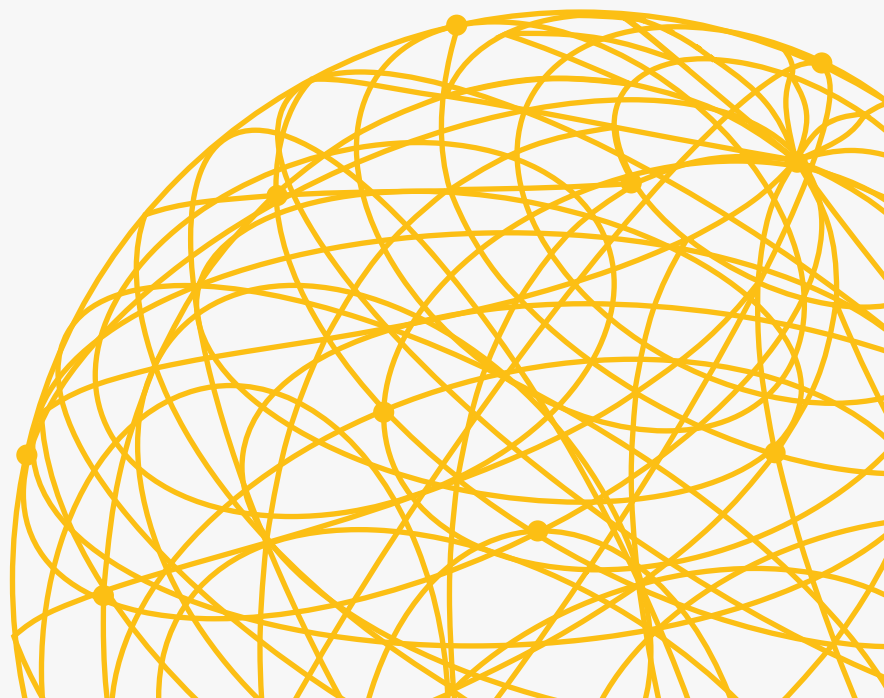




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# Accelerating sustainable tourism: Areas for public-private collaboration



## Executive summary

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# Executive summary

In *Accelerating sustainable tourism: Areas for public-private collaboration*, we examine the definition and measurement of sustainable travel and tourism (T&T), discuss barriers, and explore the ways that the public and private sectors can shape consumer behavior to accelerate sustainability in the industry. The survey results presented in this paper focus on two verticals, transportation and attractions, and find that many consumers express a willingness to adjust their behavior to achieve sustainable outcomes. While the results are promising, there is a well-known “say-do” gap in travelers’ stated preferences versus their actual consumption patterns. Our research finds that information barriers such as a lack of accessible or credible information, where sources are available but not trusted, are a notable contributor to the say-do gap.

The T&T industry is a vital economic enabler for many countries and local communities, supporting an estimated 10 percent of global gross domestic product (GDP), seven percent of global exports, and roughly one in 10 jobs worldwide (World Bank, 2023). The industry is especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, but it is also a major contributor to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and other environmental and social challenges.

Businesses across the T&T value chain are actively responding to requirements and expectations of sustainability performance and transparency. In addition, consumer interest in sustainable T&T is growing. But the continued growth of T&T also creates a core tension between myriad economic and social benefits that tourism delivers for many countries and communities and the negative environmental externalities it causes. While the carbon-intensive nature of T&T is a major concern, especially regarding transportation, this is not the only challenge. In many locations, the T&T sector is heavily dependent on the natural environment due to visitors’ behavior and their overcrowding of local attractions, which in turn puts pressure on ecosystems and biodiversity and can negatively affect destination communities.

As a global payments network, Visa facilitates payments across T&T value chains, giving us a unique perspective on travelers’ consumption choices and patterns, which contribute significantly to the overall environmental footprint of the T&T sector. To better understand these choices and the attitudes that drive them, the Visa Economic Empowerment Institute (VEEI) partnered with Oxford Economics to survey more than 1,600 consumers across five countries and conduct interviews with subject matter experts. Our survey respondents indicated that the most common barriers to becoming a more sustainable traveler—after cost (62 percent)—were a lack of information (41 percent) and a lack of credibility of available information (36 percent).

Based on our findings, we make several recommendations for policymakers seeking to encourage more sustainable outcomes and consumption options, both in the context of supporting the net-zero transition and protecting local ecosystems and resources. As policymakers implement these measures, we encourage them to collaborate closely with private sector players, who can provide innovative technology and high-quality data to develop solutions and inform decision-making. We identify the following areas for strong public-private collaboration:

- Invest in robust, sustainable mobility infrastructure where it does not already exist.
- Ensure public transit systems are accessible and inclusive, especially for out-of-town visitors.
- Help attractions and destination management organizations manage over-tourism.
- Take steps to develop a consistent framework for measuring trends in sustainability.
- Overcome informational barriers to help close the say-do gap.

Together, these measures can support travelers who are interested in making more sustainable travel choices and provide behavioral nudges to facilitate more sustainable choices for travelers. Achieving these goals requires close collaboration between the public and private sectors, leveraging both innovative technology and policy-based solutions. Many key decisions on strategies for sustainability and resilience rely on policymakers at all levels of government. But policymakers are not alone in this journey. The private sector has much to offer and we welcome continued dialogue and collaboration to help develop the future of sustainable travel and tourism.



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VEEI's overarching mission is to promote public policies that empower individuals, small businesses, and economies. It produces research and insights that inform long-term policy within the global payments ecosystem. Visa established VEEI as the next step in its ongoing work to remove barriers to economic empowerment and to create more inclusive, equitable economic opportunities for everyone, everywhere.

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