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# Climate Conference Aims to Shake Up Meetings Industry

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## Highlights

COP15 as a sustainability benchmark for large conferences; UNWTO launches Live the Deal campaign for green travel

Even as controversy swirls and protestors march at the Copenhagen Climate Conference ([COP15](#)) in Denmark this week, organizers are hoping that the gathering will change the course of meetings and conventions in years to come.

That's what journalists in the meetings industry learned last week in a behind-the-scenes look at sustainability efforts that the Danish government and many Copenhagen hotels, transportation companies, and restaurants have engineered for the conference—the largest in Denmark's history and the most important international meeting on the environment.

From buses running on biofuel to windmill power at the sprawling convention center on the outskirts of the capital, we saw a city and a country raising the bar in creative and cost-effective ways to minimize the environmental impact of convention business. Indeed, The United Nations, sponsor of COP15, has stipulated that the host country must offset the conference's local carbon emissions, but the Danish government has chosen to make COP15 a climate-neutral event, which means offsetting the impact of some 12,000 people traveling to the 12-day conference from around the world.

“This is probably the largest offset project ever,” said Jan-Christoph Napierski of the Danish Foreign Ministry, in a press conference for our group of journalists last Tuesday in Copenhagen. He said COP15 would generate an estimated 40,500 tons of emissions—90 percent from travel to and from Copenhagen. The government will compensate for that through a project in Bangladesh that will reduce the local use of coal, costing the Danish government 700,000 euros—about \$1.02 million.

“I think this really shows the level of environmental leadership in Denmark,” Napierski said. Efforts like this will continue to brand Denmark and Copenhagen as tourist and meetings destinations where sustainability is front and center. (As the conference opened, in fact, Copenhagen was named the greenest major European city by the [European Green City Index](#), a research project conducted by the Economist Intelligence Unit of London and sponsored by Siemens.)

But organizers are hoping that COP15 will also help the global meetings industry move forward with sustainability efforts. To that effect, [MCI](#), the largest global event and association management company, has been hired to establish a framework for auditing

the conference's sustainability, with the long-term goal of using COP15 as a benchmark for large conferences.

We're focused on how to use [COP15] to accelerate change in the meetings industry," Guy Bigwood, director of sustainability for MCI, which is headquartered in Barcelona, said at the press conference. "Our intent is to use this information and data in a road show for the industry, including professional organizations in the U.S. We want to show how organizers and venues can save money while they're helping to save the planet."

On December 16, the [United Nations World Tourism Organization](#) announced a global campaign to help travel companies and destinations respond to climate change, reduce their carbon footprint, and move toward the new "green economy."

Echoing the Copenhagen Conference call to "Seal the Deal"—a reference to the countries of the world coming together to set goals and mandates related to reducing CO2 emissions worldwide—the UNWTO has labeled its campaign "Live the Deal." Underlying the effort will be a carbon calculation tool that will help travel companies and destinations correlate their own efforts with government targets.

An annual Innovation and Investment Summit is planned as well, with the first to take place in Abu Dhabi, UAE, in the fourth quarter of 2010.

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