



Global Sustainable Tourism Council

40 years of Sustainable Tourism: Achievements, Challenges, and Prospects

31st APTA Annual Conference
Fukuoka, July 7, 2026

Randy Durband - CEO, GSTC

Mr. Randy Durband CEO, GSTC



- 1981-83 Academic Study Tours teaching assistant in Southeast Europe
- 1986-2009 Manager & Senior Executive of U.S.-based outbound tour operators
- Boards & committees of ETOA, USTOA, CTC, PATA ++
- 2009-2014 ICOMOS Int'l Cultural Tourism Committee
 - served on committee creating UNESCO World Heritage 1st ST policy
- 2012-13 GSTC Board member, introduced GSTC to Asia
- 2014-present CEO of GSTC

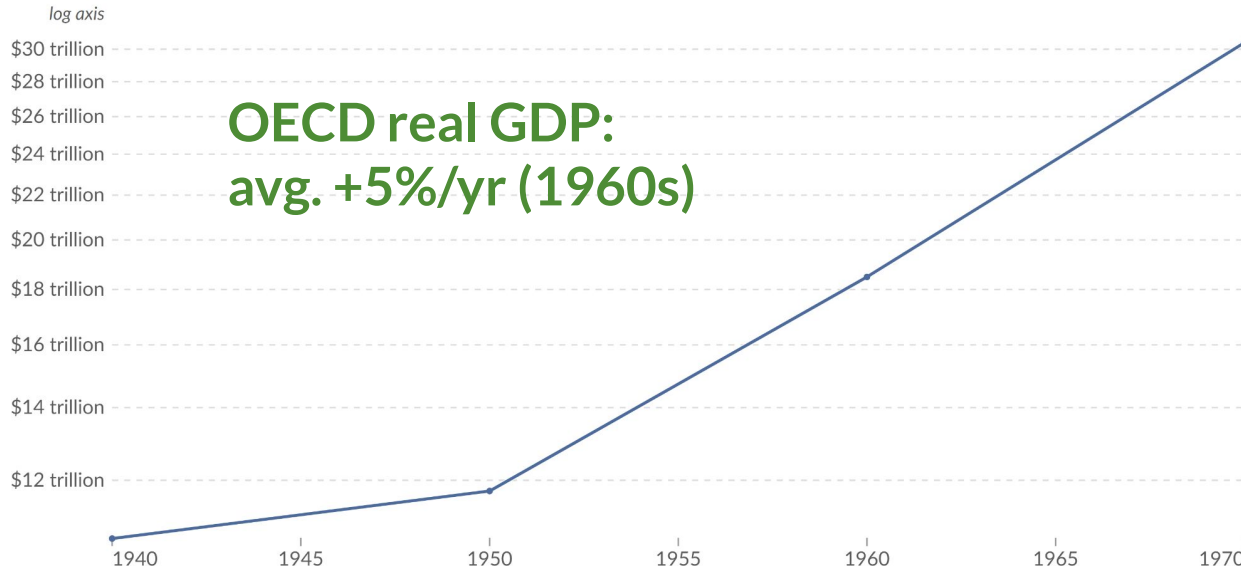
40+ years tourism on 7 continents – 30 years engagement in Asia

The Age of Growth, Until the 1970s

Global GDP over the long run

Our World
in Data

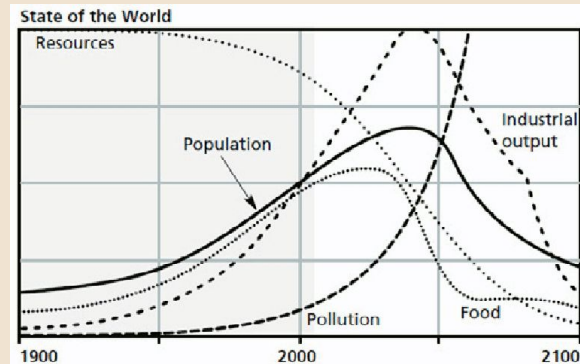
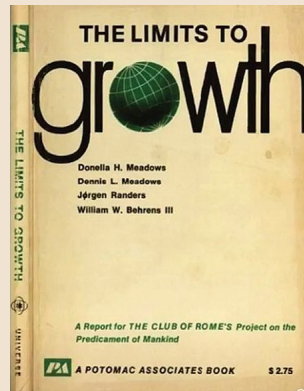
Total output of the world economy. These historical estimates of GDP are adjusted for inflation. We combine three sources to create this time series: the Maddison Database (before 1820), the Maddison Project Database (1820–1989), and the World Bank (1990 onward).



<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/global-gdp-over-the-long-run?yScale=log&time=1940..1970>

The World Begins to Question, in the Early 1970s

- Industrial growth was approaching planetary limits (Club of Rome, 1972)
- Economic, social, and ecological progress must advance together (United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, UNCHE, Stockholm, 1972)

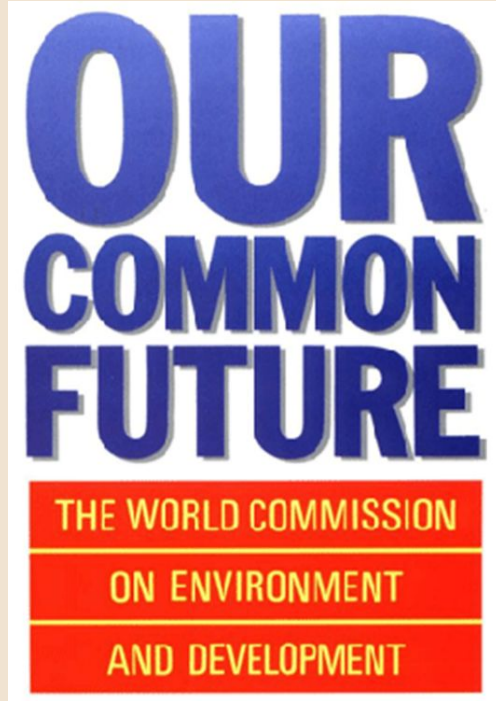


<https://www.issuesofsustainability.org/helpndoc-content/ClubofRomeLimitstoGrowth1972.html>



legal.un.org

Sustainable Development Entered the Global Agenda in the 1980s



“

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs

UNEP(1987). Our Common Future(Brundtland Report).

The World Agreed on a Blueprint in the Early 1990s

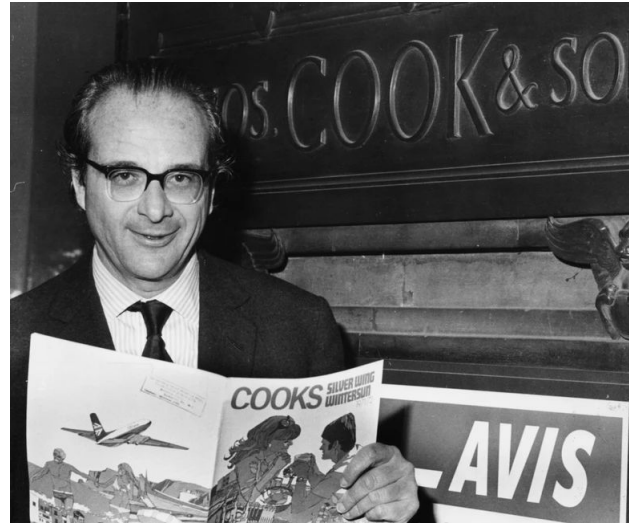
- 172 nations gathered in Rio de Janeiro and adopted Agenda 21, the first global action plan for sustainable development.
- Sustainable development was no longer a concept, it was an international obligation



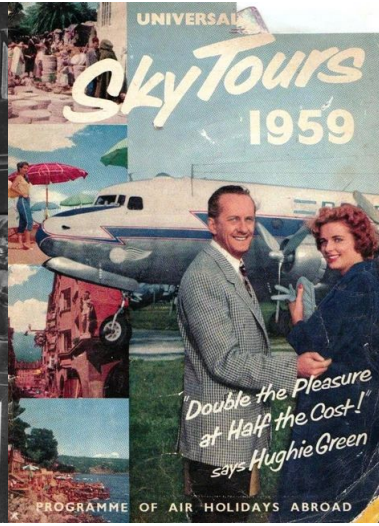
www.un.org

A Growing World, A Growing Tourism, Growing Problems

Growth of mass tourism and continued tourism development led to:
Ecosystem degradation, Cultural commodification, Economic leakage to foreign operators



Vladimir Raitz, Founder of the First Charter Package Holiday in 1949



Universal Sky Tours Brochure, 1959, The Jet Age Begins



Benidorm, 1964, when it was a small town that began to attract tourism

<https://www.historyextra.com/period/victorian/the-package-holiday-revolution/>

Global Responses to Tourism's Growing Pains, 1960–1980

- 1963 UN Conference on Tourism, Rome. First international forum on tourism.
- 1967 International Year of Tourism declared by the UN.
- 1975 World Tourism Organization (WTO) officially established.
- 1980 Manila Declaration, WTO Conference. 107 nations adopt declaration

Manila Declaration, 1980. 25 Articles, Summary

1. Tourism essential to social, cultural, and economic life of nations
2. Right to rest and leisure underlies tourism's growth
3. WTO entrusted with coordinating global tourism development
4. Access to holidays recognized as a human right
5. Constraints on tourism development should be studied and addressed
6. Tourism a major factor in global economy and trade
7. Domestic tourism should grow alongside international tourism
8. Economic returns alone cannot justify tourism policy
9. Tourism is a public need governments must support
10. Social tourism should serve the least privileged citizens
11. Tourism improves physical, mental, and social well-being
12. Tourism creates significant new employment
13. Tourism fosters international understanding and peace
14. Modern tourism carries cultural and moral value, not just economic
15. Youth, elderly, and disabled need active support for tourism access
16. Tourism can help reduce global economic inequality
17. Workers in tourism deserve fair conditions and union rights
18. Tourism resources must be protected from overuse and destruction
19. WTO plays central role in international tourism cooperation
20. Technical and financial cooperation benefits all parties equally
21. Tourism should prioritize human dignity over commercial interests
22. Tourism education should be part of civic and youth training
23. National policy must account for tourism's social role
24. States urged to implement the Conference's guidelines
25. WTO tasked with ensuring global implementation of the declaration

Sustainable Tourism Enters the Official Agenda in 1990s

- 1992 Rio Earth Summit. Agenda 21 references tourism, linking the sector to the global sustainability agenda
- 1995 **Lanzarote Charter, WTO and UNESCO**. Tourism sector's first response to Rio's Agenda 21, defining sustainable tourism and setting 18 guiding principles.

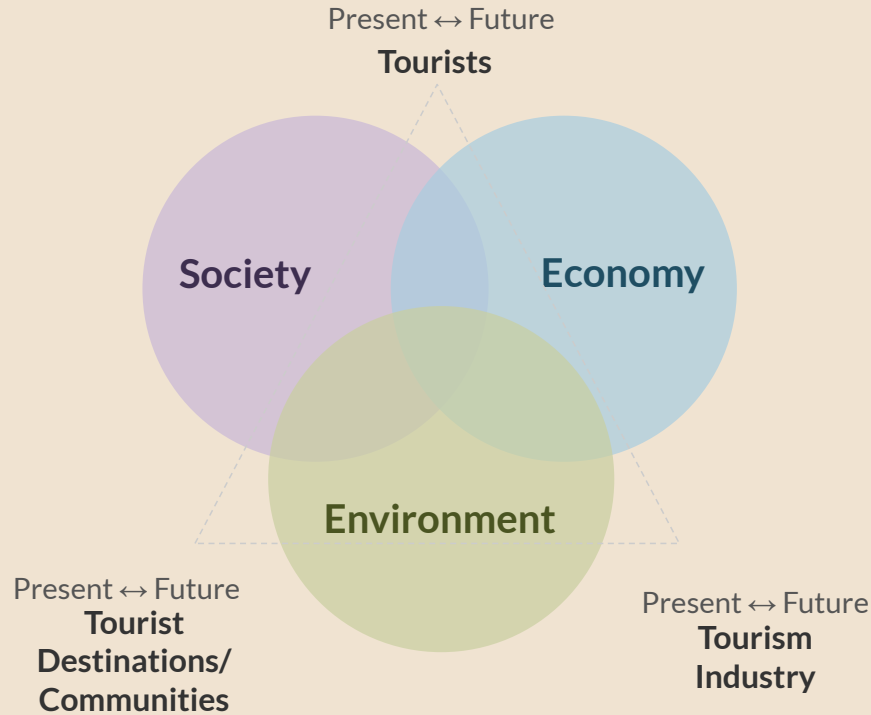
“ **Tourism development shall be based on criteria of sustainability, which means that it must be ecologically bearable in the long term, as well as economically viable, and ethically and socially equitable for local communities.**

Charter for Sustainable Tourism, World Conference on Sustainable Tourism, Lanzarote, 1995, Principle 1.

Lanzarote Charter, 18 Principles, Summary

1. Tourism development based on sustainability criteria
2. Tourism as a tool for sustainable development
3. Tourism must respect cultural heritage and local traditions
4. Solidarity and cooperation among all actors
5. Conservation of natural and cultural heritage
6. Quality criteria defined jointly with local communities
7. Tourism integrated into and benefiting the local economy
8. Tourism development must improve quality of life for all
9. Governments and NGOs to integrate tourism planning
10. Equitable distribution of tourism's benefits and burdens
11. Governments to prioritize aid for environmental quality
12. Special priority for environmentally and culturally vulnerable areas
13. Promotion of alternative forms of tourism
14. Open networks for research and knowledge transfer
15. Environmentally-compatible tourism management systems
16. Specific frameworks for sustainable tourism development
17. Attention to transport's environmental impact
18. Codes of conduct for sustainability among tourism actors

An Official Definition of Sustainable Tourism, by UNEP and UNWTO, 2005



Sustainable Tourism:

Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities.

UNEP and UNWTO(2005), Making Tourism More Sustainable

Kim et al. (2020). Sustainable Tourism Policy and Agenda, MCST, ROK

Sustainable tourism as a Philosophy of alternative tourism

Sustainable Tourism



Kim et al. (2020). Sustainable Tourism Policy and Agenda, MCST, ROK

Tourism Faced Its Climate Responsibility in the 2000s

- 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) established.
- 1997 **Kyoto Protocol**. Binding emissions targets for developed nations.
- 2007 **IPCC Fourth Assessment Report**. Confirms human-driven global warming.
- 2007 **Davos Declaration** on Climate Change and Tourism by UNWTO, UNEP, and WMO.

Tourism Industry shares

4.9%

of Global CO2 Emissions

UNWTO, UNEP, & WMO. (2008). *Climate Change and Tourism: Responding to Global Challenges*. UNWTO.

...The **Davos Declaration** demands the simultaneous implementation of actions to mitigate the impact of tourism on climate change, adapt to current and future climate changes, to develop new or apply existing technology to enhance energy efficiency...

Davos Declaration on Climate Change and Tourism, Second International Conference on Climate Change and Tourism, Davos, 2007.

The Industry Finds a Common Language in the new century

- 2000 Mohonk Mountain House, New York
- 2000 UNEP Tour Operator Initiative
- 2007 Partnership for Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria formed, led by Rainforest Alliance, UNEP, UN Foundation, and UNWTO
- 2008 First GSTC Industry Criteria released.
- 2010 Partnership for Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria and Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council merge to form the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)



UN Foundation
UNEP / UN Environment
UNWTO / UN Tourism
Rainforest Alliance

Tourism and the SDGs: A Shared Direction, in 2015

- 17 SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) adopted by the UN in 2015.
- Tourism explicitly referenced in Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth), Goal 12 (responsible consumption and production), and Goal 14 (life below water).



Tourism answers the Paris Agreement in 2021

- 2015 Paris Agreement adopted under the UNFCCC. 195 countries commit to limiting global warming to well below 2°C, with net zero emissions as the long-term goal.
- 2021 Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism, UNWTO, COP26. Tourism stakeholders worldwide commit to halving emissions by 2030 and reaching Net Zero by 2050



Glasgow Declaration
Climate Action in Tourism



<https://news.gtp.gr/2021/11/15/tourism-unites-cut-emissions-half-by-2030-achieve-net-zero-by-2050/>

New Challenges Keep Emerging

Overtourism

Venice, Barcelona, and Kyoto introduce visitor caps and tourist taxes

Pandemic (COVID-19)

International arrivals collapse by over 70% with Covid-19, exposing the sector's fragility

Climate disruption

Wildfires, heatwaves, and extreme weather increasingly disrupt destinations

Platform economy

Industry boundaries blur as platforms absorb tourism services

Labor shortages

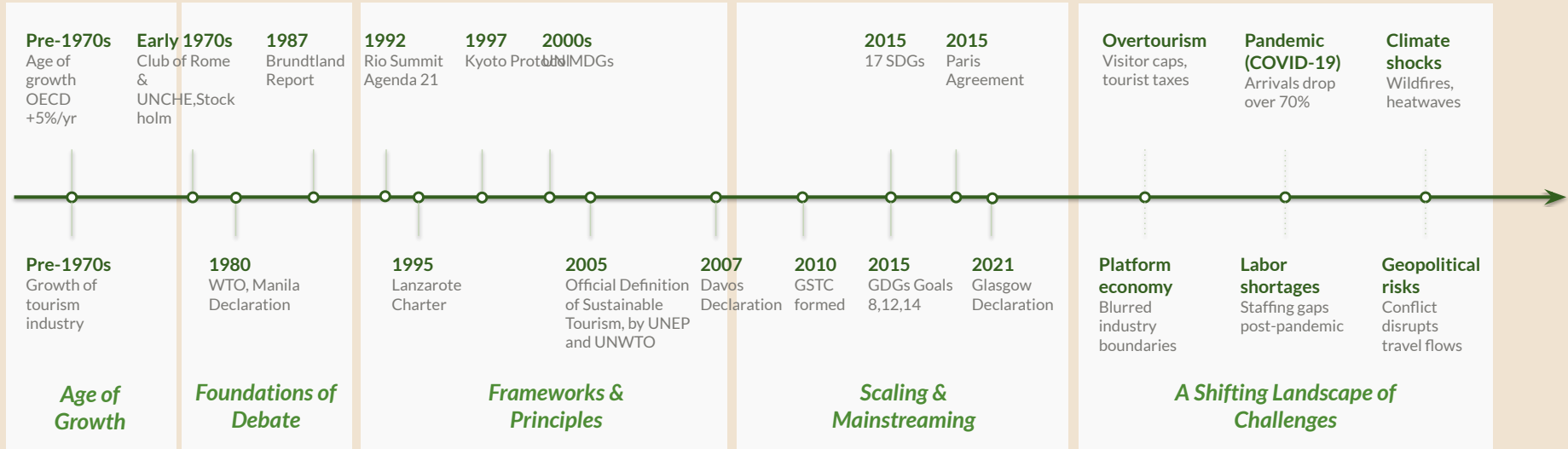
Post-pandemic vacancies strain hospitality and service quality worldwide

Geopolitical shocks

Conflict and instability redirect travel flows and disrupt routes

From Growth to Responsibility

Global / UN



Tourism sector

Awareness on the rise...

Negative Socio-Cultural Impacts

- Unchecked tourism growth can lead to negative impacts such as **loss of local identity and values** through commodification of cultures and unwanted changes to meet tourist demands.
- Host community members may develop **negative attitude** when tourism is not carefully managed, leading to friction and irritation.



Source: "Negative Socio-Cultural Impacts From Tourism", UN Environment

Negative Environmental Impacts

The negative impacts of tourism development can gradually **destroy the environmental resources on which it depends**, as uncontrolled conventional tourism puts enormous pressure on destinations and local environments through:

- Depletion of natural resources
- Pollution
- Physical impacts (degradation of ecosystems due to tourism infrastructure and activities)

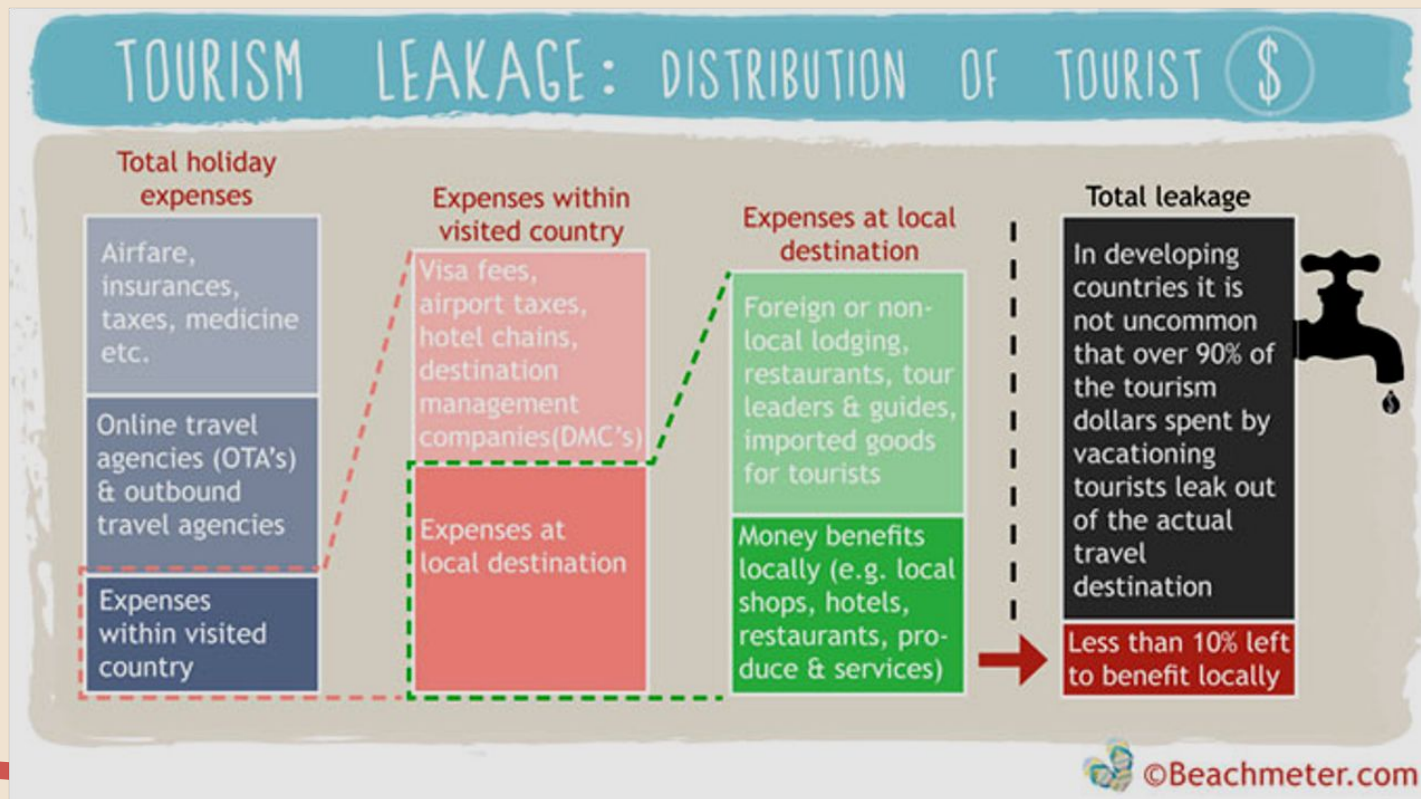
Source: “Tourism’s Three Main Impact Areas”, UN Environment



Global travel and tourism industry: **(at least) 8%** of global CO2 emissions



Leakages in tourism occur when tourists' dollars are used to purchase needed goods and services outside the host community



A slide from 15 years ago...

More of the world's 7 billion people are traveling....



Also 15 years ago...awakenings from within industry of challenges

Sustainable tourism helps safeguard resources that attract visitors (natural and cultural attractions, community experiences).

*In the end it's all about **protecting our product**.
If the product - our destinations - aren't protected
in **environmental and social** terms, then people
won't want to visit them, it is as simple as that."*
- John De Vial, Head of Financial Protection,
ABTA (The Travel Association)



Market research shows increasing demand for experiential travel; more visitors seeking authentic connection with local culture, food, customs, heritage, and people in destinations.

*Today's travelers want to experience the local culture, cuisine, activities, and so on . . . Seamless **connectivity to the local experiences** is [what] really drives value."*

(Forbes Travel Guide)



Photo by Catherine Germier-Hamel

2009-2013 a shift in focus from ecotourism and industry generally to Public Sector policy and destination stewardship

GSTC Hotel Standard

(2008, 2012, 2016, 2025)



GSTC Tour Operator Standard

(2008, 2012, 2016, 2025)



GSTC Destinations Standard

(2013, 2019)



GSTC MICE Standard

(2024)



GSTC Attraction Standard

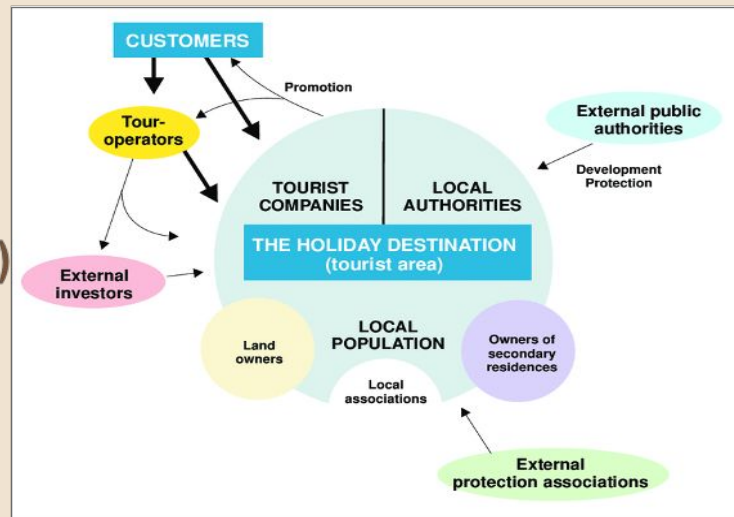
(2024)



Need a “whole government” approach

- Tourism
- Industry/Commerce
- Investment & Finance
- Transport (roadways & signposts, modes of travel for visitors, bus and train stations)
- Labor
- Rural Development
- Vocational Schools and Universities with tourism programs

INVESTMENT AND BUDGETING
MUST ENGAGE ALL OF THEM



St. Kitts Sustainable Destination Council

- SDC was established in 2013, as a result of St. Kitts' participation in the GSTC Early Adopters Program.
- SDC adheres to the principles of the GSTC Criteria for Destinations (GSTC-D A2).
- SDC serves as an advisory council for the Ministry of Tourism, with **the aim to increase opportunities for locals and tourists, and to act as destination stewards.**



Tourism for Tomorrow Awards –
Winner, Destination Stewardship
(2019)

Riverwind Foundation

Jackson Hole, Wyoming, USA

- Participated in the GSTC Early Adopters Program (2012).
- The Foundation created the Jackson Hole & Yellowstone Sustainable Program, including a Strategic Council of 57 public and private sector stakeholders and a Steering Committee of 12 key local sustainability leaders.
- “Jackson Hole Sustainability Code of Conduct” to engage travelers in sustainable tourism.



Tourism for Tomorrow Awards – Finalist,
Destination Category (2018)

Travel & Tourism Demand is Enormous and Growing

- The Asian Tiger and general global economic growth
- Low-cost air carriers
- Low-cost distribution and booking systems
- The sharing economy and technology supporting it
- Global culture promotes travel
- 1.5 billion international border crossings per year - but MOST TOURISM IS DOMESTIC
- Overtourism and community impacts

Tourism as % of GDP

		2018
1	Macau	72.2
2	Seychelles	67.1
3	Maldives	66.4
4	St Kitts and Nevis	62.4
5	Grenada	56.6
6	Vanuatu	48.0
7	Cape Verde	46.2
8	St Vincent and the Gre...	45.5
9	Belize	44.9
10	Antigua and Barbuda	44.1
11	St Lucia	41.8
12	Bahamas	40.4
13	Fiji	38.9
14	Barbados	34.9
15	Jamaica	34.0



Major Challenges & Obstacles

- Franchise model in international hotel groups; owners choose the level of sustainability, not the brands
- Lack of industry action to combat inferior sustainability labels
- Lack of measurement
 - ◆ which directly creates limitations in reporting
- True commitment is limited – more talk than action

Market demand is evolving

- Need to distinguish retail from wholesale distribution, internal operations from supply chain development, talk from action
- A demographic shift from Europe-led to global youth-led
- [booking.com](https://www.booking.com) and [trip.com](https://www.trip.com) produced the best data on market demand
- Public sector initiatives are maturing in response to market preferences and to overtourism / citizen protest pressures
- Business /Corporate Travel and MICE tend to develop more coherent sustainability programs than does leisure travel

Bridging the Gap: Words vs Actions

92.0% of respondents acknowledge the importance of sustainable travel. But this belies a gap in expected and actual actions. Some travellers exhibit a low willingness to convert verbal commitment into concrete action.



Travellers who may consider sustainable travel vs those who don't

92.0% vs **8.0%**



Travellers who may
consider sustainable travel

Travellers who don't
consider sustainable travel

Trip.com Group Sustainable Travel Consumer Report 2024

However, only 56.9% of the respondents said they have practised sustainable travel. The disparity could result from an array of factors. A principal reason people give for not choosing or prioritising sustainable travel is 'a lack of clear understanding of the concept'. This underscores the significance of user education in promoting more sustainable travel.



The top 3 reasons for not pursuing a sustainable trip:

48.1% are not entirely clear on the concept

32.0% doubt the authenticity of sustainable products or initiatives

22.4% fail to see how sustainability can enhance the travel experience

More Cost-Conscious Consumers

Apart from a lack of user education, growing price sensitivity at a time of economic challenge and soaring living costs contributes to people's ambivalence toward sustainable travel, which often comes with extra fees.



The proportion of people comfortable paying extra for more sustainable travel products declines with the increase in cost.



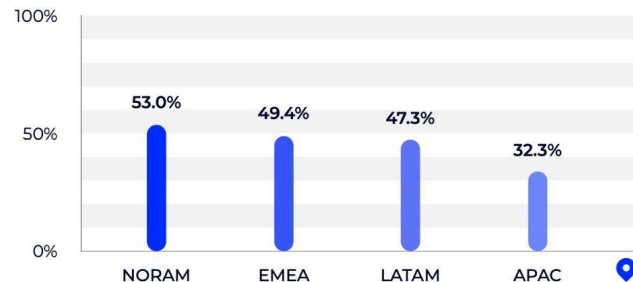
Despite varying degrees of responsiveness to price, respondents across all regions expect travel providers to present information related to sustainability, something they see as a consumer right.

Trip.com Group Sustainable Travel Consumer Report 2024

Breakdown by region

APAC travellers might be less aware of what sustainable travel entails, but they are generally more comfortable with a premium for more sustainable options. In contrast, **NORAM** and **EMEA** travellers are less willing to pay more for sustainable travel.

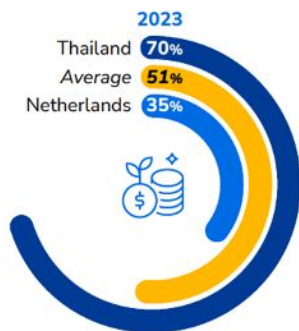
Travellers unwilling to pay more for sustainable travel within each region:





74%
want travel
companies to offer
more sustainable
travel choices

(up from **66%**
from 2022)



51%
believe there
are not enough
sustainable travel
options

Despite good intentions, **44%**
of travelers don't know where
to find more sustainable
options. For example:

75%
seek authentic
experiences that are
representative of the
local culture



40%
don't know how or
where to find tours
and activities that
will ensure they give
back to the local
community

Source: [booking.com](https://www.booking.com) report 2024

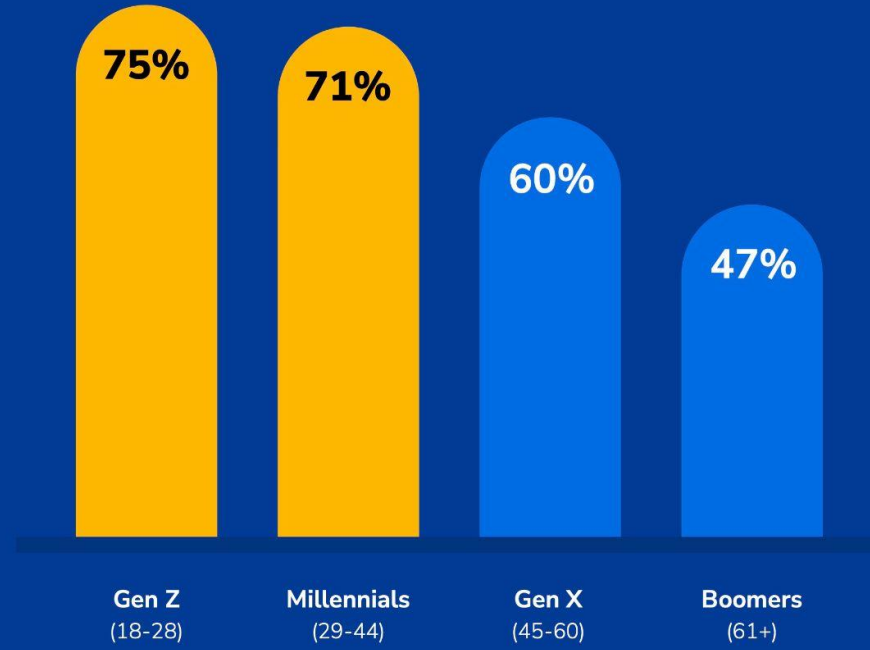
Younger Generations Show Stronger Intentions to Travel More Sustainably

While **85%** of travelers say that more sustainable travel is important or very important to them, this year's research highlights a generational paradox:

Younger generations express stronger sustainability intentions but take fewer practical actions

While older generations demonstrate greater commitment through concrete behaviors despite being less vocal in their beliefs.

Intention to Travel More Sustainably
in the Next 12 Months



Source: [booking.com](https://www.booking.com) Travel & Sustainability Report 2026 page 5

Older Generations Show Stronger Commitment to Taking Action

Plan to Reduce General Waste on Trips



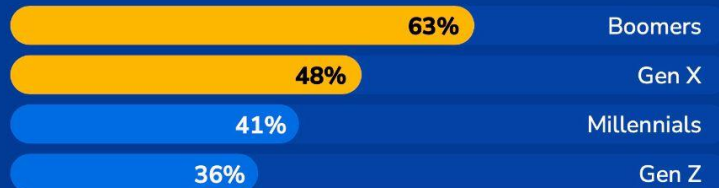
Plan to Shop at Local Stores on Trips



Plan to Reduce Energy Consumption on Trips



Plan to Travel Outside of Peak Season



Source: [booking.com](https://www.booking.com/sustainability-report-2026) Travel & Sustainability Report 2026 page 7

Some of the earliest widely published market demand surveys...

Demand is growing for sustainability

- 1 in 2 consumers would be willing to book a more sustainable holiday if available *(TUI Travel global research 2010)*
- 79% of travelers place importance on hotels implementing eco-friendly practices



(TripAdvisor online survey Dec 2012 – Jan 2013, participants from 26 countries)

Progress on sustainability

- Smaller and mid-sized brands performing well where major brands struggle to implement across their units
- Movement on measurement and reporting
- National and subnational public sector programs – Türkiye hotels, Norway destinations, Singapore broadly, Slovenia with industry, Sudtirol region of Northern Italy
- Action increasingly follows initial periods of “talk but no action”

Essential Components of a Systematic Approach to Sustainable Tourism



Standards



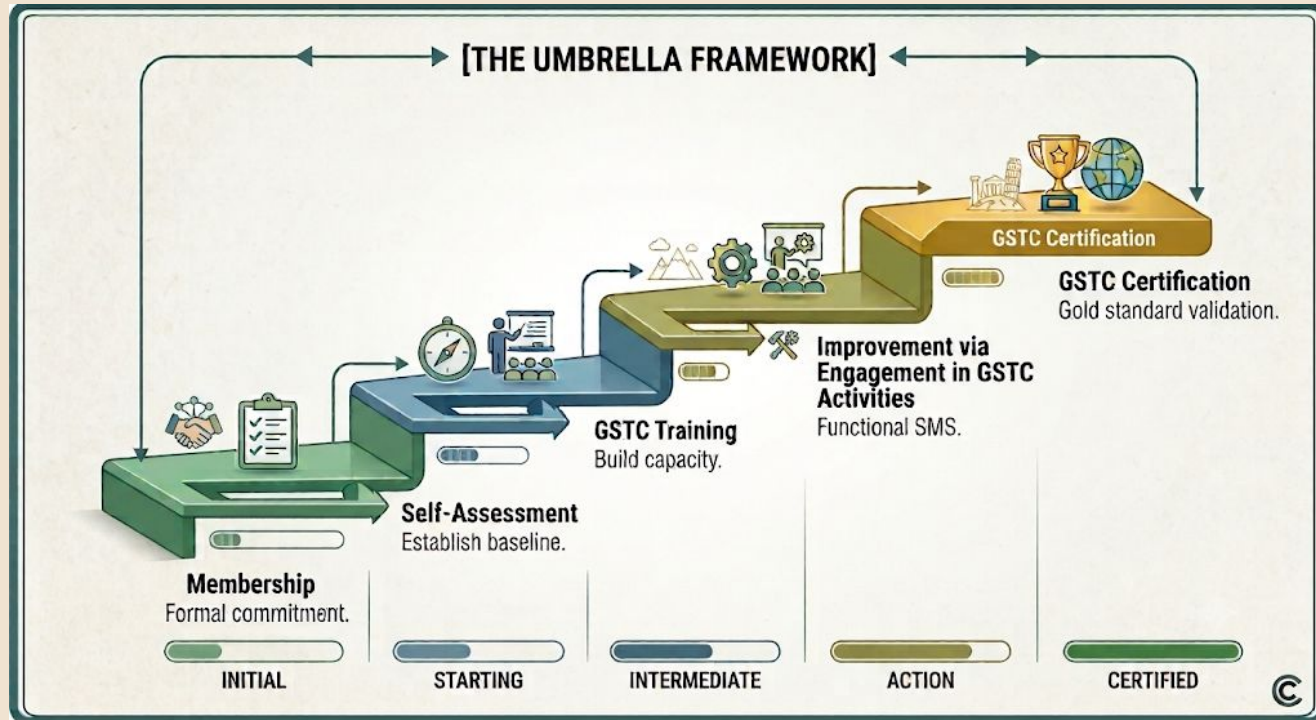
Measurement



Verification

External & 3rd-party
the highest quality of verification is
accredited certification

New focus on improvement plans



National Frameworks for Sustainable Tourism

- National Policy: various degrees of guidance and regulation
- Supporting better management of local destinations
- Encouraging or pushing industry to improvement
 - Regulatory
 - Incentives / rewards
 - Marketing support / recognition
 - Guidance and training

National Frameworks for Sustainable Tourism

- National Policy: various degrees of guidance and regulation
- Supporting better management of local destinations
- Encouraging or pushing industry to improvement
 - Regulatory: consumer protection in the EU; mandate for hotels in Türkiye
 - Incentives / rewards - Singapore, Saudi Arabia
 - Marketing support / recognition - Switzerland
 - Guidance and training - several cases

Certification for supply chain development
businesses that contract with hotels, tour
operators transport providers, MICE venues
and PCOs should urge them to implement
preferred contracting of GSTC-certified
businesses

this drives responsible production which
enables responsible consumption



The two strategies for **public** and **private sectors** have the same goal and operate in tandem



Introducing GSTC's new Futures Lab

1. **About** - Research and practice bridge within GSTC, advancing evidence-based sustainable tourism
2. **Team** - Led by Dr. Mihee Kang, with a team of 4 PhD/doctors with 15+ years of experience as professors and policy researchers
3. **Collaboration Opportunities**

GSTC research: Original research to advance the evidence base for sustainable tourism

GSTC Brief: Quarterly publication on key sustainable tourism issues

GSTC Research Digest: Quarterly digest of recent academic research, featuring an interview with the author

GSTC Academic Symposium: Annual symposium in conjunction with the GSTC Conference

Externally funded research: Research grants from international organizations (e.g. UN, EU, WB, GGGI)

My List of Academic Research Needs & Opportunities

- Impacts of certification
 - Especially the Turkish model with the legal mandate
 - Filter out “bad” certification
- Measurement skills and process in tourism
- The franchise model as an obstacle to sustainability in the hospitality industry
- Still immature tourism management and development from the public sector globally

Thank you!

