

TIKTOK TOURISM: UNDESIRABLE VIRALITY FOR UNPREPARED DESTINATIONS



Albania, a country that was once considered an exclusive tourist destination, has recently become a popular spot for tourists seeking hidden and affordable travel destinations. Its pristine beaches have attracted many visitors this summer. However, influencers criticized the country as a tourist destination, claiming it wasn't as idyllic as they had seen on TikTok. Ironically, videos made by other influencers drew them to the location.

Research has shown that TikTok tourism can cause a sudden surge in visitor numbers to a particular location. Unlike other social media platforms, **TikTok promotes videos that generate many interactions simultaneously**. This can lead to the sudden popularity of a destination and cause problems with overcrowding in areas not equipped to handle such an influx of visitors.

TikTok stands out from other social networks due to its unique audience and viral nature. Its audience is primarily the younger population, which prefers affordable and accessible destinations.

However, TikTok tourism's impact extends beyond this demographic. According to a tourism marketing agency MGH report, 35% of TikTok users in the United States have visited a new location after seeing it in a TikTok video. This percentage increases to 45% for users aged between 25 and 44.

It's challenging to verify the number of people who use TikTok to discover trending destinations, such as Albania, where tourism has grown significantly. The country experienced a 26% increase in foreign visitors in July compared to the previous year. The rise is more noticeable outside of the central summer months, with a 45% increase in international tourists arriving in September, totaling 1.1 million, more than a third of the local population. The Albanian Institute of Statistics reported a 94% increase in visits in January. In the first nine months of this year, the country welcomed 29% more visitors than in the same period last year.

The Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism has published a study that reveals a correlation between the numbers on TikTok and the data on the ground on the island of Hainan, located south of China. The largest mountain in Jianfengling National Park, which received only 50 visitors in January 2021, saw an increase in visitors to around 400-600 in the following month. This happened after a TikTok video showcased a spectacular sunrise emerging from a sea of clouds, receiving 65,000 likes.

TikTok's algorithm differs from Instagram's and is better suited to spreading videos to a larger audience, resulting in stronger virality. According to experts, TikTok generates waves of popularity that are not achievable on Instagram. Recently, some videos were published showcasing striking beaches in England that were previously unknown to people, resulting in a viral effect.

During the study conducted on Hainan Island, it was observed that the influx of visitors exposed the inadequate transportation infrastructure within the national park. Moreover, the absence of proper hiking trails and the use of private vehicles resulted in increased traffic and reduced safety on narrow mountain roads. The researchers also noted a lack of public toilets, litter bins, and eating and drinking facilities.

TikTok tourism can cause environmental issues due to increased waste and greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, without proper hotel infrastructure, tourist accommodations will multiply and drive up housing costs for residents. These problems are not limited to popular tourist destinations like the Balearic Islands, Amsterdam, Venice, Madrid, or Barcelona; they can also happen in less-prepared places. The sudden influx of visitors can significantly impact the local environment and economy.

Experts have pointed out that tourism on a national scale requires careful planning and state involvement. For instance, the process differs from one country to another. Usually, before a wave of tourism comes, infrastructure such as hotels is typically put in place. **Negotiations with airlines are necessary to increase the number of flights and make them affordable; the slots reserved for airlines must be cheap.** Additionally, tourist agencies must include the destination in their catalog and offer competitive prices. Therefore, all these preparations take place before the first traveler arrives. However, places such as Cornwall or Albania beaches already show signs of overcrowding.

Date: 2023-11-27

Article link: <https://www.tourism-review.com/tiktok-tourism-results-in-overcrowding-news14013>