



# 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 Gold Coast resort by 8.15 for an 8.30 am start.*

Topic	Speaker
Welcome to Country	Lann Levinge, Levinge Events
Welcome	<p>Victoria Carthew, Emcee Journalist and TV Presenter, Weekender</p> <p>Elissa Keenan, CEO, Ecotourism Australia</p> <p>Senator the Hon Don Farrell, Minister for Trade and Tourism, Special Minister of State</p>
<p><b>Green is Our Gold: Putting sustainability at the heart of the visitor experience</b></p> <p>How can your business or destination leverage the national Green and Gold Promise?</p>	Tourism Australia
<p><b>How Slovenia became one of the world's leading sustainable destinations</b></p> <p>Lessons from Slovenia - Discover real-world strategies for creating impact at scale</p>	<p><b>International Speaker:</b> Jana Apih, Executive Director, Green Destinations Foundation</p>

<p><b>Preparing for sustainability scrutiny and telling your story with authenticity</b></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>Nadine Schramm, Head of Sustainability, Assurance &amp; Operations, Ecotourism Australia</p> <p>Louise Freckleton, Custodian/Host, Highfield Farm &amp; Kestrel Nest EcoHut</p>
<p><b>Turning Sustainability Signals into Better Travel Choices</b></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><b>Understanding our influence: How can we better measure tourism's environmental and social impact?</b></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><b>Host sponsor address – supporting nature-based tourism on the Gold Coast</b></p>	<p>City of Gold Coast</p>
<p><b>The green skills challenge: Close the skills gap and empower your team to take action</b></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 &amp; Partnerships, Tourism and Events Queensland</p>

<p><b>Protecting 30 per cent by 2030: How can tourism aid conservation outcomes?</b></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>Jason Lyddieth, National Protected Areas Campaign Manager, The Pew Charitable Trusts</p>
<p><b>Driving regeneration, conservation and protected areas – ecotourism in action</b></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>Sonia Beckwith, Co-founder, Live Ningaloo</p> <p>Facilitated by Eloise Chaffers, Capricorn Coast</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 Gold Coast resort by 8.15 for an 8.30 am start.

<p><b>Partnering to respectfully showcase cultural practices and heritage in the UAE tourism context</b></p> <p>Explore how meaningful partnerships can support the respectful representation of cultural heritage in tourism, balancing authenticity and visitor experience.</p>	<p><b>International Speaker:</b> Adam McEwan, Founder and CEO, Hero Experiences</p>
<p><b>Furthering Indigenous tourism - new partnerships to expand Australia's First Nations visitor economy</b></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>Robert Taylor, CEO and Founder, WAITOC; Chair, First Nations Visitor Economy Partnership</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><b>Ecotourism to protect wildlife - lessons from Borneo</b></p> <p>Explore how ecotourism initiatives in Borneo are helping to protect wildlife while supporting local communities.</p>	<p><b>International Speaker:</b> Timothy Teo, CEO, Borneo Eco Tours</p>

### **Building climate resilient visitor economies**

Examine how both operators and destinations can respond to climate change through a balanced focus on mitigation and adaptation across planning, operations, and development.

Simone Novello, Program Leader Visitor Economy, Blue Mountains City Council

Fiona Merida, Director of Strategic Engagement and Education, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

Daniel Walsh, Co-Founder & CEO, Reforest

Penny Spoelder, Senior Associate, TRC Tourism

Facilitated by Nat Burke, Head of Regenerative Climate at WWF-Australia, Chair of Ecotourism Australia

### **Imagine What We Can Do – How can Australia be a leading accessible tourism destination?**

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.

Phil Wishart, General Manager, Government Relations and Stakeholder Engagement, Paralympics Australia

### **Turning purpose into profit and profit into purpose**

An inspiring look at how leading operators turn values into measurable business outcomes, and profits into long-term sustainability gains.

Amy Gash, Executive General Manager, Lady Elliot Island

Paul McGrath, CEO, YHA

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.

*\* Preliminary program as of 6 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.*