WORKING MATERIAL 4.11 · CHAPTER 4 — THE CERTIFIER'S LENS · SETTING: BUMTHANG, BHUTAN

Group Certification for Small Properties

Source: Francesco Dore, The Helm and the Lens, Volume 7b — GSTC Hotel Standard v4.0, subchapter 4.11 (book page 325)

GUIDING QUESTION

A guesthouse with six rooms cannot easily carry the cost of a certification audit on its own, and the Accreditation Manual allows small businesses to seek certification together. But a group is not a discount: it is a second management system, built above the members, that the certification body audits as hard as it audits any hotel. What does a family guesthouse sign up for when it joins one?

WHO THE RULES BIND

The GSTC Accreditation Manual (AM-I v4.1) cited on this sheet binds certification bodies, not hotels. Where a row refers to it, it describes what the certifier must do and what the hotel can check; it is not a requirement of the GSTC Hotel Standard.

1 · Verification Pact: market claims against the standard

Copied from the book. The last column is for your property: what holds here, and how you know it.

What is claimed	Binding?	What actually holds	In our property
Each member of a group receives its own certificate	No	Clause 15.16: one certificate lists the name and address of all members	
If one guesthouse fails, only that guesthouse loses certification	Only partially true	The group may sanction a member under its rules, but clause 15.18 allows the whole certificate to be suspended or withdrawn	
The certification body visits every member every year	No	At least the square root of the members each year, with all members covered within the three-year cycle	
The person who helped a member prepare can audit it internally	No	Annex B7.4: internal auditors must not audit members they advised or their own work	
A group can combine guesthouses in neighbouring countries	No	Clause 15.3.2 requires members in the same country using the same language	
Group members need not meet every applicable criterion	No	Each member delivers its services to the reference standard; the group shares the system, not an exemption	
The certification body can also act as group manager	No	Clause 15.3.6 excludes the certification body from that role	

2 · Common mistakes — a self-check

Tick each mistake you recognise in your own property, and note where it shows.

☐ Expecting each member of the group to receive a certificate of its own.

☐ Letting the person who advised a member conduct that member's internal audit.

☐ Running a group on goodwill alone, without written rules on approval, sanctions and appeals.

☐ Assuming the certification body will visit every member every year, or that unvisited members are unexamined.

☐ Treating group membership as an exemption from the Hotel Standard rather than a shared way of meeting it.

☐ Scheduling all internal audits in the same predictable week.

☐ Forgetting to tell the certification body that a member has closed or a new one has joined.

☐ Proposing a group that spans two countries or two working languages.

3 · A Checklist for a Guesthouse Joining a Group

The book's checklist, with a column for your own answer.

Question	Why it matters	Our answer
Is the group manager someone other than the certification body?	Clause 15.3.6 excludes the certification body from the role	
Who will audit my guesthouse internally, and did that person advise me?	Annex B7.4 forbids auditing a member one has advised	
Have I signed a contract that sets out inspections, reporting and suspension?	Annex B4.1 requires it, in the members' local language	
Does the group have written rules on sanctions and appeals?	Annex B1.3 and B7.7 require them; without them nobody can be corrected	
Am I keeping my own records against the Hotel Standard indicators?	The group shares a system; each member still meets the standard	
Is the member list current, including closures and new members?	Clause 15.17 requires it; new members are inspected before inclusion	

4 · What would show this is working

Questions drawn from the subchapter's reading of the standard and its practical application. Indicator references point to the GSTC Hotel Standard v4.0; where the evidence lives is this book's practice, not a requirement of the standard.

Question	Where the evidence lives	Seen?
Does each member hold a management system proportional to its size, with a designated person (A1, A7 guidelines)?	Member files	☐
Are written group rules in place for approval, records, sanctions, appeals and document control?	Group procedures (Annex B1.3: requirements of the group scheme)	☐
Has every member signed a contract in the local language, with inspection and suspension clauses?	Signed member contracts	☐
Is no member audited by the person who advised it?	Internal audit allocation and competence records	☐

Question	Where the evidence lives	Seen?
Are internal audits risk-ranked, on unpredictable dates, and is the member list current?	Audit schedule; member list with status and last audit date	☐

> *What this sheet is not: the GSTC Hotel Standard does not prescribe this form. It is a working aid drawn from the book; the standard's criteria, indicators and guidelines govern the real case. Independent material; not affiliated with or endorsed by the GSTC. The standard's own text at www.gstc.org prevails.*