

Sustainable Meetings Guide

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Sustainability Gets the Green Light from MICE

What was once the buzzword du jour in the MICE industry has become a mandate: Sustainability. *By Lisa Simundson*

Anyone who's been watching the industry for the past 10 years knows that sustainable practices at events have gone from being a secondary concern to a top priority for meetings and the venues they use, including hotels. In fact, many hotels feel sustainability isn't a checkbox, but a guiding principle that shapes their decisions on a daily basis.

One such property is Six Senses Hotels, known as being one of the most environmentally conscious brands.

Among Six Senses' many tangible green practices are onsite Earth Labs where guests learn to make candles from used wax, repurpose glass and create natural cleansers from citrus peels. In the Maldives, Six Senses actively protects over 1.2-million sf of seagrass meadows, crucial for marine life and carbon capture; while at Six Senses Zighy Bay, they've reached an 85 percent waste recycling rate, composting hundreds of pounds of organic waste every week to nourish their gardens.

Six Senses is not alone. Major hotel brands have similar sustainable divisions, including the InterContinental Hotel Group, Four Seasons and Starwood Hotels. Meanwhile, Hilton Hotels' Travel

with a Purpose initiative launched Serving Up Solutions to avoid food waste, becoming the first hospitality company to sign the U.S. Food Waste Pact.

Marriott International's Serve360 program, has named the following goals for 2025: contribute 15 million hours of volunteer service; engage 80 percent of managed hotels in community service activities; and invest at least \$35 million to increase hospitality skills development in hotel communities.

Finally, Melia Hotels & Resorts' Travel for Good—Melia for the Oceans division, has undertaken a monumental task: removing more than 20 tons of plastic waste from the Mediterranean Sea in 2025 to "help restore its iconic blue," said the company's statement.

CONVENTION CENTERS: GETTING GREENER

In one of the world's most sustainable cities—Melbourne, Australia—the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC) is the first convention center in the world to be awarded a 6-star green star

On the cover: Glass bottles crushed for upcycling, Six Senses Spa
Below (l-r): Rendering of Austin Convention Center;
Cucumber, Tuscan kale and squash blossom beds, Conrad New York Downtown

rating and one of only five convention centers worldwide to achieve EarthCheck Platinum Certification.

Inherently eco-minded, Melbourne prioritizes the preservation of its natural surroundings with a range of programs and initiatives focused on sustainability. In addition, the Melbourne Convention Bureau has created the Sustainability Planning Toolkit to assist event planners in creating business events that have a positive impact, providing tailored advice and resources to support sustainability goals.

In the U.S., there might be another convention center vying for the “most sustainable” crown, and it will be in Austin, TX, where the old convention center has closed to make room for what’s being called the world’s first zero-carbon-certified convention center (according to the International Living Futures Institute).

The new, larger Austin Convention Center will nearly double the rentable square footage of the existing facility, growing from 365,000 sf to 620,000 sf of rentable space. Due in early 2029, the \$1.6-billion project, known as Unconventional ATX, will feature open-air terraces, public plazas and seamless indoor-outdoor connections.

SUSTAINABILITY IN THE AIR

Air travel is one of the most carbon-intensive activities, yet it contributes just 2.5 percent of the world’s carbon emissions compared to sectors like energy and agriculture.

However, the overall impact of aviation on the climate is higher—5 percent—and research has found that high altitude increases those effects

Planners who want to choose a hotel aligned with their group’s sustainability requirements should look for third-party certifications validating the property’s green credentials, including LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design), Green Globe and EarthCheck, among others.

due to the chemistry of the atmosphere. What keeps global aviation from being an even bigger contributor to climate change is the simple fact that most of the world’s population of eight billion people doesn’t fly. However, the global number of commercial air passengers is growing.

Are the airlines that the MICE industry relies on so heavily doing anything to decrease their carbon footprints? Yes. Delta Air Lines’





Following are the top sustainable meeting practices, compiled by Meetings & Incentives Worldwide (M&IW).

- 1** **CSR and Givebacks:** Tied for the most popular practice, CSR and giveback elements were included in 42 percent of programs surveyed.
- 2** **Recycled Name Badges:** Also included in 42 percent of programs, this includes both name badges made from recycled materials and badges that were recycled after the event.
- 3** **Recycled Signage:** Signs made from recycled materials and recyclable signage were included in 39 percent of programs surveyed.
- 4** **Food Donations:** 31 percent of programs donated unused or surplus food after the event.
- 5** **Limited Onsite Transportation:** 29 percent intentionally reduced the amount of transportation needed onsite.

Carbon Council, for one, has reduced onboard weight, optimized landing procedures, and enhanced routing to save on jet fuel. In 2024, these initiatives led to a cumulative savings of 44 million gallons of jet fuel, worth over \$100 million.

Other airlines have been turning to fuel-saving technologies, including Alaska Airlines' investment in JetZero's blended-wing body aircraft, which promises a 50 percent reduction in fuel use and carbon emissions.

In addition, Emirates has been exploring the use of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF), but because there isn't enough existing SAF to meet current needs, they have been using an SAF blend since 2023. For their part, Delta has set a goal of 10 percent SAF usage by 2030.

In the meantime, carriers like Ryanair and Cebu Pacific are modernizing with more energy-efficient aircraft, as other airlines explore ways to mitigate waste and carbon emissions right now. The Lufthansa Group, for one, is using the "Tray Tracker," an innovative, AI-supported solution to measure and reduce onboard meal returns.

SUSTAINABILITY = COMMUNITY

In recent years, the definition of "sustainability" has evolved to include a meeting's impact on the local population and the idea of leaving a place better than it was when you arrived.

Banff, for one, has a Community Impact Program that makes it easy for event organizers and incentive planners to support and give back to local communities while attendees are learning, networking and enjoying the destination. Basically it combines prepaid spending cards usable within the destination with a direct, trackable benefit to local charities and a report for participating organizations.

Another popular trend picking up real momentum is food donations as more conventions and event organizers are actively instituting food donation programs, safely packaging and distributing unused food from their events. In many cases, items include pre-packaged meals and snacks that have never even been opened.

Below is a partial list of LEED-certified convention centers. To find more, visit usgbc.org/leed.

- Colorado Convention Center
- Savannah Convention Center
- Los Angeles Convention Center
- Morial Convention Center (New Orleans)
- Orange County Convention Center (Orlando)
- Georgia World Congress Center
- Atlantic City Convention Center



At Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings (NCLH), we believe today's events must go beyond the expected—they must serve a greater purpose. Through our industry-leading Sail & Sustain program, we empower organizations to host experiences that align with their values while contributing to a more sustainable future.

In 2024, we continued advancing our sustainability journey. Nearly 50 percent of our fleet operated on lower-emission biofuel blends, and we diverted more than half of our total waste from landfills. These measurable achievements demonstrate our commitment to reducing our environmental footprint and offering responsible event venues at sea.

Our purpose-driven approach also extends to our people. Every crew member receives comprehensive safety and service training, and we're proud to report that nearly half of our new shipboard cadets are women—underscoring our dedication to building inclusive and empowering spaces onboard.

We take our role as global citizens seriously, supporting the communities we visit through thoughtful donations, local partnerships and responsible tourism practices. Each itinerary is thoughtfully curated to leave a positive impact—before, during and after every voyage.

When planners choose NCLH, they're not just booking an event—they're aligning with a brand committed to progress. Whether it's a leadership retreat, incentive program, or full-ship charter, your event becomes part of a larger sustainability story.

Let's reimagine what's possible—together, we can deliver exceptional events with purpose and create meaningful change, one voyage at a time.

About Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings

Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings Ltd. (NYSE: NCLH) is a leading global cruise company which operates Norwegian Cruise Line, Oceania Cruises and Regent Seven Seas Cruises. With a combined fleet of 34 ships and more than 71,000 Berths, NCLH offers itineraries to approximately 700 destinations worldwide. NCLH expects to add 13 additional ships across its three brands through 2036, which will add over 38,400 Berths to its fleet.

nclhltd.com



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Cost and convenience can sometimes conflict with green meeting planning. In Park City, Utah, destination stewardship is woven into the fabric of our mountain town, with the goal of net zero emissions and food waste by 2030.

Rooted in our Sustainable Tourism Plan, Park City continues to create a future where community and environmental benefits carry equal weight to economic ones. This plan established principles centered on respecting resources, fostering a sense of place and pursuing action-focused outcomes.

To combine these initiatives into one word, we launched a brand platform: Mountainkind—to take meaningful action, promote stewardship and be mindful of others and wildlife.

It's essential to preserve the breathtaking natural beauty of our surroundings, including our over 10,000 acres of protected open space and the unique aspects of our culture. We encourage everyone to adopt sustainable practices by using reusable items, shopping locally and leaving no trace while exploring the more than 400 miles of trails we value.

The off and shoulder seasons are when we encourage planners to host conferences, as they reduce tourism's environmental effect and create a positive economic impact. Spring meetings encourage an experience that stands out from usual tourist seasons and adds the benefit of more affordable rates.

We help planners source energy-efficient venues, work with sustainably educated vendors and provide resources, like a sustainable event playbook and ideas for creative, conscious attendee activities.

Whether you're starting or well on your way to planning sustainable meetings, we're allowing groups to come together—the Mountainkind way.

About Us

Park City stands out for its proximity to an international airport and unique hotels and resorts. With a strong focus on climate goals, cultural heritage and sustainability, it offers visitors a distinctive experience. Trust Visit Park City for free local expertise to help plan your seasonal adventures the Mountainkind way.

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Charters, Meetings and Incentives

Let Virgin Voyages transform your next corporate meeting from mundane to unforgettable. Our fleet of boutique and exclusively-adult cruise ships will sweep your attendees off their feet with an Always Included Luxury guarantee—which means that dining, tips, WiFi, fitness classes and world-class entertainment are at their fingertips (and included in their voyage fare). With three onboard event options ranging from full-ship charters to intimate corporate meetings and elevated employee rewards trips, we have scalable options perfect for you and your team.

When your team embarks on a Virgin Voyage, you can set sail knowing you'll be elevating your event with a purpose that reflects your company's values. Thanks to our commitment to limiting single-use plastics, a focus on made-to-order food, and partnerships with local businesses, your team can be proud to say it sailed with us. Plus, thanks to our all-inclusive pricing and complimentary meeting spaces decked out with the latest and greatest AV equipment, you won't have to worry about any unwanted surprises when you're at sea. We know businesses like yours are always growing and changing, which is why we offer unprecedented flexibility like a 72-hour name change policy for attendees and a dedicated operations team to ensure your event goes off without a hitch.

We're committed to giving your attendees the best experience—in surroundings that create the perfect atmosphere for focus and collaboration. Let's get started bringing your next event to life!

About Virgin Voyages

Virgin Voyages' fleet of luxury, yacht-inspired ships are the perfect settings to host your group or client's incentive voyage or complete takeover of a ship with a charter. We provide meeting space (with small bites and refreshments), AV equipment and a dedicated operations team on top of our standard above and beyond service and amenities to guarantee an unforgettable voyage for your team.

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