

# BUILDING RESILIENCE: CITY-HOTEL COLLABORATIONS FOR FUTURE-PROOF DESTINATIONS



## Prefaces

‘The choices we make in the hospitality industry have repercussions on all areas of the economy. This capacity to influence must be harnessed to bring about systemic change, which can only happen if we work closely with all stakeholders, starting with municipalities and their mayors. Cities, faced with the huge challenges of climate change resilience - heatwaves, floods, etc. – stand as natural allies in our efforts to future-proof our model. I am convinced that by stimulating collaboration between cities and tourism actors to achieve our shared sustainability goals, we can contribute to the resilience and attractiveness of destinations, to the benefit of residents and visitors alike. This report is a decisive first step towards this collaboration between mayors and the hospitality industry. I am dedicated to championing initiatives that bolster urban resilience and I am excited to turn this theory into action to make systemic change happen.’

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**Brune Poirson**  
Chief Sustainability  
Officer, Accor

‘At C40 Cities, I have witnessed firsthand the power of Mayors to drive change and work together to implement science-based policies, and inspire global action. But fostering real partnerships to create thriving green cities requires more than that - allying city governments’ ability to create and shape markets to the businesses whose innovation can transform economies. The hospitality sector, with its vast footprint and influence, represents a crucial ally in addressing the climate crisis. Hotels are not only vital economic engines for cities but also significant contributors to carbon emissions and resource consumption. This report explores the untapped potential for collaboration between city governments and the hotel industry, presenting key opportunity areas for joint action to mitigate emissions and adapt to climate impacts. From reducing energy consumption and waste generation to promoting sustainable transportation and enhancing resilience, there are many opportunities for mutual benefit. By leveraging each other’s expertise, resources, and networks, cities and the hospitality sector can accelerate climate action and foster inclusive economic development, creating good green jobs, and enhancing the quality of life for residents and visitors alike.’



**Mark Watts**  
Executive Director,  
C40

## About this White Paper

The report team is deeply grateful to their partners in creating this strategic outline for collaboration between cities and tourism. This White Paper represents a joint effort initiated by Systemiq and C40, built on Accor's expertise.

Contributors and their respective organisations do not necessarily endorse all findings or recommendations of the report. The authors would like to thank Gina Campbell for editing the report and Achmad Nurjaman Jatnika for designing and producing the report. All remaining errors and omissions are the responsibility of the authors.

## Authors:

The team that developed this White Paper comprised: Jeremy Oppenheim, Sophie Herrmann, Zöe Fitzgerald, Veerle Haagh, Marlene Kick, Anya Trivedi and Mitch Groves.

## About C40:

C40 is a network of nearly 100 mayors of the world's leading cities working to deliver the urgent action needed right now to confront the climate crisis and create a future where everyone, everywhere, can thrive. Mayors of C40 cities are committed to using a science-based and people-focused approach to help the world limit global heating to 1.5°C and build healthy, equitable and resilient communities. We work alongside a broad coalition of representatives from labour, business, the youth climate movement and civil society to support mayors to halve emissions by 2030 and help phase out fossil use while increasing urban climate resilience and equity.

The current co-chairs of C40 are Mayor Sadiq Khan of London, United Kingdom, and Mayor Yvonne Aki-Sawyer of Freetown, Sierra Leone; three-term Mayor of New York City Michael R. Bloomberg serves as President of the Board. C40's work is made possible by our three strategic funders: Bloomberg Philanthropies, Children's Investment Fund Foundation and Realdania.

To learn more about the work of C40 and our cities, please visit our website or follow us on X, Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn.

## About Systemiq:

Systemiq, the system-change company, was founded in 2016 to drive the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement, by transforming markets and business models in five key systems: nature and food, materials and circularity, energy, urban areas, and sustainable finance. A certified B Corp, Systemiq combines strategic advisory with high-impact, on-the-ground work, and partners with business, finance, policy-makers and civil society to deliver system change. Systemiq has offices in Brazil, France, Germany, Indonesia, the Netherlands and the UK.



## 1. Introduction

**Tourism<sup>1</sup> is vital to cities.** One of the fastest-growing sectors in urban economies, it is estimated to create 126 million net new jobs by 2032 globally, both in and outside of cities.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, tourism stimulates infrastructure development and economic growth. For those reasons, many mayors would like to see the tourist sector in their cities flourish and expand.<sup>3</sup>

**But tomorrow's urban tourism must be different from today's.** Both city governments and the tourism industry have largely focused on driving up visitor numbers and spending. The resulting seasonal waves of urban tourists in several host cities now pose serious social and environmental concerns, such as housing shortages and congestion, which create more challenges for city mayors. C40 mayors are working to halve their collective emissions by 2030, yet today's urban tourism is still carbon-intensive. The very success of today's low-cost, high-volume tourism is not compatible with the necessary degree of mitigation and adaptation action required to achieve collective targets.

<sup>1</sup> What counts as tourism? The full tourism value chain would encompass activities and processes involved in the development, marketing, and delivery of tourism products and services. From promotion and trip-planning services, transport, accommodations, entertainment and attractions, and products consumed by visitors as well as destination management.

<sup>2</sup> WTTC (2022), *Cities Economic Impact 2022*.

<sup>3</sup> WTTC (2022), *Travel & Tourism Economic Impact Report*.



**City mayors and tourist businesses, particularly hotels, could be allies in the fight against climate change.** Both urgently need to keep host cities attractive to residents and visitors while building their resilience to the effects of climate change. That gives both a common interest in crafting new, sustainable models of tourism that bolster resilience, making cities more attractive. Growing media attention on the environmental and climate downsides of today's urban tourism adds pressure on both sides for action now. Collaboration between cities and hotels offers a route to the rapid, creative solutions that both need.<sup>4</sup>

**This paper shows why and how public-private collaborations between cities and hotels can be used to test and scale solutions to their intersecting challenges.** Tourism cuts across many city systems, notably transport, accommodation, food and water. Working with their tourism industry partners, city leaders can shape a competitive landscape for urban tourism in which sustainable tourism becomes the new normal, with hotels leading to ambitious place-based climate action.



## 2. Cities and the hotel industry face intersecting climate and resilience challenges, making them natural allies in finding joint solutions

**Cities urgently need to mitigate climate change and adapt to its effects at the same time.** Cities produce ~75% of global emissions, making their swift decarbonisation vital in the global effort to avoid worst-case warming scenarios.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, cities are highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, making adaptation a simultaneous priority for mayors. Flooding and drought could cost the world's major cities \$194 Bn a year by 2050,<sup>6</sup> and the number of cities experiencing extreme heat is expected to almost triple by 2030.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Forbes (2023), [How Business Ecosystems can Drive Sustainable Tourism](#).

<sup>5</sup> UNEP (2024), [Cities and climate change](#).

<sup>6</sup> C40 (2022), [Water Safe Cities](#).

<sup>7</sup> FT (2024), [The worlds cities are not ready for climate change](#).

**Cities are organising themselves and action is emerging.** Through C40, almost 100 cities worldwide have now formally committed to reducing their emissions in line with limiting global warming to 1.5°C. In many cities, the public sector may only account for 4-9% of the city's emissions.<sup>8</sup> Thus, cities seeking to reduce their emissions will need to find willing business partners. Similarly, cities seeking to implement adaptation and resilience measures need partnerships to achieve these at scale.

**Within the tourism industry, the hotel sector is a natural partner for cities to work with.** Hotels are already suffering the consequences of intensifying global warming in urban destinations. Widespread media coverage of the 2023 heatwaves in Europe highlighted tourists suffering heat stroke and collapsing in popular destinations like Athens and Rome. As a result, tourists are increasingly avoiding hotter destinations in summer: by October 2023, the number of European tourists citing extreme weather as their main concern when choosing a destination had increased to 14% from 7% earlier in the year.<sup>9</sup> This trend gives hotels a strong motive for making cities more resilient.

**The hotel sector is also at risk from the global transition to net zero, now gathering speed.** So far, its response has lagged other sectors. More than 92% of global GDP is now covered by net-zero targets.<sup>10</sup> Hotels that are not decarbonising at the pace required, face mounting reputational, policy and financial risks, including the risk of having to close non-compliant assets. These risks add to hotels' incentive to help solve the technical and commercial challenges of the transition and share its benefits. For instance, hotels may benefit from reduced energy costs if they enter into shared power purchase agreements for renewable energy.

**But hotels and cities are not yet working together at scale on climate and resilience goals, despite the benefits they stand to share. So far, cities have largely left tourism out of their climate action planning.** This may be because the two parties have little experience of dialogue. They may also lack a shared vision of the benefits their collaboration on net zero and climate resilience goals could achieve. Notable benefits could include faster progress on their climate action plans for cities, a renewed licence to operate and lower transition risks for hotels, and more green jobs for city residents. Most significantly, hotel-city collaborations could make destination cities both more attractive and more resilient as their tourist sectors grow.

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<sup>8</sup> CDP (2019), *City-Business Climate Alliance Guide*.

<sup>9</sup> European Travel Commission (2023), *Financial pressures shape Europeans' travel plans in late 2023 and early 2024*.

<sup>10</sup> Net-Zero Tracker (2024), *Data Explorer*.





### **3. C40 mayors and hotels could join forces in 8 opportunity areas to make destination cities more attractive and resilient**

City-hotel collaborations can focus on eight areas where the current impact of hotels and tourists on cities is significantly at odds with city climate and resilience goals (see Exhibit 1). Each impact area serves as a potential collaboration opportunity, offering mutual benefits to cities, hotels, and resident communities. The scale of impact, such as carbon emissions from tourists' mobility or the hotel sector's contribution to total food waste, reflects the collaborative opportunity in addressing these issues together. It's important to note that the examples in Exhibit 1 are illustrative due to the limited availability of detailed city-level data on tourism's negative impacts. Therefore, more robust data collection will be a key step for effective planning and problem-solving.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> This measure would not include emissions from tourist air travel, which contributes 20% of the sector's total emissions. This impact, and tourism's other negative impacts on the climate and environment beyond cities, are outside the scope of this paper.

## Exhibit 1: Illustrative examples of where tourism and cities interact

### Cross-cutting

1

Lack of hotel progress on sustainability journey preventing cities to achieve their climate plans



Source: Systemiq

### Communities & culture

2

Only 10% of jobs in tourism can be considered green jobs



Source: C40

### Mobility

3

Tourism contributes ~10% of global emissions, mainly from aviation and road transport



Source: Systemiq

### Accommodation

4

Hotels use more energy than offices, retail, multifamily housing, and industrial manufacturing



Source: Urban Land Institute

5

### Waste

Hotels are a **major contributor to the single use** plastics problem



Source: UNEP

6

### Food

1 in 6 meals in hospitality is being wasted



Source: Dhir et al.

7

### Public spaces

Sharing **limited space** between residents and tourists may reduce residents' quality of life and provoke **community opposition**



Source: Various

8

### Water

In some cities, tourism uses over **8x more water per person** on average than the local population



Source: Sustainable Hospitality Alliance



**City-hotel collaborations could help to identify and implement practical solutions in each opportunity area.** For instance, hotels can work with cities to champion low-carbon mobility options by playing a more active role in providing low-carbon transportation, such as walkways, bicycles, public transport links and electric vehicles, to and from their sites. To scale renewable energy efficiency, they could promote group purchasing of solar panels for urban rooftops. To enhance resilience, hotels and cities can address water inequality and support initiatives for watershed protection and green spaces. Collaborative efforts in food sustainability include developing local supply chains and promoting low-carbon options in hotels and restaurants. These initiatives can also generate local green jobs (see Exhibit 3 in the appendix for detailed levers).

**C40 has identified five models of Public-Private Collaboration (PPC)<sup>12</sup> that cities and hotels can deploy to create shared value,** with benefits that extend across hotel value chains and beyond them, to the city as a whole. The models can involve both parties in applying a range of levers for action including urban development plans and financial risk-sharing. Each model can be tailored to the unique profile and needs of individual cities (see Exhibit 2).
















<sup>12</sup> C40 Public-Private Collaboration Models. C40 (2023), [Public-Private Collaboration to accelerate Sustainable Urban Development: A Guide for Global South Cities](#):

1. **Non-commercial convening:** Cities bring public and private stakeholders together through networks and alliances, non-profit entities with private and public governance, and membership-based organisations or associations, with a focus on shared objectives rather than profit.
2. **Enabling Innovation:** Cities encourage rapid innovation in the private sector by, for example, hosting innovation competitions or incubator programmes.
3. **Market-Shaping Policy and Regulation:** Cities implement regulation to champion urban sustainability priorities and nurture sustainable markets. They set standards and policies through collaborative engagement with the private sector.
4. **Public-Private Partnerships (PPP):** Cities and the private sector establish formal contractual partnerships for the implementation of green economy projects or services. The roles of each partner may vary, from design to implementation. The private actor often gains the right to utilize public assets and assumes responsibilities for operation, maintenance, and/or investment in the asset.
5. **Business-Focused International Partnerships:** Cities broker international partnerships that enable public-private collaboration on city climate action projects.

## Exhibit 2: Five models of public-private collaboration for hotels and cities to deploy<sup>13</sup>



8 Opportunity Areas		 Cross cutting	 Communities and culture	 Mobility	 Accommodation	 Waste	 Food	 Public spaces	 Water
5 Models of Public Private Collaboration	 Non-commercial convening	<p><b>The Visit Valencia Foundation</b>, backed by city officials such as the chamber of commerce and the local tourist board, convenes 100+ tourism companies for strategic management and promotion of the sector. Recently adopting an ‘ecosystem approach,’ they aim to better preserve local culture and the environment. Their multi-actor “Sustainable Tourism Task Group” focuses on seven programmes, including gastronomy and cultural tourism. Notably, the Mitomed project seeks to improve sustainable maritime tourism in the Mediterranean through data collection, education, knowledge sharing, and developing a replicable integrated management model for stakeholders.</p>							
	 Enabling innovation				<p>The <b>E+ Mobility Accelerator Programme</b>, led by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, supports 10 innovative start-ups annually. The initiative addresses urban transport challenges. In 2023 solutions included; DeepVOLT for AI-powered EV charging investments in cities and Wikimove for analysing urban mobility trends and supporting sustainable urban planning, from fleet routes, to better public transport.</p>				
	 Market-shaping policy and regulation	<p>Greece has introduced <b>the Climate Crisis Resilience Tax</b>, effective from January 1, 2024, to financially prepare for and respond to future natural disasters, especially considering the impact of wildfires and floods in the previous summer. The tax amount varies based on hotel category and time of the year, replacing the previous tourist tax. The funds generated, will boost the countries special reserves from €300 million to €600 million and be allocated to restore tourism infrastructure in affected areas, create a disaster reserve, and enhance climate resilience to mitigate future crises.</p>							
	 Public-private partnerships	<p>The <b>Upper Tana-Nairobi Water Fund</b> brings together the Water Resources Management Authority and prominent corporations, enabling a 15% decrease in sedimentation, with Nairobi’s water supply achieving WHO turbidity standards and returns of \$21.5 million. While tourism corporations are not involved, the project provides mutual benefits for the industry including quality of stay for tourists while saving costs for hotels.</p>							
	 Business-focused international partnerships	<p>In 2018, <b>#FreetownTheTreetown</b> was launched to address large-scale tree loss, floods, and landslides resulting from rapid urbanisation. Leveraging World Bank grant funding, it attracted long-term private investment through public awareness campaigns and targeted business engagement. A mobile app tracked trees planted by community growers, assigned token values, and attracted investments for net-zero strategies, compensating growers based on tree growth. The project also helped create over 1,000 green jobs.</p>							

<sup>13</sup> From top to bottom: 1) Forbes Magazine (2023), [How business ecosystem can drive sustainable tourism](#). Fundació Visit Valencia (2024), [Mitomed Project](#) 2) EIT Urban Mobility (2023), [E+ Mobility Accelerator](#) 3) DIP (2023), [Greece will almost double its tourist tax](#) 4) TNC (2015), [Upper Tana-Nairobi Water Fund Business Case](#) 5) Earthshot Prize (2023), [Freetown The Treetown](#).

## There are already successful examples of these types of collaboration improving urban resilience.

- **Wonderful Copenhagen.**<sup>14</sup> The city's tourism board has worked with hotels as part of its 'Wonderful Copenhagen' strategy to encourage sustainability across the tourism sector. It has clearly signalled that it is taking a comprehensive approach to sustainability over the long-term, making it worthwhile for every hotel to do the same. Eco-certification is a critical lever: the city promotes stays in eco-certified hotels and works with hotel receptionists and guides to inspire tourists to enjoy a sustainable visit. 70% of Copenhagen's hotels are now eco-certified and 67% of Copenhageners express a positive outlook on tourism, compared to 42% in similar European cities.
- **Sydney Sustainable Destination Partnership.**<sup>15</sup> This is a collaboration between hotels, government, and the broader tourism sector to advance environmental sustainability. By sharing knowledge and exchanging best practices, the collaboration is improving the sector's performance in waste reduction, water efficiency, sustainable procurement and several other areas, engaging policymakers and champions on reaching specific objectives in each one. Notable outcomes include a 33% reduction in emissions and a 45% decrease in potable water use at the partner organisations' properties from 2018 to 2022.
- **Gardens by the Bay.**<sup>16</sup> This PPC is a major project in Singapore's programme to become a "City in a Garden." The city government has collaborated with private companies and academic institutions, including the National Parks Board, Singapore Tourism Board, and NTU/NUS, to create gardens that have become a globally acclaimed nature-based tourist attraction. They hosted more than 8.8 million visitors in 2022. The gardens incorporate resilience-building activities including rainwater harvesting, microclimate improvement and promoting environmental awareness. The success of this collaborative effort underscores Singapore's commitment to sustainable urban development.

**Together, cities and hotels can do more than halt the damage caused by old-style city tourism: we can fashion forms of tourism whose success will make cities increasingly attractive, sustainable and resilient over time.**









<sup>14</sup> Wonderful Copenhagen (2023).

<sup>15</sup> Sustainable Destinations Partnership Sydney (2024).

<sup>16</sup> Gardens by the Bay (2023), 10 Years of Growing Wonders Annual Report.



# Hotels and cities can pull various levers together to address their challenges

Opportunity areas	Hotels and cities have a shared interest in working on...	Within hotel value chains...	... and beyond
 <b>1. Cross cutting</b>	Futureproofing destinations	Develop in-house strategies for climate mitigation and adaptation preparation	Support tourism sector-wide adaptation and mitigation roadmaps
	Enhancing transparency and accountability	Implement monitoring and reporting on key sustainability KPIs	Establish industry framework to measure and report on sustainability in hospitality
 <b>2. Communities and culture</b>	Creating good green jobs	Secure jobs, upskilling via training programmes on sustainable hotel management	Apply formal and secure employment standards in urban eco-tourism businesses
	Ensuring wellbeing	Roll out employee welfare programs, including affordable housing/ health benefits	Launch community engagement programmes
	Safeguarding heritage	Showcase local art, music and traditions, educate visitors on cultural heritage	Provide platform for local artists and engage in cultural heritage restoration
 <b>3. Mobility</b>	Developing low-carbon transport	Electrify transport in hotel value chains (e.g., delivery fleets and shuttle buses), shared bike offerings	Support sustainable journeys to destination, improve better public transport access, walkability for visitors
 <b>4. Accommodation</b>	Minimising operational emissions	Switch to renewable energy supply and efficient heating, cooling and energy systems	Provide demand signals for renewable energies, partner with local renewable energy providers
	Mitigating construction emissions	Set standards with developers to prioritise repurposed buildings, retrofits and use of sustainable materials	Repurpose derelict buildings and infrastructure for tourism purposes
 <b>5. Waste</b>	Reducing waste	Implement circular practices to avoid waste and pollution, such as elimination of single-use plastics	Contribute to improved municipal waste management infrastructure
 <b>6. Food</b>	Minimising food waste	Reduce in-house production of food waste	Redistribute food through donations or waste-to-value measures
	Promoting local and sustainable offerings	Adopt better options such as local, plant-based menus in hotel-owned establishments	Promote demand for urban/ peri-urban, regenerative food production locally
 <b>7. Public spaces</b>	Enhancing green spaces	Green hotel grounds and other land assets	Engage in local nature conservation projects, incentivise the creation of new green areas
 <b>8. Water</b>	Improving water efficiency	Reduce water consumption in line with local per capita rate or lower	Support local water infrastructure improvement initiatives



