



21st April 2026
The Spanish Embassy, London

EVENT REPORT



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2026 DESTINATION SPONSORS



A DESTINATION BLUEPRINT FOR IMPROVED TOURISM MANAGEMENT

The aim of the fourth edition of the Spanish Tourist Office (UK)'s flagship event, **Spain Talks 2026**, sponsored this year by Andalucía and Gran Canaria, was to focus on one of travel's most pressing conversations: how destinations sustainably manage growth without compromising the visitor experience or local communities.

The event serves as a dynamic forum to foster dialogue and strengthen the relationship between the UK and Spain while driving collaboration and sustainable progress.

Held at the Spanish Embassy in London, with support from Her Excellency The Ambassador Emma Aparici Vázquez de Parga – the first female Spanish Ambassador to the UK – who in her opening address highlighted the strength of the UK-Spain partnership, evidenced she said by the 19 million UK visitors and 428 daily flights in 2025 – and its continued growth through sustainable innovation, investment and long-term collaboration.



“This is not only a remarkable figure,”

Her Excellency said, “it is also a sign of trust, familiarity and affection between our societies. Moreover, connectivity between our countries remains excellent. We have 428 daily round-trip flights linking cities across Spain and the United Kingdom. **We are the two countries that are more interconnected in the world by air.** And this really tells the closeness of this relationship. This ease of travel continues to support not only tourism, but also business, investment, and cultural exchange”.

The dual language conference was moderated by Simon Calder (Broadcaster and journalist) and Richard Hammond (Publisher, Green Traveller Media) and heard from a distinguished roster of speakers as the role of AI, big data and tourism taxes were discussed across three panel sessions.

Welcome from Manuel Butler, UK Director of the Spanish Tourist Office in London

Manuel officially opened the event, welcoming guests for an afternoon of **dialogue, reflection and action.**

Manuel said: “We are at a crossroads; the highest disruptive challenge we face is social sustainability... it is time to refocus on people”. He explained that “reinventing the management of tourist destinations is pivotal”, which was why the Spanish Tourist Office had chosen the theme for Spain Talks 2026 to be “A Destination Blueprint for improved tourism management”.



Rosario Sánchez Grau, Spain's Secretary of State for Tourism (SETUR) then gave a 10-minute address, reporting that last year's number of UK visitors to Spain – over 19 million – is the highest number on record, representing an increase of 4.4%. But she said that beyond these headline figures, what matters most is how this growth is evolving: “We are seeing a clear stabilisation during the peak summer months, alongside continued growth in the shoulder seasons – particularly from May to June and September to October. This is an encouraging sign of a more balanced model – one that helps reduce pressure on peak periods while creating new opportunities across the year.”



SETUR said that they are seeing **a change in where visitors are choosing to travel**: “While our islands and Mediterranean coast remain as popular as ever, **there is growing interest in the north of Spain** – in what we call ‘Green Spain’. Galicia, for example, saw an increase of almost 50% in UK visitors last year, while the Basque Country grew by 40%, Asturias by nearly 19%, and a huge jump in visitors to Aragon where UK arrivals increased by over 160%. SETUR added that such diversification of both destination and season is “a key foundation of more sustainable tourism” and that the future of tourism cannot be built in isolation.

“Our goal is not simply to remain a global leader in tourism, but to lead in how tourism is done – in a way that is more responsible, more resilient, and more meaningful for everyone involved.” Rosario Sánchez Grau, Spain's Secretary of State for Tourism (SETUR)

SETUR pointed out that Spain Talks was an initiative that was created by the Spanish Tourist Office in London in 2023 and which has become a central part of Turespaña's international sustainability strategy: “It is no coincidence that Spain Talks was born here in the United Kingdom – our number one tourism market, and a key partner as we work together to shape the future of tourism. Today's programme reflects that shared ambition, bringing together voices from across our two countries to explore how we can build a more sustainable, balanced, and forward-looking sector.”

Lyn Hughes, Founding Editor of Wanderlust Magazine, presented the Tourism Personality of The Year Award to Amancio López, Founder and President of Grupo Hotusa, recognising the group's long established commitment to sustainability. The award, Lyn said, is for someone “who is values driven and has built something with genuine purpose.”

Amancio López founded Grupo Hotusa nearly 50 years ago, and it more operates in more than 130 countries, employs over 6,000 people, and turned over 1.65 billion Euros last year. What struck the team at Wanderlust, Lyn said, was that the work went much deeper than merely the scale of the Group, citing the example of how Amancio had seen the opportunity to **breathe new life into abandoned convents, palaces, historic estates**, “turning heritage into experiences that guests won't forget”. Lyn also drew attention to the Group's investment in regions such as Chantada in Galicia – creating jobs, restoring local pride, and driving economic resilience – as well as support for independent hoteliers through Keytel – the world's largest alliance of independent hotels – where Lyn said Amancio has “championed the independent hotelier at a time when the industry has often moved in the opposite direction”.

In his acceptance speech, Amancio López said that tourism has generated wealth, sustained employment, promoted infrastructure, and contributed to modernising the country, which he said, “is the result of the collective effort of generations that have understood tourism as a strategic for the country”. He said that at Grupo Hotusa, “we constantly work to reduce our environmental impact, improve efficiency and advance the use of renewable energy” and referred to the special attention it gives to the rehabilitation of historical places giving them “new life through tourism” as a way of preserving the identity of destinations while also generating economic and cultural value. **“Sustainability is not a one off – it is a way of managing thinking in the long term”.**



Amancio López, Founder and President of Grupo Hotusa

Spain Talks 2026 was sponsored by **Andalucía** and **Gran Canaria**:

Fátima Blanco Villaverde, International Marketing Executive, Junta de Andalucía, explained how with 38 million visitors a year (12.5 million from the UK) generating 30 billion Euros, it is **shifting promotion away from peak-driven city tourism towards year-round, lower-impact segments** such as nature, gastronomy, cycling and hiking, while actively connecting international buyers with small local businesses and lesser-known areas. Fátima explained that a sustainable tourism law had recently been introduced focusing in improving the quality of tourism, regulating accommodation and fighting illegal activities, as well as supports rural tourism and “a better balance between residents and visitors”. She reported that out of the, so it’s a hugely important part of its economy and why “sustainability is not optional but essential”. It is home to 24 natural parks, 3 national parks, 11 UNESCO world heritage sites, and over 64 million olive trees, which she said is “the biggest man-made forest in the world”.

Katerina Bomshtein, Destination Manager UK & Ireland, Gran Canaria Tourism, explained how while the island remains a mature tourism destination where the travel industry remains central to the economy it is being actively reshaped around sustainability with a **new climate action strategy** addressing decarbonisation and energy efficiency (focussing on how tourists and locals are moving around the island); coastline infrastructure; regeneration; and governance to help Gran Canaria become “more environmentally sustainable, economically competitive and socially balanced”.



Fátima Blanco Villaverde, International Marketing Executive, Junta de Andalucía



Katerina Bomshtein, Destination Manager UK & Ireland, Gran Canaria Tourism

PANEL 1: EXPLORING HOW AI AND BIG DATA ARE AFFECTING AND MOVING THE DIAL IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Moderator: Simon Calder, Travel Expert and Broadcaster

Panellists:

Claire Lampon, Marketing and Communications Lead, Travalyst

Ezequiel Collantes, Institutional Director, Segittur

Carlos Cendra Cruz, Chief Marketing & Communications Officer, Mabrian

José Manuel Camarero, Vice President, Turisme Comunitat Valencia – INVATTUR

Overview: The panel highlighted the importance of reliable, standardised data to guide both industry decisions and traveller behaviour, with transparency seen as key to building trust, and the need to actively manage tourism demand – tackling overtourism and correcting market imbalances through predictive, data-led insights that can help inform decisions around sustainability. While AI offers powerful tools to track environmental impact, visitor flows, and resource use, the panel made clear that responsible progress hinges on trust, clear purpose, and practical implementation, and cross-industry collaboration to help shape how it is deployed.



Left to right: José Manuel Camarero, Ezequiel Collantes, Carlos Cendra Cruz, Claire Lampon

Claire Lampon explained how Travalyst has built on the work it has done with Google providing flight emissions data that's now used by several of its partners (Amadeus, Booking.com, Skyscanner and Expedia), to provide an interoperable 'data hub' that facilitates the exchange of data across the entire travel ecosystem. It is currently working in the accommodation sector and plans to move into the rail sector. Part of its work uses AI to ingest the data, but Claire emphasised:

“It's very, very important that the data is credible, consistent, and compliant”

Claire Lampon, Marketing and Communications Lead, Travalyst

Ezequiel Collantes provided a view from a state agency, referring to how they help destinations improve sustainability through structured assessment and guidance. He noted challenges around data overload, lack of expertise, and trust, stressing that technology must serve clear, practical objectives rather than just generating dashboards. He referred to the '**zero click search**' phenomenon whereby search engine users no longer have to click on a link on the search results page to find the answer to their query, because AI has already presented them with a set of answers. As a result, he said, you have to think more strategically about the content you upload to your website to ensure it is displayed in the search results.

Carlos Cendra Cruz said in addition to the content that Ezequiel referred to, it's important to also use '**social listening**' to get data on spontaneous visitor behaviour to identify opportunities and challenges to inform the content. He explained how his data analytics company is creating a framework of standardized indicators – KPIs – based in global data networks. He pointed out the potential of AI – particularly its analytic capabilities – in forecasting trends, managing overtourism, and identifying imbalances such as the overreliance on certain markets.

José Manuel Camarero provided insights on the implementation of AI across Valencia where tourism represents 19 % of GDP, and 2,900 million Euros each year. He underscored the importance of managing success rather than just promoting growth, leveraging AI and big data to monitor carbon footprints, demand patterns, and visitor behaviour.

Claire Lampon raised the issue of trust regarding the use of AI. She said there's a **"fragmentation of accountability"**; she said if it's unclear who's responsible for the payment or for booking the hotel, where does this trust lie? Similarly, regarding data quality: if it's not transparent, it lacks trust over whether it's real. And finally, regarding data privacy, travellers want to know how their data will be used, how will it be captured and by whom.

"While these are risks, I think this is an opportunity for us to work together as an industry to build these guardrails and to build in this data privacy element so that people really trust these nudges that AI is providing and then we can really help drive that sustainable future."

Claire Lampon, Marketing and Communications Lead, Travalyst

Claire added that legislation regarding the use of AI will take time, and that "it's up to the industry to collaborate and really work together to make that happen". She explained that as Travalyst is a "pre-competitive coalition", its unique purpose and strength in the industry is that it can work with the biggest players in the industry in a way in which it can drive forward these solutions that are making real difference, such as its travel impact model, and its data hub. She said that **"AI will no doubt have an impact, but it's up to us to shape what that will be"**.

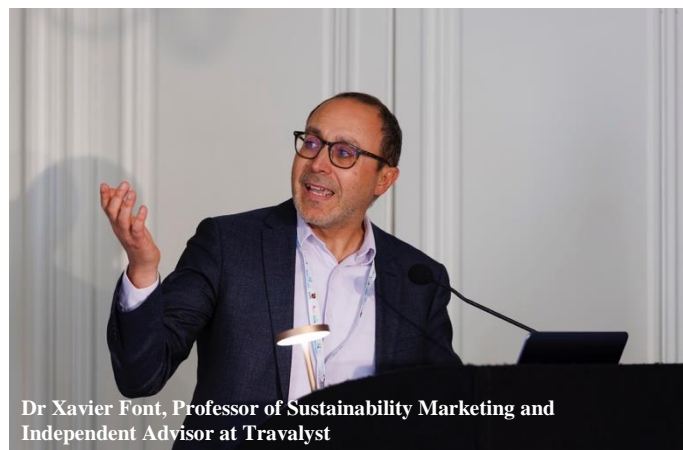
Keynote speaker:

Dr Xavier Font, Professor of Sustainability Marketing and Independent Advisor at Travalyst

Dr. Font provided an overview of what he thinks a world-class sustainable tourism destination looks like, breaking it down into the following six themes:

1. Measure & resource:

Xavier challenged destinations to show evidence of the use of resources that invests in sustainability, providing information such as the percentage of budgets that are spent directly on sustainability, and how many staff have roles dedicated to sustainability in day-to-day operations. He said that measuring sustainability metrics (such as carbon emissions, use of water, visitor flows, economic leakage, etc) – as well as the resources that are used to invest in them – provides **evidence that destinations are not merely using the sustainability label as rhetoric and are essential to future proof a destination**, particularly with regard to providing data for tourism strategies that are resilient regarding the use of water, and natural and man-made disasters, such as fire, floods, etc.



2. Be eco-efficient: Xavier said that it is generally accepted that **tourists are not willing to pay more for the same products they bought in the past** and that given the current cost of living crisis, where delivering day-to-day services is becoming more expensive "anything that we can do that makes us more eco-efficient is good."

3. Decarbonise: Xavier said that less than 5% of all the destinations in Europe measure the carbon footprint of tourists going there and that “there is a big gap between 95% of destinations saying sustainability is important to me and 5% of them measuring carbon”.

“Carbon is one of the single biggest threats that we have to human life right now, and for the foreseeable future”

Dr Xavier Font, Professor of Sustainability Marketing and Independent Advisor at Travalyst

Destinations often talk about what Xavier described as ‘vertical’ metrics of visitor numbers, ie how much people spend per person in a given destination, but he’d rather consider the ‘horizontal’, ie. what is the carbon footprint for tourists to have that amount of expenditure in that destination.

4. Normalise: Xavier said that it’s not enough to measure the number of visitors to a destination, in order to measure a destination’s efforts on sustainability, it’s far more useful to understand the ratios of how much of the money they spend actually benefits residents and how much ‘leaks’ away from them. He added that one of the indicators he would like to see is an indicator about the percentage of tourism services that certified as sustainable or the percentage of the expenditure that are sustainable suppliers “because that’s going to tell us an awful lot about where we are”.

Xavier also called for establishing indicators and standards for the **social impact assessment of tourism** but cautioned against systematic changes in certification without proper consideration of the consequences. He reported that he’d recently seen data from 82,000 hotels across Europe which showed that 9.3 % of the hotels were certified (by November 2024) up from 6.3% the previous year.

But Xavier said that while this was good news, it is mainly corporate and chain hotels that have contributed to this upswing and that “We are creating a situation where the small businesses are going to be penalised for not having the budget to prove to the world something that very often they're doing really well anyway. **So we have to consider what are the negative unintended consequences of good legislation that has been badly implemented**”.

5. Reduce seasonality: While Xavier welcomed efforts to increase the tourism season, he said that it shouldn’t be about redistributing volume... and challenged destinations to define and resource sustainability with precision reminding the audience: “**volume is vanity, profit is sanity**”. While Xavier welcomed how destinations are increasingly educating residents on “how lucky they are to have any tourists coming to their city, this cannot be the only answer”.

“Think of tourists like you think of rain. Too much rain at once, we've got floods. Slow rain that the ground can absorb, it nourishes you. Fast rain that the ground cannot absorb, it floods you. It kills everything.”

Dr Xavier Font, Professor of Sustainability Marketing and Independent Advisor at Travalyst

6. Optimise tourism behaviour: Xavier said that so often marketing campaigns focus on first-time visitors, but he applauded Spain for its work on the repeat visitor market. Xavier said he’d like to see more work is done to optimise the tourism spend of visitors “to increase it on the products actually genuinely benefit the destination”.

PANEL 2: A DESTINATION BLUEPRINT FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Moderator: Richard Hammond, Publisher, Green Traveller Media

Panellists:

Mark Tanzer, Chief Executive, ABTA

María Mar Suárez Armas, Counsellor for Tourism, Cabildo de El Hierro

Ben Lynam, Head of Communications and Research, The Travel Foundation

Overview: The discussion centred on the idea that sustainability is not optional but a structural necessity, particularly for destinations heavily reliant on tourism. Panellists called for a decisive rebalancing of economic gain with environmental protection and community wellbeing, shifting away from one-off solutions towards coordinated, long-term action. A strong emphasis was placed on designing strategies around local realities, rejecting one-size-fits-all metrics in favour of more tailored approaches.



At the outset, Mark Tanzer gave a short speech on ABTA's perspective regarding the challenges of sustainability for Spain. He referenced the figure's given earlier by HE Ambassador and the Secretary of State on how important UK tourism is to the Spanish economy saying:

“In a time when everyone's thinking about how AI is going to potentially reduce the number of jobs, hospitality and tourism are very job rich, which is incredibly important. It is good because it done properly, it can enhance destinations. It's in the interest of the tourism industry to make sure that places are preserved and attractive and work for the residents as well.”

Mark highlighted that while tourism delivers jobs and economic value, it also creates real pressures for residents, requiring an explicit re-balancing of economic, environmental and social outcomes. He referenced the event last year when the mayors of eight municipalities in Spain visited the Spanish Embassy in London to address the issues of overtourism and how residents felt about it. “It was very encouraging. There was no complacency at all. I think there was a real recognition that if they don't get that right, then that their own tourism economy will suffer.”

Mark said that for destinations to come up with the correct blueprint for sustainability it has to be a **“three-legged stool”**: **the tourism industry in Spain, the residents where tourism takes place, and those in the outbound travel industry that send the visitors.** “We have to be talking to each other about what is the right balance”, he said. “And there is no single answer. It varies from destination to destination as to how many tourists are wanted... I think having that very strong dialogue, and it is a maturing dialogue, is absolutely crucial”.

Mark referenced last year's announcement about a collaboration between ABTA and the Secretary of State's Ministry and Turespaña to start assembling a data set of what steps are being taken in destinations. He said there's a lot that's being done and that it was important “to develop a strong communication for tourists who are going so they feel good, but very importantly for residents so that residents feel we're getting a sort of economic and social return on tourism”.

Mark ended his short speech acknowledging the work that has already been done in Spain in this regard and said ABTA is very committed to be part of the journey that Spain is on”.

Ben Lynam described how sustainability is fundamentally a design challenge: destinations must intentionally shape the tourism system they want, rather than reacting to growth once pressures emerge. He said it can be helpful to go back to basics and for destinations to ask themselves why they want tourism in the first place. “Once you understand why you want tourism, why your community wants tourism, you can then start to work back from there”, he said.

Ben flagged up the importance of striking a balance – referencing what the audience had previously heard from Xavier Font and from Mark Tanzer, pointing out specifically regarding the income derived from tourism: “Where's the money going? Is it only going to promotion, or is the money going to actually supporting the product, the destination, and making sure that that is being implemented?”



Ben Lynam, The Travel Foundation, and María Mar Suárez Armas, Counselor for Tourism, Cabildo de El Hierro

In terms of monitoring residents’ concerns, he says there are ‘**checks and balances**’ that can help understand the community perspective too, not just the tourism perspective, in terms of thresholds for water, energy, and other utilities. He said destinations must accept there are limits to these: “So we have to work within those and make sure that we're designing a system that is going to give what you want for your community within those kinds of parameters”.

Ben said that there are **two important megatrends: growth and climate change**, and that tourism sits in between both.

“In our future, it will be warmer. In our future, there will be more people travelling, so we have to build a system to understand those risks and opportunities to make sure that our blueprint is future proof.”

Ben Lynam, Head of Communications and Research, The Travel Foundation

Mark said that in order for tourism companies and destinations to address the risks of the pressure of tourism and the climate and nature emergencies, “**it’s a question of numbers**”. He said, “it is the growth that creates the real pressure on the physical infrastructure and the social infrastructure and the environment”, but that “big problems don’t always have big solutions” and argued for an accumulation of coordinated actions rather than single headline solutions. Whereas in the past, he said it was possible to control visitor numbers in a destination by the number of licensed rooms, but with the boom in the private rental market “that lid came off”. He said there are mechanisms to reduce the supply of that (and referenced Barcelona and Mallorca in this regard) but he thinks that’s what’s more interesting is in managing the demand.

“It's exciting that so much more can be done on the shaping of the demand than simply cutting off supply”.

Mark Tanzer, Chief Executive, ABTA

Mark added that he was looking forward to the panel session on taxes and wondered whether they might be “a way of reducing demand because it’s more expensive or are they potentially a tool for guiding people to where and when you want them to travel?”.

María Mar Suárez Armas said that one of the first jobs she has done in El Hierro was to assess the data that they had on tourists. She explained how El Hierro’s small scale, finite resources have driven a model based on clear thresholds, around water, energy, transport and visitor capacity, supported by data-led planning (working with Mabrian on Big Data and IA platforms) and a formal **Climate Action Plan** – she said that El Hierro is the first island in Spain to have this.

Ben said that **figuring out what the priority can be the most rewarding first step for destinations** as it can help focus on what will really make a difference. He said rather than building up a long list of KPIs, it can be more constructive and efficient to look at what are your red flags – such as setting thresholds above which will be unsustainable.



María Mar Suárez Armas, Counsellor for Tourism, Cabildo de El Hierro

“Sustainability is such a ridiculously big word that can mean such a ridiculous amount of things, whereas actually chances are you really need to focus on a few things.”

Ben Lynam, Head of Communications and Research, The Travel Foundation

Ben said that **rather than focus on the type of tourists destinations want to visit, it can be useful to think about the type of tourism destinations want to develop**, particularly one that resonates with residents. But he said that local communities aren’t necessarily one homogenous like-minded group of people, **“there are many communities within a community”**, he said, and that there are often exists a system of governance within communities already and there is no need to try to re-invent it, “we just need to connect tourism to it”, he said.

On the subject of overtourism, Ben said that **just because a place isn’t overcrowded, doesn’t mean it’s necessarily ready for an influx of visitors**, so you have to be careful automatically redistributing tourists from hotspots to other less-visited areas, making sure the infrastructure is in place it cope with more visitors, particularly out of season. Mark said this was a case in point when the three legs of the stool (the tourism industry in Spain, the residents where tourism takes place, and those that send the visitors) should work together to ensure the visitor experience meet expectations. He said ABTA gets more complaints in the shoulder season when the pressure is off the peak, than it does in the peak season.

“What we found historically is that the shoulder season things may be open but they’re not really open,” said Mark. “One bar is open instead of three or hotels, who may cut back on cleaning staff because they think they’re going to get fewer numbers, and so the experience that the customer gets is poorer.”



Ben Lynam, Head of Communications and Research, The Travel Foundation

Mark said that for years ABTA has worked very closely with destinations about issues that it thinks will degrade the customer's experience, pointing out that it works closely with the Federation of Tour Operators (which merged into ABTA a few years ago) to discuss these kinds of issues. For instance, if an oil refinery were to be built just off the coast, they would flag it up to the destination to ask if they have thought about the impact. “So we have a very active dialogue on an operational level with destinations to help them understand how customers are going to perceive developments”, he said.

Mark added that ABTA also talks at the local municipal level with mayors and their offices about their plans for developing sustainable tourism, so he has the privilege of knowing what is going on in different parts of Spain.

Maria said that on El Hierro they want to grow tourism numbers but they are naturally constrained by several issues, including the limit of 7/8 boats a week, whereas as La Gomera has 6 a day, and it has just a short runway, and that there are concerns from residents that with more visitors there won't be enough water for them.

Ben brought the panel to a close with a final word about **destination limits**. He said we should all be proud that destinations do have limits. He said brands in any other walk of life “would absolutely love to be able to say that they have a high demand and a limited product”, such as some high-quality watchmakers will do that on purpose and will make sure that they have a limited supply for that demand. Finally, he said that having a limit means that you can start to make choices and “it's a really wonderful place to be... embrace it but understand why you're doing it because you can build the quality of your destination. You can then really choose to select the quality of your tourists”.

PANEL 3: TOURISM TAXES FOR AND AGAINST

Moderator: Simon Calder, Travel Expert and Broadcaster

Panellists:

Margarita del Cid, Mayor of Torremolinos

Kate Nicholls OBE, Chair, UK Hospitality (Kate was unable to attend so Simon Calder put forward her point of view as far as he understood it)

Nick Brooks-Sykes, Director of Tourism, Marketing Manchester

Pere Granados, Mayor of Salou

Overview: The discussion explored the balance between maintaining destination competitiveness and ensuring tourism contributes fairly to local economies and communities, especially in destinations where high visitor numbers create huge pressures on local public services and infrastructure. A central theme was governance—how tourism taxes are designed, implemented, and managed, and whether current approaches create clarity or fragmentation.



Left to right: Nick Brooks-Sykes, Pere Granados, Margarita del Cid, Simon Calder

The conversation also examined different models in practice, from industry-led initiatives to government-imposed schemes, and how revenues can be hypothecated to be reinvested into improving visitor experiences and local quality of life.

Simon Calder opened the panel by saying there are strong arguments both for and against a tourist tax. He gave the example of Uruguay where they automatically subtract VAT on credit card transactions for foreign visitors (typically in restaurants and car rentals) – so as Simon said – “they actually will give you a reward for being a foreigner rather than taxing you for it”.

Margarita del Cid said that in Torremolinos they are currently analysing the implementation of a tourist tax to see if it is something they want to introduce, particularly regarding **who would collect the tax, who would manage the resources, and what they would be allocated to**. She said that one of the important things to understand is that while tourism generates income via consumption of goods, not much reaches the local council which has to pay for the public services that are used by the influx of visitors. “**An imbalance occurs where the municipality assumes the costs but does not proportionally receive the fiscal return**”, she said, and that the real problem “is how tourist municipalities are financed”.

Pere Granados said that in Catalonia there is a mandatory tourist tax of 2 Euros per night with a maximum of 7 Euros per visit. He said that the issues raised by Margarita regarding the use of public services (such as beach cleaning, security, waste collection and street cleaning) are felt keenly in Salou, which has population of 33,000, yet receives around 3 million visitors a year.



Pere Granados, Mayor of Salou and Margarita del Cid, Mayor of Torremolinos

Simon Calder put forward the view from Kate who is not in favour of tourist taxes. He said that her argument would be that visitors spend money, create jobs, pay VAT, so they’re already paying a tax to be in those destinations. Furthermore, visitors help pay towards visitor attractions (such as Port Aventura), which “would not exist where it not for the marvellous international tourists”. The risk, Simon said on behalf of Kate, was that “by introducing a tourist tax you will simply price yourself out of the market”.

Nick Brooks-Sykes said that **Manchester was the first city in the UK to introduce a tourism tax** and that it was introduced by hoteliers as a levy for visitors. He said that the idea of the tax was to raise money to pay to increase the demand that was needed in order to meet the “continued growth, investment in hotels, and more supply coming into the marketplace”.

The £1 per night charge raises £4 million each year that Nick said is then spent “on driving more visitors into the city through our marketing campaigns”.

Nick said these campaigns have included conferences and conventions and creating events, hosting the Brit Awards, the MOBO Awards, and the MTV Europe Awards, which drives business into the city for overnight stays.

He said they have also improved street cleanliness, security, and “the welcome of the city to visitor... and those four things are driving more overnight stays and a better reputation for Manchester”.



Nick Brooks-Sykes, Director of Tourism, Marketing Manchester

Simon Calder then provided Kate’s counter view to introducing a tourist tax, saying that £1 was a token amount, “If you're going to have a tax, at least make it a decent tax”, said Simon, and that Kate had witnessed businesses travellers arriving at a hotel and because the agency hadn’t paid the tax, they all had to queue to pay the £1, which was “counter-productive”.

Nick agreed that the £1 was a very small amount, but explained that they had started deliberately low just to test the system, concerned that it may lead to visitors preferring to go to Liverpool instead of Manchester, but he said in fact that hasn’t happened, and that “undoubtedly the city is cleaner, more welcoming, safer, more attractive with hanging baskets and banners and welcome hosts on the street to help people find their way around”.

“I really would argue that the city is better for locals because of the tax that visitors are paying”

Nick Brooks-Sykes, Director of Tourism, Marketing Manchester

Simon asked the panel if they thought tourist taxes could be used as a deterrent or to drive a change in behaviour of tourists for certain forms of tourism, ie a form of smart taxation to nudge people to behave in a more sustainable way. He asked if visitors stayed in an apartment that they've rented on Airbnb or who have arrived on a cruise ship, should they pay more than if they are staying in a hotel? Or as per Venice, should destinations charge a tax on busy days to influence the numbers of visitors. Nick said that he didn’t see this as an issue that they’re addressing in the city currently. “We want more visitors and we are spending more money to get more visitors to come to Manchester”, he said. He cited the example of Amsterdam that has constantly increased their tourism tax, but visitor numbers haven't decreased.

“So their plan to try and control visitors by taxing them doesn't seem to be working”, he said, though he did acknowledge that there might be value in discussing with residents about visitor management. “In some cases,” he said, “there probably is a conversation to be had with residents about how visitors impact on the local city, but I think that needs to be driven by communities and by residents rather than being a mechanism to control visitors by taxing and by politicians”.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: ADE ADEPITAN, BBC PRESENTER AND DISABILITY ADVOCATE

Ade Adepitan inspired guests with his personal journey, competitive spirit, and heartfelt reflections on Spain’s influence on his life.



Wrapping up Spain Talks 2026, Manuel Butler, Director of the Spanish Tourist Office (UK) said:

“It was a pleasure to welcome such a strong gathering of travel trade and media professionals to our fourth edition of Spain Talks. Following insightful discussions across our three panels, Spain’s ambition to become a leading sustainable destination for both visitors and residents remains unwavering.

“Responsible travel continues to sit at the heart of the Spanish Tourist Office’s strategy.”

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Event Photos

A selection of the event’s photo can be found [here](#)



Tuesday 21 April 2026 #SpainTalks

MEET THE SPEAKERS

Manuel Butler, Director of the Spanish Tourist Office in the UK

Manuel Butler has played a key role in Spanish tourism promotion for over 25 years. His extensive career includes serving as Counsellor at the Spanish Embassy in Berlin, Head of Turespaña in both Miami and Frankfurt, and Director General at Turespaña's headquarters in Madrid. He has also held the position of President of the European Travel Commission and returned to Turespaña in London after three years as Executive Director of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Under his leadership, the Spanish Tourist Office in London successfully re-established Spain as Britain's top tourism destination following the pandemic. A passionate advocate for sustainable and accessible travel, Butler is committed to ensuring that his tourism strategy focuses on long-term sustainability.



Emma Aparici Vázquez de Parga, Ambassador of Spain in the UK

Throughout her diplomatic career, Emma Aparici Vázquez de Parga has held various positions at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Spain, working in the office of different Ministers and in the Directorate-General for the United Nations. Overseas, she served as Deputy Head of Mission at the Spanish Embassy in Libya and as Secretary at the Mission of Spain to the United Nations. She also served as Secretary General for Foreign Affairs at the Prime Minister of Spain's Office. She has been awarded the Officer's Cross of the Order of Isabella the Catholic and the Order of Civil Merit. Emma Aparici Vázquez de Parga was appointed Ambassador to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in December 2025.



Rosario Sánchez Grau, Secretary of State for Tourism

Rosario Sánchez Grau is an economist and member of the Audit Corps of the Sindicatura de Comptes of the Balearic Islands, with early career experience at KPMG and extensive leadership roles in regional public administration. She has served as Government Delegate in the Balearic Islands and as Regional Minister of Finance and External Relations, where she oversaw COVID-19 business support and EU Next Generation projects. Her deep knowledge of the Balearic tourism sector and experience managing European funds position her strongly in her role as Secretary of State for Tourism, driving the sector's transformation and the execution of Spain's Recovery, Transformation and Resilience initiatives.



Simon Calder, Travel Expert and Broadcaster

Simon Calder is Britain's leading travel commentator and is known as "the man who pays his way" which means that he pays for his own travel. He began his career at Gatwick airport, where he cleaned out planes for Sir Freddie Laker and, later, frisked passengers. He then started to write travel guidebooks and travel articles. Today Simon is Travel Correspondent for the Independent. Simon also writes for the Evening Standard, National Geographic as well as many other publications. Simon is a regular guest on national TV and radio, often seen on BBC Breakfast, Good Morning Britain, This Morning, CNN, ITV News, Channel 5 and Sky News. Plus BBC Radio 2, 4, 5, LBC, Times and Talk. He is frequently interviewed on national and local BBC radio.



Claire Lampon, Marketing and Communications Lead, Travalyst

Claire Lampon is the Marketing and Communications Lead at Travalyst, the independent not-for-profit coalition founded by Prince Harry, The Duke of Sussex, working to change the way the world travels – for good. With over 13 years' experience in the tech, tourism, culture and sustainability sectors, Claire creates and leads content and communications strategies that have storytelling at their heart. Her previous work has included developing a communications strategy to support a sustainable food system and a safer climate at the Soil Association and leading on a digital content strategy that brought the stories of Historic Royal Palaces to life through emerging technology. Claire has won numerous awards for her work and has spoken internationally in Los Angeles (keynote speaker at the Museum Marketing Summit) and in London (Culture Geek, Barbican).



Ezequiel Collantes, Institutional Director, Segittur

Ezequiel García Collantes currently serves as Institutional Director at SEGITTUR, the state-owned body responsible for driving innovation and technology in Spain's tourism sector. From 2021 to 2024, he was Deputy Director General of Artificial Intelligence at the Ministry of Digital Transformation and Public Administration, where he led national-level AI strategy initiatives, including the implementation of Spain's National AI Strategy, support for generative AI and language technologies, and contributions to the governance framework aligned with the EU Artificial Intelligence Act.



Carlos Cendra Cruz, Chief Marketing & Communications Officer, Mabrian

Carlos Cendra Cruz is partner and Chief Marketing and Communications Officer at Mabrian, a global leader in Tourism Intelligence for Destinations. With more than 15 years of experience in leadership in business, marketing, market research and tourism, Carlos has been a partner of Mabrian since 2017, when he saw that Artificial Intelligence and data had the potential to change the way decisions are made in the tourism sector, making them more efficient and sustainable. His specialty is transforming complex research and data analysis into actionable strategies, with a focus on international marketing, strategic management, and data analytics. He is passionate about identifying emerging trends and optimizing destination management through the use of up-to-date contextual information.

