



## **The seventh GDS-Index report - results, trends, leaders**

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**In 2023, the GDS project saw significant growth. The GDS-Index featured 100 destinations from 11 countries around the world, including as many as 42 new cities, sending a clear message of willingness to cooperate and change. 86% of the destinations improved their previous performance.**

### **Nordic domination**

Eight of the 10 highest-rated cities are in the Nordic countries. The leading cities in the top 10 are Gothenburg, Oslo, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Bergen, Aarhus, Aalborg, Glasgow, Bordeaux and Stockholm.

Gothenburg has steadily improved its performance, taking the leadership position for the seventh time. Oslo rose from 10<sup>th</sup> place to 2<sup>nd</sup> by improving and implementing its strategy. Copenhagen remained in 3<sup>rd</sup> place, and Helsinki was promoted to 4<sup>th</sup> from 12<sup>th</sup> place. Bergen, second last year despite an improved score, dropped to 5<sup>th</sup> place.

### **Trends**

Based on this year's data, GDS-Index highlights six key trends shaping the future of regenerative destination management and promotion:

1. **Growing integration of activities with climate strategies** – 85% of all cities have a climate change mitigation and adaptation strategy, but only 33% of cities have included tourism and the meetings industry.
2. Greater involvement of decision makers.
3. The growing importance of certification – in the Nordic countries an average of 70% of hotels and 84% of facilities are certified, in the Asia-Pacific region it is 71% of facilities and 25% of hotels, in Western Europe it is 46% of facilities and 28% of hotels and in Eastern Europe it is 14% of facilities.
4. Formalization of social impact strategies.
5. Greater emphasis on diversity, equity, inclusivity (DEI) – 47% of destinations now have an action plan for DEI.
6. Better destination narrative – storytelling – 53% of cities report on sustainability activities and strategies through their websites.

### **Krakow and Eastern Europe**

The ranking describes the performance of specific regions like Western and Eastern Europe, North America, the Nordic countries, Asia and the Pacific. As for Poland, our country is included in the Eastern European region. Four cities from the region participate in the ranking, with Gdańsk joining Krakow, Ljubljana and Tallinn in 2023.

According to the GDS-Index, all cities showed strong commitment. The authors score Krakow for having a good destination management strategy, as well as an open diversity, equality and inclusiveness (DEI) policy. The classification made on the basis of 69 criteria divided into four



main categories yielded the following results: the city's environmental activities 60.3% (66.7% in 2022), the city's social activities 56.6% (59.2% last year), supplier activities 12.7% (10.4% in 2022), and city management activities 43.2% (up from 33.6%). Krakow received a total of 43.2 points – the areas that need work are primarily service providers operating in the tourism sector – such as hotels and agencies. The biggest challenge seems to be the certification of entrepreneurs and facilities. In addition, the scope of DMO management and strategy should be deepened and structured.

Gdańsk, which took part in the benchmarking for the first time, has demonstrated a strong commitment toward more sustainable destination management, engaging residents in tourism-related discussions, as well as providing stakeholder training. For the first time, Gdańsk Convention Bureau took the important step of calculating the carbon footprint of the conference it was organizing, prioritizing a “net zero” approach. Tallinn and Ljubljana have significantly improved their performance. In particular, Ljubljana has been proactive by training its management team, creating various new sustainability initiatives, and engaging partners.

### **Global Destination Sustainability - GDS-Index**

The GDS-Index is a benchmarking initiative that compares cities on the basis of their sustainability performance, and is ranked based on seventy criteria. Co-founded in 2016 by ICCA Scandinavia, the ICCA, City Destinations Alliance (CityDNA), IMEX and MCI, it is a resource for cities, visitors and event planners looking for destinations offering the best in sustainability.

[GDS Index Report 2023](#)