

Shaping Climate-Smart Tourism Business

Summary of the event

Webinar 9.9.2025

This summary has been compiled using artificial intelligence. It may contain minor factual inaccuracies.

Agenda:

Nicoleta Anca Matei:

Climate change is reshaping European tourism demand – what does it mean in your region?

Jeremy Smith:

Breaking barriers to climate action in tourism

Marie Linde:

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David Naraine:

Company Case - Building a tourism business on climate-smart values

Annika Koskenkorva:

Towards climate-smart tourism through Baltic Sea region cooperation

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RESILIENT ECONOMIES AND COMMUNITIES

CliNeDest

This online event brought together different kinds of tourism stakeholders interested in the future of travel in the era of climate change. The focus was on Baltic Sea region, where destinations are already experiencing both risks and opportunities linked to a warming climate.

The program moved from the big picture of how climate change is reshaping tourism demand across Europe to very concrete examples of how regions and small businesses are adapting. Participants heard about long-term projections for tourism flows, the barriers and opportunities in climate action, regional strategies for climate-smart holidays, and hands-on cases of entrepreneurs building businesses around regenerative values.

A common thread was the importance of cooperation, both locally and internationally, as no single destination can tackle these challenges alone. The event highlighted how climate action in tourism is not only about reducing emissions but also about building resilience, motivating staff, and offering meaningful experiences for increasingly climate-conscious travelers.

The discussion concluded with a sense of cautious optimism: while the challenges are significant, practical tools, shared knowledge, and innovative examples are already emerging across Europe, showing a pathway toward climate-smart tourism.



Nicoleta Anca Matei: Climate change is reshaping European tourism demand – what does it mean in your region?

Nicoleta Anca Matei, a specialist in climate change, energy, and environmental economics, presented results from the European Commission's JRC PESETA programme on how climate change is reshaping European tourism. Tourism is a key sector for Europe, representing over 10% of GDP and nearly 12% of total employment. It is also highly sensitive to climatic variations, making long-term projections essential for planning and adaptation.

The study assessed historical tourism demand data across 269 European regions for a period of 20 years, focusing on the role of climate conditions alongside economic factors. Results confirmed a strong link between climate comfort levels and tourism demand. Coastal destinations benefit from warmer conditions, while snow, rural, and nature-based destinations are more negatively affected. Seasonality also plays a major role: summer demand is reinforced, whereas winter demand generally declines.

Projections based on regional climate models under different global warming scenarios (+1.5°C, +2°C, +3°C, +4°C) indicate significant regional shifts. Mediterranean and Southern Europe are expected to see declining tourist volumes,

while Central and Northern Europe are projected to become more attractive year-round. Under higher warming scenarios, demand increases in Northern and Baltic regions are particularly strong, with coastal areas such as Åland and parts of Sweden and Denmark projected to gain significantly.

The Baltic Sea region shows consistent growth in tourism demand, with extended peak seasons and new opportunities emerging in shoulder and winter months. However, the findings also highlight challenges: northern regions may face capacity and preparedness gaps in infrastructure, workforce, and resilience to increased demand.

Matei concluded that climate change will not only redistribute tourism geographically and seasonally but also raise urgent questions about adaptation. Southern destinations will need strategies to cope with potential losses, while northern destinations must prepare for rapid growth. Investment in infrastructure, workforce development, and climate adaptation measures will be crucial for managing these uneven impacts.

Helsinki



Jeremy Smith: Breaking barriers to climate action in tourism

Jeremy Smith addressed the challenge of turning climate commitments into action within the tourism sector. Drawing on his experience co-founding Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency and shaping the Glasgow Declaration, he described the barriers businesses face and the approaches that can help overcome them.

Since the launch of the Glasgow Declaration in 2021, more than 850 organisations worldwide have signed on, with hundreds publishing climate action plans. These plans emphasize five pathways: measuring emissions, decarbonising operations, regenerating ecosystems, collaborating across stakeholders, and ensuring adequate financing. Toolkits and guides are now available to support destinations and businesses, offering structured approaches and examples of practical actions.

Despite these resources, many organisations struggle at the starting point of measurement. Smith highlighted that useful data can be gathered from everyday business activities such as energy bills, transport modes of guests, or food waste. Simple steps can guide companies toward

identifying priorities without the need for complex systems.

Beyond technical barriers, Smith stressed the emotional and psychological dimension of climate action. Climate anxiety is rising among both staff and customers, with many feeling powerless or overwhelmed. Businesses can support resilience by acknowledging these emotions, creating space for open discussion, and offering experiences that reconnect people with nature and slower ways of living.

Tourism, Smith argued, has a unique role in helping people imagine and experience “other ways to live.” Destinations and businesses can act as living laboratories, showcasing sustainable practices and regenerative approaches. Storytelling and sharing examples of hope are vital in inspiring both employees and visitors.

Smith concluded that breaking barriers to climate action is not only about technical guidance but also about values, community, and imagination. Tourism providers can lead by combining practical steps to reduce emissions with experiences that give meaning, foster connection, and build hope.



Marie Linde:

Case West Sweden: Climate smart holidays

Marie Linde from the West Sweden Tourist Board presented a practical case study on developing climate-smart holidays. The West Sweden Tourist Board, with 30 employees and owned by Region Västra Götaland, works on both marketing and destination development with sustainability at the core of its strategy. Their regional programme, Stepping up sustainability, is built around four principles: minimizing unnecessary environmental impact, ensuring benefits for both visitors and residents, spreading visitor flows across time and place, and supporting full-time jobs and resilient businesses.

This strategy has strong regional backing, with 46 municipalities and around 800 businesses formally committed. Against this backdrop, the concept of Climate Smart Holidays was created to demonstrate that sustainable travel can be both attractive and comfortable.

The packages developed within this initiative allow visitors to experience West Sweden with near-zero emissions. Guests are encouraged to travel by train and are collected at the station with electric cars powered by solar energy. Accommodation, food, and activities are provided by small-scale family businesses, all chosen

for their commitment to sustainability. Travellers are encouraged to calculate the emissions of their journey using Travel and Climate tools, developed by University of Gothenburg. This makes the climate impact of each trip transparent.

Currently, five businesses are part of the initiative: Swedish Country Living, Dalslands Aktiviteter, Erikson Cottage, Lugnåsberget Ekohotell, and Inforest. Their offers include glass cabins, eco-hotels, and nature-based stays designed to combine exclusivity with environmental responsibility.

The initiative has attracted significant attention in Sweden and abroad, with coverage in media outlets, influencer visits, and interest from international tour operators. Linde underlined that the project not only promotes sustainable practices but also shows how climate-smart tourism can create added value through unique guest experiences and strong market positioning.

By packaging low-carbon choices into accessible and desirable products, West Sweden demonstrates how destinations can align climate goals with visitor satisfaction.



David Naraine: Company Case: Building a tourism business on climate- smart values

David Naraine shared the journey of building Swedish Country Living, a small-scale tourism business in West Sweden, in accordance with the principles of regenerative and circular economy. With a background in fashion, he and his partner shifted careers after realizing the importance of living closer to nature. What began as a summer house in Dalsland evolved into a farm with sheep and other animals, eventually expanding into sustainable tourism business.

The company's accommodation consists of hermitage-style cabins built by hand in the forest. Each unit is unique, designed with reused materials, insulated with natural fibres such as sheep wool, and constructed without heavy machinery. The cabins are off-grid, using solar power for lighting and warmth, and water is drawn from nearby lakes and filtered through a circular system before returning to nature. Composting toilets provide fertilizer for fruit trees, and food waste is minimized by feeding surplus to farm animals.

The approach combines sustainability with guest experience. Visitors are offered a private, distraction-free stay in nature,

with fresh local food and opportunities to explore the surrounding landscape. Guests are also introduced to the farm's sustainable practices, strengthening their connection to the place.

Naraine emphasized that regenerative tourism goes beyond reducing harm; it aims to give back more than it takes. Grazing animals, for example, are used to increase biodiversity. At the same time, sustainability is framed not as an abstract concept but as concrete benefits for guests—relaxation, exclusivity, and authentic connection with nature.

He noted challenges such as lengthy building permits and risks of greenwashing in the industry. However, for Swedish Country Living, sustainability has become a strong differentiator, increasing customer satisfaction and allowing for premium pricing.

Naraine concluded that the future of tourism lies in slower, greener, and more meaningful experiences—where depth, authenticity, and connection take priority over consumption.



Annika Koskenkorva: Towards climate- smart tourism through Baltic Sea region cooperation

Annika Koskenkorva, Project Manager at Visit Tampere, presented the aims and activities of the Climate Neutral Destinations (CliNeDest) project, which promotes climate-smart tourism across the Baltic Sea region. The initiative reflects on Tampere's broader climate goals: both the city and the region target carbon neutrality by 2030, with tourism positioned as a forerunner sector. Visit Tampere has already earned the Sustainable Travel Finland label, signed the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism, and launched the Urban Climate Leaders network in close cooperation with the City of Helsinki.

This collaboration inspired the idea for the CliNeDest, launched in March 2025 with a three-year duration and ten partners from Finland, Sweden, Poland, Lithuania, Norway, Denmark, and Estonia. The project's overall aim is to support destinations and businesses in transitioning to climate-neutral tourism and in strengthening the resilience of the industry.

The project focuses on two main objectives. The first is to support companies in adopting climate-smart

business practices through tools for measuring emissions, decarbonisation strategies, and co-creation of low-carbon visitor experiences. The second is to build joint knowledge and competence on climate change impacts, enabling more resilient business and service models across the Nordic-Baltic region.

A central outcome will be the Climate Smart Business Toolkit, developed and tested together with companies. The toolkit will provide carbon calculation methods, guidance on integrating climate data into business development, and models for creating and marketing low-carbon experiences. In addition, a transnational Climate Neutral Destination Network will be established to ensure long-term cooperation beyond the project period.

Koskenkorva highlighted the value for participating companies: practical tools, expert support, improving climate resilience, networking opportunities, and increased visibility. Most importantly, joining the project provides purpose and motivation, as climate action ensures the long-term future of tourism, where companies and individuals can contribute to the joint global climate effort.

Helsinki

Participants shared expectations, concerns, and questions that reveal what tourism actors in the Baltic Sea region are looking for as they navigate climate change.

Participants' needs:

Practical tools and guidance

Participants emphasized the need for accessible tools that help them start climate action. They are looking for clear methods to measure emissions and simple, step-by-step guidance that translates technical data into everyday business choices. Toolkits, calculators, and real-life examples were highlighted as essential.

Cooperation and peer learning

There is a strong desire for collaboration across destinations and borders. Businesses want to avoid working in isolation and instead exchange experiences, test ideas collectively, and learn from peers. Regional and transnational networks were seen as crucial for building momentum and sharing solutions.

Communication and credibility

Participants expressed concern about how to communicate sustainability without falling into greenwashing. They want help in framing climate-smart actions through guest benefits and authentic storytelling, rather than abstract claims. Clearer ways to present low-carbon options to visitors were seen as necessary.

Skills and capacity building

Tourism actors recognise that climate action is also about business resilience and staff motivation, but many lack the skills, resources, or confidence to act. They asked for training, expert support, and opportunities to pilot new approaches as ways to build capacity.

Motivation and purpose

Beyond practicalities, participants showed a need for meaning, inspiration and courage. They want their businesses to contribute to a positive shift in tourism, aligning with future demands while also strengthening community and environmental resilience. Climate action was seen as not only a necessity but also an opportunity to create more purposeful and attractive destinations.