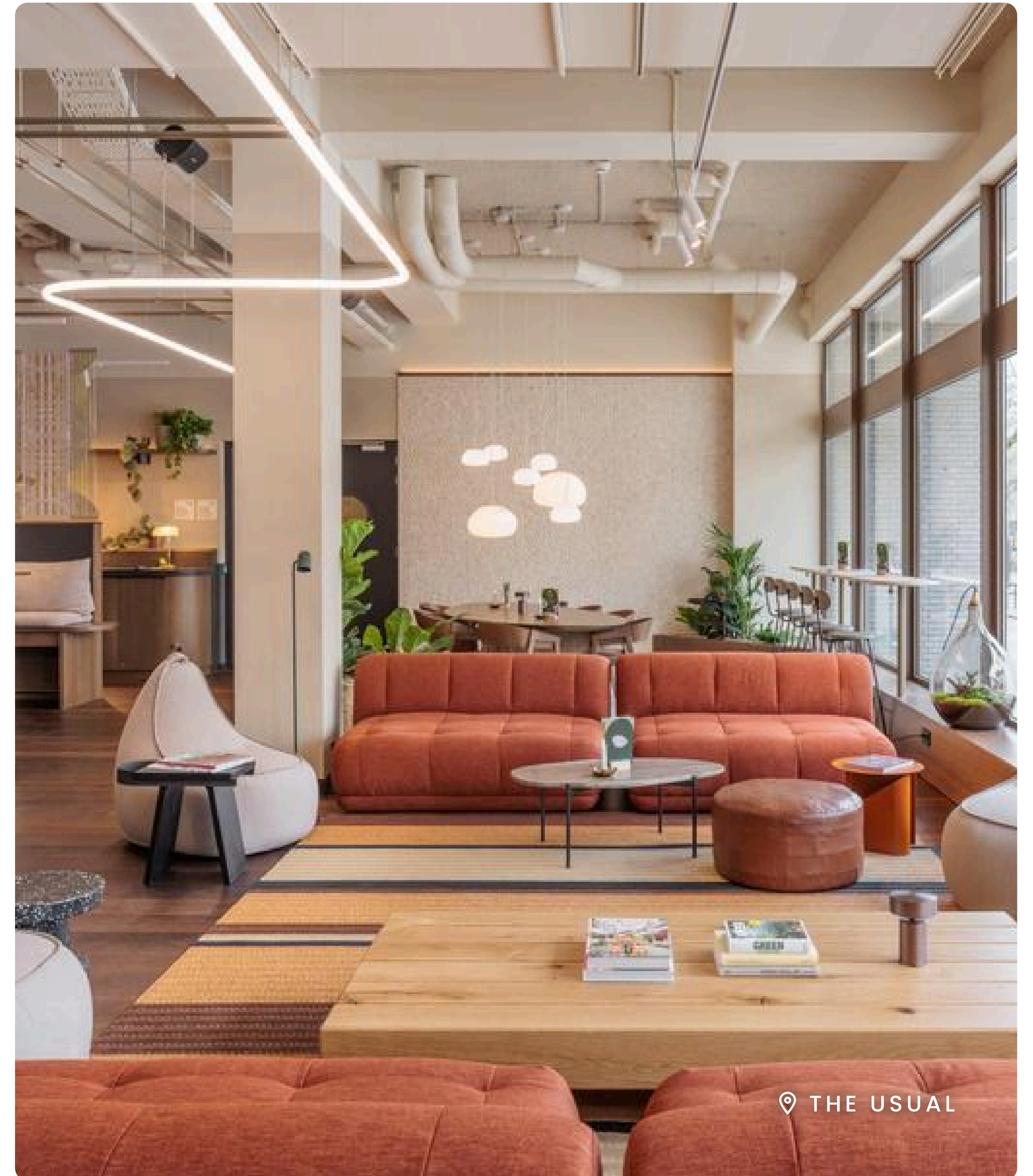
- Process-focused – does not mandate specific outcomes, only that systems exist.
- Very limited social coverage.

Conclusion

No single certification is the definitive answer – and that's not a flaw in the system, it's a reflection of the fact that sustainability itself is multidimensional. A corporate travel programme focused on Scope 3 emissions reporting will have different needs to an event planner trying to demonstrate community impact, or a procurement lead building a values-aligned hotel programme from scratch.

What the matrix makes clear is that the most meaningful question isn't 'is this property certified?' but 'certified to what standard, assessed by whom, and does that standard align with what we actually care about?'

At GSI, we help organisations navigate exactly these decisions – translating the complexity of sustainability frameworks into practical, actionable procurement strategy. If you'd like to talk through what the right certification criteria look like for your travel or events programme, we'd love to start that conversation.



We're looking forward
to working *with you*



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