

HOW THE SOCIAL MEDIA CAUSE OVERTOURISM?



The word 'overtourism' was considered one of the words of the year by the Oxford English Dictionary in 2018. In recent years, overtourism has been recurring in the world's most popular destinations, warning of the consequences of mass tourism while proposing solutions to the problem.

The continued growth of the tourism sector, which in 2019 registered 1.5 billion international tourist arrivals - the tenth consecutive year of growth - is a cause for celebration, but the development of the sector also needs to be planned.

Sustainable Flow

The causes of this phenomenon are clear. In addition to the increase in global travel, **the ease of travel also benefits mass tourism.** The greater number of air connections between destinations, the increase in maritime tourism, the lower costs with solutions such as Airbnb and low-cost airlines, are some of the cogs of this machine.

Lack of infrastructure, poor tourism management and even the influence of social networks may also be responsible for excess tourism. Instagram, for instance, has caused several destinations to experience a tourist boom in recent years. Humorous profiles in this social network satirize the problem, creating videos and images of famous tourist spots with overcrowding and without any sort of 'glamour'.

Venice, Paris, Santorini, Barcelona, Machu Picchu, Majorca, Dubrovnik are some of the destinations that suffer the consequences of mass tourism. With a population of 850.000, Amsterdam, in the Netherlands, receives more than 20 million tourists every year during all seasons. Tired of the "partying" tourists who frequent the iconic coffee shops and the Red Light District, the local population has moved to quieter cities and rebelled against tourists, forcing the city administration to act to control overtourism.

Profitable but Predatory

Although tourism is responsible for the annual inflow of 82 billion euros into the Dutch economy, the city has decided to fight firmly against excessive tourism. In 2019, the Dutch tourism authorities decided to stop advertising the tourist destination. In addition, the city council declared the end of the construction of new hotels, souvenir shops and, in 2018, the famous "I Amsterdam" sign was removed at the request of the residents, as the site was an eye-catcher for a crowd of tourists outside the Rijksmuseum, the city's main art gallery.

It is impossible to know how mass tourism will harm these destinations in the future, both regarding the residents and the environment. But some places seem to indicate that the consequences of overtourism will be cruel. Cruises have already caused significant environmental damage to the waterways and lagoons of Venice. For that reason, the city has implemented a tourism tax ranging from 2.5 to 10 euros (depending on seasonality) to make tourist activity more sustainable.

The lack of electricity and water in the famous Greek islands Mykonos and Santorini is also a reality caused by the high number of tourists and lack of infrastructure to support this increase. In June 2018, Thailand's most famous beach, Maya Bay, at Koh Phi Leh, was temporarily closed due to overtourism in the ecosystem.

The local authorities announced that the beach - famous after the release of the movie "The Beach" (2000), with Leonardo DiCaprio - will remain closed to recover natural resources, until at least 2021. Then, a new assessment will be made as to whether the site will reopen to tourism. After the film, the beach, which used to receive few tourists, started to deal with five thousand visitors per day, which harmed the life of the region's corals.

Besides the deterioration of the space and the war between tourists and residents, there are other consequences caused by excessive tourism. The compromise of the tourist experience, the increase in prices in the places most affected by overtourism, the scarcity of natural resources and real estate speculation caused by the growth of Airbnb and alternative accommodation are also some of the consequences of mass tourism.

It Is Possible to Fix the Problem

Official agencies, tour operators and governments need to come together to find solutions. Many destinations already have measures to combat overtourism.

And fee collection or price increases are not the only solutions to put a brake on excessive tourism. Places like Machu Picchu and Venice have invested in limiting daily visitors. For example, the lost city of the Incas has divided the times of entry into the territory and the visit can only be made with an official guide.

The Italian city, on the other hand, has put turnstiles to restrict the entry of tourists to specific regions during high season, holidays or busy weekends, and has put police officers on the streets to "watch" some of the busiest areas of the city, to correct and, if necessary, fine tourists who eat or drink in an undesignated area, or dive into a canal of the city - fines can reach up to 500 euros.

Other alternatives adopted by the affected destinations is to divert the flow by promoting other regions. France has invested heavily in marketing destinations that are barely known, in order to decrease the flow of tourists to the capital Paris. And this measure works.

A survey conducted by Booking.com revealed that the search for lesser-known places, in an attempt to reduce the excess of tourists by protecting the environment, is one of the trends of 2020.

The demand for experience tourism and sustainable tourism has grown in recent years. This is the ideal time for the tourism industry to act. It is necessary to take advantage of these trends to promote new destinations and reinforce the importance of environmental preservation, educating tourists and making them choose destinations with a more ecological and pleasurable experience.

Another Booking.com survey revealed that Generation Z (people between 16 and 24 years old) is aware of the effects and more than half of Generation Z do not intend to visit a place full of tourists.

Furthermore, two out of three of these young people say that the environmental impact caused by their travel destinations is an important factor to be taken into account. The other generations agree and say they would stop visiting a destination if they knew beforehand that it was threatened by an excess of tourists. 65% of Generation X respondents (people aged between 40 and 54) and 65% of Baby Boomers (people over 50) said they are concerned about overtourism.

Only Millennials (people aged 25-39) are less worried about it, with 57%.

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