



*Spain*  
**TALKS**  
Caring for the Future

**INFORME**

TURESPAÑA 

# AGENDA



**11:40 AM - REGISTRATION**

**2:30 PM - WELCOME ADDRESS**  
**MAGÍ CASTELLTORT, TOURISM CONSUL (TURESPAÑA)**

**2:40 PM - TOURISM BOARD TALK: LANZAROTE TOURISM BOARD**  
**HÉCTOR FERNÁNDEZ, CEO, LANZAROTE TOURISM BOARD**

**2:50 PM - PANEL DISCUSSION 1: NEW TOURISM PRODUCTS AND EXPERIENCES CONTRIBUTING TO A MORE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MODEL**

**3:30 PM - TOURISM BOARD TALK: MALLORCA TOURISM COUNCIL**

**3:40 PM - COFFEE BREAK**

**4:00 PM - PANEL DISCUSSION 2: BEST MARKETING PRACTICES**

**4:40 PM - TOURISM BOARD TALK: VALENCIA TOURISM BOARD**

**4:50 PM - PANEL DISCUSSION 3: CREATING A POSITIVE COMMUNITY IMPACT**

**5:20 PM - CLOSING REMARKS**

**6:00 PM - AWARDS CEREMONY**



# LANZAROTE TOURISM BOARD TALK

By Héctor Fernández, CEO of the  
Lanzarote Tourism Board

The presentation was given by Héctor Fernández, CEO of the Lanzarote Tourism Board, who outlined the island's impressive journey towards sustainable tourism. He began by showing a video that introduced the island's unique characteristics, highlighting how Lanzarote's tourism had grown to over 3 million visitors. However, what truly set the island apart was its deep commitment to sustainability and the cultural values that had driven its tourism industry.

Local artists and the community's influence had played a key role in managing the destination. Notable efforts included the declassification of numerous hotel beds and socially responsible practices such as the ban on billboards along roadsides. Sustainability had taken root on the island as early as the 1960s, well before the term became widely recognized in the tourism sector. In 1993, Lanzarote was designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, and two years later, it hosted the World Summit on Sustainable Tourism, which led to the approval of the Charter for Sustainable Tourism. This had marked the beginning of a policy that emphasized the balance between nature preservation and tourism development.

Lanzarote's sustainability efforts continued to evolve, and in 2022, the island signed the Glasgow Declaration, underlining the tourism sector's role in combating climate change. As a destination, Lanzarote faced challenges of insularity, such as resource scarcity and dependence on external sources for energy, making self-sufficiency a priority.

Recently, the local community had been at the forefront, advocating for the benefits of tourism while working to improve their livelihoods. Lanzarote's commitment to sustainability combined social awareness with natural resource protection to address global challenges.

As tourism numbers continued to grow globally, Héctor Fernández raised the question: how could tourist destinations manage the increasing pressure of visitor arrivals? This was a concern echoed by many destinations such as Venice, Barcelona, and the Balearic Islands. In Lanzarote, the government had been taking proactive steps to manage growth, focusing on quality over quantity. Defining sustainable tourism models required difficult choices regarding energy, transport, emissions, and the economy. Lanzarote, in particular, had been focusing on its dependence on air transport and had been working with airlines to create sustainable aviation fuel (SAF), positioning the Canary Islands as a key player in sustainable fuel production.



The island's strategy included fostering responsible tourism through campaigns that highlighted the importance of ethical behavior and environmental preservation. Lanzarote's "Green Challenge," as defined by the Glasgow Agreement, aimed for carbon neutrality by 2050. To achieve this, a comprehensive climate action plan was being developed, involving all sectors of the tourism industry. The island's commitment to a sustainable future was evident in the close collaboration between public and private entities, as well as the local community.

Sustainability was not only about protecting the environment; it also involved educating tourists and locals alike. Lanzarote had been working on raising awareness about the island's natural values and had been creating a code of ethics for engaging with nature. Promoting the use of green transportation and encouraging healthy lifestyles were also key aspects of its sustainability efforts.

The tourism sector had to support businesses in the transition to greener practices, focusing on waste management, climate change mitigation, and maintaining Lanzarote's reputation as a sustainable destination. The visibility of these efforts, even on a small island, helped set a global example, showcasing Lanzarote as a responsible and environmentally-conscious tourism model.

As the world moved toward regenerative tourism, Lanzarote had been leading the charge. This approach emphasized minimizing negative impacts while regenerating local resources and ensuring fair distribution of benefits. Public administration played a crucial role in encouraging the local community to actively participate in shaping the tourism strategy. By addressing issues like holiday housing and adjusting regulations to mitigate negative impacts, Lanzarote aimed to ensure that tourism remained a sustainable force for the future.



# PANEL DISCUSSION

## NEW TOURISM PRODUCTS AND EXPERIENCES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO A MORE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MODEL

Moderator: Magí Castelltort, Consulate General of Spain in New York

Russell Walters, Regional Director N. America, Adventure Travel Trade Association - Dianna Ditto, Senior Director of Product Marketing, Collette

Juan José González Álvarez, Sales Director, Paradores



### Emerging Trends in Sustainable Travel

Dianna Ditto – Collette

Travel habits among North American travelers are evolving in ways that naturally align with sustainability principles, particularly those outlined in the Glasgow Accord. One of the most significant shifts is the increasing preference for smaller group travel, which is now outpacing traditional large-group tours at an unprecedented rate. This transformation benefits both travelers and local economies, fostering stronger community connections and enhancing the perception of tourism among locals.

Another emerging trend is the excitement around local transportation, with travelers seeing it as an adventure rather than just a means of getting from one place to another. To meet this demand, Collette is incorporating more regional transit options into its trip designs.

Additionally, there is a growing interest in secondary cities, encouraging travel beyond well-trodden tourist hotspots. Travelers also prefer slower, more immersive experiences, choosing to focus on specific regions rather than rushing through multiple countries. For example, instead of a 10-day tour covering all of Europe, many now opt to explore Northern or Southern Spain in depth, allowing for more authentic interactions with locals.

Collette is also ensuring that local stakeholders benefit directly from tourism. A great example is in Salamanca, where the company has partnered with student musicians known as Las Tunas.

These performers share their music and stories with travelers, while also gaining financial support—a perfect example of how tourism can empower local communities.

### The Challenges of Implementing Sustainable Travel

Russell Walters – Adventure Travel

One of the biggest challenges in sustainable travel is aligning top-down strategies with on-the-ground implementation. Large travel corporations are increasingly developing sustainability policies, but local providers—such as small village businesses and independent tour operators—often lack the time or resources to adopt these changes. To address this, companies need to offer better training and support for local partners to integrate sustainable practices effectively.

Another challenge is shifting the consumer mindset. It's not just about educating service providers but also influencing travelers to make responsible choices. This is particularly relevant for younger consumers, who are increasingly shaping the future of travel.

### Paradores: A Model for Sustainable Hospitality

Juan José González Álvarez – Paradores

Paradores, Spain's state-owned hotel chain, offers a unique and sustainable approach to tourism. With 98 properties, most situated in historical landmarks such as castles, monasteries, and fortresses, Paradores provides travelers with exclusive, high-quality experiences in less crowded locations.

Sustainability is central to their mission, particularly as 70% of Paradores properties are located in Spain's "Empty Spain"—rural areas that have experienced depopulation. By preserving cultural heritage and ensuring that tourism benefits these regions, Paradores is redefining what luxury travel looks like.

While environmental sustainability is a major focus, Paradores also emphasizes social and governance initiatives.





The company is actively measuring carbon footprints for each hotel, offering travelers a carbon calculator on its website to track their environmental impact. Despite the challenge of implementing modern energy solutions in historical buildings, Paradores is committed to reducing emissions and promoting transparency.

To enhance eco-tourism experiences, Paradores has launched "Nature for the Senses", an initiative that immerses travelers in local traditions. Guests can engage in shepherding, fishing, winemaking, wildlife excursions, or stargazing, fostering a deeper appreciation for Spain's rich landscapes and cultures. Currently available in 30 properties, this initiative is a step toward offering truly unique, sustainable travel experiences.

### The Unconscious Shift Toward Sustainability

Dianna Ditto notes that many travelers are making sustainable choices without even realizing it. For example, Americans are increasingly avoiding peak-season travel, opting instead for trips between November and March—a shift driven by self-interest (fewer crowds, better experiences) but with positive sustainability impacts.

Another change is the growing acceptance of sustainable practices, such as eliminating single-use plastics. Travelers may initially resist changes like carrying reusable water bottles, but over time, these behaviors become the norm.

### Measuring Sustainability: From Volume to Value

One of the most critical shifts in sustainable travel is rethinking how success is measured.

Russell Walters emphasizes that tourism is often seen as a zero-sum game—where one local business's gain means another's loss. Instead, the industry must embrace collaborative approaches that benefit entire communities. This means moving away from metrics like "heads in beds" and instead assessing the real impact of travel on local economies and cultures.

For Paradores, sustainability means balancing comfort with responsibility. Luxury travelers still seek high-quality experiences, but they also want to align with sustainability values. By offering eco-conscious initiatives without compromising on quality, Paradores demonstrates that responsible tourism and premium hospitality can go hand in hand.

### Sustainability as a Competitive Advantage

Dianna Ditto highlights that for Collette, the most effective sustainability metric is traveler engagement. Their tours now include at least two responsible vendors per itinerary, and their global citizenship team ensures that sustainability remains a key focus.

The results? Tours that integrate sustainable elements are seeing growth, with repeat customers and referrals proving that travelers are not only interested in these experiences but also actively seeking them out.

Additionally, Collette is working toward becoming a carbon-neutral company within 20 years, further reinforcing its commitment to responsible tourism.

### The Future of Sustainable Travel

Sustainability is no longer just a trend—it's an essential component of modern travel. As travelers become more conscious of their impact, industry leaders like Collette, Adventure Travel, and Paradores are proving that responsible tourism can be both profitable and transformative.

# MALLORCA TOURISM BOARD TALK

By Susanna Sciacovelli,  
Director of Tourism of the  
Mallorca Council



## Mallorca's Commitment to Responsible Tourism

Mallorca, the largest of the four Balearic Islands, has taken a firm stance on responsible tourism, emphasizing the need for sustainable practices to protect its natural beauty and local communities. During a recent event, Mallorca introduced its roadmap for responsible tourism, highlighting its pledge to create a balance between tourism and environmental preservation.

The video presentation showcased Mallorca's approach to tourism, reinforcing the idea that visitors should treat the island as their temporary home—taking care of it as if it were their own. Tourists are encouraged to appreciate and protect nature, buy and consume local products, and engage in sustainable practices such as reducing waste, reusing resources, and recycling.

## Challenges and Solutions: A Sustainable Vision

With a local population of just 1 million but an influx of 18 million tourists annually, the strain on Mallorca's natural resources is considerable. The government recognizes the challenge and is committed to making tourism more sustainable through its pledge, aligning with the Agenda 2030 framework, which is built on the 5 Ps—People, Peace, Pact, Prosperity—and the 4 Cs:

1. Climate: Reducing environmental impact.
2. Community: Strengthening local connections.
3. Coexistence: Ensuring harmony between residents and visitors.
4. Collaboration: Uniting the public and private sectors.

## Turning Words into Action

Launched a year and a half ago, the responsible tourism pledge includes a series of concrete actions. The government has engaged key stakeholders, from airlines like EasyJet and Jet2 to local businesses, hotels, and restaurants, ensuring widespread commitment. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) was the first to sign, followed by all 53 municipalities within Mallorca. The pledge is more than just a signature—it involves active participation, with stakeholders regularly discussing how they can contribute to responsible tourism.

## The MALLORCA Framework

Mallorca's tourism pledge follows a framework based on the letters of its name:

- M – Mallorca is Our Shared Home: Encouraging tourists to act as responsible temporary residents, respecting the environment.
- A – Appreciate and Protect Nature: Highlighting Mallorca's 10 nature reserves, including the UNESCO-listed Sierra de Tramontana, and promoting responsible visits.
- L – Local Products: Supporting the island's 70+ vineyards and artisan markets, urging tourists to buy directly from local producers.
- L – Leave a Lower Carbon Footprint: Promoting public transportation, cycling infrastructure, and sustainable accommodations.
- O – Ocean Conservation: Advocating for marine protection, from avoiding anchoring in sea meadows to using biodegradable sunscreens.
- R – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle: Encouraging simple but impactful behaviors such as turning off taps and using reusable water bottles.
- C – Communities at Heart: Fostering the concept of 'glocal' tourists—visitors with a global mindset but a local heart, who educate themselves about Mallorca before arriving.
- A – A Destination for the Future: Ensuring that Mallorca remains a wonderful place to live and visit for generations to come.

# PANEL DISCUSSION

## MARKETING BEST PRACTICES.

Moderator: Johanna Jainchill, News Editor, Travel Weekly.  
Nancy Mammana, CMO/Interim CEO, NYC Tourism & Conventions.  
Christian Wolters, General Manager of N. American Marketing; Intrepid Travel.  
Teresa Parejo, Sustainability Director, Iberia.



### How Can Travelers and Advisors Identify Truly Sustainable Companies?

The panel, moderated by Johanna Jainchill, News Editor, Travel Weekly, focused on how travel advisors and consumers can differentiate between genuinely sustainable travel options and companies engaging in greenwashing—marketing sustainability without real action.

#### Transparency and Third-Party Validation

##### Christian – Intrepid Travel

In today's digital world, all the information travelers need is readily available. Customer reviews, third-party validation, and corporate track records are essential tools for assessing whether a company is truly sustainable.

One such validation is B Corp certification, which Intrepid Travel obtained in 2008. This certification verifies that a company goes beyond profit, prioritizing sustainability, fair labor practices, diversity, and community engagement. By checking for B Corp status or similar certifications, travelers and advisors can ensure they are booking with responsible companies.

When it comes to carbon emissions, Intrepid took a significant step in 2010 by committing to becoming carbon neutral. The process began with carbon measurement, an intensive and costly undertaking that allowed the company to understand its full environmental footprint.

More recently, Intrepid has introduced carbon labeling, allowing customers to see the exact CO<sub>2</sub> emissions associated with their travel experiences, empowering them to make more informed, socially responsible choices.

#### Building Trust Through Action, Not Marketing

##### Teresa Parejo – Iberia

For Iberia, sustainability is not just a marketing strategy—it's a long-term commitment. Having operated for nearly 100 years, Iberia has built a trusted reputation, ensuring that sustainability claims are backed by tangible action.

One of Iberia's key sustainability efforts is its CO<sub>2</sub> emissions tracking. The airline not only measures its emissions rigorously but also pays for the environmental impact it creates, holding itself accountable. To increase transparency, Iberia provides customers with a CO<sub>2</sub> emissions calculator, which considers aircraft type, meteorological conditions, operational efficiency, and cabin class. This allows travelers to compare emissions across airlines and make better-informed choices—an area where Iberia prides itself on being more efficient than competitors.

#### Encouraging Sustainable Travel Through Marketing Strategies

##### Nancy – Destination Marketing

Nancy emphasized that destination marketing can influence travelers to make more sustainable choices. As part of her company's destination stewardship responsibility, they design programs that promote sustainable travel while supporting tourism and hospitality sectors across multiple industries, including theater, attractions, and restaurants.

One key strategy is promoting travel during off-peak seasons to reduce pressure on over-touristed areas. For instance:

- Broadway Week is scheduled during slow seasons (January/February, September) to boost ticket sales when tourism dips.
- Restaurant Week happens in January, when business for restaurants typically declines.



Another key focus is distributing tourism more evenly across the five boroughs of New York City, rather than concentrating solely on Manhattan's busiest areas. This approach helps prevent overtourism, spread economic benefits, and highlight cultural diversity—giving visitors new reasons to return while supporting smaller communities.

Additionally, Nancy's team encourages visitors to respect the city through pre-trip education. Travelers receive tips on responsible tourism, fostering a mindset where they treat the city as if it were their own home.

## The Cost of Sustainable Travel: A Real Barrier or a Misconception?

### Is Sustainable Travel More Expensive?

A recent Booking.com survey found that while 74% of travelers want to travel sustainably, 47% perceive sustainable travel options as too expensive. The moderator asked Christian whether sustainable travel always comes at a higher cost.

#### Christian – Intrepid Travel

Christian explained that the cost depends on the company's approach. At Intrepid, carbon offsetting costs are absorbed into the overall trip price without making tours significantly more expensive. However, as the company moves towards decarbonization—such as adopting green vehicles—there are significant cost implications. One way to keep costs manageable is through travel dispersal—for example, incorporating rail travel instead of multiple short-haul flights. This reduces environmental impact and costs while maintaining the experience quality. While sustainable travel can sometimes be pricier, there are creative solutions that help make it more affordable.

### Does Sustainability Matter More to Younger or Older Travelers?

#### Teresa Parejo – Iberia

Sustainability priorities differ across generations. While younger travelers tend to be more sustainability-conscious, surveys indicate that older travelers are more willing to pay extra for sustainable options, as they have greater financial flexibility.

Sustainability efforts in aviation—such as investments in Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAFs) and more fuel-efficient aircraft—require substantial financial investment, which inevitably increases ticket prices. However, with public-private collaboration and incentives, Iberia believes these costs can be reduced, making sustainable flying more accessible.

Christian added that for younger generations, sustainability is an expectation rather than a selling point. If a company doesn't meet basic sustainability standards, younger travelers won't even consider it—and companies that fail to adopt real sustainable practices risk being called out on social media

### Is It Possible to Fly Sustainably?

#### Flight Shaming and the Reality of Aviation's Impact

The moderator addressed the concept of “flight shaming”—the growing movement, especially in Northern Europe, that criticizes flying for its environmental impact. She asked Teresa whether sustainable flying is achievable.



#### Teresa – Iberia

Teresa noted that while flight shaming gained traction post-pandemic, it does not fully account for the complexity of aviation's role in society. Aviation is critical for global connectivity, tourism economies, humanitarian aid, and emergency response efforts. While zero-emission flights are not yet technologically possible, aviation is undergoing a gradual ecological transition. The biggest source of aviation emissions—long-haul flights (80% of total emissions)—requires innovative solutions, such as fuel efficiency improvements and SAF investments. While short-haul flights can be replaced with train travel, long-haul routes remain a key area for progress.

The moderator also pointed out another argument: if tourism stops, conservation efforts in places like the Galápagos suffer. Christian reinforced this, highlighting how wildlife conservation efforts in Uganda have flourished because of sustainable tourism. Without it, gorilla populations would still be under threat from poaching.

### Storytelling as a Tool for Sustainable Travel Marketing

Marketing sustainability isn't just about listing eco-friendly practices—it's about connecting emotionally with travelers.

A representative from NYC Meetings discussed how sustainability is becoming a priority for events and meetings, with planners increasingly demanding clear sustainability practices.

### The Power of Storytelling

#### Christian – Intrepid Travel

Christian emphasized that storytelling is one of the most effective ways to convey sustainability. Intrepid uses videos featuring its guides, showcasing authentic local experiences that highlight the unique impact of sustainable travel.

#### Teresa – Iberia

For Iberia, storytelling involves educating customers on how the airline is reducing emissions and investing in sustainable initiatives. They also focus on their commitment to social responsibility, including support for vulnerable communities.

By using compelling narratives, companies can engage travelers in a more meaningful way, helping them see the value of sustainable travel choices beyond just statistics.

# VALENCIA TOURISM BOARD TALK

BY ISRAEL MARTÍNEZ, DIRECTOR  
GENERAL, VALENCIA TOURISM BOARD

Israel Martínez, Director General, Valencia Tourism Board

Israel Martínez opened his presentation by expressing gratitude to Turespaña for organizing the event and providing a platform to discuss sustainability in tourism—a key focus for the region of Valencia.

## Valencia: A Unique and Sustainable Destination

As one of Spain's top tourist destinations, Valencia offers a distinctive blend of natural beauty, cultural heritage, and responsible tourism initiatives. To give attendees a deeper look into the region's commitment to sustainability, Martínez showcased a video highlighting how Valencia aligns with the values of the U.S. market while maintaining its authenticity and dedication to sustainable tourism.

With an average of 300 days of sunshine per year, Valencia is one of Spain's most sought-after destinations. The region boasts:

- Three international airports with direct flights to major European cities.
- A high-speed rail network and excellent road infrastructure for seamless connectivity.
- Diverse landscapes, from long sandy beaches and hidden coves to broad plains and charming villages.
- A rich cultural history, with influences from multiple ancient civilizations reflected in its artistic and architectural heritage.
- A world-class gastronomy scene, blending Mediterranean diet traditions with modern innovations, complemented by three wine regions and over 20 Michelin-starred restaurants.

## Why Visit Valencia? A Commitment to Sustainability

Martínez outlined several reasons why Valencia stands out as a pioneer in sustainable tourism, emphasizing its commitment to environmental protection, social responsibility, and economic growth:

### 1. A Comprehensive Sustainability Strategy

Valencia integrates sustainability across three key areas:

- Environmental: Protecting ecosystems and promoting responsible resource use.
- Social: Ensuring tourism benefits local communities.
- Economic: Creating jobs and supporting local businesses.

### 2. Pioneering Water Management

With 30 million tourists annually, Valencia has been a leader in water conservation since the 1990s. The region was among the first to install:

- Foot showers on beaches to reduce excessive freshwater consumption.
- Saltwater purification systems, ensuring sustainable coastal tourism.



### 3. Ethical and Responsible Tourism Initiatives

- Tourist Ethical Code: Encourages mindful and responsible tourism, ensuring that visitors positively contribute to local culture and communities.
- European Green Capital 2024: Valencia was selected for this prestigious recognition due to its strong environmental policies and green urban development.

### 4. Home to the World's First Smart Tourism Destination

Benidorm, one of Valencia's most famous cities, is recognized as the world's first Smart Tourist Destination. Welcoming 3 million visitors annually, Benidorm utilizes technology and data-driven strategies to enhance visitor experiences while ensuring sustainable tourism growth.

### 5. Alignment with UN Sustainable Development Goals

Valencia actively works towards the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly:

- Responsible consumption and production – Promoting sustainability across industries.
- Quality education – Supporting initiatives that educate both locals and visitors on sustainability.

## "Exquisite Mediterranean" – A Sustainable Culinary Initiative

In addition to environmental and tourism initiatives, Valencia has launched "Exquisite Mediterranean", a sustainability-driven gastronomic brand that focuses on:

- Promoting local, sustainable cuisine.
- Reducing food waste.
- Supporting small-scale producers and local farmers.

This initiative ensures that Valencia's culinary excellence remains both sustainable and deeply rooted in its Mediterranean heritage.

## Valencia: A Model for the Future of Sustainable Travel

Through innovative environmental strategies, ethical tourism initiatives, and a strong focus on local culture and gastronomy, Valencia continues to set the standard for sustainable tourism in Spain and beyond. With its designation as the 2024 European Green Capital, the region is solidifying its reputation as one of the most forward-thinking and environmentally responsible destinations in the world.

# PANEL DISCUSSION

## CREATING A POSITIVE COMMUNITY IMPACT

**Moderator:** Johanna Jainchill, News Editor, Travel Weekly

**Panelists:**

- Guy Young, Chief Sustainability Officer, The Travel Corporation
- Prisca Sanchez, Vice President, Global Marketing, Global Citizen
- Mary Spadoni, program manager, Academic travel Abroad
- Erika Harms, Global Sustainability Director, Iberostar Group



During the panel titled Creating a Positive Community Impact, the moderator began by asking, "What are some of the initiatives and ways your companies try to benefit the communities you operate with?" The discussion that followed highlighted various sustainability efforts and responsible tourism initiatives undertaken by leading companies:

### A Five-Year Sustainability Plan

Chase's company has implemented a five-year sustainability plan called How You Tread Right, which outlines 11 measurable goals. Each year, they publish an impact report detailing their progress. Chase highlighted two key goals that directly affect the communities they visit.

One of these goals is to increase the number of attractions offered in secondary destinations. Unlike the company's smaller niche brands, this initiative aims to expand the reach of their mainstream travel packages. Their goal is to increase visits to these destinations by 20% over the next five years, and they are already making significant progress. To qualify as a secondary destination, a location must meet three criteria:

- It must not have been visited by their brands in 2019.
- The company must commit to at least one overnight stay.
- No more than two sites in the area should be experiencing overtourism.

Another major goal is the implementation of Make Travel Matter Experiences. These are carefully designed experiences that give back to local communities and businesses. The company's target is for 50% of its itineraries to include at least one Make Travel Matter Experience. Currently, they have achieved this in 80% of their itineraries.

A prime example of such an experience takes place in Seville, where the company supports the Christian A. Foundation. They provide scholarships for four students to complete a four-year flamenco course, ensuring the preservation of this traditional art form. Beyond financial support, travelers are invited to engage with students, participate in a hands-on dance class, and enjoy a private performance. This initiative not only sustains the foundation but also offers guests an enriching cultural experience. The company now offers around 800 Make Travel Matter Experiences across its itineraries, strengthening its commitment to responsible tourism.

### Local Guides and Sustainable Experiences

Mary emphasized the importance of using local tour directors, allowing native voices to share their communities' stories. Because the company tailors each tour uniquely, they integrate sustainable activities into every itinerary, even if sustainability is not the tour's main theme.

For instance, during a large group trip to Texas to witness a solar eclipse, the company included a visit to a nature reserve focused on organic farming and conservation. This approach ensures that sustainability and community engagement are seamlessly woven into each travel experience.

### Company's Commitment to Sustainability and Community Engagement

Erika highlighted the company's strong commitment to sustainability, which is embedded in all aspects of its operations. With 35,000 employees across 14 countries, the company not only generates local employment but also implements comprehensive sustainability initiatives.



One of its key programs, Wave of Change, was launched in 2018 and is structured around seven pillars, many of which directly engage with local communities:

1. **Climate Action** – The company actively protects 11,000 hectares of land and supports five communities. Instead of purchasing carbon credits, it develops them in collaboration with these communities, ensuring mutual benefit.
2. **Blue Foods** – The company works with local communities in multiple countries to promote sustainable local food production. Despite the challenges in accessing sustainable markets, the initiative helps integrate these communities into sustainability-focused economic activities.
3. **Nature-Based Solutions** – The company partners with fishing communities, linking them to blue food initiatives while also involving them in coastal protection. This includes co-managing protected areas, such as coral reefs, which benefit both the environment and the communities.
4. **Circular Economy** – By engaging local communities in waste management initiatives, the company creates economic opportunities. Organic waste is repurposed for farming, composting, and resale, contributing to sustainable local economies.
5. **Destination Stewardship** – The company assesses the impact of tourism on local destinations and incorporates these findings into its sustainability strategies, ensuring that tourism development aligns with community well-being.
6. **Responsible Growth** – Recently introduced, this pillar focuses on sustainable expansion while considering environmental and social factors.
7. **Inclusive Tourism** – The company actively works to make tourism more inclusive, creating opportunities for diverse communities.

Additionally, the company operates a foundation that supports community development. Initially focused on ecotourism, the foundation now facilitates meaningful engagement between hotel guests and local communities. For instance, in Puerto Plata, chocolate-producing communities have been given opportunities to showcase their products within company-owned shops, which has led to expanded market access. The foundation also supports initiatives such as regenerative agriculture, further strengthening local economies.

Through these efforts, the company integrates sustainability into its core business strategy while fostering long-term partnerships with communities.

### Addressing Tourism Pressures in Key Destinations

The discussion then turned to the challenges of tourism-related pushback in destinations such as Barcelona, Alaska, and Hawaii—places where tourism serves as a primary economic driver but also creates significant pressures on local communities. The moderator asked how companies represented by the speakers are working to alleviate these challenges.

### Encouraging Off-Season Travel and Alternative Destinations

Mary highlighted several strategies her company employs to mitigate the impact of tourism. One key approach is promoting off-season travel. Given that a large portion of the company's travelers are retirees who are not restricted by school schedules, the company encourages travel during less busy periods to reduce congestion in peak seasons.



Additionally, the company promotes secondary destinations—for instance, directing travelers to Bordeaux instead of Paris. Even when visiting major cities is unavoidable, the company encourages visits to lesser-known sites within those cities, distributing tourism more evenly.

Similarly, Guy explained that his company actively shifts visitor demand to the off-season through two main strategies. The first is contracting itineraries specifically for off-season travel, and the second is using targeted marketing campaigns to encourage travel during lower-traffic months, such as January through April and October through December. These efforts have proven successful; in 2023, the company recorded its highest growth percentages in April and October, with continued strong growth in early 2024.

Guy emphasized that the travel industry must take proactive steps to alleviate pressure on destinations. Without such initiatives, governments may impose restrictive measures such as higher tourism taxes or entry limitations. He advocated for collaboration between the travel industry and local communities to strategically manage tourism flows, ensuring that both visitors and host communities benefit.

### Destination-Specific Solutions and Sustainable Infrastructure

Erika outlined a different approach, acknowledging that hotels cannot physically relocate to adjust for seasonal changes. Instead, her company prioritizes destination-specific impact assessments to identify and address key concerns in the communities where they operate.

This proactive approach involves engaging with local stakeholders to determine specific needs, such as improved infrastructure for water supply, wastewater management, or renewable energy. Moreover, the company conducts these assessments not only in existing destinations but also before expanding into new locations, ensuring that their presence contributes positively to local development.

By implementing these strategies, the represented companies aim to balance economic benefits with sustainable tourism practices, fostering positive relationships with host communities while mitigating tourism-related pressures.

## Addressing Over-Tourism and Environmental Impact

During the discussion, the moderator highlighted the challenges faced by destinations experiencing over-tourism. Beyond concerns about the sheer volume of visitors, these communities often push back due to the pollution and environmental degradation left behind by tourists. In this context, the moderator introduced Global Citizen's initiative, *Defend the Planet*, and asked the company's representative whether the tourism industry could draw lessons from their efforts and successes.

The Global Citizen representative emphasized that environmental protection is a core priority for their organization. They underscored the strong connection between climate change and poverty, warning that without immediate action, climate change could push an additional 100 million people into extreme poverty by 2030. This pressing issue remains central to their campaigns and advocacy efforts.

Notably, climate change is one of the most actively discussed topics among users of the Global Citizen app. While many individuals are concerned about the issue, they often struggle with identifying concrete actions they can take. To address this gap, the app provides users with practical steps to drive positive change—not only within vulnerable communities but also in their own lives. By offering guidance on sustainable practices, the platform empowers individuals to adopt more environmentally conscious behaviors, including responsible travel choices.

The representative concluded by advising tourism industry professionals to encourage their clients to stay informed and engaged. Directing them to resources such as the Global Citizen app can be an effective first step in fostering a culture of responsible and sustainable tourism.

The moderator then raised an important consideration regarding the unintended negative consequences that can arise despite a company's best intentions and efforts toward sustainability. One such challenge is known as leakage, which occurs when efforts to reduce environmental or social pressures in one location inadvertently shift the burden elsewhere. The moderator asked how this issue could be effectively mitigated.

In response, Erika emphasized the importance of fostering genuine benefits for local communities. She highlighted that in the hospitality sector, a key approach is understanding destinations thoroughly and collaborating with them to maximize positive impacts. Investments in infrastructure and sustainability initiatives can help destinations become more resilient and better equipped to handle tourism-related challenges.

Moreover, Erika pointed out that sustainable investments not only improve the capacity of destinations but also create local employment opportunities. By engaging local communities in the process—whether through infrastructure projects or sustainable tourism initiatives—businesses can help ensure that these communities remain economically viable, both with and without tourism.

This holistic approach aims to prevent the displacement of challenges from one area to another, instead fostering long-term sustainability and self-sufficiency within travel destinations.

## Supporting Small Businesses and Communities Through Tourism

The moderator highlighted the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on small businesses worldwide, particularly those reliant on tourism. Recognizing Global Citizen's efforts to eradicate poverty and support small enterprises in these destinations, the moderator asked what opportunities exist for travel industry companies to help grow and sustain small businesses in areas that depend heavily on tourism.

Prisca Sanchez from Global Citizen emphasized that diversification is key. Many destinations with rich cultural offerings remain underrepresented in global tourism and need support to gain visibility. One of Global Citizen's approaches is spotlighting communities and individuals making a difference in these regions. As an example, she mentioned their current initiatives focused on showcasing Africa's cultural and economic potential through various campaigns and music events—leveraging the company's strong reputation in the entertainment industry.

Sanchez explained that Global Citizen's goal is to drive transformative investments into communities by engaging with local agencies, vendors, artists, and crew members, while also providing skill development and training. With Africa being home to the world's youngest population and possessing a uniquely rich tourism offering, she urged stakeholders to actively promote destinations that require economic support, helping to stimulate growth through responsible tourism.

### Authentic Storytelling in the Travel Industry

The moderator then asked whether Sanchez had observed good or bad examples of tourism's impact on local communities. While she refrained from naming specific companies, she highlighted Global Citizen's collaboration with corporate partners who use the platform to share authentic stories about their work and impact.

She stressed that authenticity in storytelling is crucial—genuine narratives resonate more with audiences, making them relatable and ultimately more effective. According to Sanchez, Global Citizen's corporate partners leverage the platform to highlight their initiatives and community engagement efforts, and these stories tend to perform best. This underscores the importance of travel industry players not only taking meaningful action within communities but also communicating their impact in an honest and compelling way.





## Consumer Attitudes Toward Sustainable Travel

The moderator introduced the topic of sustainable travel, highlighting findings from Booking.com that indicate a discrepancy between travelers' intentions and actions. While many express a desire to travel more sustainably and report feeling guilty about unsustainable travel, sustainability is often not a primary factor in their decision-making process. To explore this further, the moderator asked Guy about his clients' perspectives on sustainability when choosing a travel provider.

Guy shared insights from a recent survey conducted by his company in partnership with a third-party research firm. The survey was conducted across two segments: one targeting their youth brand (18-35-year-olds) and another focusing on their open-age brands, which cater to travelers aged 35-60. Respondents were asked to rank factors influencing their choice of a travel company, with sustainability being one of ten options.

For the open-age brands, sustainability ranked the lowest, with only 10% of respondents considering it an important factor. In contrast, the most influential factor was the company's reputation and reviews, which received a 64% response rate. However, among the youth brand respondents, sustainability ranked slightly higher at seventh place, with 25% indicating it as a consideration. This suggests that younger travelers place greater emphasis on sustainability, though it remains secondary to other decision-making factors. Guy acknowledged that while these results were somewhat disappointing, he believes that sustainability will become increasingly important over time, particularly among younger generations.

### Sustainability as a Factor for Repeat Travelers

Erika echoed similar findings, noting that sustainability's importance varies by region and market. While it generally ranks lower compared to other travel considerations, it is not the lowest-ranking factor. Interestingly, her company found that sustainability plays a more significant role in customer retention—travelers who have already experienced sustainable initiatives are more likely to consider them when deciding whether to book with the company again.

Mary, representing another travel company, noted that they have not conducted specific client surveys on sustainability. However, she observed that her clients primarily choose tours based on the itinerary and the expertise of the guides. While sustainability is not a deciding factor when selecting a tour operator, she emphasized that clients do not object to sustainable initiatives that are incorporated into the travel experience. Practices such as encouraging reusable water bottles, using public transportation where possible, and dining at locally sourced and seasonal restaurants are well-received, though they are not a primary competitive differentiator among tour operators.

To conclude the discussion highlighted a gap between travelers' stated support for sustainability and their actual decision-making behavior. While sustainability considerations are growing, particularly among younger travelers, factors such as reputation, itinerary quality, and expert guidance remain the primary drivers of travel choices. However, there is potential for sustainability to become a more significant factor, particularly for repeat travelers and as awareness continues to evolve.

## The Challenges and Realities of Sustainable Travel

The moderator raised the issue that, for travel advisors speaking with clients, it is not always immediately apparent how much effort and complexity go into making sustainable choices. On the operational side, sustainability initiatives require significant planning and investment.

Nancy addressed this concern by emphasizing that, while sustainability efforts require upfront investment, they are often financially sound in the long term. She provided an example from her company's upcoming hotel in Aruba, which is designed to be fully sustainable and electrified. Notably, it will be the company's lowest-waste hotel to date and is also more cost-effective than alternative designs. She challenged the common perception that sustainability is inherently more expensive, arguing that, in many cases, it leads to financial savings over time. She cited the shift from providing bottled water to installing water fountains—while there was an initial cost, the long-term savings from eliminating bottled water purchases and disposal costs resulted in a return on investment.

The moderator reinforced this point, noting that many travelers assume that sustainable travel is more expensive, when in reality, it does not have to be.

## Balancing Sustainability Goals with Practical Constraints

Mary then shared insights from her company, which incorporates carbon offsets into all its travel programs. For each traveler—student, adult, or staff member—the company makes a donation to Cool Effect, an organization supporting sustainable and carbon reduction initiatives across the country. However, she highlighted a key challenge: availability. Even with a strong commitment to sustainability, logistical constraints sometimes prevent companies from choosing the most sustainable options. For example, if a tour has a fixed schedule but the most sustainable hotel is unavailable or unaffordable at that time, alternative accommodations must be used. This underscores the reality that while sustainability is a priority, practical considerations such as scheduling and competitive pricing remain limiting factors.

Guy echoed this sentiment, expressing empathy for travel advisors who must navigate the sustainability commitments of multiple travel companies. He noted that his company works closely with travel advisors, who play a crucial role in guiding clients toward sustainable choices. However, given the complexity of sustainability initiatives, it is unrealistic to expect advisors to track every company's sustainability strategy in detail. To address this, his company has integrated Make Travel Matter experiences into 80% of its itineraries, with the goal of reaching 100%.





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# PRIZE AWARDS

## Jury:

**Molly Laycob**, Director of Global Social Impact, USTOA

**Catherine Prather**, President, National Tourism Association (NTA)

**Magí Castelltort**, Consul for Tourism Affairs

## Media Award: Travel Weekly

Recognizes the best media coverage of Spain as a sustainable destination, highlighting the essential role of communication in promoting responsible tourism, sustainability initiatives, and environmental awareness in the industry.



## Ambassador Award: Sofia Perez

Recognizes the best content showcasing Spain as a destination committed to sustainability, emphasizing the powerful role of these profiles in raising awareness and promoting responsible tourism.





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## Business Award: MaCher

Best Sustainable Tourism Product. This award recognizes the development and promotion of packages, experiences, and offers that support sustainable tourism in Spain. It highlights the importance of providing authentic, environmentally friendly travel experiences that respect and preserve the natural surroundings.



## Experience Award: HE Travel

The company with the most outstanding ESG project. This award acknowledges companies dedicated to responsible practices, including carbon footprint offset programs, recycling initiatives, accessibility, and the inclusion of employees. It highlights organizations that integrate sustainability into every aspect of their operations.

