Spain TALKS

Caring for the Future

DUBLIN | 2025. NOVEMBER, 13

REPORT

Programme

15.00 Registration of participants

15:30 Welcome speech Laura Pena, Director of the Spanish Tourism Office in Dublin.

15:40 Panel 1: Tourism products and experiences for a more sustainable tourism model.

Moderator: Eoghan Corry, journalist and lead travel commentator in Ireland.

- Juan José González, Sales Director, Paradores.
- Mary Denton, CEO, Sunway Travel.
- Abigail Sigüenza, Strategic Marketing Director, Madrid Destino.
- Clare Dunne, CEO, Irish Travel Agents Association.

16:35 Presentation "Spain by Train" Diego Juárez, Spain by train.

16:40 Coffee Break.

17:00 Key Note Speaker Donal Moriarty, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer, Aer Lingus.

17:10 Panel 2: Good Practices in Sustainable Tourism.

Moderator: Eoghan Corry, journalist and lead travel commentator in Ireland.

- Natalia Bóveda, Marketing Executive, Costa del Sol Tourism
- Pere Granados, Mayor of Salou
- Ken Lyons, Sustainability Manager, CIE Tours International
- Pat Neville, Communications Manager, Coillte

18:05 Presentation Andalusia Tourism Antonio Martín-Machuca, Head of Cooperation Management, Andalusia Tourism Board

18:10 Closing remarks.

18:20 Tourism Sustainability Awards Ceremony with drinks and canapés

MEDIA AWARD

For media outlets: recognizes the best coverage of Spain as a destination committed to sustainability, highlighting the importance of communication in promoting responsible practices.

AMBASSADOR AWARD

For the best prescriber, influencer, or content creator: recognizes the best content that highlights Spain as a destination committed to sustainability, emphasizing the power of these profiles in raising awareness.

EXPERIENCE AWARD

For the best sustainable tourism product: recognizes the marketing of packages, experiences, and offers that promote sustainable tourism in Spain, emphasizing the importance of offering authentic and environmentally respectful travel.

BUSINESS AWARD

For the company with the best ESG project: recognizes the commitment of companies to responsible practices such as carbon footprint compensation programs, recycling, accessibility, and worker inclusion, promoting a focus on sustainability in all facets of business.

Welcome

Eoghan Corry, journalist and lead travel commentator in Ireland, opened the conference with remarks on the venue's historical significance, situated on archaeologically important ground in the oldest part of Dublin, and explained the structure of the event.

Laura Pena, Director of the Spanish Tourist Board in Dublin, provided an overview of the conference theme and objectives, explaining that Spain Talks, under the slogan *"Caring for the Future,"* is organized by Turespaña to highlight and promote sustainability initiatives transforming tourism in both public and private sectors. She remarked that the conference had already been held in several countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, France or Italy, now coming to Ireland with the aim of exchanging ideas and experiences in the shared journey toward a sustainable management of tourist activities.

Laura Pena (Spanish Tourist Board)

The Director highlighted that Ireland and Spain share a strong travel connection, as Spain is the favourite holiday destination for Irish travellers and Ireland is also very popular among Spanish tourists, and that the relationship is economically significant and culturally enriching.

She emphasized the commitment of all level of governments in Spain and of industry professionals to lead the transition toward a more sustainable management of tourist activities, as well as the critical nature of this conversation: *"We have seen the effects of mass tourism: overcrowded cities, strained ecosystems, and communities that do not always benefit from influx of visitors. If we want tourism to continue to be a positive force, we need a model that is balanced, respectful, and built to last."*

Laura Pena explained that Spain has launched the national Spain Tourism Strategy 2030, developed with input from over 200 public and private organizations and that it aims to consolidate tourism as an engine of responsible economic development while enhancing competitiveness and distributing prosperity across regions.

The strategy focuses on five key stakeholders through economic, social, and environmental dimensions: 1) Destination managers working toward smarter, greener management with lower emissions; 2) Businesses encouraged to embrace innovation, digital transformation, and circular economy practices; 3) Tourism workers receiving investment in talent and working conditions; 4) Residents, with tourism enriching rather than disrupting local life through tools such as the Tourist Housing Observatory and Tourist Intensity Atlas; 5) Tourists, promoted toward respectful travel through awareness campaigns and responsible marketing

She also underscored that the Spanish Government Promotion Body (Tourspain) has launched a new campaign aligned with this strategy: *"Think You Know Spain, Think Again."* This global campaign repositions Spain as a destination for slow travel, authenticity, and sustainability. It challenges experienced travellers, particularly repeat visitors, to discover *"countless experiences beyond its well-known sun and beach offerings."* The campaign emphasizes slow-paced journeys centred on experiences, culture, and natural heritage, with the goal of promoting high-quality tourism, longer stays outside peak seasons, and deeper local engagement.

The Director thanked all speakers and participants, and expressed special gratitude to Andalusia Tourism and Spain by Train, for their commitment and collaboration, and to Eoghan Corry, for guiding the discussions.

Panel 1: Tourism Products and Experiences for a More Sustainable Tourism Model

Clare Dunne, CEO of the Irish Travel Agents Association, outlined the ITAA's three-strand approach to sustainability: education, awards, and committee work. Education initiatives include a leadership program with an embedded sustainability module, which was reported as the most popular module in the current year. Two participants became members of the sustainability

committee due to their interest. The association is launching a new entrant training program with sustainability embedded from the start.

She explained that every year they organise their Irish travel industry awards, and a really important part of that it is the sustainable innovation category, encouraging agents to evaluate sustainability within and outside their businesses. The ITAA Sustainability Committee includes board members and representatives who sit on the European travel agents and tour operators' sustainability committee (ECTA), enabling knowledge exchange between Ireland and Europe.

From left to right: Clare Dunne (ITAA), Mary Denton (Sunway Travel), Juan José González (Paradores), Abigail Sigüenza (Madrid Destino)

Mary Denton, CEO of Sunway Travel confirmed that sustainability is important to customers and travel agents. About three million Irish people travel to Spain annually, with growing numbers. There is visible demand for new holiday types: *"cycling holidays, walking holidays, arts and crafts, different things that people are looking to do. They want to do more than just get on the plane and sit on the beach for a week. They want to immerse themselves with local cultures, they want to give back to communities in small ways."*

A significant shift is occurring from coastal destinations like Benalmadena and Torremolinos to lesser-known cities. Sunway has established a dedicated special interest department in response to this demand, offering holidays such as Camino experiences and cycling in Costa Dorada. She emphasized that *"all stakeholders involved in providing holidays, whether that's me selling it, airlines, hoteliers, tourist boards, whatever—we all have to be responsible."*

Juan José González, Sales director of Paradores, addressed Paradores' sustainability efforts, which began three years ago. Paradores has renovated its sustainability credentials with the *Ecostar* certification. The organization detected that *"people, when they choose a hotel or a tourist product, have a very important interest to enjoy the environment where the hotel is positioned."*

Demand for sustainable management began with the corporate market but has extended to leisure clients.

Regarding pricing flexibility, Paradores works with airlines and accommodation companies to offer flexible rates dependent on demand. *"You can get even half price in low season or in another season, even in special places. "* Paradores operates 70 percent of its hotels in what is known as "empty Spain"—areas with limited development and tourism infrastructure. The organization is opening a new Parador in Ibiza in April 2026, positioned in Ibiza town's castle with Phoenician, Roman and medieval archaeological remains. The new property will have approximately 45 rooms—medium-sized for the Paradores model—situated in a refurbished heritage building. *"That's the sustainability that we propose in our model of tourism—medium-sized hotels in very special places using a building we have refurbished."* Paradores employs 5,000 people and *"we are a company that earns money and has profitability."*

Regarding local food, Paradores pursues authentic regional cuisine: *"We propose eating in every place where you're travelling exactly the local food."* Paradores has placed a carbon footprint calculator on its website, and corporate clients frequently calculate and neutralize their carbon footprint. *"Even when you visit a hotel that doesn't bring information about sustainability, the image you get is of a hotel that's not current. It's not a good image."* Consumer preferences are shifting such that lack of sustainability messaging reflects negatively on a property.

Abigail Sigüenza, Strategic Marketing Director of Madrid Destino explained Madrid's approach to avoiding the tourist backlash affecting other Spanish cities. Madrid has placed sustainability at the core of its strategy, working across tourism and the city as a whole. The city has rebuilt spaces into green areas *"not only for visitors but mainly for citizens and to offer new products for visitors who would like to stay longer in Madrid."* Madrid has converted areas into pedestrian spaces and green corridors connecting the Royal Palace to Plaza de España and Casa de Campo, dispersing tourism and easing pressure on residents.

Madrid has developed 12 steps for visitors to leave a positive footprint. The city's tourism campaign states: *"If you think Madrid has only one palace, you need to get out more. If you think the biggest lake in Madrid is Retiro, you need to get out more."* Madrid is partnering with other destinations like Seville, Barcelona, and Valencia on joint messaging campaigns to specific markets, *"combining the routes of connectivity between the cities to optimize"* tourism distribution.

Clare Dunne (ITAA) emphasized the need to broaden the definition of sustainability beyond carbon: *"It's about traveling better, not traveling."* She highlighted the importance of dispersing travellers throughout the year and across geographical regions, targeting lesser-known places. The approach encompasses *"the people as well as the place—the people in our own offices, the people working in different destinations, and the residents of the places we're going to. We have to look at it in a whole 360-degree way."*

She highlighted customers want to contribute to destinations: *"Customers want to immerse themselves in the destination. They want to feel they're not taking... people want to know how they can leave no trace and what they can do to give back to the community they're getting so much from by having their holiday."* However, *"the leadership has to come from our side."* The travel industry must inform customers rather than waiting for demand.

Presentation Spain by Train

Diego Juarez, Coordinator of Spain by Train started by clarifying that Spain by Train represents cities connected by Spain's high-speed rail network rather than operating trains directly. Spain operates the largest high-speed rail network in Europe and the second-largest globally—approximately 4,000 kilometres of high-speed track. About 50 cities are connected, with the association representing 35 of them. Coverage includes most of Spain except the Basque Country and Extremadura.

He described the three high-speed operators compete in Spain: 1) Renfe — the original national operator running for 20 years a "Renfe-Operadora". Its best product for visitors is the Spain Rail Pass. When purchasing a Renfe high-speed ticket requiring a train change (typically in Madrid), the local commuter train is included in the same ticket; 2) Iryo — a newer operator in the market for approximately three years, operating modern trains with good onboard experience. It serves 11 of the most important destinations; 3) Ouigo — operates primarily on busiest routes using double-deck trains and typically offers the cheapest fares, though with less comfort.

Diego Juarez (Spain by Train)

He also explained that the website Trainline allows comparison of all three operators and bus connections and that the Spain Rail Pass represents a *"fantastic option that not many people know about."* The pass can be purchased for 4, 6, 8, or 10 journeys, with the 4-journey pass costing approximately €220 per person. Purchasers can visit four different cities by high-speed train. The pass is designed for non-residents of Spain. Originally it offered no commission to travel agencies; now it offers 5 percent commission.

He underscored that the Spain by Train association aims to encourage visitors to explore beyond Madrid and Barcelona. *"Our aim as the High-Speed Train Cities association isn't to tell you which*

operator to choose—Renfe, Iryo or Ouigo, it doesn't matter to us. What we want is that you don't just stop in Madrid or Barcelona." High-speed trains connect major cities in under 2.5 hours: Madrid to Barcelona, Seville, Málaga, and Valencia. The rail network enables multi-city holiday experiences without requiring air travel between destinations.

Keynote Speaker: Donal Moriarty

Donal Moriarty, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer of Aer Lingus explained Aer Lingus connection to Spain and why Spain is such an important market for them., as Spain is Aer Lingus's third-largest country market. Aer Lingus operates 10,000 flights annually to Spain with 1.9 million seats across 17 routes to 12 destinations. The airline provides connectivity to northern Spain, flying to Santiago de Compostela and Bilbao. Aer Lingus is part of the IAG Group, which includes Iberia and Vueling. Iberia operates 11 weekly services to Madrid, and Vueling offers 11 weekly flights to Barcelona, collectively providing strong IAG Group connectivity to Spain with potential for further expansion.

Donal Moriarty (Aer Lingus)

Regarding product Improvements, Aer Lingus announced a major partnership with Starlink to introduce high-speed satellite Wi-Fi on aircraft beginning in the next year. This broadband-quality service will be available on both wide-body and narrow-body aircraft at no charge to customers. The airline has also launched Express Bag Drop technology and is significantly expanding its digital app experience, with improvements resulting in high app-store ratings.

In what regards Aer Lingus Sustainable journey**,** Donal Moriarty explained that the company has set an ambition to power 10 percent of all flights with Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) by 2030,

exceeding regulatory mandates. SAF is identified as *"absolutely critical"* to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Regarding SAF production and sourcing, Aer Lingus uplifted 3,600 tonnes of SAF from Spain in the previous year, partnering with Spanish companies Repsol and CEPSA. These partnerships are part of broader IAG Group relationships with Spanish fuel providers, making Spain vital to the airline's SAF journey.

He also stressed aircraft modernization is central to the sustainability strategy. Thirty-five percent of Aer Lingus's fleet consists of new-technology engine aircraft: 8 Airbus A321LR, 6 Airbus A321XLR, and 8 Airbus A320NEO. These new-technology engines emit *"20% less carbon than previous-generation engines,"* representing a major leap forward toward net-zero emissions by 2050. IAG announced an order for 21 Airbus A330-900neo aircraft to join the group fleet from 2029 onwards, significantly improving efficiency across the group.

Panel 2: Good Practices in Sustainable Tourism

Natalia Boveda, Marketing Executive of Costa del Sol Tourism, remembered Costa del Sol's pioneering role in European tourism, stressing that the region has evolved significantly, with demand for diverse experiences beyond traditional beach tourism.

Costa del Sol represents the entire province of Málaga with over 100 municipalities, most located in mountains as whitewashed Mediterranean villages. The region works with tour operators, travel agencies, and the industry to educate about *"the diversity available here—tradition, history, and culture."*

Sustainability initiatives include a certification program with Green Destinations involving approximately 50 companies, primarily hotels and rental car companies. The program includes auto-evaluation, training, and education on water conservation, waste reduction, and CO2 offsetting. A carbon footprint calculator has operated successfully for three years with separate versions for companies and visitors.

Costa del Sol operates a major reforestation program and the certification *"Sabor a Malaga"* (Flavours of Málaga), with hotels, restaurants, and shops using only locally-sourced products from the province.

Pere Granados, Mayor of Salou acknowledge that Salou is known for its beaches (one of Salou's beaches was selected by the second most-read Spanish newspaper as the best beach in Spain for 2025), but highlighted that the destination has developed beyond being a single beach destination. The municipality hosts 25 beaches and coves and has developed diverse tourism products.

He explained that Salou is a sports destination hosting tournaments, organized events, and international rallies. Catalonia is designated the region of gastronomy globally for the current year, with Salou representing one of Spain's best gastronomic regions alongside Galicia. The municipality is working on sustainability across three axes: environmental, social, and economic.

He also underlined that Salou is among Spain's top cities for resident well-being. *"When tourists visit, they have very good feedback about their experiences, so they return."* Many Irish people visit Salou multiple times. The relationship between sustainability and off-season tourism is strategic: *"Greater environmental and social sustainability enhances the destination's quality and attractiveness beyond the peak season. Off-season tourism helps maintain a stable flow of tourists, reducing environmental and social pressure during summer months."*

From left to right: Natalia Bóveda (Costa del Sol), Pere Granados (Salou), Ken Lyons (CIE Tours), Pat Neville (Coillte)

The major also stressed that the municipality offers diverse tourism products: sports tourism, year-round family tourism, conferences and events, culture and heritage tourism, and festivals. Salou is the cultural capital of Catalonia for the current year. The proximity to PortAventura enables year-round operation and off-season business opportunities. While summer brings over 2 million tourists, off-season presents significant opportunities for business and the town.

Ken Lyons, Sustainability Manager at CIE Tours International noted that CIE Tours International's customer base is predominantly American, with sustainability not ranking high on their stated agenda. However, the company decided sustainability was the right approach regardless of direct commercial benefit: *"Taking action on sustainability is the right thing to do, regardless of commercial benefit."*

Research revealed that customers care less about terminology and more about actual practices: *"They just want the industry to be sustainable. They don't need to know the terminology. They need*

to know we're doing the work." Customers want hotels that operate efficiently, manage water and energy, handle waste responsibly, and fulfil roles as community employers.

Ken Lyons joined the organization when sustainability efforts were already underway. Understanding emissions sources revealed that aviation accounts for approximately 82 percent of company emissions, ground operations approximately 16 percent, and company office operations 2 percent. While office operations represent only 2 percent, the company prioritizes these because *"we need to lead by example."*

He stressed that the tour operator has limited direct control over its supply chain, relying entirely on supplier partners. It has established a pilot program with seven suppliers across hotels, visitor attractions, transportation, and aviation. This group helped develop a sustainability supplier charter outlining expectations without mandating compliance. The company has invested in software platform *"Because"* to collect ESG data from suppliers, enabling assessment of supplier sustainability positions and identification of support needs.

He also pointed out that hotels have progressed beyond basic cost-saving measures like energy efficiency and water reduction. They now invest substantially in on-site renewable energy, staff training and development.

Pat Neville, Communications Manager at Coillte explained that Coillte manages the State Forest Company with a focus on sustainable forest management and tourism. People travel to experience nature and escape stress, wanting memorable experiences often involving natural environments. Forests enable visitors to leave crowded streets and experience *"less screen time and a bit greener time."*

Forest management balances wood production for decarbonizing the built environment with habitat restoration and nature protection. Coillte currently designates 30 percent of forests for nature and wildlife, with ambitions to reach 50 percent. The goal is attracting visitors to outdoors sustainably while encouraging responsible wildlife interaction.

Coillte manages 6,000 forests receiving approximately 18 million visits annually. The organization has 250 forests designated for recreation with marked trails, car parks, and playgrounds, plus 12 forest parks and 6 mountain bike centres. Plans aim to double recreational forests to 500, located near towns, villages, and communities.

Avondale Forest Park in County Wicklow opened in July 2022, receiving between 350,000 and 400,000 visitors annually compared to approximately 20,000 before the attraction. The Park prioritizes accessibility with slopes no steeper than 6 degrees, benches every 100 metres, and on-site wheelchairs. It won Ireland's first age-friendly destination award, friendly for all ages and families and people with limited mobility. Signage explains forest benefits for climate, wildlife, and people.

Indigenous tree restoration is ongoing. Productive conifers are gradually being replaced with native trees through smaller clear-fells or continuous cover forestry. Simultaneously, mountain bike trails and additional walks are being developed, supporting local businesses like small coffee shops.

Regarding forest coverage, Ireland has approximately 11 percent while the European average is 40 percent and Spain has 37 percent—four times Ireland's coverage. Approximately 50 percent of Irish forests are state-owned compared to 25 percent in Spain, where 75 percent are privately owned. Spanish private ownership, combined with state-owned forests, encourages rural employment in activities like pine cone collection, resin extraction, and hunting, maintaining village and town viability and forest culture.

Natalia Boveda (Costa del Sol) addressed over tourism concerns, noting that certain locations experienced protests, though the media amplified impact beyond reality. Legal changes are implementing stricter regulations regarding short-term rentals and Airbnb operations to prevent gentrification and protect local interests.

Málaga city has experienced continuous growth over 20 years, developing as a contemporary city. When accommodation becomes constrained during peak periods, visitors can stay in nearby alternatives like Torremolinos, Fuengirola, or Benalmadena, which offer tropical environments and coastal or inland locations. *"People are not staying in just one location... you can also go to the right area which is also a very tropical area and also on the coastline or in the inland where we have amazing places."*

Pere Granados (Salou) stated that Salou does not experience tourism phobia because the municipality implements policies balancing local and tourism interests. *"Implementing policies that balance local interest with tourism activity is win-win. Residents and tourists."* Salou's economy is tourism-dependent, requiring careful management ensuring high resident quality of life. Tourists recognize and benefit from living in well-managed, high-quality municipalities. The coexistence of residents and tourists is achieved through policy implementation at council and town levels.

Ken Lyons (CIE Tours International) acknowledged the challenge of directing visitors away from iconic destinations. However, tour operators can incorporate main attractions while introducing lesser-known sites. Itineraries function as sales tools, with primary attractions driving sales decisions while lesser-known experiences create the best guest experiences.

CIE Tours International engaged with a reforestation program called *Refarm*, supported through a sustainability action fund, investing in nature-positive farming in the Burren (Co. Clare). The company works with 15 farming families incorporating conservation grazing through technology. *"We love this area. We know as a business we get great benefit because our guests love being here, but we also know we have a responsibility to ensure that you continue to enjoy living and working in this area."*

Presentation Andalusia Tourism

Antonio Martín-Machuca, Head of Cooperation Management of Andalucía Tourism presented Andalucía's relationship with Irish tourism and sustainability initiatives. In 2024, Andalucía welcomed 710,000 Irish visitors, representing a 17.5 percent increase from 2023 and 30.4 percent more than 2019 (pre-pandemic). Andalucía is now the second-largest destination for Irish people.

Antonio Martín-Machuca (Andalusia Tourism)

Irish visitors spend €182 per day with an average stay of 7.2 nights. Beyond statistics, *"what truly matters is the sustainable human connection, and the affection with which we always welcome you."*

Andalucía comprises a large region—as large as Portugal—with nine million residents across eight provinces, with Seville as the capital. While Málaga and Costa del Sol are well-known, the region offers substantial additional tourism opportunities.

He said that Andalucía is launching a new campaign by January combining residents and visitors, reflecting the themes discussed throughout the conference. The campaign aligns with central government policies, aiming to encourage visitor dispersal across the region toward inland towns, lesser-known cities, cultural sites, gastronomy, and nature—beyond sun and beach destinations. The initiative seeks to *" to show you all that Andalucía can offer."*

Closing Remarks

The first edition of Spain Talks Dublin provided an opportunity for positive exchanges regarding trends and challenges in the tourism sector, demonstrating the power of enriching and dynamic dialogue and highlighting the efforts of Spanish destinations and both Spanish and Irish travel sectors to move towards a more sustainable management of tourism activities.

Eoghan Corry summarized the conference themes and contributions, underscoring the following points:

Laura Pena's introduction established five dimensions of sustainability beyond conventional climate focus, incorporating community contribution and work practices, often absent from sustainability discussions.

Juan José González's presentation on Paradores highlighted the importance of locations in "Empty Spain," creating employment, developing food chains, and maintaining historic buildings. The achievement of operating 30–35-bedroom hotels in historic castles and palaces demonstrates sustainability beyond environmental considerations.

Mary Denton's message emphasized product supply: *"Give us the product and we will sell it."* She stated that sustainability terminology is unnecessary if itineraries incorporate experiences like beach cleaning and community engagement. Irish travellers value participation and engagement.

From left to right: Antonio Martín-Machuca (Andalusia Tourism), Clare Dunne (ITAA), Maria Teresa Lizaranzu (Embassy of Spain), Laura Pena (Spanish Tourist Office)

Abigail Sigüenza discussed Madrid's neighbourhood expansion, infrastructure development, and seasonal extension capabilities.

Clare Dunne emphasized proactive industry engagement: the Irish travel industry does not require customer demand to embrace sustainability. Suppliers, agents, and tour operators are prepared to advance sustainability initiatives.

Diego Juarez's Spain by Train presentation introduced three high-speed rail operators and a single booking platform. The Spain Rail Pass enables multi-city experiences while representing a sustainable transportation option.

Donal Moriarty's Aer Lingus presentation detailed fleet modernization and SAF ambitions exceeding regulatory mandates. Aviation represents approximately 2 percent of global emissions, yet requires continued innovation. The airline's target of 10 percent SAF usage by 2030 demonstrates commitment to net-zero objectives. Spain's role as a SAF supplier through Repsol and CEPSA partnerships reinforces Spain's significance to Aer Lingus's sustainability journey.

The best practices panel addressed specific initiatives. Natalia Boveda detailed layered sustainability efforts including seasonality, visitor dispersal, community engagement, and regional food festivals ensuring year-round events.

Pere Granados described Salou's evolution from a beach-only destination to a multifaceted destination integrating sustainability. The municipality balances resident well-being with tourism activity, positioning residents and tourists as complementary rather than competing interests.

Ken Lyons addressed supplier engagement, consistently asking suppliers what they do regarding sustainability without blacklisting non-compliance. Many perceive sustainability efforts as commercially insignificant, yet financial benefits emerge through energy efficiency, reduced water consumption, and renewable energy adoption. Tourism provides commercial reward alongside environmental benefits.

Pat Neville discussed Coillte's approach to forest management and public access. Rather than restricting access to natural areas, the organization encourages responsible interaction through marked trails, recreation facilities, and accessible infrastructure. Plans to double recreational forests reflect commitment to sustainable outdoor access. Forest management demonstrates that environmental protection and public engagement are complementary objectives.

The closing addressed persistent challenges in tourism sustainability. Visitors naturally gravitate toward iconic destinations and established attractions. However, careful itinerary design can incorporate primary attractions while introducing lesser-known experiences that provide superior guest satisfaction. The industry's role is facilitating sustainable choices through accessible, appealing alternatives.

Eoghan concluded: *"I think tourism is ultimately a force for good,"* emphasizing that sustainability initiatives strengthen rather than diminish the tourism industry's societal acceptance and long-term viability.

Tourism Sustainability Awards Ceremony

The event concluded with the Tourism Sustainability Awards Ceremony, which honoured Irish professionals and organisations for their significant contributions to advancing sustainable tourism in Spain. Her Excellency, **Maria Teresa Lizaranzu**, **Ambassador of Spain to Ireland**, presented the awards, along with Laura Pena and Eoghan Corry.

The 2025 award winners were:

- **Media Award:** Article on Vitoria-Gasteiz written by Tom Sweeney, Travel Editor at The Herald. The piece masterfully explores the culture, gastronomy, and nature of this lesser-known inland Basque city, promoting respect for local communities and urban sustainability.
- **Ambassador Award:** Blog, *This Wild Life of Mine*. Created by the Irish zoologist, Dearbhaile Ní Dhubhghaill, the blog inspires readers to explore Spain responsibly through personal stories and expert insights, championing lesser-known places.
- **Experience Award:** Package "Treasures of Southern Spain" created by The Travel Department. Recognised as the best package promoting sustainable tourism, it offers an inclusive, cultural itinerary for solo travellers and promotes the principles of slow, responsible tourism.
- **Business Award:** Follow the Camino for their exemplary ESG project. The specialised tour operator was praised for its carbon footprint compensation programme, low-impact hiking and cycling tours, direct support for local communities, and a transparent sustainability policy.

From left to right: Tom Sweeney (The Herald), Francesca Rizzarello (The Travel Department), Natalia Bóveda (Costa del Sol), Eoghan Corry (Moderator), Maria Teresa Lizaranzu (Embassy of Spain), Tanya Agarwal, (Follow the Camino), Laura Pena (Spanish Tourist Office)