

GLOBAL  
DESTINATION  
SUSTAINABILITY  
INDEX

# Sustainable Destination Management Trends and Insights: A Path to a Brighter Future

A WHITE PAPER AND ANALYSIS OF THE 2016 GLOBAL DESTINATION  
SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

AN INDUSTRY COLLABORATION BETWEEN IMEX, ICCA, MCI & ECM



# Foreword

When city convention bureau leaders at ICCA's Scandinavian Chapter set up the first Scandinavian Destination Sustainability Index – the precursor to the Global Destination Sustainability Index – they had two primary objectives: to drive sustainability across the region through competition, collaboration and raised consciousness, and to differentiate the Nordic region to non-European markets as the most sustainable region in which to hold international meetings.

Tremendous progress was made towards both goals in a very short period of time, but then, rather than purely retaining that competitive advantage, the Scandinavians did something totally unexpected: they approached ICCA, IMEX and MCI to expand the programme globally. They made it open to all.

It's very rare that an initiative designed to create a marketing advantage for a destination is transformed into a resource to benefit society – and the planet – as a whole. However, that is the foundation story of the Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDS-Index), insights from which are highlighted in this first in a series of White Papers.

In the first year some 35 pioneering destinations from five continents have participated in the GDS-Index, each gaining their own business advantage through their involvement: some are showcasing their strong environmental credentials, others are identifying weaknesses and setting up programmes to make improvements; many are developing stronger local teams with politicians and economic development professionals joining meetings with suppliers to design new citywide strategies; and all are gaining new knowledge from competitors around the world. These leading destinations are sharing insights and outcomes, and creating innovative ways to address the vital sustainability issues facing our world.

Following the philosophy of our Scandinavian founders, the creation of White Papers to share this collective wisdom is a key element of GDS-Index – to reach far beyond the circle of active participants in the programme itself.

We believe that the GDS-Index belongs to the entire meetings industry, and – in this, the UN designated International Year of Sustainable Tourism – we look forward to welcoming many new partners, supporters and participating destinations in the next stage of the Index's development, and to uniting the Meetings and Events Industry to support change in policies, business practices and client behaviour.



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Image Credit: Anders Wester/Göteborg & Co

# Executive Summary

## A NEW MEASURE OF DESTINATION SUCCESS

Cities are the growth engines of the future, representing beacons of opportunity that carry the promise of education, employment and prosperity. Yet when driven by rapid and unhindered growth, the proliferation and development of cities around the world carries with it the threat of environmental damage, social friction and resource strain.

Though not immediately apparent, Destination Management Organisations (DMOs)\*, Convention and Visitor Bureaus (CVBs) and the events industry at large have a critical role to play in supporting cities in the transition to greater sustainability. By building communities, promoting local businesses and crafting policies that encourage more sustainable practices, the events industry carries with it the potential to create shared value for society, our planet and the economy.

## A GLOBAL PRIORITY

The tourism and events industry touches each and every city on the globe generating 10% of GDP and is accredited for \$US 1.5 trillion of exports globally. Its potential for driving social and environmental benefit into communities is undisputable. It is for this reason that the United Nations has designated 2017 the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development – a tipping point for sustainable events and tourism slated to bring a refreshed enthusiasm and vigour to our industry's push for progress.



*Dear reader – for the sake of simplicity, we use the term Destination Management Organisation (DMO) in this document in reference to the work of Destination Management Organisations, Convention Bureaus and Tourism Boards.*

*We recognise that in some destinations these organisations may be separate.*



The GDS-Index was inspired by the members of the ICCA Scandinavia.

## THE NEED FOR COLLABORATION

In conjunction with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is ever more important that stakeholders from across the meetings and events industry come together to catalyse and support change in policies, investment, business practices and client behaviour. A focus on sustainability can also help a destination develop new knowledge, create jobs and accelerate innovation, which will ultimately lead to competitive advantage.

Some destinations have discovered this nexus of national policy, consumer choice and economic and environmental opportunity. All the destinations in the Global Destination Sustainability Index (**GDS-Index**) are on this journey. By participating in the **first ever ranking to measure the sustainability performance of meetings and events destinations**, they are championing change for a better world.

## THE GLOBAL DESTINATIONS SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

The GDS-Index is a collaborative platform that promotes the sustainable growth of events and meetings destinations.

Inspired by the ICCA Scandinavia Chapter and launched globally in 2016 by ICCA, IMEX and MCI, 35 cities on five continents have joined the GDS-Index, with a goal of having 100 destinations by 2020.

The GDS-Index has been established to help destinations develop their sustainability strategy, engage clients through this commitment, align with the UN SDGs and drive the adoption, promotion and recognition of sustainable practices in their city.

The GDS-Index supports destinations and event organisers by benchmarking across four key areas: their environmental strategy and infrastructure; social sustainability performance; industry supplier support (e.g., restaurants, hotels and convention centres); and convention bureau strategy and initiatives.

# 1



## Leadership drives Excellence

DMOs must take a leadership role to drive true sustainability across a destination, being a spectator is not an option.

# 2



## Long term strategy a necessity

Destinations are increasingly focusing on multi-year sustainability masterplans aligning with national and local policymakers.

# 3



## Localism

Today's discerning traveller seeks the authentic, seeks the original and seeks to experience the local.

# 4



## The sustainable food revolution

Sustainable food is sexy! Delegates are devouring local, fresh and organic food - with a story. Food has become a powerful tool for effective sustainability engagement.

# 5



## Targeted storytelling

Advertising is out, storytelling is in. DMOs are segmenting consumer profiles and developing more reactive and nuanced content based on big data.

## Summary - Key Insights

In this White Paper we illustrate through case studies how sustainability has become a key measure of destination success and is catalysing action to develop better and more competitive cities..

While each city in the GDS-Index has its own challenges, unique vision for change and way of working, the benchmarking and assessment of the strategies of the 35 participating cities has highlighted 10 key insights driving the development of sustainable destinations:

# 6



## DMOs as an agent of economic development

Destinations have evolved to become much more strategic about how they attract and create events that support their city's development agenda.

# 7



## Peak tourism - the need to engage the community

Destinations need to plan their development to growth within environmental boundaries and to ensure quality of life for their residents.

# 8



## The journey matters

How we travel to and from events is responsible for the highest proportion of event emissions. Destinations are taking steps to promote sustainable mobility.

# 9



## Collaborate, educate and co-innovate

Solving environmental and social challenges in a city is complex and requires a combination of short term action and longer term systemic change. Collaboration is key.

# 10



## Concentrate and champion certification

In a market where everyone is proclaiming their sustainability credentials, recognised eco-certifications are increasingly important.

# Insights Driving Development of Sustainable Destinations

Analysing the research, results and interviews from the 2016 Global Destination Sustainability Index, we have identified 10 key insights that can help destinations develop a sustainability strategy.

1

## LEADERSHIP DRIVES EXCELLENCE

Who is responsible for the sustainability of a meetings destination? Is it the city's environment department, the tourism authorities or the industry suppliers? It's often difficult for a Destination Management Organisation (DMO) to address this dilemma, and perhaps this explains why many destinations lack robust sustainability initiatives for their events industry. However, many of the cities participating in the GDS-Index have managed to tackle this conundrum and are driving sustainable practices in their destination.

Gothenburg's pioneering 2010 Sustainable Events Strategy provided the vision and ambition to catalyse actions that resulted in them become the overall GDS-Index winner, as well as earning them the title of Europe's No.1 Eco-Business Destination by Business Traveller Magazine.

However, one does not need to be a top performer in order to show leadership. A particular mention should be given to the incredible commitment of South Africa, which has three destinations on the Index: Cape Town, Durban and Tshwane. Though they are not the highest ranked cities on the Index, they are champions of change



nonetheless and are leaders on their continent.

Progressive DMOs and CVBs today are now understanding that to be successful they need to foster the right type of development, assets and attractions in their destinations. From both the leisure and MICE services perspectives, DMOs are rethinking their roles, competencies and relationships when managing their destination's brand, developing and placing a spotlight on the destination through a cohesive and targeted strategic branding framework. Sustainability is becoming a core component of this "destination story", driving the need for DMOs to better position their assets – be they local suppliers, produce and delicacies or natural marvels.

In a similar vein, identifying the right person(s) to drive sustainability is equally crucial. Today 60% of the GDS-Index leaders have a dedicated sustainability manager, and 40% have a committee with industry stakeholders. Looking at the top 10 scoring destinations\*, it can be expected that the role of the sustainability manager will expand and become more common and important in the future.



*\*For the purposes of this report, top 10 scoring destinations refers to GDS-Index destinations that have achieved amongst the top 10 performing scores, as more than one destination may have the same score.*

## 2

## LONG TERM STRATEGY A NECESSITY

Across the globe we are seeing an increase in cities with smart and sustainable strategies and policies. Leaders such as the Copenhagen City Council are working to become the world's first CO2-neutral capital. This type of municipality leadership is heavily influencing DMOs to develop sustainability "visions" and longer term strategies. At present, 53% of the top 10 destinations have implemented a robust sustainability strategy that aligns with the city's social, environmental and economic development agenda.

Sustainability incorporates many different aspects, stakeholders and interests, so DMOs working without a long term plan may find themselves struggling over ad-hoc initiatives that typically do not achieve the same business impact.

Looking to the future, destinations are encouraged to work on multi-year sustainability masterplan strategies with at least a 5 to 10-year roadmap. Presently only 47% of the top 10 scoring destinations have SMART (i.e., Specific, Measurable, Agreed upon, Realistic and Time-based) objectives, despite the proven benefits of implementing a roadmap based on these principles.

One of the leaders, Zürich Tourism, established their "Sustainability Concept 2015+". The holistic strategy includes various employee policies (covering procurement, energy, paper etc.), with goals for the destination as well as the organisation, based on the three dimensions of sustainability: People, Planet and Profit.





Kyoto Convention and Visitors Bureau are creating initiatives to better connect the events visitor to local artisans and culture. Image Credit: Kyoto Convention and Visitors Bureau

### 3 LOCALISM

Local is hot. Local food, local products, local craft and tours by locals. Today's discerning traveller seeks the authentic, seeks the original and seeks to experience the local. The rise Airbnb, family run homestays and small bed and breakfasts is challenging the hotel chains, and their once loyal travellers are seeking more local options.

Similarly, in the MICE industry, clients are increasingly drawn to destinations that offer an "authentic" experience to their attendees, something fresh and original, with the trend towards localism being clear across all destinations

This becomes increasingly critical when we've witnessed citizens from other destinations in Europe berating the effect of tourism on their cities, and a number of destinations in Asia looking at tourist quotas to stem the flow of people through their borders.



Image Credit: Wonderful Copenhagen, GClbillede

## CASE STUDY:

# Copenhagen, Denmark

Copenhagen is one of the most vocal proponents of the need to change. In their new **destination strategy**, Wonderful Copenhagen claims “The end of tourism as we know it” and that “Today, fewer and fewer visitors want to be identified as tourists”.

“The Localhood strategy in Copenhagen is a long-term vision that supports the inclusive co-creation of Copenhagen as future destination. A future destination where human relations are the focal point. Where locals and visitors interact around shared experiences of localhood. Tourism growth is co-created responsibly across industries and geographies, between new and existing stakeholders, with localhood as the shared identity and common starting point.”

## 4 THE SUSTAINABLE FOOD REVOLUTION

### FOOD IS THE TASTE OF A PLACE

Restaurants around the world are scrambling to market their “localness”. For example, both Melbourne and Sydney work with suppliers to offer alternative healthy menus that are produced within a certain radius of the event, guaranteeing its freshness. By supporting local producers and farmers, destinations can play an integral part in building the community, while giving attendees a unique gastronomic experience. Another upside? Sourcing locally also reduces pollution, carbon emissions and costs from long-distance freight transport.

### WAR ON WASTE

Thanks to a growing online service called **ResQ Club**, some 200 restaurants around Finland now sell their leftovers at discount rates, instead of just dumping them at the end of the day. With the help of GPS and data connection, the app shows the user’s location and displays which participating restaurants and hotel nearby are offering discounted goodies. To date there are more than 200 participating restaurants in Finland, about half of them in the Helsinki region. The app has saved over 125,000 meals since January 2016, which equals 40,000 kilograms of food and represents the equivalent CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of driving 5,000,000 kilometres!

The Zurich Hotel Association, in collaboration with **United Against Waste**, is currently organizing food waste workshops for its partners. The first results are astonishing: participating hotels could in average reduce their food waste by 42% (**more information**). The DMO promotes this initiative on [www.zuerich.com](http://www.zuerich.com), where visitors can find restaurants with a strong commitment to sustainability.

### LOW CARBON MENUS

Food and agricultural production makes up 30% of the global carbon footprint, so small changes to our diet could help reduce its impact considerably. At Chalmers University of Technology in Gothenburg, a group of researchers have developed a web-based tool that makes it easy for restaurants and catering suppliers to calculate the emissions intensity of different menus, consequently helping consumers make smart choices.

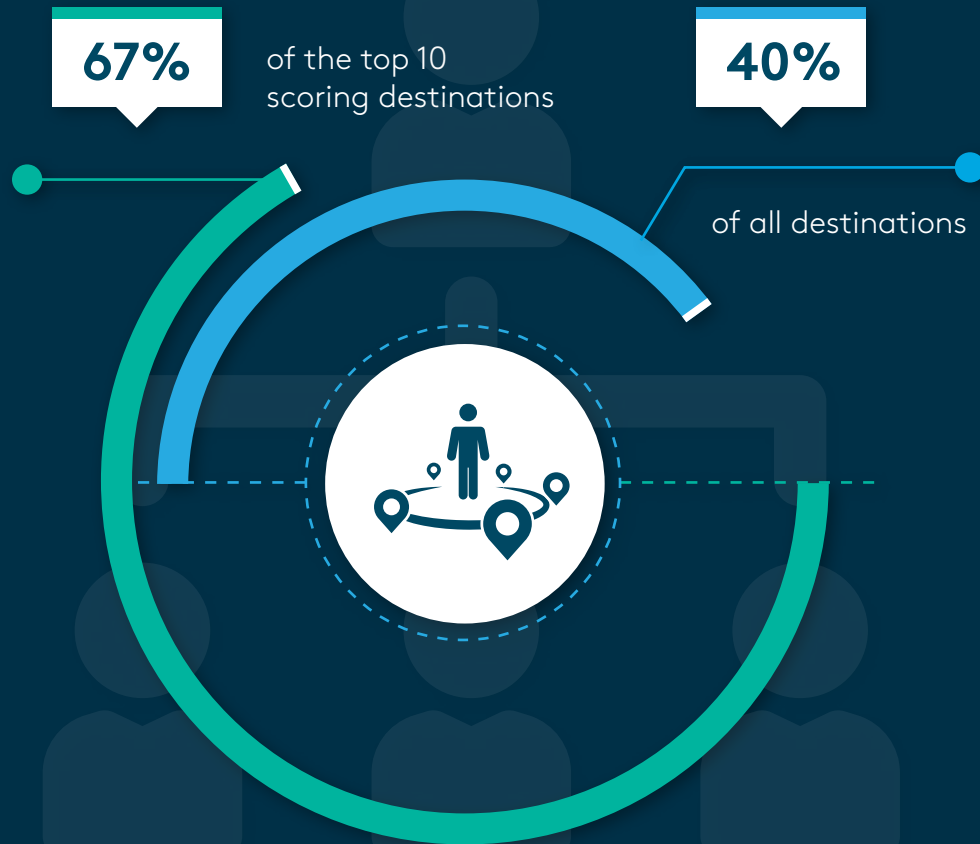
By visualizing scientific information, the tool aims to support a transition to more resource efficient eating habits. When initially tested at the Chalmers University lunch restaurant, the carbon labelled menus **lowered emissions by 25%**. To make menus more environmentally friendly and to empower consumers to make informed decisions, restaurants in Sweden – including several of Gothenburg’s main conference venues – are now beginning to use the carbon label. The city’s annual cultural festival (which draws 1.5 million visits) is also planning to incorporate the carbon label in August 2017.



# Community Development

67% OF THE TOP 10 SCORING GDS INDEX DESTINATIONS vs 40% OF ALL DESTINATIONS

are actively engaging their members and clients to support local community development initiatives. However, greater impact is available if DMOs work with other stakeholders to be more strategic in their approach.



# Sustainable Food

67% OF THE TOP 10 SCORING DESTINATIONS vs 57% OF ALL PARTICIPANTS

have a sustainable food initiative.

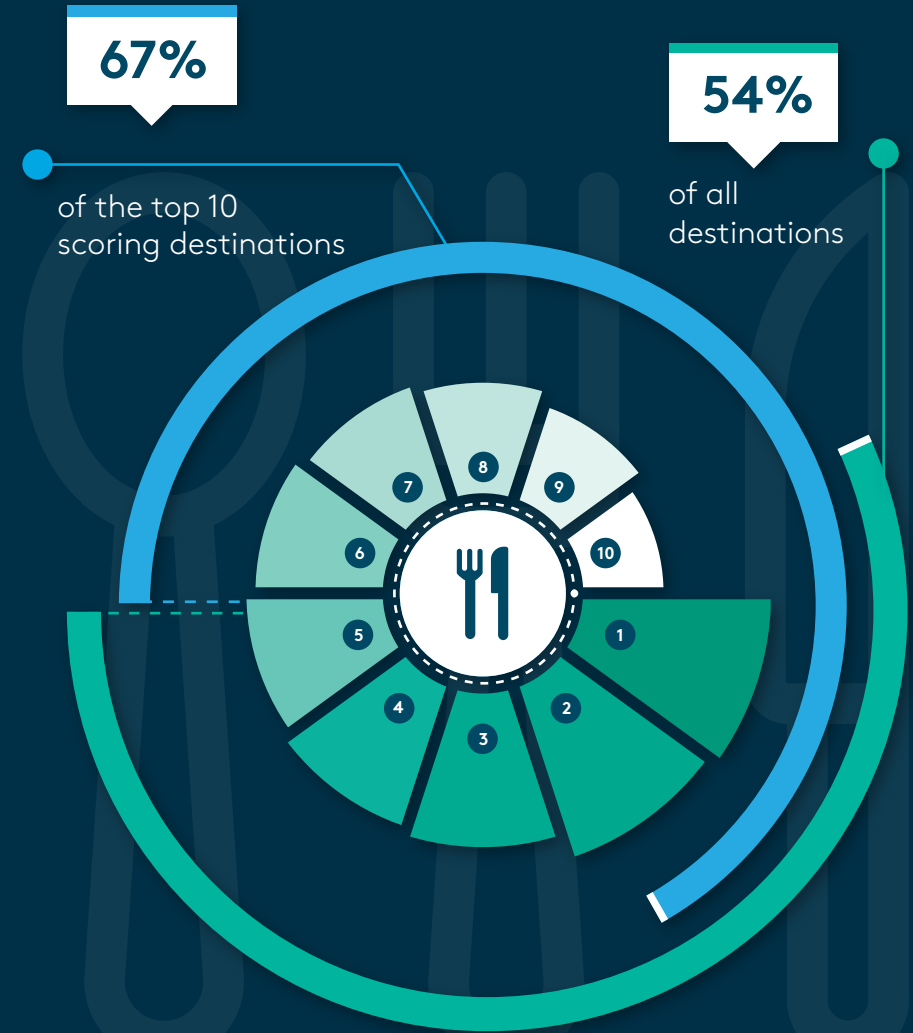




Image Credit: Destination Jönköping

## CASE STUDY:

# Destination Jönköping focuses on “Food, Flavour and Nature Experiences”

Starting in 2017 with support from the Swedish Agency for Economical and Regional Growth, the DMO Destination Jönköping and the regional tourism board Smålands Turism will collaborate on a new project that focuses on the local development of sustainable tourism in their region, for both leisure and corporate purposes. Taking place in the East Vättern Scarp Landscape, which was designated a biosphere reserve by UNESCO in 2012, the goal is to renew the tourism industry with traditional and local products such as traditional candy canes and horse carriages.

A special focus will also go to more adventurous culture and gastronomy experiences, using the region's unique natural and cultural values as a basis. This project will collaborate with companies in the region, specialists from the tourism industry, public sector, NGOs and researchers to initiate and ensure the sustainable development of products for the international tourism market.

## 5 TARGETED STORYTELLING

Advertising is out, and storytelling is in. There is a surge towards diving deeper into consumer segmentation profiles and developing more nuanced and strategic content based on this research.

Targeted storytelling is especially relevant when considering the wants and needs of the customers of the future. A study by **Nielsen** revealed that millennials are more willing to pay extra for sustainable offerings. About 72% of millennial respondents were willing to pay more for products and services that come from companies with a purpose and are committed to positive social and environmental impact – an increase from 55% in 2014.

There exists, however, a larger and more relevant target group: the “**Aspirationals**” – a group defined not by their year of birth but by their desire to be part of something bigger and to realise a better world. They represent 39% of the global market, incentivising cities to embody a new set of values that includes communicating their sustainability “story”.

Destinations are also upgrading their brand advocate and ambassador programs. Through word-of-mouth and social media communications, everyone from visitors to niche Instagram influencers, non-traditional partners and residents can affect destination perceptions and help win business.

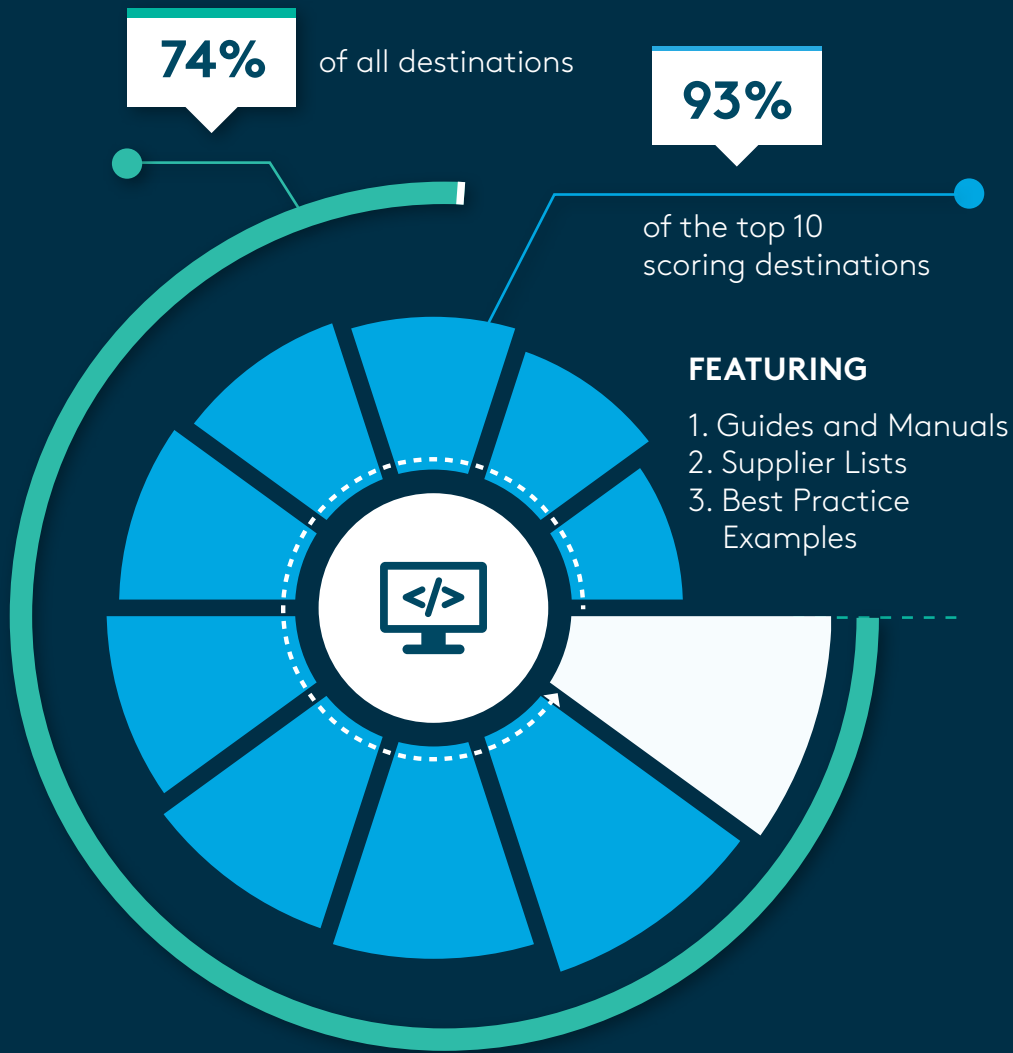
**Zürich Tourism** is a good example of a DMO employing the local community to help sell the destination with their personal stories. No longer do we just want to know the features of a product, we want to know the values and principles of the brand.



# Sustainability Focus

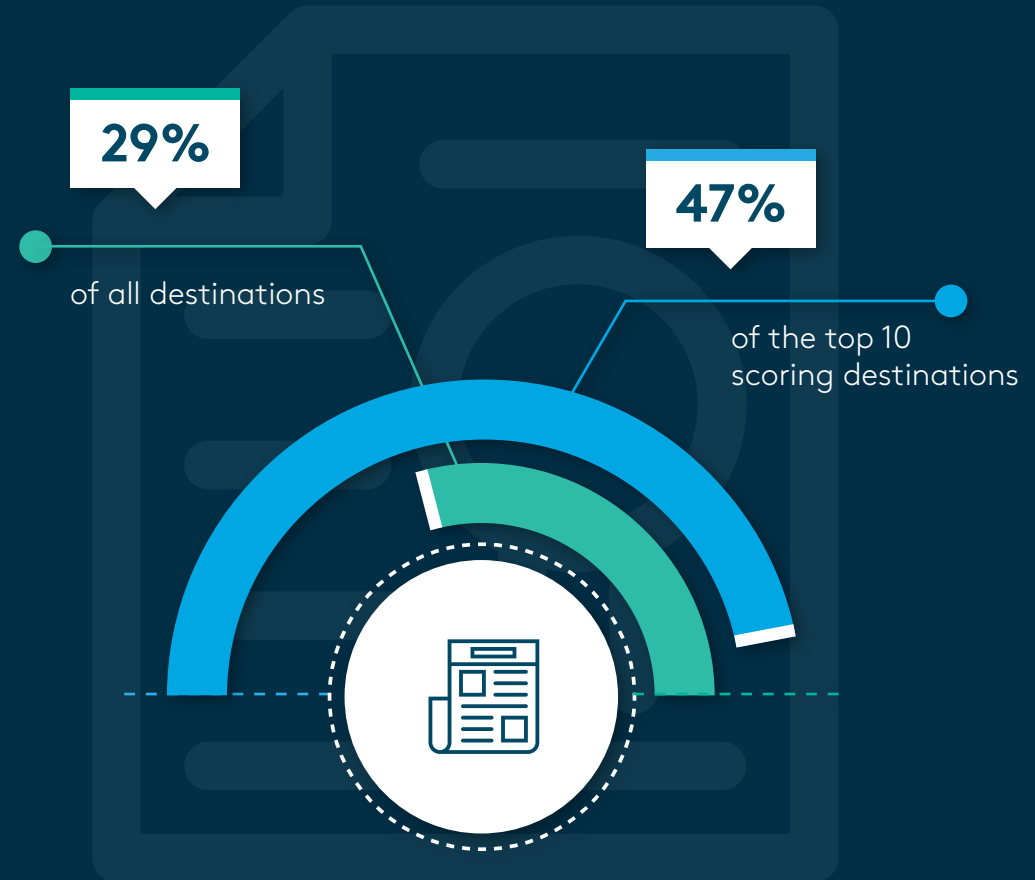
93% OF THE TOP 10 SCORING GDS INDEX DESTINATIONS vs 74% OF ALL DESTINATIONS

include sustainability features on their website.



# Sustainability Reporting

ONLY 29% OF DESTINATIONS PRODUCE A SUSTAINABILITY REPORT vs 47% OF TOP 10 SCORING DESTINATIONS





Copenhagen Convention Bureau using humour and originality to engage clients around important sustainability issues. Image Credit: Guy Bigwood

## CASE STUDY:

# Copenhagen's #BeeSustain leads in creative communication

Copenhagen's **#BeeSustain** initiative is a wonderful example of communicating creatively. Using the bee as a mascot and logo, the convention bureau managed to create a unified campaign for their environmentally friendly meetings – making the project fun and easily recognisable, while enhancing brand value.

The campaign generated a global buzz around sustainability and a tweet reach of more than 12 million since the launch, and was recognised by ICCA with the "Best Marketing Award" in 2014.

As well as promoting the destination, the campaign raised awareness of the importance of bees to our ecosystem, thereby supporting local social enterprises. "Bybi", the campaign partner is an innovative community project that has placed 4.5 million bees around the city. The Wonderful Copenhagen Convention bureau supports the initiative online, at industry events and promotes to clients. Wonderful Copenhagen have also adopted two bee families.



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## DMOS AS AN AGENT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Sustainability in cities is a growing theme for events, and one of the high growth sectors in the meetings industry. Globally we are seeing destinations become much more strategic about how they attract and create events that support their cities' development agendas. DMOs are increasingly targeting specific industry clusters in areas like green energy, cleantech, smart cities and responsible business. Some destinations are creating themed weeks and mini festivals.

For example, in the next two years Glasgow will host 20 energy, sustainability and low carbon industry-related meetings, which will deliver nearly 60,000 delegate days and boost the city's economy by more than £23 million. (Source Glasgow CVB.)

Barcelona co-created and hosts the Smart City Expo World Congress, which attracts more than 14,000 visitors, and Business Events Sydney's marketing strategy focuses on promoting their expertise and experience as a leader in sustainability.

Sydney's many green initiatives – such as the GoGet car sharing program and OzHarvest food recycling – are proudly portrayed in the CVB's Sydney Shines magazine. Business Events Sydney also organises events to promote sustainable development, such as their June 2016 Speaker Series event on "How the new UN Sustainable Development Goals can create a better world".

Rotterdam is an example of a city that capitalises on international events (such as the C40, Eurocities and events like the Shanghai Expo) to promote the city's delta technologies, know-how and expertise on water management and climate related issues – all the while building their brand as a city that is able to address climate change issues while bettering its economy.

7

## PEAK TOURISM - THE NEED TO ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY

The events, meetings and tourism industries have boomed over the last 20 years. Cities have been among the key beneficiaries of this increased revenue. However, this growth is challenging the environmental capacity of certain cities and the quality of life of the people who live there. As a result, destinations need to better understand, determine and manage boundaries and limits.

Cities such as Venice, Amsterdam, Barcelona and Hon Kong have experienced exponential growth in tourism and meetings. They have also seen significant backlash from local residents, who claim that they are losing their city and culture to the masses.

To get the support and advocacy of the local community, DMOs needs to get much better at engaging with, including and listening to their stakeholders.

*The Barcelona 2020 Tourism Strategy aims to better integrate tourism and events into the running of the city with three priority objectives: **leadership** from the public administration, **sustainability** and to increase the **social and economic returns** for local residents.*

The Barcelona City Council has been a pioneer in "open democracy" – using technology to engage and involve the citizen in city decision making. The new Barcelona **2020 Tourism Strategy** was developed with a year of participation from over 300 people. The **research** included analysis of data from diverse sources and stakeholder groups. The strategy aims to better integrate tourism and events into the running of the city, with three priority objectives: leadership from the public administration, sustainability, and to increase the social and economic returns for local residents. To support this, businesses with eco-certifications will received enhanced promotion by the DMO.



Image Credit: Kyoto Convention and Visitors Bureau

**CASE STUDY:**  
**Kyoto CVB uses meetings to support local artisans**

The Kyoto Convention and Visitors Bureau works in partnership with the Kyoto Museum of Traditional Crafts to make convention bags that use high quality, locally produced kimono fabric made by traditional Kyoto artisans. These bags allow meetings to connect with the culture and contribute to the local economy – while giving delegates a chance to take home a tangible reminder of their experience in Kyoto that can be reused again and again.

To support these initiatives, the Kyoto Convention and Visitors Bureau developed the "Kyoto Culture for Meetings Subsidy" in order to protect its culture and traditional industries. The city government-funded subsidy pays up to 300,000 JPY (approximately 2,800 USD) of the costs of incorporating Kyoto's traditional culture in qualifying conventions, meetings and incentive travel. Examples include tea ceremonies, handmade gifts from local artisans, kimono wearing, Zen meditation classes and Sake barrel opening ceremonies.



Image Credit: Turisme de Barcelona

## 8 THE JOURNEY MATTERS

Mobility is a key focus for sustainable, smart destinations with many cities creating strategies for more efficient, healthy and less polluting forms of transportation. As an example Paris, Mexico City, Madrid, New York and at least 8 others cities are considering **banning diesel vehicles** from entering their city centers. This could prove a future challenge for the bus and private car companies that transport delegates to events.

In 2017, Oslo decided to pilot a temporary ban on diesel vehicles on municipal streets during days with acute levels of air pollution. Taking its place as a mode of transportation? Bicycles! The city measured 18% more cyclists in 2016, and the Oslo City Council will be developing eight more bike routes in the city centre.

An example of smart collaboration around transportation is Stuttgart, the city that is considered the cradle of the automobile industry. On the 125th anniversary of the automobile in 2011, Stuttgart-Marketing GmbH collaborated with about 60 hotels and the Transit and Tariff Association Stuttgart to provide free public transport passes to travellers when hotel reservations are made through Stuttgart-Marketing GmbH.

Cities with a strong focus on public transport infrastructure are also increasingly making them more accessible and available to everyone on equal terms. Barcelona Tourism were pioneers and thought leaders in this area: with their Barcelona Sustainable Tourism consortium, they are developing regular tours that are accessible to the visually and hearing impaired.

As an example they created the "Easy Walking Tour Gòtic", the first guided tour for people with reduced mobility. The one-hour guided tour of the Gothic quarter has no architectural barriers, so people with reduced mobility and/or wheelchairs can visit and enjoy the old quarter of Barcelona.



Image Credit: Business Events Sydney

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## COLLABORATE, EDUCATE AND CO-INNOVATE

Collaboration is key. Solving the environmental and social challenges faced by cities is complex and requires a combination of short term action and longer term systemic change. Progressive DMOs realise the important role other stakeholders play in co-creating and implementing a Sustainable Destination strategy.

Many city administrations have joined together to form powerful networks that allow for easier sharing of best practices, while creating momentum to build policy – examples of these include C40 Cities, ICLEI and the Smart Cities Council. DMOs are advised to create better links with their city colleagues who are involved in these initiatives to promote and accelerate the role events and tourism have in creating smart sustainable cities.

**Building capacity:** 34% of all participating cities and 53% of the top 10 destinations have become heavily involved in engaging, informing and training their customers, staff and industry professionals about sustainability. Meanwhile, 73% of the GDS-Index

leaders provide funding and incentives to support local businesses and/or clients to become more sustainable.

Of the top 10 scoring destinations, 73% provide financial incentives and funding for events businesses to become more sustainable. Sapporo, one of Japan's leading cities in embracing sustainable practices, has a Green MICE Initiative that provides a subsidy and an award to conference organisers that meet specific criteria for Green MICE. In addition to such incentives, Sapporo also promotes education and awareness by organizing the Sapporo Greener Week, during which a series of environment-related events are held with the aim of promoting the host city as a national leader in environmental issues.

The City of Sydney's **Smart Green Program** works with businesses including hotels, events, and conference and entertainment venues in order to improve their environmental performance while reducing operating costs. Launched in 2009, the program has provided hands-on sustainability advice and support to businesses, such as no cost water and waste assessments, recommendation reports, referrals to state government energy programs and implementation support.



CASE STUDY:

# Gothenburg's ElectriCity initiative transforms public transport

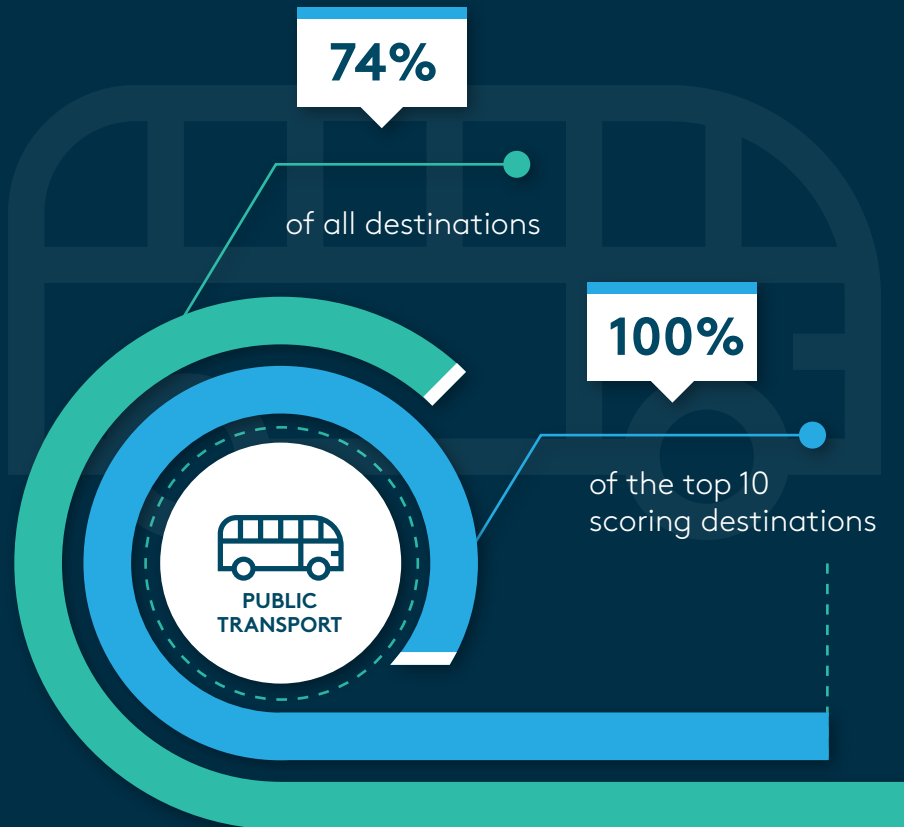
Gothenburg is currently the scene of ElectriCity – an exciting cooperative venture that brings together industry, research and society in the development and testing of solutions for next-generation sustainable public transport. The bus route 55 offers quiet, exhaust-free buses that pick up passengers indoors and are powered by electricity from renewable sources.

ElectriCity is highlighted as an innovative collaboration in the field of new and clean public transport. Electrifying public transport is a great way to reduce noise and air pollution while developing new ways to travel. In particular, it significantly reduces energy consumption and the impact of the transport sector on our climate. As such, western Sweden is a leader in creating new opportunities for travelling, building and living in the cities of the future. Around 100 delegations consisting of 5500 people from all over the world have already visited Gothenburg to find out more about ElectriCity.

# Public Transport

100% OF TOP 10 SCORING GDS-INDEX DESTINATIONS **vs** 74% OF ALL DESTINATIONS

provide free or subsidized public transport



# Certification

63% OF CONGRESS AND EXHIBITIONS CENTRES HAVE A THIRD PARTY VERIFIED CERTIFICATION

this number increases to 71% for the top 10 scoring destinations. 48% of hotels are certified rising to 64% for the top 10 scoring destinations. But only 27% of PCOs are certified.

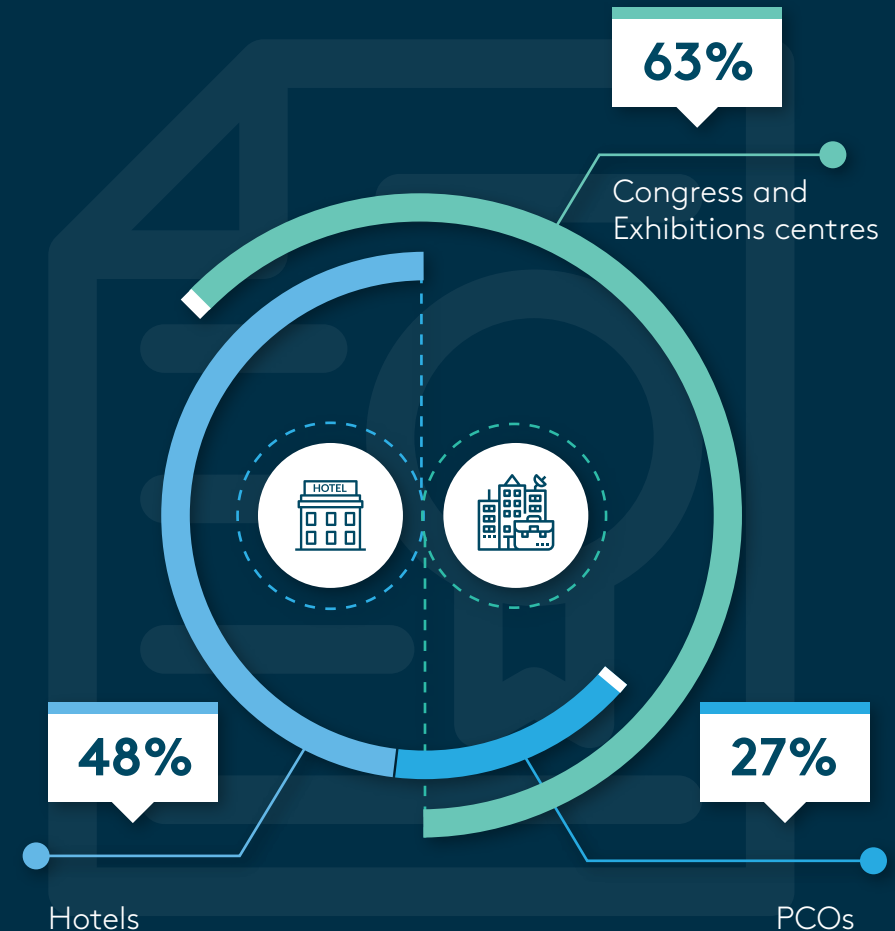




Image Credit: Geneva Tourism, Nathalie Roze

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## CONCENTRATE AND CHAMPION CERTIFICATIONS

When the Green Meetings Industry Council surveyed event professionals on eco-certification, many respondents stated that certifications are confusing and hard to compare or evaluate objectively. Destinations can accelerate progress by streamlining, promoting and educating their stakeholders on eco-certifications and how they affect a business.

In a market where many are proclaiming their sustainability credentials, recognised eco-certifications assure customers that products and services are backed by a strong, well-managed commitment to sustainable practices. More and more destinations are working with their industry suppliers to encourage certification within their local community. Due to the growing demand for transparency and accountability, a number of regions have developed their own standards and certification programs – such as the Scandinavian Nordic Swan Ecolabel and the North American Green Key Eco-Rating program.

On average, 48% of total hotel room inventory is eco-certified by a third party. The Swedish define best practice with stunning performance for Karlstad, which has 100% of its hotels certified, followed by Malmo with 95%, Västerås with 93%, Uppsala with 88% and Gothenburg with 83%.

63% of purpose-built congress and exhibition centres in the GDS-Index have an internationally or regionally verified third party certification, and this number increases to 71% if we consider only the top 10 scoring destinations.

The certification of Professional Congress Organisers (PCOs) and Destination Management Companies is a weak link, with only 27% of agencies in the Index having achieved third party certification. As an indication of a future trend, six DMOs in the GDS-Index have achieved a certification: Barcelona (Biosphere), Gothenburg (Environmental Diploma), Zurich (ISO14001), Stuttgart (Baden-Württemberg Sustainable Destination), Malmo (ISO20121) and Sapporo (Environmental Management System). Nantes, Copenhagen and Reykjavik DMOs are in the process of obtaining eco-certifications.



Image Credit: Stuttgart-Marketing GmbH

## CASE STUDY:

# Building Capacity at the Stuttgart Convention Bureau

The Stuttgart CVB makes sure that its staff are trained in sustainability at all levels of operation.

**Internal sustainability training:** Every two weeks the sustainability team issues the “Green Wednesday” newsletter, sent to all colleagues. Topics include general information of city or nationwide relevance, information about new sustainable offers and providers or information on revised internal procedures to increase sustainable effects.

**Business to consumer:** six city guides were trained in the field of sustainability during a two-day course by the Environmental Agency of the State of Baden-Württemberg. They are now able to establish sustainability specific city tours or include the sustainability topic in regular city tours for tourists. The Stuttgart Convention Bureau will feature these tours in its educational tours for conference planners.

**Business to business:** the whole Stuttgart Convention Bureau team, as well as key staff from the major city venues, were trained via sustainability seminars offered by the German Convention Bureau. The CVB now provides consulting services to help clients organize more sustainable meetings.

Since the creation of the Stuttgart Convention Bureau’s sustainability strategy in 2012, the number of partner hotels and venues with green policies has continually increased. Today there are more than 90 sustainable tourism and meeting businesses in Stuttgart.



# 2016 Global Destination Sustainability Index Results

AMERICAS		
17	Houston	44%

ASIA PACIFIC		
10	Sapporo	58%
10	Sydney	58%
11	Melbourne	57%
13	Kyoto	51%

MIDDLE EAST & AFRICA		
19	Durban	39%
21	Cape Town	37%
23	Tshwane	23%

EUROPE		
1	Gothenburg	83%
2	Copenhagen	79%
2	Reykjavik	79%
3	Zurich	73%
4	Stuttgart	71%
5	Uppsala	68%
6	Helsinki	66%
7	Glasgow	64%
7	Tampere	64%
8	Stockholm	61%
8	Västerås	61%
9	Espoo	59%
10	Frankfurt	58%
10	Karlstad	58%
11	Jonkoping	57%
12	Malmö	56%
13	Barcelona	51%
14	Bergen	50%
14	Geneva	50%
15	Aalborg	48%
15	Nantes	48%
15	Rotterdam	48%
16	The Hague	46%
18	Oslo	42%
19	Turku	39%
20	Aarhus	38%
22	Trollhättan	35%



\*Detailed results of each destination can be found at <http://gds-index.com/index/>

# Award Winners

The Global Destination Sustainability Index aims to not only benchmark destination performance around sustainability, but to also recognise and showcase pioneering cities that have implemented innovative solutions to drive sustainability performance in their local MICE industry.

The awards were announced and given during the 2016 ICCA Congress, where the GDS-Index gave out its first year of awards to destinations that showed remarkable leadership and innovation.



Annika Hallman, Director of the Gothenburg Convention Bureau receiving the GDS-Index Leadership in Sustainability Award from ICCA President, Nina Freysen-Pretorius.  
Image Credit: ICCA

# Leadership Award

Based on the GDS-Index's benchmarking and assessment results, this award goes to the top performer amongst participating destinations in order to highlight the destination's exemplary sustainability performance and commitments.

Since the inception of the GDS-Index, the city has actively integrated sustainability into its strategy and operations, achieving the top score in supplier performance (an impressive 96%) as well as the leading overall score of 83%.

“ We are extremely honoured to win the GDS-Index Leadership Award. From the very beginning, we had widespread support amongst all types of stakeholders to help us ensure a better society. Collaboration has been a key factor, allowing everyone to gather around a united vision. We gladly take responsibility for our industry's ability to contribute towards a community that shows concern for the environment and its people, and we are grateful that the GDS-Index Leadership Award has recognised this. ”

- Annika Hallman  
Director of the **Gothenburg Convention Bureau**.



WINNER:

**Gothenburg, Sweden**

# Innovation Award

This award is evaluated by a panel comprised of experienced event professionals and sustainability leaders. Candidates were required to submit an application describing why and how their destination's sustainability initiatives stand out from the crowd.

The city received the Innovation Award for its "Greening Events Project" - a joint venture between the neighbouring cities of Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa that aimed to develop concrete ways of implementing environmental management at events in the capital area in Finland. Close runners-up were Kyoto and Stuttgart, who deserve honourable mentions for their innovative submissions.

“ It is a great honour for us to win the GDS-Index Innovation Award, and we sincerely appreciate the recognition. Moving forward, we would like to emphasize that one does not need an award in order to be a role model. In Scandinavia, we have many role models, and we encourage all of you to join us on this movement towards a sustainable future. This award has inspired us to continue leading and working towards an even more sustainable meetings region, and we hope it will inspire you too. ”

- Ines Antti-Poika  
Director of the Helsinki Convention Bureau



WINNER:  
**Helsinki, Finland**

# Appendix

## ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

Developed by MCI Sustainability Services in close collaboration with the founding Scandinavian cities, the GDS-Index methodology measures and compares the social and environmental sustainability strategies, policies and performance of participating destinations using 35 criteria across four key areas.

After signing onto the Index, the destination Convention Bureau (CVB) or Destination Management Organisation (DMO) completes a questionnaire, gathering answers and providing key performance indicators and supporting data.

Consultants from MCI Sustainability Services assess and validate the answers, requesting corrections and/or further information as required. Each performance indicator is assigned a number of points according to how well the destination fulfils each indicator. These values are then aggregated to provide the final "Performance Score", and the website is updated to reflect the destination's ranking and performance in each category. For more details please consult [www.gds-index.com](http://www.gds-index.com).



### ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE

includes a city's performance pertaining to its policies and infrastructure, such as climate change commitment, recycling availability, public transport options and air pollution levels.



### CVB PERFORMANCE

indicates the sustainability commitment of the convention bureau itself, including questions pertaining to the existence of a sustainability policy and manager, communication of sustainability initiatives to support client planners, and the rigorousness of their reporting on sustainability operations.



### SOCIAL PERFORMANCE

indicates the development and corruption levels associated with the city's country.



### SUPPLIER PERFORMANCE

addresses the sustainability commitment and performance of the local meetings industry supply chain, including hotels, venues and restaurants.



## BACKGROUND

The initiative started in 2010, when leading destinations from Norway, Iceland, Denmark, Finland and Sweden converged to create a common vision and roadmap for making a sustainable Scandinavian meetings region. Lennart Johansson, Director of the Gothenburg Convention Bureau commented: “in our second workshop we realised that we needed a system to evaluate if a destination was sustainable and compare performance between the ICCA members”.

“ in our second workshop we realised that we needed a system to evaluate if a destination was sustainable and compare performance between the ICCA members ”

From there, MCI Sustainability Services worked with 20 Scandinavian convention bureaux to create the Scandinavian Destination Sustainability Index, which was launched in 2012.

Using benchmarking as a way to understand and compare sustainability performance, the project stimulated a large number of sustainability initiatives across the Nordic region that continues to this day. From 2012-2014, nearly half of convention bureaux in the region developed a sustainability strategy (originally 20%), sustainability communication improved by 50%, and eco-certifications across the region rose to include 60% of event industry suppliers – more than any other region in the world.

Given the success and industry recognition of this initiative, the program was re-developed, rebranded and launched globally at IMEX in 2016.

# Credits and Contact Information

## AUTHOR

This report was produced for the GDS-Index by MCI Sustainability Services, a dedicated sustainability consulting unit of MCI Group. The expert commentary and analysis was provided by Jennifer Ching, Pranav Sethaputra, Roger Simons and Guy Bigwood. The insights were compiled based on the research of the GDS-Index and interviews with the destination representatives, partners and other industry experts.

Artwork and Graphics: Provided by Change Agent Collective  
Front Page Image Credit: Visit Houston

## DISCLAIMER

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the material in this document, neither MCI nor any of the partners of the GDS-Index will be liable for any loss or damages incurred through the use of the report.

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Image Credit: Glasgow City Marketing Bureau