



# COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT AND TOURISM

## (TRAN)



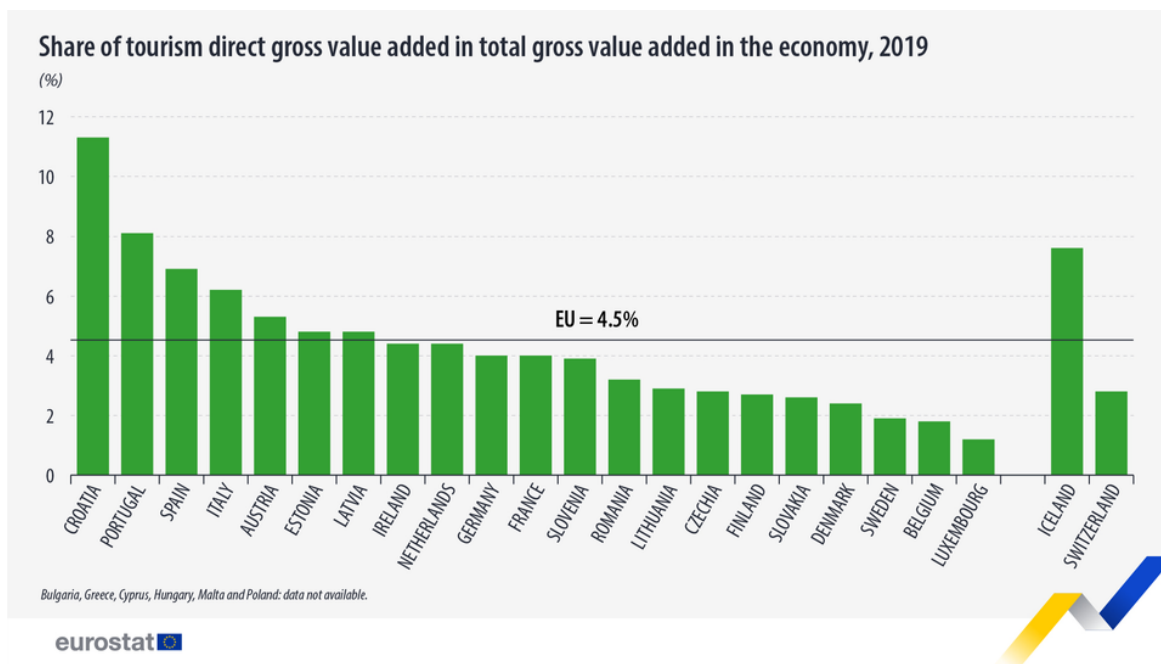
**Wonderlust.** Tourism has long been a significant contributor to Europe's economy, playing a vital role in the region's growth and development. The appeal of Europe's rich history, diverse cultures, stunning landscapes, and renowned landmarks draws millions of domestic and international visitors each year. However, like a two-sided coin, the booming tourism industry has caused lots of damages to landmarks, vandalism, and natural impact. What can Europe do to find balance?



Foto de Glenn Carstens-Peters en Unsplash

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism has long been recognised as a vital sector in Europe, acting as a key driver for economic growth, employment generation, and cultural exchange. Over the years, millions of visitors from across the globe have been drawn to the continent's rich historical heritage, diverse landscapes, and vibrant cultures, making Europe one of the world's premier tourist destinations. The tourism industry's significant contribution to the European economy cannot be understated, with countless businesses, local communities, and governments relying on its revenues to thrive.



However, the surge in tourism in recent times has brought to the forefront a pressing concern – the negative impact it inflicts on the very foundations it thrives upon. While tourism offers numerous benefits, including cultural enrichment, international cooperation, and increased prosperity, it has also given rise to complex challenges that cannot be overlooked. The exponential growth in visitor numbers has pushed certain destinations to their limits, paving the way for what has come to be known as "overtourism." This phenomenon occurs when the influx of tourists surpasses a destination's capacity, leading to detrimental consequences for both the environment and local communities.

In the context of Europe, overtourism has manifested in several ways. Popular cities like Barcelona, Venice, and Amsterdam have witnessed an overwhelming surge of tourists during peak seasons, placing immense strain on infrastructure, transport networks, and public spaces. The delicate balance between preserving cultural heritage and satisfying the demands of mass tourism has given rise to conflicts and tensions between local residents, authorities, and the tourism industry.

One of the most concerning outcomes of overtourism is the degradation of Europe's natural environment. Iconic landmarks, pristine coastlines, and ecologically sensitive areas are increasingly susceptible to habitat destruction, pollution, and overexploitation of resources due to uncontrolled tourism activities. The loss of biodiversity and ecological imbalances threaten the very landscapes that draw tourists to Europe's shores.

Furthermore, the commodification of cultures, while driving economic gains, often leads to the erosion of authentic traditions and the homogenization of local identities. The pressure to cater to tourists' expectations has caused a decline in genuine cultural experiences, replacing them with commodified, superficial portrayals of local customs. As a result, the essence of Europe's diverse cultural tapestry is at risk of being diluted.

Economic disparities also arise in the face of soaring tourist numbers. While the tourism industry creates immense profits, the benefits may not be equitably distributed among local communities and businesses. Larger corporations and foreign-owned enterprises often dominate the industry, leaving smaller local businesses struggling to compete. The imbalance can lead to economic inequalities and may deter genuine community involvement in tourism development.

To address these challenges, various measures and initiatives have been put in place by governments, non-governmental organizations, and the tourism industry. Sustainable tourism practices, carrying capacity assessments, and community engagement efforts are some of the strategies aimed at mitigating the negative impacts of tourism while preserving Europe's unique cultural and natural assets.

This report seeks to delve deeper into the multifaceted issue of the negative impact of tourism in Europe. By exploring the key terms, identifying the main actors and stakeholders involved, analysing conflicts that arise, and evaluating existing measures, this study aims to provide valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders. Through a comprehensive understanding of the challenges at hand, it is our hope that Europe can pave the way towards a more sustainable, responsible, and harmonious tourism industry that benefits all – tourists, local communities, and the environment alike.



## KEY TERMS

- **Overtourism:** A situation where the number of tourists exceeds the carrying capacity of a destination, leading to negative consequences for the environment and local residents.
- **Carrying Capacity:** The maximum number of tourists a destination can sustainably accommodate without causing significant harm to its natural and cultural resources.
- **Leakage:** The percentage of tourism revenue that leaves the destination's economy, often due to foreign-owned tour operators, hotels, and international supply chains.
- **Cultural commodification:** The transformation of local cultures and traditions into marketable products, leading to the loss of authenticity and identity.
- **Cultural Erosion:** The gradual loss or dilution of a destination's unique cultural practices, traditions, and heritage due to the influence of tourism.
- **Carbon Footprint:** The total amount of greenhouse gases, primarily carbon dioxide, that are emitted directly or indirectly by an individual, organization, event, or product, including those generated by travel and tourism activities.
- **Seasonality:** The variation in tourism demand and visitation patterns throughout the year, which can lead to concentrated pressures on destinations during peak seasons.
- **Crisis Management:** Strategies and plans put in place to respond effectively to sudden and unforeseen events, such as natural disasters, health crises, or political instability, which can significantly impact tourism.
- **Cultural Sensitivity Training:** Educational programs designed to increase awareness and understanding of different cultures among tourism industry professionals, helping to promote respectful and responsible interactions with local communities.



Tourists at the Fontana di Trevi in Rome (c) Museums Rome

## KEY ACTORS & STAKEHOLDERS:

- **Tourists:** The primary actors who directly impact the environment and local communities through their travel choices and behaviours.
- **Local Communities:** The residents of tourist destinations who are affected by the influx of visitors, changes in infrastructure, and socio-cultural impacts. Local artisans and craftsmen depend on the arrival of tourism for survival after the peak season.
- **Tourism Industry:** Including tour operators, hotels, airlines, and travel agencies, which play a crucial role in shaping the tourism experience and its impacts.
- **Governments:** Responsible for setting regulations, policies, and infrastructure development to manage tourism and its impacts effectively. Councils and visitors must maintain a healthy relationships since the survival of the municipality might depend on tourism while bigger cities must ensure a smooth relationship between locals and visitors.
- **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):** Advocacy groups working towards sustainable tourism practices and the protection of natural and cultural heritage. NGOs play a crucial role in advocating for policies and practices that protect all natural resources.



San Juan de Gaztelugatxe months before appearing in *Game of Thrones*. (c) Argia



Traditional boulangerie in Paris with influencer. (c) The Times

## KEY ISSUES:

- **Environmental and Landmarks Degradation:** Increased tourism can lead to habitat destruction, pollution, and overexploitation of natural resources, threatening biodiversity and ecological balance.
  - *Tourists Go Home! Fed Up With Over-tourism, European Hotspots Impose Bans, Fines, Taxes* – Celia Rodriguez. Forbes. 2023
  - *Tourism in the Basque Country: A wave which may drown us.* – Lander Arretxea. Argia. 2017
  - *Which Popular Sites Have Been Ruined by Mass Tourism?* – Rossi Leso. The Collector. 2023
  - *11 European heritage sites shortlisted for 7 Most Endangered Programme 2023.* Europa Nostra. 2023

- **Cultural Disruption:** Mass tourism can alter local cultures, erode traditions, and create tensions between tourists and local communities.
  - Spain's island paradise is becoming a nightmare for locals. Ainhoa Goyeneche and Macarena Muñoz. Financial Review 2023
  - Venice awaits Unesco heritage ruling as beds for tourists outnumber residents for first time. Angela Giuffrida. The Guardian. 2023
- **Economic Inequality:** The tourism industry may benefit larger corporations and foreign entities, leading to economic disparities and limited benefits for local businesses and communities. By promoting small-scale tourism and working with local businesses, tourism can create jobs and generate income for the community. This economic benefit can help improve the standard of living for local residents and provide long-term economic sustainability. However, tourists tend to deal with big corporations with great online presence who usually pay lower salaries and take the benefits somewhere else. Small businesses are in desperate need to attract tourists to their doors in order to keep families and local economy running.



Family-owned cafe in Maastrich, Netherlands



Cafe own by big corporation in Maastrich, Netherlands

- **Infrastructure Strain:** Tourism influx may surpass the capacity of existing infrastructure, causing strain on transportation, waste management, and other public services. Some cities must increase the budget for street cleaning, rubbish collection and other municipal expenses to meet the demands. Some cities, see their population double during peak season.
  - French ski resorts on slippery slope with €15 million energy bills. Lottie Limb. Euronews



Waitig lines at a French ski resort



Tourists in Santorini (Greece)

## KEY CONFLICTS:

### Local and national culture vs. Cultural erosion and commodification

Local traditions and culture can be an appeal to tourists interested in immersing themselves in authentic and enriching experiences. These unique aspects offer a window into the soul of a destination, providing a deeper understanding of its history, values, and way of life. For many travelers, participating in traditional festivals, savoring local cuisine, and engaging with indigenous arts and crafts offer a profound connection to the places they visit. It's through these cultural encounters that tourists forge lasting memories and gain a genuine appreciation for the diversity and richness that each destination has to offer.

However, increased exposure to global influences, driven in part by tourism, can introduce new ideas, lifestyles, and cultural practices. While cultural exchange can be enriching, it may also lead to a dilution of national traditions if they are not actively preserved. In efforts to attract tourists, there can be a tendency to present a simplified or stereotypical version of a nation's culture. This can lead to the commodification of cultural elements, potentially at the expense of their authenticity and deeper meaning to tourists, there can be a tendency to present a simplify or stereotype a nation's culture. Economic interests tied to tourism revenue may prioritize profit over cultural preservation. This can lead to decisions that prioritize tourism-related development at the expense of preserving traditional practices.



Traditional German dress



Airbnb logo

### Local businesses vs. Big corporations

Big corporations, due to their scale and resources, may have the ability to offer services at a lower price point or with higher marketing visibility. This can put pressure on local businesses, which may struggle to compete on the same level. Big corporations can sometimes dominate the market, leading to a concentration of wealth and control. This can result in a larger portion of tourism revenue flowing out of the local community, potentially leaving fewer resources for local development and investment. Local businesses often emphasize preserving the authenticity and unique character of a destination. In contrast, big corporations may be more focused on standardization and uniformity across their various locations, potentially leading to a loss of local flavor.

## Public funding

Councils often invest in tourism as it can bring substantial economic benefits to a community. Tourism generates revenue through spending on accommodation, food, activities, and other services. This, in turn, can lead to job creation, increased tax revenue, and overall economic development. On the other hand, councils have a responsibility to meet the needs and protect the interests of their local residents. This includes providing essential services like healthcare, education, transportation, and maintaining the overall quality of life.

Investing in tourism infrastructure, marketing campaigns, and amenities requires financial resources. This allocation of funds may be perceived as diverting resources away from local services that residents rely on for their daily well-being. Rapid or poorly managed tourism growth can put stress on local resources and infrastructure. This may lead to issues like traffic congestion, increased cost of living, and changes in the character of neighborhoods. Residents may feel that their needs are being overlooked in favor of the demands of tourists.

There's often a tension between the immediate economic benefits of tourism and the long-term sustainability of the community. Overemphasis on short-term gains can lead to issues like overdevelopment, environmental degradation, and loss of cultural authenticity.

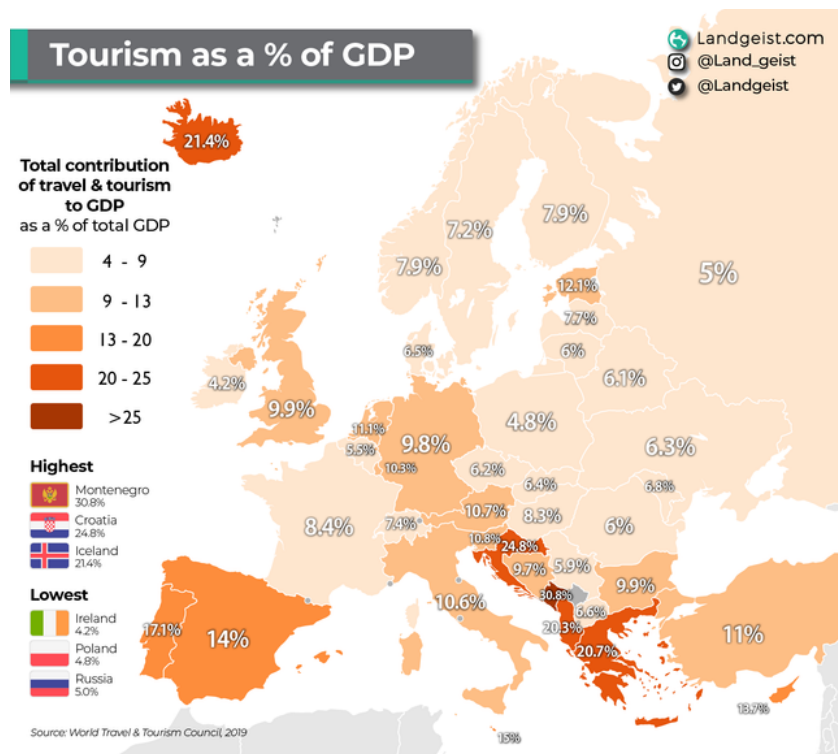
## POSSIBLE RESOLUTIONS

1. Finding a balance between embracing global influences and preserving national culture requires thoughtful planning and policies. This can involve strategies like **cultural education and awareness programs, supporting local artists and artisans, and implementing regulations that safeguard cultural heritage**. Additionally, promoting **sustainable and responsible tourism practices** can help protect and celebrate a nation's unique cultural identity.
2. Balancing the interests of local businesses and big corporations often requires thoughtful destination management strategies. This can include **policies that support and protect local enterprises, encourage responsible corporate practices, and foster collaboration between different stakeholders in the tourism industry**. It must be ensured that the **benefits of tourism are distributed more equitably** across the community.
3. Balancing the interests of tourists and local residents requires careful planning, community engagement, and strategic decision-making. This can involve:
  - **Community Involvement:** Engaging residents in the decision-making process regarding tourism development to ensure their voices are heard.
  - **Sustainable Tourism Practices:** Implementing policies that promote responsible and sustainable tourism, considering the long-term impacts on both residents and the environment.
  - **Diversification of Economic Activities:** Investing in other sectors beyond tourism to create a more resilient and balanced local economy.
  - **Infrastructure and Services:** Ensuring that the necessary infrastructure and services are in place to support both residents and tourists.
4. Ultimately, finding this balance is crucial for creating a thriving and harmonious community that benefits from tourism without compromising the well-being of its residents
- 5.
- 6.



## LINKS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- European Travel Commission – Sustainable Tourism: [Link](#)
- United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) – European Tourism Trends: [Link](#)
- European Environment Agency – Tourism and Environment: [Link](#)
- World Travel & Tourism Council (WTC) – European Impact Reports: [Link](#)



## KEY QUESTIONS

- **How can we ensure European nations keep their local culture and traditions while they welcome tourists?**
- **How can we protect local businesses and help them thrive under the threat of big corporations?**
- **How can public funding ensure balance into attracting visitors and keep excellent facilities for locals?**

