

# TOURISM RECOVERY RECIPES FOR SMALL ISLANDS



Small Island Developing States (SIDS), as [defined by UNESCO](#), have experienced a dramatic expansion of their tourism sector, particularly in the last decade. However, the sharp decline in international tourism due to the COVID-19 pandemic is having a significant impact on these territories.

In 2019, the rich biodiversity and magnificent ecosystems of these countries attracted approximately 44 million visitors. In St. Lucia and Palau, tourism revenues account for 98% and 88% of export earnings, respectively. **In the Caribbean island states, tourism accounts for 27% of employment, while the proportion rises to 24% in the Atlantic-Indian Ocean-South China Sea region and 20% in the Pacific region.**

Tourism activity is a vital source of income for sustaining the livelihoods of the people, recovering from disasters and preserving biodiversity and cultural heritage in these countries.

However, the sharp decline in international tourism due to the Covid-19 pandemic is having a significant impact on island states: these countries are experiencing a 3.6% decline in GDP in 2020, a value well above the global average.

Many SIDS, particularly in the Caribbean, are heavily dependent on tourism revenues to service a large debt burden, mainly due to their disproportionate vulnerability to climate change.

While the tourism sector is a driver of economic development, it also produces more than 5% of global greenhouse gas emissions and can lead to ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss.

"The crisis is forcing us to rethink certain practices," explains the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and some current systems.

The question that arises is: how can we create a tourism economy that thrives in harmony with nature - a model that integrates into national economies, promotes the participation of all, and preserves the cultural and ecological integrity of the islands?

The United Nations Development Program proposes three paths, tourism recovery recipes, to encourage a green recovery and accelerate transformative change.

**1. The blue economy concept**, which sees tourism as a driver of recovery and revitalization capable of building resilience to economic shocks, anchoring local economies in sustainable activities, and generating more environmentally friendly ways of living.

"It is therefore essential to stimulate large-scale private investment in activities that promote biodiversity conservation and combat ecosystem degradation while generating growth".

Diversifying tourism products with non-traditional marine activities (such as scuba diving, surfing and wildlife watching) is an opportunity to broaden the sources of income for local communities.

The implementation of innovative "blue finance" mechanisms - insurance schemes to protect coral reefs, debt-for-environmental investment swaps, blue bonds, tourism taxes - can help finance innovations while empowering communities and businesses and alleviating the budgetary constraints of SIDS.

**2.Digital transformation** is a powerful gas pedal of inclusion, competitiveness and sustainability. It is essential to develop and retrain workers in digital fields.

Better access to technology for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises enables their full integration into the local value chain and enables them to become champions of innovation. Technologies such as metadata, artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things can improve market knowledge and provide statistics to help reduce the industry's environmental footprint.

Finally, the digital creative sector can launch new environmentally friendly tourism products and social networks can be used to change consumer behavior.

### **3.Communities First and Responsible Tourism**

Tourism activities taken in hand by local communities are essential to ensure the sustainability of the sector.

The tourism sector relies primarily on people, many of whom are heavily dependent on this activity and who find themselves in an extremely precarious situation.

Compared to the traditional "sea, beach, sun" triptych, community-based tourism also promotes responsible consumer behavior by encouraging deeper exchanges and a better understanding of local culture.

Consumers are a powerful vector for change. Their voices and demands have the power to improve economies and the well-being of populations.

The possibilities are vast, but so is the scale of the task. **Only effective partnerships involving governments, international organizations, the private sector, regional networks, civil society and local communities will be able to bring about such radical change.**

Development requires an integrated approach involving the whole of society and change in the tourism sector is vital for the future of SIDS.

Date: 2020-12-07

Article link: <https://www.tourism-review.com/small-islands-tourism-recovery-recipes-news11797>