



BACKGROUND PAPER:

United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)
Developing Sustainable Tourism Practices in Developing Nations

*“The thing about tourism is that the reality of a place is quite different from the mythology of it”
-Martin Parr*

Introduction:

Tourism is the lifeblood of developing countries. It not only provides countless jobs to its citizens⁴, but it also allows nations to control their international identity, a tool vital to successful diplomacy⁴. Thus, it should be no surprise that before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism was one of the world’s largest industries, accounting for over 10% of the global GDP¹¹. For a developing nation, tourism’s short-term economic and diplomatic benefits seem a golden situation, a sure investment; however, these nations appear over-invested in tourism and use unsustainable or downright exploitative practices above their humanitarian, physical or environmental capacity. As a result, the environmental, societal, and long-term effects of an economy using current tourism practices appear unsustainable in their contemporary forms. The current exploitative tourism practices by companies operating in developing nations will destroy the environment, cultures, and economies of these nations if nothing is done to promote more sustainable tourism practices.

Background & History:

The modern concept of tourism is as old as can be, with its first instances appearing in the 17th century when European Nobles made “Grand Tours” of Europe. However, it wasn’t until the 18th century that the groundwork for tourism began to take off. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution, a new middle class formed mainly of former farmers moving to the city. Seeing the subsequent need for an industry focused

around the mass movement of people, the framework for mass tourism was born. Later in the 19th century, the first travel agencies were established, the most famous of which was *Thomas Cook & Son*, who invented the travel package. Because agencies like *Thomas* were able to buy resources such as tickets, rental cars, and other necessary items in bulk, the financial barrier to tourism fell significantly, taking what was previously a tool of leisure for European royalty and making it possible for many high-end middle-class families to visit other areas. As the 20th century came around, income for the middle class expanded further, creating tourist hot spots. Tourists flocked to the coastline for the beaches, oceans, and exotic activities. Later, the 1970s proved the end of the final fiscal barrier to mass tourism fell, allowing the now developed middle class the ability to travel. After the petroleum shortages and economic downturn which plagued the 70s, the Western World experienced a period of stagflation, in which inflation rose while wages stagnated. In response, emerging global hotel chains, airlines, and travel agencies sought to lower the cost of travel to encourage continued travel and income revenue for their companies. This most recent price drop opened tourism experiences to all in the middle class, creating mass tourism as it exists today.²¹

Due to the independent, relatively modern advent of tourism, there is little history of international tourism agreements. At some point during the 1990s, bilateral tourism agreements began appearing between nations, but these agreements existed between two nations and were not entirely disclosed to the international community¹⁷. To date, the only major tourism framework agreed upon by the international community is the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (GCET), written and approved in 1999³. As such, there are few guidelines for how a nation should develop its tourism industry, which demonstrates the need for more comprehensive works to be created by this committee.

Current Situation:

Mass tourism is a perceptible trend, as precise and accurate data about international tourists have been collected since the 1950s when there were 25 million documented international tourists. In 2019, that number grew over 50 times larger, with 1465.5 million document tourists²⁰. Of these documented tourists, over half of them came from just 10 countries (the United States, China, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, the Republic of Korea, Japan, Canada, Russia, and Australia), 6 of which are the top global GDP Producers (the United States., China, Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom, and France)^{23,28}. Furthermore, many of these tourists visit developing nations², which leads to environmental damage, economic leakage, and cultural homogenization (all of which will be discussed later in the background guide) in these countries. In fact, around 30% of all international tourists visit developing nations; therefore, in 2019, there were approximately 439.65 million tourists to developing nations⁹. The world of mass tourism currently sees millions of wealthy citizens from 10 countries visiting developing

countries that struggle to provide an acceptable standard of living to their citizens. Thus, developing nations are forced to provide luxury experiences for wealthy foreign visitors at the expense of their citizens and resources in order to secure much-needed revenue.

Though the COVID-19 pandemic caused tourism levels to fall back to levels seen before 1989, the phenomenon will not last forever²⁰. Most top experts on the tourism economy believe that the sector will fully recover by 2024, limiting the window of time available for dramatic reform to the tourism sector²⁷. While recovery could occur quickly within developed nations, developing nations struggle to address the socioeconomic fallout from the pandemic⁷. Particularly Small Island Developing States (SIDS), such as Saint Lucia, which saw a total group of travelers 700% greater than its population in 2019, self-identified as slow recoverers from the pandemic^{7, 12}. Over 28% of St. Lucians lost their jobs due to the lack of tourism during the pandemic, meaning that the road to recovery must address safety and economic recovery¹⁴. In large part, this committee will need to find a way to make tourism safe in smaller nations while adhering to the rapidly approaching 2024 time limit, after which the implementation of reform will become significantly more complicated.

The Problem:

The issues with unsustainable mass tourism can be summarized into four broad categories: environmental issues, commercialization of native cultures, economic impacts of tourism and its current development, and overreliance of developing nations on tourism. This section of the background guide will discuss each of these issues more in-depth^{6, 22}.

First, tourism can motivate nations to drastically alter, destroy, or exploit the environment to attract more visitors¹⁰. For example, an aggressive program seeking to expand tourism in South Africa has triggered contractors to begin mass deforestation to the point where the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) commanded South Africa to stop¹⁰. Though exact data is unknowable, this trend is copied worldwide, as economists have proven a clear link between the increase in deforestation levels and the development of a nation's tourism industry²⁴. Additionally, tourism can impact access to natural resources like water. Tourists tend to consume more water while traveling, and in a tourist-filled, water-scarce area, like the Mediterranean, tourists use double as much water as an average resident⁶. In addition, tourism development creates adverse effects on the physical environment in addition to deforestation. Tourists produce a considerable amount of litter and pollution. Their actions have consequences on land and the oceans, eventually harming tourist hosting nations. In the ocean, 90 out of 109 countries with

coral reefs see their reefs damaged from tourist practices, ranging from cruise ship anchors to run-of-the-mill littering and pollution⁶. In fact, it has been estimated that one cruise ship dropping an anchor in a coral reef just once could destroy an area about half the size of a football field⁶. It was further estimated that coral reef recovery from current damage caused by tourism would take fifty years if all tourism immediately stopped⁶. On land, the pollution from tourism creates negative effects. For an international tourist, the flights, high-class amenities, and luxury status emit a massive amount of CO₂, which heavily contributes to global warming⁶. Additionally, the littering of tourism greatly harms the appearance of a country, so much so that hiking trails in Peru and Nepal have received nicknames like “Coca-Cola Trail” and “Toilet Paper Trail”⁶.

Second, there are adverse effects on native culture due to its commercialization to tourists. Of international tourists in 2016, around 30% were self-identified “cultural tourists,” seeking to experience cultures different from their own⁸. However, to appeal to these tourists, countries modify their culture in at least one of three ways. There is first standardization in which a tourists’ search for familiarity within their tourism environment leads to a loss of cultural diversity⁵. Standardization leads to the cultures of more wealthy nations dominating the cultures of developing countries, as the tourist citizens of wealthy nations seek familiarity in the developing nations they’re visiting⁵. Next, there is commodification, where local cultures mutate and transform to better cater to the wants and needs of tourists⁵. Frequently, commodification manifests through the change of older cultural ceremonies or events, which are dramatically condensed to fit the tight time schedule of tourists. Further, this could also see these ceremonies heavily changed to lean into the developed world’s perceived stereotypes around a culture⁵. An example of this occurs commonly in Brazil, where tourists will go on Favela, slum tours, to see how the poor live; however, these tours often gloss over the deplorable conditions of these slums and attempt to pander to tourists’ wants of viewing the less fortunate in a safe way²⁶. Finally, staged authenticity occurs when a pseudo-culture is created, which has no authenticity and holds no genuine meaning to the local people⁵. Unlike commodification, staged authenticity results in the falsification of local culture. For example, the Maasai tribe in Kenya and Tanzania are a highly coveted tourist destination, seen as a view into tribal life in Africa²⁵. However, most of the traditions that tourists see, from the ritual clothing to the outdated housing and communications technology, are staged by current tribe members for tourists²⁵. In fact, it is relatively common to see one of these tribe members standing in their traditional dress, mobile phone in hand²⁵. In this case, citizens of a developing nation still practice parts of a culture and traditions that hold no value to them to attract more tourists²⁵.

Still, regardless of how much a country does, they will never see most of the money in their country, bringing up the third problem with mass tourism: tourism leakage. Tourism leakage describes revenue generated within a country by tourism, but by a foreign entity, usually from the tourists’ home country¹. The United Nations

Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) estimates that for every \$100 USD spent in a developing nation by a tourist, only about \$5 USD will remain in that country¹⁹. This leak can occur in two ways - through import leakage and export leakage. Import leakage, the more easily committed of the two, occurs when a tourist hosting country must spend revenue on imports to satisfy tourists' needs¹. For example, hotels may need to buy foreign products and pay a hefty import tax to better accommodate tourists, which also coincides with the issue of standardization of local cultures¹. Further, a tourist company may import English-speaking tour guides to better accommodate English-speaking tourists, which results in most of the wage that the tour guide earns leaving the country¹. Export leakage, the other form of leakage, occurs when a large corporation invests in creating tourist facilities in a foreign nation and takes most of the profits from that facility out of its host country¹. Unlike import leakage, the company operating the tourism event was never based in the host country, resulting in a surprising amount of money spent at these facilities never even seeing the country they were in¹. The UNCTAD estimates that import leakage for developing nations is between 40-50%, while only around 10-20% for developed nations¹⁹. Further, the U.N. concluded in a 1996 study that export leakage rates for developing nations were anywhere from 25-56%, with a perceived average of around 40%¹⁹.

Lastly, nations over-rely on the unstable tourism industry. This problem particularly hits developing nations, as the top four nations most reliant on tourism to make up their GDP are all developing nations²². To see the effects of tourism on overinvested nations, the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on tourism provides a blaring example. According to the UNWTO, globally, the pandemic put 100 to 120 million direct tourism jobs at risk, while anywhere from \$910 billion USD to \$1.2 trillion USD were lost. This loss, however, disproportionately affected developing nations, especially those whose GDP mainly came from tourism. Malta, ranked #1 on the tourism reliance chart, lost over \$3.1 billion USD from the pandemic, making up a quarter of their economy¹³. Thailand, ranked third on the list, experienced a loss of 9.5% of its GDP from the pandemic, which also put many local businesses at risk¹⁶. If this committee seeks to create a sustainable framework for tourism, it must address all of the problems above, as each is intertwined in a complex web.

Relevant Documents:

Due to the lack of international agreements on tourism, there are few agreements in place to guide this committee. The first is the existing Global Code of Ethics for Tourism. The non-binding document serves as a loose guideline for what sustainable tourism should look like, outlining the goals of tourism, the factors of sustainable development, the obligation of service providers, etc.³. Due to the lack of enforcement

nature and broad scope of this code, many countries interpret this code in different ways³.

The second major document regarding tourism is the Buen Vivir model developed by South and Latin America¹⁸. The idea, applied to tourism during the pandemic, sought to address the issues around mass tourism¹⁸. In fairness, this radical departure from the general view of the world has been challenging to implement due to the rise of modern economics and politics¹⁵. Still, many appear hopeful that this philosophy could succeed, and it could serve as a model for the resolution this committee authors.

Bloc Positions:

Within the debate around solutions, there are three main blocks. First, countries, primarily developing nations, would want to take a balanced approach to the issue. For these nations, such as Thailand or Malta, there is a need to balance the needs of the environment and the needs of the people/economy. These nations overly rely on the tourism sector, so a rash shift in philosophy could dramatically harm their economies, depriving them of much-needed revenue and jobs. These nations would also like to address these issues while protecting their local economies from tourism leakage. The next major bloc is nations whose governments hold the issues like climate change in high regard and who will seek to stop the negative environmental effects of mass tourism no matter the cost. Primarily developed nations, such as Norway, do not have to deal with the impact of a sudden shift in philosophy between tourism and the environment as their governments have already begun pursuing climate goals independent of the international community. Further, these nations will likely seek to protect their businesses, though it may vary how much they are willing to sacrifice in the international community to accomplish this.

The final major bloc is the group of nations that either do not prioritize, justify, or outright deny the existence of negative impacts from tourism. These nations, a mixture of developing and developed, will be primarily financially motivated and seek to protect their business, economies, and cultures abroad no matter the cost.

The three blocs listed above primarily exist to provide delegates with a very loose understanding of how their country will operate in committee. No country will fit any category perfectly, as the issue of tourism creates depth and complexity, which cannot be summarized in three paragraphs. As with any conference, delegates are highly encouraged to perform their own research on their country's policy and to think critically to draft solutions that would fall in line with that policy.

Committee Mission:

The UNWTO seeks to promote responsible, sustainable, and universally accessible tourism worldwide ²⁹. In this committee, the UNWTO will seek to fix the unfair, unsustainable, and environmentally unfriendly tourism practices either promoted or permitted by developing nations through the use of a comprehensible international set of solutions while bearing in mind the economic effects of lower tourism levels in a developing nation.

Questions to Consider:

1. How much does your country value issues such as the environment, protection of local cultures, and development of other nations?
2. What can this committee do to promote the recovery of the tourism industry as soon as possible?
3. How can the committee limit the environmental impacts of tourism in developing nations while also not harming the economies of these nations?
4. How can the committee protect local economies, while also protecting large corporations which provide thousands of jobs?
5. How can this committee promote nations to diversify their economies?
6. How can the committee more effectively promote Article 5 of the GCET to protect local populations, while not sacrificing the industry that so many depend on?
7. How have the histories of colonialism and imperialism in developing countries contributed to their reliance on tourism? What can be done to combat this core issue and its symptoms?

Sources for Further Research:

Buen Vivir -

<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003164616-16/buen-vivir-natas-ha-chassagne-phoebe-everingham>

UNWTO GCFT - <https://www.unwto.org/global-code-of-ethics-for-tourism>

Works Cited:

¹ Kelly-Shankar 2021-11-21 at 2:35 pm - Reply, S. (2021, November 17). *Negative impacts of tourism leakage and how to prevent them*. Curiosity Saves Travel. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://curiositiesavestavel.com/prevent-tourism-leakage-negative-impact/#:~:text=Tourism%20leakage%20happens%20when%20tourism%20dollars%20leave%20the,than%20the%20gross%20or%20total%20spent%20on%20travel>.

² *The 41 most popular travel countries*. Worlddata.info. (n.d.). Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://www.worlddata.info/tourism.php>

³ Ambrose, I. (1999, October 1). *UNWTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (1999)*. ENAT. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://www.accessibletourism.org/?i=enat.en.reports.366>

⁴ Baranowski, S., Pinley Covert, L., Gordon, B. M., Ivan Jobs, R., Noack, C., & Rosenbaum, A. T. (2019, March 15). *Discussion: Tourism and diplomacy*. Taylor & Francis. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1755182X.2019.1584974?journalCode=rjth20>

⁵ Coventry University. (n.d.). *Negative social and cultural impacts*. FutureLearn. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://www.futurelearn.com/info/courses/the-impacts-of-tourism/0/steps/90679>

⁶ *Environmental impacts of tourism*. Environmental Impacts of Tourism. (n.d.). Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://www.gdrc.org/uem/eco-tour/envi/one.html>

⁷ Forum, W. E. (2020, May 20). *Small developing countries face difficult covid-19 recovery*. Forbes. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/worldeconomicforum/2020/05/19/small-developing-countries-face-difficult-covid-19-recovery/?sh=1b4d0948fbfa>

⁸ Goss. (2016, November 17). *Cultural tourism: A huge opportunity and a growing trend - tourism marketing: The goss agency*. Tourism Marketing | The Goss Agency. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://culturaltourism.thegossagency.com/cultural-tourism-whitepaper/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Travel%20Industry%20Association%20of%20America%2C,their%20choice%20of%20destination%20on%20their%20last%20trip>.

⁹ IPS Correspondents. (1998, June 22). *Tourism: Developing countries gain in income and jobs*. Inter Press Service. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://www.ipsnews.net/1998/06/tourism-developing-countries-gain-in-income-and-jobs/#:~:text=A%20study%20by%20French%20academic%20Francois%20Vellas%2C%20of,made%20up%20183.9%20million%20of%20all%20tourist%20arrivals.>

¹⁰ IvyPanda. (2019, December 27). *The environmental issues and unsustainable tourism - 1995 words: Report example*. The Environmental Issues and Unsustainable Tourism. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://ivypanda.com/essays/the-environmental-issues-and-unsustainable-tourism/>

¹¹ Jus, N., & Misrahi, T. (2021, June). *Home | WTTC*. Travel and Tourism Economic Impact 2021. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://wttc.org/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/2021/Global%20Economic%20Impact%20and%20Trends%202021.pdf>

¹² López, A. M. (2021, November 10). *Inbound tourism volume in Saint Lucia 2020*. Statista. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/816479/saint-lucia-number-of-tourist-arrivals/#:~:text=Located%20north%20of%20Saint%20Vincent%20and%20the%20Grenadines,reduction%20from%20nearly%201.3%20million%20recorded%20in%202019.>

¹³ Marin, I. (2020, March 26). *Virus impact on tourism 'could cost economy €3BN'*. Times of Malta. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/virus-impact-on-tourism-could-cost-economy-3bn.780926>

¹⁴ Martial, Z. (2021, January 13). *Impact of covid-19 on Island Nations: St. Lucia, a case study*. The St Kitts Nevis Observer. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://www.thestkittsnevisobserver.com/impact-of-covid-19-on-island-nations-st-lucia-a-case-study/>

¹⁵ Mercado, J. (2017, December 25). *Buen vivir: A new era of great social change*. Pachamama Alliance's Blog. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://blog.pachamama.org/buen-vivir-new-era-great-social-change>

¹⁶ Mmojica. (2020, November 18). *Covid-19 active response and expenditure support program: Report and recommendation of the president*. Asian Development Bank. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://www.adb.org/projects/documents/tha-54177-001-rrp>

¹⁷ Myanmar Ministry of Hotels and Tourism. (2021). *Bilateral Tourism Agreements – Ministry of Hotels & Tourism Myanmar*. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://tourism.gov.mm/bilateral-tourism-agreements/>

¹⁸ Natasha Chassagne, P. E. (2021, July 29). *Buen vivir: A guide for socialising the tourism commons in a post-COV*. Taylor & Francis. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003164616-16/buen-vivir-natasha-chassagne-phoebe-everingham>

¹⁹ *Negative impacts; leakage*. UN Atlas of the Oceans: Subtopic. (2002). Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <http://www.oceansatlas.org/subtopic/en/c/72/#:~:text=According%20to%20UNCTAD%20The%20average,only%20typical%20of%20developing%20countries.>

²⁰ Published by Statista Research Department, & 7, J. (2022, June 7). *International Tourist Arrivals Worldwide*. Statista. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/209334/total-number-of-international-tourist-arrivals/>

²¹ Périz Rodríguez, C. (2020, June 16). *Travelling for pleasure: A brief history of tourism*. Europeana. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://www.europeana.eu/en/blog/travelling-for-pleasure-a-brief-history-of-tourism>

²² Raul Editor. (2017, April 26). *Which countries are most dependent on the travel industry?* HowMuch. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://howmuch.net/articles/travel-tourism-economy-2017>

²³ Robino, D. M. (2019). *Global Destination Cities Index 2019 - mastercard*. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://www.mastercard.com/news/media/wexffu4b/gdci-global-report-final-1.pdf>

²⁴ Sergo, Z. (2014, September). *The influence of tourism on deforestation and biodiversity - researchgate*. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283011176_THE_INFLUENCE_OF_TOURISM_ON_DEFORESTATION_AND_BIODIVERSITY

²⁵ Stainton, D. H. (2020, April 2). *The truth about your tour to the Maasai tribe*. Tourism Teacher. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://tourismteacher.com/maasai-tribe-tour/>

²⁶ Stainton, D. H. (2020, April 4). *Is what you are seeing 'real'? examples of staged authenticity in tourism*. Tourism Teacher. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://tourismteacher.com/staged-authenticity-examples/#:~:text=Examples%20of%20staged%20authenticity%20in%20tourism%201%20China,tour.%20...%2010%20Traditiona1%20Thai%20Green%20Curry.%20>

²⁷ Torkington, S., Johan N. Lundström · The Conversation, Naylor, K. A., Shine, I., & Conversation, R. S. · T. (2022, January 25). *This is the impact of covid-19 on the travel sector*. World Economic Forum. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/01/global-travel-tourism-pandemic-covid-19/>

²⁸ *World Economic Outlook Databases*. IMF. (2019, October). Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/SPROLLS/world-economic-outlook-databases#sort=%40imfdate%20descending>

²⁹ *World Tourism Organization*. UNWTO. (n.d.). Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://www.unwto.org/about-us>