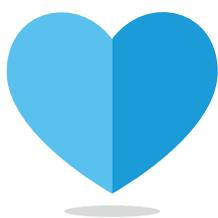


# Booking Cares Annual Update



**Booking.com**  
cares

2018



# Foreword

by Marianne Gybels

Global Manager Corporate Social Responsibility

Our commitment to sustainable travel this year was bigger than it ever has been and will only continue to grow. As our efforts advance, we also see the level of complexity increase, along with the inevitable small failures, and most importantly, new learnings. That is why this year we've taken a different approach to our annual impact report. In the past, we've focused on getting the hard numbers across, showing our growth in volunteers or the number of startups we've supported via our programs. We realize now it is much more important for us to share what we've learned about sustainable travel over the past five years of Booking Cares, including Booking.com's role in the future of the industry and the positive impact we can have.

Each year our ambition increases exponentially and we continue to find new partners with whom to collaborate. Five years ago, we supported a single program: an employee volunteer scheme born from our colleagues desire to give back. Fast forward and we now have four full-fledged programs working at both a local and a global level with governments, nonprofits and startups. In addition to these programs, we're working on bringing sustainability into our product and platform.

This expansion comes hand in hand with an evolution and maturation of our core mission as Booking Cares. We feel it's important to take our stakeholders along with us on this journey, making sure to share our understanding of sustainable tourism and what we believe is the way forward.

Our market studies, open calls for applications, and years of working with a variety of partners have given us unique access to the pioneers and changemakers of sustainable tourism and provided us with a better understanding of where the industry is going. In this annual update, we share the trends we see in sustainable tourism today, and where we see room for innovation, advancement and exploration in the future. We reflect on the efforts of our employees across the business who are working to create a more sustainable future for the travel industry, not just over the past five years or throughout 2018, but well into the foreseeable future.

**I am looking forward to it!**



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# Introduction to Booking.com

Established in 1996 in Amsterdam, Booking.com has grown from a small Dutch start-up to one of the largest travel e-commerce companies in the world. Part of Booking Holdings Inc. (NASDAQ: BKNG), Booking.com now employs more than 17,500 employees in over 200 offices in 70 countries worldwide.

With a mission to **empower people to experience the world**, Booking.com invests in digital technology that helps take the friction out of travel. At Booking.com, we connect travellers with the world's largest selection of incredible places to stay, including everything from apartments, vacation homes, and family-run B&Bs to 5-star luxury resorts, tree houses and even igloos. The Booking.com website and mobile apps are available in over 40 languages, offer over 28 million total reported listings, and cover over 146,000 destinations in 229 countries and territories worldwide.

Each day, more than 1.5 million room nights are reserved on our platform. So whether travelling for business or leisure, customers can instantly book their ideal accommodation quickly and easily with Booking.com, without booking fees and backed up by our promise to price match. Via our customer experience team, customers can reach Booking.com 24/7 for assistance and support in over 40 languages, any time of the day or night.





# Introduction to Booking Cares

At Booking Cares, our mission is to [make sustainable travel the way to experience the world](#) so that future travelers can continue to encounter a world full of destinations still worth exploring. We understand that without systemic change in the industry, it won't be long until our destinations, partners, hosts and travelers feel the negative effects of unsustainable travel. But sustainable change can only come through

strategic and deliberate collaboration across the entire ecosystem. [That is why we are harnessing the power and scope of Booking.com to lead sustainable change through innovation and collaboration.](#)

For the past five years, we have worked alongside industry stakeholders to design and implement initiatives and products that support communities, spread tourism more evenly, preserve culture, and protect the environment. In doing so, we are fostering a future where the whole industry works hand in hand to further transform the global travel experience into a powerful force for good.

An aerial photograph of a dense, lush green forest, likely a coniferous forest, filling the entire background of the page. The trees are tightly packed, creating a vibrant green canopy.

# Defining Sustainable Tourism

Booking Cares defines Sustainable Tourism as being comprised of four main pillars: Tourism Dispersal, Environmental Conservation and Protection, Inclusive Travel, and Cultural Preservation and Promotion. In the next pages, you will find further information that uncovers how each of these pillars make up aspects of sustainable tourism and how they frame the work done within Booking Cares.

**Tourism Dispersal:** Spreading the benefits of tourism more evenly and helping to relieve pressure on overcrowded tourist areas.

**Environmental Conservation and Protection:** Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development; maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.

**Inclusive Travel:** Empowering local communities to fully benefit from the potential of the travel industry (inclusive growth) and ensuring that all can participate in the tourism industry (accessible travel).

**Cultural Preservation and Promotion:** Respecting the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserving their tangible and intangible cultural heritage and traditional values, and contributing to intercultural understanding and tolerance.



## Environmental Conservation and Preservation

**Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development; maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.**

There are many complex environmental challenges presented by the travel and tourism industry. Tourism and travel accounts for 8% of global greenhouse emissions. That figure is roughly equivalent to that of Japan - the world's 5th largest polluter. While [nearly 70% of the world is covered by water, only 2.5% of it is fresh](#), with the majority trapped in ice [7]. According to the United Nations, water usage has grown at more than twice the rate of population increase in the last century. In many countries, including

Sri Lanka, China, Thailand, Fiji, and India, water usage by tourists exceeds that of a traveler up to a factor of eight [8]. For communities already coping with water scarcity, this means relying on bottled water, which comes with additional environmental and operational costs. We produce around [300 million tons of plastic waste globally every year](#), according to the United Nations Environmental Program. To put that in perspective, that is roughly the same weight of the entire human population. Much of this plastic waste ends up in the world's rivers and oceans, polluting the global water supply; threatening marine ecosystems and cluttering beaches and other coastal destinations in the process.

## Tourism Dispersal

**Spreading the benefits of tourism more evenly and helping to relieve pressure on overcrowded tourist areas.**

In 1950, there were 25 million international tourists. In 2017, there were over 1.3 billion. The United Nations World Tourism Organization predicts that the sector will continue to grow by 3.3% annually until 2030. If that is true, the number of tourists crossing international borders will hit 1.8 billion [1]. Overcrowding is one of the most urgent topics in sustainable tourism, with overcrowding in beloved destinations affecting the experience of travelers and locals alike.

Recent Booking.com research has highlighted that most travelers are open to the idea of

adjusting where and how they travel, as well as what they do during their stay in order to help spread the effects and benefits of their trips more evenly [2]. In fact, [more than half of global travelers declare a willingness to stay outside of the city center \(51%\) or travel outside of the peak season \(68%\)](#). Nearly half (47%) are also willing to skip major tourist attractions in favor of less well-known alternatives, while [54% say they would extend their stay with the purpose of making trips outside of main tourist areas](#). These figures highlight the significant potential for increased innovation to empower travelers to explore further, discover under-visited areas, and support more local businesses.



## Inclusive Travel

**Empowering local communities to fully benefit from the potential of the travel industry (inclusive growth) and ensuring that all can participate in the tourism industry (accessible travel).**

### Inclusive Growth

In a frequently quoted statistic from the UN Environmental Program, it is estimated that [for every \\$100 spent on holiday by tourists from a developed country, only \\$5 actually stays in the country and benefits the local destination and community](#). This represents a significant opportunity for travel companies to help local communities benefit more equally from global tourism and to promote a more inclusive growth model for the travel industry as a whole. Recent Booking.com research found that [nearly two thirds of travelers \(65%\) say that they would like to seek out more local products instead of mainstream tourist souvenirs](#). Not only that, over half of global travelers (53%) are interested in undertaking experiences organized by the local community if that would help mitigate the impact of tourism [\[3\]](#).

### Accessible Travel

Globally, there are [one billion people with a disability, and over two billion people directly affected by disabilities](#) including their family, spouses, and caregivers [\[4\]](#). Travelers with disabilities can face a number of hurdles, whether that is a lack of information during the booking process, a reduced number of accommodations that provide the amenities they need, or simply staff who are not trained to provide accurate and necessary advice. Achieving fully accessible travel is a multi-stakeholder process that requires the help of governments, policy makers, city marketing, OTAs, accommodations and more.

## Cultural Preservation and Promotion

**Respecting the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserving their tangible and intangible cultural heritage and traditional values, and contributing to intercultural understanding and tolerance.**

Much of what makes travel so magical is getting to experience other cultures; both tangible (such as monuments and sites) and intangible (such as traditions and skills). But did you know that every decade, [15% of the artisans in Asia leave their handicraft behind in search of a more sustainable source of income](#) [\[5\]](#)? This deficit stops their intangible heritage from being passed on to future generations and puts countless traditional crafts at risk. Tangible cultural heritage is also at risk, with sites being destroyed at a rapid rate due to conflict and natural disasters [\[11\]](#). It takes an enormous amount of time, effort and knowledge, as well as a great deal of funding, to restore these sites to their original condition and continue preserving them for years to come.





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# The State of Sustainable Tourism

Booking.com has been supporting sustainable travel initiatives for the past five years, during which time we have seen an increased interest in sustainable travel products and services from our customers, as well.

Through our work with startups and innovators across the industry, as well as the number of applications we receive for the Booking Booster, Cares Lab and Cares Fund programs, we have been able to identify a number of trends that currently epitomize the ever-evolving landscape of sustainable travel.

- **Everything local:** People looking to connect with real and authentic communities so they can experience ancient culture and traditions.  
(Initiatives: Keteka, Bitemojo, YourTour Ventures)
- **Off-the-beaten path trips:** With many people visiting the same place multiple times or visiting a place for the first time, but not wanting to spend their holiday waiting in line, travelers are increasingly looking for alternatives to major sightseeing attractions and places.  
(Initiatives: Tastemakers, Secret City Trails, Wander)
- **Giving back:** Not only do people want to meet local people on their travels, they are also looking to have a positive impact on the places they visit.  
(Initiatives: Global Himalayan Expedition, Hotel con Corazon)
- **Women empowered:** From female drivers, to local homestay hosts, women are leading the way in creating a safe homes-away-from-home for travelers.  
(Initiatives: Women on Wheels, Community Homestay Network)
- **Plastic/waste free travel:** Journeys that take a proactive approach to our waste problem by reducing travel footprints.  
(Initiatives: KITRO, Reflow, Hosteling International)
- **Accessibility:** Initiatives that increase accessibility in tourism, so that anyone and everyone can enjoy the possibilities of international of travel.  
(Initiatives: Wheel the World, AccessibleGo, PlanetAble, Rare & Roll)

These trends all focus on two kinds of traveler: the transformative traveler who is searching for unique, impactful and immersive experiences, and the performative traveler who wants to stand out and tell a different story than the rest. In an era of social media and social recognition, these sustainable and unusual experiences will only become more popular over time.





## So what's next?

### Technology Consolidation

There are lots of initiatives that help today's traveler experience and make a positive impact on the world. Although these products frequently have a significant impact on their local stakeholders and beneficiaries, they often lack innovation in terms of the actual product they offer. Which brings us to the question: where are the true industry disruptors? Who will bridge the digital divide by consolidating current technology or streamlining technologies altogether?

### Going Global

Despite there being many different sustainability guidelines out there, there is still no leading standard that has both global coverage and the trust of consumers. Who will lead the way in choosing a new industry standard and create much needed transparency by defining what true sustainability really is?

### Spread the Love

Leveraging the growth in travel to create flourishing communities is something we all strive for. We can do that by designing smart solutions that allow mature destinations to manage their growth and visitor flow better. In turn, that leads to higher quality visitors and greater value for residents and communities of growing destinations around the world.

### Learning From Others

Industries like fashion and real estate lead the way in sustainable energy and materials. The tourist industry? Not so much. We're yet to catch up on the use of green energy, and biodegradable and sustainable materials. There is space to learn from other industries to improve the travel supply chain.

### Back on the Map

While there are many sustainable tourism initiatives that support emerging economies and even mature destinations, there is still room to help revive destinations who have suffered significant blows to their incoming travel market after crises like natural disasters, accidents, or geopolitical incidents, aside from the traditional relief efforts.

### Make the Perfect Match

There is a perfect guest for every destination. Finding the right match not only helps the destination become more sustainable, it also allows the traveler to enjoy a more personalized and unique experience. When travelers understand local rules and customs and stay for more than just the highlights, everyone benefits. Helping travelers understand what it takes to be the perfect guest is an important part of sustainability.

# Our Programs

Over the past five years, four ongoing programs have been supporting Booking Cares' mission to make sustainable travel the way to experience the world. They are the Booking Volunteers, the Booking Booster, the Booking Cares Fund, and the Booking Cares Labs (formerly Booking Booster Labs). In addition to these programs, Booking Cares engages in a variety of activities and initiatives to drive sustainable change in the wider travel industry.

In the following sections, you will find an overview of each programme, as well as a list of our 2018 activities and an update on any major changes that occurred over the last 12 months. You will also find information on previous participants and some examples of their impact on the field of sustainable tourism. To finish, we will cover some of the internal initiatives that fall outside of our four pillar programs.





# Booking Volunteers

The first Booking Cares program was our employee volunteer scheme. It was started five years ago as a response to the rising number of employees that wanted to give back to local communities.

Each Booking.com employee has the option to use eight working hours a year to volunteer their expertise and time to a sustainable tourism organization. The program is an opportunity for our Booking.com employees to give back to both the destinations our customers visit, and the communities where our teams work and live. When the program first started, volunteers could only spend their time on hands-on projects like beach clean-ups, conservation efforts, and tourism festival support. Now our colleagues have the opportunity to share their knowledge, too. These expertise projects can involve advising startups, carrying out tasks like web-design, research, or translating, and participating as mentors through one of the other Booking Cares programs.



## 2018 Activities

In 2018, the Booking Volunteers team worked to become the main support for startups and nonprofits supported through our three other Booking Cares programs. Thanks to our Cares Volunteers program, supported organisations receive mentorship and guidance from experts during and up to a year after the completion of the programs. Previous participants of the programs gain unlimited access to submit volunteer projects so that Booking.com's support can continue far beyond the Booster, Fund, or Lab.

2018 also saw Booking employees continue to refine the scope of the projects our volunteers could work on. This means that each project on the Booking Cares platform directly contributes towards creating a more sustainable travel industry.

We were also successful in increasing the number of expertise-based projects available for our volunteers. The number rose from 17% in 2017 to 32% in 2018. Not only does this increase diversify the type of projects on our platform, but also the types of organisations that our workforce can support.

## 2017 vs. 2018

More good news! The volunteer program saw an increase in office participation from 153 offices in 2017 to 157 in 2018. As we mentioned before, there was an impressive increase of expertise-based projects from 17% to 32%: an incredible 15% increase. Although there was a decline in overall participation, dropping from 46% in 2017 to 36% in 2018, it is worth

noting that we made a conscious effort to focus on choosing impactful projects. This push towards expertise-based projects meant that many projects from 2017 were not repeated in 2018. Our Volunteers team is still working hard to make sure that everyone who contributed to our Fund, Booster, and Labs programs is accounted for in our end-of-year reports. Even so, we hope this has given you a good idea of what we have achieved over the last 12 months.

**Number of hours volunteered: 32,244**

**Number of tasks: 751**

**Number of employee volunteers: 5,399**

**Number of countries in which projects were realized: 61**

# Brazil

Brazil was our entry point to South America and for that reason, it remains close to our hearts. A rich and diverse country, Brazil is bursting with opportunities for Booking Cares' programs and we hope to capitalize on those as soon as we can.

Right now we have colleagues spread throughout the country via our six offices. In 2015, we assigned one of those colleagues, based in São Paulo, the task of promoting our programs. Not only did we want them to spread the word to employees, but also help us to connect with different causes that contribute to our overall mission.

Last year, one of the main focuses was showing our offices how they could leverage their skills and knowledge to positively impact local communities, all the while, deepening our collaboration with new and existing partner organizations, most of them NGOs. What we saw was more than just an increase in expertise-based projects (compared to 2017), but insight into how projects like World Clean-up Day and Virada Sustentavel were executed in different cities around the country (Salvador, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo for both projects, plus Porto Alegre for Virada Sustentavel).

For years, Brazil has actively engaged with our Volunteer Programs, driving participation up. Historically, most of our Brazilian projects were focused on hands-on activities related to the environment, with only a few concentrated on local communities. A missed opportunity! We empowered one of our employees to become a local ambassador, with the goal of promoting our programs internally and externally. They showed their colleagues and other local organizations what could be achieved if they shared their unique set of skills. And it worked! Together, they collaborated on some great initiatives this past year.

So what about our Inclusive Growth pillar, which makes sure local communities benefit equally from tourism? We partnered with an organization in São Paulo called AFESU, which empowers disadvantaged young women by teaching them soft and technical skills so they can get a job in hospitality. We're happy to say 14 of our colleagues volunteered their time and expertise in an AFESU workshop. The project had such an impact on both our employees and the organization that the collaboration will continue in 2019. This means every young girl who takes the AFESU hospitality course will get the chance to visit the Booking.com office in São Paulo. and spend some time shadowing the different teams there. The girls will learn more about the organization and the different roles within it. We hope the experience will provide them with practical, professional advice, and inspire them to pursue a career in hospitality.

Our programs also took us to Natal in the northeast of the country. There, we partnered with the Ponta Negra Community Association to create a series of lectures for residents who, despite living next to the city's main attractions, do not benefit from the opportunities tourism is bringing to the area. Again, 14 of our colleagues who live and work in Natal, volunteered to share their knowledge about the job market and help the residents generate business ideas. The lecture series covered everything from identifying job opportunities in the tourism sector to preparing yourself for a job interview. It also offered sessions on digital marketing and creativity and entrepreneurship, with the aim of stimulating new business within the community.

It is only by generating new partnerships (and improving the relationships we already have) that we can make more opportunities for local communities, and hopefully, impact the world in a positive way. There's still work to do!





## Case study

# The Movement Hotel

The Movement Hotel was an initiative designed by the foundation: 'Movement on the Ground'. This pop-up hotel was run entirely by former refugees, at what was once the BijlmerBajes prison in Amsterdam. The Movement Hotel's objective was simple: to empower asylum status holders through work, and give them a chance at a new beginning in the Netherlands.

More than 130 of our Amsterdam-based employees rose to the challenge and volunteered either expertise-based or hands-on support. Together, we took on tasks large and small; from setting up the hotel (painting, cleaning, and preparing the rooms) to translating and copywriting. Some even volunteered to teach the basics of online distribution, revenue management and web marketing. In essence, we shared our industry knowledge and expertise, and it truly helped!

The Movement Hotel ran for over a year, had eight full-time employees and 42 trainees. It received over 7,000 guests from Booking.com (coming from 95 countries worldwide!) and we're happy to say that 20 former hotel employees found a job in hospitality afterwards. Another 10 decided to continue studying, helping them further their integration.

the  
movement  
hotel





# Booking Booster

Booking.com's three-week accelerator for sustainable tourism startups who are ready to scale.

The program consists of over 30 sessions suited to impact entrepreneurs, such as leadership, investor readiness, customer development, networking, product development, marketing, pitching, social impact strategy, and measurement. Startups also have the chance to learn from Booking.com's high-level experts via one-on-one expertise sessions. Not only that, the startups have access to a personal mentor who can guide them throughout the program, and continue to offer additional support on the volunteer platform once they have returned home. Last but not least, each cycle culminates in an opportunity for each startup to pitch for their share of the zero-equity €2 million fund.



## 2018 Activities

After a successful launch in 2017, 2018 saw Booking Booster invite another 10 startups to Amsterdam. The latest intake hailed from six different countries and operated across six continents, including Antarctica! Their businesses represented a diverse mix of innovative online marketplaces that connect travellers with inclusive experiences, and cutting-edge technology solutions that empower local communities to benefit more equally from the global tourism industry. On May 31st, our

startups pitched to a live audience of industry experts and Booking.com employees, with all 10 receiving a share of the fund.

## 2017 Booking Booster Results

The Booking Cares team also has promising news from our 2017 startups. As reported in the 2018 Booking Booster impact report, the startups funded in our pilot year experienced an average revenue increase of 67%, an average employee increase of 90%, and a total customer increase of 190,558. The startups working with local hosts (Authenticook, Awake, Backstreet Academy, and Local Alike) increased their beneficiaries by an average of 154%.

## Grants Awarded

**Global Himalayan Expedition (India):** €400,000

**Sakha Consulting Wings (India):** €325,000

**Keteka (United States):** €275,000

**Wheel the World (United States):** €275,000

**Community Homestay Network (Nepal):** €225,000

**HiveSters (Thailand):** €100,000

**Hotel Con Corazón (Netherlands):** €100,000

**KITRO (Switzerland):** €100,000

**Reflow (Netherlands):** 100,000

**Tastemakers (United States):** €100,000

Case study



# Global Himalayan Expedition

Let's talk about Global Himalayan Expedition (GHE). GHE has electrified more than 80 villages in the Himalayas, impacting more than 35,000 lives, offsetting more than 920 tons of CO2 and involving more than 800 travelers in their unique and authentic impact experience. But that isn't all they do.

On top of organizing expedition trips for travelers and electrifying villages with solar micro-grids, they empower communities to use tourism as an extra revenue stream, generating new tourism entrepreneurs, while creating a local ecosystem to support the maintenance of these grids. As if this wasn't enough, they also set up computer labs at remote schools, using simple solar-powered technology to allow pupil's access to offline educational content for the first time.

GHE is committed to empowering earth's most remote communities by leveraging tourism as a driving force for development. They aim to inspire conscious travelers to take life-changing experiences that will, in turn, transform local communities.

It is this vision that made GHE one of our 2018 Booking Booster winners, receiving the full amount requested, and it is all thanks to their powerful story and tangible impact on sustainable development. The funding has allowed them to source new villages in the upper Indian Himalayas that can be electrified, and expand their team to better support their on-ground operations and CSR efforts. It also allowed them to design and deploy a new website, invest in their digital marketing strategy, automate some of their operations, and further develop their Homestay Information Server: a Wi-Fi hotspot that allows travelers to access local information and media using their mobile device while visiting a homestay.

Besides the Booking Booster, GHE also received support from our Volunteer Program. A number of Booking.com employees donated their time and expertise to support projects that required specific technical skills. We saw UX Designers and Developers help GHE on the last stages of their new website, and provide critical support for the implementation of their Homestay Travel Information Server.





## Case study



# Keteka

Keteka is an online marketplace that allows travelers to connect with validated local guides. It serves two main purposes: to provide travelers with authentic experiences, and provide guides and operators with the ability to effectively promote themselves and their business online.

By giving guides direct access to their customers, they are guaranteed to receive fair payment for their services. Currently, the tours and activities industry is filled with middlemen who effectively marginalize local guides, particularly those who come from developing communities. By shifting focus to the guides, Keteka drives dollars into these communities, and improves the overall experience for the traveler.

Keteka also joined our three-week Booking Booster program and managed to secure grant funding to support their growth in the region. This included further investment in marketing, expanding the team, and strengthening their tech capabilities. Through our Volunteer Program, Keteka benefited from the ongoing support of a dedicated mentor, as well as expert advice on a variety of topics, including a deep dive into their analytics and a thorough review of their digital marketing strategy. Keteka also had the opportunity to connect with our local office in Santiago de Chile, where they received support on best practices in customer service. After they finished the 2018 Booster Program, co-founder Kyle Wiggins joined us in Amsterdam for our first Innovation Week, where he participated in an interesting panel discussion, focused on the way payment innovations can positively benefit local communities.

We're happy to see how Keteka has grown. In 2018, €313,223 was split between approximately 400 local guides: €104,408 more than they likely would have received if they had sold their tours through traditional middlemen. Here is an example of the impact this money has had: one of Keteka's local guides, who started working by himself, now has 17 full-time guides and drivers. With a fair wage, he has been able to build a new house for himself and his family. While this is only one of the lives changed by Keteka, it shows the incredible impact sustainable travel can have.

# KETEKKA



Case study



# Sakha Consulting Wings

Sakha Consulting Wings provides safe and reliable transportation services for women, in India. Ran entirely by female drivers, Sakha provides its chauffeurs with an unconventional, sustainable and dignified livelihood. To date, Sakha has provided paid employment to hundreds of women.

With the growing demand for women-driven transport services, employment markets have also been slowly opening up, with various public sector and business players now offering jobs to women drivers. Many of those trained through Sakha's "Women on Wheels" program have been able to find jobs independently as cab drivers, chauffeurs, bus drivers, valets at prestigious institutions, and even driving instructors for other women.

Meenu Vadera created the Women on Wheels program as a way of doing something about the gender equality imbalance in India, while confronting spaces where women have endured injustice. Vadera saw an opportunity to further scale her impact by applying to the 2018 Booking Booster Program. The impact of Sakha, which provides both safe transport solutions and equips women with the necessary training to become self-sufficient, has made Vadera one of the finalists of our three-week accelerator program. Her idea ultimately won grant funding, as well as ongoing mentorship and support from a number of Booking.com experts.





# Booking Cares Labs

(formerly Booking Booster Labs)

The Booking Cares Labs are three-day regional programs that connect destinations with relevant sustainable tourism solutions.

Focusing on destination support and local innovations, the Care Labs invite entrepreneurs or nonprofits to work with destination representatives, along with Booking.com experts, to grow their sustainable tourism solutions. Each innovation Lab culminates in a pitch ceremony, with the opportunity to win individual grants of up to €25,000.



## Grants Awarded

### Amsterdam

- [TravelTime Platform by iGeolise \(UK\)](#): €24,000
- [ClioMuse \(Greece\)](#): €20,000
- [Secret City Trails \(Portugal\)](#): €19,000
- [Seavents \(Netherlands\)](#): €18,000

### Tel Aviv

- [AccessibleGo \(Israel\)](#): €25,000
- [Bitemojo \(Israel\)](#): €25,000
- [Knowers \(Israel\)](#): €20,000
- [Questo \(Romania\)](#): €15,000

### Follow-up Funding

- [YourTour Ventures \(UK\)](#): €17,500
- [Wander \(Netherlands\)](#): €15,000
- [TravelTime Platform by iGeolise \(UK\)](#): €10,000



## 2018 Activities

2018, we hosted the second Booking Booster Lab in Tel Aviv which supported nine sustainable tourism startups from Israel. The Booster Lab was a three-day program with sessions on scaling, impact measurement, and pitching. Ultimately, six were awarded funding, sharing a total of €85,000. Startups were also given access to experts from Booking.com to help them complete their investor deck and roadmap for the upcoming year.

The success of this event made us reflect on the

purpose of the Booking Booster Lab; the ability to marry destination support and innovation acceleration. The third Lab, rebranded as Booking Cares Lab, was designed and executed in collaboration with the city of Amsterdam and Amsterdam Marketing in order to tackle Amsterdam's sustainable tourism needs.

Together with representatives from the city of Amsterdam and Amsterdam Marketing, three key focus areas were identified: behavioural awareness to encourage local-friendly behaviour from guests, tourism dispersal to help divert Amsterdam's heavy tourist flows from overcrowded parts of the city, and inclusive growth to support a diverse range of local businesses. Nine startups and one non-profit from Europe were invited to participate in the Lab, in the hope of developing innovative early-

stage ideas to support these three themes. During the program, the 10 innovators had the opportunity to learn more about the context surrounding each theme in order to better tailor their solutions to the city of Amsterdam.

Four solutions were selected to be funded and implemented in Amsterdam by our panel of judges, including representatives from the city, Amsterdam Marketing and Booking.com. All 10 innovators had the opportunity to submit their progress after 30 days for an additional pool of €45,000. Three were awarded the funding based on their impressive plan to create a real solution for Amsterdam.

## 2017 Booking Cares Labs Results

In December 2018, a year after our first Booking Booster Lab in Barcelona, we checked up on our startups. Good news: those who reported had increased both their customers and impact beneficiaries by 120%! Additionally, one of the participants, Clean Travel, has even been accepted to the 2019 Booking Booster to further grow their impact and accelerate their business.



# accessibleGo

Introducing accessibleGO: transforming the end-to-end travel experience for people with disabilities. accessibleGO is a platform that not only makes travel accessible for all, but also incentivizes travel suppliers to become more accommodating of those with disabilities.

They were one of nine startups that joined us in Tel-Aviv for our first Cares Lab of 2018 and ultimately, tied for first place.

Motivated by their own personal experience, the founders of accessibleGO know all too well that travelers with disabilities often receive limited, or even inaccurate, accessibility information when planning a trip. Knowing reliable information is paramount for a person with a disability, accessibleGO was born. This unique platform offers a combination of critical services, including accessible bookings, reviews, and resources.

accessibleGO has been embraced by the disability community at large. In the last five months, users in the US have risen from 5,000 to 40,000, with a continued weekly growth of 5%. The platform is also drawing interest from Germany, Korea, Romania, and South Africa, with more countries expected to join as partnerships with major disability organizations continue to drive traffic to the platform. With all major US cities covered and the recent launch of a travel forum for members to ask and answer questions, the platform is attracting unprecedented numbers thanks to the exchange of critical accessibility information.

2018 was a banner year for accessibleGO. Not only did it get to participate in the Tel Aviv Booking Booster Lab, it took home €25,000 in grant funding, allowing it to support future development and continue making travel easier for all.

accessibleGO 

# TravelTime Platform by iGeolise

TravelTime platform helps people plan journeys by time, rather than distance. Tourists can discover what is reachable within three hours of a location using sustainable modes of transport, such as cycling, walking or public transport.

The platform suggests locations that are within easy reach of a specified time range. Content is located, ranked and sorted in a way that makes it easy for travelers to find things to do with the time they have.

During our first Cares Lab with the City of Amsterdam, TravelTime platform proposed a project that would help disperse tourists around the city and avoid over-crowded areas. Addressing one of Amsterdam's pain points with cutting-edge technology, the platform was awarded an initial grant of €24,000 to further support the project, along with an additional €10,000 to implement their app for iamsterdam.

Over the last year, the TravelTime team has made tremendous efforts to further develop their technology, allowing them to calculate travel times from an origin to 2,000 points in a single request, combine transport modes like cycling and public transport, and allow geocoding for customers. Truly a revolutionary way to self-guide you through any city!





# Booking Cares Fund

Launched at the end of 2017, the Booking Cares Fund is Booking.com's €2 million fund supporting non-profit ideas in the sustainable travel space.

Market scans and feedback from partners showed that there were very few opportunities to get non-revenue generating projects off the ground. With that, the Booking Cares Fund was born. Its mission: to champion the organizations making lasting impact on the sustainable travel industry by providing funding and guidance from Booking.com volunteers.



## Grants Awarded

### Round 1

[Jordan Trail \(Jordan\): €200,000](#)

[Rare & Roll \(China\): €200,000](#)

[Hosteling International USA](#)

[\(United States\): €200,000](#)

[Oceanic Society \(United States\):](#)

[€170,000](#)

[Khwela Tourism Stars \(South](#)

[Africa\): €150,000](#)

### Round 2

[TravelAble \(Germany\): €200,000](#)

[Ukarimu \(Uganda\): €200,000](#)

[Aegean Marine Life Sanctuary](#)

[\(Greece\): €180,000](#)

[Citizen Science App for Polar](#)

[Travelers \(UK\): €170,000](#)

[Renewable Jet Fuel from Organic](#)

[Waste \(Netherlands\): €150,000](#)

[ParkPass \(Canada\): €100,000](#)

[Visita Mobile Destination](#)

[Management \(Philippines\): €80,000](#)



## 2018 Activities

Having received hundreds of applications at the start of the year, the Booking Cares Fund team selected five international projects to be awarded the first half of the fund. These projects came from China, Jordan, USA, and South Africa, and work on a variety of sustainable tourism topics: from water usage to accessibility to hospitality training. At the start of May 2018, representatives from all five programs came together to work with their Booking.com mentors and several experts to tackle the roadblocks their projects faced. Together, they built plans for the coming year in

a bid to maximise their impact and potential to scale.

Experimenting with a new format, 13 selected organisations attended a four-day programme in Amsterdam at the end of year. During this program, they received dedicated mentor support and additional expertise sessions, working towards the submission of their project plans and a final interview with our panel of judges. Six projects were funded the remaining share of the €2 million fund.

## Round 1 Updates

Since it hasn't been a full year since we opened the Booking Cares Fund, our supported projects haven't yet finished. Still, there have been some notable milestones since the five projects of

Round 1 joined us in May. Khwela Tourism Stars currently has nine supporting partners and another 14 who hope to participate in 2019. Of their 19 students, five have already been offered permanent positions. And that's not all. Hosteling International has installed 700 Hydrao shower heads in hostels across the US and is currently waiting on analytics to measure what will hopefully be a significant reduction in water usage. Last but not least, the Jordan Trail. Since

the inception of the project, they have trained 15 local guides and doubled their number of annual hikers! We're looking forward to seeing what else has changed after their full project year is finished, and celebrating the achievements of our other recipients too.



# Hostelling International USA

Hostelling International USA (HI USA) has 35 hostels throughout the United States. These hostels consume 33 million gallons of water each year, with nearly two-thirds of this consumption estimated to be attributed to guest showers.

If each guest shortened their shower by just 30 seconds, they would save over one million gallons annually. Of course, for that to work, guests need to change their behaviour. So how do you capture the interest of a millennial audience? Simple: you need a disruptor.

Enter the Million Gallon Challenge! Hostelling International USA will pilot the use of 750 smart shower heads with built-in LEDs that change color based on the length of time the shower is in use. If successful, it could serve as an example to every hotel and home in the world of how to reduce water consumption.

In the fall of 2018, HI USA kicked off the project by installing 100 Hydrao smart-shower heads between HI San Francisco City Center and HI Los Angeles Santa Monica. This pilot is currently collecting data which will be reviewed by George Washington University in a bid to better understand water consumption, savings, and behavior. Initial findings will be released on World Water Day, March 22nd, as part of the public launch of the Million Gallon Challenge. Additional hostels across the US will begin installing Hydrao smart-showers on World Water Day, with 50% installed by World Environment Day, and all 750 by the end of 2019.



# Khwela Tourism Stars

We strongly believe that tourism can be used as a driver for development. We've seen that by empowering people with knowledge, tangible change can be achieved. Khwela Tourism Stars, one of our Cares Fund grant recipients, is a cutting-edge hospitality academy in South Africa for disadvantaged women.

Through an intensive hospitality course, followed by a three-week road trip through the country, students build relationships and skills that will help them become tourism stars in the future.

"Khwela" in Xhosa, one of the official languages of South Africa, means to climb. This is exactly the opportunity Khwela offers to learners: the chance to climb out of poverty and achieve greatness.

After successful candidates make it through the selection process, there are different training sessions, where the basics of hospitality are taught online. Followed by a series of goal-related projects and a three-week road trip through the country, students can see the beauties of travel first-hand. We must highlight that many have never left their communities.

The last five months are spent doing a hands-on internship in the ever growing tourism business and, after this, Khwela assists students to secure permanent employment or even better: start their own tourism business. Words are not enough to explain the impact this program has.

Khwela Tourism Stars inspired us with their story and tangible impact, which has already touched the lives of all the girls that have been part of the program. They made it to our 2018 Cares Fund and were awarded €150,000 in grant funding. Like all the finalists in our program, they also received exclusive ongoing mentorship, plus the possibility to connect with experts via our volunteer program, who are willing to donate their time and expertise to support initiatives like Khwela.





Case study



# Aegean Marine Life Sanctuary

The Aegean Marine Life Sanctuary (AMLS) on Lipsi island, Greece, is an endeavour pushed by Archipelagos' Institute of Marine Conservation. In a world first, they will offer the ideal solution for long-term rehabilitation of formerly commercially exploited dolphins.

In a large highly biodiverse natural bay, dolphins released from captivity and forced performances will live in a natural ecosystem where they can behave as they would in the wild.

AMLS aims to be the world's first project addressing the global lack of dolphin sanctuaries. It will provide medical care to wild marine mammals and turtles; an educational facility open to selected audience aiming to drastically change the perception in relation to dolphin captivity and an open-source pilot best-practice which will aim to encourage the development of future sanctuaries.

There's an estimated 2,900 dolphins around the world in small, unstimulating artificial enclosures. At the first phase of operation, the AMLS will have the capacity to host up to six dolphins in a long fjord that offers safe shelter from rough seas, has deep sections reaching up to 40 metres in depth, and a rich biodiverse bay which is home to over 64 native species. We hope that the €180,000 of grant funding received by AMLS towards the end of 2018, plus the help of our experts, will help them become fully operational by 2020.





# Internal Initiatives

For all the support we have given to destinations over the last five years, we are aware that our platform has the potential of creating immense impact on the very issues we are helping others to solve.

In 2018, we intensified our internal efforts to create positive change by experimenting with a number of different initiatives. You can find an overview of the different initiatives we are trialling, and examples for each of them, below:

- 1. Integrating Booster startups into our platform:** Some of the homestays from GHE are now bookable on our website. They offer our travelers the opportunity to visit authentic, remote locations that would have otherwise been difficult to discover, and local communities the opportunity to make a living out of tourism.
- 2. Supporting destinations by testing solutions within our product:** As a result of the cooperation between the Booking Cares Labs and the city of Amsterdam, as well as a clear definition of the opportunities to enhance the Amsterdam experience, we have started to support tourism dispersal and behavioral awareness initiatives. An example is our behavioral awareness experiment, which we trialled in a pre-trip email to support Amsterdam visitors' understanding and respect of local Dutch customs.

- 3. Helping our customers make sustainable travel choices:** From research, we know that 87% of our customers want to travel more sustainably, but 60% don't manage to do so. Since 2017, we have run several experiments displaying partner eco-certifications on our website. Up until now, we have not yet found the best way to do this, so we continue to iterate, expand, and adjust our approach until we find the right way to make sustainable travel mainstream.
- 4. Finding ways to make our offering as sustainable as possible:** During the final half of 2018, we ran several sustainability feature experiments. We will continue to do so into 2019 so that in the future, we can reward our partners for their sustainable practices and make it easier for guests to book a sustainable trip.
- 5. Emergency Response:** We support several initiatives that offer help after a natural disaster occurs. Once an emergency is detected, employees can contribute to a crowd-fund on our internal volunteering platform. In 2018, employees donated €16,500 to seven campaigns. Booking.com matched those contributions and added additional funds to bring the total amount donated in 2018 to €37,650. All donations are sent to immediate relief organisations such as the Red Cross. We have also been working on an internal tool that allows us to identify and automatically reach out to potentially affected partners in disaster areas, supporting our regional teams handling emergency responses. We hope to make further progress on this in the coming year.



## The Numbers in 2018



**€4,208,500**  
Granted to drive innovation in sustainable tourism (total of all programs)



**32,244**  
Number of hours volunteered

**1,096**  
Applications to participate in our external programs



**€37,650**  
Donated to disaster relief

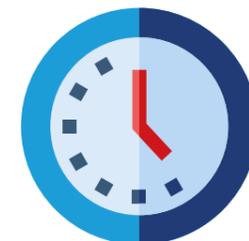


**448**  
Number of organisations supported by our programs

## Since the start of Booking Cares



**24,490**  
Number of employee volunteers (cumulative)



**150,855**  
Number of hours volunteered

**€6,308,500**  
Granted to drive innovation in sustainable tourism (total of all programs)



**€249,252**  
Donated to disaster relief

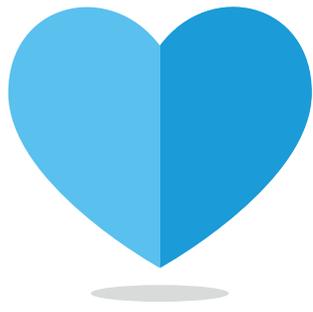




# Conclusion

To finalize this year's update, we would like to share some of our biggest learnings from 2018, along with some insight on our goals for the coming year.

1. A wealth of opportunities:
  - a. **The opportunity for Booking.com in sustainable travel is immense.**  
We're excited to continue working with new and old stakeholders on a variety of initiatives, both internally and externally, over the next 12 months.
  - b. **There is a world to win in product.**  
We see an opportunity for more product innovation in the sustainable travel space. We're excited to continue exploring the best way to support both the innovation and advancement of this area in the future.
  - c. **The future of destination support.**  
While sustainable travel can be approached thematically, there is also the possibility of delving into destination support. This allows for precise learnings and the ability to scale to similar destinations globally. We're looking forward to scaling our support through several initiatives, and improving the way we approach even the most pressing sustainable travel challenges.
2. We have reflected on how we define sustainable travel and found that **Cultural Heritage Preservation and Promotion often goes hand-in-hand with Tourism Dispersal and Inclusive Growth**. Startups and non-profit projects often identify their impact as the latter and see the preservation of culture as a benefit. This may mean that it does not remain a priority topic, but rather a focus within those two themes.
3. When it comes to our employee volunteer program, we've learnt that it takes a tailored approach to make a lasting impact. **But to continue making the right matches, and involving the majority of our employees, more efforts are needed.** We look forward to developing our flagship program as time goes on.
4. Our next steps involve further integrating supported solutions into our product, and making sure we're **developing a sustainable supply, rather than continuing to focus on the demand.**
5. As a final note, although there is still lots of work to be done, we're confident that there is a bright future ahead for Booking Cares and the sustainable travel industry as a whole. **Thank you for your support over the last year. Let's see what we can achieve in the next!**



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