

Beyond the Souvenir

Stakeholder Event on Sustainable Tourism and Hospitality

Monday 11 May 2026,
VIVES University of Applied Sciences

Programme

Time	Session
09:00 – 09:20	Introduction to ICP Connect Beyond the Souvenir
09:20 – 10:15	Unlocking the SDGs through tourism start-ups José Ricardo Díaz Ardila
10:15 – 10:35	Morning coffee break
10:35 – 11:40	Connecting perspectives from Ecuador, Uganda and Vietnam: Strengths and challenges across ICP Partners 10:35 – 11:00: UCuenca, Ecuador 11:00 – 11:20: Makerere University Business School & Mountains of the Moon University, Uganda 11:20 – 11:40: Quy Nhon University, Vietnam
11:40 – 12:00	Green Key: Sustainability (certification) in the tourism sector Jana Deschepper, Green Key
12:00 – 13:00	Lunch
13:00 – 13:50	Travel to Tomorrow Evy Van Schoorisse, Westtoer
13:50 – 14:20	Sustainable hospitality in practice: from concept to daily operations. A real-life case from circular boutique B&B Royal Swans Griet Cappelle, B&B Royal Swans
14:20 – 14:40	Rethinking diversity in hospitality: playing across cultures Yelyzaveta Zahoretska & Viktoriia Yemelina, graduates of the Bachelor in Hotel Management at VIVES University of Applied Sciences
14:40 – 15:10	Afternoon coffee break
15:10 – 15:40	How hotels can turn their nature impact into opportunity Lies Syryn, Go Forest
15:40 – 16:30	Villa Fregn: Where sustainability meets local food and community Bart Claes, Villa Fregn
16:30 – 17:00	Sustainable destinations in Norway: A case study from Lærdal and the Sognefjord Helene Maristuen, Associate Professor in Tourism & Coordinator/HVL Business School/Western Norway University of Applied Sciences
17:00 – 18:30	Networking reception

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Session details

Unlocking the SDGs through tourism start-ups

Tourism and open innovation are powerful drivers of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Technology-driven and social impact start-ups are uniquely positioned to deliver scalable solutions for destinations worldwide, ranging from AI-driven decision-making tools and green energy platforms to initiatives that advance women's and youth empowerment.

This session explores the global innovation ecosystem and highlights how tourism-related entrepreneurship can act as a catalyst for sustainable development. Through practical examples and key insights, participants will be encouraged to support, enable and scale start-ups that contribute to a more sustainable tourism sector.

By José Ricardo Díaz Ardila

José Ricardo Díaz Ardila is Innovation Expert at UN Tourism (UNWTO), where he advises on global entrepreneurship ecosystems. He has positioned open innovation as a catalyst for sustainable development across tourism destinations worldwide and he specializes in designing curated programmes that identify start-ups and scale-ups that provide solutions to the sector's most pressing challenges.

He has contributed to the creation of the first UN Tourism Innovation Network and has led flagship initiatives such as the Acceleration Programme for public officials, the Rural Tourism Competition and the SDGs Global Start-up Competition, which brought together more than 1,300 participants from 138 countries. With industry experience in Colombia and Oman, and degrees in International Development and Tourism & Hospitality Management, José Ricardo mobilizes support for technology-driven and social impact models, connecting them with ministries, corporations and investors, and enabling their implementation in real-world contexts.

Green Key: Sustainability (certification) in the tourism sector

During this presentation, we will take you through the 'why' of sustainability certification in the tourism sector. We'll touch upon the current evolutions affecting sustainability certification and highlight some best practices.

By Jana Deschepper – Project Manager, Green Key

Travel to Tomorrow

The mission of 'Travel to Tomorrow' is to make Flanders a flourishing destination with resilient, sustainable and future-oriented places that offer added value to all involved. Tourism is a means and not an end in itself.

By Evy Van Schoorisse – Manager duurzaam toerisme, Westtoer

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Sustainable hospitality in practice: from concept to daily operations. A real-life case from circular boutique B&B Royal Swans

In this session, Griet offers a real-life perspective on how sustainability can be embedded from the very first design choices to daily operations and guest experience. A practical story of how ecological thinking can become a natural and coherent part of hospitality entrepreneurship.

By Griet Cappelle – B&B Royal Swans

Griet Cappelle, former COO of a listed company and co-founder of B&B Royal Swans in Bruges, will share how a small hospitality concept was built around a clear DNA of history, circular thinking and ecological responsibility.

Rethinking diversity in hospitality: playing across cultures

Introducing the concept of cultural diversity and its potential as a strategic advantage in today's hospitality industry. Presenting "Cultural Quizz" – an innovative game-based tool designed specifically for hotel teams to develop cultural intelligence, strengthen collaboration and foster employee well-being.

By Yelyzaveta Zahoretska & Viktoriia Yemelina – Graduates of the Bachelor in Hotel Management at VIVES University of Applied Sciences

How hotels can turn their nature impact into opportunity

This keynote explores why forests matter to the hospitality industry as an asset worth protecting. It examines the sector's impact on nature and presents two practical models that hotels can act on. The session closes with insights into why this matters, what the hospitality sector can gain from it and how nature-positive action can create long-term value.

By Lies Syryn – Operations Manager, Go Forest

Villa Fregn: Where Sustainability Meets Local Food and Community

Villa Fregn is a hotel and restaurant in Norway where sustainability is at the heart of everything. Recognized as 'Sustainability Company of the Year' in its region, it combines short supply chains, local food traditions, renewable energy, innovation, community engagement and nature education. Owner and manager Bart Claes shares the story behind this approach.

By Bart Claes – Owner and manager, Villa Fregn

Sustainable destinations in Norway: A Case Study from Lærdal and the Sognefjord

In 2010 four pilot destinations were picked to work with sustainable tourism criteria. Today there are over fifty destinations who achieved the brand as a sustainable destination. The overall goal with

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sustainable destinations in Norway was to support tourism development that balances environmental protection, local well-being and long-term economic value. In recent years, sustainability has become a key priority in Norwegian tourism policy, supported by national strategies, certification schemes and collaboration between authorities, tourism organisations, businesses and local communities. Pilot destinations and case studies played an important role by testing measures in practice and generating knowledge which can be shared and applied across other destinations.

By Helene Maristuen – Associate Professor in Tourism & Coordinator, HVL Business School/Western Norway University of Applied Sciences

Helene Maristuen has extensive experience across both the tourism industry and academia. She is a Senior Lecturer with a background that combines teaching, research and development work with practical knowledge of tourism and destination development. In addition, she has held several relevant board positions, contributing strategic and professional expertise in areas such as sustainability, governance, and cross-sector collaboration.

Practical information:

Participation is free of charge and includes lunch and a reception. **Registration is required via the following form by 7 May 2026: <https://forms.office.com/e/WS1dgaZxZQ>.**

Location:

VIVES Bruges
Xaverianenstraat 10
8000 Bruges
Belgium

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