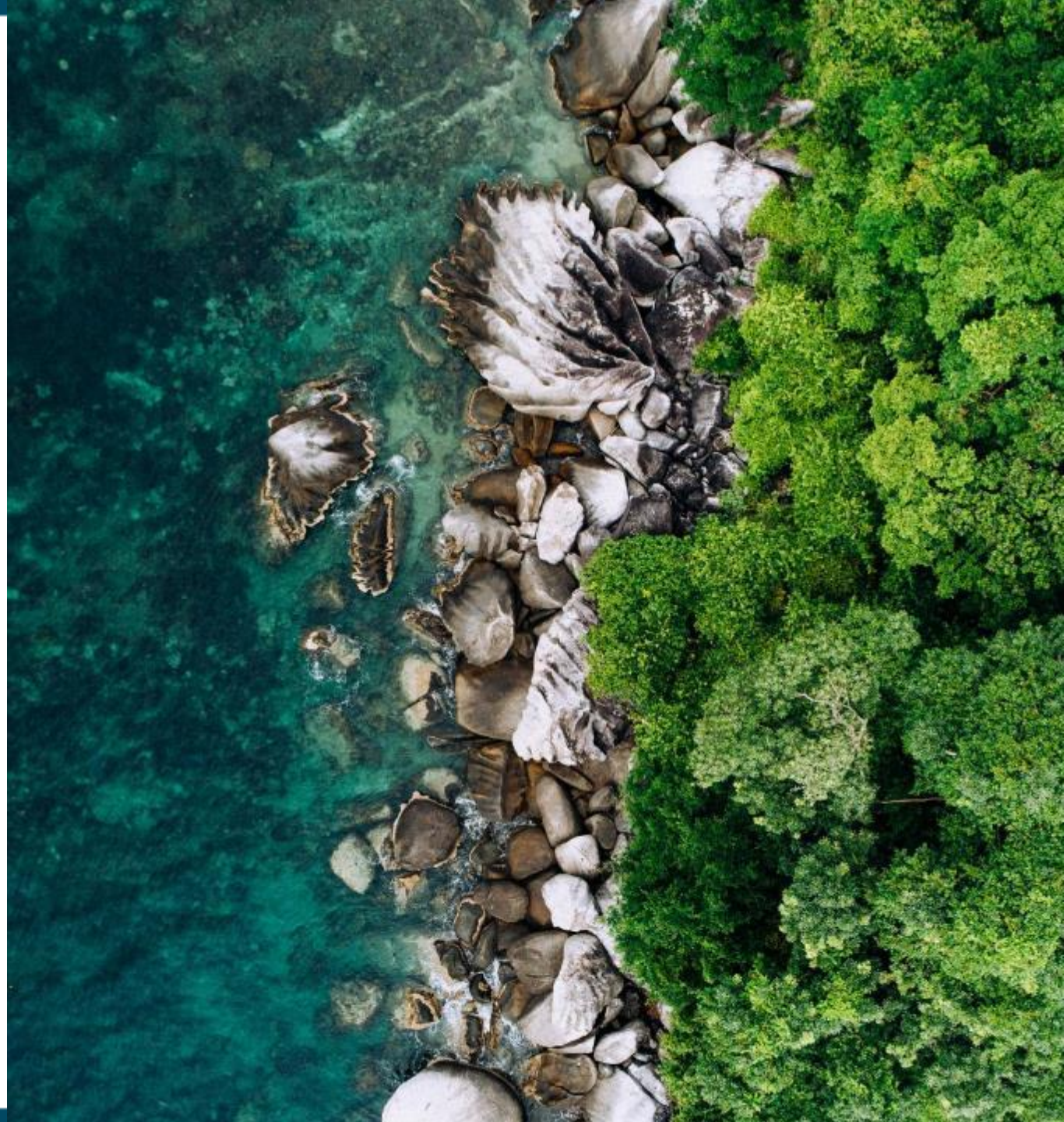




GLOBAL  
**DESTINATION  
SUSTAINABILITY  
MOVEMENT**

GDS-Index : Learning for  
Development  
Jennifer Jensen  
27 January 2026

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# Content

- 1 Introduction to The GDS-Movement
- 2 The GDS-Index
- 3 UK Performance & Benchmarking
- 4 VisitWest Recommendations





# Welcome to the GDS-Movement

Our purpose is to empower people  
with the mindsets, skillsets and  
toolsets to create regenerative  
events, destinations and  
organisations.







The GDS-Movement is a data-driven international change agency that acts to catalyse socio-economic and environmental transformation in events, cities and regions across the world.



## Our Services



### GDS-Index

Benchmarking destinations and leveraging data to drive performance and impact



### GDS-Consulting

Facilitating strategies, narratives, and innovation for destinations & events (for the visitor economy)



### GDS-Academy

Educating and developing changemakers



### GDS-Forum

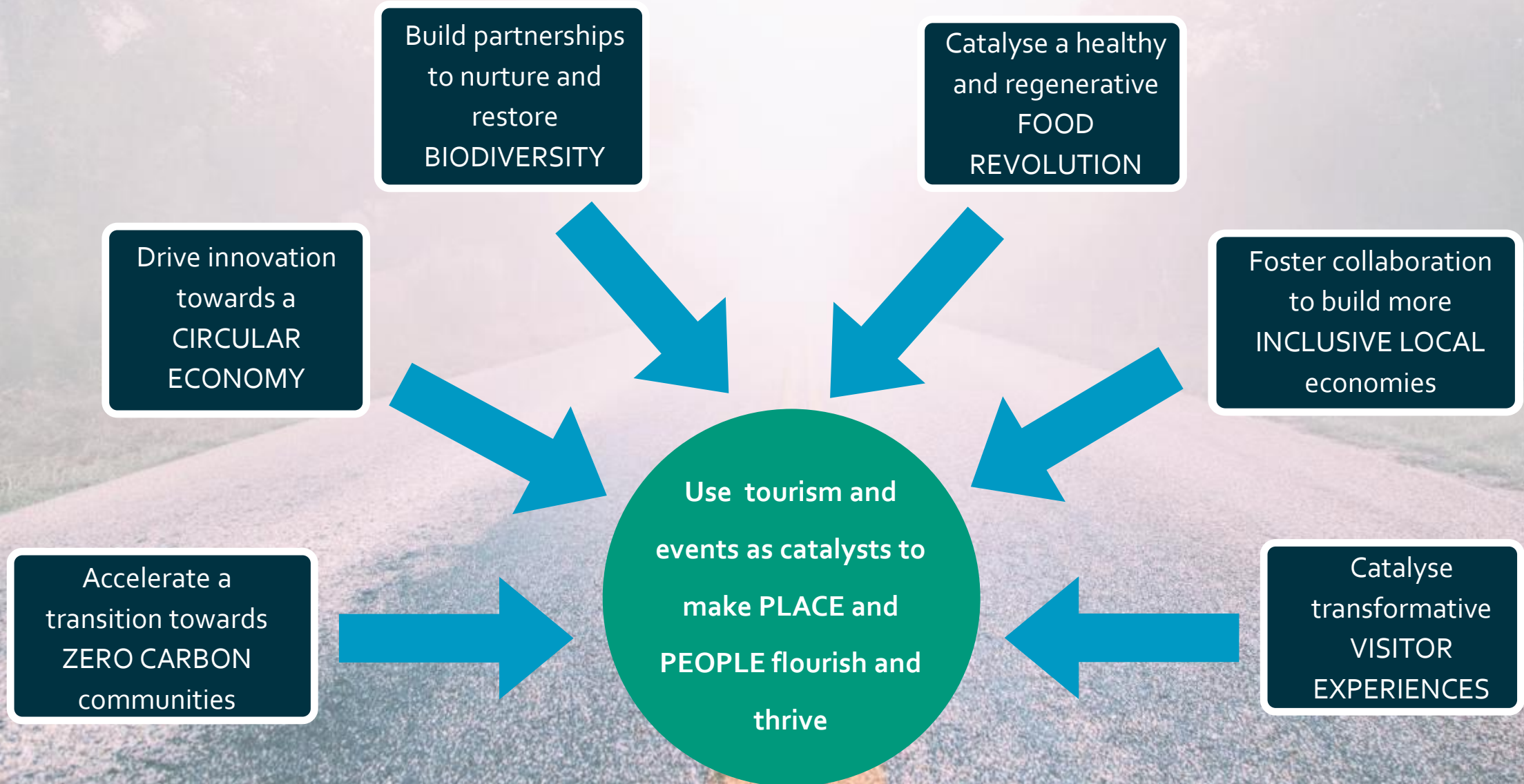
Building a dynamic, collaborative global community



### GDS-Insights

Researching trends to uncover and define next practices

# GDS-Movement helps cities and countries accelerate their path towards Regenerative Destination Management and Stewardship







# GDS-Index

How do we help DMOs to  
benchmark and improve  
sustainability performance?

Launched in 2016, the GDS-Index is the leading global programme for benchmarking and accelerating sustainability performance of urban destinations.





# 10 YEARS DRIVING CHANGE

# 151

destinations have completed a benchmarking submission since 2016

— **231 MILLION\***

residents have been affected by destination sustainability contributions since 2016

— **2-3 BILLION\*\***

visitors have been affected by participating destinations' tourism and events' sustainability efforts since 2016

\* Calculations were supported by AI-assisted modelling, using publicly available data and conservative assumptions. The margin of error is approximately ±10-20%.

\*\*This is a low- to medium-conservative estimate of annual visitors, calculated for each of the 151 destinations, using city size or available public data, and multiplied by the number of years they have participated in the GDS-Index. Estimates based on modelling and available data.

# 626

benchmarking assessments completed since 2016

# 35

countries have been represented on the GDS-Index since 2016

# 738

users have logged into the Omni platform since 2016

# 56

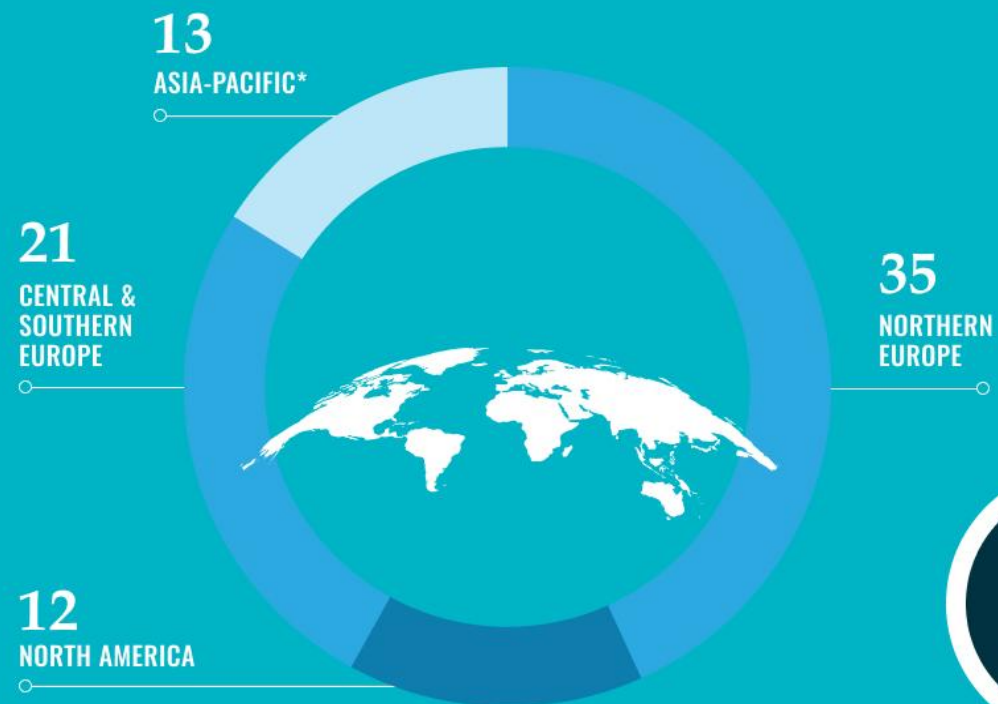
destinations have completed 5 or more benchmarking submissions since 2016



# WHICH DESTINATIONS ARE IN THE GDS-INDEX?

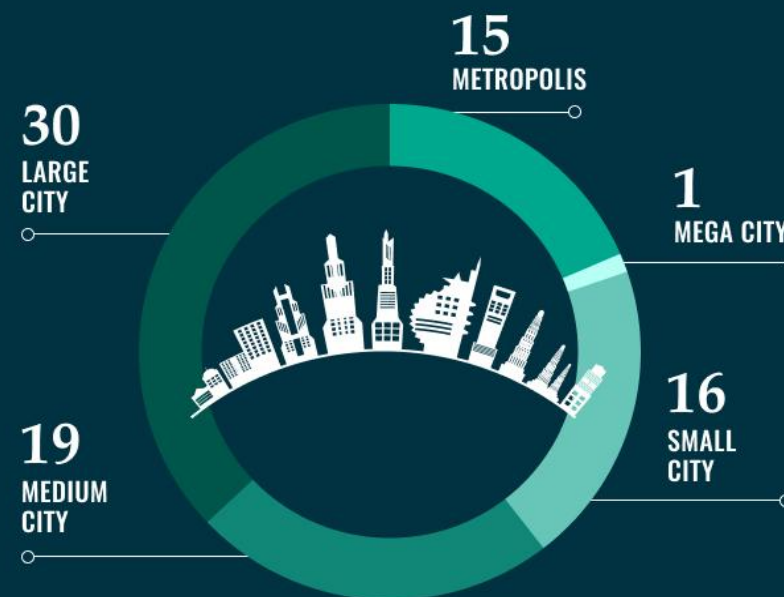
The GDS-Index has 81 cities committed to continually improving the social, economic, and environmental well-being of their destinations through tourism and events benchmarking. They are spread across the earth that sustains us and are co-creating the global journey towards regeneration through measurement and management.

## REGIONAL BREAKDOWN



81  
DESTINATIONS

## CITY SIZE BREAKDOWN

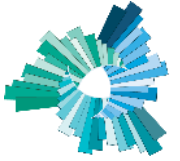


Benchmarking cities of all sizes and in all regions

\*Two cities from Middle East have been included into the Asia-Pacific group



# GDS-Index: What Do We Benchmark?



- Climate, Energy and Emissions
- Circularity and Waste
- Water
- Air Quality
- Transportation
- Biodiversity
- Alignment with tourism

## City Environmental Performance



- SDGs Alignment
- Corruption
- Personal safety
- Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity
- Health, Safety, and Wellness
- Accessibility
- Resident Engagement
- Funding Mechanisms

## City Social Performance



- Hotels
- Airport
- Agencies (PCOs & DMCs)
- Restaurants
- Venues
- Attractions
- Academia
- Tourism and event businesses

## Supplier Performance



- Destination Strategy
- Governance and Reporting
- Policy and Certification
- Capacity Building
- Impact Measurement
- Marketing and Communications
- Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
- Mobility
- Climate Action

## Destination Management



Co-created by destinations for destinations

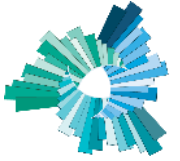
76 qualitative and quantitative criteria

Informed and closely-aligned to UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) and to the GSTC Destination Criteria.

For more detail visit: [www.gds.earth/index](http://www.gds.earth/index)



# GDS-Index: The Performance Improvement Journey



1 |

## Collect Data

Destination builds a team, and collects data and evidence from city, suppliers and DMO



Training webinars  
and 1:1 support  
sessions

2 |

## Submit Data

DMO uploads the data into the online portal. GDS review and provide feedback



3 |

## Benchmark

GDS assess responses. After extensive QA, results are scored



6 |

## Action!

DMO develops improvement plan and implements. Quarterly follow up with GDS



5 |

## Report

In-depth Performance Improvement Report is presented to each destination team



4 |

## Results Launch

Top 40 ranking is published (September 2026)



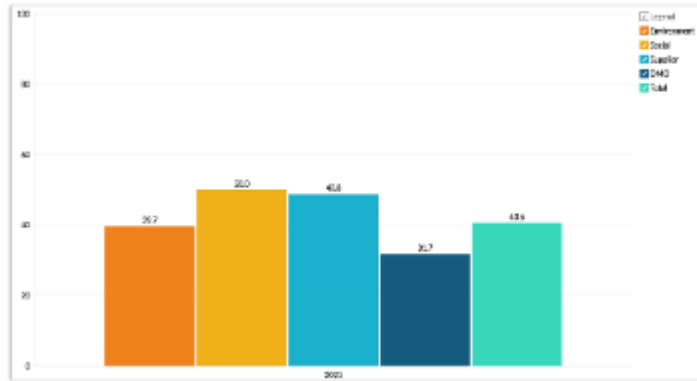
# Performance Improvement Report

## - Insights and Data

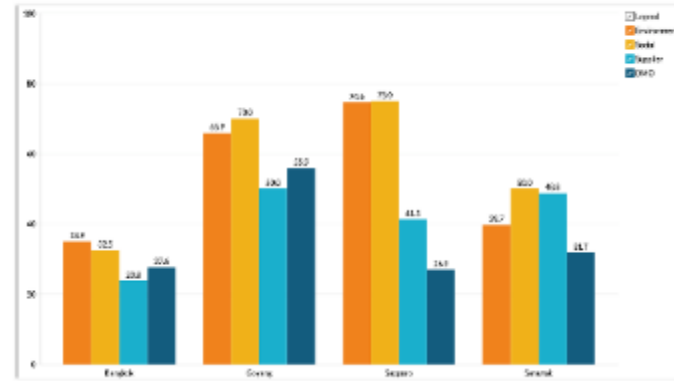


Detailed report on your performance across 4 categories

Destinations performance by category



Performance against peers and competitors



Comparison with neighbours in your region

Identification of your strengths and opportunities

Analysis Summary

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Good cross-collaboration between Sarawak Tourism Board and Convention Bureau</li><li>Nice BES legacy programme</li><li>High consumption and generation of renewable energy from Sarawak Energy</li><li>All Sarawak airports are ISO 14001 certified</li><li>Good post-couping recovery plan for Sarawak</li><li>National plastics roadmap for circular economy</li><li>Great document 'kuchingcreativity' on the cultural heritage of Sarawak food</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>No Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation strategy from the city</li><li>No sustainability strategy from the DMO (SEAC includes mentions of sustainability but is not a sustainability strategy in and of itself)</li><li>Strategies do not contain time-bound KPIs, action plans or environmental and social focus</li><li>No circular economy strategy for the tourism and events industry localized for Sarawak (WormUp is a good start though)</li><li>No destination-wide promotion of F&amp;B with commitment to sustainable food or encouragement of F&amp;B sector to commit to sustainable food</li><li>Low rate of eco-certified hotels</li></ul>

Recommendations



A list of recommendations based on the opportunities

# THE GDS-INDEX

## 2025 TOP 40

		2025	2024
Helsinki*	1	93.52	92.43
Göteborg	2	91.51	90.83
Copenhagen*	3	88.76	88.19
Aalborg	4	87.06	82.98
Glasgow	5	86.00	81.88
Tampere	6	85.76	76.96
Aarhus	7	85.15	85.68
Lyon	8	84.40	80.16
Belfast	9	84.40	83.14
Reykjavik*	10	83.72	78.28

		2025	2024
Melbourne	11	83.03	76.61
Kerry	12	82.80	77.65
Singapore*	13	82.34	83.37
Barcelona	14	81.88	75.57
Goyang	15	81.65	78.90
Brisbane	16	81.19	75.23
Berlin*	17	80.50	75.92
Cork	18	80.08	77.18
Dublin*	19	80.05	75.69
Montreal	20	79.82	74.77

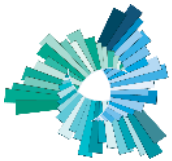
		2025	2024
Bilbao	21	79.82	80.27
Basel	22	79.59	71.40
Quebec	23	79.13	73.74
Stockholm*	24	79.13	75.57
Sydney	25	78.56	83.13
Clare	26	77.24	75.77
Victoria	27	77.06	77.17
Songkhla	28	76.84	74.89
Galway	29	76.84	76.0
Faroe Islands	30	75.92	74.88

		2025	2024
Luzern	31	75.69	72.82
Marseille	32	75.00	
Kumamoto	33	74.54	63.42
Milan	34	74.31	70.18
Manchester	35	73.79	63.27
Ostersund	36	72.71	65.71
Strasbourg	37	71.79	66.97
Limerick	38	71.34	73.51
Ljubljana*	39	70.76	64.16
Amsterdam*	40	69.72	61.81

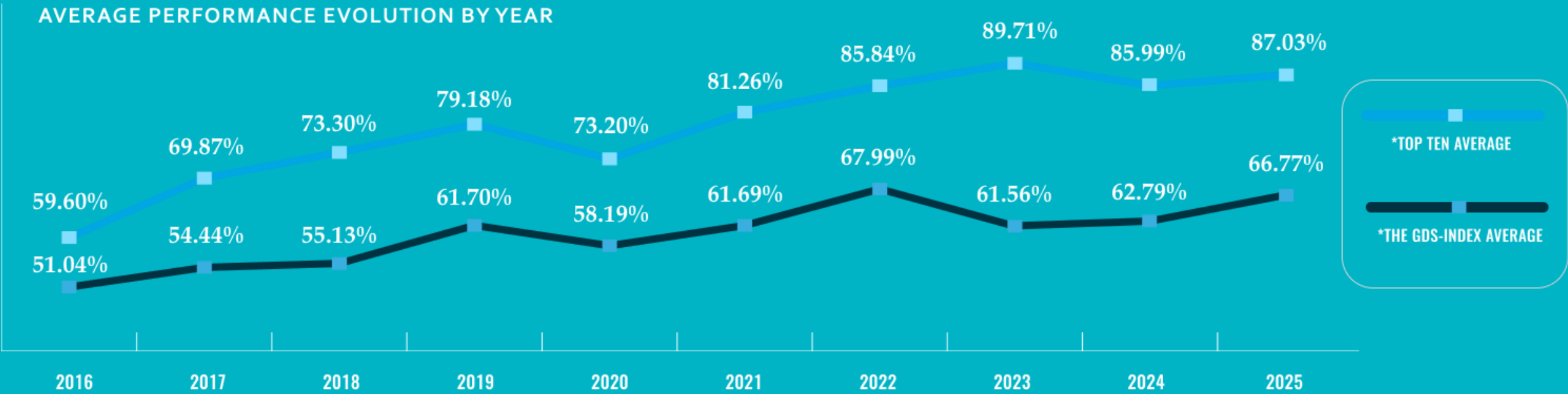
\*Capital Cities



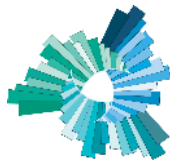
# Driving performance



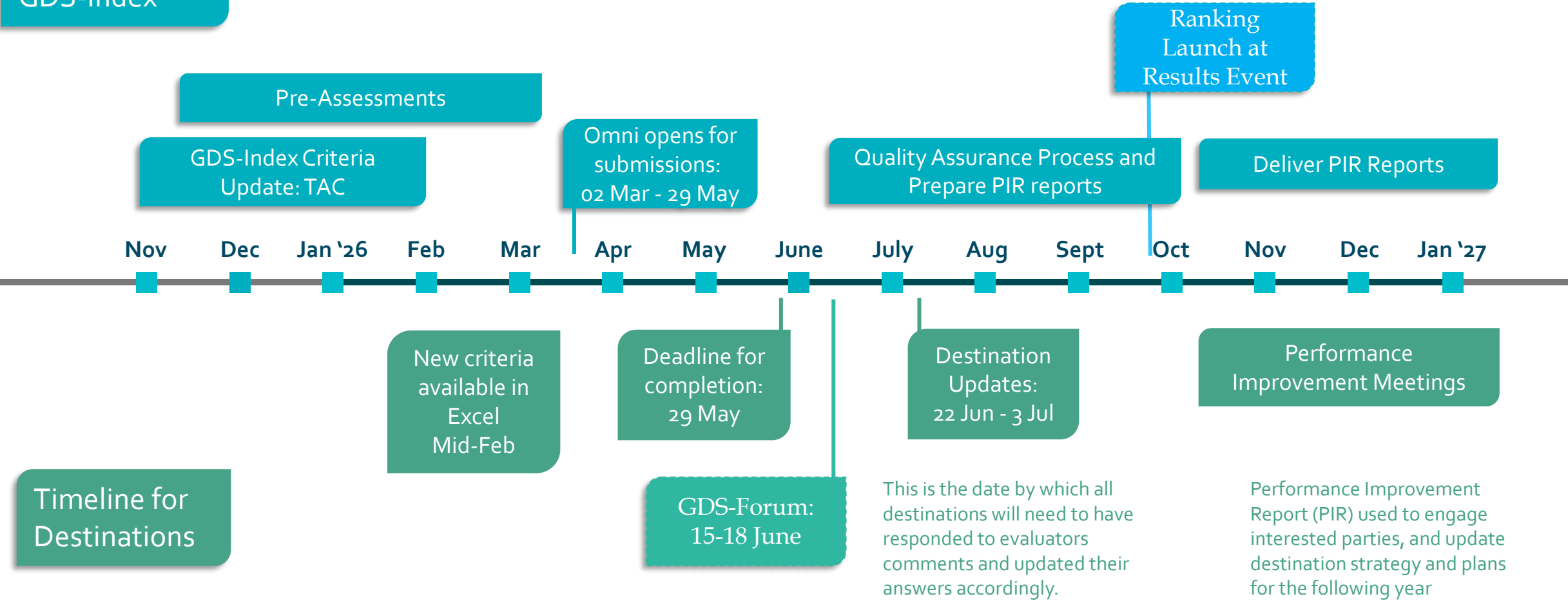
Over the past ten years, we've observed a 31% increase in average performance across all participating destinations, with a remarkable 46% rise in the Top 10.



# GDS-Index: The Benchmarking Journey



## Timeline for GDS-Index



## Timeline for Destinations



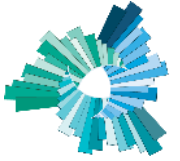
# Why do DMOs and CVBs participate in the GDS-Index?

- 1** Benchmark to understand performance in relation to other destinations
- 2** Improve strategy and drive performance by using gap analysis and recommendations
- 3** Catalyse collaboration and innovation within the destination
- 4** Build capacity and increase knowledge in the DMO and CVB
- 5** Communicate and promote their destination's unique sustainability story





Please download and read the 2025 GDS-Index Report



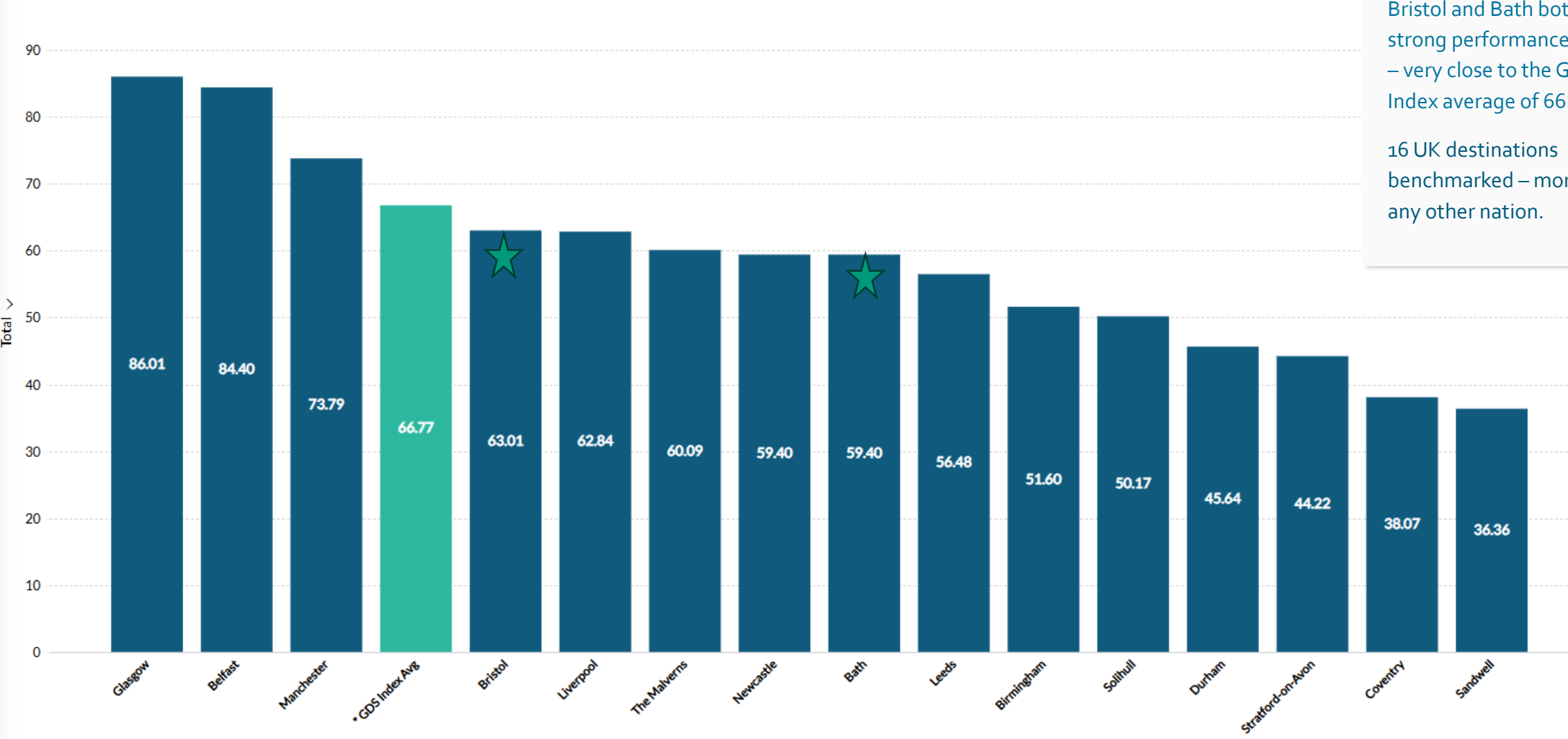
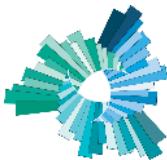
[www.gds.earth/reports/](http://www.gds.earth/reports/)



# UK GDS-Index Performance



# UK Cities- Performance by destination 2025



Bristol and Bath both had a strong performance in 2025 – very close to the GDS-Index average of 66.7

16 UK destinations benchmarked – more than any other nation.



# Performance 2025 : Core Cities

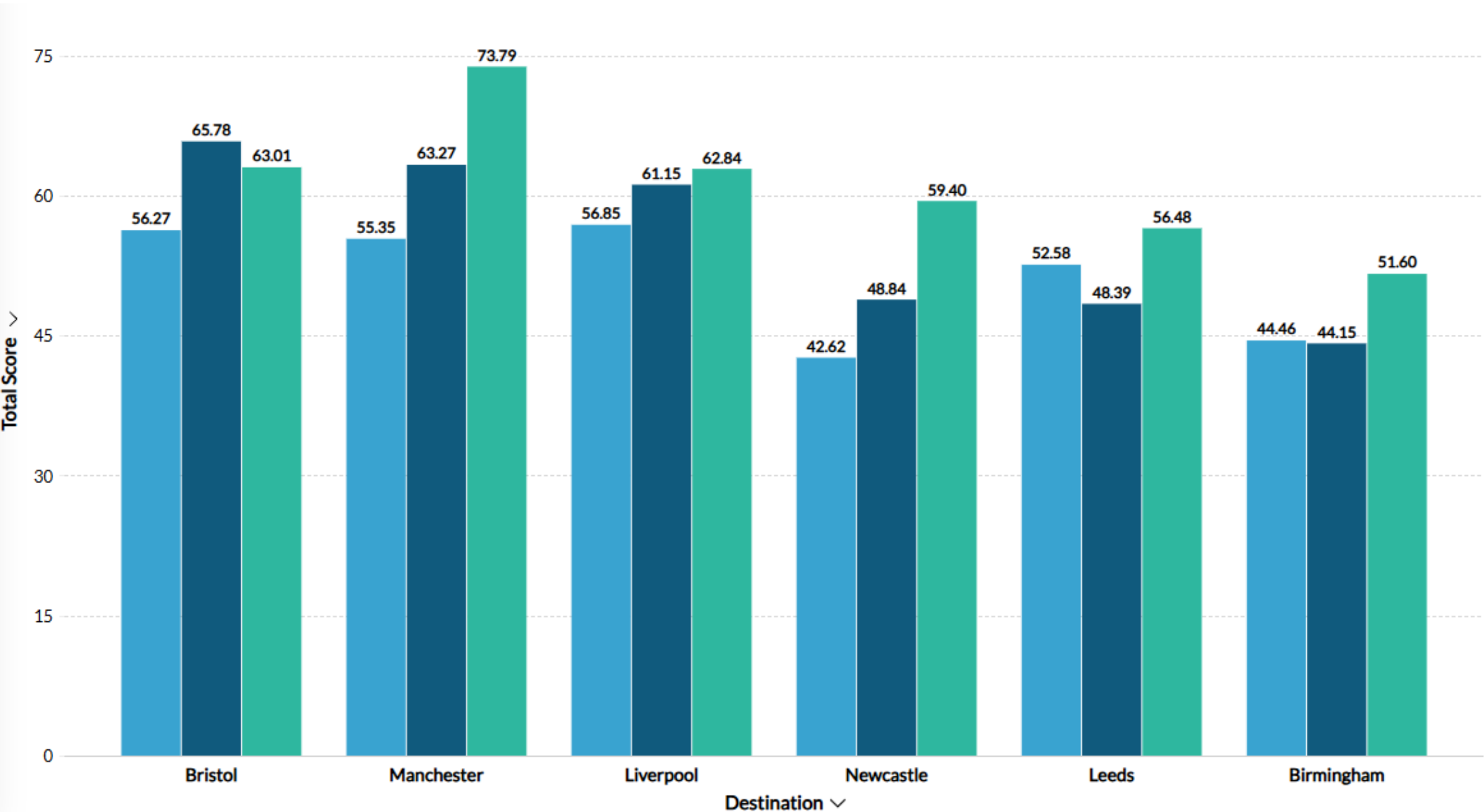


Year

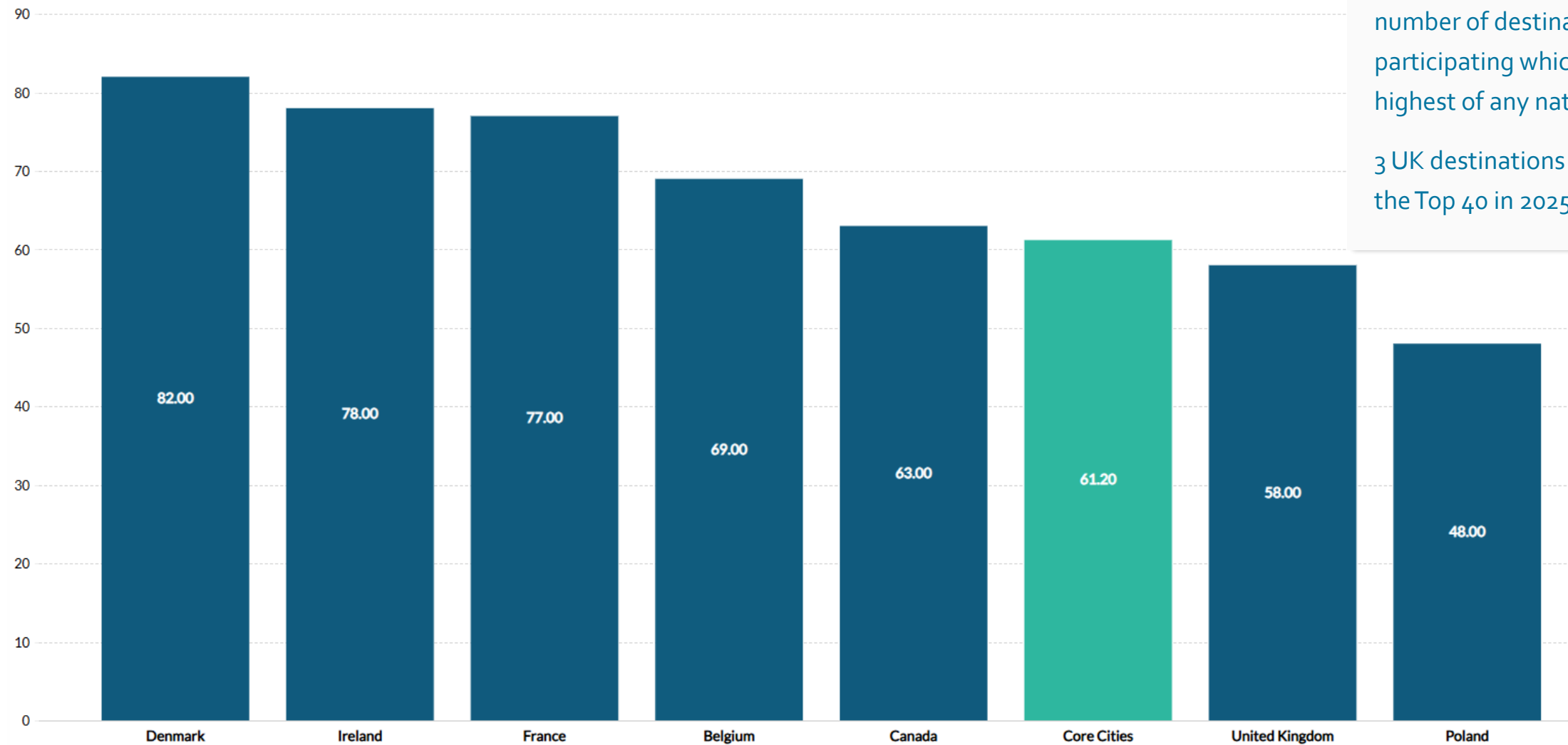
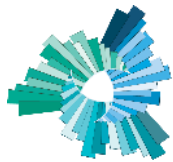
2023

2024

2025



# 2025 National Performance



UK average impacted by the number of destinations participating which was the highest of any nation.

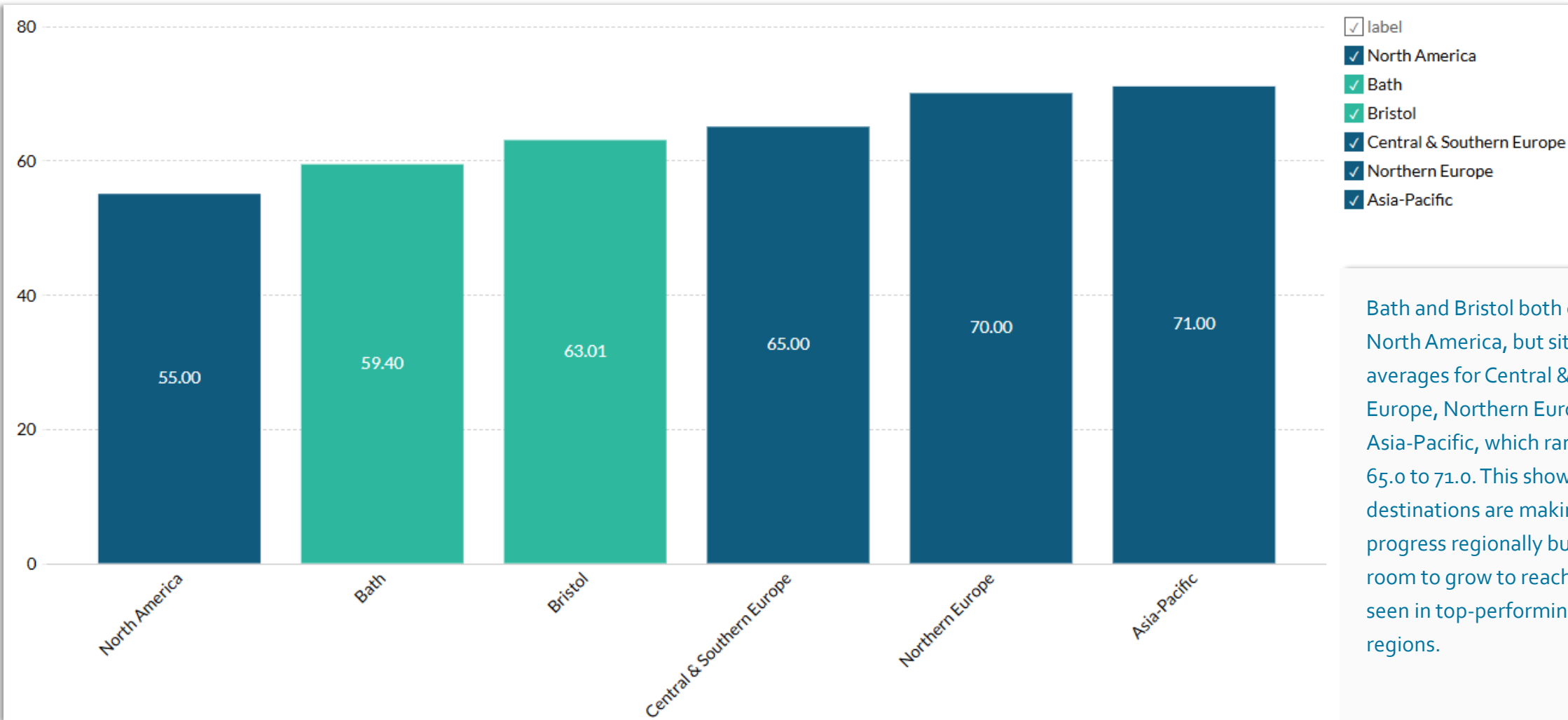
3 UK destinations were in the Top 40 in 2025



# VisitWest Performance & Recommendations

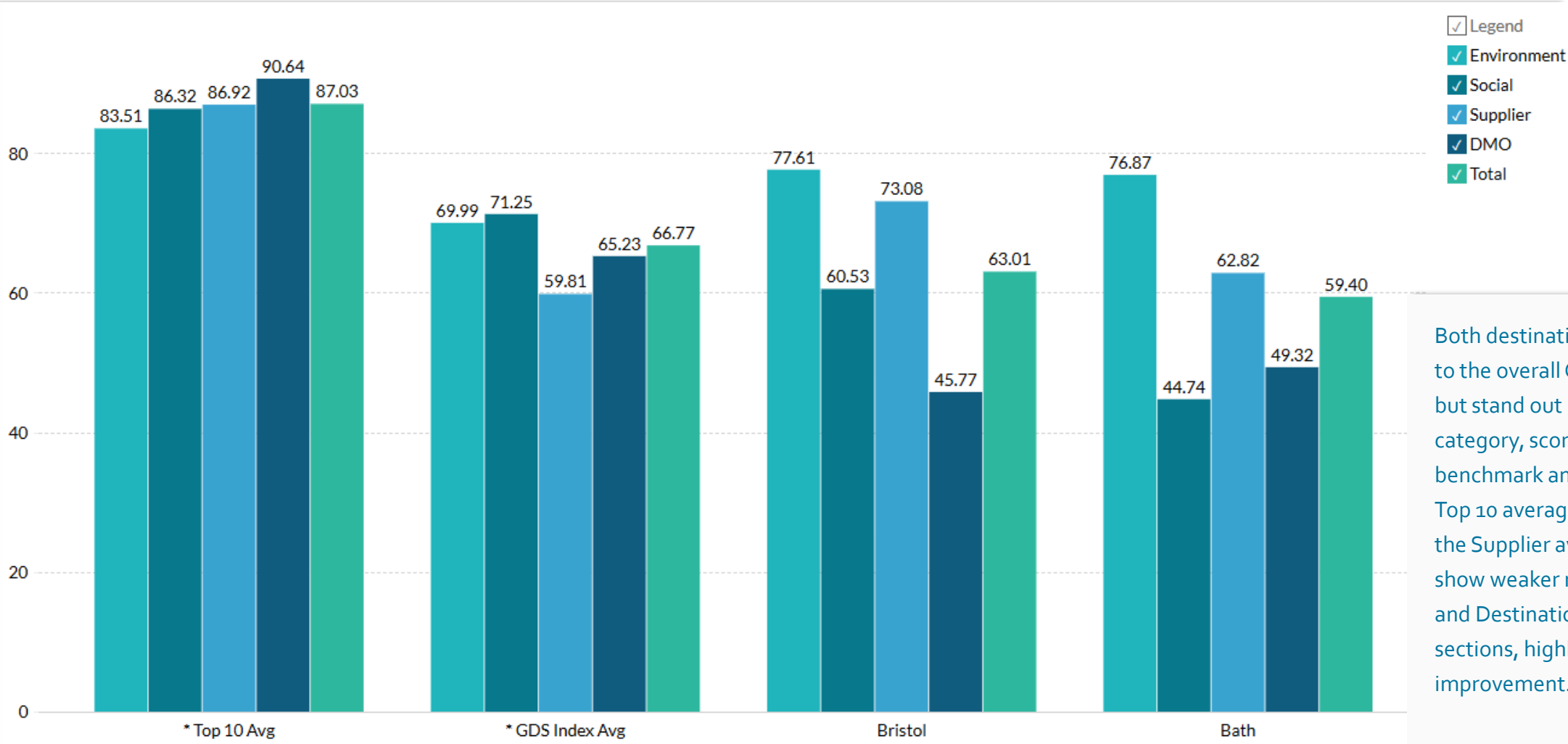
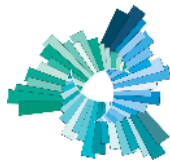


# Comparison against regions





# Performance against 2025 average



Both destinations perform close to the overall GDS-Index average but stand out in the Environment category, scoring well above the benchmark and edging toward the Top 10 average. They also exceed the Supplier average, though both show weaker results in the Social and Destination Management sections, highlighting areas for improvement.

# Strong performance



Very strong score in  
the Environmental  
Section

Bristol Airport – ISO  
Certification and  
Carbon Neutral for  
direct emissions

Increase in percentage  
of hotels with  
certifications

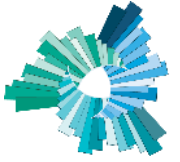
More event agencies  
with sustainability  
policies

Signatories of the  
Glasgow Declaration –  
public commitment

Lots of training  
opportunities  
available on a wide  
range of topics incl.  
DEI / climate action

Tools and support in  
place to support  
businesses





# Improving Performance

## Certification

- Increase the number of hotels, attractions, event agencies, convention centres with 3rd party sustainability certifications

## Education

- Participate in sustainability training offered by VisitWest or partner organisations
- Share / use any tools or guidance that is relevant for other businesses
- (Learn from each other!)

## Communications

- Share case studies or blogs to showcase best practise
- Promote VisitWest activities through your channels
- Engage with visitors to change behaviours

Join a dynamic community of  
changemakers

Email: [info@gds.earth](mailto:info@gds.earth)

Web: [www.gds.earth](http://www.gds.earth)

LinkedIn: [bit.ly/GDSM](http://bit.ly/GDSM) LinkedIn

YouTube: [@GDS-Movement](https://www.youtube.com/@GDS-Movement)



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