

Fighting overtourism challenges: Young talents accelerate Sustainable Tourism Innovation in new TUI Care Foundation initiative in Spain

- *Two-year initiative brings together universities, innovation centres and tourism businesses to develop solutions for Spain's tourism challenges*
- *200 young entrepreneurs will benefit from direct technical assistance, and nine early-stage startups will be supported in their acceleration journey*
- *The project collaborates with Wayra Telefonica and encompasses 15 collaborative events, including a hackathon for university students and young innovators, and supports 25 jobs.*

Berlin, 2 April 2026. *Spain's tourism sector stands at a decisive turning point. In 2025 the country welcomed a record 96.8 million international visitors, confirming its position as one of the world's leading tourism destinations, yet in some densely populated areas this success comes with mounting pressure on people and places. Around 80% of travellers worldwide visit just 10% of destinations, and in Spain that concentration leaves some hotspots facing significant population increases during peak season, driving up housing costs, straining infrastructure and fuelling local frustration. Climate change intensifies these pressures through rising temperatures, water scarcity and growing waste management challenges, whilst many tourism businesses still lag behind in digital adoption that could make operations more competitive and sustainable. At the same time, powerful new technologies - from data analytics and digital platforms to AI-driven tools - create fresh opportunities to spread visitor flows across seasons, unlock lesser-known destinations and diversify tourism products that benefit more communities.*

In response to this complex landscape, the TUI Care Foundation, in partnership with development agency Target 8.9 and in collaboration with Wayra Telefonica, has launched TUI Futureshapers Spain, a two-year acceleration programme that empowers young entrepreneurs and startups to design green and digital solutions for the tourism sector. By connecting universities, innovation centres and tourism companies, the initiative aims to turn Spain's tourism innovation ecosystem into a driver of long-term prosperity that uses technology to tackle de-seasonalisation, decentralisation, decongestion and diversification, while protecting communities and the environment.

The project works through three complementary pathways that support innovation, from first idea to market-ready solution. The Ignite Path focuses on young entrepreneurs at the earliest stages of development, helping them move from concept to prototype. TUI Futureshapers Spain will team up with local universities and innovation hubs to build a network of talent tackling clearly defined tourism challenges linked to overtourism, climate resilience and the digital transition. Through six practical training modules, 100 young participants will strengthen their digital skills and learn to use vertical technologies to design green and digital solutions for Spain's tourism sector. This path culminates in a two-day tourism hackathon where around 50 young entrepreneurs will work intensively with mentors to develop minimum viable products, with at least 8 prototypes expected.

The Grow Path focuses on early-stage startups that already show product–market fit and are ready to embed their solutions in the tourism value chain. At least nine startups will receive personalised advisory support during this phase to refine their business models with a strong focus on environmental and social sustainability, as well as digital innovation. Dedicated networking activities and market-linkage events will connect these ventures with potential partners, clients and investors from across the tourism ecosystem. During a final demo day, participants will pitch their solutions to key stakeholders, and five startups will gain access to a curated network for solution validation, while three finalists will be selected to move into the Scale Path.

The Scale Path concentrates on technology adoption, piloting and investment readiness for the most mature ventures. TUI Futureshapers Spain will facilitate partnerships with tourism stakeholders willing to pilot innovative solutions, enabling real-world testing in destinations and businesses. Each of the three selected startups will receive tailored technical assistance and support to strengthen their investment readiness, including customised roadmaps that outline how to scale their solutions and deepen impact. By the end of the programme, at least one startup is expected to be well positioned to access venture capital or other investment mechanisms and to explore pilot opportunities for its solution with committed tourism partners, opening the door to full implementation as conditions allow.

Overall, the project will directly support 200 people through technical assistance, create or maintain 25 jobs and organise 15 events that encourage collaboration across Spain's tourism innovation ecosystem. By nurturing ideas at every stage - from early concept to scalable solution - TUI Futureshapers Spain promotes a tourism model that harnesses digital tools and green innovation to relieve pressure on destinations, strengthen local economies and build resilience.

This project is part of the global TUI Futureshapers Programme, which empowers passionate people in tourism destinations who are committed to turning social and environmental challenges into entrepreneurial opportunities. The programme is active in destinations around the world, including Cape Verde, Jamaica, Morocco, Namibia, Greece, Tunisia, Egypt, Albania, Portugal, Sweden, UK, Colombia, Zanzibar, Dominican Republic and Laos.

About the TUI Care Foundation

Building on the potential of tourism as a force for good, the TUI Care Foundation supports and initiates projects which create new opportunities and contribute to thriving communities in tourism destinations all over the world. Connecting holidaymakers to good causes, it supports education and training opportunities for young people; drives the protection of natural habitats and the marine environment; and helps local communities to thrive sustainably and benefit from tourism. The TUI Care Foundation builds on strong partnerships with local and international organisations to create meaningful and long-lasting impact. The independent charitable organisation was founded by TUI, one of the world's leading tourism businesses, and is based in the Netherlands. www.tuicarefoundation.com

About Target 8.9

Target 8.9 is a global development agency initiated by TUI Care Foundation. It is dedicated to mobilising both non-financial and financial resources to create meaningful and sustainable impacts in local tourism destinations, aligned with target 8.9 of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This specific objective within the SDGs aims to promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all, with an emphasis on the tourism sector and highlighting local culture and products. Target 8.9's primary focus is on fostering inclusive economic opportunities and social development, with a strong emphasis on conservation and landscape restoration. www.target-89.org/

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