



2024 USTOA Sustainability is Responsibility (SIR) 3.0 Summit in Singapore

Executive Summary

1. Background and Purpose

Starting with SIR 1.0 in 2022, the USTOA SIR summits were designed in collaboration with Innovation Norway to bring together sustainability champions within our community while also showcasing a destination where real sustainable innovation is taking place, giving attendees first-hand experiences and knowledge to return to their organizations with. The SIR summits create unique opportunities for attendees to engage and collaborate with fellow sustainability staff members in the travel and tourism industry who find themselves facing similar obstacles. The SIR summit atmosphere provides a safe space for transparency and support to help each other advance in individual organizations' sustainability journeys while also establishing roadmaps to address our collective challenges as an industry.

2. The Host Destination: Singapore

With Norway being host of the previous SIR summits, a country of vast pristine landscapes and culturally rich heritages, which embody what it means to be truly sustainable, Singapore's small but mighty bustling metropolis provided an incredible contrast and different perspective on how creating a sustainable cityscape is possible through initiatives implemented by the government and embraced by the citizens.

While in Singapore, SIR 3.0 attendees learned about the various aspects of the Singapore Green Plan¹ 2030, a whole-of-nation movement to advance Singapore's national agenda on sustainable development. Under the Green Plan, various government agencies rally Singaporeans and work with

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- [1 Singapore Green Plan 2023](#)
 - [Singapore Travel Sustainably](#)
 - [Sentosa Development Corporation \(Sentosa Island Sustainability\)](#)
 - [Sustainability at the Gardens by the Bay](#)
 - [PARKROYAL COLLECTION Pickering Hotel](#)
 - [Southern Ridges – Henderson Waves Bridge](#)
 - [URA – Singapore City Gallery](#)

both private and public partners to contribute expertise, co-create sustainable solutions, and achieve ambitious targets by 2030.

Through off-site excursions to the Urban Redevelopment Authority, Sentosa Island, Gardens by the Bay, and diverse surrounding neighborhoods, attendees learned how Singapore's commitments under the UN's Sustainable Development Agenda and Paris Agreement position them to achieve long-term net zero emissions goals by 2050. Through panels and learning sessions, attendees gained an understanding of Singapore's and Sentosa Island's GSTC Destination Criteria certification, which outlines the guiding principles and minimum requirements that tourism businesses and destinations should aspire to reach to protect and sustain the world's natural and cultural resources that the industry relies on. From the sustainable architecture of the hotel to the locally sourced cuisine at the restaurants, Singapore is an inspirational example of what a sustainable destination looks like and what it takes to implement nation-wide eco-conscious practices. To view the SIR 3.0 Summit in Singapore highlight video, click [here](#).



3. Educational Content

The first SIR summit in 2022 in Bodo, Norway focused on the "why" part of creating a sustainability business case, while the 2023 SIR summit, in Tromso, Norway, in collaboration with Tourism Cares, focused on the "how". Molly Laycob, USTOA's Global Social Impact Manager, who attended the first two summits, has witnessed an evolution of membership needs when it came to sustainability and set out with a goal to have the 2024 SIR summit in Singapore focus on a few specific focus areas that she continuously heard members asking to learn more about and were finding themselves meeting barriers with. She brought these focus areas to Malcolm Preston, the returning summit facilitator from SIR 1.0 to create the curriculum, and together, alongside Singapore Tourism Board and various experts under the USTOA umbrella, designed a program that provided learning sessions, action planning, best practices and resource sharing, and exploration of Singapore's innovative sustainability practices. The focus areas were:

a. **Day One: The Business Case for Sustainability and Sustainable Development Goals**

The morning sessions started with a business simulation, demonstrating the challenges of holistic decision making taking in to account the needs of different stakeholders considering environmental and social factors together with the impact on the local economy.

The session also revisited the themes of Malcolm's presentation in LA in December 2023 of "Would they want you back?" and "Leakage vs Linkage".

There was a brief conversation around changing consumer behaviour and the concepts of “nudging” versus “choice editing” were introduced.

Finally, the key five business cases for sustainability were introduced, which were used as a recurring theme for all the other sessions of the event:

- i. Cost reduction/profitability
- ii. Licence to operate
- iii. Growth opportunity
- iv. Regulation (comply or stay ahead)
- v. Dependency

Following panel discussions with Singaporean companies and USTOA members on how they made their business cases, including challenges and opportunities, the afternoon session looked at the Sustainable Development Goals. The session was focused on how to use the SDGs as a strategic tool for stakeholder engagement and alignment. It introduced a number of frameworks, tools and resources for the participants to use.

USTOA and Tourism Cares ran a joint session on tools for helping develop sustainability strategies and a new database available to all members with best practice examples, case studies, etc.

b. Day Two: Impact Measurement and Certifications

The day started with a short presentation on Impact Measurement, drawing out the difference between the traditional business metrics of inputs and outputs and the more relevant metrics for sustainability measurement of outcomes and impact.

Four key elements of good impact measurement were introduced:

- i. All stakeholders
- ii. Positive and negative impacts (no greenwashing)
- iii. Across the value chain (no cherry picking)
- iv. Counterfactual (or alternative)

The rest of the morning focused on certification both from the suppliers and the operator's perspective. Interestingly in a poll most participants ranked their interest in certification as most important to certifying their own organization with less interest in that of their suppliers or the use of questionnaires to understand the activities of their suppliers. However, in the breakout discussions, almost all the conversation was on how to survey suppliers and the need for better coordination and verification procedures. There was universal agreement that there is a role for USTOA to provide some sort of coordination in this area.

In the afternoon Intrepid introduced their framework, with examples, for measuring the carbon footprint of each trip, to identify ways of reducing the “in destination” footprint of their trips.

c. **Day Three: Partnerships and Collaboration**

The day started with a short session on the different types of partnership, e.g. private/public, private/private, private/NGO or a combination of all three. It also looked at how partnerships can be up and down the value chain or within one horizontal of the value chain.

The rest of the day centred around panel discussions and break-out workshops discussing different partnership models, what worked well, what didn't and the barriers to forming good mutually beneficial partnerships.



4. Summary of Findings and Learnings

- a. **Day 1: Evolving your Business Case and Strategy** - When asked the question “What actions/initiatives can you take to enhance your sustainability strategy?” attendees answers included common themes surrounding the Sustainable Development Goals, key performance indicators, internal operations, supply chain operations, destination management, and USTOA involvement.
 - i. From Malcolm’s **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** presentation, attendees were inspired to relook at SDGs in various ways with the goal of utilizing the Sustainable Development Report to not only discover where their organization’s headquarters country ranks but also where their destinations rank and apply targets

accordingly. They also noted that including the SDGs in procurement surveys and internally including them in company guidelines and policies moving forward will be a priority. This will also help companies engage travelers in sustainability initiatives, which they have found challenging in the past.

- ii. **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** were also discussed heavily amongst attendees, with many noting that they are looking to create KPIs beyond carbon by implementing them throughout the company to start measuring internal harm then creating targets from those measurements. These metrics will also allow for better decision making by creating business cases for sustainability and eventually supplying the correct data for reporting.
- iii. The need for further collaboration between **destinations** and tour operators was highlighted, especially through sharing of priorities and asking destinations “how can we help you?”. Destinations are looking to prioritize their own strategies through bottom-up regulation, and tour operators can create partnerships with them to help reach goals, specifically by adding local community experiences to itineraries.
- iv. Sourcing a **meaningful supply chain** with lasting impact by either utilizing the Tourism Cares Meaningful Travel Platform or creating a supplier survey is an ongoing goal of many attendees. While some attendees say focusing on the supply chain is harder because you have more control of your business operations, others say that they have found more success in initiatives when it comes to improving supply chain operations. Measuring the impact of supply chains and developing policies surrounding it is the next step.
- v. While the supply chain is where a majority of USTOA members’ carbon footprint is, improvements in **internal operations** were not overlooked, with many noting that the word sustainability has lately accompanied a negative connotation and that knowing the audience is key to successful initiatives. Making intentions clear, employee training, sharing travelers' stories, choice editing, and avoiding greenwashing are also a priority for members. From a leadership buy-in standpoint, some attendees mentioned that they are now inspired to host quarterly meetings with department heads, align with stakeholder priorities, and eventually create a sustainability strategy.
- vi. Finally, many noted that they are looking to increase collaboration with **USTOA’s SIR Community** by utilizing USTOA’s new external resources library as well as the sustainability sample strategy, while also building sustainability into their organization’s culture leverage USTOA to engage leadership.

- b. **Day 2: Certification** – When asked the question “What does certification really mean for your business and what actions can you take as a result?” supply chains, internal operations, and USTOA were all discussed again for a second day. However, practices in the Travel and Tourism Industry were challenged, making for lively discussions.
- i. It was asked “What standards are we/should we be holding **suppliers** to?”. A supply chain audit and search of suppliers’ certifications was suggested for those looking to get started. Many members either create their own responsible procurement surveys or are looking for an industry standard supplier survey. They were happy to learn that one is included on the USTOA & Tourism Cares Sustainability Sample Strategy and are also looking forward to utilizing the WTTC map for procurement, especially to gain insight on potential partnerships and sustainable hotels.
 - ii. Regarding **internal operations**, establishing self-assessments (employee flights, in-office operations, current certifications, etc.), working groups, and impact models to ensure positive impact take precedent over pursuing certifications for the organization. Creating a responsible tourism initiative through GSTC guidelines while ensuring that their current strategies include SDGs and offer frameworks for partnerships with DMOs is something that many say they want to improve on. Overall, becoming certified as a Tour Operator is not high on the priority list for many reasons, including resources (employee bandwidth and money), while questioning the difference between legal requirements and certifications, which is becoming very blurry in Europe. From a customer standpoint, it was suggested that customers are not at the point of caring about, or even having knowledge of, certifications, which was also challenged by those who see interest from travelers.
 - iii. As for the **Travel and Tourism Industry**, many are curious what ETOA members are doing with certifications and if it is the tour operators’ responsibility to be certified in the first place, or should they rely on a certified supply chain. Another question asked was, “should tour operator association members have a minimum sustainability requirement to join and does this include a certification?”.
 - iv. Finally, utilizing the **USTOA & Tourism Cares** sustainability sample strategy while also leveraging the resources library once back home to familiarize themselves with who else uses certifications was a common goal amongst many.
- c. **Day 3: Partnerships** – When asked the question “What partnership initiatives will you take forward with you and who will be involved?”, it unexpectedly turned into a USTOA action planning session, which you can see the details of in section 5-G. Outside of USTOA, **internal operations** for members, such as conducting annual partner evaluations to ensure goals are

aligned, horizontal collaboration with the advisory board, employee training on partnerships, establishing partnerships in overlapping regions, utilizing carbon calculators, and highlighting changemakers internally, were all discussed as future goals. **Destination Management Company** (DMC) educational workshops, understanding the sustainable nature of **Destination Marketing Organizations** (DMO) and creating partnerships from these collaborations is much needed in the industry. Establishing a place for small products to be showcased to tour operators and travel agents could be another avenue for establishing partnerships.

5. USTOA Sustainability Action Plan Moving Forward

- a. **USTOA SIR 4.0 Summit** – The SIR 4.0 summit will take place in Valencia, Spain in 2025. The summits will continue to evolve to reflect USTOA member sustainability needs and provide a place for community, collaboration, resource sharing, and action planning.
- b. **USTOA Sustainability Committee** - The committee's mission is to advance sustainability within USTOA, member companies, and the wider community. The four pillars of focus for the committee are 1) education, 2) change management to address adaptation and mitigation, 3) community, and 4) guidance. The committee is compiled of Active and Associate members that represent various corners of the Travel and Tourism Industry and provide guidance and insight on all USTOA sustainability initiatives.
- c. **USTOA SIR Education Series** – The SIR Education Series provides a webinar platform for USTOA member organizations to share their sustainability journeys while encouraging attendees to bring forward their own projects and ask questions in a group setting. The focus areas discussed at the SIR 3.0 summit were derived from topics discussed since the launch of the SIR Education Series.
- d. **USTOA Sustainability Policy and Member Responsible Promise** – The USTOA Sustainability Policy represents an official statement from USTOA to the travel and tourism community regarding our efforts to move forward on our sustainability journey. The accompanying promise allows members to show their support and acknowledge a shared vision for sustainability in our industry.
- e. **USTOA SIR Resources Hub** - The resource hub, sponsored by Trip Mate, acts as a one-stop-shop for members to access items such as the policy, promise, education series, events, best practices, and more. The accompanying external resource library is a compilation of USTOA member resources and best practices ready to be shared for the benefit of fellow members' sustainability journeys.

f. USTOA Future Lights – The Future Lights campaign, sponsored by Trip Mate, recognizes individuals who are champions of sustainability and DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion) as well as efforts within their own companies. Future Lights finalists are involved in the SIR summits, SIR Education Series, Sustainability Committee, and various other USTOA sustainability initiatives.

g. Potential Action Ideas Discussed at the SIR 3.0 Summit

i. Resources

1. Include more resources for destinations, especially on the library.
2. Allow non-USTOA members to have access to SIR Resources Hub.
3. Better market current and future USTOA sustainability resources.
4. Launch sustainability sample strategy.
5. Provide shared resources on training (e.g.: template workshop for employees, responsible sourcing, marketing benefits, etc.).
6. A pathway for members (with timelines) to better assess sustainability in their supply chain (starting with hotels) with steps that would require them to get criteria verified and then set further/similar steps potentially towards restaurants, local transports etc. (note: they consider self-assessment not enough reliable and certifications too pricey and constraining).
7. Regulations monitoring (for the USA and worldwide) to regularly inform members about major sustainability policies/legal requirements.
8. Access to data that would be relevant to all members (example: carbon emissions database) for which it doesn't make sense for each member to purchase data when costs could be shared.
9. Benchmark of data and consolidated report on members carbon footprint, with collectively agreed reduction targets.
10. Information in Active/Associate members profiles (most likely tick boxes)
 - a. List of partners that each member uses on member portal
 - b. List of certifications

ii. Collaboration/opportunities amongst members

1. Create a reddit page for people to discuss ideas and ask questions.
2. Establish “partnership-place”
 - a. 1) socialize the event 2) come away with questions and identify where partners stand 3) members can display all partners online 4) they can create partners from there. Dana: travelling SIR roadshow/SIR BAH events. Colleagues can recommend each other.
 - b. Support/innovate DMOs to create sustainability lab that could flow into partnership-place.
 - c. Partner up destinations with Tour Operators.

3. Provide/encourage verbiage for marketplace on “what questions to ask”.
4. Host SIR-focused BAH’s for those that cannot attend SIR.
5. Provide opportunities for Active and Associate members to sponsor non-profits at Annual Conference and Marketplace.
6. SIR Education Series workshop ideas: sustainability sample strategy, travel agent training, hosted webinars for DMC’s requested by TOs (start with USTOA members then add DMC members, collaborate with GSTC).
7. Information in Active/Associate members profiles (most likely tick boxes)
 - a. List of partners that each member uses on member portal
 - b. List of certifications
8. Create a DMO + TO sustainability lab and create a standard for DMOs.
9. Including ETOA/other associations in next SIR/USTOA events
 - a. Europe is more regulatory than the US. Host a conference surrounding sustainability regulation with both USTOA/ETOA and/or create a travel agency SIR event.
 - b. Add on an optional day to SIR 4.0 for ETOA/other European companies.
10. USTOA active members put \$ into UNTOURS to help move the mission forward. Utilize the MTP to get this done.
11. Drive marketing around “secondary cities” and allow consumers to be excited about traveling there. This could be DFD-integrated.
12. Implement minimum sustainability standards across USTOA membership

6. Testimonials from Attendees

- a. *“Thank you for an incredible visit. Having been here several times before, I had no idea of the strategic, long-term thinking and commitment to addressing climate issues with innovative approaches (waste, disposal, recycled water, renewable energy) the country has embarked on – incredibly impressed.”* - Timo Shaw, President, Xanterra Leisure Resort Holdings
- b. *“Look at what we accomplished through our discussions and how our eyes have opened to a country-wide strategy that is working well. Thank you for setting a high bar and being great friends.”* -Jerre Fuqua, President, Holiday Vacations
- c. *“Thank you for an amazing SIR and for allowing us to discover Singapore and their commitment and efforts towards a more sustainable world. You proved to us that it is possible!”* -Patrick Preiano, Head of Sustainability, Globus Family of Brands
- d. *“Incredibly huge thank you for putting together such an informative session with so many great minds and resources. Singapore absolutely blew my mind on so many levels. Showcasing that a country can put sustainability plans in place and be executing against*

- them gives me hope not only for travel but beyond. So much work to do but I feel even better equipped and supported.” -Carly Biggart, Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Hurtigruten Inc.*
- e. *“Thank you to all the organizers, hosts, discussion leaders, change makers, and sustainability champions within their organizations for this amazing meeting of the minds and hearts. As a first time SIR participant, I felt a very warm welcome and 100% supported by this community. Looking forward to our continued collaboration!” -Gina Bang, Chief Sales and Marketing Officer, Avanti Destinations*
 - f. *“SIR-lived my first SIR! Big thanks to everyone for the open conversations and for checking their egos at the door. So energized from my time in Singapore!” -Nadine Pinto, Global Sustainability Manager, The Travel Corporation*
 - g. *“USTOA’s SIR is quickly becoming the industry’s primary platform for discussing the future of sustainability in travel. Attending SIR gives me the knowledge, inspiration, and network I need to be successful in this critical space.” - David DiGregorio, Senior Advisor, VisitNorway*
 - h. *“It was truly wonderful as a SIR rookie to find such a collaborative spirit and the open sharing of the vast collective expertise of this big-hearted group of people. It was a privilege to take part and now thanks to you all much less daunting to take the next steps.” -James Matthews, Senior Vice President, Overseas Operations, American Council for International Studies*
 - i. *“Thank you for creating a wonderful experience that provided hope on what the evolution of the industry can look like and how we can all have a voice in shaping and creating that. Thank you to all the presenters, panelists, and facilitators for sharing their wisdom, ideas and challenges. I am really inspired by all the conversations I had and the passion that there is to build businesses and products that are aligned with considering and benefitting our stakeholders.” -Gen Lawrence, Sustainability and Impact, MaCher*
 - j. *“The SIR summit is an incredible opportunity to work together to build a more responsible and sustainable travel industry. You will learn about new, innovative initiatives addressing climate issues from the destination partners. You will participate in workshops with a focus on the business case for pursuing more sustainable strategies and you will hear from expert speakers and engage in discussions around some of the most critical environmental challenges facing our planet.” - Dana Santucci, Executive Vice President, EF Institute for Cultural Exchange, Inc.*
 - k. *“These days together in this SIR summit community have been inspiring, informative and left many question marks in my mind which I take home with me to develop and work on. It is*

the passion and knowledge, the honesty and the willingness of everyone to share and actively contribute to discussion and activities that made conversations so productive, enjoyable and memorable!” - Julie Higgins, Sustainability Officer and Director Hotel Operations, The Travel Corporation

- l. *“If you are committed to make a positive impact on the future of travel, while still securing profitable operations, then SIR is for you. SIR is a platform that gives you and your company added insight, knowledge, and a network of industry insiders that allows you to drive future growth and success with a more sustainable and value driven business model. It’s worth it!”*
Hege V. Barnes, Managing Director North America, Innovation Norway

- m. *“Anyone in the travel industry regardless of your role or the role your company plays, needs to wake up and pay attention to climate change. Invest in your education and then share your knowledge. Participating in SIR is a great first step.”* - Kelly P. Sahrer, Chief Commercial Officer, Trip Mate

- n. *“The SIR Summit proved to be an invaluable experience, and I consider myself fortunate to have participated. The daily sessions were both inspiring and educational. Each attendee’s sustainability journey is unique, and SIR summits provide a unique opportunity to collaborate with industry leaders and drive progress. Singapore, “the city in nature”™ demonstrated an impressive commitment to sustainability and served as the ideal host location for this event.”* - Bronwyn Hodge, Vice President, Communication and Corporate Affairs, Goway Travel, Inc.

