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# THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO PLANNING SUSTAINABLE MEETINGS

Showcasing Innovative Approaches by Destinations,  
Venues, Hotels and More

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## ABOUT SKIFT MEETINGS

Skift Meetings is defining the future of events.

As a Skift brand, Skift Meetings delivers insights into how business events, technology and travel play leading roles in creating and instilling organizational – and indeed industry – culture. We believe meetings and events are the catalyst for new ideas, cultivating values and building professional relationships.

Skift Meetings is defining the way forward, and helping our global audience of business event professionals to thrive by delivering up-to-date guidance, inspiration and news analysis through our multi-platform digital content, research, and live events.

## ABOUT IMEX GROUP

*IMEX* is where the global meetings, events and incentive travel industry comes together annually in Frankfurt and America. At IMEX thousands of global meeting planners connect with more than 2,500 suppliers from across the world, building powerful working relationships – to create better events, meetings and experiences.

## INTRODUCTION

# FROM INSPIRATION TO ACTION: ACCELERATING THE INDUSTRY'S TRANSFORMATION TO SUSTAINABILITY

Business events focus on bringing people together to innovate, collaborate, and debate. They have a tangible impact on individuals, organizations, and even society at large. Unfortunately, they also impact the planet, often in a negative way.

Sustainability is no longer a niche topic. It is a priority for people globally, and event professionals are no exception. Therefore, climate change must be urgently addressed. The many industry initiatives focused on achieving net zero by 2050 are an example of the energy around this topic that we care deeply about at Skift Meetings.

There is no time to waste when it comes to sustainability. Industry stakeholders, from attendees to sponsors, are demanding change. Sustainability is no longer a nice to have — it is a must-have.

As an industry that connects people, how everyone is treated matters, and accelerating inclusion and belonging is essential to becoming more sustainable. Global sustainability initiatives focus on those making a difference in the business events industry. The stories navigate the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and our aim is that they may inspire you to create your own initiatives to support each goal.



# MEETINGS WITH PURPOSE

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# 1 NO POVERTY



Leave No One Behind is the central promise of the Sustainable Development Goals and is the unequivocal commitment to eradicate poverty.

Sustainability was paramount when planning the **UN Climate Change Conference** in Glasgow (COP26). Both the organizers and the team at the **Scottish Event Campus (SEC)** wanted to demonstrate how an event could be a stimulus for economic and social good. In addition, the aim was to use the scale and attention around the event to create a roadmap on how to make immediate contributions to local communities.

Three initiatives encapsulated this ambition. First, the event team partnered with a local charity to best manage the miles of carpet used throughout the venue. The organizers agreed to upgrade to a thicker, more durable carpet, knowing it would have a life beyond the event. This enhanced quality allowed the charity to redistribute the carpet to over 1,800 families in the local area — a great example of reusing before recycling. In addition, by partnering with IKEA, one of the event's sponsors, 6,000 pieces of furniture used during the event was donated to local charities and community groups. Many computers and hardware were part of the event. Once again, the strategy of reuse was used, and more than 600 laptops were donated to locals who needed them, including Ukrainian refugees. These initiatives, along with the partnerships and roadmap created, were able to connect the event to the local community in a more tangible way. It led to a feeling of cohesion between Glasgow and the biggest global event of the year.



## 1. NO POVERTY

End poverty in all its forms everywhere

## SUPPORT THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

**1**

Use a reverse logistics mind-set to plan how post-event materials can support local community groups working to address poverty. By consulting with these groups in advance, you can help select materials that will have a greater benefit.

**2**

Work with community leaders to identify local needs, and then develop a community service project in support of this. In some cases, preparing hygiene kits will be apropos; for others, a women's professional clothing drive or a warm coat drive will work best.

**3**

Ensure your supply chain pays a living wage. Actively seek opportunities to purchase goods and services from social enterprises working to end poverty.

# Skift. MEETINGS

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## FORUM 2023

**NEW YORK CITY**  
SEPTEMBER 27, 2023

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## 2 ZERO HUNGER



Reduction at the source is the ideal way to eliminate food waste. However, this can be more complicated in Las Vegas, where serving hundreds of thousands of convention goers simultaneously is commonplace. With more than 4 million square feet of event and convention space used for these large gatherings, MGM Resorts wanted to find a way to reduce food waste while supporting the communities in which it operates, a commitment grounded in its company's values. The resulting food donation program takes unserved food from events and gives it a second life in the community.

The main challenge in any food donation initiative is maintaining temperatures throughout the donation process. **MGM Resorts** allows this to happen by using blast chillers to freeze the food to be donated. Southern Nevada's biggest food bank, Three Square, also has this equipment to freeze safely. Blast chillers in some MGM Resorts properties streamline the process and improve efficiencies.

"By putting the blast chillers in our auxiliary banquet hot kitchen, we can prep the pans more quickly to get them ready for distribution," said Mandalay Bay's Chef Jose Flores. "This is a very important initiative and the right thing to do. We are happy to be able to share this food with people who need it."

Once the food is frozen and stored at **Three Square**, a system allows local nonprofit organizations to order the food, which is then served to food-insecure Nevadans. The food donation program has expanded to include perishable prepared food in addition to non-perishable food and beverages from minibars and warehouses. Since the program's inception in 2016, 3.4 million meals have been donated. The company's goal is to donate 5 million meals by 2025.



## 2. ZERO HUNGER

End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture

### DONATE EXCESS FOOD

# 1

Always focus first on preventing food waste. This can include strategies such as confirming guaranteed numbers, reviewing room block patterns and history for meal function performance, and even reducing the number of options provided on a buffet. Learn more about food waste prevention in the *Hotel Kitchen Toolkit* (from the World Wildlife Fund and American Hotel and Lodging Association, with support from the Rockefeller Foundation).

# 2

Before the event, confirm arrangements for food donation, including where the food will be donated, how it will be stored safely and transported, and what will be used to package and label the food.

# 3

Familiarize yourself with local food donation regulations. In many jurisdictions, including throughout the U.S. and Canada, there is liability protection for food donors. As the laws will vary based on where your event takes place, it is important to look at the specific conditions that must be met, and work with reliable partners to receive and distribute the food.

# 3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



Promoting health and well-being is central to Sustainable Development Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being

Designing events and workplaces with these critical themes in mind is increasingly becoming an expectation and results in better performance.

When **Maritz Global Events** appointed industry veteran Rachael Riggs as their well-being leader within the Design Studio to help clients design events differently, it was new and unprecedented in the events industry. Another industry veteran, Charlene Tierney, director of business development - corporate performance at **Canyon Ranch**, thought this was the perfect connection for her new post-pandemic organization. Together, the two created the Canyon Ranch/Maritz Global Events WellBeing Experience Familiarization Tour. The goal of the experience was to showcase Canyon Ranch as a possible venue to host group events focused on a guest's well-being. For Maritz, it was a way to further cultivate relationships with their clients and team. The outcome for both organizations was a unique experience focused on overall well-being, self-care, high performance, better events, and stronger relationships.

Riggs and Tierney created the program in relation to the Maritz 5 Dimensions of WellBeing Design which focuses on personal, social, financial, career, social and environmental well-being. It also showcased Canyon Ranch's 5 Pillars of Wellness — health and performance, mind and spirit, fitness and movement, food and nutrition, and spa and beauty. This four-day, three-night experience featured education focused on the 5 Pillars with lectures from experts on sleep, performance, cooking, nutrition, and mindfulness. Guests also immersed in the 5 Pillars by participating in various activities, including yoga, spa, exercise classes, and more. As a result, guests walked away feeling cared for, inspired, and invigorated to design their events focused on a guest's well-being at the heart of the experience.

## 3. GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

### FOCUS ON WORKPLACE WELLNESS

#### 1

Offer opportunities for your team members to access confidential mental health services, fitness programs, flexible working hours and time off, and options to work remotely to support their well-being. Consider building an employee incentive program that rewards participation in well-being activities. For the Maritz WellBeing Challenge, the company partnered with Heka Health to develop an app to track activity. This program is now available for event participants.

#### 2

Embed mindfulness into everyday practice. Event technology company Shocklogic begins daily team calls with a five-minute breathing exercise. They also have a dedicated counselor to support team members, have daily check-ins with staff, and have a 10-minute meditation led by a different team member at each of their weekly “General Scrum” meetings. Learn more about their initiatives [here](#)

#### 3

Plan production schedules with attention to healthy habits for team members, including rest hours, nutritious meals, and hydration.

### DESIGN EVENTS WITH WELL BEING IN MIND

#### 1

Add a well-being space for meditation and self-care at your events. It can also serve as a calming sensory space for neurodiverse participants. Learn more about neuroinclusion at events from the [Neu Project](#).

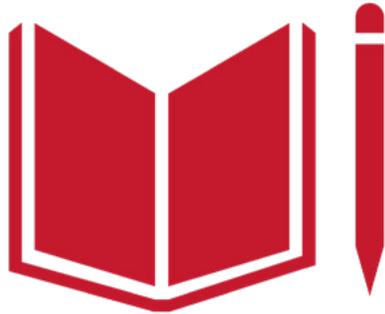
#### 2

Add a fitness-based networking activity, such as a fun run, morning yoga, or nature walk, to your event schedule.

#### 3

Select healthy menu items for your events. What you select for your event menus will impact participant energy levels; choosing brain-friendly foods will help boost engagement and attention levels.

# 4 QUALITY EDUCATION



One aspect of Goal #4: Quality Education, is to ensure that all learners acquire knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development. At its 2022 Las Vegas show, **IMEX Group** partnered with **Encore** to deliver an innovative and immersive experience highlighting sustainability issues within the business events sector.

The Break Free activation was designed as a journey of transformation. It challenged more than 900 participants to break free from the conventional thinking holding them back from achieving their goals, including those related to sustainability.

Break Free participants were guided through three separate areas: connection, inspiration, and collaboration. During the connection phase, technology was leveraged to start conversations with thought-provoking questions related to sustainable practices. From there, a second room immersed participants in inspirational imagery meant to empower them. Finally, in the third room, the focus was on developing and fostering the resources and collaborations needed to break free and achieve your goals.



## 4. QUALITY EDUCATION

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

### CONNECT, INSPIRE, AND COLLABORATE

# 1

Explore ways that you can use technology to help start conversations about sustainability that lead to action. This can include fully immersive experiences such as Break Free, audience response systems, or social media to ask challenging questions about sustainability. As a further option, embed carbon or water footprint calculators on your website.

# 2

Keep the power of imagery in mind when designing your event environment. Try including natural elements in your decor or share empowering messages during unstructured events.

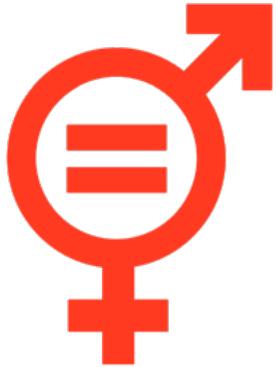
# 3

Intentionally design event experiences to lead participants through a transformation using connection, inspiration, and collaboration. This can be a powerful way to accelerate the action needed to achieve Sustainable Development Goals.



The Events Industry Council's [\*Sustainable Event Professional Certificate\*](#) provides online education for business event professionals related to sustainable and socially responsible events.

# 5 GENDER EQUALITY



While SDG 5 specifically references equality and empowerment for women and girls, gender equality also needs to be prioritized for trans, non-binary and gender diverse people.

**Explore Edmonton's Responsible Events Program** has several initiatives designed to support the Sustainable Development Goals, including Gender Equality. There are also unique Edmonton experiences including the annual SkirtsAfire. The Canadian destination's annual **SkirtsAfire Festival** provides women and non-binary artists a platform to present powerful and insightful stories and messages to their audience. Founded in 2012, the 10-day festival is held in conjunction with International Women's Day in March. The festival values diversity, and welcomes artists of all backgrounds, including cis and trans women, non-binary people who are comfortable in a space that focuses on the experiences of women, the Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and additional sexual orientations and gender identities (2SLGBTQIA+) community, and artists of all ethnicities and all abilities.

Period poverty is a complex issue with many factors, including being unable to afford products, little to no access to washrooms, limited laundry services, stigma due to gender identity, and shame around menstruation. Explore Edmonton, in collaboration with the **United Way Alberta Capital Region**, offers the **Period Promise** program, a turn-key community service project for events. By running a period product drive at your event, your participants can help create menstrual equity and reduce barriers that prevent individuals from fully participating in work, school, and community by providing access to menstrual products.



Photo Credit: April MacDonald Killins - SkirtsAfire Festival

## 5. GENDER EQUALITY

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

### INCLUDE ALL

1

When selecting speakers, panelists, and entertainment for your programs, keep gender balance and pay equity in mind.

2

Check your supply chain for gender equity. How many are owned or led by women, trans, non-binary, or genderqueer individuals?

3

Host programs to help strengthen gender equity in your industry or organization.

# 6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



Improving water quality by reducing pollution is a key aspect of SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation. Nitrogen, while beneficial for land-based agriculture, can damage aquatic life. Nitrogen makes its way into marine ecosystems through wastewater, stormwater, and farm runoff.

There is a nature-based super-filter — the oyster. According to the **Chesapeake Bay Foundation**, a single adult oyster can filter up to 50 gallons (approximately 200 liters) of water daily. As they feed, oysters assimilate nutrients into their tissue and shells, clearing the water in the process. The **Baltimore Convention Center (BCC)** has partnered with **Blue Oyster Environmental**, a local aquaculture company, to broker a nitrogen credit deal. As a way of helping to regenerate the bay from which they source the oysters they serve their guests, the BCC has invested in an oyster aquaculture project with Blue Oyster Environmental's help. In a model similar to carbon offsets, nitrogen credits are created, and oyster farmers are compensated for the ecological benefits of their farms, allowing them to expand their operations and increase the number of oysters they grow while also allowing the community to participate in oyster restoration.



## 6. CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

### IT TAKES A DROP AT A TIME

1

Source sustainable seafood options for your events.

2

Explore opportunities to support clean water and sanitation projects. This can include projects such as recycling hotel soaps or packaging hygiene kits.

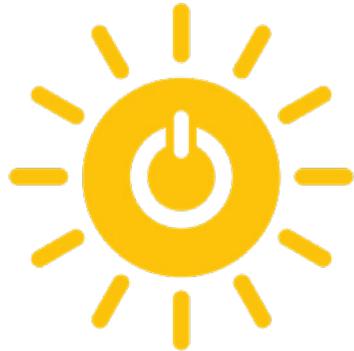
3

Work with charitable organizations to support safe drinking water projects.



Learn more about sustainable seafood from the [Marine Stewardship Council](#)

# 7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY



The **Hillside Music Festival** held annually on Guelph Lake Island in Ontario, Canada, has a long-standing commitment to sustainability. The festival volunteers use their creativity to implement clean energy practices. They use pedaled stationary bikes to produce the energy needed for the sound system for one of their stages and have installed solar-powered charging stations.

One of their most innovative clean energy projects has been creating a solar-powered dishwashing station. A solar water heater for washing dishes was invented by Nick Dalton, a volunteer, and built by a team of Hillside volunteers. A group of volunteers, including an architect, found and stripped an old rusty trailer to become the heater's frame; they bought solar panels from supplier Guelph Solar; and installed the housing and panels. The water heater supplies all the hot water dishwashing needed to keep the dishes squeaky clean. It's a lot of dishes — the festival serves about 10,000 meals per day to patrons, volunteers, and artists. This creation is on display between the main stage and the dishwashing tent. Handcarts are used to collect the dishes from trash turnaround stations, and similarly, cargo tricycles are used to shuttle musicians' gear.



Photo credit: Vanessa Tignanelli

## 7. AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all

### BRIGHT IDEAS

# 1

Look for venues with existing renewable energy infrastructure. This is getting easier as an increasing number of hotels and convention centers have installed solar panels on their rooftops. See the [\*Skift Research Report: Progress in Sustainability: Hotel Company Analysis 2023\*](#) for more information.

# 2

A temporary microgrid can also be brought in to support your event. At the 2019 Greenbuild International Conference and Expo held at the LEED Gold Georgia World Congress Center, a solar powered microgrid was brought in to power a portion of the show floor. Demonstrating clean energy solutions was a priority for Greenbuild which is owned and operated by Informa Connect and produced in partnership with the US Green Building Council.

# 3

Add an interactive energy production opportunity for your event participants to raise awareness of clean energy. Bicycle-powered smoothie stations and charging stations are popular.

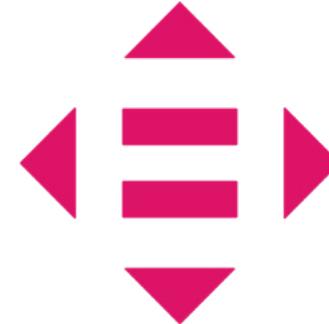
## 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



## 9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



## 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



In Medellín, Colombia, initiatives are underway in support of these goals.

Community-based tourism is helping support SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth in Medellín. **Casa Kolacho** was created by a collective of young men who have helped strengthen the Hip Hop movement in Medellín in honor of Héctor Pacheco, known as Kolacho, an artistic leader who was assassinated in 2009. They focus on four elements: DJ, rap, graffiti, and break dance. This collective has evolved into a creation laboratory embarking on new projects focused on art, for example, painting neighborhood roofs and walls or creating festivals where children can sing or dance. They also began neighborhood graffiti tours for city residents to see what they do and mitigate the stigma they were subjected to for many years. Without forethought, this sparked the tourist epicenter that the neighborhood has become today. Visitors converge on the area to learn more about them and the painted walls they create. Their quality of life has transformed with more economic



Photo Credit: medellin.travel

opportunities, having a voice, and serving as an example for others in the country.

The C13 Territory of Artists has also been born, inspiring children with art. They aspire to change lives.

Recently, the City of Medellín invested in a pilot project to bring high-speed fiber-optic internet to a neighborhood in the upper part of Comuna 13. This initiative aligns with SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure.

To help reduce inequalities in support of SDG 10, a capacity-building program has been developed by **Asoeventos Colombia**, an association committed to strengthening the competitiveness of the meetings industry in Colombia. The **Jobis** program, led by Asoeventos Colombia, was created to

support the safe and sustainable recovery of the business events industry after the Covid pandemic. The program is a valuable way for Asoeventos to demonstrate its commitment to the community by helping to make the events industry more inclusive and sustainable. Due to a significant decrease in the workforce, there was a critical need to accelerate specialized training. Opportunities were given to vulnerable citizens including former street dwellers, people with disabilities, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, migrants, single mothers, victims of armed conflict, indigenous people, the elderly, and the city's youth. Industry entrepreneurs with real-world experience led the training and made connections to the local business events community. Program participants demonstrated their abilities in customer service at the annual **EventLab Congress**, held in conjunction with the **2022 COCAL Congress**. They have continued with these roles since, and it has improved their quality of life.

Maria Londoño, a trans woman who participated in the program and worked at the Congress, shared her thoughts on the events industry. "I think that inclusion in events is important, especially for a trans person who is constantly growing and, above all, in search of a new life, to survive and to get ahead in a world where there are few opportunities for girls. I thank events for everything, and above all, God for life, health, and the opportunities that he offers me." She added that the program helped her "to be a strong woman, determined, authentic and useful, and accepted in a world of work and society." Her advice for other trans women and girls is that "they look for the opportunities to open up to the world and show who we are and what we are worth."



Photo Credit: medellin.travel

## 8. DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all

## 9. INDUSTRY, INNOVATION, AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation

## 10. REDUCED INEQUALITIES

Reduce inequality within and among countries modern energy for all

## EVENTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

### 1

Events can help support economic growth by purchasing directly from micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises or by encouraging event attendees to purchase from them. This can include bringing in food trucks for an event function, providing maps and descriptions of local restaurants and shops, or buying gifts from a social enterprise.

### 2

When speaking with prospective destinations, event organizers can ask questions and encourage sustainable infrastructure development.

### 3

To combat inequality, events must be inclusive and accessible, taking all aspects of design and supplier selection into consideration. Using a universal design approach, where the event has accessibility features built in by default, and sharing how you're making your event accessible in your marketing materials can help improve attendance and create a better sense of belonging for all.



**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:** The *Events Industry Council's Equity Task Force* has released a benchmarking study on equity in the business events industry, with a particular focus on addressing racism.

# 11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



The City of **Gothenburg, Sweden**, has topped the **Global Destination Sustainability Index** for six consecutive years. With priorities developed by the city's destination management organization, **Göteborg & Co**, that align with the official mission of SDG 11 to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable, this achievement is well-earned. In its 2022 Sustainability Report, Göteborg & Co's sustainability framework focuses on being a welcoming and inclusive destination, green and climate-smart, contributing to positive societal impact.

SDG 11 focuses on sustainable transport options, one area where the destination is actively working to achieve its ambitious goals. The City of Gothenburg's climate target for 2030 includes reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transport within Gothenburg by 90 percent and from international travel by 64 percent. As travel-related emissions are a significant part of an event's carbon footprint, accelerated innovation in this space is essential. With this in mind, the city is working on two electrification projects to help transition to an emission-free event center. Heart Aerospace, a local Gothenburg company, is working to electrify regional air traffic and develop electric aircraft. Currently, around 95 percent of public transport in Gothenburg runs on renewable energy. There are also a thousand "Styr & Ställ" city bikes for rent at 60 different city locations.



Photo Credit: Peter Kvanström

## 11. SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable

### BUILD SUSTAINABLE FRAMEWORKS

1

Ask your destination about sustainable travel options. This can include transportation within the city, including areas within walking distance and the availability of public transport. Ask about access via rail to the destination and the number of direct flights.

2

Look for destinations that prioritize inclusion, and review their websites to see what initiatives they have to welcome all.

3

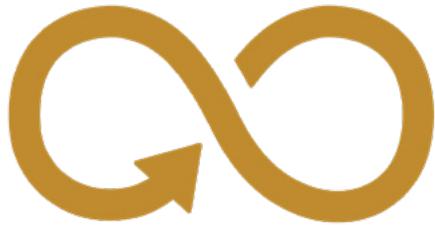
Ask your destination about how it is helping safeguard cultural and natural heritage.



Learn more about the Global Destination Sustainability Index:

<https://www.gds.earth/index/>

# 12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



To achieve Sustainable Development Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, the business events industry needs to move from linear to circular economy thinking. This means considering the entire life cycle of materials used in event production, and shifting the approach to minimize waste creation, and maximize the reuse of materials.

At the **CapeWine2022**, the South African wine industry's premier trade show, there was a strong focus on sustainability that included recyclable stands that proved that sustainability is more than just viable. It is beautiful, impactful, faster, cleaner, efficient, and financially equal or better to non-sustainable approaches. For the event, 95 percent of the exhibits were manufactured from a purpose-manufactured sustainable fiber board (non-toxic, recycled, reusable, recyclable, flat packable) from **Xanita**. This allowed set-up time to decrease from a week to two days. In addition, the reuse, repurposing, and recyclability of booths increased by 30 percent (post-event exhibitor value). Logistics decreased 60 percent by preloading flat-packed stands into containers that formed a staging area in the loading yard.



## 12. RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

### CONSIDER THE ENTIRE LIFE CYCLE

# 1

To shift from a linear model to a circular one, ask whether any historically single-use items can be eliminated or substituted with something reusable. For example, using reusable dishes and flatware instead of disposables, substituting cut flower arrangements with succulent plants for décor, or skipping a printed program if you have an event app. Take the Informa Better Stands program. Core elements like walls, archways, and counters must be built to be reused.

# 2

If the event includes an exhibition, educate exhibitors about reusable stand/booth options, how to store and reuse shipping materials, and how to minimize single-use, disposable items. Have options for participants and exhibitors to recycle, compost, and donate leftover materials.

# 3

Has your supply chain achieved sustainability-related certifications? Helpful resources are the *Events Industry Council's Sustainable Event Standards* and the *ISO 20121 Standard*.

# 13 CLIMATE ACTION



“The alarm bells are deafening, and the evidence is irrefutable,” said United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres about the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report. The report also sparked a rallying cry for the **Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB)**. Its most recent initiative, the decarbon MICE framework, was launched in response to the report that Guterres said is nothing less than a code red for humanity.

The Thailand MICE industry has teamed up to fight climate change, focusing on avoiding and reducing carbon emissions. From there, an event’s carbon footprint calculator is used to determine unavoidable emissions, with opportunities to offset them with renewable or bioenergy projects or forestry carbon capture projects. There are also experiential training programs to develop change makers who can implement the framework into their events, products, and services. Trainees see carbon emission reduction strategies in action, from vegetarian menus and food waste prevention practices to upcycled décor.



## 13. CLIMATE ACTION

Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

### RALLYING CRY AMPLIFIED

1

Travel, an event's largest source of carbon emissions, can be managed by selecting destinations with low-carbon transportation options like rail, offering hybrid participation options or multi-hub formats, and using carbon offsets to balance unavoidable emissions.

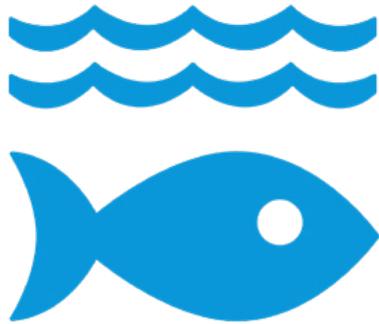
2

There are many ways to reduce the carbon footprint of an event's food choices. Examples include opting for vegetarian or vegan menus. Managing food waste is another critical way to reduce your event's carbon footprint.

3

Increasingly, suppliers are signing on to net zero commitments. Check how they are progressing on their carbon footprint reduction journey, and how they align to existing frameworks such as the *Science Based Targets* initiative and the *Race to Zero*. Free resources to support small and medium-sized event enterprises are available from *Positive Impact* and the *Net Zero Carbon Events Initiative*.

# 14 LIFE BELOW WATER



# 15 LIFE ON LAND



Protecting biodiversity is at the heart of Sustainable Development Goals 14 and 15.

The **Vancouver Convention Centre** on Vancouver's waterfront with its mountain backdrop, is British Columbia's flagship convention center and is recognized globally for its commitment to sustainable practices. In order to enhance the local marine environment in the area which was previously an industrial site, the building was designed with an innovative marine habitat restoration program that includes an artificial reef, an under-the-deck marine habitat, and a marine habitat skirt. This unique feature is suspended in the water column, and during low tide, all five levels of the skirt can be seen above water, while at high tide, most or all of it is underwater. The skirt has been designed to replicate the conditions of a natural shoreline, inviting marine life to attach to it. There is now a thriving underwater ecosystem with an abundance of marine life observed including blue mussels, barnacles, and seaweed. Fish including Chum and Coho salmon can be found.

According to the UN, about 60 percent of worldwide ecosystems have been destroyed and/or used unsustainably. Not at the Vancouver Convention Centre, which features a six-acre living roof, the largest in Canada, with more than 400,000 indigenous plants and grasses. It features native vegetation which requires less maintenance and water, and is home to other wildlife including four beehives that provide honey for its scratch kitchen — not to mention pollination benefits. Each year, the roof is mowed in the fall, and the clippings are composted back into the soil as fertilizer.



Photo Credit: Hubert Kang

## 14. LIFE BELOW WATER

Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development

## 15. LIFE ON LAND

Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss

## PROTECT BIODIVERSITY

### 1

Over 75 percent of our food comes from just 12 plants and five animal species. Over reliance on a limited number of species increases food security risks if these crops are affected by drought, disease, pests, or climate change. Event menus are an ideal opportunity to introduce new ingredients, and inspire attendees to adopt a more biodiverse diet. Plant-forward, vegetarian or vegan menus are good options as they usually have lower water and carbon footprints.

### 2

Consider introducing a community service project that supports local biodiversity. This can include activities such as habitat restoration, planting a pollinator garden, coastal activities such as beach cleanups or protecting nesting areas for sea turtles.

### 3

Remember to help protect biodiversity by working to keep habitats free from event waste, including single-use plastics. Opting out of straws, plastic water bottles, and plastic service ware can be a valuable way of helping to protect local species.

# 16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



SDG 16 is a critical call to action for all event professionals to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and violence against and torture of children.

**It's a Penalty** is an organization that activates global campaigns to prevent abuse, exploitation, and human trafficking. The campaigns are activated during major sporting events, including the 2022 Qatar World Cup, the 2023 Super Bowl in Arizona, and the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, highlighting penalties for offenders and educating about the signs to look out for and how to make a report. Working in partnership with the sports, travel and tourism industry, NGOs, law enforcers, and high-profile sporting athletes, the campaigns are contextualized to the host cities and countries and include a film featuring sports icons raising awareness about abuse, exploitation, and human trafficking and how to report. The films are played in hotel lobbies and guest rooms, airports, and on flights, and additional materials are distributed through airline in-flight magazines, taxis, and rideshares. Together with their partners, It's a Penalty has helped protect 16,977 children from exploitation.



## 16. PEACE, JUSTICE, AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels

### END HUMAN TRAFFICKING

1

Human trafficking and modern-day slavery happen in every country in the world. Event professionals may travel through places where these crimes could be taking place. By learning the signs and knowing how to make a report, all can do their part in the global effort to end human trafficking.

2

Ask your event partners, including hotels and airlines, if they provide regular training on identifying and reporting human trafficking.

3

Hire social enterprises that provide safe and fair employment opportunities for human trafficking survivors.

# 17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



Achieving Sustainable Development Goals requires unprecedented collaboration, including public and private partnerships to innovate and research solutions to some of the world's greatest challenges.

**Resorts World Sentosa**, an integrated resort on the island of Sentosa off the southern coast of Singapore, has partnered with the **National University of Singapore** in a research collaboration to enhance biodiversity conservation and accelerate decarbonization. This five-year program, the **RWS-NUS Living Laboratory**, launched last year. An academic-industry partnership, it aims to advance marine science, better understand Singapore's rich biodiversity and ecologically-important habitats, and help develop sustainable solutions for conservation.

Findings from the Living Lab will feed directly into national and international efforts to help protect the Coral Triangle's biodiversity, centered in archipelagic Southeast Asia. The program will also be able to make significant contributions towards the **Singapore Green Plan 2030** and support **Sentosa Development Corporation's** plans to transform the island into a carbon-neutral destination by 2030.



## 17. PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

### POWER IN NUMBERS

1

Look into potential research partnerships with local and regional colleges or universities or opportunities to showcase local sustainability-related research.

2

Engage guests and staff through programs and exposure to nature to learn about local sustainability and conservation issues.

3

Educate your guests and participants about how they can support conservation efforts in your destination.



## **VIRGINIE DE VISSCHER**

Senior director of business development,  
*Destination Canada Business Events*

As senior director of business development for Destination Canada Business Events, Virginie De Visscher has a tenacious determination to reimagine how the country attracts business events to its destinations.

An innovative thinker with a highly collaborative approach, Virginie has extensive experience in business development, international operations and humanitarian aid; from leading international trade missions to managing coffee and cocoa operations in East Africa.

She is also a highly sought-after speaker and thought leader, bringing an infectious enthusiasm and passion for topics that range from sustainability to meeting trends. A biosystems engineer by trade, Virginie has received a wide range of certifications, including her Sustainable Excellence Associate designation from the International Society of Sustainability Professionals and Certified International Trade Professional designation through the Forum for International Trade Training.

# THE LATEST SUSTAINABILITY BEST PRACTICES: SPOTLIGHT ON DESTINATION CANADA

Skift Meetings sat down with Virginie De Visscher, senior director of business development for Destination Canada Business Events, to learn more about the destination perspective on sustainability. She shared thoughts on the transformative power of the Global Destination Sustainability Index, ways that destinations can help planners to meet their sustainability goals, tips on how to assess destination options, and advice for reporting on an event's environmental footprint. Here are the insights that emerged from that conversation.

## **PREPARING FOR A NEW ERA OF ACCOUNTABILITY: THE GLOBAL DESTINATION SUSTAINABILITY INDEX (GDS-INDEX)**

The Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDS-Index) is an incredibly useful tool when it comes to providing greater transparency and standardization in the business events industry.

The Index is used by over 100 cities across the world and, by putting Canadian destinations through the same review process as these international cities, we're better able to learn — and share — how Canadian sustainability efforts rank on the global stage.

It's also important to remember that the GDS-Index's criteria were not created in a vacuum. They are aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and, therefore, hold a significance that extends beyond meetings and events.

Equally, any of the information that a destination provides for the benchmarking is independently verified by experts, ensuring that the outcomes are accurate and reliable.

The verified accuracy of the output of the indexing process, combined with the uniformity in approach to gathering this information, leaves you with sustainability insights that anyone can refer to and rely on.

This drastically improves the accountability of destinations which, given the ever-developing interest in this arena, will doubtless lead to a more sustainable future for our industry.

## **PARTNERING WITH DESTINATIONS FOR MORE SUSTAINABLE EVENTS: CANADIAN CITIES LEAD THE WAY**

From coast to coast to coast, Canadian destinations are finding innovative ways to help planners implement environmentally sustainable solutions into their event. Exactly what this looks like depends on the destination, but our wonderful partners are making things as simple as possible for planners.

In Edmonton, for example, event organizers can choose from a “Responsible Events Program Menu,” which provides easily digestible options for holding sustainable events. A leader in the space, the city also offers the option to create carbon-neutral events — as does Victoria, the provincial capital of British Columbia.

Meanwhile, in Montréal, planners can take advantage of the Palais des Congrès de Montréal’s Palais Boreal program to offset their emissions. And this isn’t

the only convention centre in Canada where sustainability is top of mind! The Vancouver Convention Centre — with its six-acre living roof — is the world’s first double LEED platinum certified convention centre.

I could keep going but the message that I’m trying to get across is: No matter what aspect of environmental sustainability an organization is most interested in, there’s a Canadian destination that would be thrilled to work with you, and help you bring your values and goals to life.

And this isn’t just about environmental sustainability; our program and the GDS-Index also look at socio-cultural and economic sustainability.

## **FINDING THE RIGHT DESTINATION: TOP CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING SUSTAINABILITY**

When planners are assessing the sustainability of an event destination, they should consider criteria right across the supply chain.

This can include everything from the environmental policies of the host city to how the city performs in relation to indicators of inclusivity, and from the sustainability commitments of available suppliers — like hotels — to the regeneration strategy of the Destination Management Organization (DMO).

There’s so much that you can look at but, when it comes to some crucial things to think about, I’d suggest the following:

- 1.** Consider existing certifications of convention infrastructure — do they hold things like LEED or BOMA accreditation?

2. Look at transportation options at the destination — are there opportunities for clean travel or public transit options?
3. In terms of the food and beverage options, are they locally and sustainably sourced, and are there programs in place to deal with any excess?
4. And this leads me onto general sustainability initiatives. It's important to assess whether or not the DMO and/or convention centre have meaningful programs in place that will aid with your efforts. Will they be a good partner in your sustainability journey?

I also always recommend that planners connect with their peers and ask for their perspectives on a destination. Your similarly minded colleagues should be able to provide referrals for destinations that excel in this arena.

## REPORTING ON EVENT SUSTAINABILITY: TIPS FOR TRACKING YOUR OWN PROGRESS

When it comes to reporting on the environmental impact of events, there are certain steps that I would recommend planners follow.

Firstly, you should remember that environmental impact can come in many different forms and it's important to outline exactly which areas you're looking to address. I'd suggest not trying to tackle everything at once — it can be easy to get overwhelmed or discouraged!

It is, therefore, key to determine what your objectives are, and set specific and measurable targets that relate to these aims. For example, are you looking specifically at your event's waste, at carbon emissions and so forth?

Once you've got these in place, you should work on establishing tracking mechanisms that will monitor how you're performing. For example, if you're looking to measure and manage your carbon emissions then you can use tools like *TRACE* to keep tabs on how you're doing.

Doing this also allows you to frequently review your progress and adapt your approach if necessary. So you're likely to end up with a more positive outcome! Finally, you will come to review your results. In doing so, you should celebrate your wins but also identify areas for improvement so that you know where you need to focus your efforts for your next event.

Sustainability is a journey, and it's one where you can make continual improvements — no matter how advanced your efforts are.

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## CMP CREDITS

Skift Meetings is a CMP Preferred Provider accredited by the Events Industry Council and provides Continuing Education credits for learning activities.

This report is worth **1 CMP** Credit under the Strategic Planner category.

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