Booking.com sustainability update 2019
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To make sure there is a world worth experiencing, now and far into the future, we must integrate sustainability into more aspects of our business – and our industry. That is why, after five years of testing different ways to support sustainable travel and tourism, we have decided to take a more holistic approach.

We began our Booking Cares volunteer programme in 2014 to support projects across the globe. In 2016, we set up the Booking Booster to collaborate more directly with the travel industry by supporting sustainable tourism startups through mentorship and funding. Then, in 2019, we took this industry collaboration a step further and co-founded Travalyst – a global initiative with the ambition to change the impact of travel, for good.

At the end of 2019, we shifted our focus away from corporate social responsibility (CSR) and moved to a more holistic, strategy-integrated approach – and in doing so, Booking Cares became Booking.com Sustainability.

Sustainability is not a single point on a map. It is a journey – one we must take together. In 2019, we asked our partners and customers how they feel about sustainability. 82% of our partners want to collaborate on creating more sustainable options and 87% of global travellers want to explore the world in more sustainable ways. Clearly, we are not alone on this journey.

This update will give you insight into the steps we’re taking – and some of the challenges we face – to make sure there continues to be a world worth experiencing. We’ll reflect on what we have achieved already and what we need to do to make sustainable travel the way to experience the world.
Sustainability – 2019 at a glance

Volunteering

- 5,995 Number of employee volunteers (cumulative)
- 93% of offices contributed
- 34,742 Number of hours volunteered
- 507 volunteering projects online

We provided

- 10 grants to Booking Booster
- 6 grants to Booking Cares Fund
  - Totalling €3,2M
  - To 16 organizations
  - From 12 countries

Initiated Sustainable strategy

Launched Animal welfare policy

Co-founded Travalyst

Donated €62,050 to Emergency Response
The challenges of sustainable tourism

Interview with Dr. Anna Spenceley

What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the travel and tourism industry over the next few years when it comes to sustainability?

I think the biggest challenge is mainstreaming sustainability into all tourism – whether it is a business trip to Tokyo, a camping holiday in France, a conference in New Zealand, or staying with family in another part of the country. I want to see a transition to us integrating good purchasing decisions into our consciousness - so that it becomes the usual way of traveling – and ensuring that there is sufficient volume of accommodation and tours practicing sustainable approaches available to meet that demand.

Where do you think the industry is doing well in terms of sustainability, such as reducing environmental impact, reducing overcrowding and keeping local communities safe and intact? And where do you think it needs to improve?

There has been real progress in addressing waste in the hotel and restaurant sector – particularly with regards to food and single use plastic. There are new and improved tools to support animal welfare. Popular destinations are finding innovative and creative ways to manage overtourism, including using mobile phone apps, local licensed guides, fee systems, dispersing visitors to a broader range of attractions, and using GSTC-recognised certifications. For local communities, there are good efforts made in some destinations, and by some travel companies and local authorities, but these tend to be patchy and fragmented. More needs to be done to safeguard local people's livelihoods and their cultural heritage, outside of the UNESCO World Heritage Site area of influence and protection.

How can we encourage people to continue to travel while also ensuring we protect the planet and the people on it?

We need to give people more options, more meaningful and trustworthy information, and tools that they can use to make good travel decisions. The frameworks that Booking.com and its Travalyst partners are collaborating on provide an ideal entry point to this. Ensuring that the information has credibility, while being showcased by champions such as the Duke of Sussex, will really help to make this change. This needs to be coupled with support from governments and financial bodies to provide support needed by tourism businesses to transform their business models. Good planning and policy frameworks coupled with proactive regulations that galvanize thriving tourism industries, and encourage innovation, and maximize local employment, entrepreneurship and associated benefits. The education and not-for-profit sectors can also provide support to ensure credibility, and provide guidance, tools and training where needed. There is clearly an increasing demand for sustainable travel, and we need to support this trend.

What are the biggest opportunities for industry collaboration to create positive change for travel and tourism?

I think collaboration in itself is part of the biggest opportunity. Working together to tackle the big questions, and putting aside commercial competition when it comes to addressing bigger-picture challenges such as climate change, waste, nature and culture conservation, gender equity and poverty. For example, big hotel groups and major tour operators can make a massive difference by nurturing and forging market linkages with smaller enterprises and entrepreneurs in destinations where they work. This supports local economies, families, and ensures that they will continue to welcome visitors long into the future.

What does the future hold for travel and tourism? Are you optimistic?

I'm always optimistic. Where we can turn big and scary challenges into simple and practical steps that we can all use to improve how we travel – such as traveling light, with trust, slowly and carefully – then collectively we can make major changes. People like Greta Thunburg have shown quite vividly that one committed champion can inspire millions towards action – and also that when youth collectively take action, their parents and grandparents listen. However, there is much to be done, and we cannot be complacent, or only rely on others to do good. We have to all take personal responsibility in our own lives, and encourage our families, those we work with, and for, to take positive action and support sustainable tourism.

Dr. Anna Spenceley is an author and tourism consultant with over 20 years' international experience, and an expert in sustainable and responsible travel. She is also the chair of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas Tourism and Protected Areas Specialist Group, a board member of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). Anna sits on the Travalyst Independent Advisory Panel, and is a signatory to Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency.
Travel is a force for good. Every trip has the power to enrich people’s lives, bring cultures together and help communities thrive. Travel can open minds, end prejudice and foster collaboration. That’s why we work so hard to make it easier for everyone to experience the world.

But every trip has a footprint, and as a leader in our industry, we have a responsibility to make travel more sustainable. So we’re taking a holistic approach, recognising the importance of addressing environmental, social and economic sustainability in travel and tourism. Working alongside partners, we can conserve and celebrate the natural environment and biodiversity; strengthen local communities making sure the benefits of tourism are fairly spread across the citizens of our destinations and preserve cultural heritage – while celebrating our intercultural differences.

We also recognise that at this moment, even with the growing appetite for sustainable options, not all travelers have the same understanding of sustainable travel. Our partners are struggling to find the best ways to include sustainability in their operations, we see this is an opportunity to share the positive potential of the industry with our customers, partners and employees. Together, we can create a collective movement.

It is now a business priority to drive the travel industry to a more sustainable future. This is not only a benefit to the planet, but our customers and partners – building longevity and health in the industry. It also benefits the bright minds behind our products, our employees, who can be proud of both our mission and the contribution it makes to the world.
Our Initiatives

- Booking Volunteers
- Booking Booster
- Booking Cares Fund
- Emergency Response
- Internal Sustainability
- Industry collaboration
- Sustainability for Accommodations
- Animal Welfare
To give back to the destinations that give us so much, we encourage our employees – all 17,500 of them – to volunteer their time and expertise to partner with local organizations on projects that help improve destinations worldwide. This includes supporting organizations in a multitude of areas, including working in a data-driven way, developing funding models and optimizing their technology solutions, as well as offering advice on how to build fruitful partnerships and develop proactive PR and media strategies, all with the aim of helping them maximise their overall impact as their projects continue to grow and scale.

2019 in numbers

- 5,995 Employee participation
- 34.742 Hours volunteered
- 93% Office participation
In 2019, Booking.com began a strategic partnership with Indonesia’s Ministry of Tourism. The aim was to boost the booking capabilities of their official website – indonesia.travel. To mark the start of our official partnership, we were invited to send a team to meet the Minister of Tourism. Once the discussion began, we realised there was more to be done than just the website. We could use our experience as leaders in the travel industry to help property owners across Indonesia become more digitally-savvy and, hopefully, boost the local tourist economy along the way. We came up with the idea for a series of workshops, taking place in ten key tourist destinations. So that’s what we did. Over the course of the year, employees from all three of our Indonesian offices took part in the workshops and together, we reached more than 300 people. We educated owners of hotels, hostels, and homestays about current trends in tourism – including sustainability – and showed them how they could leverage the power of our platform to increase their occupancy. While some had experience promoting their homes on local marketing sites, most of our participants had never advertised their space on a digital platform before. Our team showed them how to optimise their strategy and engage with an international customer base. The feedback was very encouraging.

“It was a privilege for me and the team in Indonesia to connect with the Ministry office. We loved working together to help more destinations go digital and educate people on how to optimize online platforms. I really believe this is just one concrete example of our effort to make it easier for everyone to experience the world.”

Gegen Sumarjana, Hotels Area Manager at Booking.com
Wheelmap.org is a global project that has mapped more than one million wheelchair-friendly spaces worldwide with the help of the community. Wheelmap.org allows anyone to find, enter and rate locations using a simple traffic light system: “green” meaning fully wheelchair accessible, “yellow” meaning partly wheelchair accessible and “red” meaning not wheelchair accessible at all. The initiative was started by Raúl Krauthausen after a friend had complained that they always had to meet in the same café. Neither of them knew another place without steps at the entrance. He started Wheelmap.org in 2010 to help other people with other mobility restrictions discover the world.

We wanted to help too, so on May 16 – Accessibility Awareness Day – Booking.com’s content team took part in an “Amsterdam for Everybody” event. Holger, Wheelmap.org’s Product Manager, came over from Berlin to tell our volunteers how the project started and explain the daily challenges faced by people who use wheelchairs. 31 people then set out to look at Amsterdam’s cafes, shops and public spaces from the perspective of a wheelchair user, rating each location’s accessibility and asking if property owners would be willing to make their spaces more wheelchair-friendly by investing in a mobile ramp. The day was a great success, with volunteers adding an incredible amount of 755 new locations to the map.

We managed to run successful mapping events on multiple continents thanks to the motivated volunteers in the Booking Cares program. Not only did we get 100 people to rate the wheelchair accessibility of 2,200 places on Wheelmap.org, we also got a lot of feedback from participants who told us that they really enjoyed being part of such a fun and useful activity.

Svenja Heinecke, Community Manager at Wheelmap.org

<table>
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<th>initiatives started across 33 cities</th>
<th>volunteers participated</th>
<th>hours spent</th>
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<td>45</td>
<td>260+</td>
<td>1040+</td>
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Booking Booster

The Booking Booster accelerator programme supports sustainable tourism startups, helping them innovate and scale. 2019 was the third year of the initiative. The three week programme consists of a series of lectures, hands-on workshops and coaching sessions led by Booking.com employees and expert trainers. It culminates in a final pitch from the startups on their next stage of growth for a share of the Booster’s €2 million accelerator fund.

2019 Booking Booster Winners

Okra Solar (Australia, operating in Cambodia) €400,000
IMPULSE Travel (Colombia) €400,000
NotOnMap (India) €250,000
Avy (The Netherlands) €200,000
SASANE Sisterhood Trekking and Travel (Nepal) €175,000
Picha Eats (Malaysia) €175,000
Clean Travel (Australia) €100,000
Hydrao (France) €100,000
I Like Local (The Netherlands, operating in Kenya) €100,000
Sumba Hospitality Foundation (Indonesia) €100,000
In 2016, our government settled on a peace agreement with Colombia’s most powerful guerrilla force. There was a collective feeling that it was time for a new, reconciled society. We asked ourselves: what can we, as travel entrepreneurs, do to help? We realized that we had a great tool in our hands. As tour providers, we had the power to make a positive impact on the lives of travelers and locals. We aligned our efforts with community-driven projects that supported positive social transformation processes, leveraging the social and economic power of tourism to help communities earn a sustainable income.

Instead of relying on volunteering trips or charity initiatives, we offered authentic experiences, designed with the experiential traveler in mind. Our biggest challenge was balancing our desire to make a positive impact on local communities, with our need to offer a great experience for travelers. That is why we applied to the Booking Booster. The program was a huge turning point for us.

The Booking Booster helped us break our organization into small pieces and rebuild it in a way that optimized results. It gave us a deeper understanding of our place in the industry – a breakthrough that led us to design our HEART tours; experiences that embody our impact strategy, while enriching the traveler experience.

We were lucky to have an excellent mentor who supported us throughout the program, as well as the opportunity to take part in several follow-up sessions in Amsterdam. The Booking Booster also gave us the financial resources to dream bigger than ever before. We have used the grant to bring new talent to the company, develop our product portfolio and invest in key partnerships, both commercial and operational. By 2022, we hope to work with 40 community-driven projects, bringing more than 15,000 travelers to our HEART tours, generating $400,000 in sustainable yearly income.

Thanks to the Booking Booster, we have found the support and motivation to keep making sustainability the essence of our business model, without sacrificing the economic viability of the organization, we are positioning Impulse as a world leader in regenerative tourism, and we are beginning to see smaller organizations follow our lead. That makes us very proud.

Rodrigo Atuesta, Impulse Founder and CEO
While big organizations are busy protecting ancient cities, palaces and monuments, at NotOnMap, we’re busy protecting cultural heritage. How? By tapping into the hidden potential of India’s remote rural villages. We rely on a “build, operate and transfer” model that capitalizes on villagers’ traditional way of life, without disturbing the essence of their community. By creating a place for visitors to stay, these rural destinations can receive the benefits of the travel economy. Our hope is for these villages to become places of cultural exchange, where travelers can enjoy authentic cultural experiences and villagers can benefit from a sustainable source of income.

Our experiences vary from adventure training to traditional skills workshops, with an incredible 80 percent of revenue going towards the development of the village. We have already seen great success in communities who have embraced our model. When a village was opened in the northern state of Himachal, travellers generated employment for 13 people, revived two local crafts, helped build a library and established an Innovation center in the local school. In our first three years, we opened 60 model villages across the country but we knew we could do more – which is why we took part in the Booking Booster program.

The Booking Booster proved to be highly instrumental in catalysing the progress of our organization. The program boosted our reputation and led us to national and international recognition, with NotOnMap receiving five awards in just six months. The Booking Booster truly is the perfect platform for companies hoping to create a wider social impact. We hope to create at least one liveable place to stay in every non-developed village in India within the next ten years and with the help of the Booking Booster, we just might.

Kumar Anubhav, NotOnMap Founder.

The program helped us identify key areas for improvement, with practical advice and insight from eminent speakers, while the grant allowed us to invest in our people and infrastructure. Within six months, we managed to extend our initiative to 120 culturally rich communities across 15 states, which is a huge achievement.

We hope to create at least one liveable place to stay in every non-developed village in India within the next ten years and with the help of the Booking Booster, we just might.

Kumar Anubhav, NotOnMap Founder.

### Booking Booster - NotOnMap

- **180 new destinations** created
- **135 new Jobs** created
- **78 cultural practices** supported & preserved
- **23 libraries opened** in villages
Booking Cares Fund

The Booking Cares Fund champions non-profit sustainable travel projects which present new and unexpected solutions to reimagine the industry. With the Booking Cares Fund, we support projects that strengthen local communities, preserve and promote local culture, help disperse tourism and protect natural resources. In 2019, Booking Cares Fund provided nearly €1.3 million to support projects in the sustainable travel space and is now part of the Booking Booster to further support sustainable tourism initiatives.

2019 Booking Cares Fund Recipients

The third edition of the Booking Cares Fund supported and funded startups, social enterprises and nonprofits around the globe that are building solutions to sustainable travel challenges.

› Mahouts Elephants Foundation
› Costa Rica Accessible Network
› The Khwela Youth Tourism
› The Nature Conservancy
› Innovation Lighthouse
› Reflow

Case study I
Mahouts Elephant Foundation

Case study II
The Nature Conservancy
When we saw the poor living conditions of mahouts – people who work with and tend to elephants – in Thailand, we knew we had to act. So we took it upon ourselves to find a new way for indigenous mahouts to earn an income – one that rewarded sustainable practices and environmental stewardship. The Mahouts Elephant Foundation was born. Our mission is to protect the communities left behind by rapid development, as well as their elephants and the beautiful forests they call home.

We do this by partnering with communities untouched by commercialized agricultural development to create a sustainable, ethical model for tourism that facilitates the return of captive elephants to protected forest habitats. We made great progress but without funding, we were struggling to make an impact in the communities who needed us most. The Booking Cares Fund changed all that.

Every aspect of being involved in the Booking experience has been exciting and supportive. From the very first interaction, we felt looked after and following our time in Amsterdam with the team, it was clear that we were part of something very special – a global family of support, sharing the same vision for a future of sustainable and ethical travel. For us, the funding came at a pivotal point for the work of the foundation. Our dreams and visions can now become a reality.

We’re currently in the process of constructing a multi-purpose community center where locals can take part in educational programs and skills training. The center is also home to an important research program, documenting the biodiversity of this threatened forest landscape, and has already generated an incredible income from tourism.

We need to say a special thank you to our incredible mentor Alessandro who believed in us and pushed us to be our best. We are deeply grateful to Booking.com and our whole team for believing in our mission to support captive Asian elephants and their mahouts, as well as the communities and forests vital to our planet. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Sarah Blaine Mahouts Elephant Foundation CEO and Co-Founder
Coral reefs are declining at an alarming rate. Since the 1970s, 60 percent of reefs in the Caribbean have been lost. If this degradation continues, it will have a major impact on nations who depend on tourism to sustain their economies. Threats to coral reefs are a challenge we need to address with innovative, science-based solutions so that the communities and livelihoods that depend on these vital ecosystems can continue to do so. That is where we come in.

Our mission at The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is to preserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. We work in 17 Caribbean countries and territories developing scalable solutions that improve reef health and maximize the benefits reefs bring to people and the planet. We are committed to securing lasting, meaningful outcomes by protecting our ocean and coasts, safeguarding against the impacts of climate change, and conserving and restoring coral reefs.

The only way to meaningfully rebuild our reefs is to scale up the growing and planting of new corals. There are volunteer programs across the Caribbean but they simply do not have the scale or scope to have the necessary level of impact. What we need are marketable experiences that build on the growing push for socially and environmentally responsible tourism. We decided to apply for the Booking Cares Fund to help us finance our first marketing experience.

We chose to spend our grant on three key areas: developing our online portal to monitor restoration activities, testing potential restoration activities, and launching The REEFhabilitation Experience; a critical part of our holistic Coral Strategy. The Booking Cares Fund program is also an important learning experience for us, offering insight on how to design a multi-stakeholder project – and a scalable final product – specifically geared toward the sustainable tourism sector.

The REEFhabilitation Experience addresses the growing need for environmentally responsible tourism and builds on the strong interest of travelers to help protect nature in the beautiful places they visit. It provides tourists with an opportunity to become agents of positive change in the fight to save coral reefs in the Caribbean, and around the world.

Ximena Escovar-Fadul, Project Manager at The Nature Conservancy.

1,700 coral reef fragments outplanted through tourism-based restoration

50 travellers engaged in the REEFhabilitation Experience contributing to coral restoration

2 tourism providers engaged and trained to deliver the REEFhabilitation experience
Natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes, fires or earthquakes have a truly devastating effect on a community and a destination. That’s why we support several initiatives that offer help to these communities after a natural disaster occurs. Once an emergency response campaign has been activated, employees can contribute to a fundraiser on our internal volunteering platform. In 2019, employees donated to seven campaigns – with Booking.com matching those contributions – to bring the total amount donated to €62,050. All donations are sent to immediate relief organizations such as the Red Cross.
For years, teams across the business have taken sustainability into consideration in their own tasks, but we had not aligned these efforts to a single strategy or collective goals. So in 2019, we took the first steps to defining our internal sustainability program. We began by gathering data on our carbon footprint.

Through this process, we brought together teams from facilities, data centres, business travel and more to make collective steps towards our sustainability goals. Once we had the data, we could set targets and at the end of 2019, we set the target of becoming carbon neutral in our operations in 2020. Alongside this goal, we began making plans to eliminate all single-use plastic from our offices around the world.

When it comes to sustainability, it takes a first step to reduce your footprint. That’s what we did in 2019. We took our first steps. They will be followed by many more in 2020 and beyond. This includes reducing the emissions of our offices and data centres by combining efficiency initiatives with renewable energy procurement; finding creative solutions to reduce our business travel emissions, and utilising credible carbon offsets for all the rest.

We know that we can not ask our partners and customers to make changes to their behavior for the sake of sustainability when we are not willing to make changes to our own. So we ask everyone to help us lead the way, be open to changing their behaviour and remembering their own footprint whenever they come to work.
Industry Collaboration

We want to make sustainable travel the way to experience the world – but we know this is not something we can do alone. If we want to make real, lasting change, we need to work with both our partners and the wider industry. That’s why we co-founded Travalyst, alongside Skyscanner, Tripadvisor, Trip.com and Visa. Travalyst is a global initiative led by the Duke of Sussex that is changing the impact of travel, for good. As Travalyst members, we believe we have a shared responsibility to our planet and each other. By coming together as a catalyst for change, we can shape the future of travel – for everyone.

As part of this collaboration, we are developing sustainability frameworks that will act as a guide for highlighting sustainable practices throughout the travel and tourism industry, from accommodations to airlines. These frameworks will make it easier for customers to identify travel options that are kinder to local communities, wildlife and the environment. But these frameworks are just the beginning. We are making it a priority to secure a positive future for generations to come. The number of people travelling internationally has doubled since 2000, and is set to increase to 1.8 billion people by 2030. More people travelling means more impact on the environment – but also more opportunities to do good with every trip we take.

“Travel has an unparalleled power to open minds to new experiences and cultures, creating a profound appreciation for what our world has to offer. As tourism inevitably grows, it is critical to accelerate the adoption of sustainable practices worldwide; balancing this growth with the needs of the environment and local populations. Bringing companies, consumers and communities together is our chance to protect destinations and ecosystems for the future.”

Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex
Sustainability for Accommodations

Not only is sustainability an increasing focus for our business, but our customers and partners as well. Research found that 70 percent of travellers would be more likely to book a property if it was eco-friendly, while 82 percent of partners would like to work with us to become more sustainable. But we also understand that sustainability can be confusing. Some people believe it to be more expensive or less readily available, which is not always the case. While others aren’t even sure what ‘sustainable tourism’ actually is. At Booking.com, we follow the UNWTO definition: “Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities”.

We do want to make it simpler for them to make sustainable choices. We believe the best way to do that is by leveraging the relationship we have with our partners to highlight their current sustainability efforts and inspire them to implement sustainable practices. As a leading online travel marketplace, we have a unique opportunity to bring supply and demand together. That’s why we have partnered with Travalyst and why we’re exploring ways of measuring sustainable practices that have the most impact and making sure they can be applied to all types of accommodation. As a first step, we have started collecting information on sustainability practices from partners that can be potentially validated by guests. We’re also working together with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) to collect information about which accommodations have been independently certified.

We know this is just the start and there is much more to do, but as we identify the supply and find ways to increase it, we will achieve our goal of making it easier for consumers to make sustainable choices.
Animal Welfare

With Booking opening an attraction track in 2017, it was quickly clear we needed to decide how we would act with regards to attractions who use animals for entertainment. The attractions team worked together with World Animal Protection to establish our first-ever animal welfare guidelines, which outlined the contracting process for this department. We then began implementing these guidelines with not only our attraction partners but accommodations as well. To do this successfully, we had to create both a business impact assessment and a business integrity process, so we could best work with partners identified as potentially breaching the guidelines. We also implemented changes to help make sure activities, such as swimming with dolphins or riding elephants, are not promoted on our products.

"With the launch of its animal welfare guidelines, Booking.com has made a crucial move at a critical time for wildlife, showing how a company like yours can assist in protecting wild animals, whilst listening to your customers who more and more want to engage in responsible wildlife experiences."

Julie Middelkoop, Global Campaign Lead - Wildlife, Not Entertainers at World Animal Protection.
For the past five years, we have been testing different ways to support the travel ecosystem and engage employees on the topic. This began with our Booking Cares volunteer programme, expanded with the Booking Booster and, through Travalyst, has evolved into a wider industry collaboration. But our focus is not only external. We’re looking at our own footprint. In 2020 and beyond, we will need the help of all our employees to do this, whether that’s as simple as reusing a mug, conducting meetings remotely or innovating our product.

We will also need the help of all our partners, from major chains to single apartments, to provide customers with the options to travel more sustainably. And finally, we will need our customers to select those sustainable options, to try them, review them and share them. Sustainability is not a destination, it is a journey. And it is one we must all take together, because it is perhaps the most important journey we will ever take.