

Spain **TALKS**

Caring for the Future

Copenhagen, Tuesday 16 September, 2025

AGENDA

3.00 Welcome speech and Presentation,
Ignacio Jimenez, Managing Director, Spanish Tourist Office in Copenhagen

3.05 Panel I: How to include sustainability metrics in destination management and promotion strategy?

Moderator: Parastou Booyash

- Leire Bilbao, Visit Benidorm
- Jukka Punamäki, City of Helsinki
- Natalia Bóveda, Costa del Sol Tourism Board

4.00 Coffee Break

4.15 Panel II: Sustainability as a purchasing lever. Accommodation and travel marketers share their insights on how users rate sustainability and how it influences purchasing behavior.

Moderator: Parastou Booyash

- Ian Corbett, TUI Nordics,
- Bárbara García, Paradores
- Glenn Bisgaard, Apollo Travel Group

5.10 Panel III: Spain Talks Nordic Edition (One year later). The winners of the Spain Talks Awards 2024 discuss their approach to sustainability, key challenges, and solutions.

Moderator: Linda Vismer

- Jakob Wilhelm Aarsheim, JWA (Sweden)
- Anne-Marjut Vaananen, Olympia Air Travel (Finland)
- Karin Møller-Olsen, Journalist (Denmark)
- Bjørn Moholdt, Journalist (Norway)

6.05 Conclusions

7.00 Dinner and award ceremony

WELCOME

On Tuesday, September 16, 2025, the second edition of the conference “Spain Talks: Caring for the Future” in the Nordic countries was held in Copenhagen, organized by the Tourism Office in Copenhagen (Turespaña) at the hotel 25H Paper Island. The Spanish Tourist Office in Copenhagen, together with its colleagues in Stockholm, Helsinki, and Oslo, had prepared an extensive program of panel discussions and presentations featuring leaders from key organizations and destinations in both Spain and the Nordic countries. It was a day dedicated to sharing valuable experiences and best practices, fostering dialogue, collaboration, and knowledge exchange to strengthen a more responsible and sustainable future for tourism.



In his welcome speech, **Ignacio Jiménez, Managing Director of the Spanish Tourist Office in Copenhagen**, opened the session by introducing the Spain Talks initiative, explaining how it aims to foster open and honest dialogue with the sole purpose of building a better future for the next generations. He emphasized the importance of establishing a clear channel for sharing knowledge on tourism initiatives between the Nordics and Spain. To conclude his opening speech, he introduced the panel moderators and panels, before handing over the floor to the first session.

PANEL I

The first panel, which was moderated by Parastou Booyash, discussed how to include sustainability metrics in destination management and promotion strategy.

Leire Bilbao, Managing Director at Visit Benidorm explained how Visit Benidorm has succeeded in reducing water consumption. Benidorm is the 3rd destination for overnight stays in the Iberian peninsula and with a population of 74.588 in contrast with a floating population of 150.000 to 350.000 there is a huge demand of resources like housing and water in busy periods. Despite this and a population increase of 40% over the last 20 years, Benidorm has managed a reduction in water consumption of 9%.

Natalia Bóveda, Marketing Executive at Costa del Sol Tourism Board highlighted how Costa del Sol promotes sustainable tourism in various ways, including through the Huella Zero program, which recognizes companies that reduce their CO₂ emissions, save water, and minimize waste. Travelers can also calculate and offset their own carbon footprint by supporting reforestation projects in Málaga. This way, Costa del Sol nudges both visitors and local businesses towards more meaningful excursions.

Jukka Punamäki, Senior Advisor at City of Helsinki, explained in his presentation how Helsinki is on a strong path towards reaching its 2023 carbon neutrality goal. Helsinki is among the world's leaders in sustainable tourism and ranks at the top of the Global Destination Sustainability Index. This is the result of a comprehensive strategy outlined in the city's Tourism and Events Program 2022–2026. The city applies a model of “regenerative sustainability,” which goes beyond figures and measurements to focus on creating positive change in local systems. Tourism businesses and other stakeholders are provided with training and tools to help them communicate and put sustainable solutions into practice.

During the following debate, moderator Parastou Booyash asked the panel **how destinations should make travelers more interested in making more sustainable choices**. **Natalia Bóveda from Costa del Sol Tourism Board** pointed to offering experiences out of the ordinary, while **Jukka Punamäki from City of Helsinki** argued that in Helsinki, they don't offer options – “companies have to be certified in order to work with us. Don't give them an option to be unsustainable.”

The panel also discussed whether destinations should lean towards sharing a framework so that everyone can benchmark against each other or should everyone do it more locally. Here, the panelists agreed on a balance, some standards should be global but they should be flexible.

A person from the audience, a travel agent, asked about how to make the agencies promote local free events instead of the classic events that may not be authentic or relevant anymore. **Natalia Bóveda** pointed to making a mix of the classic, paid experiences and the free added value events. **Leire Bilbao from Visit Benidorm** argued that we should explain to the clients to go by themselves, not just follow the agencies. Local DMCs (destination management company) are the key.



PANEL II

The second panel, which was also presented and moderated by Parastou Booyash, was about sustainability as a purchasing lever, and consisted of Ian Corbett from TUI Nordics, Bárbara García from Paradores and Glenn Bisgaard from Apollo Travel Group.

Bárbara García, International Area Sales Manager at Paradores, focused in her presentation on how Paradores hotels have made sustainability a central part of their tourism concept. They are following the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and the hotels protect Spain's nature, culture, and local communities, working towards responsible tourism with a focus on energy efficiency, effective resource management, and lower emissions. For instance, all the electricity consumed at Paradores is 100% renewable, and since 2019, Paradores has eliminated 100% of single-use plastic from the bedrooms, as well as plastic straws, tableware and bottles.

Glenn Bisgaard, Sales Director Denmark from Apollo Travel Group, highlighted in his presentation how Apollo is Travelife-certified and meets over 200 sustainability criteria. Apollo educate travelers via dedicated sustainability pages on the website, newsletters and booking flow prompts. They have partnerships with over 200 selected sustainability certified hotels and a majority of their concept hotels hold a sustainability certification (>30% of clients).

Apollo compensated for all internal business travel emissions up until 2023 and now transferred this budget to Renfuel (SAF) project. Customers are offered easy CO2 offset options via 6 established organizations. Only 3–4% currently opt in – they recognize a need

to improve. Glen Bisgaard mentioned future actions such as looking at options to offer clients to add SAF to their booking and engaging with Industry Partners, Trade and Sustainability organisations to improve the entire sustainable ecosystem around travelling by air from A to B.

Ian Corbett from TUI Nordics presented two major arguments:

1. Sustainability is a complex topic so we need to make it simple for customers.
2. At the moment sustainability is important for people but transforming it into a purchasing lever needs better data and work.

He pointed out that when it comes to sustainability, 70% of customers are positive, 20% aren't sure, 10% aren't interested. So the interest is there. He said:

"Certification is a good way to measure but it doesn't tell you what exactly this hotel is doing. We need to be able to verify it. If we start collecting data, then customers will start to see the same information across multiple platforms. Awareness brings the action we want to see." And: "What can we do to make them choose the certified one over the other? What works is when you make it tangible and relatable in terms of what you mean by sustainability. Tell the human story, make it personal."

Inspired by Ian's presentation, **Parastou Booyash** asked the panel whether we should then **only market sustainable hotels?** **Glenn Bisgaard** replied that it is all about inclusion, not exclusion: "It's never too late to start. Small family run hotels may not have considered it, but maybe they are already 50 percent sustainable. So no, but we should motivate them to take part in a sustainability program." **Bárbara García** agreed: "Sustainability has to be an opportunity to grow, not to cut. there are a million ways to be sustainable."



Ian Corbett: “it is the dream, isn’t it? We have to be realistic about where we are. If we look at the global hotel supply, an absolute tiny fraction is certified. So we have got to grow the demand on one hand but also grow the supply on the other. And it is about education and incentives and providing hotels with a clear pathway on how to progress.”

Then **Glenn Bisgaard** picked up on the question from Panel I about promotion of local events: “We are working closely with our partners and the DMCs to find both ecological and sustainable options. We see an increasing tendency in excursions with goats for instance – walking with goats. More people want to go more local.” Ian Corbett added on this topic that AI is a huge opportunity for people to find exactly what they want.

Online question: **Who is the typical consumer that prefers sustainability?**

Ian Corbett: Older customers are concerned about it. But you have to make it simple, easy and relevant for them.

PANEL III

The third panel, consisting of the winners of the Spain Talks Awards 2024 and moderated by Linda Vismer, discussed their approach to sustainability, key challenges, and solutions. The participants were **Jakob Wilhelm Aarsheim, owner of JWA Tours, Anne-Marjut Vaananen, Managing Director of Olympia Air Travel, Journalists Karin Møller-Olsen and Journalist and Bjørn Moholdt.**

Linda Vismer introduced the panel discussion by asking: “All of you were mentioning going local, away from mass tourism and off the beaten track. Why is it so important?”

The responses from the panelists are different, ranging from their personal interest in nature, to the wish of creating a counterbalance to the tourists who go to the more popular places. Anne-Marjut Vaananen pointed out that her customers have a specific interest in going to lesser-known places.

Jakob Wilhelm Aarsheim criticized luxury tourism and pointed out that people who just travel to certain places in helicopters, looking for Michelin Restaurants, undermine the local community. In the end, local people cannot live there because of the prices.

Linda Vismer then asked **Anne-Marjut Vaananen**, how do she see the relationship between high-end tourism and sustainability

Anne-Marjut Vaananen: “I need to say that we don’t offer luxury – they are high-end. We have been able to take people to places where they wouldn’t have a possibility to go otherwise. After arriving to Spain, we take people in train for instance, so we try to do it sustainably.”

Linda Vismer: “Bjørn, do you think that the progress in sustainability will mainly be driven bottom-up, from the consumer perspective or top down, the industry?”

Bjørn Moholdt: “Top down definitely. People will always go for price. So we need politicians and tour operators to implement sustainability.”

Linda Vismer: Karin, can you share your point of view on how to make it easier to make sustainable choices as a consumer?

Karin Møller-Olsen: when I travel I see many hotels claim to be sustainable but I can't see through it. But I am convinced that everybody could do better, so maybe you should do even more, in a way that I can see it and feel it. I don't have the answer, but I must say that I was happy to hear Barbara tell about the Paradores.

Linda Vismer: Anne-Marjut, the development can be hard to see, what do you think is needed to make the progress more visible?

Anne-Marjut Vaananen: it is almost impossible, because we are doing tours all over the world, and not all countries are working as seriously on sustainability as Spain does. I do not have an answer to that due to the variety of countries.

Linda Vismer: Bjørn, how would you describe the responsibility for the media in that sense of spreading the word and being part of the marketing for the destinations when it comes to that many people wants to explore our lovely continent?



Bjørn Moholdt: there are very few platforms left in terms of communicating this in an editorial way. The objective approach. We have all these instagrammers doing commercials. But you need the other side, the more objective description. This is a big challenge. I have been doing this for 20 years and now I have only two clients left. It will be the responsibility for maybe the tour operators to approach this. It is a big challenge.

Linda Vismer: Karin, what role do you think journalist and tour operators can play in moving towards sustainability?

Karin Møller-Olsen: I would very much like the tour operators to consider slow tourism. Going by train, hiking, and biking. It is also better for your mind. Going by plane is stressful.

Anne-Marjut Vaananen: Tour operators are at the center, we have a unique position in impacting supply and demand. We can educate travelers, bring business and money to local communities, and regulate travel. I think there is great power, just to be used wisely.

Jakob Wilhelm Aarsheim: changing from mass tourism to more responsible tourism. That is the only way. Educating people, changing the mindset. People must accept lower standards. The cheap traveling, big groups, maybe we cannot allow that. Because it does nothing for the local community.

Bjørn Moholdt: obviously we have a role in unbiased reporting, because the platforms are gone and you need to get the message out there. You need to push the tourists away from the main destinations. The tour operators are biased and you need an independent platform. Who are telling them where to go?

CONCLUSIONS

Julio Jiménez, Managing Director of the Spanish Tourist Office in Finland, concluded the Spain Talks 2025 event by summarising the day's discussions: "Spain talks has demonstrated the power of dialogue. This has not been a one way conversation but a collaborative exchange. We see dialogue and exchange as a cornerstone of how to work with tourism and we aim to keep the dialogue transnational.

Our first panel addressed how metrics and data are guiding destination management. From Benidorm, we have learned how vertical urban planning allows for efficient land use. Also we have learned how water is managed smartly. They have reduced water consumption by 9%. From Helsinki, we saw that it is not only an ethical decision but also a smart business. Ongoing effort has produced results. From Costa del Sol they reminded us that sustainability is also about proximity.

In panel II we have shifted to the private sector. We saw how sustainability is now embedded in the product design but also in marketing and promotion. Certification is playing a key role in the way that private companies are able to hire reliable suppliers. We have also seen how customers expect responsible choices.

One of the main things that we can highlight is the aim to have one single standard for KPIs.

Also for Paradores, a company that was founded in 1928, presented an inspiring case. One of the key elements are the accomplishments that have already been made.

The third panel gave voice to the 2024 winners. Karin Møller-Olsen and Bjørn Moholdt reminded us that the media must put emphasize in highlighting slow tourism, off the beaten path destinations and reflect on the real impact of tourism.

Tour operators Jakob and Anne-Marjut Vaananen and Jakob Wilhelm Aarsheim showed us that even high-end tourism can and must support sustainability. Also the idea that mass tourism is killing the industry. That idea is worth reflecting on.

The message from today is clear. Sustainability is no longer a side topic – it is a central path. But it requires management and it requires a certain bias to action from stakeholders. These panels has reflected on how different stakeholders are taking action on addressing the various complex sustainability issues.

We see how destinations, businesses and individuals are taking real steps and inspiring each other to do better.

Spain is proudly and humbly pushing forward this transformation. The claim is “think you know Spain, think again”. It is the first ever campaign that is focusing on lesser known places and focuses on longer stays, deeper connection and connection to culture, people, landscapes and traditions. The future is not on where we go, but why and how we go there. We are putting emphasis on making tourism meaningful. Thank you everyone.”

AWARD CEREMONY

Finally, the event moved to Restaurant Nærvær, where Turespañas Media Awards and Experience Awards were presented.

H.E. Salvador Rueda Rabanal, the Spanish Ambassador to Denmark, welcomed the attendees to this second part of the event. The ambassador emphasized the importance of sustainability and the future of tourism as the core themes of the event. He recognized the commitment and courage of participants in promoting responsible tourism. He highlighted the Spanish Government’s support for initiatives and models that foster sustainability. He underlined that tourism, when well-managed, connects cultures, economies, and ecosystems, but if mismanaged, it can be harmful. Finally, he celebrated the award winners and the event as a space for new ideas, partnerships, and inspiration.



MEDIA AND EXPERIENCE AWARDS

The awards recognize innovation and commitment to sustainable tourism in Spain, and two awards were presented for each of the participating countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden).

Each country's Media Award went to the best content on sustainable tourism in Spain published between June 2024 and May 2025, both online and offline. Publications that invited reflection on more responsible tourism were particularly highlighted. Each country's Experience Award went to the best tourism product that has promoted responsible tourism in Spain.

The winners were:

Finland Media Award: Journalist Pirjo Houni and photographer Heli Sorjonen. "The magical island of peace and love". Published in Mondo.

Finland Experience Award: "In the footsteps of the mansion of secrets in Spain". Kon-Tiki Tours.

Sweden Media Award: Susanne Ytterskog. "Life on the countryside". Published in Connoisseur.

Sweden Experience Award: "Nat Geo Day Tour: The Valley of the Oranges".
TUI Musement, a leading provider of tours and activities from TUI Group.

Denmark Media Award: Hanne Olsen. "Spain's Manhattan is one of the most touristy seaside resorts in the country. But it is possible to steer clear of the crowds". Published in Politiken.

Denmark Experience Award: "Train ride along the green coast". Spain is More.

Norway Media Award: Lena Eriksen. "Explore the unknown at a known destination". Published in Travelletters.

Norway Experience Award: "Nat Geo Day Tour: Guanches Mysteries Unearthed with an Archeologist". TUI Musement, a leading provider of tours and activities from TUI Group.





The winners of the Media and Experience Awards 2025 along with representatives from Turespaña Nordic offices.

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