The Union Environment Ministry has selected 12 beaches in India to vie for a ‘Blue Flag’ certification, an international recognition conferred on beaches that meet certain criteria of cleanliness and environmental propriety.

These beaches are at Shivrajpur (Gujarat), Bhogave (Maharashtra), Ghogha (Diu), Miramar (Goa), Kasarkod and Padubidri (Karnataka), Kappad (Kerala), Eden (Puducherry), Mallapuram (Tamil Nadu), Rushikonda (Andhra Pradesh), Golden (Odisha), and Radhanagar (Andaman & Nicobar Islands).

International standards
“ar to achieve the internationally recognised highest standard for the purpose of beach management, planning and execution of projects for infrastructure development, cleanliness, safety and security services, these beaches have been identified for Blue Flag certification in different States and Union Territories,” reads a notification by the Ministry. The Blue Flag programme for beaches and marinas is run by the international, non-governmental, non-profit organisation FEE (the Foundation for Environmental Education). It started in France in 1985 and has been implemented in Europe since 1987, and in areas outside Europe since 2001, when South Africa joined. Japan and South Korea are the only countries in South and southeastern Asia to have Blue Flag beaches. Spain tops the list with 566 such beaches; Greece and France follow with 515 and 395, respectively.

33 criteria
There are nearly 33 criteria that beaches must meet to qualify for a Blue Flag certification, such as the water meeting certain standards such as waste disposal facilities, disabled-friendly facilities, first aid equipment and no access to pets in the main areas of the beach. Some criteria are voluntary and some compulsory.

India is set to apply for certification for two beaches, at Shivrajpur and Ghogha, by July-end. About ₹20 crore have been spent on each and the FEE jury will decide by October if these beaches meet the mark, an official in the Ministry told The Hindu.

If approved, beaches are given the qualification for a year and must apply annually to continue meriting the right to fly the flag at their locations.

To help Indian beaches meet these criteria, the Union Ministry has allowed structures such container toilet blocks, change rooms, shower panels, mini grey-water treatment plants in an enclosed structure, mini solid waste recycling plants and off-grid solar photovoltaic panels to come up, provided they are a minimum 10 metres from the high tide line.