

**USTOA'S SUSTAINABILITY IS RESPONSIBILITY (SIR) ANNUAL SUMMIT UNITES
INDUSTRY LEADERS TO PROGRESS RESPONSIBLE TOURISM INITIATIVES**
Hosted in Anchorage, Alaska



USTOA SIR Summit Attendees on a mountain bike ride around Lake Eklutna

NEW YORK – May 28, 2026 – The [United States Tour Operators Association](#) (USTOA) held its yearly Sustainability is Responsibility (SIR) Summit from May 17 through May 20, 2026, in Anchorage, AK. The 2026 SIR Summit was hosted in partnership with [Visit Anchorage](#).

USTOA President and CEO Terry Dale emphasized that this year's summit highlighted members who played a key role in addressing sustainability goals in the travel industry. "As the state of our world evolves, so does the focus of SIR. Our members' passion for responsible travel is what drives them to advance their own sustainability strategies in a way that tackles the current needs of our industry," added Dale. "We wanted to extend a special thanks to our generous hosts at Visit Anchorage for providing immersive off-site learning opportunities and sharing how this breathtaking destination is spearheading sustainability in travel for the future of the industry."

"Hosting the SIR Summit in Anchorage created an opportunity to bring together local voices living and working at the intersection of tourism, conservation, culture, and community every day," said Kara Troglin, tourism sales manager at Visit Anchorage. "We're grateful to the many local organizations and speakers who shared their time, knowledge, and lived experience, giving attendees a deeper understanding of Alaska through meaningful conversations and place-based learning."

In Anchorage, the SIR Summit began with a welcome reception at the Bluewater Basecamp where attendees were able to mingle and gear up for three days of hands-on learning experiences in nature-centric Alaska, while simultaneously learning about how Alaska addresses accessibility for both locals

and travelers in the wilderness. The first morning session kicked off with opening remarks from Kevin Berry, Professor of Economics at University of Alaska Anchorage, who served as the keynote speaker and delivered a presentation about the economic trends shaping Alaska's tourism and sustainability. Professor Graham Miller, Rodrigo Guimarães Chair of Sustainable Business and Academic Director for the Westmont Institute for Tourism and Hospitality at Nova School of Business and Economics, Lisbon, Portugal, returned for the third year as facilitator of this year's SIR Summit. His facilitation was a huge reason for the summit's success. Next up was a panel discussion centered on the theme, "Tourism, Communities & Business: Creating Shared Value & Addressing Challenges," with panelists Shane McHale of Blueberry Tours, Carl Johnson of Alaska Photo Treks, Cady Lister of Renewable Energy Alaska Project, and Kevin Berry. The afternoon brought off-site learning experiences along Turnagain Arm and Beluga point, and a stop at the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center where attendees experienced wild animal encounters. Afternoon panel discussions about wildlife conservation and sustainable fisheries were presented by Nicole Schmitt of Alaska Wildlife Alliance and Elizabeth Dubovsky of Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association. The evening brought attendees together for dinner at Bison Hall, where they later were surprised by the Alaska Photo Treks team with a viewing of the evening "Bore Tide," a rare phenomenon that all SIR Summit attendees felt was a true once in a lifetime experience.

The following day, participants convened for a morning panel discussion about how sustainability shows up in real-world tourism operations across Alaska, led by Jillian Simpson, President of Alaska Travel Industry Association and Adventure Green Alaska, Jennifer Woolworth of the National Parks Conservation Association, and Bonnie Westlund of Holland America Line. The afternoon brought attendees to the Alaska Native Heritage Center for an additional off-site educational program, featuring a guided village tour and a cultural briefing within an Athabascan Ceremonial House led by Kelsey Wallace, President of Alaska Native Heritage Center. The program delivered insights into Alaska Native heritage and ongoing cultural preservation initiatives, effectively aligning with the key themes of the summit – responsible tourism. The final day of the summit featured an experiential learning program in Whittier, in partnership with Lazy Otters Boat Tours, where attendees toured Blackstone Glacier in Prince William Sound.



USTOA SIR Summit Attendees exploring a temperate rainforest beach on their Prince William Sound glacier tour

In addition to the immersive field programming, the four-day summit incorporated structured forums designed to facilitate discussions and idea sharing. Presentations and conversations were led by a few USTOA members, and local and industry experts Sarah Thomas and Samarys (Sama) Seguinot-Medina of Alaska Community Action on Toxics. Industry challenges such as aviation, carbon methodology, overtourism, and climate risk were addressed through collaborative working groups comprised of both tour operators and value chain organizations that have facilitated tangible change over the last six months, leading up to and throughout the summit. These Working Groups were led by USTOA's very own Molly Laycob, global social impact manager, and will continue to meet and progress their initiatives post-summit.

"Visit Anchorage was honored to be asked to host this international group of forward thinkers by USTOA," said David S. Kasser, SVP of sales, Visit Anchorage. "It was wonderful to support the attendees working together to pioneer solutions to sustainability issues facing tourism businesses around the globe."

"This year's SIR summit delivered strong results, driven by the collaboration with Visit Anchorage and the expertise of local Alaskan conservation leaders who provided valuable and educational presentations," said Dale. "SIR remains focused on unifying and educating members around responsible tourism practices, and each summit continues to raise the bar year after year."

For more information on USTOA, visit www.ustoa.com.

About USTOA:

Representing \$24.4 billion in revenue, the member companies of United States Tour Operators Association provide tours, packages and custom arrangements that allow 8.4 million travelers annually unparalleled access, insider knowledge, peace-of-mind, value, and freedom to enjoy destinations and experiences across the entire globe. Each member company has met the travel industry's highest standards, including participation in the USTOA's Travelers Assistance Program, which protects consumer payments up to \$1 million if the company goes out of business. As a voice for the tour operator industry for more than 50 years, USTOA also provides education and assistance for consumers and travel advisors.

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