

FUTURE OF TOURISM

- Whereas tourism done well can benefit destination communities, incentivize protection of nature and history, and enrich the traveling public,
- Whereas irresponsible practices have eroded the value of the true tourism product, the destination,
- Whereas poorly managed tourism, driven by short-term, unguided market forces, has disrupted communities and ecosystems, worn away cultural and historic sites, added to environmental stress, and degraded the travel experience itself,
- Whereas this trend has been aggravated by undue policy emphasis on quantity of tourists over quality of experience and benefits to destination communities,
- Whereas, widespread degradation has persisted despite earnest attempts to counteract the trend by many responsible parties,
- Whereas recovery from the COVID-19 crisis has presented an opportunity to choose a more sustainable future, we therefore urge worldwide commitment to these principles:



1. See the whole picture

Recognize that most tourism by its nature involves the destination as a whole, not only industry businesses, but also its ecosystems, natural resources, cultural assets and traditions, communities, aesthetics, and built infrastructure.

Most tourism is about the place and its people. To varying extents, tourism businesses rely on the character, appeal, and resources of the destination as a whole. Sometimes it may be one particular attractor – wildlife, a beach, a historic district. But more often, it's the interwoven combination of all of these elements that together constitutes a sense of place. That is why we travel.

Planning for the future of tourism requires thinking beyond business success and building a solid, holistic foundation. Securing the future of tourism requires investing in the long-term health and vitality of all of the different elements that comprise the destination as a whole.

Real life examples:

1. Here's [a recent example from Amsterdam](#) of a destination undertaking some big picture thinking.
2. The Travel Corporation has recently launched their "Make Travel Matter" (MTM) Experiences, which assess the impact of tours and excursions using the Sustainable Development Goals as a framework. Learn more about the MTM Experiences [here](#).

The questions we should ask to further achieve this principle:

- Where does money from tourism dollars end up?
- What kind of tourists are arriving?
- What are the hidden costs to the local communities and the natural habitats? (See Principle #6.)
- Who makes decisions within that destination and ultimately defines 'success'?



2. Use sustainability standards

Respect the publicly available, internationally approved minimum criteria for sustainable tourism practices maintained by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) for both [industry](#) and [destinations](#).

Arrived at by extensive international consultation and cooperation, the GSTC Criteria provide the minimums for protecting destinations and the people who live and work in them. They serve as basic guidelines for destinations and tourism businesses that wish to become more sustainable. The GSTC Criteria indicate what should be done, not how to do it or whether the goal has been achieved.

Performance indicators help do that, along with educational materials, tools for implementation, and help from numerous NGOs and private businesses who specialize in sustainability and improved destination stewardship. The GSTC Criteria constitute the basis for sustainability certification, which can help travelers identify sound sustainable tourism destinations.

Real life examples

1. Vail, Colorado has been certified as a sustainable destination in adherence with the GSTC Criteria for destinations (by a GSTC-Accredited certifying body, Green Destinations). As part of their strategy to ingrain sustainability at all layers of the destination, Vail developed Actively Green, a business training and certification program that helps local businesses incorporate best practices, such as energy efficiency, reducing waste, and educating guests. [Learn More.](#)

Further resources:

- o [GSTC Industry Criteria](#) (for accommodations and tour operators)
- o [GSTC Destination Criteria](#)



3. Collaborate in destination management

Seek to develop all tourism through a collaborative management structure with equal participation by government, the private sector and civil society organizations that represent diversity in communities.

Without holistic management that includes equal participation and representation from the private and public sector in the decision making process, difficulties can easily arise, and have - overtourism, neighborhood disruption, cultural degradation, exclusion, exploitation, and various environmental problems. Well-managed tourism can enrich communities, improve public education, help sustain natural habitats, and revitalize elements of cultural heritage.

A real-life example: St. Kitts has formed the [Sustainable Destination Council](#), a multi-stakeholder advisory body to the Ministry of Tourism that oversees the sustainable development and management of tourism on the island.

The questions we should ask to further achieve this principle:

- Who is involved in tourism planning and management decisions? Are individuals and entities both within and outside of the tourism industry engaged? Are minority groups represented and do they have an equal voice?
- Is tourism meeting the needs of residents? If so, why not?
- Is there a centralized entity that ensures sustainable tourism efforts are coordinated across government agencies, sectors, community groups, etc.?

Further resources:

- [GSTC's Crucial Criterion A1: its importance and its context](#)



4. Choose quality over quantity

Manage tourism development based on quality of visitation, not quantity of visitors, so as to enhance the travel experience while sustaining the character of the destination and benefiting local communities.

Prior to the pandemic, we saw the burden that an influx of tourists can put on any particular destination. These implications include, but are not limited to, degraded environments and cultural sites, usurped resources, overloaded infrastructure and heightened tensions with locals. In tourism, more is not necessarily better. Counting sheer numbers of tourist arrivals can be the crudest, least meaningful, and most dangerous metric—but also the easiest to obtain. Promoting lesser known places and non-peak travel, respecting carrying capacity (including infrastructure, social and environmental limits), and developing tourism in line with community needs, will serve destinations and the businesses that rely on them better.

A real-life example: Vanuatu has drafted its [Vanuatu Sustainable Tourism Policy](#) (VSTP) (2018-2030) which includes objectives based on the GSTC Criteria for sustainable destinations and seeks to attract visitors who are quality visitors – higher yield, longer stay, culturally aware and environmentally responsible. The questions we should ask to further achieve this principle:

- How many visitors can the destination handle? (Are waste management systems and energy infrastructure sufficient?)
- How are residents and ecosystems impacted by the amount of visitors?)
- What are we doing to manage congestion?
- How are we positioning the destination?
- How is tourism success defined?

Further resources:

- [The Case for Responsible Travel: Trends & Statistics 2018](#)



5. Demand fair income distribution

Set policies that counter unequal tourism benefits within destination communities that maximize retention of tourism revenues within those communities.

Inappropriately large shares of tourism profits should not leave the destination (known as “leakage”). Nor should all the profits end up in the hands of one business or family to the exclusion of the rest of the community, nor should they bypass any marginalized communities within the destination.

Local residents should have first right of refusal for tourism jobs, with access to capacity training as needed, and real opportunity for upward mobility. Whenever possible, there should be a link from the tourism supply chains to the local communities - for example, incorporating locally-made handicrafts in gift shops, building a circular economy with linkages to the local agricultural sector rather than mass-imports, driving business to social enterprise that through their business structure directly impact the local people, etc. Tourism revenues should support the destination’s environmental and socio-cultural programs whenever possible. A healthy community is the basis for a healthy tourism sector.

The questions we should ask to further achieve this principle:

- Simply, who gets the money?
- Are the vendors you are working with hiring locally and providing local goods?
- Are locals able to advance into higher-level positions?

Further resources:

- [GSTC Destination Criteria](#)
SECTION A: Sustainable management
A(a) Management structure and framework

A3 Monitoring and reporting

SECTION B: Socio-economic sustainability

B(a) Delivering local economic benefits

B1 Measuring the economic contribution of tourism



6. Reduce tourism's burden

Account for all tourism costs in terms of local tax burdens, environmental and social impacts, and objectively verifiable disruption. Ensure investments are linked to optimizing net-positive impacts for communities and the environment.

Sustaining the appeal of a destination starts with ensuring all the "costs" of tourism on a destination are understood and covered. For destinations, that may range from excessive water use and waste generation by tourists, to strains on the food supply chain, to the real-estate market, to residents' patience. Wear and tear on irreplaceable heritage sites must be avoided or counteracted, and growth in crime prevented. Tourism should be a benefit to the local communities, and not displace them from tourism hubs. The care of fragile ecosystems should always be at the heart of management decisions, ensuring tourism infrastructure is additive and not destructive.

The questions we should ask to further achieve this principle:

- Are we measuring tourism's impacts on the destination on an ongoing basis?
- Is tourism benefiting or harming communities, wildlife, resources, heritage sites, etc. What are the most pressing issues?
- What are we doing to address our negative impacts?
- How many visitors can the destination handle? (Are waste management systems and energy infrastructure sufficient? How are residents and ecosystems impacted by the number of visitors?)

Further resources:

- [The Invisible Burden of Tourism Report](#) - published by the Travel Foundation, Cornell University's Centre for Sustainable Global Enterprise, and EplerWood International

- [Cruise Tourism in the Caribbean: Selling Sunshine](#). (2019). This CREST study explores the lessons learned from half a century of Caribbean cruise tourism; one of the most popular and profitable sectors of the tourism industry. Originally released in Spanish in 2018, the book considers the limited economic benefits of cruise tourism, its environmental and social impacts, and the effects of climate change, and overtourism.

- [Por el Mar de las Antillas: 50 Anos de Turismo de Cruceros en el Caribe](#) (Issues Topics, 2018): This study by the Center for Responsible Tourism (CREST) on "lessons learned" from 50 years of large-scale cruise tourism was officially launched in April 2018 during an event in Havana, Cuba. Published in Spanish.

- [GSTC Destination Criteria](#)
 - SECTION A: Sustainable management
 - A(a) Management structure and framework
 - A3 Monitoring and reporting
 - SECTION B: Socio-economic sustainability
 - B(a) Delivering local economic benefits
 - B1 Measuring the economic contribution of tourism
 - B3 Supporting local entrepreneurs and fair trade



7. Redefine economic success

Rather than raw contribution to growth in GDP, favor metrics that specify destination benefits such as small business development, distribution of incomes, and enhancement of sustainable local supply chains.

Determining measures of success requires more finesse than merely counting the tourism transactions that factor into GDP. Also important are added employment, small business development and marketplace competitiveness, and tax benefits or savings that residents can actually see. Objectively, other indicators might include the number of natural resources protected and available for local use, proportion of waste diverted from landfills through composting and/or recycling, percentage of structures and/or vehicles that operate on renewable energies, additional cultural enrichment, public education, and enhanced community assets.

The right amount of tourism traffic—not too much, not too little—can help support small businesses, museums, and performance venues that could not survive on local patronage alone. To the surprise of some cynics, the trend toward ESG investing – environmental, social, and governance prioritization – has survived and even thrived during the COVID-19 pandemic. Investment in impact organizations in tourist destinations through social enterprise and nonprofit partnerships, benefit the communities and create a positive, and unique, experience for travelers. This creates a multiplier effect that supports the health and desirability of a destination. Sustainable livelihoods, in partnership with local NGOs and grassroots leaders, can and should be developed as part of the tourism supply chain.

Public policy should also steer economic and educational benefits to impoverished and marginalized groups. Respect for human dignity requires that tourism involving minorities be under the control of those same minorities, including a decision to have no tourism at all.

Further resources:

- [The Case for Responsible Travel: Trends & Statistics 2019](#). CREST's 2019 edition of their annual Trends & Statistics report includes a special focus on impact tourism, providing cutting-edge examples of how tourism businesses, travelers, and organizations are making strategic contributions of time, talent, and treasure to social and environmental projects in destinations.

- [GSTC Destination Criteria](#)
- SECTION A: Sustainable management
- A(a) Management structure and framework
- A3 Monitoring and reporting
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- B(a) Delivering local economic benefits
- B1 Measuring the economic contribution of tourism



8. Mitigate climate impacts

Strive to follow accepted scientific consensus on needed reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Invest in green infrastructure and a fast reduction in transport emissions involved in tourism - air, sea, and ground.

The climate emergency is the greatest risk to the future of our planet. Climate change is increasingly unpredictable, extreme weather. Climate events such hurricanes, drought and sea level rise are obvious physical stressors for communities with economies based on tourism. Perhaps less obvious, these events are leading to population displacement worldwide. Reductions in land productivity, habitability and in food and water security, have impacts on demographic, economic, and social factors that increase forced migration, causing higher risk for the spread of disease.

Policies to lessen the global impact should favor green infrastructure, construction, and retrofitting for lodging and businesses, as well as abandonment of such carbon-spewing practices as excessive air conditioning, heating, and lighting. Landscaping with native plants, habitat restoration, and climate friendly agricultural practices can also help.

For travel and tourism, mitigating climate impacts is a matter of balance. Lessening frivolous flying, investing in a balanced carbon offset program, making sure that when you do take a flight, you make it count - e.g. taking fewer, longer holidays.

Building sustainability practices into destination management builds resiliency and can help to withstand pandemics, economic crisis, terrorism, and other crises. See Principle #11. Investment must be made to mitigate climate impacts on tourism assets - from polar bear tours in a warming Arctic, to island chains in the Caribbean and Pacific ravaged by increasingly stronger storms, to indigenous communities affected by drought, and food and water insecurity.

Importantly, tourism is also an opportunity for public education around climate change, especially how it manifests itself locally and the consequences that flow from it. Visitors to tropical beach resorts, for instance, should go home with a better idea of climate impacts on coral reefs and on our marine food chain, as well as consequences of sea-level rise. This is best done through the impact of tourism, rather than unrequested lecturing.

A real-life example: After Hurricane Maria destroyed much of Puerto Rico in 2017, the island communities made a huge investment in solar energy - lessening their carbon footprint, and strengthening resiliency for future storms. [Read more.](#)

The questions we should ask to further achieve this principle:

- What is contributing to the carbon footprint of our operations? Are we measuring it?
- How can we reduce our reliance on fossil fuels?
- How can we better prepare for climate change impacts and build community resilience?
- Are we offsetting the emissions that we can't reduce?
- Are we raising climate awareness among tourists and local communities?
- Are we fostering clean energy innovation?

Further resources:

- [Tourism Declares A Climate Emergency](#)
- Sustainable Travel: [How Carbon Offsets work](#), [Choosing a carbon offset partner](#), [Why Carbon Offsetting Matters](#)
- [Coastal Tourism, Sustainability, and Climate Change in the Caribbean, Volumes I & II](#) (Business Expert Press, 2017): In 2017, CREST released two volumes entitled Coastal Tourism, Sustainability, and Climate Change in the Caribbean. [Volume I](#) is focused on Hotels and Beaches and [Volume II](#) on Supporting Activities, including Golf, Sustainable Food Sourcing, and Airlines & Airports. The volumes contain essays and case studies by 33 different experts that look at how various tourism sectors both contribute to and are impacted by climate change.
- [Marine Tourism, Climate Change, and Resilience in the Caribbean, Volumes I & II](#) (Business Expert Press, 2017): As the island and coastal nations of the Caribbean respond to and prepare for the effects of climate change, tourism has the potential to both exacerbate and mitigate these efforts.

- [GSTC Destination Criteria](#)
- SECTION A: Sustainable management
- A(c) Managing pressure and change
- A10 Climate change adaptation
- SECTION D: Environmental sustainability
- D(c) Management of waste and emissions
- D10 GHG emissions and climate change mitigation
- D11 Low-impact transportation



9. Close the loop on resources

When post-pandemic safety allows, turn away from the use of disposable plastics by tourism businesses, and transition to circular resource use. Tourism should lead other sectors towards a circular economy. Pollution and waste are damaging to the environment, and deplete resources such as land, water, food, and energy which are often already scarce (e.g. Islands), and there may be limited or no infrastructure for recycling and waste management.

A real-life example: [Refill Not Landfill](#) is a global campaign to reduce single-use plastic drinking bottles and other single-use plastic waste. Refill Not Landfill aims to reduce the millions of plastic water bottles discarded each year by encouraging the use of reusable drinking bottles, replacing millions of single-use plastic water bottles, and offering free water refill stations at participating businesses and partners around the world. The questions we should ask to further achieve this principle:

- What is contributing to the carbon footprint of our operations? Are we measuring it?
- How can we reduce our reliance on fossil fuels?
- How can we better prepare for climate change impacts and build community resilience?
- Are we offsetting the emissions that we can't reduce?
- Are we raising climate awareness among tourists and local communities?
- Are we fostering clean energy innovation?

Further resources:

- [GSTC Destination Criteria](#) SECTION D: Environmental sustainability
- D(c) Management of waste and emissions, D9 Solid waste

10. Contain tourism's land use



Limit high-occupancy resort tourism to concentrated areas. Discourage resort sprawl from taking over coasts, islands, and mountain areas, so as to retain geographical character, a diverse economy, local access, and critical ecosystems.

Tourism-related sprawl and its accompanying environmental impacts including increased traffic, scenic degradation, barriers to local residents, and loss of character is a major hazard of resort regions. Those impacts endanger all the elements that create a distinctive sense of place – a destination’s unique selling point.

In all cases, tourism development should respect cultural landscapes and protect natural habitats that provide the locale’s characteristic scenery and unique ecosystems. Local stakeholders should be consulted to ensure that the development of new tourism facilities and assets take community desires and rights into consideration. Maintaining historic sites, structures, and architecture allows us to tell the unique story of a destination, its greatest tourism asset.

The questions we should ask to further achieve this principle:

- Does development compliment a sense of place?

Further resources:

- [GSTC Destination Criteria](#)
- B(b) Social wellbeing and impacts
- B6 Property and user rights
- SECTION C: Cultural sustainability
- C(a) Protecting cultural heritage
- C4 Traditional access SECTION
- SECTION D: Environmental sustainability

- D(a) Conservation of natural heritage
- D1 Protection of sensitive environments



11. Diversify source markets

In addition to international visitation, encourage robust domestic tourism, which may be more resilient in the face of crises and raise citizens' perceived value of their own natural and cultural heritage.

International travelers may spend more on average than domestic, but domestic travelers are more likely to be the first to begin traveling again after a crisis or catastrophe. What's more, they can vote on public support for tourism-worthy historic and natural sites.

Some commonly under-represented tourism segments have hidden value. Self-catering visitors (those staying in a holiday cottage, house, campground, etc.) may spend more with local merchants for groceries and supplies than guests in hotels with pre-established supply chains that may or may not be local. Backpacker tourists may spend less per day than an affluent resort tourist, but they often stay longer and spend more with local businesses. Most important, young travelers within these segments are an investment in the future. Travel memories etched in youth create the appetite for return visits later in life, with their families and their own incomes.

Further resources:

- [GSTC Destination Criteria](#)
- SECTION A: Sustainable management
- A(c) Managing pressure and change
- A11 Risk and crisis management



12. Protect sense of place

Encourage tourism policies and business practices that protect and benefit natural, scenic, and cultural assets. Retain and enhance destination identity and distinctiveness. Diversity of place is the reason for travel.

This is an overriding guiding principle, one by which all activities can be measured. Sense of place manifests itself in numerous ways and places, destinations, are not just businesses. They are total experiences that can inspire deep attachment. In this sense, protecting the various aspects and assets of a place are akin to protecting home and family, or for visitors, ensuring the safety of cherished memories. Either way, the locale should inspire that greatest of compliments, "I love this place!"

Supporting local businesses who are preserving a sense of place is key to this - artists, guides, farmers, fishermen, chefs, and activists. Work with the grassroots organizations who know their community best and keep more money in the community to preserve local traditions and businesses and the local way of life.

A real-life example: [IMPULSE Travel](#), a tour operator and social enterprise operating in Colombia, brings tourists directly into the local communities - eating in their homes, visiting locally owned businesses, and sleeping in locally-owned accommodations. Through their Sounds of Colombia tour, they preserve a unique sense of place - through the music that defines the Afrolatinidad roots of their country.

The questions we should ask to further achieve this principle:

- As an organization/company, are we sustaining or enhancing the character of the place?
- When you enter a town or walk down a street, does the architecture suggest what region you are in? Does the landscape? If you enter a hotel lobby or disembark at an airport terminal, can you tell where you are? Does your

restaurant menu have regional dishes and/or drinks? What music is playing in public spaces?

Further resources:

- Turismo de Pequeña Escala: Una mirada desde Cuba y Costa Rica. Center for Responsible Travel (2020).

- [GSTC Destination Criteria](#)
- SECTION C: Cultural sustainability
- C(a) Protecting cultural heritage
- C1 Protection of cultural assets
- C3 Intangible heritage
- C4 Traditional access



13. Operate business responsibly

Incentivize and reward tourism businesses and associated enterprises that support these principles through their actions and develop strong local supply chains that allow for higher quality products and experiences.

Several ways exist to systemize responsibility throughout a destination, even an entire country. There is a range of ways that this can be influenced - both at the destination level and among individual businesses.

At its simplest, a business can post its practices and values online and invite public feedback, which is important to avoid greenwashing. Beyond this, tourism businesses have the ability to influence other actors in the tourism value chain. A single tourism business may have hundreds of different suppliers - for example, a tour operator may partner with numerous hotels, restaurants, attractions, and transportation providers. By prioritizing eco-conscious and local suppliers, travel companies can facilitate the uptake of sustainable practices even beyond their own doors.

From the government side, tax incentives, regulations/policies, training programs, and business certification schemes can help. DMOs can showcase sustainable businesses in their marketing, diversifying their product offerings and attracting the responsible tourist.

Further resources:

- [GSTC Destination Criteria](#)
- SECTION B: Socio-economic sustainability
- B(a) Delivering local economic benefits
- B3 Supporting local entrepreneurs and fair trade