



GEO Certified[®]

GEO Certified[®] Report Real Club De Golf Sotogrande

Prepared by independent verifier, Hector Forcen

Certified by GEO Foundation: April 2022
Valid until: April 2025

GEO Certified[®]

 **GEO
Foundation**
Sustainability in and through golf

Real Club de Sotogrande is a great example of golfing tradition professionally managed using the latest technology. The use of 100% recycled water with a highly efficient irrigation system is a clear proof of commitment to responsible resource use. Exemplary irrigation and agronomic practices make it possible to maintain top quality playing surfaces throughout the year, while also encouraging space for nature and wildlife. Monthly energy audits and controls clearly demonstrate efforts towards efficiency and sustainability. The clubhouse is also an excellent focal point and various sports activities are practiced by people of all ages. All this and more creates an awareness and education within the community, staff, and membership.

Hector Forcen

(GEO accredited independent verifier)



Introduction

GEO Foundation is pleased to confirm that **Real Club De Golf Sotogrande** 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.

Real Club De Golf Sotogrande 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 set for the future, **Real Club De Golf Sotogrande** should be awarded GEO Certified® status.

For the certification period stated above, **Real Club De Golf Sotogrande** 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

Richard Allison
Manager, GEO Certified Facilities



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitats & Biodiversity • Turfgrass management • Pollution prevention
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water • Energy • Materials
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	The golf course is within a residential area bordering river Guadiaro and the natural park "Los Alcornocales", both areas with high ecological value, numerous plant and animal species.

	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 known legal designations on the property. The club is not aware of any rare or endangered species found on the site however there seem to be a number of species occupying the course including amphibians and small mammals like hare, fox and squirrels. Hare have been reproducing on the site. CIP - The club could work to undertake a survey of different flora and fauna species and monitor these annually.
	N1.1.3 Understanding and respect for cultural heritage	Protect any archaeological, historical or cultural designations on the site	No archaeological, historical, or cultural designation are present (or known) on the course.
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	Some rough areas on the course have been naturalised with crushed pruning remains, and reorganization of irrigation in sectors to reduce consumption. During the site-visit it was confirmed, enough surface area is available for further naturalisation (CIP).
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	Real club de Sotogrande have mature vegetation with pine, cork oaks, eucalyptus, and giant palm trees enhancing the natural beauty of the surroundings. The club is working, for several years, replanting native trees replacing species damaged like Pinus. CIP: The club should formalise habitat management to encourage planning and succession. CIP: Amphibian hibernacula and insect hotel would be good, quick-result projects for the near future, possibly in collaboration with local schools.
N1.4 Conserve key species	N1.4.1 Practical conservation measures for priority species		Trees areas are well maintained having healthy trees on the property. 2 bird nesting boxes installed in trees and sure the first guest will arrive this spring. CIP: The club should install further nesting boxes, including potentially for bats.
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	Bermudagrass 419 is the warm season grass used on tees, fairways and roughs due to drought and low water quality toleration. Only 1,5 ha of the property (greens) have Agrostis. CIP – Course management should continue their assessment of new cultivars of Bermudagrass such that might be a more sustainable choice for greens surfaces in the future
	N2.1.2 Practices to maintain good soil structure and condition		Aerating and topdressing programmes on greens, approaches, tees, fairways and rough are being implemented with excellent results. The club keeps investing in new machinery more efficient and productive for the greenkeeping department.
	N2.1.3 Careful and responsible fertiliser application throughout the year to avoid over-fertilisation	Undertake soil tests and nutrient analysis	In terms of fertilization the applications are made mainly of liquids with trace elements. The amounts in recent years have been drastically reduced thanks to and performant fertigation system. Monthly leaf tissue analysis on greens to determine if fertilization program is correct and adjusting fertilization applications.
N2.2 Prioritise mechanical maintenance	N2.2.1 Non-chemical pest, disease and weed management	Sharpen mowing blades; Remove surface moisture; Hand weeding	Mowers cylinders and knives are sharpened regularly. Machines are washed every time after they have been used. Dew moisture and leaves are removed to keep the turf as dry as possible. Standard good practices (daily inspections, local weeding etc) are used to reduce herbicide use as much as possible. Local applications of herbicide are made on fairways, hand weed removal on greens and aprons against Poa.
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	Diseases are closely monitored, and when problems are noticed, local corrective actions are taken. The use of pesticides is kept to a minimum and efforts for prevention are prioritized. It is important to emphasize the careful and studied nutritional program that reduces the applications of N helping to control diseases. Mainly preventive applications are done.
	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	Only legislated chemicals are used. The applications are made by trained and qualified employees using the necessary security measures. Greens applications being done by portable hand cart. Ecological conditions and weather are considered before the application is carried out.

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; 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.	The club is respecting the security perimeters established by Spanish law. CIP: The club should prepare an emergency spill response plan.
	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	Contracts for disposal of hazardous waste from the facility are established with external local companies that are specialists in waste management. Wastewater is led to the municipal wastewater treatment plant.
	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	In the workshop all drums with oils for machinery maintenance have their corresponding anti-spill containment system. After passing through the solid's decanters, the machinery cleaning water is recovered and reused for irrigation, filtering any remains or residue that may remain in it with the golf course itself.
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	All fuel tanks are installed according to legislation and have approved inspections and controls. Records of products and treatments are maintained in a suitable room for the storage of phytosanitary products. Hazardous waste is provided to a licensed contractor. Fire extinguishers are placed in locations with fire risks. They are inspected annually by a certified company.
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)	The wash bay outside the machine hall has an impermeable surface and is collected by the sewer that takes the wastewater to the recycling water lake for irrigation.

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	<p>The course manager takes the issue of water very seriously. For this, they have formed an irrigation team made up of three workers who review and control the system daily. During the visit I was impressed by the professionalism and quality of system maintenance.</p> <p>Only irrigates when is necessary based on the course manager and irrigation technicians experience in combination with soil moisture analysis and weather station data. Measurements are made with moisture sensor before planning the night irrigation to adjust the amounts applied with a performant system that irrigates individually his 2176 sprinklers.</p> <p>Surfactants and penetrants are used to improve water infiltration and soil moisture retention.</p>
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	Efficiency has been achieved thanks to a modern irrigation system with individual sprinkler control, quick valves for hand-watering, nozzle technology has also allowed an improvement in distribution and uniformity on the application of water. The pumping is maintained according with the manufacture's recommendations with daily inspections and adjustments improving efficiency with considerable savings in electricity consumption. The club has its own weather station.
	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	The clubhouse is well maintained and is very well equipped. Equipments of the latest technology and quality have been installed during recent years. Water saving activities are in place including the use of low-flow urinals and toilets, pressure reduction nozzles on taps and water-efficient dishwashers and washing machines are installed. Daily meter readings.

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	The club has legal access to extract water from the recycling water plant for irrigation. The golf course acts as a “secondary recycling plant” because it uses the urban residual waters for irrigation. The water consumption is read daily and reported to the municipality that is the supplier of freshwater to the clubhouses.
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 naturalized areas of the club have been increased. The maintained rough has been diminished. Adjusted fertilization program together with the application of growth regulators is allowing to reduce the mowing frequency in fairways and tees with the consequent energy saving that it supposes.
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	Clearly the club is fully aware of its energy use and responsibilities, has installed several energy saving measures including low energy lighting and motion sensors, is switching from more traditional energy consuming lighting to LED and in coming years the club hopes to be fully equipped with LEDs. The maintenance offices and employee area are recently built and represent a considerable improvement in terms of energy efficiency and comfort for its staff. The frequent and good maintenance practices on the pumping systems are helping to be more performant and efficient assuming an economy in electricity each year. An external engineering specialist in energy management and resource optimization helps the club to improve and control their consumption.
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	The photovoltaic installation in the maintenance warehouse is one of the main projects under consideration (CIP).
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	The club works with a local waste management company for recycling. All waste is stored according to legislation CIP: The club could study the possibility to prepare its own compost system in the near future.

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	Local distributors are used and some furniture of the golf course has been built by local companies. Liquid fertilizers are being produced on site from crystalline fertilized bags with considerable reduction of cost avoiding transporting water. As with most restaurants nowadays, local products are preferred. CIP – Could develop a more structured, formal sustainable purchasing policy.
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	The club keeps internal record/bills/invoices of annual quantities and all fractions produced. The waste is derived from hazardous and household waste. Almost all waste is recycled or reused, including PET, aluminium, metals, glass, paper and cardboard. Materials from the kitchen and maintenance area such as detergents, oils, lubricants, pesticides and batteries are collected and disposed by specialized company.
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	Authorized waste and recycling contractors are used for both housekeeping waste, industrial and hazardous waste. Waste is collected by the municipal contractor and the specialized recycling company. Regarding the golf course and its maintenance, all regulations are complied with.

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		Real Club de Sotogrande is very popular for national and international championship tournaments and its excellent facilities. The restaurant is open to members, families and green fee players who can use the facilities and enjoy the menus prepared by the excellent food & beverage team. The club organises different course and sports activities for members including the summer junior camp where every year 80 kids learn and enjoy the sport of golf.

			Well-known are the events and meetings for members and families including the famous “spring party” where in the last edition more than 500 people attended, being an important point of reunions and enjoyment of its members.
C1.2 Provide for volunteering and charity	C1.2.1 Opportunities available for volunteering and support of charities and good causes		Charitable events have been organized every year. They are currently discussing the possibility of expanding the number of charity events due to recent national and world events.
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'	Course manager informs members regularly about the activities and work carried out on the course. CIP: The club should create a sustainability working group with staff from different departments.
C2 Golfers & Employees			
C2.1 Improve health and wellbeing	C2.1.1 Benefits to human physical and mental health from golf and facility activities		The club takes care of its employees and makes available non-alcoholic beverages, coffee, sunscreen, uniforms and all the necessary safety equipment for the correct and safe performance of daily tasks. Staff have golfing privileges.
C2.2 Be open and inclusive	C2.2.1 Inclusivity and diversity in membership and visitor policies	Demonstrate inclusive policies for members and visitors	For some years now, the club has decided to reserve several hours a day so that visitors can enjoy its excellent course and facilities. The club encourages golf for children and promoting a solid junior programme.
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	Greenkeeping staff receive regular education on pesticide handling, safety, and waste administration. Free working clothes, employee locker rooms, lunchroom, personal protection equipment, and first aid is available. This year a part of the team will take a drone management course to catch up on the technological innovations that could be implemented in the club for its more efficient management.
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	The club truly promotes awareness within the employee community with respect to energy and safety aspects. CIP: The club could think about promoting sustainability activities via their website and social media.

<p>C3.2 Celebrate and promote sustainability</p>	<p>C3.2.1 Activities that raise awareness and engage people in the wider community</p>	<p>Provide evidence of external communications and community engagement</p>	<p>Real Club de Golf de Sotogrande is a private club of members who are properly informed of all activities and actions carried out in the club. The club has published different articles for the Spanish Federation, AEdG, AEDG and various local newspapers and golf magazines.</p>
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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