

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Sweden earns top spot for global sustainable tourism: Euromonitor

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Luxury tourism organizations are focusing on the role of sustainability in bouncing back in a post-pandemic landscape. Image credit: Prada Group

By KATIE TAMOLA

While travel has not returned to the historic levels of 2019, countries hoping to welcome larger crowds of tourists should prioritize sustainability efforts, according to a new report.

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In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, countries around the world are focusing on reopening while prioritizing safety and profit at the same time. Euromonitor International developed a [Sustainable Travel Index](#) to help travel and tourism businesses shift to more sustainable and purpose-driven tourism models that will help them thrive in a post-COVID-19 age.

"Sweden is a pioneer in lifecycle assessment research which is critical to understand the full impact of consumer behavior and consumption patterns," said Caroline Bremner, head of travel at [Euromonitor International](#), in a statement. "There is globally a clear change in mindset and resistance in returning to a volume-driven travel and tourism model.

"Instead, stakeholders are rallying together to build back better' through value creation from sustainable tourism," she said. "As momentum grows in the run up to COP26, consumers, travel brands, destination marketing organizations and governments continue to align to avert the climate emergency."

The best of the best in sustainable tourism

In the [Top Countries for Sustainable Tourism report](#), Euromonitor analyzed each country across seven pillars that make up sustainable travel.

The pillars included environmental sustainability, social sustainability, economic sustainability, risk, sustainable demand, sustainable transport and sustainable lodging. The pillars addressed 99 countries and used 57 data indicators to derive the final index ranking which determined the comparative performance of the countries.



he report also finds that 66.4 percent of consumers globally want to have a positive impact on the environment through their daily actions in 2021. Image credit: Euromonitor

According to the report, Scandinavia is leading by example in its engagement and progress towards sustainable travel, with Sweden ranked first, followed by Finland, Austria, Estonia and Norway. The report also finds that about two-thirds of consumers globally want to have a positive impact on the environment through their daily actions in 2021.

The top ten countries for sustainable tourism are all European: Sweden, Finland, Austria, Estonia, Norway, Slovakia, Iceland, Latvia, France and Slovenia.

Sweden earning the top spot makes sense as it is the birthplace of the flygskam, or flight shaming, movement and home to renowned climate strike activist Greta Thunberg. The country also is known for its lifecycle assessment research that is critical to understanding full impacts of consumer behavior and consumption patterns.

Sweden is also highly engaged with the United Nation's sustainable development goals (SDGs) to preserve the Arctic ice and permafrost to halt climate change and is aiming to achieve net zero emissions by 2045. The country proves that sustainability can enhance the travel experience, while working to promote rural and regional tourism in core cities.

The country also highlights its efficient transport infrastructure and alternative forms of travel as beneficial to climate. Sweden also receives praise for its sustainable lodging with its Nordic eco-chic architecture and design.

Experts urge that organizations will have to differentiate what changes that have emerged after the pandemic will be short-term or long-term.

During the pandemic, where possible, domestic tourism substituted international travel. For regions like western Europe, 22 percent of travel executives do not expect consumers to return to their pre-crisis travel habits, due to an increased pressure on middle-income households and a greater awareness of the negative impacts of tourism.

Although sustainability is a much discussed and prioritized topic, only 55 percent of travel businesses implemented some form of sustainability strategy compared to 70 percent of consumer packaged good (CPG) industries in 2020. Additionally, 50 percent of travel businesses say that they engage with the U.N. 17 SDGs that form the 2030 agenda.

More companies are committing to higher environmental standards and some are even partnering with nonprofit organizations. The report advises that businesses need to resist focusing on short-term goals and instead focus on long-term value-driven strategies for a sustainable post-pandemic recovery.



Travelers are seeking out transparent and prominent sustainability practices. Image credit: Belmond

In terms of economic sustainability, many of the world's leading tourism destinations saw their economic sustainability rankings improve. Japan, Israel and Italy had the strongest increases in 2020.

Canada, Hungary, Israel, Chile and Italy improved sustainable lodging the most.

The report notes that organizations and governments must continue to align their desires to avert the climate emergency. Environmental and social initiatives must be championed and integrated into the visitor experience, as sustainability will differentiate and elevate the experience for consumers, ensuring mutual and long-term success.

Sustainability, here to stay

The travel industry stands alongside many other sectors taking the time to meticulously consider and reprioritize its sustainability efforts.

The travel and tourism industry has notoriously stunted sustainability efforts in the past, but businesses and travelers can significantly reduce their carbon footprints by implementing environmentally and socially conscious systems of behavior.

During a panel at *Cond Nast Traveler's* third annual Points of View travel summit last December, industry experts discussed how the industry has acted as a problem within the realm of sustainability, and how it can become a solution. Panelists examined how a shift in behavior, on the part of both businesses and travelers, can ignite positive change for biodiversity and the human condition ([see story](#)).

Many in the luxury travel sector are also realizing that consumers have come to expect useful sustainability products and that a lacking could be detrimental to business.

Last year, Agoda found that 26 percent of all respondents want to make more environmentally-friendly travel choices. According to a recent survey by Booking.com, 54 percent of global travelers want to play a part in reducing over-tourism, while 51 percent would swap their original destination for a similar alternative if it would have a positive environmental or social impact ([see story](#)).

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