




Summit 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 Yugambah language region, and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

Welcome to the Global Sustainable Tourism Summit!

Welcome Function - Tuesday 2 June, Mercure Gold Coast Resort, 6-9 pm

We look forward to seeing you at our Welcome Function on Tuesday evening to kickstart the Summit. Enjoy drinks, canapés and the opportunity to connect with fellow delegates, speakers and industry leaders from across Australia and beyond.

Conference Program

People | Place | Planet | Purpose

Conference Day 1 - Wednesday 3 June

Please arrive at the Mercure Gold Coast Resort 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

Preparing for sustainability scrutiny and telling your story with authenticity

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.

Elissa Keenan, CEO, Ecotourism Australia

Louise Freckelton, Custodian/Host, Highfield Farm & Kestrel Nest EcoHut

Turning Sustainability Signals into Better Travel Choices

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.

International Speaker: Aromica Bhattacharya, Data Strategy Lead, Travalyst

Session 2
11.00am
- 1.00pm

Understanding our influence: How can we better measure tourism's environmental and social impact?

Explore the tools, frameworks, and data needed to better understand tourism's true environmental and social footprint.

Garrett Tyler-Parker, Director, Analysis and Insights, Tourism Research Australia

Katharine Hopper, Head of Sustainability, EVT

Tai Lennon, Managing Director, Climate Zero

Dana Ronan, Founder, Nourish Group

Facilitated by Nadine Schramm, Head of Sustainability, Assurance & Operations, Ecotourism Australia

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 - Pacific, 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>Welcome</p>	<p>Victoria Carthew, Master of Ceremonies</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>Session 1 8.30am - 10.40am</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 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>Elissa Keenan, CEO, Ecotourism Australia</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 (Sold out)

Celebrating World Environment Day, the program will commence at 8.15 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.

**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.*





GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE TOURISM SUMMIT 2026

Sponsors

The Global Sustainable Tourism Summit is made possible through the generous support of our sponsors. Their commitment to advancing sustainable tourism reflects a shared belief that responsible travel has the power to create lasting value for people, place and planet. We are honoured to acknowledge each of the organisations listed below for their contribution to GSTS 2026.

We encourage all delegates to connect with our sponsors and explore the meaningful work they do. Their involvement goes beyond financial support - each organisation shares in our mission to champion credible, impactful and responsible tourism.

TOURISM AUSTRALIA



Summit Partner
Tourism Australia

New industry-wide commitment to sustainable tourism: Green is Our Gold

Tourism Australia has launched Green is Our Gold, a new initiative for the Australian tourism and business events sectors aimed at rallying the industry around a shared vision: to protect the natural environments, cultures, and communities that make Australia so special. Those who join the Promise will gain access to a practical toolkit designed to help the industry share five simple Principles of responsible travel with guests: Celebrate Community, Embrace Culture, Preserve Place, Respect Wildlife, and Take Care.

Join via the QR code or find out more at: tourism.australia.com/greenandgold

The Green and Gold Promise

As custodians of the tourism industry, we play a vital role in sharing Australia with the world. Yet we're equally dedicated to looking after it too.

Whether we're protecting the precious ecosystems of our backyard, teaching visitors how to tread lightly, or passing on the knowledge of the world's oldest living cultures, caring for our country is engrained in what we do every day. That includes caring for our visitors too, to ensure everyone has the opportunity to experience Australia safely and sustainably.

Because when you spend every day surrounded by Australia at its best, you can't help but want to protect it - and empower visitors to do the same.

So, when we talk about being 'green', well, that's a word we take seriously in the tourism industry. It's a standard we'll never stop striving for - because down here, *Green is Our Gold*.



Gold Coast Nature-Based Tourism grants now open

Round 2 of the City of Gold Coast's Nature-Based Tourism Grants Program is now open for applications.

Developed in response to visitor demand, the program supports both local operators and eligible organisations outside the Gold Coast to help expand the pipeline of sustainable, immersive nature-based experiences in the region.

Last year, the City of Gold Coast awarded more than \$2.5million between 23 businesses, kick-starting several nature-based projects including a humpback whale and discovery learning hub, wellness immersions, bike park upgrades, indigenous and wildlife experiences and eco-tours all due for completion this year.

Round 2 offers 2 funding streams to support projects of all sizes:

- Small Grants (under \$100k) for existing and new Gold Coast businesses delivering low impact products and quick activation projects.
- Large Grants (\$100k to \$500k) open to local operators and businesses outside the region, to support new or significantly enhanced best practice, low impact, nature-based tourism experiences and associated infrastructure.

Applications are now open to 30 June 2026 for small grants, and to 31 July 2026 for large grants.

To apply or find out more: [Nature-based tourism](#) | [City of Gold Coast](#)





Corporate Sponsor
WWF Australia

WWF-Australia works at the intersection of people, nature and climate to create lasting solutions for Australia and the planet. Our mission is urgent: to halt the degradation of the natural world and build a future where people live in harmony with nature. Across Australia, the Pacific and Asia, WWF-Australia partners with Traditional Owners, local communities, governments and businesses to protect and restore critical ecosystems, from koala habitats and coral reefs to rivers and landscapes. Our work is science-based, collaborative and focused on long-term impact.

Inclusive conservation is central to our approach. We work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, recognising them as the world's oldest continuing conservationists. By supporting Indigenous leadership and combining traditional knowledge with contemporary science, we deliver conservation outcomes that are culturally strong, locally grounded and environmentally effective. Sustainability shapes how we operate. We prioritise responsible practices and embed sustainability into decision-making, procurement and partnerships, ensuring our values are reflected in how we work day to day. WWF-Australia believes a strong economy and a healthy environment go hand in hand. We work with businesses and institutions to support ambitious climate and nature goals and responsible supply chains, delivering practical solutions that protect the natural systems sustaining life on Earth.



Corporate Sponsor
RACV

RACV Resorts earn Australian-first Advanced Sustainable Tourism Rating

RACV has achieved Ecotourism Australia Sustainable Tourism Certification across all ten of its Club and Resorts properties in Victoria, Queensland, and Tasmania, with RACV Noosa Resort and RACV Royal Pines Resort becoming the first hotels in Australia to attain Advanced Sustainable Tourism Certification. The certification recognises RACV's enterprise-wide commitment to environmental management, community engagement and responsible tourism practices.

Sustainability initiatives across the portfolio include renewable electricity where available, rainwater harvesting, electric vehicle charging infrastructure, reforestation programs, local conservation partnerships and the Go Green and Give program, which allows guests to opt out of daily housekeeping to support community organisations.

RACV Noosa Resort participates in Tourism Noosa's Tread Lightly reforestation program, while RACV Royal Pines Resort supports Clean Up Australia Day, Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary and the Containers for Change scheme. Together, these initiatives demonstrate a considered approach to sustainable tourism, supporting environmental outcomes while contributing to the communities in which RACV operates.



Summit Sponsor Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort

Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort is a world-leading, award-winning ecologically sustainable tourism operator dedicated to protecting and enhancing Lady Elliot Island, the Great Barrier Reef and surrounding communities.

Situated within a highly protected 'Green Zone' the coral cay is a sanctuary for over 1,200 species of marine life and is known for its abundance of manta rays, turtles, amazing array of spectacular marine life and unspoilt coral reef.

Since 2005, the family run resort has become a leader in eco-tourism. They reduce emissions, water use, and waste; protect biodiversity and inspire guests to become ECO Warriors for future reef protection.



Summit Sponsor Coral Expeditions

Coral Expeditions is Australia's pioneering expedition cruise line. For over four decades we have operated with a single purpose - to take small groups of like-minded explorers to remote natural and cultural places with expert guidance and warm Australian hospitality. Our fleet of three purpose-built expedition ships operate year around in the Kimberley, Tasmania, Great Barrier Reef, Cape York and Arnhem Land and further afield into Papua New Guinea, the Spice Islands, New Zealand and Indonesia. We are a proud recipient of the Ecotourism Australia Hall of Fame award.



Summit Sponsor Diverse Travel Australia

For close to three decades, Diverse Travel Australia has been seeking out the experiences that reveal Australia at its most authentic - ancient landscapes, living First Nations cultures, and rarely visited natural environments, shaped into itineraries that are meaningful and deeply connected to place. Their specialist team has built genuine relationships with Aboriginal communities, expert guides and quality operators across the country, delivering attentive on-ground client support for both tailored and pre-packaged journeys. On every booking, Diverse Travel Australia contributes to the Koala Clancy Foundation in Victoria and The Forever Reef Project in Far North Queensland.



Summit Supporter
Tourism and Events
Queensland

Queensland features some of the world's most distinguished natural and cultural landscapes, including internationally recognised and iconically Queensland World Heritage Areas. From the Great Barrier Reef to ancient tropical rainforests and remarkable outback regions, tourism in Queensland is guided by a commitment to protecting the places that inspire that holiday feeling visitors seek. Tour operators and guides act as responsible stewards, delivering thoughtful, low-impact experiences that respect Traditional lands, protect ecosystems and deepen understanding. Through principled tourism practices and powerful storytelling, they invite global audiences to experience the very best of Queensland and discover it for themselves.



Summit Supporter
Southern Cross
Tours

Southern Cross Tours is proudly ECO Tourism Certified, delivering small-group experiences through rainforest, waterfalls, and scenic lookouts with a strong focus on sustainability. In partnership with Reforest, they help remove 50% of your tour's CO2 through tree planting and restoring native landscapes. Travel with purpose, knowing your visit supports conservation, biodiversity, and local communities. Enjoy guided walks, wildlife encounters, and breathtaking views along the way. **Book now and enjoy 20% off using promo code GSTS26, valid for travel until 24 December 2026.** It's the perfect way to experience the Gold Coast hinterland, guided by passionate local experts.



Summit Supporter
Reforest

Reforest is the restoration partner built for tourism, travel, and events. We believe tourism can leave every destination better than it found it, so we connect businesses and destinations to local restoration projects that turn that belief into action.

At this year's GSTS, Ecotourism Australia has partnered with Reforest so every delegate has a tree planted in their name, collectively removing the carbon emissions of hosting the event. Claim your tree, see exactly where it's growing, and track its progress through your personal impact dashboard [here](#).



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Thank You to Our Sponsors!



Thank you for being part of something bigger.

Your participation in the Global Sustainable Tourism Summit is a reflection of your commitment to a better future for people, place and planet. You are the changemakers and advocates who give this event its energy and its heart - and the conversations, connections and ideas shared over these four days have the power to shape our industry in ways that matter long after we leave.

