

SPAIN: STUDY SHOWS INCREASED INTEREST IN SUSTAINABLE DESTINATIONS



Two Spanish studies conducted jointly by researchers from the Universities of Extremadura and Jaén have revealed that tourists are increasingly showing appreciation for sustainably managed destinations.

The studies by these researchers have indicated that, when taking a trip, tourists are opting for destinations that are part of a scheme of policies for environmental or heritage sustainability, for example, because there they enjoy "more satisfying experiences."

Lidia Andrades, a professor in the Department of Business Management and Sociology at UEx and co-author of this work, acknowledges that **the purpose of the study was to "demystify" certain beliefs or social myths, "such as the view that investment in sustainability is less profitable in the short-term."**

According to Andrades, this has therefore demonstrated that, from an economic standpoint, meeting the tourist demand, while protecting the areas for the future, is viable.

"Until a few years ago it was observed that tourists did not know the difference between a sustainable destination and one that was not. However, this is changing," said the researcher, who has expressed the view that tourists demand unforgettable experiences in destinations that are not overcrowded or over-exploited, destinations that preserve their uniqueness and identity" and that are "able to provide authentic experiences. Countries should take this into account in their destination offerings." These studies have shown that "sustainable tourism management promotes a country's socio-economic development by preserving resources and generating employment," the UEx stated in a press release.

Also along these lines, **the studies have produced other findings, such as the fact that the tourist experience is significantly worse when destinations are overcrowded.**

"It is paradoxical, but we have noticed that the most popular destinations are getting a lower rating than other supposedly less attractive destinations, and this is because these areas are overcrowded," declared Andrade, adding that if measures are not put in place to preserve resources they will deteriorate "and in the long term this will be detrimental to the image of these destinations, which will be left out of the market."

The UEx also notes that the researchers emphasize the need to revisit the strategies to improve the competitiveness of a country or area, especially because despite these findings, it has become clear that during the sampling period (between 2008 and 2011) out of a total of 128 countries, only eleven had improved ratings for sustainable tourism, "which is worrying," the professor noted.

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