Circular Innovation in Island Tourism: Advancing Climate Action

COP31 Side-event

Date & time	**19 November 2026,** from **02-00** to **03.00 pm** (local time)
Venue	Mediterranean Pavilion (UfM), COP 31 Blue Zone, Pavilion D-400, Antalya, Türkiye
Organiser	Greening the Islands Foundation, UN Tourism
Format	In-person 1-hour session: Keynote speech and panel discussion
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Event Summary

Tourism represents the major economic driver for many island and Mediterranean territories, generating vital employment, supporting local businesses, and driving regional development. However, increasing tourist arrivals can place considerable pressure on fragile ecosystems, municipal infrastructure, and coastal resources. These pressures are compounded by climate change, which increasingly threatens coastal ecosystems, water resources, infrastructure and community wellbeing.

Because islands operate under particular geographic and resource constraints – limited land area, waste management capacity and high transport costs – they experience these pressures in an intensified form. These challenges have also encouraged the development of innovative circular strategies and solutions.

Building on the GTI Academy webinar series, EU projects and regional exchanges, and the initiatives of the One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme, this COP31 side event will explore how circular strategies and solutions developed in island destinations can contribute to climate action and resource efficiency, while offering lessons for other coastal destinations.

The discussion will consider how circular approaches can reduce tourism-related emissions, improve resource efficiency, and create opportunities for local economies. It will also examine the enabling conditions needed to replicate successful approaches, including supportive policies, partnerships and access to finance.

In particular, the session will explore advancing practical circular approaches to tourism in island destinations, including:

- **Island-tested circular models:** Demonstrating how practical circular economy approaches on islands, including waste prevention, reuse, and resource recovery can reduce dependence on off-island disposal and support more sustainable tourism operations.
- **Evidence-based data and digital tools:** Leveraging IoT, AI, sustainability indicators and other data-driven tools to identify waste patterns, improve resource management and inform decision-making.
- **Decentralised circular innovation:** Showcasing locally developed and collaborative solutions that can transform tourism-related waste into resources, support decentralised processing and create opportunities for local businesses and circular value chains.
- **Multi-level governance and knowledge sharing:** Explore how tourism observatories, policy guidance, research and regional cooperation can support the exchange and replication of successful circular approaches across island destinations.

Background and Alignment with COP31 Priorities

Hosted at the Mediterranean Pavilion, this side event directly builds upon ongoing collaboration between the Greening the Islands (GTI) Foundation, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), and regional partners under the Antalya MED Climate Dialogue. Organized in collaboration with UN Tourism, the event will also draw on international experience and initiatives advancing climate action and circular economy approaches in tourism, developed jointly with UNEP. The session will connect these experiences with relevant policy frameworks, including the Barcelona Convention, UNEP/MAP, the EU Strategy for Islands, and the EU Ocean Pact.

By highlighting the experience of island destinations in developing innovative and practical solutions, this event reinforces joint commitments between GTI and UfM to accelerate knowledge sharing and the transfer of successful approaches across the

Euro-Mediterranean region and beyond, with potential for replication in other island and coastal destinations.

The side event also contributes to several priorities of the COP31 Presidency's Action Agenda, particularly:

- **Zero Waste and Circular Economy**: Promoting waste prevention, reuse, resource efficiency and circular business models in tourism, including plastics circularity, food waste reduction and the prevention of marine pollution.
- **Oceans and Seas:** Promoting circular approaches that reduce pollution and pressures on marine and coastal ecosystems, while supporting sustainable tourism in island destinations.
- **Clean Energy Transition and Electrification:** Exploring opportunities to improve energy efficiency and reduce emissions in island tourism operations. Across these priorities, the discussion will also examine how partnerships, innovation and access to finance can support the replication of successful island solutions.

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OBJECTIVES

- **Showcase island experiences in circular tourism and climate action:** Demonstrate how circular tourism strategies developed in response to island-specific challenges can contribute to resource efficiency, emissions reduction and environmental sustainability, while offering lessons for other island and coastal destinations.
- **Promote monitoring and knowledge transfer for regional policy:** Highlight how digital innovation and reliable environmental data enable evidence-based decision-making, waste prevention and more efficient resource management across Mediterranean destinations.
- **Strengthen regional governance:** Disseminate actionable guidelines from EU projects and multi-stakeholder recommendations, encouraging the integration of circular economy approaches into tourism policies and destination planning.
- **Catalyse replicable action:** Identify opportunities to replicate and scale successful circular tourism solutions through cooperation among destinations, businesses, policymakers and other relevant partners.

AGENDA & SPEAKERS

Segment	Duration	Speakers
Welcome remarks	5 min	• **Ines Duarte** – Project Manager – Climate Finance – Stability and Resilience Division, Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)
Introduction and context setting	5 min	• **Virginia Fernández-Trapa -** Programme Coordinator, Climate Action and Circularity, UN Tourism
Keynote speech (EU projects: outcomes and synergies for island sustainability)	5 min	• **Gianni Chianetta**, Chair GTI Foundation
Multi-stakeholder panel discussion	40 min	Moderator: **Gianni Chianetta**, Chair GTI Foundation Panellists: • **Hon. Dr. Joyelle Clarke**, Minister of Sustainable Development, Environment and Climate Action and Constituency Empowerment, St. Kitts and Nevis • **Petros Varelidis,** Secretary General for Natural Environment and Waters, Ministry of Environment and Energy, Greece • **Adam Terando,** Climate Action Director, Iberostar Hotels & Resorts • **Vincent Ernoux**, Coordinator of the Branch Office for the Western Mediterranean for the Interreg NEXT MED Programme
Closing remarks	5 min	• **Gianni Chianetta**, Chair GTI Foundation