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**Travel Industry Leaders Unite to Drive Sustainable Transformation at  
Tourism Cares' Meaningful Travel Summit in Norway; Next Stop: Panama!**

Tourism Cares successfully wrapped up its first European Meaningful Travel Summit on 23 April in partnership with Innovation Norway and The United States Tour Operators Association (USTOA), bringing significant commitments from industry leaders and influencers, all determined to lead the way on climate action and sustainable tourism.

The annual Global Meaningful Travel Summit was held this year in the Norwegian Arctic, an environmentally fragile region that is threatened by climate change. The objective was to encourage mutual learning among attendees and to secure pledges to integrate sustainability more deeply into their businesses through immersive exchanges with local communities.

Numerous destinations worldwide, including the Norwegian Arctic, confront the task of reconciling the negative effects of tourism with the economic benefits derived from their natural attractions. The complexity of this challenge was acknowledged during the summit, with conversations centred on discovering methods to address the carbon problem while permitting tourists to continue to explore the world. All attendees at the summit pledged to work closely with local communities to integrate sustainable practices into their operations to collaboratively reduce the harmful effects of climate emissions.

Greg Takehara, CEO of Tourism Cares said: *"At this year's Meaningful Travel Summit we noticed a clear shift in thinking among travel and tourism executives and decision-makers attending*

*the conference. Rather than focusing on individual actions to tackle environmental issues and competing against each other, everyone showed a willingness to collaborate and engage in collective action. There was also a shift in recognizing that sustainability should be built into core business KPIs and be balanced with a human approach, rather than just being a marketing tool."*

Leaders in the tourism and travel industry made Action Commitments to promote a more balanced and sustainable approach to tourism. These commitments included reducing short-haul trips due to their environmental repercussions, adopting comprehensive measurement tools to accurately assess their operations' environmental and social impact, and sharing information with travellers to empower them as agents of change. By taking these steps, the industry aims to promote a more responsible and sustainable approach to tourism that benefits both travellers and local communities.

The Summit highlighted two additional obstacles that render sustainable tourism a more intricate issue. Firstly, there is a requirement for more businesses to acquire certification which hinder many small businesses that have limited funds, and there is no universal accreditation authority for activities. Secondly, a deficiency of education and effective sustainable practices in the tourism industry leads to a communication gap, amplifying the challenge.

Tourism Cares also unveiled its plans for a newly designed "Meaningful Travel Map," due to launch this summer. The Map is a product development tool that links global tour operators and travel advisors to community partners in destinations around the world. The Map features social enterprises, community organizations, and non-profits benefiting their local community and environments, creating market connections for historically excluded individuals and organisations to work with the travel and tourism industry.

After the success of this year's Summit, Tourism Cares also announced the location of its next Summit, Panama, which will be held March 18 -22, 2024. Panama was chosen because of the strong commitment by its tourism sector to prioritize sustainable livelihoods through community tourism initiatives. The Innovative Community Tourism Experiences contest, launched by the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) and the Panama Tourism Authority, is a result of this commitment. The objective of this project is to advance sustainable tourism in Panama and create positive outcomes for local communities. As part of the contest's judging panel, Tourism Cares CEO, Greg Takehara, as well as Tourism Cares Board Member and CEO of the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA), Shannon Stowell, will assess innovative proposals submitted by local community operators that showcase the country's natural and cultural heritage while also enhancing the well-being of its residents.

Greg Takehara said: *"At Tourism Cares we are incredibly proud of delivering another successful Meaningful Travel Summit in Norway. For nearly 20 years we've been bringing together key influencers across the travel and tourism industry. We are more committed than ever to advancing the positive social and environmental impact of our industry by promoting sustainability. This ensures that future generations can continue to explore the world's wonders. We are looking forward to seeing what positive steps will be taken over the next year from companies at the Summit and look forward to meeting in Panama in 2024 to continue advancing this important work for the industry."*

During the announcement for next year's Summit in Panama, its Minister of Tourism, Ivan Eskildsen, expressed that *"it is an honor to be a part of this collective drive for the sustainable transformation of our industry. We are very excited to host next year's Summit in Panama, building upon the work of these world tourism leaders convened by Tourism Cares. It will be a great opportunity to contribute to this significant global discussion, with the work we have been implementing with the Panama Sustainable Tourism Model, focused on empowering local communities, so they can preserve and regenerate their natural and cultural heritage."*

Tourism Cares' Summit in Panama will precede ATTA's Adventure Travel World Summit scheduled for the fall of 2024. The aim is to build on these two events to amplify and integrate community-based tourism businesses into a more sustainable tourism supply chain.

For more information about Tourism Cares and its Meaningful Travel Summit, please visit their website, and to express interest in supporting *Tourism Cares with Panama*, visit [www.tourismcares.org/panama-summit](http://www.tourismcares.org/panama-summit)