



Conference Program



GLOBAL
SUSTAINABLE
TOURISM SUMMIT
2026

2-5 June | Gold Coast, QLD, Australia

Ecotourism Australia respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we host the Summit, the Kombumerri people of the Yugambeh language region, and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

Conference Program

People | Place | Planet | Purpose

Conference Day 1 - Wednesday 3 June

Please arrive at the Mercure by 8.00 am to allow sufficient time to register and enjoy arrival tea and coffee.

The Conference Program will kick off at 8.30 am sharp with a Welcome to Country.

Session	Topic	Speaker
Session 1 8.30am - 10.30am	Welcome to Country	Lann Levinge, Levinge Events
	Welcome	Victoria Carthew, Master of Ceremonies Journalist and TV Presenter, Weekender Elissa Keenan, CEO, Ecotourism Australia Senator the Hon Don Farrell, Minister for Trade and Tourism, Special Minister of State [video address]
	Green is Our Gold: Driving sustainable travel across the nation Consumer insights, industry action and how to get involved.	Lauren Caverley, Senior Communications and Sustainability Manager, Tourism Australia
	How Slovenia became one of the world's leading sustainable destinations Lessons from Slovenia - Discover real-world strategies for creating impact at scale	International Speaker: Jana Apih, Managing Director, GoodPlace
	Host sponsor address: Rethinking a Global Tourism Destination Through Nature	Tim Baker, CEO, City of Gold Coast

10.30 am - 11.00 am Morning Tea

Session 2 11.00am - 1.00pm	<p>Preparing for sustainability scrutiny and telling your story with authenticity</p> <p>Consumer expectations are changing and international regulations are coming! Ensure you're prepared for the European Union's Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition Directive.</p>	<p>Elissa Keenan, CEO, Ecotourism Australia</p> <p>Louise Freckleton, Custodian/Host, Highfield Farm & Kestrel Nest EcoHut</p>
	<p>Turning Sustainability Signals into Better Travel Choices</p> <p>Understand how Travalyst – a global coalition working to standardise and accelerate sustainability across the travel and tourism sector - is working with the world's major travel brands to embed sustainability into the travel booking experience.</p>	<p>International Speaker: Aromica Bhattacharya, Data Strategy Lead, Travalyst</p>
	<p>Understanding our influence: How can we better measure tourism's environmental and social impact?</p> <p>Explore the tools, frameworks, and data needed to better understand tourism's true environmental and social footprint.</p>	<p>Garrett Tyler Parker, Director Analysis and Insights, Tourism Research Australia</p> <p>Katharine Hopper, Head of Sustainability, EVT</p> <p>Tai Lennon, Managing Director, Climate Zero</p> <p>Dana Ronan, Founder, Nourish Group</p> <p><i>Facilitated by Nadine Scramm, Head of Sustainability, Assurance & Operations, Ecotourism Australia</i></p>

1.00pm - 2.00pm Lunch



<p>Session 3 2.00pm - 3.35pm</p>	<p>The green skills challenge: Close the skills gap and empower your team to take action</p> <p>Learn how to embed sustainability across your organisation by building the skills, capability, and culture needed to empower teams to take meaningful action.</p>	<p>David Young, Director of Sustainability, Accor</p> <p>Darren McClenaghan, Resort Manager, RACV Noosa</p> <p>Diana Mulholland, Tourism Experience and Sector Development Leader - Commercial & Partnerships, Tourism and Events Queensland</p> <p><i>Facilitated by Jessica Keen, National Manager - Industry Development & Capability, Australian Tourism Export Council</i></p>
	<p>Protecting 30 per cent by 2030: How can tourism aid conservation outcomes?</p> <p>What is the true value of nature to the Australian economy? Investing in nature not only safeguards biodiversity but also strengthens nature-based tourism. How do we work together to achieve greater nature protection?</p>	<p>Nicole Forrester, WWF Australia</p> <p>Andrew Picone, National Advocacy Coordinator, The Pew Charitable Trusts Australia</p> <p><i>Facilitated by Elissa Keenan, CEO, Ecotourism Australia</i></p>
<p>3.35pm - 4.00pm Afternoon Tea</p>		
<p>Session 4 4.00pm - 5.00pm</p>	<p>Driving regeneration, conservation and protected areas – ecotourism in action</p> <p>ECO Certified operators and destinations share best-practice approaches to ecotourism today</p>	<p>Kristy Malapa, General Manager, Untamed Escapes</p> <p>Laura Haley, Environment Business Partner, NRMA Parks and Resorts</p> <p>Michael Thurston, General Manager, Destination North Coast</p> <p><i>Facilitated by Eloise Chaffers, Capricorn Coast</i></p>
	<p>Day 1 Wrap-Up</p>	<p>Victoria Carthew, Master of Ceremonies</p>

The Day 1 program will conclude at 5 pm.

Buses will leave from the Mercure Gold Resort at 5.30 pm for the J.W Marriott Resort for our Evening Cocktail Function. Transport will be provided back to the Mercure at the conclusion of the event at 9 pm.

Conference Day 2 - Thursday 4 June

*Please arrive at the Mercure by 8.00 am to allow sufficient time to register and enjoy arrival tea and coffee.

<p>Session 1 8.30am - 10.40am</p>	<p>Welcome Back</p>	<p>Minister for the Environment and Tourism, the Hon Andrew Powell MP [video address]</p>
	<p>Reading the soul of a place - bringing authentic culture into the visitor experience</p> <p>Explore understanding a destination's living culture can transform visitor experiences and create more meaningful, sustainable tourism.</p>	<p>International Speaker: Adam McEwan, Founder and CEO, Hero Experiences</p>
	<p>What are travellers looking for in sustainability?</p>	<p>Emma-Louise Padillo, Area Manager, Booking.com</p>
	<p>Furthering Indigenous tourism - new partnerships to expand Australia's First Nations visitor economy</p> <p>Understand how collaborative partnerships can support the growth of Australia's First Nations tourism sector while strengthening self-determination, cultural integrity, and economic opportunity.</p>	<p>Fraser Nai, Co-founder, Strait Experience</p> <p>Heidi Quatro, Team Leader, Jellurgal Aboriginal Cultural Centre</p> <p>Soraya Rankine, Board Member, South Australian Aboriginal Tourism Operators Council (SAATOC)</p> <p><i>Facilitated by Robert Taylor, CEO and Founder, WAITOC; Chair, First Nations Visitor Economy Partnership</i></p>
<p>10.40am - 11.00am Morning Tea</p>		
<p>Session 2 11am - 12.30pm</p>	<p>Imagine What We Can Do – How can Australia be a leading accessible tourism destination?</p> <p>As Australia prepares to welcome the world for the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, explore how operators and councils across Australia, regardless of their size or location, can help lift the profile of Australia as an accessible destination by incorporating the principles of universal design into their tourism offerings and visitor experiences.</p>	<p>Curtis McGrath OAM, Australian Paralympic Team, Paralympics Australia</p> <p>Phil Wishart, General Manager, Government Relations and Stakeholder Engagement, Paralympics Australia</p>

	<p>Ecotourism to protect wildlife - lessons from Borneo</p> <p>Explore how ecotourism initiatives in Borneo are helping to protect wildlife while supporting local communities.</p>	<p>International Speaker: Timothy Teo, CEO, Borneo Eco Tours</p>
12.30pm - 1.30pm Lunch		
<p>Session 3 1.30pm - 4.00pm</p>	<p>The State of Sustainable Tourism</p>	<p>Nadine Schramm, Head of Sustainability, Assurance & Operations, Ecotourism Australia</p>
	<p>Building climate resilient visitor economies</p> <p>Examine how both operators and destinations can respond to climate change through a balanced focus on mitigation and adaptation across planning, operations, and development.</p>	<p>Simone Novello, Program Leader Visitor Economy, Blue Mountains City Council</p> <p>Fiona Merida, Director of Strategic Engagement and Education, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority</p> <p>Daniel Walsh, Co-Founder & CEO, Reforest</p> <p>Penny Spoelder, Senior Associate, TRC Tourism</p> <p><i>Facilitated by Nat Burke, Head of Regenerative Climate at WWF-Australia, Chair of Ecotourism Australia</i></p>
	<p>Solving the Single Use Plastic Crisis</p>	<p>International Speaker: Christina Leala-Gale, Sustainable Tourism Manager, Pacific Tourism Organisation</p>
	<p>Turning purpose into profit and profit into purpose</p> <p>An inspiring look at how leading operators turn values into measurable business outcomes, and profits into long-term sustainability gains.</p>	<p>Amy Gash, Executive General Manager, Lady Elliot Island</p> <p>Paul McGrath, CEO, YHA</p> <p><i>Facilitated by Daniel Gschwind, Griffith University</i></p>
	<p>Conference Close</p>	<p>Victoria Carthew, Master of Ceremonies</p>

The Day 2 program will conclude by 4 pm. If you are departing on the same day, please book flights from Gold Coast Airport from 6.30 pm onwards to allow sufficient travel time.

Friday 5 June 2026: Destination Immersion Program, Gold Coast (additional/optional ticketed event)

Celebrating World Environment Day, the program will commence at approximately 8.30 am and conclude at 1.30 pm. Transfers from the Mercure Gold Coast Resort and drop off at either the Gold Coast Airport (by 2 pm) or the Mercure Gold Coast Resort will be provided.

** Program as of 20 May 2026. Please note confirmed speakers and updates to the program will continue to be released. Speakers, session topics, and program themes are subject to change at the organisers' discretion and may be updated without notice. Please check [our website](#) for the latest version.*

