



Center for Responsible Travel

Transforming the Way the World Travels

The Case for Responsible Travel: Trends & Statistics 2018

The travel and tourism industry is booming. During 2017, the UN’s International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, international tourist arrivals grew by 7% to reach a total of 1.326 billion. This total far exceeds the United Nations World Tourism Organization’s 2010-2020 long-term projections of 3.8% growth per year.¹ In January 2018, UNWTO projected a 4-5% increase for 2018;² during the first four months of 2018, growth was 6%, already surpassing expectations.³ In addition, UNWTO provides rough estimates that apart from the 1.3 billion international trips, there are another 5-6 billion domestic trips.⁴ What factors are responsible for this growth? The range of causes that have been identified include, but are not limited to, a growing middle class, emerging new travel markets, improved connectivity, and travel options to fit a wide range of budgets.

The World Travel & Tourism Council reports that in 2017, the travel and tourism sector accounted for 10.4% of global GDP and 313 million jobs, or 9.9% of total employment.⁵ At its best, the travel industry provides critical economic, environmental, and socio-cultural value. But in recent years, the question for an increasing number of destinations has become, “How much is too much of a good thing?” At the same time, under-touristed and emerging destinations are vying for their piece of the pie. How do we sustainably and equitably distribute the benefits so that destinations on both ends of the spectrum can thrive? When considering these questions, it is helpful to understand the following terms.

KEY TERMS	DEFINITION
Overtourism	<i>Tourism that has moved beyond the limits of acceptable change in a destination due to quantity of visitors, resulting in degradation of the environment and infrastructure, diminished travel experience, wear and tear on built heritage, and/or negative impacts on residents.</i> ⁶
Tourism Carrying Capacity	<i>The maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time, without causing destruction of the physical, economic, socio-cultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors' satisfaction.</i> ⁷
Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC):	<i>A land management philosophy that identifies specific indicators of environmental quality and tourism impacts, and defines thresholds within which the conservation goals of a protected area are met.</i> ⁸ Increasingly, this concept is also applied to social impacts and moves beyond the quantitative benchmarks of carrying capacity to considering qualitative benchmarks.
Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP)	<i>A planning and management framework that focuses on visitor use impacts on the visitor experience and the park resources. These impacts are primarily attributable to visitor behavior, use levels, types of use, timing of use, and location of use.</i> ⁹
Sharing Economy	<i>The sharing of underutilized assets, monetized or not, in ways that improve efficiency, sustainability and community.</i> ¹⁰
Undertourism	<i>Inadequate levels of tourism.</i> ¹¹
Responsible Tourism	<i>Tourism that maximizes the benefits to local communities, minimizes negative social or environmental impacts, and helps local people conserve fragile cultures and habitats.</i> ¹²
Sustainable Tourism	<i>Tourism that leads to the management of all resources in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life-support systems.</i> ¹³

Role of Responsible Travel in Overtourism Solutions

In this year's edition of "Trends & Statistics," we take a closer look at the complex issue of "overtourism." While tourists have flocked to popular destinations for decades, the recent emergence of the term demonstrates just how pressing this issue has become.

In 2012, UNWTO announced that the number of international tourists had surpassed one billion for the first time. That same year, #overtourism became an active hashtag on Twitter. And in a pivotal August 2016 piece on the impact of tourism in Iceland, Skift raised critical awareness of the problem.¹⁴ Since then, Skift and scores of other major publications have reported on overtourism in a wide range of destinations, such as Montreal, Barcelona, Lisbon, Venice, the Galápagos Islands, Banff National Park, Machu Picchu, and New York City.

The term is now at the center of conversations about the rapid growth of global travel. *The Telegraph* even called on dictionaries to designate "overtourism" as the 2018 word of the year. As the study of overtourism has evolved, discussions have been shifting to consider how to prevent it in emerging destinations and mitigate it in mature destinations.

Though overtourism has only recently entered the mainstream tourism lexicon, the notion of overtourism is not new. Within the field of parks and recreation, as well as tourism policy and planning, the term *carrying capacity* began to be used in the 1950s to measure the quantity of visitors that a protected area could sustainably accommodate. In recent decades, carrying capacity has been gradually replaced with two other concepts that are proving more useful in measuring visitor impacts in protected areas. These are *limits of acceptable change*, or LAC, which is used primarily by the U.S. Forest Service, and *visitor experience and resource protection*, or VERP, which is used by the U.S. National Park system. Both LAC and VERP focus on measuring the interactions among three components: 1) resources (soil, vegetation, water, wildlife); 2) visitor experience (crowding, conflict, etc.); and 3) management (visitor education, rules, and regulations), with an emphasis on "management by objectives" or establishing a set of objectives and indicators which inform how each park is managed.¹⁵

While *carrying capacity*, *limits of acceptable change*, and *visitor experience and resource protection* are used by scientists and parks managers in assessing overtourism issues in parks and protected areas, they are also often used more loosely and descriptively when referring to tourism management in other types of destinations. We want to be clear, for instance, that within the CREST definition of overtourism, "limits of acceptable change" is a descriptive reference and does not imply a scientifically rigorous application of the LAC framework.

Today overtourism is not only a hotly discussed topic, it also encompasses a range of issues and therefore serves as a platform for exploring critical topics associated with tourism management. It is a multifaceted problem impacting various types of destinations, and there is no one-size-fits-all solution. What is certain is that at the base of solutions to overtourism are policies and practices that are aligned with the principles of responsible travel and visitor education.

The World Travel & Tourism Council and McKinsey & Company released a seminal report in December 2017 called *Coping with Success: Managing Overcrowding in Tourism Destinations*. Within the report, a diagnostic is shared to help tourism managers in destinations – specifically cities, at this stage – to prevent, mitigate, and monitor overcrowding. As the authors state, "Overcrowding is easier to prevent than to recover from. Good tourism management practices and stringent planning are key to the sustainable development of tourism. Our research and interviews with tourism experts highlighted the following four best practices—regardless of whether a destination is facing overcrowding:

- 1. Build a comprehensive fact base and update it regularly.** Countries, regions, cities, and sites must begin by gathering detailed data and developing their analytics capabilities to inform and refine tourism strategies.
- 2. Conduct rigorous, long-term planning to encourage sustainable growth.** Destinations need to shift their focus from promotion to broader planning and management challenges. Those with a clear, long-term strategy built upon a solid fact base are more likely to achieve sustainable growth and mitigate—or even prevent—overcrowding.
- 3. Involve all sections of society—commercial, public, and social.** The perfect data and strategy can only work if all stakeholders are engaged throughout the process. Tourism authorities should create committees and other formal mechanisms to work with stakeholders, including local communities, to discuss problems and devise solutions.
- 4. Find new sources of funding.** Once data, strategy, and stakeholders are aligned, destinations can explore a growing number of innovative approaches to finance investments in infrastructure and sustainability."¹⁶

In UNWTO's September 2018 report, *'Overtourism'? Understanding and Managing Urban Tourism Growth Beyond Perceptions*, the authors make a point to rebuff common myths surrounding overtourism, by clarifying:

1. "Tourism congestion is not only about the number of visitors but about the capacity to manage them.
2. Tourism congestion is commonly a localized rather than citywide issue.
3. Tourism congestion is not a tourism-only problem.
4. Technological or smart solutions alone are important but will not solve the issue of tourism congestion."¹⁷

Of course, historic cities and national parks/forests are not the only types of destinations experiencing overtourism, nor is overtourism always equivalent to overcrowding or congestion. The types of places impacted by overtourism range from marine protected areas, to World Heritage Sites, beaches, and national and regional destinations. Sometimes, even a socially manageable number of people are too many for a fragile natural environment or cultural-heritage site. The root of the problem (and solution) lies in tourism policy and management.



Perito Moreno buses (photo by Jonathan Tourtellot)

Destinations: Supporting Responsible Travel, Coping with Overtourism

Experts say...

"Sustainable or responsible travel and tourism hit the mainstream media in a bigger way than ever before in 2017 due to the growing awareness of what's being called 'overtourism.' I hope that this mainstreaming of the discussion of tourism in general and poor or weak visitor management in particular will help drive greater awareness of the much broader and deeper discussions we need to make all forms of travel and tourism more sustainable."¹⁸ — Randy Durband, CEO, Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)

"It's important to grasp the arithmetic implications of soaring tourism numbers. If the world sees 1.4 billion international trips next year, and if only one in a million of those trips is by someone who intends to climb Mount Everest, that would still put 1,400 climbers on the mountain that season, not to mention Nepalese support teams and the crowds who simply want to visit Base Camp. No wonder Everest has entered the ranks of overtouristed destinations."¹⁹ — Jonathan Tourtellot, CEO, Destination Stewardship Center

"We must avoid the temptation to take a reductionist view of this complex and contemporary phenomenon. The ways in which discontentment manifests itself depends on the specific practices involved, the main six of which can be categorised as follows:

01. Congestion of public spaces in city centres;
02. The privatisation of public spaces;
03. The growth of cruise tourism and the consequential seasonal congestion;
04. The rise in housing prices (rental and purchase by square metre);
05. The loss of residents' purchasing power;
06. The unbalanced number of locals compared to visitors."²⁰

— Professor Claudio Milano, Ostelea School of Tourism & Hospitality



Tourists at Angkor Wat (photo by Jim Sano)

"The shocks and challenges to Travel & Tourism over the past few years have made our crystal ball distinctly cloudy. For 2018, it would be remiss not to continue to expect the unexpected — extreme weather, extreme behaviors and extreme policy reactions. As we end the 2017 UN-designated International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, 2018 brings an opportunity for destinations to capitalize on the tremendous focus the sector has had at the highest international levels and continue to build the long-term viability of their products and communities. Indeed, it is only by building the relationships and maximizing benefits for all stakeholders that destinations can truly design in the resilience that they would need to recover quickly from shocks and grow sustainably."²¹ — Rochelle Turner, Research Director, World Travel & Tourism Council

Surveys and Statistics show...

The sharing economy continues to be an industry disrupter. On one hand, tourism wealth is spread throughout the destination, “living like a local” takes true form, and dependency is lowered on continued infrastructure development. On the other hand, locals have seen themselves pushed out of residential neighborhoods, and hotels and certified bed and breakfasts have called for fairness in terms of taxation, quality, and safety regulation. With varying results, destinations are working individually with sharing economy accommodation (and transportation) providers to maximize benefits for all. The Organization of American States, in its 2018 Declaration of Georgetown, has called for further study on the “best arrangements which successfully incorporate the share accommodation alongside the formal accommodation sub-sector.”²²

“Every year, Ethical Traveler reviews the policies and practices of hundreds of nations in the developing world. We then select the ten that are doing the most impressive job of promoting human rights, preserving the environment, and supporting social welfare—all while creating a lively, community-based tourism industry. By visiting these countries, we can use our economic leverage to reward good works and support best practices.” The World’s Ten Best Ethical Destinations for 2018 are (in alphabetical order): Belize, Benin, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mongolia, Palau, St. Kitts & Nevis, Uruguay, and Vanuatu.²³

2017 marked the third year of “[Sustainable Destinations Global Top 100](#)” presented by Green Destinations and industry partners. “Typical Top 100 destinations are dedicated to GREEN values: **G**enuine and authentic (supporting the celebration of local culture and tradition); **R**esponsible (defending people against exploitation, human rights violation, and disruptive mass tourism (*overtourism*)); **E**conomically sustainable (involving the local business community and enhancing local community employment during and beyond the holiday season); **E**nvironment & climate friendly (combatting climate change and environmental degradation and ensuring public health and safety); **N**ature, scenery & animal friendly (protecting scenic views, habitats and wildlife, and respecting animals used in tourism.”²⁴

In the following section we consider examples of trends and overtourism solutions in five types of destinations: Historic Cities, National Parks & Protected Areas, World Heritage & Cultural Sites, Coastal & Beach Communities, and National & Regional Destinations.

1. Historic Cities

A 2018 article by prominent tourism researchers noted, “Across southern Europe, protests and social movements are growing in number. This has led to the formation of organisations such as the Assembly of Neighborhoods for Sustainable Tourism (ABTS) and the Network of Southern European Cities Against Tourism (SET). They are at the forefront of the fight against overtourism and the impact that it has on local residents.”²⁵ Indeed, the UNWTO concluded in their September 2018 report that “understanding residents’ attitudes towards tourism and engaging local communities is central.”²⁶

“In an effort to combat overcrowding at key attractions in Amsterdam, tourism planners are using data to encourage the geographic spread of tourists across the city. The Amsterdam City Card is a chip-enabled card that provides access to public transportation and key attractions. It also allows the city to track the movements of tourists and then feed that information back by informing tourists of wait times or identifying less congested attractions.”²⁷

Mayor Mato Franković of Dubrovnik, the historic Croatian port city, recognizes the fine line between success and failure when it comes to Mediterranean destinations facing the pressure of thousands of cruise ship passengers arriving every day. In 2018, the Port of Dubrovnik began staggering cruise ships arrivals to spread out passengers and ease infrastructure problems during peak times. The plan’s full effects are expected to be seen by 2019.²⁸ In addition, the city is launching a new app to inform visitors in real time when the Old City is overcrowded. Also, in an attempt to disperse tourists to other places around the historic walls, the city plans to launch a car-sharing program.

“Flanders, Belgium invests 72 million euro in 5 years in projects that match with their target segments (cultural and MICE travelers),”²⁹ according to Vincent Nijs, Research Manager from Visit Flanders. Flanders also carefully and holistically involves the local population in tourism planning. Results of resident studies show widespread positivity towards tourism, including: “1) 6 to 7/10 residents in the Flemish Arts City believe their city is looking better thanks to tourism developments; 2) 75% of the residents think tourism helps preserving their cultural identity and help restoring historic buildings; 3) 7 to 8/10 residents are a proud resident of the art city thanks to tourism; and 4) 7 to 8/10 residents support tourism in their city.”³⁰

“In Venice, 30 million visitors per year swamp the city, whose local population has dwindled to around 55,000. In a single day, one cruise ship can bring crowds nearly as large as the population of the whole city.... Locals are finding it too expensive and stressful to continue living in the city where their families have lived for generations. The fragile relationship between the city and the lagoon into which it is slowly sinking is becoming ever more tenuous as large ships disrupt the waterways and the building foundations, and as more tourists bring more waste.”³¹



Tourists in St. Mark's Square, Venice

In 2018, Charleston, South Carolina was ranked by *Travel + Leisure* readers as the #1 U.S. city to visit for the 6th year in a row. In addition, Charleston was the only U.S. city on the list of the World's Top 15 Cities in 2018.³² In order to ensure the city remains an outstanding place to both live and visit, the City Council has implemented new regulations on sharing economy accommodations in the historic city. These include policies that short-term rentals must be an accessory use to the principal residential use; owners must be on the property overnight while guests are present; no signs may advertise short-term rentals; no meals other than breakfast may be served to paying guests; the owner must keep a general liability policy; and the owner must comply with business license and revenue collection laws.³³

2. National Parks & Protected Areas

“Some 105 sites (46 percent) of the 229 natural UNESCO sites, many of which are national parks or wildlife reserves... have no active tourism management plan,” according to UNESCO-commissioned research by Griffith University, Queensland, Australia.³⁴

IUCN's Giulia Carbone shares that the organization's “Key Biodiversity Areas³⁵ support conservation planning and priority-setting at national and regional levels. Similar to and also often overlapping with protected areas, KBA's linkages with tourism are often rooted in policy that sustains them ecologically and raises awareness about the value of these unique sites.”³⁶



Visitor viewing area, Old Faithful, Yellowstone National Park (photo by Samantha Bray)

In the U.S. during 2017, “The National Park System received an estimated 331 million recreation visits. Visitors to National Parks spent an estimated \$18.2 billion in local gateway regions (defined as communities within 60 miles of a park). The contribution of this spending to the national economy was 306 thousand jobs, \$11.9 billion in labor income, \$20.3 billion in value added, and \$35.8 billion in economic output.”³⁷

In Acadia National Park, Maine, concentrated traffic has been causing public safety issues, severe congestion, reduced quality of visitor experiences, impacts on the road systems and the park's natural and cultural resources, and pressures on the efficiency and sustainability of park operations.³⁸ The National Park Service (NPS) has responded with a new Transportation Plan to ensure safe and efficient transport via bus, shuttle, and concentrated parking, and a variety of high-quality experiences are available for park visitors.^{39,40} The NPS further proposed an increase in peak season fees for Acadia National Park, as well as 16 other parks, with the aim of generating revenue for improvements to the aging infrastructure and visitor services of national parks.⁴¹

“Each dollar Brazil invested in the PA [protected area] system produced \$7 in economic benefits. Also, the total economic contributions generated more than \$1.3 billion in total sales, \$342 million in personal income, \$473 million in value added to the GDP, and supported 43,602 jobs nationally. [This] reinforced the view that economic impacts of tourism influences PAs as well as indirectly to other businesses and the local communities.”⁴²

Cinque Terre, a series of coastal Italian mountain villages with only 5,000 total residents, became a national park in 1999 and now receives more than two million tourists per year. Visitors come to hike the scenic paths that link the towns and the terraced vineyards. Over the years, the walkways have fallen into disrepair from erosion and overuse. Park authorities have been testing an app which tourists can see in real time the number of people on various routes. A red warning sign shows when a path is overcrowded, allowing visitors to alter their course. In the future, authorities may test virtual waiting lists. Visitors are also encouraged to buy a Cinque Terre Card, which allows access to trails and public transport and the proceeds go towards trail repairs, among other things.⁴³



Cinque Terre (photo by Emma Sargeant)

In Barcelona, there are an average of 154,000 visitors per day, with a high of 220,000 visitors during peak cruise periods and events. These tourists normally represent 10-15% of mobility demand and up to 30% of demand for the underground metro system in the summer. Beginning in 2012, the percentage of residents that felt Barcelona should keep attracting more tourists dropped for the first time, while the percentage of residents that felt that Barcelona was reaching its limit on the number of tourists it could host increased for the first time. In 2016, the percentage of residents that felt the latter (48.9%) surpassed the former (47.5%) and has continued to increase.⁴⁴

3. World Heritage and Cultural Sites



Machu Picchu (photo by Jim Sano)

According to TripAdvisor, “Iconic landmarks and sites remain the most-booked by travelers globally. Travelers are becoming increasingly interested in new experiences, but they’re still loyal to the world’s most iconic sites. In 2017, the most-booked experiences globally were a combined skip-the-line pass for the Vatican Museums, St. Peter’s, and Sistine Chapel, the Chicago River Architecture Cruise, and a skip-the-line pass for a walking tour of Ancient Rome and the Colosseum. Bookable options for The Sagrada Familia, Eiffel Tower, and the Empire State Building also featured in the top ten.”⁴⁵

“One example of a site experiencing the ill effects of overtourism is Machu Picchu, the iconic ‘Lost City of the Incas’ in Peru. Though UNESCO’s recommended carrying capacity for the site is no more than 2,500 visitors per day, during the popular summer months daily visitation is regularly twice this number. With so many visitors, the site is rapidly losing its integrity, with some poorly-behaved travelers climbing the monuments, taking stones from ancient stone walls, and otherwise disrespecting the site. Overtourism also reduces the quality of visitor experience to the site—a Google search for ‘Machu Picchu overrated’ brought up 643,000 results.”⁴⁶ In 2017, authorities brought in new system to help control numbers. It requires visitors to purchase tickets for either a morning or afternoon entrance to the park.⁴⁷



Forbidden City, China (photo by China Foto Press/Getty Images)

“The Forbidden City, the imperial palace during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, is a must-see tourist attraction in Beijing. It charges 60 yuan (US\$9) per person for admission, far lower than the €15 (US\$17) for

the Louvre in Paris or the £23 (US\$29) for Buckingham Palace in London.”⁴⁸ Because of the public value of the cultural-heritage site, museum directors are advocating for the entrance to be free so all may enjoy. However, due to overcrowding, in 2015 the museum imposed a daily cap on visitors, with a maximum of 80,000 allowed in each day. New sections of the Forbidden City have been opened to visitors, increasing accessible areas from 48% in 2012 to 76% in 2016 of the total compound. In the future, 86% of the compound is expected to be accessible.⁴⁹

4. Coastal and Beach Destinations

“80% of all tourism occurs within coastal areas,”⁵⁰ indicating the importance of developing sustainable visitor management practices in coastal and beach communities.

Overtourism, particularly in coastal and beach communities, can exacerbate the negative impacts of climate change through unsustainable development. According to Dr. Jonathon Day of Purdue’s Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management says, “Climate change will impact every destination community in the United States... Those changes will be both direct with heat waves, water scarcity and other weather-related factors, and indirect, through changing ecosystems and the impacts of climate change on health and welfare. Already many municipal planners are considering the impact of changing climate on long term planners. As these planners work they must consider the infrastructure needs of not only residents but visitors. Tourism businesses must consider adaption strategies and building resilience in the face of change.”⁵¹

In March 2018, Thai authorities closed for four months the famed Maya Bay in an effort to grapple with overtourism. Since this secluded cove appeared in the film *The Beach*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio, 4,000 to 5,000 visitors have been turning up *each day*. Experts say 77% of Maya Bay’s coral is at serious risk, mainly from damage by boat anchors. Beginning in September 2018, Maya Beach is limiting visitors to 2,000 a day and boats will no longer be allowed to cross the shallow reef. It will close again for four months in 2019.⁵²



Maya Bay, Thailand (photo by Getty Images)

Boracay, the 7-km-wide island in the Philippines known for its beautiful beaches, is often listed on *Travel + Leisure’s* list of “World’s Best Islands.” In 2017, a record 2 million visitors traveled to the Boracay, generating more than \$1 billion in revenue. However, in April 2018, the Philippine president declared a “state of calamity” on the island due to the strains on the environment caused by tourism. The president ordered a six-month closure of the island to tourists and non-residents.⁵³



Playa del Amor, Mexico (photo by Getty Images)

“Mexico’s National Commission for Protected Natural Areas (CONANP) closed Playa del Amor, also known as Hidden Beach or Playa Escondida to tourism in 2016 shortly after its recognition as one of the best beaches in the world, in order to begin a coral restoration program. The closure would allow design of a more orderly, sustainable program for visits... [C]riteria for visits was established before the destination was re-opened to the public, including a maximum of 116 visitors per day; 15 people maximum per boat; no more than 15 people at a time allowed on the beach and they can only remain for 30 minutes; access via a corridor marked by buoys; and passengers must wear life jackets and no fins. Scuba and/or diving of any kind are also prohibited.”⁵⁴

“In May 2018, a Beaches Operator Entity was created for the destination Mazatlan, in Sinaloa, Mexico, to be financed by the municipal government. Among the entity’s goals are to obtain Mexican national certifications for clean beaches and sustainable management. They also aim to achieve internationally recognized certifications such as “Blue Flag” certification. Additionally, the first destination management organization (DMO) in Mexico was formed in Mazatlan. These entities were created as a result of recommendations made by CREST in the Strategic Action Plan proposed for that Sinaloa as a result of a Global Council for Sustainable Tourism (GSTC) assessment between 2015 and 2016.”⁵⁵

5. National and Regional Destinations

In response to overtourism, many regions are beginning to conduct surveys of residents to inform strategic planning policies. As shared by the World Travel & Tourism Council, a national survey conducted in New Zealand found, "While more than 90 percent of New Zealanders support tourism, the percentage who worry that 'international visitors put too much pressure' on the country increased from 18 percent in December 2016 to 35 percent in March 2017. Top concerns include road accidents, traffic congestion, stress on infrastructure, and litter."⁵⁶

According to Hugh Riley, Secretary General of the Caribbean Tourism Organization, "The CTO is working with its member countries to sensitize stakeholders to the detrimental impacts of 'overtourism' through an ongoing Regional Education and Awareness Campaign. By advocating for climate smart, eco-friendly and planned tourism development, Caribbean destinations are being encouraged to conserve sites and attractions and engage in responsible actions. These efforts foster tourism's role in enhancing resilience and are aligned to the market demands of the 'new tourists' who are more environmentally prudent and culturally perceptive."⁵⁷

The Intrepid Group's "Adventure Travel Index" aims to compare overtouristed nations to niche destinations that would appeal to adventure travelers. In countries like Croatia, they estimate that tourists make up a whopping 1,380.78% of the population, or 57,587,000 tourists to 4,170,600 locals. In Iceland, tourists make up 565.74% of the population, or 1,891,000 tourists to 334,250 locals. In countries that are experiencing "undertourism," such as Tanzania, Papua New Guinea, and Kenya, tourists make up less than 3% of the population.⁵⁸

Arnie Weissmann, Editor in Chief of *Travel Weekly*, reported on the proactive strategy by the Colorado Tourism Office to get ahead of overtourism: According to Weissmann, Director Cathy Ritter recently initiated "a strategic planning project that included 20 'listening sessions' and face-to-face meetings with 1,000 residents and industry stakeholders. What she heard were 'consistent concerns across the state, in the mountains, cities and plains, about the impact of travel and tourism on land, wildlife and, especially, the experience of having too many people in the same place at the same time. It was not even on our radar when we started the process. But we knew we had to address these concerns, or they could evolve into a threat against travel and tourism in Colorado.'" As Ritter told Weissman, "'We want to make sure the message isn't 'Stay away,' but rather, 'Here's how you can enjoy and respect Colorado.'" "To encourage exploration of less visited areas, the tourism office created a 'field guide' on its website: 70 three-, five- and seven-day itineraries, including suggested activities, places to stay and where to eat. Voluntourism opportunities are also highlighted. In a sentiment survey fielded this spring, two years after her listening tour, Ritter found clear evidence that Colorado residents were more supportive of tourism: More than 60% now view it as 'extremely important,' only 14% view it as negatively impacting their lives and 80% agree that 'when the Colorado Tourism Office ... educates visitors about how to respect our resources, I feel more positive about tourism.'"⁵⁹



Chichén Itzá (photo by Emma Sargeant)

Diversification of new tourism sites may help to relieve pressure on natural and cultural resources and achieve a more equitable distribution of tourism benefits for residents. According to tourism professor Kennedy Obombo, in Mexico, programs like *Pueblos Mágicos* (Magic Towns/Villages), introduced in 2001 by the Ministry of Tourism, "highlight the extraordinary qualities of some of Mexico's most revered locations. Currently there are 211 magic towns aimed at easing tourism pressure in Mexico's big-name destinations, like Cancun, the pre-Hispanic ruins of Chichén Itzá, or the crowded plazas of Mexico City. Each designation comes along with significant investment to boost alternative tourism: nature and heritage-based tourism, ecotourism, community-based tourism etc."⁶⁰

Consumer Demand for Responsible Travel

Recent surveys and market studies indicate a growing portion of travelers are interested in authentic, unique, and localized travel experiences that are good for residents and destinations. Responsible consumers that consider the attitudes of residents and value the destination they visit will likely begin to notice rising tensions and increased environmental pressures due to overtourism. Thus, the demand for tourism products is at risk when cultural and natural resources deteriorate, and responsible consumers seek authentic experiences elsewhere.

Experts say...

“Increased social and environmental concerns amongst travellers and the growing awareness of the impact of their trips means that more people are willing to pay for authentic cultural experiences, especially if they benefit local communities and don’t harm their natural resources... The need to create such experiences in order to attract higher-spending visitors, combat seasonality and improve visitor experience is one of the key challenges but also key opportunities for emerging destinations where tourism has been growing fast, like Georgia. Local tourism service providers must accept that sustainable tourism that benefits the local people and helps protect their nature and culture is the only way forward, in 2018 and beyond.”⁶¹

– Marta Mills, One Planet Blog

“With a greater public awareness not only of environmental issues, but also of human rights and working conditions, tour operators and hoteliers are supporting this move towards responsible tourism that looks after our environment and our people. In 2018, we can expect more initiatives such as social enterprise projects which give back to local communities, carbon-neutral group tours, and the banning of plastics from beaches.”⁶² – ABTA, The Travel Association (United Kingdom)

Surveys and Statistics show...

In an increasingly digitally-connected, work-centric, and material world, travelers are seeking opportunities to reconnect with nature, other people, and sense of individual meaning.⁶³ Both the Baby Boomer and Millennial generations have shown inclinations to pay a premium for authentic and meaningful travel.

U.S. Baby Boomers make up 80% of all luxury travel spending. Now at retirement age and with disposable income, many have time and desire to travel. Many have already been to the most popular European countries and are now seeking lesser visited destinations and smaller customized tours. As reported by an award-winning blog written for Baby Boomer travelers, “One of the biggest trends for the Baby Boomer demographic is luxury trekking.” Finding the classic trek to Machu Picchu with four nights of camping may be a turnoff for Baby Boomers, tour operators have successfully combined visiting such iconic sites in remote locations with “stays at cozy, luxurious lodges and customized hikes that range from easy to extreme.”⁶⁴

At the same time, Millennials, the fastest growing consumer segment of the industry, are looking for transformational experiences over accumulation of things. They are “active, adventurous, connected and socially conscious and want to engage with places they care about; they want to give back,” according to Sustainable Travel International.⁶⁵

Forbes magazine reports Millennials are also likely to spend more. They spent \$4,594 a person on vacations in 2017, with an average of \$1,312 per vacation, an 8% increase over 2016.⁶⁶

Booking.com reports, “Looking ahead, more than two-thirds (68%) of travelers intend to stay in an eco-accommodation in 2018, reassuringly up from 65% in 2017 and 62% in 2016. Additionally, the percentage of travelers who have not considered eco-friendly stays because they were unaware of their existence continues to decline, resting at 31% this year, compared to 39% and 38% in 2017 and 2016 respectively.”⁶⁷

This Booking.com report also finds the positive and negative factors that promote sustainable travel among consumers include: being impressed by natural sights during their own travels (60%); noticing a visible impact of tourism at the destinations they have visited (54%), seeing the positive effect that sustainable tourism can have on the local people (47%), seeing the unsustainable effects of tourism in their home country (42%), and feeling guilty about the impact their vacation has had on the environment (32%). The obstacles to traveling more sustainably were listed as: costs (42%), lack of information/lack of certification (32%), time (22%), less appealing destinations (22%), and loss of luxury/comfort (20%).⁶⁸

72% of Airbnb guests say the environmental benefits of home sharing were of at least some importance in their choice of Airbnb.⁶⁹

A survey conducted in the Western Costa del Sol (Andalucia, Spain), showed that most tourists (97.8%) with high levels of "sustainable intelligence" (commitment, attitude, knowledge and/or behavior with regard to sustainability) are willing to pay more to visit a sustainable tourism destination. However, overall, only 26.6% of all types of tourists surveyed are willing to pay more to visit a sustainable destination, and a large majority of those who are willing to pay more for sustainable tourism products would not pay more than 10% above the cost of travel.⁷⁰

"Today's travelers no longer view adventure travel as a holiday that involves gravity-defying excursions and exhilarating recreational activities. In fact, recent data shows that travelers are 45 percent less likely to book that type of vacation, opting instead for cultural immersion opportunities," writes Rezdy.com. "In 2018, globetrotters are setting out to new destinations in hopes of experiencing the people, the culture and the flavor of a new place, rather than simply stopping by a big attraction for a quick photo opportunity."⁷¹

The Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) shares, "As adventure travelers become more experienced, they are increasingly seeking to experience destinations as temporary locals. In 2018, more destinations will create proactive strategies to facilitate this, which will mean educating residents and providers, as well as partnering with technology platforms that make these experiences accessible... The concept of Localhood may even offer a solution to overtourism as it seeks to create a framework for locals and visitors to interact amicably around shared experiences."⁷²

"The new adventure trend is the desire to experience new cultures, with a 20% rise in tourists opting for food adventure tours, including wine tasting, sampling local cuisine, and taking cookery classes," according to The Resort Group.⁷³



Food adventures offered by Intrepid Travel (photo by Trekible)

In 2017, historical and heritage experiences topped the list of fastest-growing categories for global travelers (+125% in bookings), writes Trekk Soft.⁷⁴



Travelers learning to make Cheese in Switzerland with Jacada Travel (photo by Jacada Travel)

National Geographic finds, "Family-owned properties, capitalizing on the travelers' desire to make deep, local connections, will become an even bigger draw in the upcoming year."⁷⁵

58% of *Condé Nast Traveler* readers surveyed said they choose a hotel based on whether the hotel gives back to local people and the planet.⁷⁶

"More and more, people are travelling to achieve something, whether that be climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro or hiking the Annapurna Circuit. Travel companies have recently seen a rise in the number of trips that involve trekking and hiking. For example, between 2015 and 2016 the number of such trips taken with Jacada Travel doubled, with a similar growth rate happening in 2017," according to Pilot Guides.⁷⁷

A growing number of social-impact companies and NGOs are offering consumer carbon offsets for flights. However, according to ABC News, few travelers actually purchase carbon offsets, "with Qantas (including Jetstar) and Virgin Australia reporting about 10 per cent of passengers opting in. Reasons for not buying carbon offsets vary, with climate change denialism, unwillingness to pay more money, and a mistrust of how airlines will use the money all being contributing factors. However, perhaps the biggest barrier is that travelers simply don't have the information."⁷⁸

The Business Case for Responsible Tourism

As we learned from the previous section, consumers are open to traveling responsibly. In order to truly mainstream responsible travel, barriers to entry for sustainable actions must continue to be lowered through increased participation from the industry. Tourism businesses have a role to play in addressing community livelihoods, environmental issues, workers' rights, and the satisfaction of their responsible travelers, not only because it is right, but because these will be factors that contribute to the longevity and sustainability of their businesses. Overtourism should also be a concern of tourism businesses, although counterintuitive. When travelers start to perceive overtouristed destinations as being inauthentic or unenjoyable, they will stop visiting them. Promoting alternate destinations once one becomes overtouristed is an unsustainable strategy for companies like hotels that need to invest in the longevity of their tourism product. Instead, companies should be active in strategic, sustainable tourism planning in the destinations that host them.

Experts say...

"The question is no longer can sustainable tourism work; independent case studies from around the world have documented that it does. Rather, the question today is how far the travel industry can take sustainable tourism principles to help protect the world's natural and cultural treasures – the very 'products' upon which tourism businesses also depend."⁷⁹
- Virtuoso

"We are on the cusp of making [an] impact real on a much broader scale. We continue to see our community grow (from 5,000 to 20,000 individuals this year), from the growth in attendance at our events, emergence of our local chapters around the world, and in the increased frequency of a wide spectrum of tourism professionals implementing more and more sustainable initiatives into their businesses... Sustainable tourism no longer has to be confined to a niche within the industry."⁸⁰
– Impact Travel Alliance

"Now, the very nature of travel is to expose people to not only new places but to thoughts, ideas and cultures. The rise in voluntourism, sustainable tourism and ecotourism initiatives all point to a common value that people share by perusing their wanderlust: do good wherever you go. The concept of adhering to values and doing good has now evolved to appeal to all businesses. Imagine the impact your company could make in the world, one good deed at a time."⁸¹ - Frances Kiradjian (2018) CEO, Boutique & Lifestyle Leaders Association (BLLA)

Surveys and Statistics show...

"Despite the tourist's concern and willingness to help, the tourist industry lags behind others in delivering products that appeal to its audience's sense of responsibility. According to an AIG Travel Survey conducted in 2016⁸² which explores consumer perceptions of sustainable travel movement, a mere 4 percent of the industry is practicing some form of sustainability. Of those who want to travel sustainably, more than one third (35 percent) found it difficult, and half didn't know how."⁸³

According to Green Key, "Hotels should note that guests are also open to make luxury adjustments in order to stay somewhere eco-friendly. The vast majority of global travellers would be happy to accept this, with 94% willing to stay in a property with energy saving light bulbs, 89% in one with HVAC units that only run while you're in the room, and 80% happy with low flow showerheads." In addition, 79% would be happy with less frequent toiletry replacement, 75% would be happy to have linen and towel changes less frequently, and 64% would be happy to accept higher cost for food because it's all locally produced.⁸⁴

The Adventure Travel Trade Association reports, "In tour operators' judgment, the host region sees significant economic benefits from adventure tourism. They estimate that, on average, nearly two-thirds (65%) of the money guests spend on their trip stays in the local region, and that guests spend an average of \$145 on local handicrafts or souvenir while on their trip."⁸⁵

Gender equality and empowerment of women are key components of responsible travel. According to a 2010 UN report, women, on average, make up 48.6% of the tourism workforce globally, and rise above 50% in the Caribbean and Latin America. The UN report found that "tourism provides better opportunities for women's participation in the workforce, women's entrepreneurship, and women's leadership than other sectors of the economy."⁸⁶

Certification continues to play an important role among responsibly-minded businesses, with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council providing both [industry](#) and [destination](#) benchmark criteria that have a strong relationship with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council has [accredited](#) 5 certifying bodies and [recognized](#) over 2-dozen global standards programs that adhere to and are equivalent to the GSTC Hotel & Tour Operator Criteria.⁸⁷

Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort in Aruba became the first carbon-neutral hotel in the Caribbean in 2018 through CarbonNeutral® certification. Bucuti says “When we commit, we commit... We committed to offering the most romantic vacation and for the last three years we have been TripAdvisor’s No. 1 Hotel for Romance in the Caribbean. We committed to provide a healthy environment for our guests’ vacations - and the environment - and we’ve achieved the status of the most eco-certified resort throughout the Caribbean... Bucuti & Tara has now proven that carbon neutrality and a memorable vacation are mutually inclusive. A stay with us helps combat climate change and is better for the environment than an equivalent drive vacation!”⁸⁸

A growing number of tourism businesses are also choosing to opt for [B-Corp](#) certification, which is offered for all types of social and environmental impact organizations. B-Corp states, “Society’s most challenging problems cannot be solved by government and nonprofits alone. The B Corp community works toward reduced inequality, lower levels of poverty, a healthier environment, stronger communities, and the creation of more high quality jobs with dignity and purpose. By harnessing the power of business, B-Corps use profits and growth as a means to a greater end: positive impact for their employees, communities, and the environment.”⁸⁹ B-Corps are committed to verified performance, legal accountability, and public transparency. As of Fall 2018, [30 travel and leisure businesses](#) had been B-Corp Certified.

In 2016, Bodhi Surf + Yoga became the first surf and yoga camp in the world to be B Corp Certified and was honored as Best for the World: Community in 2017 and 2018. The company utilizes surfing, yoga, nature immersion, and community engagement as a way to facilitate memorable learning experiences with the intention of bolstering individual long-term pro-environmental action. In 2018 they launched The Bodhi App: Linking Tourism, Technology, and Purpose to provide their guests with nearly 60 environmentally-friendly actions for both before and after their vacation experience to reinforce the lessons learned and behaviors modeled at Bodhi and provide practical ways to incorporate them into their own lives and communities. Each action holds a point value that can be redeemed for prizes each quarter.⁹⁰



Bodhi Surf + Yoga

After Intrepid Group, another B-Corp certified company, announced a historic stance on eliminating elephant riding from their tours in 2014, Executive Chairman Darrell Wade estimates that as many as 160 companies have [pledged](#) the same. “The reality is people make decisions that are not fully informed. Tour operators have a responsibility to delve into these issues because we live with them all the time.”⁹¹

Responsible travel also aims to help businesses promote and protect children’s safety at every stage in the supply chain. [Child Welfare Guidelines](#) developed for businesses by G Adventures and the Planeterra Foundation in conjunction with Friends-International’s ChildSafe Movement in 2017 reports, “As the demand for experiential travel and social, cultural, and community-based tourism grows, so do the risk factors for children. The children selling souvenirs in and around cultural destinations, the children in villages where homestays are taking place, those shining shoes at busy intersections, and those in residential care and schools, all need effective protection systems in place to ensure their safety. They need businesses and the tourism industry to adopt approaches that not only recognize their vulnerability, but also seek to mitigate risks.”⁹²



Preparing traditional meals at Hotel Rovies (photo by Greek Reporter)

The tourism industry continues to provide opportunities to build bridges and to achieve peace through understanding. In an accommodation program developed by the European Union, 66,400 Greek asylum-seekers were taken in by Greek hotels and resorts. At Hotel Rovies, “[owner] Vasileiou has gone the extra mile. He’s created a collective environment where refugees, hotel staff and locals in nearby Rovies village can eat, work and live all together – and learn from each other. At Hotel Rovies, instructors hired through the accommodation programme teach refugees theatre skills and swimming at the beach just outside. Refugee women cook their traditional meals in the bustling collective kitchen, while the reception-area TV blares Arabic channels. Children attend classes in German, English and French, taught by Greek teachers as well as fellow refugees. The community they have built is an example of solidarity in action.”⁹³

The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company embarked on a three-year program centered on reducing energy consumption. The program had resounding success, with energy consumption reduced by over 13% from the baseline year which gave rise to a substantial decrease in energy spend. The three-year energy cost savings were \$11,086,000.⁹⁴

The Hilton Palacio del Rio Hotel in San Antonio, Texas reduced water consumption by 49%, resulting in cost savings of US \$160,000 in water, sewer, and energy costs per year.⁹⁵

Visitors are typically willing to give back to community projects supported by tourism businesses if they are asked. One of the most successful and reliable techniques is proving to be “opt out” programs that add a small amount (usually \$1 to \$5) per night to a guest’s hotel bills. Guests are given the option to request this voluntary levy or ‘tax’ be removed, but this rarely happens. Russ Fielden, owner of True Blue Bay Resort in Grenada, says no guest has ever declined to pay the \$1/night the hotel adds to bills to support a local school, and many opt to pay more after learning about the project.⁹⁶ Hotel El Ganzo in Mexico adds 19 pesos (about US\$1) per night for its community center, which is rarely declined.⁹⁷

The tourism industry can easily support initiatives that benefit the whole of the destination through strategic partnerships. “Last year alone, thanks to hotel bookings on Kind Traveler, more than 500 in-need New Yorkers received meals from local NYC food bank, City Harvest.” This is based on Kind Travelers’ unique ‘Give + Get’ business model, in which travelers receive discounted rates on hotel stays through a nightly donation to a local charity.⁹⁸

In 2017, World Wildlife Fund (WWF-US) and the American Hotel & Lodging Association, with generous support from The Rockefeller Foundation published HotelKitchen.org -- an online toolkit for hotels to prevent and manage food waste in their operations. Following the launch of this platform, WWF-US is now working to adapt this initiative for adoption in key geographies globally. Using a regional approach, capacity is being built to engage community partners, adapt program resources, train hotel and restaurant staff, run demonstration projects and develop case studies, and build a collaborative community of stakeholders to improve the efficiency of a local food system, with potential projects in the Caribbean, Southeast Asia, Brazil, Kenya, China, Pakistan, and Europe.⁹⁹

As part of this initiative, in 2018, CREST and WWF-US worked together to enable three resort properties in the Caribbean to adopt Hotel|Kitchen guidance. A joint survey on food waste management in hotels and resorts in the Caribbean showed that 81% of hotels and resorts would be interested in implementing or strengthening a property program to reduce and manage food waste with assistance; 83% already buy local foods to extend shelf life; 77% use reusable bottles or bulk condiments instead of single-use plastic condiments; and 76% plan menus purposefully to limit portions and cross-utilize ingredients.¹⁰⁰ Starting in Fall 2018, three Caribbean resorts will begin tracking food waste with the help of technology applications Winnow and LeanPath. Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort in Aruba has been separating food waste for 24 years and engaged with the Hotel Kitchen program in July to train staff of multiple functions on strategies to prevent food waste.

According to Antonis Petropoulos of EcoClub.com, “Responsible Tourism also includes worker rights and living wages: In Greece, a vibrant parliamentary democracy with strong trade unions, a National General Collective Labor Agreement, which also covers all tourism businesses, is signed every year while a separate, sectoral collective labour agreement is also signed between the Hellenic Hoteliers Federation (ΠΟΞ) and the Hotel & Restaurant Workers Federation (POEE-YTE). This document specifies minimum wages and minimum wage raises for all employees.”¹⁰¹

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