
United Nations World Tourism Organization

MUNE XV



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Letter from the Chair

Hey everyone! My name is Yoshi Ordoñez, and I'm so excited to welcome you to MUNE XV's General Assembly, the World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism), and serve as your chair. I'm a sophomore at Emory, and while I haven't officially declared my major yet, I'm heavily leaning toward something in government, public policy, or business. This marks my fifth year being involved in Model UN, and my second time staffing at MUNE! Outside of MUN, you can probably find me biking, trying new food spots, and watching movies—let me know any recs!

As a lifelong traveler who loves visiting new cities and landmarks around the world, I've always been fascinated by the intersection of cultural exchange, economic policy, and global sustainability. Today's world is increasingly globalized, more so now than ever. On a planet of more than 8 billion people, tourism has become an undeniable metric of macroeconomic success and social impact. The indispensable purpose of the UNWTO lies in maintaining this industry as an economically viable one while ensuring its practices are responsible and sustainable.

The topics of this committee concern regulating the cultural and ecological impacts that the tourism industry continues to have, particularly in high-density urban centers and cultural heritage sites, while protecting the key role that tourism plays as an economic engine of so many nations worldwide. While these issues go hand-in-hand, the decentralized nature of the tourism industry means that policymakers often focus on one problem at the neglect of the other. Collaboration, negotiation, and debate will be essential in ensuring the continuing role of tourism to both serve global travel and preserve the sanctity of cultural hubs and natural environments. The measures through which this is accomplished will be up to you.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at yoshi.ordonez@emory.edu
Excited to meet you all!

Best,
Yoshi

Sensitivity Statement

At MUNE XV, it is our responsibility to ensure that everyone feels safe and respected throughout committee. This committee involves the discussion of contemporary and relevant real-world issues, and delegates are expected to approach the committee with the proper level of respect that these topics require. As such, we request that delegates maintain proper decorum throughout the committee, and treat each other with the highest level of respect and kindness. We also request that delegates treat the dias and members of the MUNE XV secretariat with the highest level of respect and kindness.

MUNE XV maintains a strict zero-tolerance policy for bullying or discrimination in any form. Delegates are reminded not to engage in any rhetoric that may be inappropriate or offensive to others, including the use of language that may be racist, xenophobic, homophobic, transphobic, or ableist. This includes in speeches, moderated caucuses, unmoderated caucuses, and anytime else during the committee. If you do ever experience a problem, please raise it with your chair or co-chair and we will do everything in our power to help you.

Technology Policy

MUNE XV seeks to foster a fair, balanced, and competitive environment for delegates. Pre-writing or the use of plagiarism for working papers before or during committee is not permitted by the dias; similarly, the use of generative AI to write or assist in the writing of working papers or draft resolutions during committee is prohibited.

While the use of laptops and similar forms of technology will be permitted during unmoderated caucuses and/or resolution drafting periods, delegates are encouraged to refrain from the use of these technologies during moderated caucuses.

Key Terms

Tourism: A phenomenon socially, culturally, and economically pertaining to travel outside one's usual residence to domestic destinations or foreign countries for personal recreational or professional purposes.¹

Tourist: A domestic, inbound, or outbound visitor. Under UN Tourism classifications, a tourist must be traveling outside their usual, daily environment for under a year, be traveling for purpose of leisure, personal or business (excluding employment by an entity in the region) reasons, and be staying for at least one night (same-day visitors are classified by UN Tourism as excursionists).

Traveller: An individual who traverses between two geographic locations for any purpose within any amount of time.

Inbound Tourism: Refers to the travel and activity of non-residents outside their country of origin to a foreign destination (phenomenon of a country receiving tourists).

Outbound Tourism: Refers to the travel and activity of resident tourists outside their country of origin to a foreign destination (phenomenon of tourists traveling outside their country of origin).

Domestic Tourism: Refers to the travel and activity of resident tourists to a destination within their country of origin.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): A set of 17 interconnected, global objectives created in 2015, aligned with the United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, addressing areas of social & economic development, infrastructure & sustainability, and environmental & institutional protection.

Carrying Capacity: The maximum threshold of individuals that an environment or ecosystem can support indefinitely without the degradation of its natural resources, standard of living, or waste absorption capacity.²

Overtourism: A phenomenon in which a country receives more visitors than it can sustainably manage, with the excess in visitation leading to detrimental impacts on both the experiences of tourists and host residents' quality of life.

¹<https://www.untourism.int/glossary-tourism-terms>

²<https://worldpopulationhistory.org/carrying-capacity/>

Ecotourism: A type of tourism purposefully inclined toward observing nature through the responsible engagement of cultural and biological diversity and the maintenance of the natural vitality of local communities and ecosystems.

Inclusive Economic Development: A people-centered economic agenda prioritizing equitable macroeconomic growth, especially for marginalized or underrepresented populations, through investment in entrepreneurship, local employment opportunities, and historically disinvested communities while emphasizing local resource use and fair global market competition.

Small Island Developing States (SIDS): A distinct, delineated group of developing states identified by the United Nations as possessing unique vulnerabilities economically, socially, and environmentally. These states also collectively hold jurisdiction over nearly 30% of the world's oceans through Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs).³

Short-term Rental: A residential property that is fully furnished, utilized for temporary stays (typically classified as less than 30 consecutive days), and regulated through local zoning rules, occupancy taxes, and permit requirements. Houses, apartments, cabins, condos, and even single rooms could all constitute possible short-term rentals.⁴

³ <https://www.un.org/ohrlls/content/about-small-island-developing-states>

⁴ <https://www.airroi.com/glossary/short-term-rental>

Overview of UN Tourism



Source: UN Tourism

UNWTO: Founding & Function

UN Tourism, also known by its former name, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), is an intergovernmental organization and specialized agency of the United Nations.⁵ The agency consists of 160 member states, 6 associate members, and over 500 affiliate members. The duty of UN Tourism is officially stated as the “promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism.”⁶ This includes working in collaboration with member states to help develop tourism as a driver of inclusive growth, ensuring progress coincides with environmental sustainability and helping foster economic development through travel innovation and job creation. While UN Tourism does not possess the supranational authority to enforce national tourism policies, its General Assembly can adopt resolutions, approve the organization’s program of work, and promote international standards and cooperation between states.

UN Tourism is composed of several bodies, including the UN Tourism General Assembly and the UN Tourism Executive Council. The secretariat, including the UNWTO Secretary-General,

⁵<https://www.untourism.int/how-we-are>

⁶ <https://www.untourism.int/who-we-are>

typically operates from the agency's headquarters located in Madrid, Spain, with regional office locations in Nara, Japan and Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Numerous departments of the agency are also organized regionally, including in Africa, the Americas, East Asia and the Pacific, South Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Furthermore, departments that target specific industry verticals are also organized thematically, encompassing departments such as sustainability, international cooperation, and crisis management & marketing.⁷

The initial predecessor of the UNWTO was the International Congress of Official Tourist Traffic Associations (ICOTT), founded in 1925 in The Hague, Netherlands with the goal of improving coordination on international policies used for travel and border regulations, alongside the creation of a standardized database for tourism statistics. Following World War II, the organization was reformed into the International Union of Official Travel Organizations (IUOTO) in 1946, operating as an NGO geared at fostering international travel cooperation. The body then evolved by member vote into the World Tourism Organization in 1970. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) was officially formalized on November 1, 1975 in Madrid, Spain, with this day widely considered the official founding date for the organization's modern iteration. In 2003, UNWTO was officially recognized as a specialized agency of the United Nations.⁸ The UNWTO officially changed its name to UN Tourism in 2024 in an effort to modernize and simplify the agency's brand name while maintaining a recognizable identity as a UN specialized body. The rebrand, adopted with the tagline "*bringing the world closer*," was largely a brand overhaul rather than an internal or systemic change, with the former and current names still used interchangeably.⁹

UNWTO Five Strategic Priorities

UN Tourism's primary mission of promoting sustainable, ethical, and accessible tourism worldwide can be understood through its five strategic priorities that include fueling economic prosperity, fostering inclusive development, and driving environmental sustainability, with the interest of protecting the prosperity of the people and the planet in its core initiatives.

UNWTO Five Strategic Priorities:

1. "Accelerating innovation and digital transformation;
2. "Enhancing sector competitiveness through investment and entrepreneurship;
3. "Generating employment and expanding training opportunities;
4. "Improving resilience and ensuring safe, seamless travel;
5. "Protecting cultural and natural heritage while supporting local communities."¹⁰

⁷ <https://www.untourism.int/structure>

⁸ <https://www.scribd.com/document/67929175/UNWTO>

⁹ <https://www.untourism.int/news/unwto-becomes-un-tourism-to-mark-a-new-era-for-global-sector>

¹⁰ <https://www.untourism.int/about-us>

These strategic priorities and overall goals of the organization fall in line with the items outlined in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in promoting tourism as a means of affirming and protecting cultural heritage, of economic mobility, and spurring innovation at the digital level.

Notable Frameworks

Notable frameworks undertaken by UN Tourism include the ESG Framework for Tourism Businesses, an ongoing initiative developed in cooperation with the World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance to create standardized metrics for firms and businesses. These metrics would outline specific Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) efforts through a framework focused on upholding common standards for sustainability.¹¹ The International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (INSTO) Framework outlines 11 key areas that must be monitored, delineating categories such as energy and water management, local satisfaction, and tourism seasonality.¹² UN Tourism has also developed Investment Guidelines for enabling frameworks for tourism investments. The Series A framework centers on methods for removing barriers for investment, guiding stakeholders toward strategic plans to implement in order to create sustainable investments in the tourism business ecosystem.¹³



Approval of the UNWTO Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics (2017). Source: TnHGlobal

UN Tourism also carries precedent in human rights frameworks. The Manila Declaration on World Tourism, adopted in 1980, recognizes tourism, including access to travel, as a vital asset for the flourishing of nations and individuals socially, culturally, and economically worldwide. Access to travel and leisure is encouraged as a fundamental human right, and 25 core principles through which

¹¹ <https://www.untourism.int/news/un-tourism-and-world-sustainable-hospitality-alliance-to-advance-common-esg-framework>

¹² <https://www.untourism.int/sustainable-development/into-framework>

¹³ <https://www.untourism.int/investment/un-tourism-investment-guidelines-SA1>

global tourism should be guided are outlined. These include encouraging governments to ensure that tourism is sustainably implemented and minimally impactful on natural environments, and that the tourism industry is mutually beneficial to tourists and local host populations alike. The principles also encompass basic guidelines surrounding international cooperation, accessibility, and economic growth to generate employment and reduce poverty.¹⁴

On September 11, 2019, the UNWTO General Assembly in St. Petersburg adopted the Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics, which, approved prior in 2017, established significant recognition with regards to the safeguarding of human rights and prevention of human exploitation in the travel industry.¹⁵ The International Code for the Protection of Tourists (ICPT), passed by consensus on December 3, 2021 by the UNWTO General Assembly in Madrid, Spain was primarily directed at governments, public and private stakeholders, and tourists. The code coincided with the recovery of the tourism industry following the COVID-19 pandemic; the crisis inflicted by the pandemic made apparent the lack of a unified international legal framework regarding consumer protection for tourists, especially in emergency situations.¹⁶

¹⁴ <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/pdf/10.18111/unwtodeclarations.1980.01.01>

¹⁵ <https://ecpat.org/unwto-adopts-framework-convention-on-tourism-ethics/>

¹⁶ https://unctad.org/system/files/non-official-document/ccpb_IGECON2024_Tourism_Code_book_WTO_en.pdf

Topic 1: Enhancing the Role of Tourism in Achieving Inclusive Economic Development



Source: Adventure.com

The Tourism Industry

One in ten jobs worldwide are supported by the tourism industry.¹⁷ Accounting for 9.8% of the global GDP, tourism also represents 7%, or around \$1.6 trillion, of global exports, making it one of the largest global exports in the world.¹⁸ As approximately 10.9% of jobs worldwide are supported by tourism, about one-third of these professions are directly employed in travel industry, hospitality, aviation, or tour operations roles.¹⁹ A prominent consensus is that tourism is a largely positive marker of economic development, serving as an inclusive and scalable engine of employment growth. According to the World Bank, tourism serves as one of the most significant engines for the creation of new jobs worldwide.²⁰ Tourism brings employment, entrepreneurship, and overall economic growth.

¹⁷ <https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/united-nation-s-world-tourism-organization-annual-report-continues-to-demonstrate-the-importance-of-tourism-around-the-world>

¹⁸ <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/resource-efficiency/what-we-do/responsible-industry/tourism>

¹⁹ <https://wtcc.org/research/economic-impact>

²⁰ <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/voices/cities-that-work-how-urban-tourism-drives-jobs>

By 2035, studies suggest that the tourism industry could create as many as 91 million additional new jobs and roles.²¹

Inclusive and sustainable growth are outlined in the core initiatives of UN Tourism, yet countries and municipalities around the world experience disproportionate levels of economic growth when it comes to the tourism sector.²² Many developing nations, especially within rural communities, emerging markets, and small island economies, possess a high capacity for visitor volume with a developing tourism market but suffer pitfalls that stall inclusive economic development. According to the World Bank, “small states face a combination of constraints—geographic isolation, small populations, reliance on imports, and narrow economic bases—that limit production, reduce economies of scale, and raise the cost of doing business.” These issues are compounded through events such as recurrent climate disasters and external demand volatility, which halts private investment and sustainable job creation.²³

The United Nations SDG 8 outlines a goal that “promotes policies that create decent jobs, support local culture, and foster local entrepreneurship.” This includes the implementation of policies promoting sustainable tourism practices and the exchange of local cultural goods and services. Paragraph 24 of the World Heritage Sustainable Development Policy presents a goal to “contribute to promoting sustainable forms of inclusive and equitable economic development, productive and decent employment and income-generating activities for all” that includes strengthening local livelihoods and employment, growing local entrepreneurship, and investing economic tourism opportunities directly benefiting local communities.²⁴

Despite similar intentions declared by UN Tourism and a multitude of international humanitarian bodies worldwide, many economies lack the community-focused frameworks to implement means of inclusive economic development, and rather than benefitting local and emerging markets, tourism often drains local resources from them. In an effort to develop and monetize, community-based tourism models are often foregone in favor of heavily foreign-reliant consumer chains.

Infrastructure Deficits

A major issue faced by many emerging economies and small island states (SIDS) is a lack of sustainable or permanent infrastructure to be able to accommodate the consistent outflow of tourism expenditure. A lack of tourism infrastructure can render many economies in the global age uncompetitive, leading to a strain on natural resources. When this happens, these developing states

²¹ <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/psd/20-reasons-you-should-integrate-tourism-your-development-agenda>

²² <https://www.untourism.int/news/un-tourism-and-world-tourism-alliance-identify-ways-to-make-sector-key-driver-of-inclusive-development>

²³ <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/voices/new-world-bank-group-strategy-for-small-states-jobs-at-the-center>

²⁴ <https://whc.unesco.org/en/glossary/270>

become more vulnerable to economic or environmental shocks. Without adequate infrastructure, growth is stalled, and visitation stagnates.²⁵

Even with valuable cultural assets and vibrant urban hubs, countries still suffer from a lack of infrastructure to be able to sustainably accommodate tourism. Underdeveloped tourism infrastructure can range anywhere from hotels and other forms of travel hospitality, airports, roads, or ports. Overburdened utilities, such as those concerning water, sanitation, and electricity, often hinder the development of locations that would otherwise possess high tourism potential. In addition, poor road quality and a lack of public transit lead to structural deficiencies that complicate the transportation needs of both locals and visitors.²⁶ High maintenance costs for all of these factors, including for tourism infrastructure, is ultimately difficult to maintain without sufficient funding models, meaning without them, facilities are often not well-kept. The reliance on visitor taxation as one of the most prominent funding models creates a self-sustaining loop, as a lack of funding diminishes the potential number of visitors that these same models may derive revenue from.²⁷ Furthermore, development in many developing states is often unregulated, meaning governmental safety thresholds are not always met or properly regulated. Without adequate regulation, development is often unlikely to lead to long-term benefits in increasing visitor inflow.²⁸



Active tourism construction projects in South and Central America. Source: Hotel Management Network

²⁵ <https://www.wider.unu.edu/publication/tourism-competitiveness-small-island-developing-states>

²⁶ <https://islandstudiesjournal.org/article/81195-the-potential-of-disruptive-transport-infrastructure-for-tourism-development-in-emerging-island-destinations-research-project-in-the-faroe-islands>

²⁷ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307820387_Public_Tourism_Infrastructure_Challenges_in_the_Development_and_Maintenance_Activities

²⁸ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1447677024000500>

In addition, the fiscal status of governments plays a prominent role in the reduction of financing needs for infrastructural services. Governments carrying high amounts of debt are often susceptible to high interest rates from international lenders, dramatically driving up the costs of infrastructural projects. As a result, strained municipalities divert funding from infrastructural projects to essential public services, in turn diverting foreign capital and increasing investor uncertainty in these regions.

South America and Central America serve as prime case studies in this example. A lack of funding and technological advancement in regions outside primary international hotspots such as Brazil and Mexico has stalled visitation and economic growth across the continental region. The severe infrastructural imbalance in these regions contributes to a lack of international visitors and has stalled long-term growth. A lack of public-private partnerships or foreign investment leaves much of the regions' hospitality capabilities currently in doubt; furthermore, low numbers of active sustainable infrastructural projects lead many locations to face a lack of resiliency to environmental and economic challenges.²⁹

Economic Leakage

One of the most prominent issues stalling inclusive economic growth are economic leakages. While tourism in many developing nations comprises an average 45% of total service exports, an estimated 40% to 50% of tourist spending leaves, or 'leaks out,' of developing economies (with up to 80% in many import-dependent islands), according to UNCTAD.³⁰ This issue lies in foreign exchange and service export imbalances. The lack of service economies in many developing states leaves goods production and hospitality training heavily reliant on foreign imports. These occur when export revenues from services, such as those based in tourism, do not manage to balance the deficit in goods and capital, resulting in a loss of revenue that does not funnel back into the local economy.

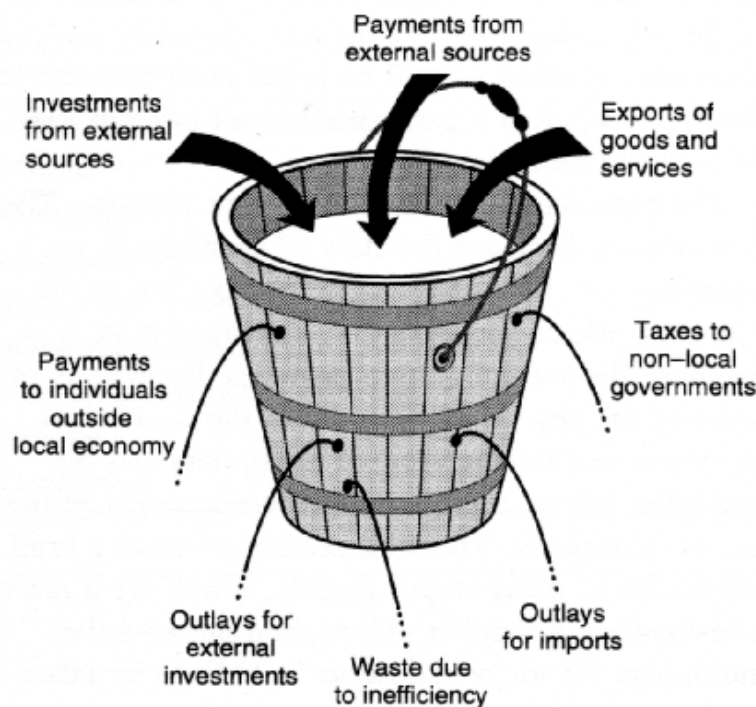
Many developing nations that find themselves relying heavily on tourism without adequate, accommodating infrastructure fall into a structural trap in which countries lose foreign exchange earnings due to an inability to capture high-value global travel spend. With a lack of airports meeting international standards, standardized payment processes, and networks for transport, travel earnings are far more likely to remain with foreign operators, or locations are bypassed altogether by tourists for better-accommodated destinations.

This ultimately leads to a phenomenon, experienced especially by Small Island Developing States (SIDS), called the tourism leakage paradox. It is often viewed as a 'double-edged sword' because it fuels foreign exchange and jobs into remote regions but drains local gross domestic product (GDP), as reliance on foreign-owned assets severely bleeds tourism revenues generated in host

²⁹ <https://www.hotelmanagement-network.com/comment/tourism-infrastructure-south-central-america/>

³⁰ https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/aldcafrica2017_en.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

economies.³¹ This makes inclusive economic development challenging because the market is heavily international, even with investment in local businesses and natural resources.



Economic Leakage. Source: Elevatedtrips.com

This phenomenon can be attributed to multiple factors. As previously mentioned, import-heavy hospitality fosters a heavy reliance of developing countries on high-end food, beverages, vehicles, and amenities in order to compete with the global market of luxury-quality goods that has come to define the standard of the tourism industry. This global competition creates a strong demand for destinations to import goods and services that meet a level of quality expected by tourists, which in turn creates a heavy outflow of foreign currency.

The repatriation of profits generated from tourists in travel businesses in local destinations to corporate headquarters, usually located in developed nations, is also a major factor through which inclusive economic development is stalled. These businesses range from airline carriers to multi-national cruise lines and international hotel chains that are largely prevalent over the booking pipeline, regardless of locality. Because many of these services are headquartered internationally, the majority of profits rarely stay locally in the places through which these chains operate, instead being repatriated to corporate headquarters in wealthier nations.³²

³¹ <https://ijeponline.org/index.php/journal/article/view/1266>, <https://www.untourism.int/roadmap-for-recovery-tourism-travel>

³² <https://www.proparco.fr/en/article/tourism-risk-developing-countries>

Dominant Currency Pricing (DCP) also weakens the flexibility of local exchange rates and leaves emerging economies extremely vulnerable to global currency fluctuations, as they might otherwise follow the depreciation of a destination's local currency where tourism firms will also borrow in dollars. Tourism booking and pricing is especially reliant on the U.S. dollar over local forms of currency, according to the IMF's research on *Exchange Rate Elasticities of International Tourism*. This means that the economic success of many developing, tourism-dependent economies is directly connected to the vitality of the dollar, and that in many developing economies, hotel prices, loans, and other key tourism assets are benchmarked to the value of the dollar.³³ Severe inflation thus occurs when local currency weakens, yet many tourism businesses operating in the region will still price services according to the U.S. dollar, devaluing the destination for foreign visitors.³⁴

The digital divide, specifically in rural communities, harshly impacts local micro, small, and medium-sized businesses. With a lack of broadband technology and reliable internet access, businesses are cut off from direct access to global consumer markets and online storefronts, meaning they continue to be financially dependent on external international parties. For example, direct businesses that cannot run independent booking websites must be reliant on online travel agencies (OTAs) in order to gain sufficient outreach to consumers. Many of these bookers set high commission fees, from 15% to 30% per booking, siphoning profits and increasing economic leakage. Many digital platforms also have leverage over small businesses to control their pricing and cancellation policies, maintaining often harsh control over businesses who have little say in these policies.³⁵

Current Issues

Funding deficits, high debt burdens, and profit-driven market models have been identified as some of the most prominent economic barriers to sustainable infrastructural development, especially in high-risk areas. Economic leakage, income inequality, and the lack of sustainable financing models have left many economies unable to inclusively innovate, equitably employ local workers, and compete in the ever-growing tourism market.

According to the World Forum's Travel & Tourism Development Index, as of 2024 low- and lower-middle-income economies, particularly throughout South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) around the world, are particularly lagging in inclusive economic development.³⁶ The reliance on international conglomerates means that up to 80% of tourism-generated revenue is not returning to local businesses and suppliers, and the lack of social mobility in many of these emerging economies means that workers cannot access the necessary skills training or opportunities to be able to work higher-paying in employment sectors.³⁷

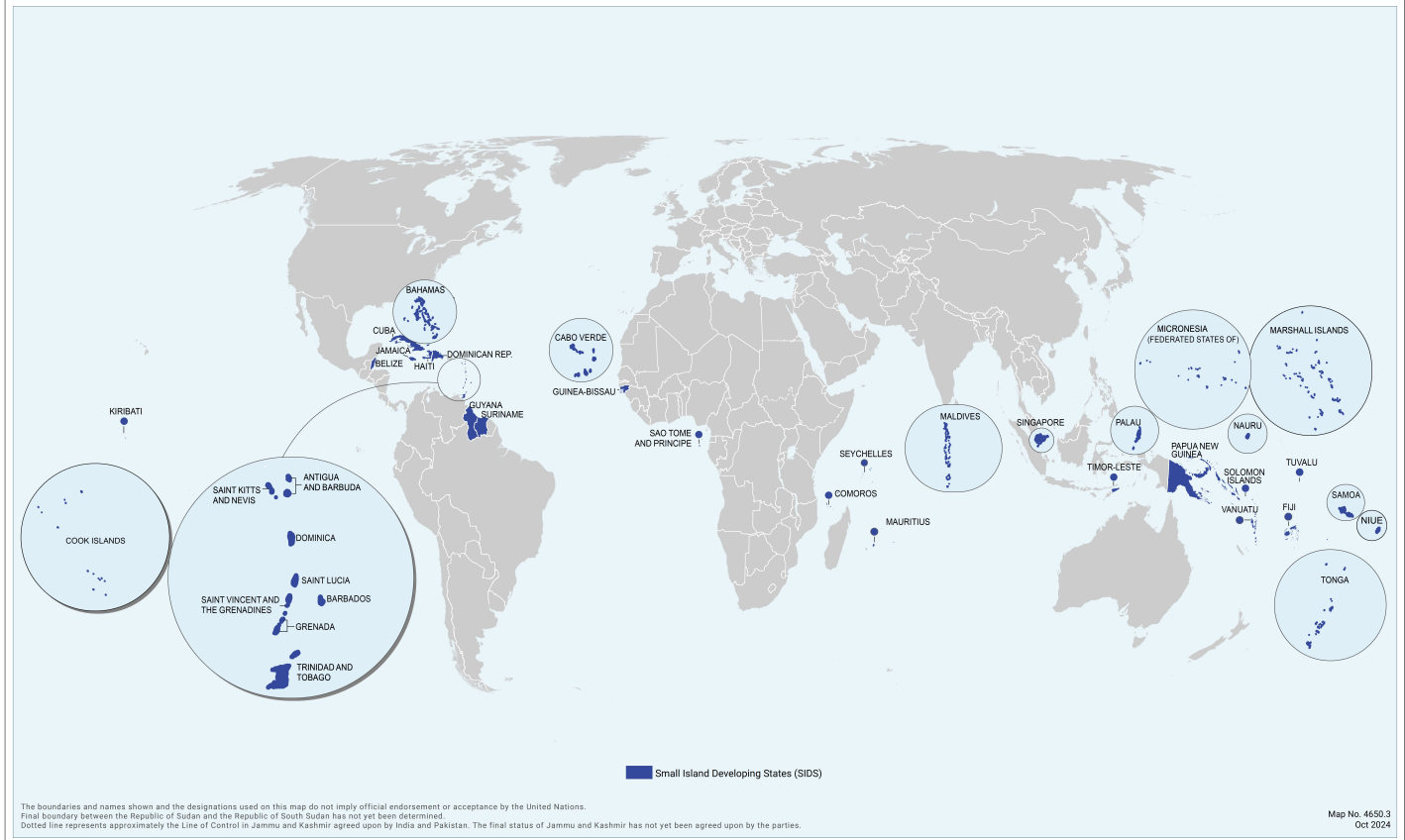
³³ <https://www.imf.org/-/media/files/publications/wp/2022/english/wpiea2022024-print-pdf.pdf>

³⁴ <https://www.mesirow.com/currency-viewpoints/currency-tourism-the-fx-effect>

³⁵ https://link.springer.com/rwe/10.1007/978-3-030-48652-5_109

³⁶ <https://www.weforum.org/publications/travel-tourism-development-index-2024/digest/>

³⁷ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21568316.2025.2499520>



Small Island Developing States. Source: United Nations

Island nations such as Vanuatu and Solomon Islands suffer severe infrastructural deficits and geographic dispersion that has led to severe cost inflation for transport and public spending, and many rural locations that possess viable tourism potential lack asphalt roads, electric grids, or flight connections. A lack of diversified agriculture or manufacturing base means that a vast majority of goods used in hospitality industries in Vanuatu must be imported from neighboring nations, such as Australia and New Zealand. In Fiji, a large percentage of resort transactions are conducted outside the country entirely, with profit shares often repatriated to international conglomerates. The lack of infrastructural self-sufficiency in Fiji is partially climate-influenced; the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) has stated that an 83% increase of Fiji's national debt has followed after three recurrent cyclones, straining public funding for local transport networks and waste facilities.³⁸

Natural disasters and global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic have been especially harmful on developing nations and less-resilient economic ecosystems that are disproportionately reliant on tourism. Smaller states are forced to divert crucial funding to address healthcare disease outbreaks, or climate-driven disasters that are only becoming more recurrent. In addition, the supply chain of informal workers in developing economies have suffered severe income losses without an

³⁸ <https://odi.org/documents/10098/SSR2026-V8-Chapter-2.pdf>

economic safety net.³⁹ Many indigenous groups and rural workers often experience the greatest environmental and social impacts of tourism, yet these impacts are inadequately addressed, and local public services in these locales seldom invested in.

The maintenance of tourism business ecosystems is crucial in order to revitalize developing economies and bolster business ecosystems that have become heavily reliant on foreign revenues. Leveraging employment and development through travel has been a prominent priority for the United Nations, as efforts toward rural and indigenous empowerment see community-based tourism aiming to diversify local economies. Many tourism locales are implementing Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks to ensure that local workers are employed in an economically sustainable business ecosystem. In Guyana, indigenous communities legally own and manage tourism operations on their own land, using revenues to help preserve cultural skills taught to their youth.⁴⁰

However, there is still much work to be done. Many developing nations, including small island nations and rural emerging economies, are still heavily reliant on foreign investment and lack the adequate infrastructure to sustain tourism that forms the livelihood of many cities and locales. The implementation of inclusive economic practices in achieving equitable economic development and the fight for accessible wages and employment opportunities remains at the forefront of UNWTO's priorities. Growing the tourist economy equitably and sustainably will be crucial to ensure that these developments can occur.

Questions to Consider

1. How can countries mobilize tourism as an engine of effective economic growth while investing in marginalized or underrepresented communities?
2. How can jobs and employment opportunities be created through tourism, especially in countries lacking the adequate infrastructure to support it?
3. How can the tourism industry be leveraged to uplift small business and local markets to a wider international audience?
4. How can tourism be responsibly managed to maintain local shares of revenue and mitigate repatriation to multinational corporations?
5. How can countries effectively and resiliently respond to future international crises that could severely impact tourism visitation, infrastructure, and economic revenue?
6. Are 'tourist traps' a smart marketing maneuver to generate local revenue, or a disinvestment in cultural authenticity (and how is this connected to Topic 2)?

³⁹ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8989872/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lrxI-qrqmY&t=89s>

Topic 2: Addressing the Impacts of Overtourism on Urban Centers and Cultural Heritage Sites



Source: Travel Earth

Overtourism

While the global international flow of tourists is reaching a near record high at approximately 1.52 billion international arrivals worldwide, UN Tourism predicts that this number could reach 1.8 billion by 2030. Yet this high density of travelers often concentrates in few, urban-heavy destinations around the world. Many highly-popular global urban hubs and sought-after landmarks alike are suffering a problem in which they are attracting such a high volume of visitors that the destinations' carrying capacities are becoming overburdened. The UNWTO defines overtourism as “the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitors' experiences in a negative way.”⁴¹ The term became popularized largely in the last decade, entering mainstream media in 2016 through an internet travel website when a travel journalist wrote an article detailing the excessively large number of tourists on a trip to Iceland. However, the phenomenon predates the official definition by decades. Overtourism most frequently occurs when popular destinations or attractions receive too many visitors to be able to sustainably

⁴¹ <https://encyclopedia.pub/entry/42>

manage, leading to impacts including environmental degradation, overcrowding, and mutually diminished quality of life and experience for both locals and visitors.⁴²

The term largely promotes a negative stigma surrounding tourism. Scholarly research and academic circles have long discussed the evolving phenomenon of overtourism, and analyze its impacts through three major dimensions.⁴³ The first dimension is management, through which the regulation of short-term rentals and marketing destinations are analyzed against visitor flow and peak hours of tourist congestion in popular sites. On the experiential dimension, researchers attempt to draw associations with the negative impacts of overcrowding on authenticity and visitor experience. The contextual dimension monitors the sentiment of local residents concerning local socio-economic impacts and infrastructural strain of overtourism on host communities.

Measuring overtourism is difficult because there is no specific threshold determining the point at which a destination's carrying capacity for visitors has been surpassed. It is a location's ecological, infrastructural, and social capacity that makes overtourism such a dynamically-assessed and fluctuating statistic, not to mention the subjective experiences of tourists and locals that greatly contribute as well. Venice, Barcelona, and Machu Picchu are all examples of locations that suffer from overtourism, but the comparative proportion of visitors that constitutes overtourism between each location looks different. Statisticians utilize global density and volume metrics to measure the social and environmental pressures of tourism on destinations. Tourism density rates (TDR) assess the number of visitors per square kilometer, letting researchers analyze the effect of crowds spatially on a specific area of land. Tourism penetration rates (TPR) evaluate the ratio of visitors to local populations, which lets researchers assess how heavily local infrastructure and livelihoods are impacted by visitors. While research garners statistical findings, the implementation of these findings is still heavily debated, with widespread disagreement on how much overtourism should be regulated.⁴⁴

Social, Cultural, and Environmental Impacts of Overtourism

Higher levels of tourism through visitor volume and expenditure typically bring a greater amount of profit, and when economic development is inclusive of the local host economy, the gross domestic product (GDP) of the host country is bolstered greatly. Thus there is a consistently shifting regional consensus worldwide on what number of tourists is considered 'too many;' many destinations worldwide are eager to attract higher numbers of tourists, whereas other places have consistently narrowed restrictions on international visitation. Taxes, as well as bans and fines, have become more commonplace in many major cities, in an effort to mitigate overtourism in popular destinations.⁴⁵ In

⁴² <https://sustainabletravel.org/what-is-overtourism/>

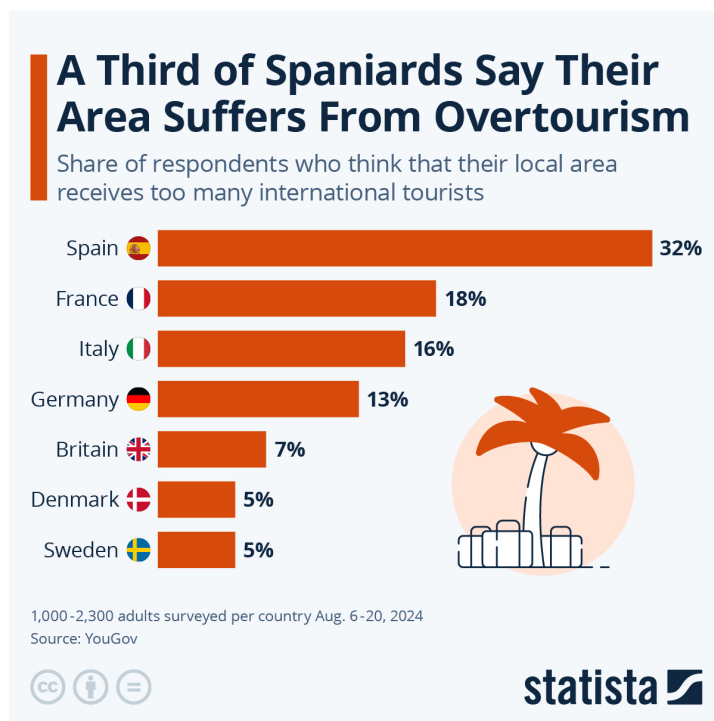
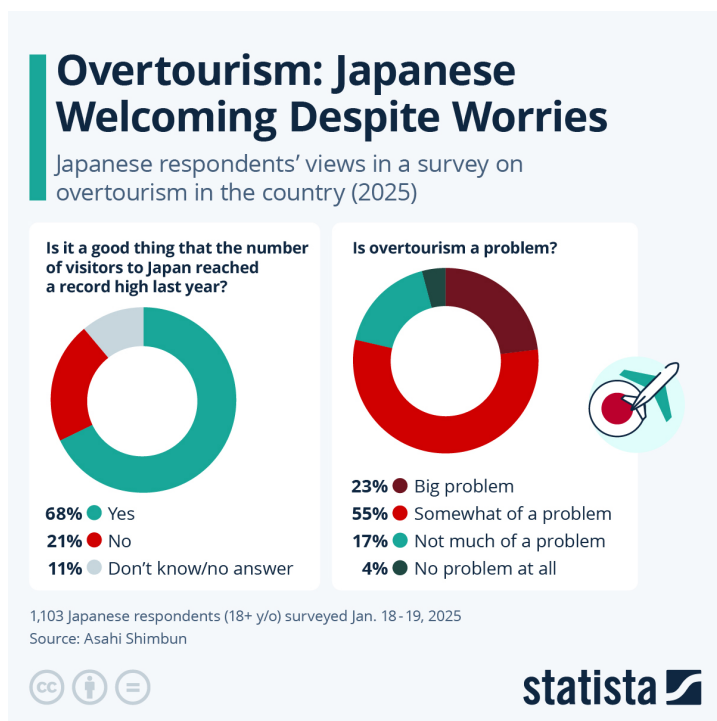
⁴³ <https://www.uni.lu/en/news/the-dark-side-of-tourism/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/what-is-overtourism>, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666957924000272>

⁴⁵ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/what-is-overtourism>

2026, Kyoto, Japan raised its tourist accommodation tax, increasing a nightly surcharge that's steepest increase at upscale hotels is as high as 900% for luxury stays costing more than ¥100,000 per night.⁴⁶

Higher numbers of tourism also drive up housing costs in popular urban centers, shifting culturally significant, historical, and local neighborhoods valued by locals into hotspots for tourists and visitors.⁴⁷ This is a phenomenon known as tourism gentrification, in which property investors convert permanent residences into rental spaces such as guest houses or vacation homes, driving up property values and impacting local, neighboring residents. This phenomenon is especially frequent in destinations receiving high waves of tourists seeking to stay in popular neighborhoods, bypass high luxury hotel prices, or live more authentically within the locale.⁴⁸ Mass conversion of short-term rentals has seen sharp, critical reception in cities such as Barcelona, with many locals pushing back against the conversion of traditional homes into Airbnbs and other forms of vacation rentals through protests and demands for policy change, arguing that the practice is gentrifying neighborhoods and adversely affecting the local livelihoods of its residents.



Local respondents in Japan and Europe on overtourism (2024-2025). Source: Statista

The economic consequences of tourism are inherently intertwined with the social and cultural perception of tourists. According to former UNWTO Secretary General Taleb Rifai, the prevalence of 'tourism-phobia,' or protests against mass tourism in highly-dense tourist cities such as

⁴⁶ <https://www.travelpirates.com/captains-log/us-these-popular-destinations-are-now-charging-tourists-extra-just-to-show-up>

⁴⁷ <https://cer.econ.columbia.edu/news/economic-challenges-over-versus-under-tourism>

⁴⁸ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/404262651_Tourism_Gentrification_Short-Term_Rentals_Displacement_and_Policy_Tools

Barcelona and Amsterdam, is a largely recent phenomenon. What he identified is that while tourism is a long-standing, fundamental component of the global economy with higher revenue than ever being generated through massive tourism inflow, it is the lack of sustainable management on the municipal side that is helping fuel the issue.⁴⁹

Many local businesses and governments are heavily dependent on tax dollars generated from tourism, which often disincentivizes these very same bodies from applying strict tourism caps because of how integral these visitor taxes are in funding infrastructural projects and emergency services. Because policymakers fear the economic impact of visitor caps, policy is applied elsewhere in destinations that these visitors frequent, such as specific caps on historic landmarks, attractions, and cruise lines. Yet the maintenance of these cultural landmarks and presence of mass-tourist attractions in these destinations has also sparked a wave of controversy, as numerous historic, culturally-significant landmarks have been transformed into highly-priced ‘tourist traps’ in the eyes of many who view them more as glorified attractions than authentic representations of history and cultural heritage.⁵⁰

The economic progression of the tourism industry has coincided with a myriad of environmental impacts. The UN Environmental Programme has stated that tourism of the 21st century must be defined by sustainable practices, yet the prioritization of short-term profits often actively hinders this agenda. Social norms, lifestyle, and environmental demands are often difficult to reconcile with intense tourist demand, and energy consumption from tourism is expected to drastically increase through 2050.⁵¹

A cornerstone of UN Tourism’s work concerns promoting sustainable tourism, aligned with the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Over the past decade, the idea of sustainable tourism has been popularized as the detrimental environmental impacts of the tourism industry have become more apparent to many around the world. This includes impacts pertaining to transportation, accommodations, and attractions within the tourist sphere. While transportation contributes to 75% of worldwide greenhouse gas emissions caused by tourism, the accommodation sector accounts for 20% of emissions caused by tourism, and tourist attractions 3.5%.⁵²

One of the most prominent public concerns regarding the impact of overtourism is the ecological footprint left by tourists in a multitude of popular tourist destinations frequented year-round in high, dense numbers, something that policies such as price inflation on tourist attractions have historically tried to mitigate. In other words, negative environmental impacts are often positively correlated with the sheer amount of foot traffic traversing the environment. Habitat destruction, soil erosion, and resource depletion are only a few of the side effects of areas that are past the natural carrying capacity of visitors. As many cultural landmarks exist in already fragile natural ecosystems,

⁴⁹ <https://inequality.org/article/mass-tourism-drives-inequality/>

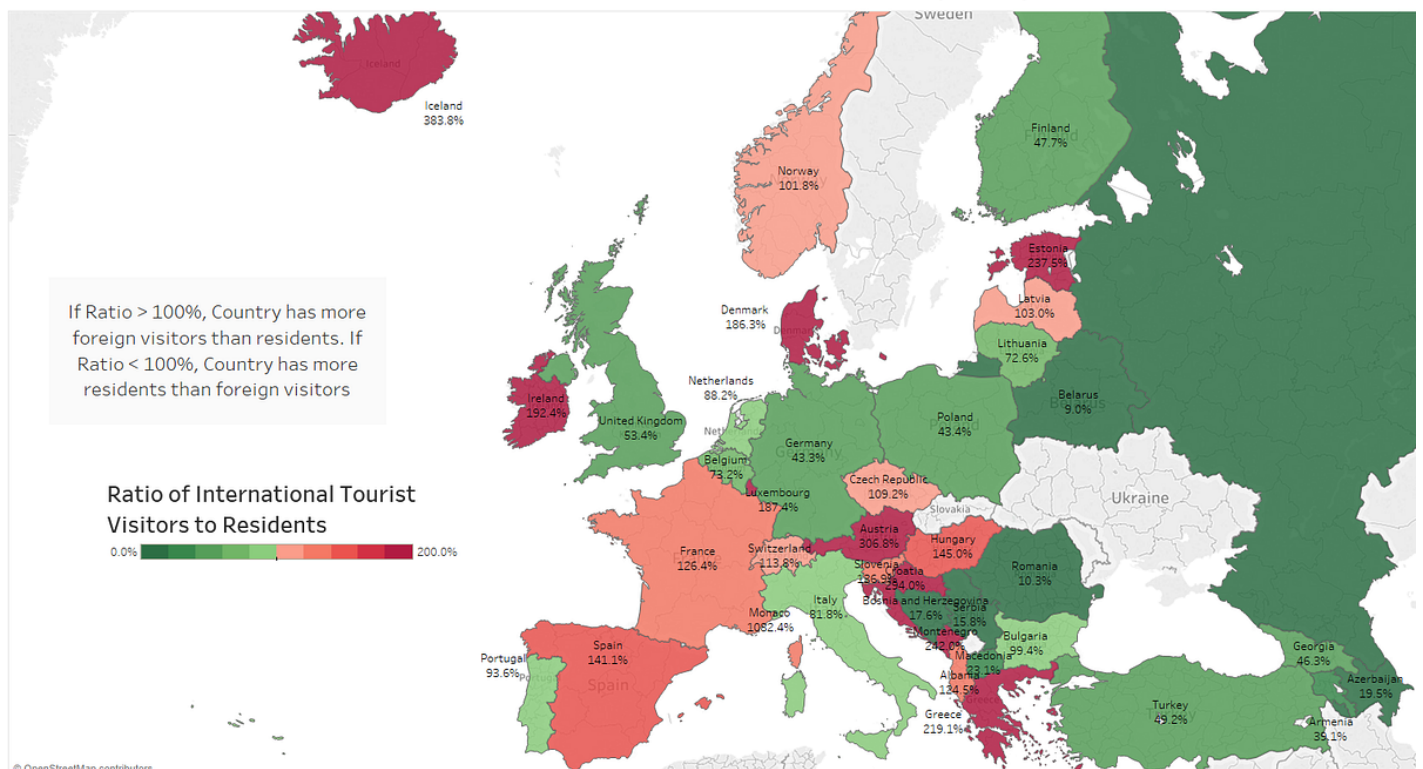
⁵⁰ <https://cer.econ.columbia.edu/news/economic-challenges-over-versus-under-tourism>

⁵¹ <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/resource-efficiency/what-we-do/responsible-industry/tourism>

⁵² <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/unai-presents-digital-discussion-series-sustainable-tourism>

overcrowding further erodes the surrounding environment, exacerbating localized pollution and physical deterioration.

Ratio of International Tourist Visitors vs. Residents: Europe (2015)



Ratio of International Tourist Visitors vs. Residents: Europe (2015). Source: Medium

Ecotourism has grown into a popular movement in an effort to divert more attention from tourists to acknowledging their environmental impact on local communities, emphasizing responsible travel and interaction with local flora and fauna in natural environments and remote, rural destinations. Environmental education, respect for cultural norms, and thoughtful engagement with the local community are cornerstones of the movement, and many advocacy groups hope to utilize the popularity brought by tourism to spread environmental awareness. Yet these ideas stand in fragile balance with economic interests that prioritize short-term profit over sustainable environmental maintenance.

Current Issues

The global scale of the internet, especially the prevalence of social media platforms, has increased the desirability and publicity of popular tourism destinations. The use of social media has inevitably served as an online funnel; thanks to the 'Instagram effect,' social media algorithms attract millions of people to the very same photo backdrops, which not only increases overcrowding but has

radically transformed travel marketing. While international bodies such as UNESCO can designate sites as endangered, they are without the means to legally enforce crowd limits, leaving these policies at the discretion of governing bodies and policymakers. As locations that may have been relatively unfrequented weeks prior become sudden, viral hotspots unprepared for the excessive foot traffic they are about to receive, crowd limits that UNESCO or UNWTO are unable to enforce take many local governments far longer to pass. Hallstatt had long been a picturesque, lakeside town in Austria, but after its photogenic views went viral on Instagram, authorities had to intervene to fence off viewing spots and limit the nearly 10,000 visitors a day that the town of 800 residents had been receiving.⁵³

Amsterdam and Barcelona are primary case studies in pioneering policy interventions in response to overtourism. Amsterdam has capped the nightly stay of short-term rentals in many specified central neighborhoods to 15 nights. Multiple caps have been put in place to maintain the liveability of the inner city and mitigate short-term overnight stays. A 20 million-cap policy target is intended to restrict the number of yearly overnight stays, with Airbnb's facing harsher rental limits. Meanwhile, Barcelona plans to revoke up to 10,000 legal rental licenses in an effort to ban the short-term rental practice entirely. Cruise goers are the targets of an 100% tax hike, and mass tourist transit is being rerouted from popular tourist landmarks such as the Sagrada Familia to surrounding routes within their proximity.⁵⁴

Alongside dense urban hubs, many cultural landmarks are enforcing timed-entry tickets and strict daily caps to mitigate erosion and manage the capacity of visitors without overcrowding. For example, Pompeii has implemented a visitor cap of 20,000 visitors per day, and Machu Picchu has employed strict timed circuits. Venice has even banned the use of megaphones and placed a limit on the size of large tour groups (capping at 25 people per group).⁵⁵

Yet amidst the action being taken, overtourism has persisted through numerous enforcement loops, economic dependence, and digital pressures. The number of tourists globally has only increased, and popular urban destinations and landmarks are both in higher demand and more crowded than ever. Numerous businesses and companies continue to prioritize profit over developing the tourism sector sustainably, and environmental challenges across the world have only become more prevalent. While economies worldwide seek to capitalize on the tourism sector, many of them must reconcile the social and cultural effects that disproportionate levels of tourism have on the wellbeing of their residents.

⁵³ <https://travelworkspr.com/2024/07/18/the-rise-and-fall-of-destinations-how-social-media-is-changing-destination-marketing/>

⁵⁴ <https://www.richardstourism.com/post/barcelona-and-amsterdam-overtourism-vs-touristification>, <https://eureports.com/2026/05/europes-anti-tourism-backlash-spreads-beyond-spain/>

⁵⁵ <https://www.museumnext.com/article/over-tourism-and-museums-navigating-the-challenges-of-excessive-visitor-numbers/>, <https://travel-forward.org/tackling-overtourism/>

Questions to Consider:

1. How should tourism be governed to ensure responsible practices while maintaining sustainable economic growth?
2. How can cultural sites and landmarks regulate foot traffic and visitor volume to preserve physical integrity while still generating revenue?
3. Should tourists subsidize the maintenance of landmarks/cultural sites in their ticket fees, or should the property managers fund these services? (Who should bear the costs of renovating and conserving cultural heritage sites, the ticket payer or the site owner?)
4. How can the UN's concept of sustainable tourism be implemented to regulate overtourism?
5. How can the opinions of local host populations be incorporated in curating tourism-friendly destinations without neglecting long-term residents?
6. How could sustainable tourism practices, particularly ecotourism, be incorporated into the broader tourism market?

Closing Statement

Members of the UN Tourism General Assembly hold an invaluable role in shaping the future of global travel. The global economy, foreign relations, and overall livelihoods in the 21st century have become inherently shaped by tourism, and as globalization and technological innovation show no sign of slowing, policymakers must stand to the challenge and ensure that the industry continues to develop as both a sustainable and economically viable one. Although tourism innovation has contributed a myriad of benefits to the world, it is crucial now, more than ever, to address the economic imbalances and damage to cultural institutions that coincide with tourism to best mitigate its impact on local host communities.

In this committee, delegates must debate the economic, social, and cultural ramifications of tourism accessibility. Is ensuring economically inclusive tourism and positive economic opportunities in emerging economies worldwide the necessary path to universalize access to tourism and travel? Or has overtourism become too prominent an issue to ignore, in global hotspots of tourism that are receiving more visitors than they can handle? Delegates are encouraged to research and create substantive solutions, analyze areas where the two topics may substantially intersect or differ, and make their case for the brightest path forward as representatives of the globalized world. Travel policy has always been identified as a cumulative effort that transcends political or cultural differences in order to find the greatest common benefit. As strongly as delegates are encouraged to debate these topics with the appropriate amount of respect and weight given to these issues, cooperation and diplomacy are key in creating solutions that will work for all.

Country List for MUNE XV

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Argentina | 38. Peru |
| 2. Austria | 39. Philippines |
| 3. Bahamas | 40. Portugal |
| 4. Barbados | 41. Qatar |
| 5. Bhutan | 42. Republic of Korea |
| 6. Botswana | 43. Rwanda |
| 7. Brazil | 44. Samoa |
| 8. Cabo Verde | 45. Saudi Arabia |
| 9. Cambodia | 46. Senegal |
| 10. China | 47. Seychelles |
| 11. Colombia | 48. South Africa |
| 12. Costa Rica | 49. Spain |
| 13. Croatia | 50. Sri Lanka |
| 14. Dominican Republic | 51. Switzerland |
| 15. Egypt | 52. Tanzania |
| 16. Ethiopia | 53. Thailand |
| 17. Fiji | 54. Türkiye |
| 18. France | 55. United Arab Emirates |
| 19. Germany | 56. Vanuatu |
| 20. Ghana | 57. Vietnam |
| 21. Greece | |
| 22. India | |
| 23. Indonesia | |
| 24. Italy | |
| 25. Jamaica | |
| 26. Japan | |
| 27. Jordan | |
| 28. Kenya | |
| 29. Madagascar | |
| 30. Maldives | |
| 31. Mauritius | |
| 32. Mexico | |
| 33. Morocco | |
| 34. Nepal | |
| 35. Netherlands | |
| 36. Oman | |
| 37. Palau | |

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