



# Regenerative Tourism

## Feedback Report

Skift Take: Regenerative tourism represents an opportunity for the industry to respond to clear market demand and develop new approaches to sustainability and innovative business models. But it suffers from a lack of defined methodologies and demonstrable impact.

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# Background

Regenerative tourism has been receiving a lot of attention in recent years and is often touted as the new paradigm for positive transformative change for the industry. The concept is sometimes regarded as a puzzle for the industry, even described by one commenter on LinkedIn as a “beast of a topic”. According to many (though not all), it seems to emphasize maximizing positive impact rather than simply mitigating harm and, unless this can be demonstrated, it is vulnerable to being co-opted by greenwashing; yet no standardized model for measuring and disclosing this currently exists.

According to some critics, this is a problem to be solved, but according to others, attempts to standardize the regenerative model or “put it in a box” negates the holistic philosophy it is attempting to embody.

Furthermore, it can appear from all the fanfare that it is taking the world by storm and is the next frontier for ethical and responsible tourism, but outside the industry there is very little knowledge about it and consumers are mostly unfamiliar with the concept.

In Skift’s view, and those of various experts with whom we spoke, regenerative tourism also presents certain risks, such as becoming a vehicle for greenwashing.

This does not make the paradigm invalid, however, and these risks could be mitigated by approaching the paradigm with rigor and a science-based lens. Again, though, this is not a universally agreed upon position.

One of our more controversial conclusions is that the practice (if not the term/movement) of regenerative tourism is not new. But the inaccuracy of its claim to newness also does not invalidate the paradigm. Indeed, the fact that it has been done before and profitably so, with demonstrably positive social and environmental effects, at the very least makes a case for it.

In order for it to scale, however, it is essential for regenerative tourism to demonstrate its impact through robust data – and this is not easy. Any claims not backed by data merely open up accusations of greenwashing. It can be done, though, and several standout examples of destinations and accommodation businesses demonstrate this. TBut although there are existing case studies, there is not even broad agreement on which examples constitute regenerative tourism and which do not, particularly as

some projects such as the Eden Project in Cornwall and the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront in Cape Town, predate the term and thus have not identified themselves with it even if the overall approach fits within the regenerative paradigm.

## Regenerative Tourism: Fact vs. Fiction

So, clearly this is the subject of passionate debate, whatever side of the argument you fall on. This raises the question as to why the subject is important enough to spark such a debate. Advocates suggest that it is filling the gaps in “sustainable tourism” with a more holistic approach emphasizing connection and community, while skeptics have suggested that it makes a straw man of sustainable tourism in order to market itself as something new and necessary. Currently, the truth seems to lie somewhere in the middle and the concept is still evolving.

Before we go any further, let’s reiterate our delineation of the facts from the fictions, as this provides context for Skift Research’s position within the debate:

<b>Fiction</b>	<b>Fact</b>	<b>Details</b>
Regenerative tourism is a revolutionary new paradigm for the tourism industry.	Regenerative tourism is a new term but not a new practice.	Leveraging tourism to improve a destination, as well as repurposing degraded sites for tourism, has been going on for decades.
Regenerative tourism is a replacement for sustainable tourism.	Regenerative tourism shares some commonalities with sustainable tourism but is not a replacement for it.	Regenerative tourism can be complementary to sustainable tourism but it (currently) lacks the macro broad focus at the core of sustainable tourism.
Regenerative tourism is an inherent good and doesn’t present any potential downsides.	There are risks that regenerative tourism could become a vehicle for greenwashing or a distraction from climate action.	Regenerative tourism appears well-intentioned but there is a serious risk that the fanfare around it becomes a dangerous distraction from the less glossy work of addressing climate change.

<p>Regenerative tourism is just a rebrand of sustainable tourism.</p>	<p>Regenerative tourism is distinct from sustainable tourism but overlaps with it.</p>	<p>Regenerative tourism does recycle aspects of sustainable tourism and sometimes makes a “straw man” of sustainable tourism, but it differs in its scope and intent.</p>
<p>Regenerative tourism is just greenwashing.</p>	<p>Regenerative tourism is not just greenwashing (yet).</p>	<p>As a new fashionable buzzword, there is a risk that regenerative tourism could backslide into or become a conduit for greenwashing.</p>
<p>Regenerative tourism can't be accurately measured or encompassed within a standardized methodology.</p>	<p>There is not yet a standardized or agreed upon approach to measuring regenerative tourism.</p>	<p>Standardizing the practice of sustainable tourism is extremely challenging, as it is complex and context-specific. But some metrics are universal (such as climate impact, water use, air emissions etc.) and the process for determining bespoke metrics (materiality) can be standardized.</p>
<p>There is no broad market for regenerative tourism because consumers don't care about traveling sustainably or giving back.</p>	<p>There is a market for regenerative tourism.</p>	<p>The data show a hunger (particularly among younger generations) for more sustainable options and a willingness to pay for them. This does not always translate into action, however, and there are many possible reasons for this beyond them simply not caring.</p>

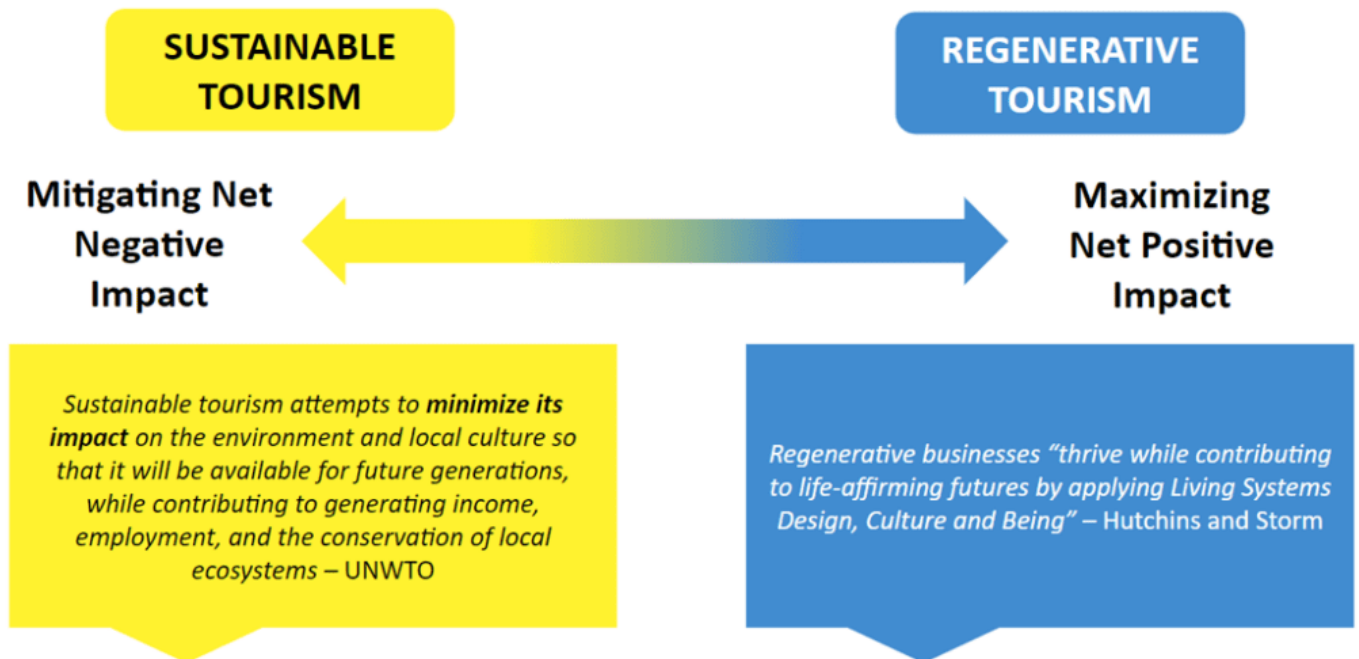
# Discussion Points

## Defining Regenerative Tourism

One of the main and perhaps most fundamental topics that has sparked debate around regenerative tourism following the publication of our report is the actual definition of it.

In terms of defining regenerative tourism, favorable interpretations see it as the latest stage in a gradual evolution of travel and tourism in an ethical direction. Earlier concepts, such as sustainable tourism, focused on minimizing harm, which starts from

the assumption that travel and tourism can only mitigate negative impacts. Regenerative tourism, by contrast, seeks to maximize positive impacts. Mitigating harm assumes an inexorable deterioration that can only be slowed and is ultimately insufficient to address problems such as climate change, biodiversity loss, or societal inequalities.



Source: Skift Research

## Feedback

Crucially, this is also not a universally agreed upon position by either critics or advocates of regenerative tourism. While this definition represents a summation of the more common definitions and understandings found both online and in literature, it is seen as problematic among both advocates and critics of the paradigm:

- **Critic:** Some experts, particularly in the sustainable tourism space, have suggested that it creates a “straw man” of sustainable tourism in order to brand itself as something different. According to Richard Edwards of UnTours and the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, characterizing sustainable tourism as only being about mitigating harm and “containment” is disingenuous. Ostensibly, to claim regenerative tourism is a new and necessary concept requires some denigration of sustainable tourism so that regenerative tourism appears more evolved by comparison. In fact, many of the principles and imperatives described in regenerative were already being tackled by sustainable tourism, specifically the concept of holistically improving a destination rather than merely mitigating harm. As Edwards states, “How could you have sustainable tourism if you were

just ‘containing’? That doesn't make any sense.”

- **Advocate:** From the regenerative position, this definition is seen as simultaneously reductive and broad: “The sources suggest from the start that regenerative tourism is primarily about outcomes: building back better, seeking to maximize positive impact rather than merely minimizing harms, focusing on cultural factors, community engagement and visitor participation. In short, ‘doing good’ in order to ‘leave a place better than when found’. By focusing only on outcomes and ignoring the fundamental assumptions, logic and forms of thinking that underpin regeneration, the concept is trivialized, and its real potential understated, if stated accurately at all.”

The first of these two criticisms was documented in the initial report, while the second was shared in response to the report.

Further reflections were offered via LinkedIn, in response to Skift’s [podcast](#) and [LinkedIn Live](#) session:

Phrases like “regenerative travel leaves a place better than before” make me confused.

There’s nothing wrong with the phrase itself, it clearly attracts people's attention. The problem is that people define positive impact differently.

Cecil Rhodes and his company had many reasons to say “We leave our places better than before” – after all, Rhodesia was named after him by people. Except, you know, they were white supremacists and imperialists.

A regenerative approach to tourism is all too often simplified to “leaving the place better than before.”

Regenerative design and development has been around for decades now, and learning from those who have been practising this approach is where we look for deeper understanding of what this means for tourism.

## Skift’s Response

## The Issue of Definition

While we have stated in our report that both the above definition and its intent make perfect sense in theory – to leverage tourism to leave a destination better off than it would be without it, rather than trying to simply minimize damage – we agree that it is reductive in isolation and open to multiple interpretations of what “better” actually means. Positive intent doesn’t guarantee meaningful action, nor does it speak to the practicalities of implementation. We do, however, find it instructive as a broad framing or opening discussion point.

Furthermore, the definition, regardless of our own critiques of its limitations, does succeed as an accurate summation of multiple definitions from other individuals and entities. For example:

- World Travel and Tourism Council: “Sustainability is about making sure that the resources we enjoy today will still be available for the generations that follow; regeneration is about making sure that what we do now feeds back into the system from which we benefit. It’s about being proactive and intentional.”
- Mize: “It goes beyond ‘helping to conserve’ a destination. The main goal of this tourism is to inspire visitors to impact the destination positively.”
- Tourism Collab: “Regenerative tourism, at its simplest, is about ensuring the visitor economy delivers a net positive benefit for communities, the environment, and the destination.”
- Fáilte Ireland: “Regenerative tourism focuses on fostering positive relationships between tourists, host communities, and the natural environment, while also promoting long-term resilience and well-being for all stakeholders involved.”
- The Tourism Space: “Tourism that actively and intentionally creates the conditions for communities and places to thrive and flourish. It is tourism that gives back more than it takes, that delivers net benefit to all stakeholders.”
- Earth Changers: “It’s not about less, it’s about more of the things that matter.”

So while there may be more nuanced and holistic definitions, one must start somewhere and, in our view, the distinction between net positive impact and mitigation of negative impacts (for all its limitations) succeeds as a starting point for understanding regenerative tourism’s overall intent, while also avoiding the pitfalls of some of the more esoteric definitions that can be confusing to the layman.

A point of frustration for many is that some definitions tend to be vague and evoke



esoteric, emotive, or spiritual concepts without commenting on actual applicability or outcomes. One of the more credible (in Skift's view) definitions comes from EarthCheck in collaboration with Griffith University's Institute for Tourism, which defines it as a process whereby the tourism sector and tourism stakeholders "collectively exert care and guardianship (through decision-making and practices) for the improvement and enhancement of natural, human and human-made elements when moving to, visiting, living or operating in a destination", with a goal to "allow these elements to exceed their current survivability conditions".

### **Focusing on "Outcomes"**

The notion that focusing on outcomes is unproductive or even harmful is counterintuitive. It is certainly true that regenerative tourism is informed by a "holistic systems approach", which emphasizes a bottom-up shift in overall systems and relationships within them, and thus discourages a narrow focus on specific milestones; ultimately, it is another means of achieving positive outcomes. Indeed, the "regeneration" of a holistic system, such as the collective ecosystem of society and the environment, while extremely complex, difficult to measure, and lacking a definable "end-point" (as improvements can always be made), does represent a collective effort towards outcomes – and outcomes can and should be tracked, to ensure the claims being made are defensible.

This should not be taken as an attack on regenerative tourism, but rather an effort to protect it and ensure the people and entities claiming regenerative goals and intentions are doing what they claim to be doing.

## **What Is (and Is Not) Regenerative Tourism**

The lack of standardized scalable model for regenerative tourism, when combined with a resistance to definition, lead to a third point of contention – a lack of agreement as to what constitutes regenerative tourism.

While regenerative tourism is a relatively new term it is, arguably, not a new practice. As we stated in our original report:

"There are many examples of profitable and socially and environmentally beneficial projects that have converted former industrial or even brownfield (land that has been

abandoned or underutilized due to industrial pollution) sites that have been repurposed for tourism, often with an emphasis on sustainability or the restoration of nature. Many of these have been extremely successful. So these examples clearly support the criticism that regenerative tourism, at least in practice, is nothing new. They also demonstrate, however, that it can achieve a balance of profitability and positive environmental and social benefit.”

In our original report, we cited several case studies including the Eden Project in Cornwall and The Forks in Manitoba, Canada, as projects that, while predating the popularization of the term, appear to fit the criteria for regenerative tourism. In our subsequent podcast, we also discussed the example of the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront in Cape Town, an example cited by a sustainable tourism academic with whom we spoke, as an exemplary case of regenerative tourism, complete with a holistic approach to environmental restoration, community development and protection of cultural heritage, a focus on authenticity and placemaking, and a granular approach to maximizing positive impact.

Some of the responses to these examples, however, have suggested they do not fall into the category of regenerative tourism, or are even unrelated to the paradigm entirely.

## Feedback

World Economic Forum and Travel and Leisure Co. illustrated regenerative tourism with images of picking up trash at the beach.

Skift's Robin Gilbert-Jones brought the example of V&A Waterfront in Cape Town.

All these are great things, and V&A is one of my favorite urban areas. But they have little to do with regenerative tourism.

## Skift's Response

There has been no shortage of contention as to what can or can't justifiably be categorized as regenerative tourism, but little clarity about what criteria should be applied and by whom.

As stated earlier, given the actual and potential misuse of it, some policing of the term

is understandable, but this is unhelpful unless an accurate description or framework can be offered in response and both remain elusive in the public square. Furthermore, unlike sustainable tourism, there is no recognized regulatory body or certification structure so, outside of a nebulous movement, it is unclear to whom it falls to decide what qualifies as regenerative tourism.

## The Challenge of Measurement and Scalability

In our view, the most crucial question to ask of any destination making claims about being sustainable, let alone being regenerative is: are its sustainability claims transparent and backed by data? A primary concern with regard to regenerative tourism is the current lack of an agreed upon, standardized, or regulated methodology for measuring and managing the impact of regenerative projects. This is gradually changing and some organizations, such as EarthCheck and Weeva, have taken a more science-based approach to defining how regenerative tourism should be carried out and how to measure it. This has proven another point of contention, particularly among those within the regenerative movement.

### Feedback

As with the issue of definition, there are broadly two camps on this point:

- **Critic:** Some experts, particularly in the science-based, sustainable tourism space, see a lack of a generalizable approach as another potential opening to co-opting by greenwashing, which is a major issue for the travel industry in general. If you can't demonstrate your impact, you could be claiming it disingenuously. It bears repeating that the travel industry is a frequent target of and vehicle for greenwashing, so a paradigm that resists quantification of outcomes is particularly vulnerable. According to a senior impact manager at a global tour operator that we interviewed, "I think we need to change this whole rhetoric around thinking something is sustainable, something is regenerative. It's all actually a journey to improvement. It should be about improvement and metrics around showing that improvement with whatever practices you're doing, because that's the only indication of whether things change or not. Impact, sustainability and regeneration should be about showing some change."
- **Advocate:** Regenerative tourism is highly site-specific and holistic and this is

often to its credit; therefore, attempts to develop a standardized approach to measurement could be seen as reductive and negating its holistic quality. According to one commenter, “The mass industrial version is the one I am concerned about because it seems stuck on a model that is not healthy. The alternative is emerging but is localized, place-shaped and dependent on community participation. In fact, tourism shouldn’t aim to lead but to serve in this case.”

Indeed, regenerative tourism tends to be place-shaped and site-specific, which creates a lot of variability in implementation but also adds to the challenge of defining the approach. The need for measurement is not universally agreed upon, as some of the feedback we received has suggested.

In response to the news that Weeva, a sustainability management tool for the accommodation sector that we had mentioned in our previous report as coming among the closest to a true science-based, metrics-driven approach to regenerative tourism (albeit in a narrow sector), would be closing its doors, I posted the following on LinkedIn:

This is very unfortunate news. Weeva is one of the few companies that have a compelling approach to managing regenerative tourism. Their reasons for closing down are varied but broadly seem to corroborate with our conclusions on regenerative: the market is just not there yet and there are major challenges in scalability.

*“The addressable market is well below our initial expectations with market insight and analysis demonstrating that many in the industry are not yet ready to adopt a more rigorous approach to sustainability.”*

I think speaks volumes about the challenges of creating a rigorous and sustainability management system that the market is ready for.

The post received the following response:

Again, regenerative development is not about hyper tracking sustainability targets. How is Weeva's tool a compelling approach to regenerative tourism? You are right, it's hard to scale regenerative development at this stage but positive change is very, very hard and this continued misinformation, especially from leaders in tourism information sharing, only adds to that. Please interview people who know what regenerative tourism is

The resistance to the use of metrics was also observed by one of our follow-up interviewees. "I attended a conference and when asked how you know if transformational travel is having the right or positive effects, the response was 'well, you just know' – that was the answer from a leading expert, where you just know, you feel it. And I get that every time I hear anything from either of those two camps [regenerative and transformational travel]. You're this enlightened person, and you're just supposed to know."

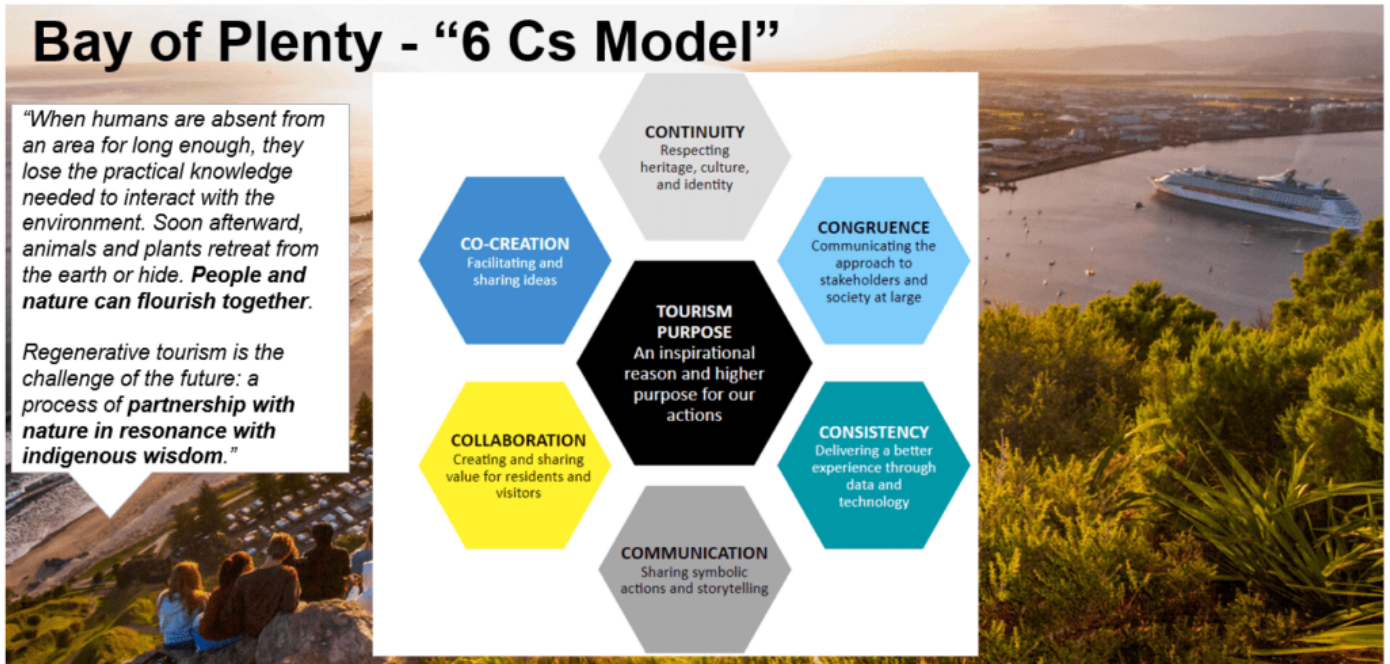
## Skift's Response

The hostility towards measurement or demonstration of impact raises a further question – if regenerative tourism is being practiced by a destination or business, how does a scalable approach to measuring and demonstrating its positive impact harm the endeavor? It would most likely have the opposite effect, generating leadership and an aspirational following among others in the sector who wish to emulate the approach. In fact, in certain cases, this is already taking place.

In the absence of leadership around demonstration of impact, the term "regenerative" risks being an open-source conduit for greenwashing. According to one of our interviewees, this is already happening, "people are using the term in relation to 'regenerating' yourself – you can go and stay in a 300-room hotel and you visit a community, plant some trees, do some yoga or wellness activity. I've seen it at least twice and I just thought, this is happening because they're not organized." In light of the term being co-opted by businesses as an ostensible branding tool, it is understandable that those within the movement would be protective of it, but the vagueness of the definition and lack of standardization enables this misuse.

While there is no agreed-upon or standardized model for measuring or demonstrating regenerative tourism, or even confirming that it is in fact regenerative. This is not to

say that no progress has been made, but it has been at the grassroots level – by destinations and businesses themselves who have selected their own set of criteria, such as the case study examples of Playa Viva and Bay of Plenty, which have taken innovative approaches to understanding what their crucial metrics are and how to demonstrate them.



Source: Tourism Bay of Plenty

Grootbos Nature Reserve and Lengishu House, both Weeva clients, have carved out leadership positions as centers of excellence for regenerative tourism development and this has been bolstered by their data-driven approaches.



**Sanitary Pad Program:** funded at a nearby school to ensure girls can attend year-round without interruptions, promoting gender equality and reducing absenteeism.

**Employment:** Lengishu provides employment opportunities to the local community to help them meet their basic needs. We empower them by providing training and refresher courses and we also provide internship to students.

**Cultural Immersion:** Villages of the Ngare Ndare forest enrich guests' experiences while generating income for local communities.

**Infrastructure:** improved education, setting the foundation for long-term community development.

**90% Reduction in plastic use – bulk purchasing and collective supply**

**70% Reduction in generator cost**

**Actively Tracking:** Energy consumption | water consumption | water extracted | water recycled | waste recycling

Source: Lengishu House, Weeva

In our view, these success stories demonstrate that a metrics-driven approach can be achieved, it just has not yet been done at scale.

The level of personalization needed for regenerative tourism requires a higher level of specific data collection that is different based on the destination and the goals of the destination. Simply put, if regenerative tourism really is the next phase of evolution from sustainable tourism, it may be necessary to create a standardized list of high-level metrics to apply a regenerative tourism model and differentiate it from sustainable tourism.

Based on the various examples and case studies, we identified seven key criteria:

## Potential Measurement Metrics



### Environment

- Biodiversity
- Climate adaptation
- Climate mitigation
- Pollution
- Resources
- Energy use
- Rewilding
- Clean water
- Clean air
- Wildlife protection



### Visitor Engagement

- Behavior change
- Education
- Responsible access for all
- Cultural engagement
- Visitor impact



### Social

- Cultural heritage
- Centring traditional communities
- Stakeholder engagement
- No exploitation
- Property rights
- Community access
- Gender rights



### Economic

- Work and career opportunities
- Fair pay
- Supporting local business
- Delivering local economic benefit
- Investment in communities
- Financial inclusion
- Fair and sustainable supply chain



### Commitment and Compliance

- Monitoring and disclosure
- Planning regulations and sustainable development
- Third-party certification
- Public regenerative commitment



### Innovation

- Regenerative technology for environment
- Regenerative technology for society
- Leading by example



### Health and Safety

- Community health
- Women's health
- Spiritual health
- Employee safety

Source: Skift Research

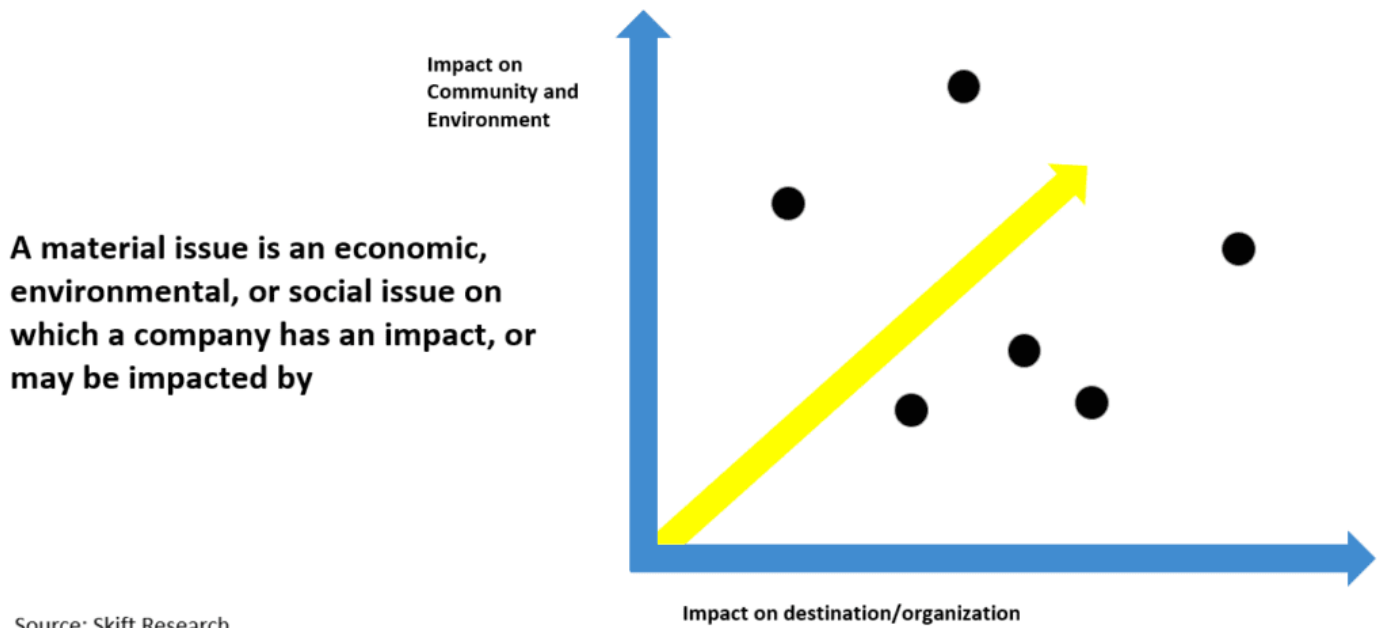
But the bottom line is: this is not easy. The complexity and expense involved in accurately measuring and verifying regenerative impacts – such as quantifying biodiversity improvement or assessing social impacts – add another layer of difficulty. Furthermore, with regenerative tourism being highly site-specific in approach and implementation, standardization will be harder in some cases than in others.

But, if the primary impact metrics cannot be standardized, the approach for determining them may be.

### Materiality: Balancing the Need for Scalability and Flexibility

One of the main challenges to any effort to standardize regenerative tourism is that it tends to be highly localized and context-specific. One solution to this is the concept of “materiality”. Largely popularized by the ESG (environmental, social, governance) space, materiality really just means determining which issues or metrics are most important for an organization or entity to track and focus on, according to its specific context, rather than applying a blanket set of metrics across all organizations.



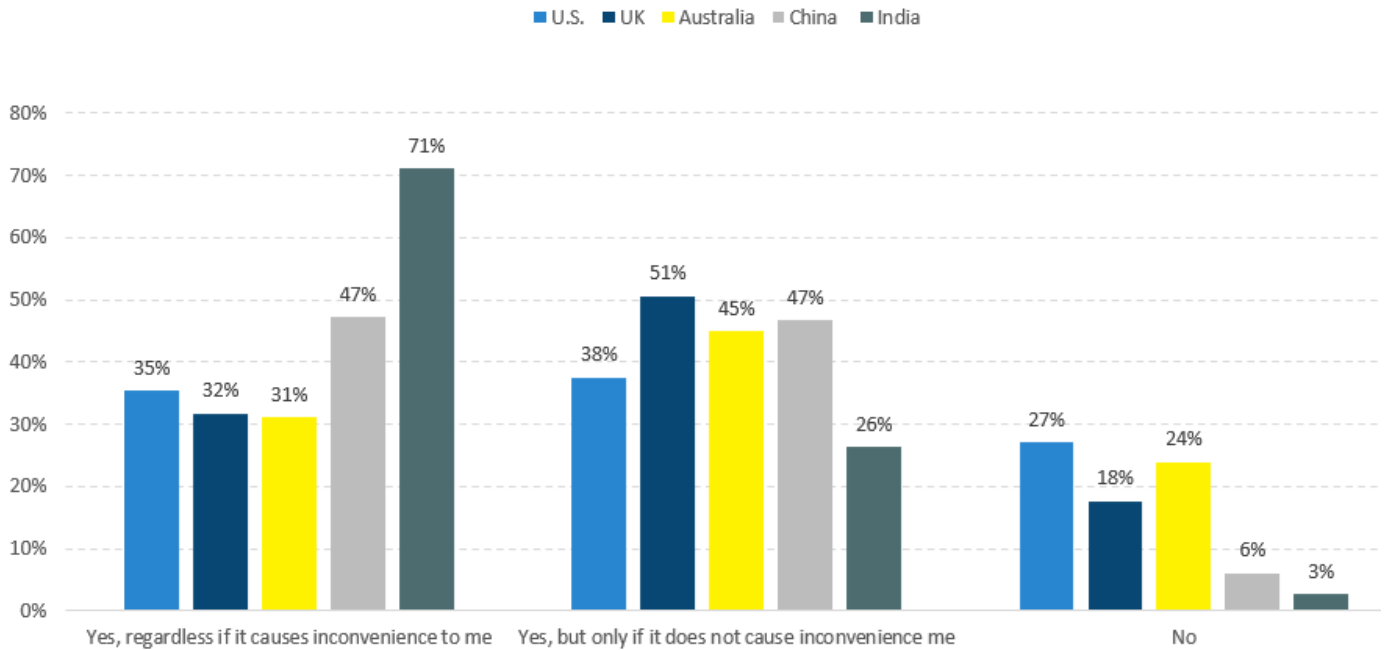


Such an approach could present a solution to the problem of standardization posed by regenerative tourism and some businesses and destinations are already implementing something like this. For example, Playa Viva, a regenerative tourism operation in Mexico, is a beachfront eco resort that shares its space with a turtle habitat. In its seasonal disclosure, therefore, it documents metrics around turtle conservation, such as number of turtle eggs moved to the sanctuary (a metric unlikely to be relevant to, for example, an urban destination in Northern Europe). This is an example of determining site-specific, regenerative metrics that are not necessarily relevant to other destinations – in essence, a determination of materiality.

## The Consumer Picture

Looking from the consumer side, we concluded (based on Skift's survey data) that the market is craving more credible, nature-positive options. According to Skift's data, across all markets, consumers overwhelmingly believe it is important for businesses to adopt practices to mitigate climate change.

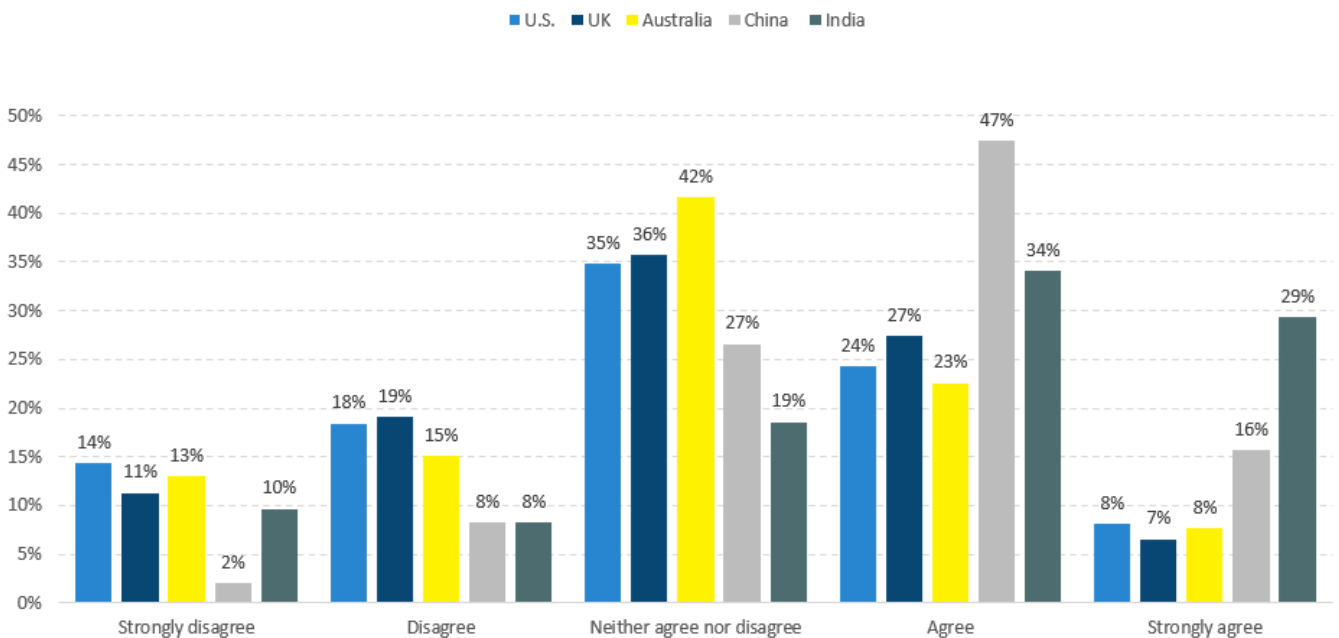
**Do you intend to make more sustainable (eco-friendly) decisions when planning travel in the future?**



Base: Made at least one trip in 2019; N: U.S. = 1004, UK = 504, Australia = 509, China = 1019, India = 1001

Source: Skift Research, Data as of Dec 9, 2021

**How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I'm willing to pay higher rates/fares to use a travel service provider who demonstrates environmental responsibility (consider hotels, airlines, etc.).**



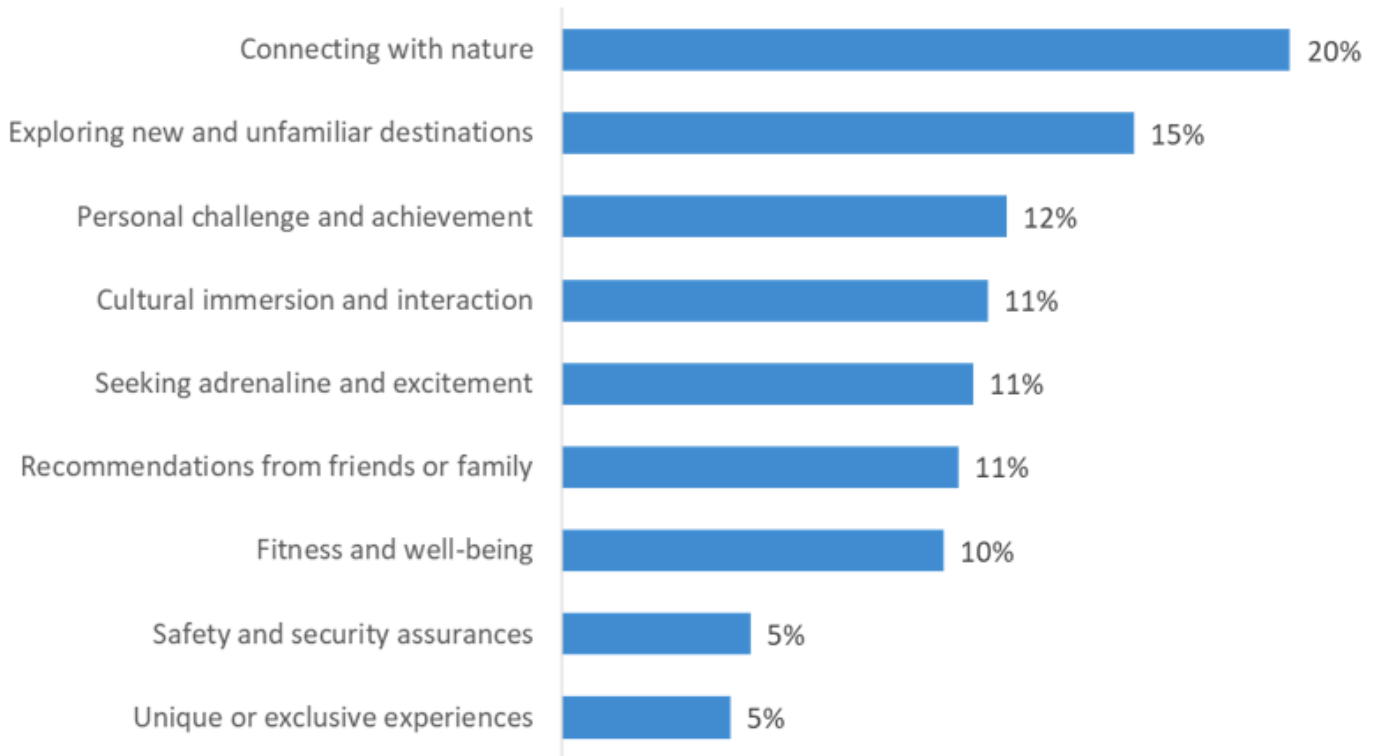
Base: Made at least one trip in 2019; N: U.S. = 1004, UK = 504, Australia = 509, China = 1019, India = 1001

Source: Skift Research, Data as of Dec 9, 2021

Travel consumers, particularly among the Millennial and Gen-Z age groups, tend to profess values in relation to travel that track well with the vision of regenerative tourism. This is good news for the movement as by 2030, Millennials and Gen Z are

expected to account for nearly 90% of all trips and will inherit nearly \$68 trillion from older generations. The data highlight a strong emphasis on immersive and nature-centric experiences among young travelers, but also a sense of involvement that regenerative tourism claims to offer (credibly in some standout cases such as Playa Viva and the Eden Project).

**Factors influencing the decision to participate in adventure tourism**



Base: N = ~1,500 (U.S. N = 523; UK N = 470, Germany N = 511)

Source: Skift Research Exploring Gen Z and Millennial Travel Habits. Data as of Nov 2023

So, the consumer picture is looking pretty positive for regenerative tourism. There is, however, generally an agreement among the readers and listeners who provided feedback on the research that there is a lack of awareness, understanding, and engagement with the concept outside of the industry and this represents untapped potential to harness extant consumer values and generate a movement of consumer advocacy around regeneration.

**Feedback**

Customer confusion — I would So, that the average traveler is not aware of regenerative. So, sustainability can still tend to be the best lingo to use. But time will tell.

But here come the next gen's — "We've also found that Gen Z and millennial travelers are particularly engaged on sustainability and ecological issues. So, both regenerative and sustainable travel do fit nicely in there. And they also show concern about tourism's potential negative impact on local communities and cultural heritage."

Regenerative can have better engagement with travelers — "Something regenerative tourism tends to get right is engaging with travelers in such a way that they feel included in the overall sustainability mission as participants rather than just like spectators on the sidelines."

Amid greenwashing and confusion with sustainability — The most exciting aspect of regenerative tourism is building trust and engagement with travelers. This can create an even more positive travel experience and

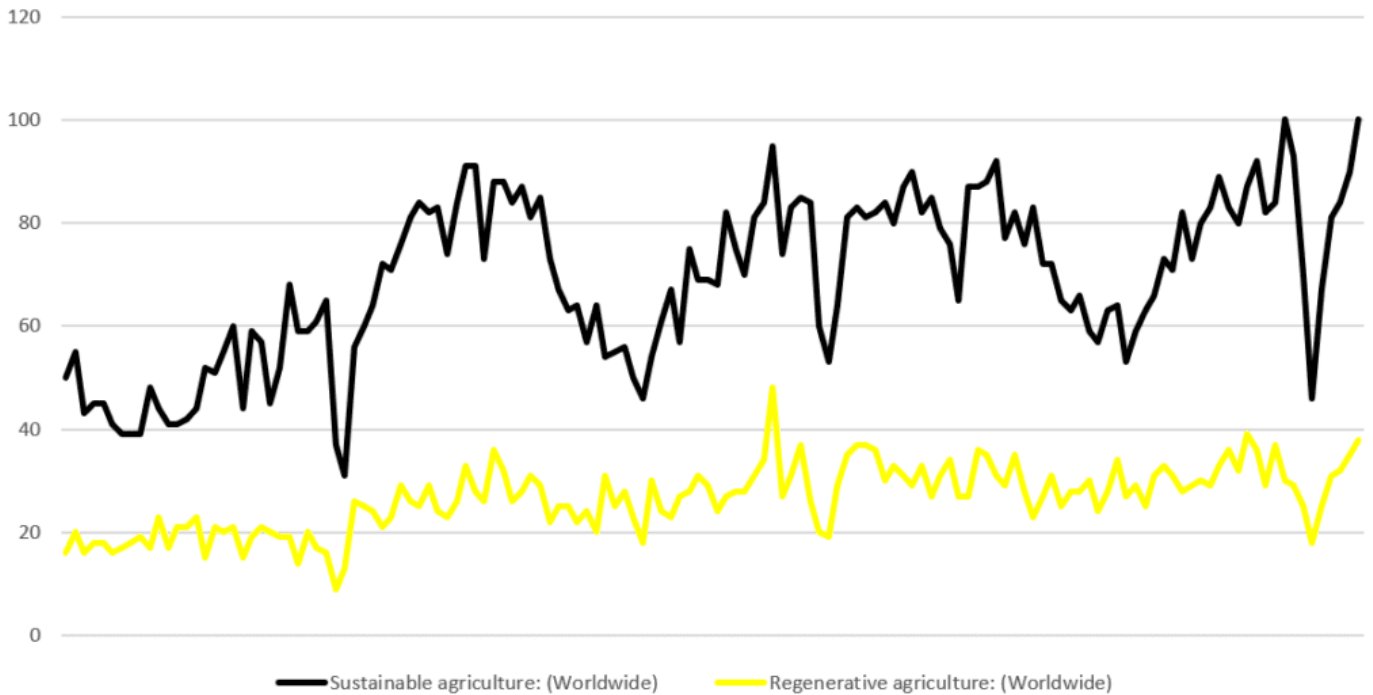
## Skift's Response

These comments reflect the fact that regenerative tourism faces two broad challenges:

- **Engagement:** A lack of awareness of the term and understanding of its definition and intent.
- **Suspicion:** Concerns about greenwashing and the deployment of new buzzwords that are (or perceived to be) ill-defined and vulnerable to abuse.

The first challenge is simpler, although not necessarily easy to address. Consumers simply don't understand the term well enough and are often entirely unaware of it. It is not commonly used outside the industry and gets very little engagement online as our Google Trends analysis demonstrates.

### Searches for Sustainable Agriculture vs. Regenerative Agriculture, 2021-2024



Source: Google Trends

The second challenge, in our view, is best tackled by addressing the previously mentioned issue around demonstrating impact – whether through a modular approach to impact metrics, or a materiality-based approach.

## Conclusion

This is a contentious topic with strong views held among both champions and critics of the concept, so it is no surprise to us that delving into it has sparked spirited debate. The subsequent discussions and feedback have also been useful in calibrating our position on the topic.

We maintain that it is important to critique emerging concepts such as regenerative tourism, partly to assess their validity as a scalable model in the crucial effort to make tourism more positively impactful towards both environment and society, and partly as a preventative measure against such concepts being co-opted by greenwashing, which remains a major challenge for the industry. What is required is more open debate and less closing of ranks. According to a senior impact specialist at a global travel business, "I'm not surprised that it kicked off a bit of discussion. I think that, especially post-COVID, the term really got supercharged without a huge amount of foundation to it all. So I think you've highlighted an interesting issue that needs to

have more discussion and more debate around it, because it isn't well defined, and it is definitely prone to greenwashing.”

Regenerative tourism remains, not only ill-defined, but resistant to definition among some of its most passionate advocates. There is an understandable concern about “putting it in a box” or commodifying it and thus denuding it of its holistic and grassroots nature, but as long as it remains difficult to define it also remains vulnerable, both to dismissal by critics (as “just another buzzword”) and to hijacking by greenwashing.

This resistance also extends to measurement and metrics-based management, which poses a similar risk – impact that cannot be demonstrated is either too easily dismissed or too easily claimed falsely. There have been laudable success stories in regenerative tourism and what many of them have in common is a defensible approach to impact metrics. These metrics-driven approaches, however, remain largely confined to grassroots efforts and scalable third-party verification seems a challenging business model to monetize.

With all this being said, regenerative tourism could be a powerful new direction for the industry if it can take collective action to generate consumer and grassroots advocacy, as well as develop new approaches to impact management.