



Preparing for an Evaluation

Prior to an evaluation meeting taking place, businesses will receive a preparation form to complete that captures key information that allows our Qualmark Specialists to prepare for the meeting and understand the business in more detail. The answers provided help outline examples and evidence of how the business performs across the 5 pillars and 23 standards in its day-to-day operations. See our [Preparation Checklist](#) for more detail on what's required.

Once the preparation form is completed and received back by one of our Qualmark Specialists they will contact the business and schedule an evaluation date and look to answer any questions.

During an Evaluation

During the evaluation, the Qualmark Specialist will have an open discussion with the business and collate all evidence provided, taking on any examples and evidence that demonstrate how the business activity aligns across the five pillars and 23 standards. The specialist will dig deeper into answers provided to gain a better understanding of how the business is benchmarking within these areas, across the grading below.

Expected Standards

The minimum requirements have been met to an acceptable level.

Opportunities for improvement of the essential functions and systems are likely.

Good Business Practices

Excellent practices are in place.

Industry norms and expectations are often exceeded.

Focus on sustainability.

Best Practice

A best-in-class sustainable tourism business.

Leads by example with exceptional service and sustainability.

Has systems for continuous improvement.

Following an Evaluation

The business will be scored by the specialist following the evaluation, based on current business practices, and will be provided with a report that acknowledges how the business is performing against the standards. This report also includes opportunities for the business to improve against certain standards in the future.

Qualmark looks to recognise businesses that are delivering a holistically sustainable experience and will ensure that basic requirements for each of the standards are met before the business receives a Bronze, Silver or Gold Sustainable Tourism Business Accreditation that reflects its performance, highlighting the standards achieved.

We also recognise that each business is unique in size, capability and resources and our Qualmark Specialists conduct each evaluation using sub-criteria, that sit behind the 23 standards, with this in mind.

The Sustainable Tourism Business Standards

Qualmark has 23 Sustainable Tourism Business standards under five pillars, which can seem overwhelming, but it shouldn't be. We don't expect all members to have a marketing or HR department and, in many cases, industry certifications will be enough to provide evidence against the standards. It's also created to be relevant for all types and size of business.

The 5 Pillars of the STB are Business Systems, Health and Safety, Environment, People and Community & Culture. Under these sit 23 standards, comprised of a number of sub-criteria, and through the evaluation process our Qualmark Specialist will work through evidence provided and discussed to ascertain how the business is performing against these. In this document there are guidelines on what information to provide to a specialist when being evaluated and how best to prepare.

BUSINESS SYSTEMS	HEALTH & SAFETY	ENVIRONMENT	PEOPLE	COMMUNITY & CULTURE
Business Plan	Leadership	Managing Environmental Impact	Caring for Employees	Great Hospitality (Manaakitanga)
Policies & Procedures	Risk Identification & Mitigation	Waste Management & Pollution	Staff Training	Customer Values & Education
Marketing & Branding	Worker Engagement, Participation & Training	Restoring Nature	Staff Acknowledgement & Satisfaction	Hosting
Channel Strategies & Execution	Worker Wellness & Wellbeing			Local Knowledge & Products
Business Improvement Processes	Emergency Management Procedures			Community Support
Risk Management & Mitigation	Investigating & Improving			

Sector Specific Obligations

Whether the business is a hotel, backpacker, kayak, bike or bus operator, industry-specific standards will be relevant to the sector it operates in. It is important for businesses to demonstrate appropriate actions and provide evidence of compliance with any sector-specific obligations that may apply to them, ensuring a smooth and valuable evaluation process.

Accommodation Star Rating

In today's increasingly diverse accommodation market, star ratings continue to serve as a trusted guide for travellers and trade partners when making booking decisions. A star rating accurately reflects a property's market position, helping to set and meet visitor expectations while ensuring a consistent level of quality throughout their stay in New Zealand. It also provides a valuable benchmarking tool for accommodation providers, supporting high standards of quality and service across the sector.

Properties displaying the Qualmark Accommodation Star Rating are independently reviewed by a trained Qualmark Specialist, ensuring credibility and consistency. The star symbols are a licensed trademark and may only be used by properties that have been officially evaluated by Qualmark New Zealand Ltd. Star gradings are available across ten accommodation categories: Hotel, Boutique, Lodge, Motel, Villa, Apartment, Bed and Breakfast, Backpacker/Hostel, Holiday Home, and Holiday Park.

A property's Qualmark Accommodation Star Rating is determined through an independent evaluation against five key areas: Exterior, Public Areas, Guest Bedrooms, Guest Bathrooms, and Services. Each property is assessed against five standards, ranging from 'Basic Standards' through to 'Best Practice'. The overall score achieved determines the final star rating.

Preparation Checklist

The below tables provide a guide for the types of evidence and documentation that our Qualmark Specialists will require during the evaluation process. There may be things that are unique to the business that are not listed here that could also be provided as evidence.

To meet **basic entry requirements** for membership, there are certain processes and procedures that a business must have in place, prior to an evaluation taking place, to meet 'expected' levels of Qualmarks STB standards and are required as evidence as part of your preparation. These are;

Safety Management Plan (including Emergency Management Procedure)

Risk Register (in use) and clear process for reporting and recording incidents/accidents/near misses

First Aid Certificates Level 1 for staff (relevant for size of business)
and up-to-date staff induction and training records for Health & Safety

Employment Law Standards met (employment/contractor contracts etc.)

Compliance Documentation - These are any requirements for the business to operate.
Examples would be, but not limited to; Adventure Activity Operator Registration / Third Party H&S Audits / Maritime Audits / Passenger Service Licence / COFs / Building Warrant of Fitness / Council Concessions

Website - or an online booking function i.e., Google listing/Facebook/C-trip/WeChat

Feedback Mechanisms - Customer surveys/complaint handling procedures used for continuous improvement

Public Liability Insurance – Minimum of \$1 million NZD

In addition to the above requirements, during an evaluation our specialist will also require the business to cover off and/or have evidence of the below – noting some points are not applicable for Sole Traders;

Business Systems

Run through a business plan, including how the business identifies risks and mitigates them

Reference relevant operation manuals and standard operating procedures that are in place

Evidence of a sales and marketing plan and collateral

Review reservation procedures, processes and cancellation policies

Health & Safety

Evidence of worker induction/training and engagement

Staff wellness/wellbeing plans

Environment

Review resource use and waste management data, and plans

Look at the business's environmental initiatives and sustainability plans

Discuss any procurement policy in place

People

Check evidence of employment agreements and/or contractor contracts

Training schedules

Staff satisfaction surveys and initiatives for recognition

Community & Culture

Service standards in place

How the business provides visitor information promoting respectful, responsible engagement

How does the business share its story and/or local knowledge

Approach to accessibility for guests with different ability needs

Evidence of engaging and supporting the local community

The 5 Pillars and Sustainable Tourism Business Standards

Business Systems Pillar

Definition: This pillar checks the management systems and processes the business has implemented to plan, deliver, and maintain a professional tourism experience for its guests.

Standard	Expected	Good	Best practice
Business plan	The business is able to clearly articulate its business model and direction. For larger businesses, a written business plan should be in place.	The business owner (or written business plan) is able to describe each business area (including finance, marketing and operations, including sustainability) to an outsider to understand the business trajectory in detail.	The business owner reviews their business progress (against the business plan) regularly against their targets and has action plans in place to progress the business.
Policies & procedures	The business has documented procedures for key staff (operations, admin).	Documented procedures provide sufficient detail for new staff to be inducted.	Documentation is comprehensive to allow for staff to work unsupervised or provides direction for where to go for further help / information / support. Staff sign off on comprehension of processes.
Marketing & branding	The marketing plan covers the initiatives for each market served and demonstrates a basic understanding of the business's customer base.	The business has a comprehensive plan that identifies key markets and incorporates strategies and performance milestones.	The marketing plan covers all targeted segments with clear value propositions and regularly tracks performance metrics.
Channel strategies & execution	The business has an overview of the channels used to sell to customers.	The channel strategy shows the channels used for each segment and sets goals accordingly.	The channel strategy is integrated across channels and customer segments.
Business improvement processes	The business provides opportunity for clients to review the activity / business.	The business responds to reviews and also provides opportunity for clients to offer constructive feedback (as opposed to just leaving a review).	The business undertakes its own research to gauge customer satisfaction and feedback and integrates this with third party reviews.
Risk management & mitigation	The business has identified key risks to the business.	The business has a list of key risks and plans to mitigate the impact for the locations it operates in.	The business proactively assesses risks in business decisions and works to reduce risk exposure or mitigate impacts and holds necessary levels of insurance cover.

Health & Safety Pillar

Definition: This pillar checks that the business has all the expected systems and processes to manage the health and safety of visitors, workers and others.

Standard	Expected	Good	Best practice
Leadership	Business owner/s aware of health and safety obligations and has systems to ensure they are met.	Is committed to developing a strong safety culture. Systems have been implemented to capture activity and enable continual improvement.	Leaders drive the business's safety culture and ensure health and safety is visible across all areas of the operation.
Risk identification & mitigation	Risks within the business are identified and recorded. Appropriate controls are in place to manage risks.	All areas of work are assessed, workers are engaged with reporting risks. Risk register is a living document. Risks are managed according to hierarchy of controls.	Workers are empowered to manage risk. Risk management is highly visible across all aspects of the business.
Emergency management procedures	Emergency plans include reasonably foreseeable events, effective responses and evidence of training.	Regular training is undertaken. Workers are familiar with roles in emergency situations.	Emergency management training is on-going. Workers are able to take ownership of managing emergency situations.
Investigating & improving	System is in place for recording events. Events are reviewed to find opportunities for improvement.	There is an active culture of reporting events. Events are investigated to identify causal factors.	Investigations conducted by appropriately trained person. Business seeks to learn from external events. Decisions impacting health and safety are researched.
Worker engagement, participation & training	Workers are inducted into the workplace and trained how to undertake work tasks safely. Workers are familiar with how to report events.	Workers are actively involved in the operations' health and safety management. Ongoing training is provided and workers have a voice on health and safety matters.	Workers are highly skilled in managing health and safety and are empowered to take action. Workers are seen as health and safety experts in their role.
Worker wellness & wellbeing	Business is aware of requirements and benefits of supporting worker wellness and wellbeing. Evidence that workers are supported.	Actions are in place to support wellness and wellbeing. Workers have input in developing appropriate programs.	Business has a clear strategy which facilitates the needs of individuals.

Environment Pillar

Definition: This pillar checks whether the business is aware of its environmental impact and takes action to manage its waste and restore the local environment.

Standard	Expected	Good	Best practice
Managing energy & resources	The business is aware of all the elements that contribute to its resource consumption and takes action to reduce it.	The business measures its resource consumption and has documented and evidenced actions to reduce it, including through a sustainable purchasing policy.	The business measures its footprint through a third-party tool or audit and takes action to reduce it.
	Expected	Good	Best practice
Waste management & pollution	The business is aware of all discharge and waste streams from the business.	The business measures all waste streams and keeps a regular record of the volumes discharged.	All areas including suppliers and partners are included in the measurement.
	Expected	Good	Best practice
Restoring nature	The business can demonstrate actions taken to reduce its impact on the surrounding environment.	The business can demonstrate actions taken to enhance the surrounding environment.	The business embraces nature restoration, sharing its environmental actions and providing opportunity for visitors to contribute.

People Pillar

Definition: This pillar checks whether the business has all the expected documentation for its staff, training is provided and a staff satisfaction review system is in place.

Standard	Expected	Good	Best practice
Caring for employees	The business follows all official regulations on employment matters.	The business goes beyond the regulations and actively makes itself attractive to current and potential staff.	The business consistently exceeds employee expectations and is viewed as a great place to work.
	Expected	Good	Best practice
Staff training	The business has basic required relevant training in place.	The business provides ongoing training and updates.	The business constantly improves the training process to ensure staff are confident to deliver on business goals.
	Expected	Good	Best practice
Staff acknowledgement & satisfaction	The business recognises the value of engaged staff.	The business actively fosters a positive company culture.	Strong and proactive leadership underpins a cohesive team culture.

Community & Culture Pillar

Definition: This pillar examines if the business understands the customer engagement principles, has plans to welcome different customers and if cultural interpretation is accurate.

Standard	Expected	Good	Best practice
Great hospitality	The business understands what great hospitality means.	The business has taken steps to ensure they can host and care for their guests.	Great hospitality is a core component of the guest experience.
	Expected	Good	Best practice
Customer values & education	The business provides information to help guide visitor behaviour and promote sustainable travel.	The business actively promotes general good practice for traveling sustainably and responsibly to visitors.	The business actively promotes behaviours that can have a positive impact on the people, culture and environment with a focus on their local area.
	Expected	Good	Best practice
Hosting	The business recognises different cultural and ability mixes in the target market and amongst its staff	The business can demonstrate actions taken to accommodate visitors and staff from different cultural backgrounds and with different abilities.	The business fully appreciates and anticipates different guest and staff expectations and practices.
	Expected	Good	Best practice
Local knowledge & products	The business is aware of and empathetic towards relevant local historic and NZ cultural aspects.	The business has taken active steps to ensure authenticity in interpretation.	Cultural experiences are an integral part of the customer offering.
	Expected	Good	Best practice
Community support	The business makes a conscious effort to give back to the community it operates in.	The business actively encourages staff to become involved in community activities and initiatives.	The business is recognised as being of value to the community and wider industry peers.