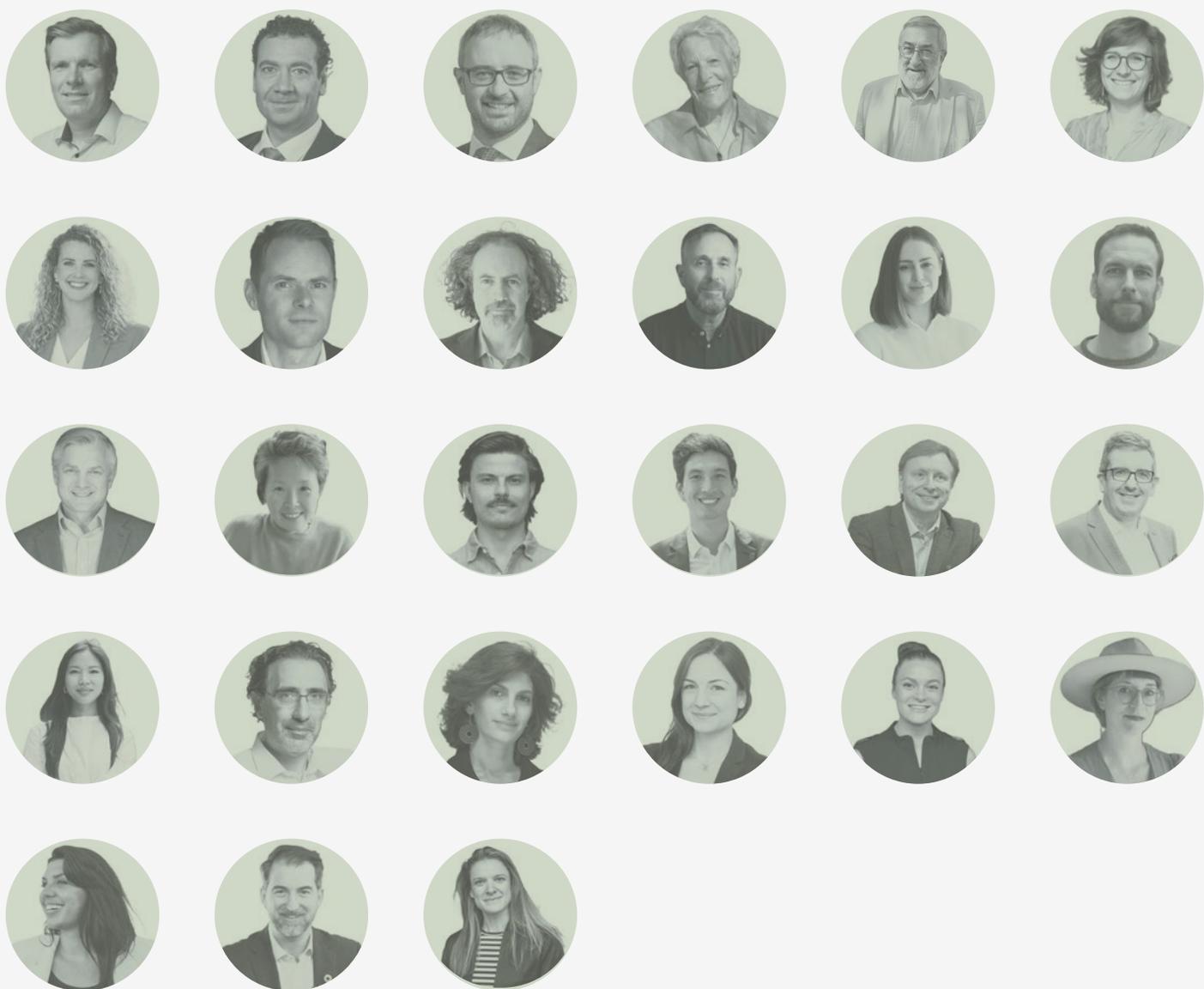


HYB26

Sustainability Edition

The Regenerative Question - What
Hospitality Must Become



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Regenerative Tourism: Needs Protection

Sustainability standards

Harold Goodwin

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Harold Goodwin warns that “regenerative tourism” is rapidly becoming the next vague sustainability label, used in marketing without standards and ripe for greenwashing. He argues that true regenerative tourism is the pinnacle of Responsible Tourism: delivering demonstrable, positive economic, social and environmental impact for residents first, not just better experiences for visitors.

Over the last five years I have been increasingly concerned about the rapidly increasing use of regenerative travel by businesses and destinations seeking to differentiate themselves from their competitors in a crowded marketplace.

Regenerative Tourism is now widely used:

	Google Hits	Google Scholar
04/10/2025		
Responsible Tourism Examples	92,400,000	1,510,000
Regenerative Tourism Examples	3,290,000	45,100
Regenerative Travel Examples	1,110,000	15,900

"Regenerative" has joined "sustainable" and "ecotourism", both similarly widely used as aspirational language conveying a degree of superiority, untrammelled by any need to meet any standard. Regenerative is ideal for greenwashing in that, for the consumer, it carries real meaning, but lacking a broadly agreed definition it is presently unlikely to result in regulatory action by the UK's [Advertising Standards Authority](#), the EU's current misselling consumer protection or the forthcoming Empowering Consumers Directive. "Ecotourism", "regenerative" and "sustainable" are safe greenwashing.

Why does this matter?

It matters because mis-selling and greenwashing matters: they confuse and mislead consumers into making choices which run counter to the objectives of sustainability – our sustainability, and our children's sustainability on our [finite planet](#). I find it particularly unacceptable because greenwashing most affects the choices made by consumers wanting to do the right thing.

It matters to me particularly because we see the word "regenerative" being used by businesses and destinations applying for a Responsible Tourism Award. The awards have been running since 2004; only in the last five have we seen "regenerative" used in applications. The word has meaning and importance for some of the businesses we are recognising in the Awards.

In the Responsible Tourism Awards we have been using “positive impact” for some time to emphasise the impact of the responsibility the business or destination has taken. In my view no business or destination can, whilst remaining profitable and in business, employing local community members and contributing to the local economy, take responsibility for everything on the [Responsible Tourism agenda](#). We advise businesses and destinations to take a careful look at the issues arising in and because of the businesses activities, to consider the concerns of its neighbours, determine what the business or destination can effectively take responsibility for, and report its actions and impact to its neighbours, business partners and consumers.

Regenerative tourism is, in my view, an exemplary example of Responsible Tourism; it is very difficult to achieve, arguably the highest form of Responsible Tourism. Every year in the Responsible Tourism Awards we discover outstanding examples of businesses and destinations where changemakers have stepped up, taken responsibility, and achieved change across the environmental, social and economic pillars of the sustainability agenda.

The Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism in Destinations included the assertion that Responsible Tourism is about “*making better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit...*” This has become both a meme and a litmus test. A meme because it is often used but rarely sourced; a litmus test because where the visitor is placed before the resident, the speaker or writer reveals that they have not understood. “Better places” is broadly used in Responsible Tourism to include economic benefits through direct inclusive employment and local sourcing, benefiting lived and built cultural heritage and the environment, including the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity.

In the extensive and growing literature on regenerative tourism there is a plethora of definitions, which I reviewed in establishing the case for a regenerative category in the awards. In the paper on [Responsible Tourism and Regenerative Travel](#) I argue that Regenerative Tourism is a form of Responsible Tourism and that Regenerative Tourism is often the pinnacle of the Responsible Tourism Movement.

As no firm definition of regenerative tourism has yet emerged in the industry or in academia, as [Hussain & Haley](#) have pointed out “*there is a high risk of ‘green washing’ and inappropriate adoption of a regenerative model.*” [VisitBritain](#) has done just that: in April 2025 it rebranded all of its sustainable tourism work as regenerative, conflating the two and undermining the concept of regenerative.

In the Responsible Tourism Awards in 2026 we are looking for regenerative destinations and businesses of two kinds:

1. Where tourism is making a significant contribution to economic regeneration and to the livelihoods of the local community.
2. Where, drawing on its roots in biology, medicine and agriculture the ambition is [transformational](#): “*regenerative thinking dares us to imagine systems that actively create life, resilience, and beauty — for people, places, and the planet. It’s not the end goal. It’s a design principle. A mindset.*”

It needs to demonstrate that it delivers. I hope that by doing this we can do our bit to protect the idea of regenerative tourism.

“Show me only chemical-free,
bed bug-safe hotels.”



What becomes searchable
becomes bookable.

