



GEO Certified®

GEO Certified® Report

Garda Hotel - San Vigilio Golf

Prepared by independent verifier Marta Visentin

Certified by GEO Foundation: 2024
Recertification due: 2027

“After our verification visit, which included a detailed tour of the course, we can summarise the club's sustainability achievements by mentioning four fundamental actions that they have taken: (1) the construction of the largest existing photovoltaic park at an Italian golf club; (2) turfgrass conversion from cool to warm season grasses to have a sustainable turf considering climate change and the necessary saving of the water resources; (3) the restoration of the ancient abbey and court by contributing to the preservation of Italy's cultural heritage with their own economic investment; (4) great sensitivity towards sustainability with a direct commitment to take on board our recommendations for future recertification, also demonstrated by the inclusion of the 2024 data in a very short timeframe.

For the recertification the club has committed to: (1) carry out a census of all the species present involving a zoologist and a botanist for the trees; (2) confirm the re-naturalization of the hectares identified to be left to natural evolution; (3) restructure the maintenance facilities, in particular improving their waterproofing; (4) verify the possibility of placing signaling devices for birds on the high voltage poles that cross the field to avoid accidental deaths. If possible, they will also try to increase the quantity of natural organic fertilizers and calculate the carbon footprint of the club.

I look forward to seeing this continuous improvement over the coming years!”

Marta Visentin
(GEO accredited independent verifier)



Introduction

GEO Foundation is pleased to confirm that Garda Hotel - San Vigilio Golf has successfully achieved GEO Certified® status for its outstanding work to foster nature, conserve resources and support the community.

GEO Certified® is the most respected certification for golf, based on a credibly and transparently developed modern sustainability Standard of best practice.

Garda Hotel - San Vigilio Golf has:

1. Met the required certification criteria for sustainable golf operations
2. Successfully completed the official third-party verification process
3. Successfully passed the final evaluation by GEO Certification Ltd. (autonomous subsidiary of GEO Foundation)

GEO agreed with the conclusions of the official verification report, that, having achieved all mandatory criteria; and with specific Continual Improvement Points (CIP) set for the future and Critical CIP's (CCIPs) to be reviewed at recertification, Garda Hotel - San Vigilio Golf should be awarded GEO Certified® status.

For the certification period stated above, Garda Hotel - San Vigilio Golf can therefore claim a position as a leader in advancing sustainability in golf – making important contributions in protecting nature, conserving resources and strengthening communities.

The GEO Certified® Report that follows comments on the actions undertaken against the criteria, as observed by the independent verifier during the assurance process.

Certification is nearly always the result of a dedicated team effort resulting in many practical and valuable social and environmental results around the golf course, maintenance facility and clubhouse. These dedication and leadership qualities are an important part of ensuring the resilience of the golf facility and the golf industry into the future and also as part of society's wider effort to pull together for people and planet.

We congratulate all involved.

Jonathan Smith
Founder and Executive Director, GEO Foundation
GEO Certification Ltd. Board Member

Kelli Jerome
Executive Director, GEO Foundation

Carole Kerrey
Manager, Data and Reporting, GEO
Certification Ltd.



Verification and Certification

Verification

The official third-party audit was carried out by an independent verifier, accredited by GEO to undertake verifications of golf facilities applying for certification.

Verification involves reviewing practices and data, using the International Voluntary Standard for Sustainable Golf Operations as the guide to ensure comprehensive and consistent evaluation of performance. A detailed verification report is submitted for evaluation by GEO Certification Ltd, a subsidiary of GEO Foundation.

Certification

GEO Certification Ltd, an autonomous subsidiary of GEO Foundation [both not-for-profit entities], undertook a full review of all content submitted through the OnCourse® online platform and the report submitted by the verifier, ensuring:

- Comprehensiveness – that activities undertaken touched on all elements of the Standard
- Consistency – that the verification approach was balanced, well weighted and with consistent depth of evaluation across each theme
- Accuracy - matching the verification report with evidence submitted by the golf facility to ensure statements and claims were accurate

GEO Foundation is an international not-for-profit founded to advocate, support and reward sustainability in and through golf. Over more than ten years, the group has worked collaboratively with dozens of golf industry associations and government and non-government organisations around the world, to help golf become a sustainability leader, striving for a net positive social and environmental impact. In addition to managing and assuring GEO Certified®, GEO Foundation also provides a suite of credible, practical programmes for golf facility management, new golf developments and golf tournaments called OnCourse®, often delivered in partnership with national golf bodies. Find out more at www.sustainable.golf

Credibility

GEO Certified® is part of the ISEAL Alliance, a group of the world's foremost credible certification systems including Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance, Forest Stewardship Council, Marine Stewardship Council and many others. GEO Foundation earned and retains full membership of the ISEAL Alliance global association following a rigorous evaluation against the ISEAL Codes of Credibility in Sustainability Standards and Certification. The ISEAL Codes cover standard-setting, assurance, and monitoring and evaluation. Find out more at www.isealalliance.org



Verifier's Report

The Sustainability Agenda for golf covers the following themes and action areas:

THEMES	ACTION AREAS
Nature	• Habitats & Biodiversity • Turfgrass management • Pollution prevention
Resources	• Water • Energy • Materials
Community	• Partnerships & Outreach • Golfing & Employment • Advocacy & Communications

Included below are the observations made by the Independent Verifier against each item in the Standard.

NATURE			
N1 Habitats and Biodiversity			
Objectives	Requirements	Mandatory Practices	Verifier Notes
N1.1 Understand the site and surroundings	N1.1.1 Sound understanding of the nature and landscape value of the site	Map all habitats and vegetation types on the site; Regularly update landscape / biodiversity surveys	Garda Hotel San Vigilio is located in northern Italy, Lombardy region, a province of Brescia, just south of the famous Garda Lake. The landscape of the Club is configured as a parkland and consequently it is not possible to identify specific habitats and vegetative typologies. The Club is aware of the importance of managing the biodiversity present on the course and after the verification visit it confirmed to record all the species observed in the club.
	N1.1.2 Knowledge of legal designations for protected areas, habitats and species	Understand legal responsibilities for protected landscapes and species; Record and monitor protected, endangered, or rare species found on the site	There are no specific legislative references because the course does not fall within the boundaries of protected areas. However, according the law nr. 157/1992 hunting in sports areas is forbidden. Therefore, like other Italian golf courses, it is a protected oasis for wildlife. Among the species counted during the verification visit, the following are present in the course: green woodpecker (<i>Picus viridis</i>), cormorant (<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>), cattle egret (<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>). There are several non-native species such as the nutria (<i>Myocastor coypus</i>), sacred ibis (<i>Threskiornis ethiopicus</i>) and the Louisiana crawfish (<i>Procambarus clarkii</i>). There are no protected sites, nor collaboration with environmental associations. Around the wetlands (such as buffer zones) the reeds are allowed to grow (in the areas not in play). There are trees (prev. willows) and dry-stone walls. CCIP: Please complete a census of all species (fauna and flora).
	N1.1.3 Understanding and respect for cultural heritage	Protect any archaeological, historical or cultural designations on the site	The Garda Hotel San Vigilio was built around the ancient Benedictine Abbey that dates to the 12th century. It takes care of maintenance and restoration at its own expense, not receiving funding from any State body. The abbey is used for ceremonies. The surrounding structures, which were built in modern times, reflect the medieval style of the ancient complex.

N1.2 Opportunities to naturalise the course	N1.2.1 Measures taken to identify and minimise the required area of managed turfgrass	Observe, track and / or monitor golfer play	The course is currently configured as a parkland but during the verification visit approximately 3 hectares of areas were identified that will no longer be subject to maintenance. CCIP: Please leave the identified areas to natural evolution and/or seeding useful for 'Operation Pollinator'.
N1.3 Actively manage habitats for wildlife	N1.3.1 Projects to manage habitats in the best way for wildlife and golf	Regularly review and follow a habitat management plan; Prioritise native species when planting and landscaping	The course was inaugurated in 2009. Since then, there has been no need to replace trees. However, the management is aware that in the case of new plantings or replacements only native species should be inserted. The mowing of the reed strips is done at the end of the breeding season, in order not to disturb the species that nest there. Around the lakes the reed is present in the out-of-play areas and in one of the lakes a wooded island has been created where mallards (<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>) and moorhens (<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>) can safely nest.
N1.4 Conserve key species	N1.4.1 Practical conservation measures for priority species		During the visit the species present on the path were counted. Interesting is the presence of several pairs of mallard (<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>). These were non-nesting until two-years ago. Present are the green woodpecker (<i>Picus viridis</i>), cattle egrets (<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>) and grey herons (<i>Ardea cinerea</i>) that feed in the lakes and in the meadow areas. In the past the land was used to grow irrigated corn. The presence of the golf course is a significant environmental recovery and improvement. CCIP: Please explore the possibility of placing signaling devices for birds on the high voltage poles that cross the field to avoid accidental deaths.
N2 Turfgrass			
N2.1 Maintain optimum turf and soil health	N2.1.1 Appropriate turfgrass varieties adapted to climatic and other geomorphological factors	Select appropriate grass species for climate	Confirm. In light of ongoing climate change, and the experiences that have been gained in the Po Valley for over 20 years on similar courses, the tees and fairways were converted from <i>Agrostis stolonifera</i> to Bermuda (<i>Cynodon dactylon</i>) cv Riviera in 2019. In autumn, overseeding with <i>Lolium perenne</i> has been carried out. The environmental advantages resulting from this choice are obviously innumerable. By virtue of its location in the center of the Mediterranean Sea, Northern Italy or rather the Po Valley, which is crossed by the 45th parallel, and also the phenomenon called: "Tropicalization of the Mediterranean", the facility represents the extreme limit of use of warm season grasses in the world.

	N2.1.2 Practices to maintain good soil structure and condition		The main cultivation operations related to maintaining a good soil structure are conducted according to the physical analyses of the soil. In particular, aeration operations are constant and well distributed throughout the season.
	N2.1.3 Careful and responsible fertiliser application throughout the year to avoid over-fertilisation	Undertake soil tests and nutrient analysis	The fertilization programs are formulated on the basis of data from chemical-physical analyses that are prepared on a regular basis every 2/3 years. CIP: Please try to increase the proportion of natural organic fertilisers used.
N2.2 Prioritise mechanical maintenance	N2.2.1 Non-chemical pest, disease and weed management	Sharpen mowing blades; Remove surface moisture; Hand weeding	The presence of PAN (National Action Plan for responsible use of pesticides) in Italy does not allow the use of pesticides. The control of pathogens and weeds is practiced through the correct use of IPM strategies.
N2.3 Use chemicals responsibly	N2.3.1 Application of chemicals only when necessary to prevent or cure defined / identified turf health issues	Establish patterns and levels of risk for pests and diseases; Scout the course daily for early signs of pests and disease; Accurate pest and disease identification; Map and track pest and disease hotspots; Establish pest and disease thresholds	Since it is not possible to distribute pesticides, the Superintendent is aware of the enormous importance of acting in prevention, avoiding all situations and/or operations that could favor the onset of weeds, fungal diseases, or insect attacks. For this reason, the water supply and that of nutrients are dosed in a rational and effective way. Furthermore, there is also continuous monitoring of the surfaces to catch the first symptoms of problems at the outset.
	N2.3.2 Application of chemicals with full safety precautions	Use only legally registered and approved products; Ensure staff are fully qualified and licenced to use pesticides; Regularly calibrate and test applicators; Use appropriate protective equipment; Dilute and dispose of leftover product on untreated areas of turf .	As already written, pesticides cannot be used on golf course turf in Italy. Occasionally, the Ministry of Health has the power to issue a temporary authorization in national derogation for the use of plant protection products following a particular pathological emergency. This event is, however, very sporadic. In any case, the Superintendent is in possession of the necessary authorizations to distribute chemical products. As regards liquid fertilizer distributions, the Superintendent is aware of the importance of appropriately calibrating the distribution tools in order to adequately dose the products.
N3 Pollution Prevention			
N3.1 Prevent pollution across the entire site	N3.1.1 Practical measures to ensure pollution risks are minimised from golf course operations	Document procedures for emergency spill responses; Maintain mowing buffer zones around water and all ecologically sensitive areas;	The no spray zones were established to prevent fertilizer run off. They are mostly not made of turf but of reeds around the water bodies. At the moment the calculable surface is about 1.5 ha.

		Maintain spraying and spreading buffer zones around water and all ecologically sensitive areas; Create a map / aerial visual reproduction, drawing etc of the course showing buffer zones and no-spray, no-spread areas.	
	N3.1.2 Practical measures to ensure pollution risks are minimised from clubhouse operations	Ensure all hazardous materials are safely and securely stored; Ensure compliance with all required standards and systems for hazardous waste and wastewater discharge	The management of the Club is aware of the risks associated with the possible dispersion of polluting agents and all necessary precautions have been taken from a safety perspective. Confirm. The storage of hazardous materials is carried out in accordance with the law.
	N3.1.3 Practical measures to ensure pollution risks are minimised from maintenance facility operations	Ensure wash areas are on impermeable, leak-free surfaces; Mixing and loading of pesticides and fertilisers over an impermeable surface; Triple rinse pesticide containers and applicators	The maintenance facility is equipped with a washing platform. This platform is inside the maintenance facility and has sumps and filters. However, its waterproofing can be improved (to be implemented for a possible recertification). The same applies to the surface intended for the transfer of liquid fertilizers into tanks. CCIP: Please enlarge the current washing platform and loading area. These should have more space realized with an impermeable material, helping to prevent the risk of possible ground contamination.
N3.2 Safely manage hazardous substances	N3.2.1 Legal compliance in the storage, handling, application and safe disposal of all hazardous substances	Maintain a register of hazardous materials available to authorised staff; Safe storage in secure and ventilated concrete or metal building; Sufficient storage capacity; Impermeable flooring; Spill containment kits present; Emergency wash area; Fire extinguisher in the immediate area; Secondary containment for fuel, either externally constructed, or integrally manufactured; Regular inspection of storage tanks	Confirm. Confirm. The maintenance of the course is contracted to an external company that has its headquarters nearby. Therefore the maintenance facility does not have fuel and/or fertilizer storage. These materials are transported from time to time from the headquarters of the external company to the club when necessary. The Club management has informed the external maintenance company of all the legal provisions relating to safety that must be complied with.
N3.3 Responsibly manage waste / storm water	N3.3.1 Appropriate wastewater usage and discharge licences	Wastewater discharge licence; Appropriate treatment of machinery wash water (impermeable surface, oil / grease / clipping separation)	Confirm. The washing platform needs better waterproofing, but is equipped with wastewater collection and oil separator filter. CCIP: As per N3.1.3 above, please enlarge the current washing platform. This should have more space realized with an

			impermeable material, helping to prevent the risk of possible ground contamination.
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RESOURCES

R1 Water

Objectives	Requirements	Mandatory Practices	Verifier Notes
R1.1 Minimise water demand	R1.1.1 Measures to reduce the need to consume water	Target irrigation to essential playing surfaces only	The most water-demanding species, <i>Agrostis stolonifera</i> , is now only present on greens and collars. Following the conversion of the tees and fairways from cool season to Bermuda grass, there has been a strong reduction in water consumption. This has gone from 285,000 m3 in 2019 to an average of around 200,000 m3 in recent years, a decrease of 30%.
R1.2 Maximise water efficiency	R1.2.1 Practical measures to use water more efficiently on the golf course	Conduct regular irrigation performance checks; Provide staff training on efficient irrigation practices; Ensure effective application of water to target areas; Ensure irrigation schedules are informed by weather patterns and soil moisture analysis	Confirm. The irrigation system is constantly monitored in terms of its efficiency. The maintenance staff is professionally updated and able to intervene quickly following the detection of any problems. The monitoring of climatic conditions and humidity levels is taken into account by the PC software with which the Superintendent sets the irrigation system programming.
	R1.2.2 Practical measures to use water more efficiently in buildings	Audit water use regularly; Review bills frequently and look for irregularities; Encourage water-saving practices amongst staff and visitors; Categorise and track water consumption	Confirm. Confirm. The club management is very careful in monitoring water and energy consumption, both through the accounting of invoices and bills for what concerns the clubhouse and through the software that supervises the irrigation of the course.
R1.3 Source water responsibly	R1.3.1 Measures towards alternative, lower quality sources of water	Ensure appropriate water abstraction permit and reporting, as required	Confirm.

R2 Energy

R2.1 Reduce energy demand	R2.1.1 Measures to reduce the amount of energy consumed in course maintenance	Minimise areas of managed turf to reduce mowing, irrigation, and turf inputs	The high energy values were linked to before the construction of the photovoltaic system. In terms of the surface area dedicated to photovoltaic panels, the San Vigilio Golf is considered among the first golf course in Italy to have such high energy production.
R2.2 Maximise energy efficiency	R2.2.1 Measures to use energy and fuels more efficiently in buildings	Audit energy use regularly; Regularly review bills; Categorise and track energy consumption	The resort has a 1100 square meter SPA. For heating, they use natural gas while the hotel and apartments only use heat pumps using energy produced by the photovoltaic system. CIP: Please explore the possibility of undertaking a carbon footprint. This will help to identify and develop further operational efficiencies.
R2.3 Source energy responsibly	R2.3.1 Measures to source alternative, renewable forms of energy	Determine potential sources of renewable energy in the area and on-site, through renewable energy providers	Over the last few years, the creation of ever-increasing surfaces of photovoltaic panels (parking lots and maintenance facility) has enabled the facility to produce electricity from renewable sources of around 2,400,000 kWh/year. The resulting savings can be calculated at around €700,000/year.
R3 Materials			
R3.1 Reduce materials demand	R3.1.1 Products and materials selection based on necessity, including opportunities for recycled, reused and locally sourced alternatives	Undertake a review of materials consumed	Confirm. Waste is disposed of according to local laws and has specific codes for disposal. The value of waste produced is an estimate related to the size of the facility (local law). Part of the waste is biodegradable. The rest is sent to the incinerator.
R3.2 Purchase responsibly	R3.2.1 Practical use of an ethical / environmental purchasing policy	Adopt a sustainable, or ethical / environmental purchasing policy to maximise the use of locally sourced goods and goods made from recycled, recyclable and certified materials	Confirm. Confirm The use of local products is encouraged by the management. In particular, the restaurant has in its menu many typical dishes from the Lake Garda area.
R3.3 Reuse and recycle	R3.3.1 Waste stream separation for maximum recycling and re-use opportunity	Demonstrate waste separation, reuse and recycling; Track how much waste goes to landfill, or is reused / recycled	Waste management is the responsibility of the municipal administration. Waste is differentiated and separated (paper, glass, plastic and metals, organic) and its collection is the responsibility of the municipality. The club has set up so-called "ecological islands" where the staff, but also the resort's customers, can deposit their waste.

R3.4 Demonstrate legal compliance	R3.4.1 Compliance with all local and regional waste management regulations	Use authorised waste and recycling contractor for general, hazardous, industrial and green waste	Confirm.
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COMMUNITY

C1 Outreach

Objectives	Requirements	Mandatory Practices	Verifier Notes
C1.1 Diversify access and provide multi-functionality	C1.1.1 Social and recreational activities at the facility		Tennis, beach volleyball, soccer, swimming, gym. Palio golf between districts inside the condominium. Daily summer camps organized on the course to let the participating children play golf.
C1.2 Provide for volunteering and charity	C1.2.1 Opportunities available for volunteering and support of charities and good causes		Some charity races are organized: Brescia Hospital – Tumor Center Paolo Dal Fior Memorial Ronald McDonald Fundraiser.
C1.3 Establish active community partnerships	C1.3.1 Positive and constructive engagement with neighbours, the local community and other groups	Create a 'sustainability working group'	Confirm. The club rooms are granted free of charge to the municipality of Pozzolengo (cultural events such as book presentations).

C2 Golfers & Employees

C2.1 Improve health and wellbeing	C2.1.1 Benefits to human physical and mental health from golf and facility activities		Employee welfare consists of bonuses to be spent on medical visits or children's needs.
C2.2 Be open and inclusive	C2.2.1 Inclusivity and diversity in membership and visitor policies	Demonstrate inclusive policies for members and visitors	The club is open to all golfers. It is not exclusive and is pet-friendly.

C2.3 Employ fairly and safely, and provide career opportunities	C2.3.1 Ethical and legal employment, working conditions and professional development	Follow all relevant national legislation and best practice for employment, health & safety etc	Welfare is extended to all employees (50/80 between employees and workers) + external companies. The employees all live on site.
C3 Communications			
C3.1 Engage golfers and members	C3.1.1 Communications activities that raise awareness and understanding amongst members and visitors	Provide information on the facility's sustainability commitments, actions, or achievements	Communication to involve members, players and external people takes place via messaging with WA and with the use of various social networks. All this to communicate events, news, updates on activities planned in the club.
C3.2 Celebrate and promote sustainability	C3.2.1 Activities that raise awareness and engage people in the wider community	Provide evidence of external communications and community engagement	The club participates in Open Days on local sports, promoting golf through the presence of a stand where you can find useful information for playing. During competitions, prizes are often typical local products. In 2023, the club obtained the Committed to Green Awards in the Water and Energy categories.

Golf and Sustainability

Among all sports, golf has a particularly close relationship with the environment and communities, golf facilities can bring many benefits to people and nature - from the protection of greenspace and conservation of biodiversity; healthy recreation for all ages; local supply chains; and jobs, tourism and other forms of economic value.

Adopting a more sustainable approach is also good for golf. It's about presenting a high-quality golf course and providing a memorable experience in natural surroundings. It's about being as efficient as possible. And it's about supporting the community in a range of ways that bring increased recognition, respect and contact.

At a broader level, it's important that golf credibly demonstrates its commitment, and its social and environmental value – strengthening the sport's image and reputation for the long term.

Golf facilities that participate in OnCourse®, an international sustainability initiative assured by the non-profit GEO Foundation, are taking a comprehensive approach and striving to be leaders in the community.

Find out more at www.sustainable.golf