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# 15 Inspiring Examples of Sustainable Tourism from European DMOs

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# 01

## What Sustainable Things Are European DMO Marketing Teams Doing?

Travel is supposed to do more good than harm. At its core, travel is about the free movement of people from one place to another. It should reveal how different cultures are connected and more alike than different. The subtext of this promise offered by travel has always been that local communities are better for having visitors from near and far-flung places, and that tourism is meant to complement the local flavor of a place rather than replace it.

But for decades, too many places have suffered from unsustainable tourism growth simply because sustainable tourism wasn't a priority. And, it's also difficult to create the right messaging to convey to travelers what it means to be sustainable. Sustainable tourism has only a positive impact if every destination has sustainability goals and if there's a unified definition of sustainable tourism, which we lay out in the next section.

Technology and new marketing channels have made it easier for DMOs to get more creative with how they promote sustainable tourism to their audiences, and more cultures have embraced trends that align with sustainable tourism practices such as eating locally produced foods, supporting local businesses, and visiting places off the beaten path to discover something new.

European destinations like Barcelona, Paris, and Venice have played a leading role in influencing destinations on every continent to re-evaluate their marketing strategies on how much good they were actually doing for the good of local economies. The 15 inspiring sustainable tourism examples we chose have taken shape in the past few years, with some DMOs using CrowdRiff and others simply being smart examples that offer valuable takeaways. All of the DMOs are of varying sizes and budgets.

Promoting electric cars, challenging hotels and restaurants to serve 100% locally produced food, making local bus systems free, and branding a country as a city are only a few examples of how Europe is working towards solutions that provide plenty of hope that the travel industry is on the path to a bright future.



**Julia Manoukian**

Senior Content Marketing Manager  
CrowdRiff

# 02

## Destination Marketing vs Destination Management

For many years, European destinations didn't have to do much marketing. Travelers grew up learning about European history in schools and seeing different cities on TV or in the movies.

Though, as European borders became more fluid in the latter half of the 20th century, so did travelers' ability to move about the continent relatively easily. Many destinations like the UK, France, and Spain didn't have a problem attracting visitors, but they did come to realize that they needed to be more strategic about what kind of visitors they were attracting — those who would stay longer, spend more, and leave a positive impact.

Many marketing plans, however, didn't consider the long-term health of a destination. They ignored how local populations would benefit from tourism dollars, how tourism would impact natural resource supplies, and how some economies would become so dependent on tourism that a destination would be crippled should visitation suddenly or sharply declined.

Destination management has entered the remits of more DMOs in the past decade as these organizations have realized that they play a far greater role in their communities beyond just tourism promotion.



Destination management<sup>1</sup> requires a DMO to take a leadership role in the community to ensure sustainable tourism growth in every sense of the term sustainability, including encouraging environmental behavior, promoting local businesses and communities, monitoring and responding to environmental trends, dispersing tourism, and promoting year-round tourism.

<sup>1</sup>Crowdriff, 2019

All five of these sustainable travel themes must be embraced together for a destination truly to commit to making tourism work for its people and the future of its environment. Destinations International identified three transformational opportunities – destination stewardship, community alignment, and digital conversion – that together form an effective destination management plan that addresses the five sustainable travel themes.<sup>2</sup>



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## 1 Destination Stewardship

Building a public-sector coalition among the visitor industry, economic development agencies, academic institutions, and civic and philanthropic organizations.

## 2 Community Alignment

Improving resident sentiment, protecting destination development initiatives and public funding, and improving hospitality culture.

## 3 Digital Conversion

Developing more video and personalized digital strategies on mobile to improve marketing effectiveness and get real-time insights into how your audience engages.

The following sustainable tourism examples all take destination management into account, while some are still in the early stages and others have already had significant impact on their locales and the wider region. We hope these compelling examples will help spark ideas for your next campaign and help you understand that small and carefully measured steps can lead to big results where tourism is celebrated by the entire community.

<sup>2</sup>[Destinations International, 2019](#)



## 03 Encouraging Environmental Behavior

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Destinations are more enjoyable when all those who visit are respectful of the environment. Consider a bus tour versus a bike tour. A bus usually makes lots of noise and doesn't allow you to stop anywhere that piques your interest. You're also separated from the people and places that you drive by.

A bike or walking tour allows you to interact freely with anything and anyone you want and you have more opportunities to support businesses that rely on tourism. Chances are that if you are behaving environmentally friendly you're also respecting the local culture and traditions of the place you're in, and it's in that kind of spirit that we've chosen the following examples.

# Lyon: European Capital of Smart Tourism

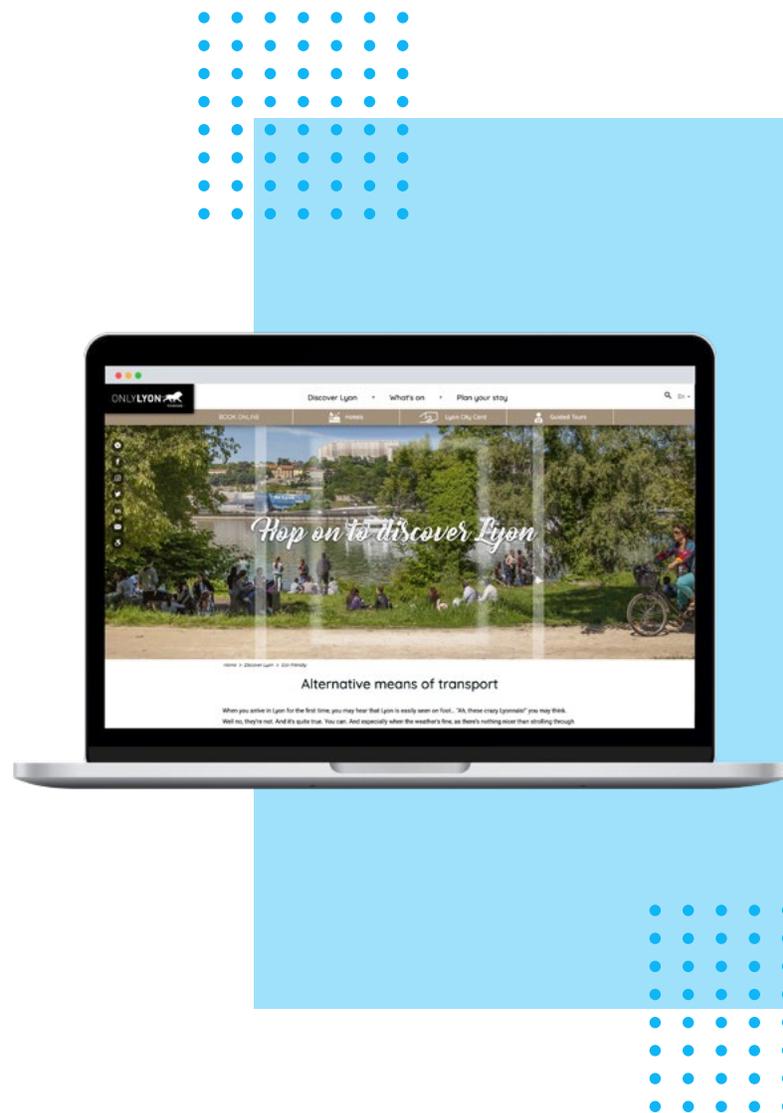
## Sharing is caring

As more European cities implement restricted zones in city centers for tourist buses in a bid to prevent congestion, more destinations like [Lyon](#) are encouraging visitors to explore using alternative modes of transport like bikes and Segways.<sup>3</sup>

Lyon's DMO won the European Capital of Smart Tourism 2019 competition which offers knowledge-sharing opportunities among cities to share best practices and create new partnerships. To be considered, a city needed to demonstrate innovative achievements and solutions in five categories: accessibility, sustainability, digitalization, cultural heritage, and creativity.

Apart from marketing sustainable modes of transport, the city also has initiatives that help tourists identify restaurants that source ingredients locally and ethically. What's more, it's also developing a mobile app that will help send tourists to different areas by showing them current queue times and availability of different tourist services.

More cities will embrace sustainable tourism ecosystems if cities like Lyon can share what they've learned and partner together for the good of the planet. Following Lyon's example can be as simple as asking visitors to learn if they would use such a mobile app if one was created, or creating a map that leads visitors to restaurants that source locally.



<sup>3</sup>[Only Lyon Tourism and Congress, 2019](#)



# Provence-Alpes-Catalonia-Côte d'Azur Regional Tourism Council

## Three regions come together

More than a decade ago, years before sustainable tourism became a top priority for the global travel industry, the French region of Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur linked up with Italy's Tuscany and Spain's Catalonia regions to create the Network of European Sustainable and Competitive Tourism Regions.<sup>4</sup>

The goal is for these three regions to work together to promote environmentally friendly practices among tourism businesses in each region. In turn, other destinations will be encouraged to work together towards a shared sustainability goal, if this council is successful.

The regional council's work includes funding grants for sustainability projects for tourism businesses, preserving water resources, and getting tourism businesses certified as sustainable.

Tackling sustainability shouldn't happen in a vacuum. All destinations need to be on the same page for the good of the planet. The three regions in this example are among Europe's most visited and also some of the most susceptible to climate change. This partnership is an opportunity to share best practices with other regions on how to think of themselves as team players in the European community all working towards a goal – ensuring tourism services that benefit everyone.

<sup>4</sup>Ministry of the Ecological and Inclusive Transition, 2015

# Helsinki's Carbon-neutral Goal

## Rallying a city

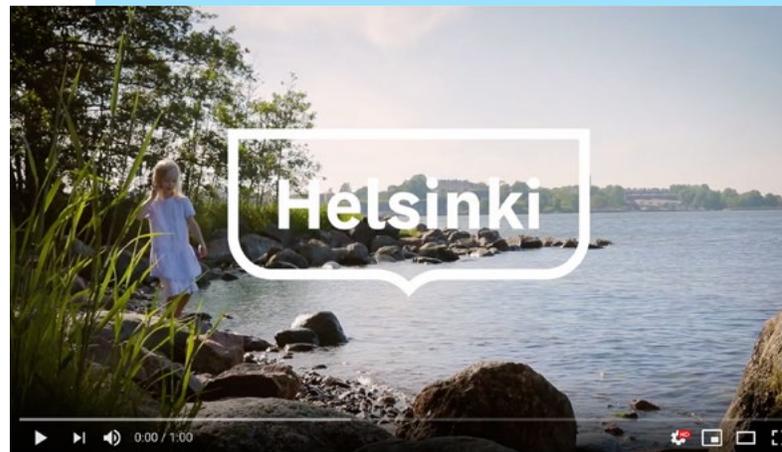
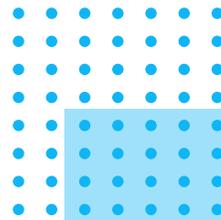
[Helsinki Marketing](#), the DMO for Helsinki, Finland, has launched its Think Sustainably criteria<sup>5</sup> for all facets of city life that include transportation, energy production, construction, and travel and hospitality. The city has a goal to become carbon-neutral by 2035, and Helsinki Marketing is using its platform to rally the entire city – not just visitors – behind the goal.

The Think Sustainably page directs visitors towards accommodation, restaurants, and attractions that have all taken a sustainable approach to their operations. The DMO is using its website to promote an action plan that will help achieve the carbon-neutral goal.

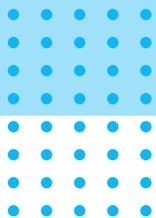
These include promoting the use of electric cars (by, for example, extending the charging network), replacing outdoor lights with more energy-efficient alternatives, replacing fossil fuels by building heating plants that run on renewable energy, and making the development of climate-friendly products and services in Helsinki as easy as possible.

The action plan was created in collaboration with hundreds of experts, Helsinki residents, and corporate representatives, bringing together all three pillars of sustainability. This definitely represents one of the more ambitious municipal sustainability plans that have been adopted. Not only do marketers need to market to travelers, they also need to market to their communities on why residents should be optimistic about Helsinki's future.

<sup>5</sup>[Helsinki Marketing, 2017](#)



click to watch



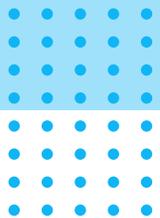
# Visit Berlin's Sustainable Meetings

## Planning green events from start to finish

The media often focuses on leisure tourists' environmental impact on destinations, but business travelers also leave carbon footprints behind and usually travel more frequently than leisure tourists. Visit Berlin developed a set of sustainability criteria for its event partners to ensure organizations seeking to host their meetings and events in the city would have ecologically responsible support that would help make their events economically successful.

“The UN’s sustainable development goals put the onus on our industry to pursue sustainability and to offer appropriate solutions,” said Burkhard Kieker, Managing Director of Visit Berlin, in an interview with the Sustainability Leaders Project. “We accept this responsibility and have created the innovative Sustainable Meetings Berlin online platform in response. It brings together sustainable offerings from venues, service providers and hotels across Berlin and provides tips for event organisers who want to ensure that their event is socially and environmentally responsible, yet still a financial success.”

Each of the DMO’s event partners has been vetted against about 62 sustainability criteria in the categories of governance, business, environment, and society<sup>6</sup>



# Werfenweng's Soft Mobility Push

A tiny village's big ambitions for mobility

The STARTER (Sustainable Transport for Areas with Tourism through Energy Reduction) initiative of Werfenweng in Austria is aimed at bringing new mobility options to this tiny village to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. These include more than 80 environmentally friendly cars, scooters, and Segways that are available to travelers for free with the Samo card, which is available for 10 Euro per person at the destination's visitor center and gives visitors access to the vehicles and transportation options.

Destinations that make these eco-friendly vehicles accessible throughout their area have a better chance at getting travelers to use and find them where and when they need them.<sup>7</sup>

## Baiona's Beaches Go Smoke-free

Cleaner beaches mean cleaner oceans

In 2019, Baiona, Spain became a Sustainable Top 100 Destination for its efforts towards making its beaches smoke-free and also accessible to disabled visitors.<sup>8</sup> Baiona's beaches were becoming too polluted and cigarette butts had started to pollute the waters surrounding the destination making it less enjoyable.

In 2013 and 2016, Baiona also won the Quality Coast Gold Award. This award is supported by the European Commission and assesses destinations on the sustainability of their nature and local culture and also considers destination management plans.

Some destinations may have to make unpopular decisions, such as banning smoking on beaches where it's been allowed for many years, for the good of the environment. Though, it's important to remember that people always adjust to these kinds of changes and soon it will become the new normal.



<sup>7</sup>Tourismusverband Werfenweng, 2018

<sup>8</sup>Sustainable Top 100 Destinations, 2019



## 04 Promoting Local Businesses

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Today, you can eat at a McDonalds or grab a cup of coffee from Starbucks in virtually any destination in the world. As the world becomes increasingly globalized, it's the local businesses and stories that are resonating with travelers who visit new places to enrich their lives and learn something new, or temporarily escape their comfort zones, to try to understand how they can make a difference.

These next few DMOs have made this a priority—they are prime examples of helping local communities to maintain their individual presence and promote their cultural identity, as well as put money back into the local community.



carlaqteixeira

# Cogne's Free Local Bus Program

## More buses, fewer cars

In the past, local residents didn't always see the benefits of tourism taxes. That's slowly changing as more destinations view tourism as a vehicle to improve the quality of life of the locals. That's exactly what Cogne, Italy had in mind when it used its tourism taxes to make its local bus system free to use.<sup>9</sup>

Cogne wanted to make its city center less congested and more accessible. Since it made the bus system free, it's seen increased ridership

and local businesses in the city center benefit too from customers being able to move more freely and not worry about their vehicles.

Community alignment, especially in small towns, is the key to creating a local transport system that works for everyone. Ensuring that a transport system has the capacity for tourists and locals is also vital so that the system is usable and not overloaded.

<sup>9</sup>[Sustainable Top 100 Destinations, 2019](#)

# Next Stop: Järvsö

## Take the train into town

Järvsö, Sweden invested in a project to bring a local rail link directly to its city center so that visitors could directly connect to activities they wanted to do and have better access to businesses and restaurants in the city center.<sup>10</sup>

The destination was Sweden's first to earn the EarthCheck certification, which helps destinations measure and monitor their environmental, economic, and social impact, and prepare and track that performance against their own goals and the other destinations' performances.

"Becoming Sweden's first EarthCheck Certified Destination will add value to the way in which we market Järvsö as a lifestyle destination to visit, work, live, and bring up children," said Roland Hamlin, the project coordinator.

"Working with EarthCheck will help us to monitor and improve sustainability and promote our achievement, as well as learning more from the best of the world."

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**Working with EarthCheck will help us to monitor and improve sustainability and promote our achievement, as well as learning more from the best of the world.**<sup>11</sup>  
”

<sup>10</sup>Destination Järvsö AB, 2018

<sup>11</sup>Pacific Asia Travel Association, 2018



© vittozfr

It's incredibly important that any destination that wants to grow sustainably is connected to a transportation network or hub that makes it easy for travelers to figure out how to get to their destinations. This is a good reminder for how marketers always need to stress how well-connected a destination is, and if it's not, propose solutions to local officials for how to change that.



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# Røros: Norway's Local Foodie Capital

## Take a local food safari

Røros is Norway's leading region for locally produced food and in 2013 it was awarded the Innovation Norway's Sustainable Destinations certificate. The destination became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1980 and has made sustainability a priority for decades.

When more food is produced locally, more local businesses can be part of the supply chain and directly benefit from that production while helping to preserve culinary traditions.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup>NOW Transforming Hospitality, 2018

# Meaningful Travel Map of Jordan

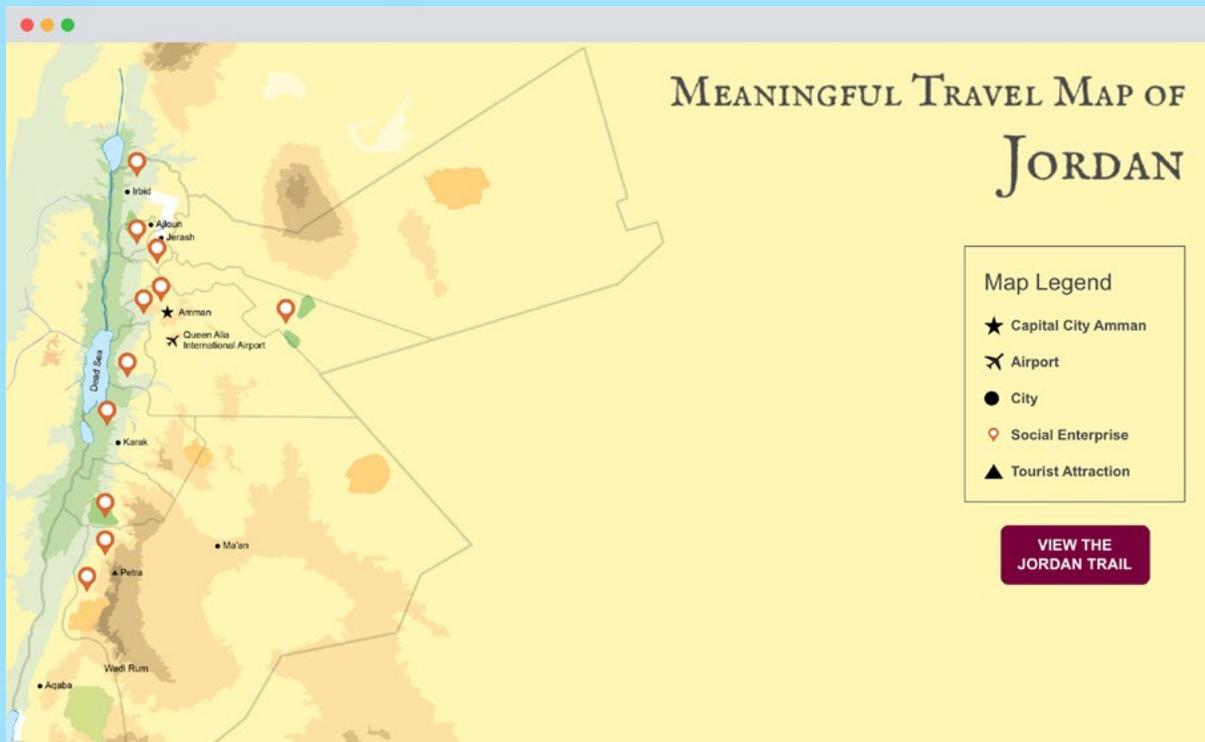
## Connecting communities

Jordan has gained more traction with travelers from various regions in recent years for its combination of cosmopolitan flair and ancient history that together prioritize the social well-being of its people.

The Jordan Tourism Board and Tourism Cares created The Meaningful Travel Map of Jordan that highlights 12 social enterprises in the country that include ecolodges and local village tour operators.

The map allows travelers to learn more about each of the enterprises and how they can visit and support the work that each of them do, and also helps the travel industry to sell experiences and packages.<sup>13</sup>

Even if it's as simple as including a map in your local visitor's guide, helping put the spotlight on local communities at your destination can go a long way.



<sup>13</sup> Jordan Tourism Board, 2018

# 100% Valposchiavo

## Making value chains stronger

Valposchiavo Turismo began a collaborative project in 2012 between agriculture and tourism businesses to make local value chains stronger from the production to consumption by visitors.

“100% Valposchiavo” is a very ambitious project and even though we have been working on it for five years now and can see positive results, the mission is by far not accomplished yet,” said Kaspar Howald, Director of Valposchiavo Turismo, in an interview with the Sustainability Leaders Project.

“

**For instance, the collaboration between producers and gastronomy has to become much closer. The chefs have to adapt their menus much more to the different seasonal offers and they have to become more resourceful in the use of local raw materials.**

”

It’s an interesting project that shows how tourism can benefit small agricultural businesses that are often the most vulnerable within a community.<sup>14</sup>

“The most important thing is to build your strategy on existing foundations,” said Howald. “Your possible stakeholders have to embrace the strategy and consider it a part of themselves. So, a top-down approach surely won’t work. Then there must also be some fun in it.

The most gratifying effect of ‘100% Valposchiavo’ for me is to see the enthusiasm with which our stakeholders invent new products – pizza, gin, eight types of different ravioli, ketchup and much more – and create new collaborations. This shows that they really share the ‘100% Valposchiavo’ spirit.”



<sup>14</sup>Sustainability Leaders Project, 2019



# Ljubljana Loves Local Food

## Challenging local hospitality businesses

Ljubljana Tourism collaborated with other city agencies to challenge local hotel and restaurant managers to use 100% locally grown ingredients in their kitchens. The DMO won the Best Cities Sustainable Tourism Award in ITB Berlin in 2019 for their work on this project.

“The basic drive behind the organization of such types of locally grown food exchange is the aim of the organizers themselves to encourage the local food self-supply,” said Petra Stuček, M.S.C., the Managing Director at Ljubljana Tourism. “The short supply chains have positive effects on several perspectives of the sustainable development of the

city and its wider region in the field of the economy; it influences the environment of social relationships, the direction followed by the City of Ljubljana for more than a decade.”

The Locally Grown Food Exchange was organized twice in 2018 and food producers from Ljubljana and the Central Slovenia region as well as potential buyers from the public and private sector gathered at one location, organized by Ljubljana Tourism and various government agencies.

Shorter supply chains give DMOs more leverage to be able to promote truly authentic offerings that travelers can’t get from other destinations.

<sup>15</sup>Ljubljana Tourism, 2019



## 05 Dispersing Tourism Throughout a Region

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Gateway destinations like Amsterdam have always had a glut of tourists that would have loved to see other cities or regions, but didn't have enough information on how to do so. Spreading tourism throughout a destination ensures that tourism dollars reach areas that need it most.



# Holland City

## Marketing a country as a city

The Netherlands Board of Tourism and Conventions' Holland City initiative is aimed at getting travelers to explore more of the country beyond the major gateway of Amsterdam.

You can drive from one end of Holland to the other in under four hours, and the DMO seeks to capitalize on that reality to portray different Dutch cities as neighborhoods to visit and the entire country as a city that you can easily move about in one visit.

“We are doing this by means of creating storylines and districts,” said Jasper Broekhuis, Social Media Marketing Manager at NBTC Holland Marketing, in an interview with CrowdRiff. “So, for example, the Van Gogh storyline – you can see his works in the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, but not many people know that you can also discover his works in other parts of Holland.

<sup>16</sup>CrowdRiff, 2018

Visuals are very important for our marketing strategy, because we truly believe that these visuals bring the storylines and the districts to life.”

Tourism initiatives like Holland City help bring tourism to other parts of a country that haven't historically attracted many tourists and as tourism in Holland, for example, continues to grow the economic benefits of tourism will be distributed.

The DMO worked with CrowdRiff to integrate more UGC galleries into its website. So far, for website articles with a CrowdRiff gallery, the amount of time users spend on the page has tripled and the click-through rates have quadrupled, generating 29% higher conversion rates.<sup>16</sup> These results all contribute to the likelihood that a traveler will consider visiting another Dutch city besides Amsterdam while they're in the Netherlands.



# Better Jobs for Barcelona

## Working to make work better

Hospitality and tourism jobs require a lot of energy and skills to ensure visitors have the best possible experience. In recent years, Barcelona has faced challenges from local residents due to the issues tourism has caused, including higher costs of living.

While the city's 2020 strategic tourism plan does call for strategies to disperse tourism beyond the

crowded city center, the plan aims to turn that on its head and make tourism a desirable industry to work in.<sup>17</sup>

This includes promoting unions and skills training opportunities to help ensure the residents benefit from high-quality jobs that result from increased visitation.

<sup>17</sup>Turisme de Catalunya, 2018



## 06 Promoting Year-round Tourism

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So many destinations promote year-round tourism but don't always do so in a compelling way. It's not enough to keep the marketing going in the off-season; you have to give travelers an exciting or intriguing reason to visit.

There are many ways to highlight year-round tourism activities in your marketing — we wanted to showcase Lucerne, Switzerland for the innovative way they're using their website to ensure the benefits of tourism benefits don't disappear when the high season ends.

# Switzerland Tourism

## Using user-generated content to promote seasonal events and lesser known attractions

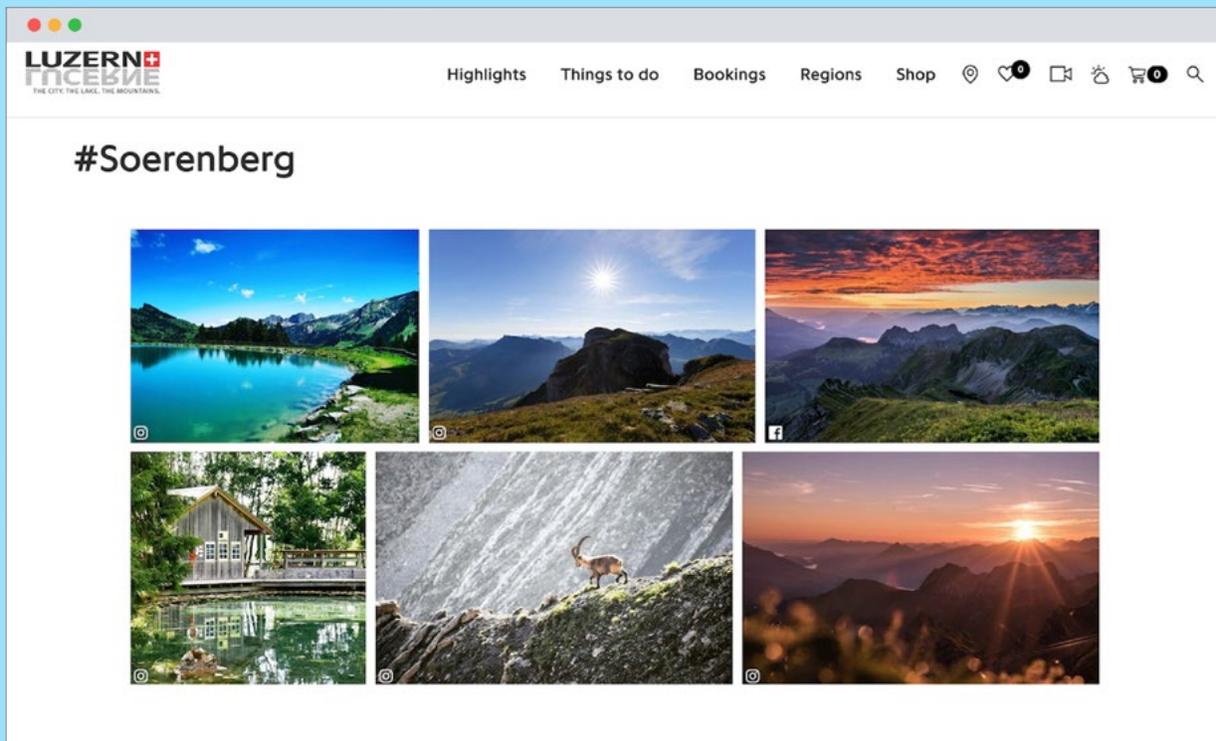
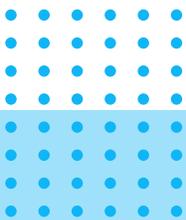
A warmer planet means more destinations, like Switzerland, that have built their brand on outdoor activities will need to consider carefully how changing weather patterns will impact their branding.

Switzerland is renowned for its skiing and winter activities, but in recent years it realized that climate change will cause future winter seasons and snow patterns to be unpredictable.

That's why Switzerland Tourism, the national DMO, is focused on promoting summer and autumn

activities like hiking and biking, having recently run an autumn and spring campaign geared towards piquing interest in activities that only require some sun, not snow.<sup>18</sup>

In 2018, Lucerne Tourism started using user-generated content through CrowdRiff in an attempt to expose would-be travelers to off-peak season events and travel opportunities, offering more glimpses into what the surrounding Swiss villages, lakes, and mountains have to offer.<sup>19</sup>



<sup>18</sup>Sustainability Leaders Project, 2018



**In 2018, Lucerne Tourism started using user-generated content through CrowdRiff in an attempt to expose would-be travelers to off-peak season events and travel opportunities, offering more glimpses into what the surrounding Swiss villages, lakes, and mountains have to offer.<sup>19</sup>**

In the last two years, Lucerne Tourism has used the platform to create individual visual galleries that get updated weekly for each region and attraction.

In total, the website features 29 individual UGC galleries that seek to promote the entirety of the Lake Lucerne Region and what it offers to travelers during all seasons.

They've also installed photo walls at their tourist information centre, that feature a selection of the best user-generated visuals the team has sourced through CrowdRiff.

Year-round tourism also helps keep many local residents employed beyond the peak season. Tourism plays a big role in the health of local middle-class and working-class families and this directly correlates to why DMOs should keep their communities aligned and engaged year-round.

<sup>19</sup>CrowdRiff, 2019

# Balancing Growth and Preservation

It's not easy to strike the right balance between growing tourism arrivals and protecting the precious environs and attractions that make travelers want to book trips.

Many DMOs face pressure from their boards and local governments to deliver results with the funding they're allocated, and it can be easy to ignore the big picture when you're faced with that kind of pressure. The big picture being that getting more travelers to visit your destination means nothing if there isn't a destination to visit, meaning if a community doesn't have a solid social and economic foundation and protected environment, the destination isn't sustainable in the long-term.

Marketing sustainability and pursuing ambitious tourism goals aren't mutually exclusive; they go hand-in-hand. You can't reach your goal without having a plan for how to ensure that tourism growth is sustainable, and we embrace sustainability in the first place so that our societies can grow and flourish for generations to come.



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# 07

## How CrowdRiff Can Help Support Sustainable Tourism



### Source and get the rights to UGC

- Discover high-quality UGC showcasing positive environmental actions.
- Securely acquire rights to UGC worry-free.
- Use the industry's most intelligent image search to find on-brand UGC quickly.



### Track the performance of your visuals

- Monitor visuals of sensitive cultural sites or endangered wildlife and counteract negative media coverage following an environmental event.
- Discover what assets are driving the most engagement and conversions.
- Use these insights to help you choose your ad creative and watch conversions improve.



### Easily distribute UGC across platforms

- Display local businesses, year-round tourism activities and hidden gems on your website, social channels, ad campaigns and more.
- Enrich your images with Google Locations so website visitors can easily find the information they need to visit.
- Add calls to action to your UGC imagery that take people to your booking pages, partner websites or deeper into your website.





# About CrowdRiff

CrowdRiff is a visual content marketing software solution for digital and social teams at travel and hospitality brands. CrowdRiff can help you source, distribute and optimize the photos and videos that will attract and influence visitors.

We help travel brands at every step of the campaign process:

- **User-generated Content:** Discover authentic, high-quality photos and videos shared by visitors
- **Digital Asset Manager:** Manage all your visuals in a modern, intuitive AI-powered platform
- **Media Hub:** Easily share UGC and branded visuals with journalists, PR agencies and bloggers

Powering the world's most successful travel & hospitality brands



Zürich,  
Switzerland.



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