

THE RACE FOR THE TOURISM SUSTAINABILITY COULD HAVE THE OPPOSITE EFFECT



Lately, everything we read about tourism has to do with sustainability and climate change but, as strange as it sounds, the race to achieve tourism sustainability may have the opposite effect.

Destinations, companies and tourism operators address the same topic, and while they all seem to agree on what needs to be done, their actions suggest every industry sector is moving at its own rhythm.

Just recently, **tourism experts discussed the matter at the “World for Travel” Evora forum** (took place Sep 16 – Sep 17, 2021 in Portugal), addressing the issue of mass tourism and the current measures being taken, with some experts raising concern over destinations not having established a tourist load capacity yet. An example of this is how islands that can only be accessed by plane already have a predetermined tourist capacity based on the plane’s number of seats, the number of rooms, or cruise passengers.

Keeping the number of tourists and visitors under control should not have to be hard, certainly not now that technology has advanced this much, but experts agree that something fundamental is forgotten: political and business actions, two sectors that are closely related. If the tourism industry (destinations, companies, and public administrations) planned management based on acceptable limits, knowing that negative impacts can be minimized but not avoided, it would be possible to control the number of visitors and activities in natural and urban areas.

If well-defined and achievable goals are not set, it becomes impossible to use tools and implement strategies that help to achieve them, and in many cases, the economic goals are far more important than preserving resources, protecting areas, and the natural and social environment.

For the experts, one of the biggest mistakes in tourism management is to place sustainability as a goal to achieve without answering a simple question first: Why do we have to be sustainable? Why must tourism be sustainable?

The same issue is climate change, with industries repeating over and over how we have to cut down emissions, be sustainable, and care for the planet before it is too late. Although most would agree that it is a very important issue, especially when it comes to political correctness, the truth is that negative human actions on our planet do not matter because it is part of our evolution. However, it is precisely our productive activities that may be in danger, as is the case of tourism.

Sustainability involves thinking about the future and what we are leaving behind for future generations. In reality, our current situation is a consequence of what previous generations have done, with the difference that now due to mass production and a culture of profitability, these negative changes are bigger and much faster.

Simply put, if we want tourism to thrive on and be a competitive industry, the best solution is for it to become sustainable. Although it sounds very good, when we speak of promises such as carbon neutrality or net-zero carbon in short-term scenarios, we are being reckless and maybe even liars. As of now, these dreams of sustainability are almost impossible because the only way to achieve them would mean banning all tourist activities worldwide.

Companies and businesses should turn to a more honest and ethical approach, and think that most of the benefits for others and the environment will benefit us in the long term: it is not a competition, but a matter of survivability; so it's time to forget about greenwashing, and environmental and social compensations that many large companies have adopted in their CSR, even the tourism ones. In the end, it is not about compensations, but moving forward together.

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