Make Change - Travel more sustainable!

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First and foremost the Belgrade Open School express heartfelt appreciation to young people from Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Austria, Moldova, and Romania – who took part in the competition „50 Ideas for Europe". Young people have been a real motivation, and their innovative and creative ideas a key in establishing this analysis and publication.

OPENS

OPENS is the Federation of Associations whose task is to show along, with its partners through a set of activities, projects, programs, events, initiatives, that there are many doors which can be opened for the transfer of energy, knowledge, experience, information, as well as that the capacities of young people can thereby be empowered

Make Change - Travel more sustainable!

Most of us just love to travel! No matter if it is school trip, excursion, traveling for work or for educational purposes. There is just something exciting in visiting new places and meeting new cultures and different people. European Union is about free movement. Four freedoms of the European Union include free movement of goods, services, capital and of course, persons. In the whole world, but especially in Europe, free movement of people is easier and cheaper than ever before. Traveling was never so easy and accessible as it is today. Well, not precisely today since 2020 is specific as it is, but generally people travel more than ever before. In 2019 number of international tourist arrivals reached 1.5 billion. Travel industry become third largest export category. Huge number of tourists moving around causes a lot of problems and damage to local community and nature, and tourism definitely plays role in climate crisis. In fact, a [2018 study](#) found that tourism accounts for 8% of the world's carbon emissions.

Having this in mind, it may seem strange, but situation with pandemic brought at least something good – nature started to recover. Due to significantly lesser number of tourists in 2020, many natural landscapes started to re-generate, wild animals can go back to their habitats which are usually crowded with tourists, and we all have seen photos of some of the most popular touristic spots empty, for the first time in a while.

Nevertheless, situation of restricted travel activities will not last forever, and in the foreseen future we will be able to travel freely again. It is good opportunity to use time until then to redefine the way we were traveling, and to change our travel habits so we become more sustainable travelers.

This publication intends to explain negative effects of huge number of touristic visits, but also to provide tips and tricks for "green traveling" which will have positive impact not only on nature and local communities and people, but also on traveler itself.

Overtourism – what is it?

Trying to cross Carl's bridge at noon, or to walk up and down Maria Hilfe street nonchalantly seems almost impossible. At the touristic peak visiting Dubrovnik become a nightmare.

Large number of visitors has impact on local community. Overcrowded cities, noise, traffic jam, higher prices of basically everything, from food to accommodation, huge amounts of garbage have strong impact on local community and influence quality of life of a local population. On the other hand natural sports are becoming more and more popular in recent years which led to reduction in number of wild animals and plants. Huge growth of tourism influences people and wild life, and in recent years tourism creates more problems than benefits.

This increase in the number of tourists in certain areas lead to phenomena of overtourism. It can be defined as an excessive number of visitors heading to famous locations, damaging the environment and having a damaging impact on resident's lives. Overcrowded streets, impossibility to view landmarks because of too many people, degradation of the environment are all signs that overtourism occurred. Overtourism occurs when the negative aspects outweigh the benefits. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) also recognized overtourism as a one of the burning issues.

FUN FACT

Term overtourism was coined recently after travel industries started to point out negative impacts of the holiday industry. Even though it is not a new problem, it came under the spotlight recently, in 2017 after local residents in overcrowded touristic destinations raised their voice and organized marches in the streets. Protests spread quickly and mass gatherings were organized in Barcelona, Venice and Dubrovnik, graffiti saying "Tourists go home" were created and local authorities had to give response by increasing fees, refusing to issue permits for tourist-focused business in city centres and they even closed entire places for visitors.

In 2018, the Oxford English Dictionary made overtourism, one of its words of the year.

What causes overtourism?

Chasing numbers – number of touristic visits per year represents main indicator of success in tourism. For this reason governments refrained from for introducing measures that can lower the number of tourists, such as increasing tourist taxes, or trying to ensure that tourist's behavior is not harmful, but it is beneficial for local community.

Cheap flights and more accommodation available – Cheaper flights made travel more accessible to larger number of people. Number of flights is rising from year to year. Besides, after Airbnb appeared, thousands of units of accommodation become available for passengers.

The summer holiday season and national holidays – Touristic seasons are usually periods when overtourism occurs. People travel more during summer season and holidays. Crowd will grow as visitors from around the world visit "must see" destinations in short period of time.

The giant cruise ship – Cruise ships land on beachside destinations, or ports in the cities and unload large number of tourists at once. Port cities as well as small islands with exotic beaches suffer from this problem.

Consequences of overtourism

Destruction of natural ecosystems – Plants and animals are usually first to suffer in the popular touristic spots. Environmental issues that are result of huge number of visitors lead to destruction f the entire ecosystems. Coral reefs are largely destroyed by tourists directly or indirectly – big cruise ships are large polluters of the sea and oceans.
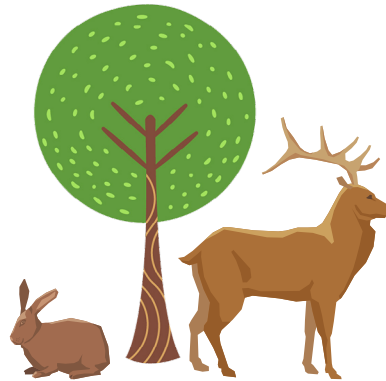
Amount of waste is rising – Tourists leave a lot of waste! Large accumulation of waste as a consequence of the mass tourism created big environmental problems of disposal and pollution in many areas. Another big problem is that waste tourists produce is usually not differentiated.

Escape and mistreatment of local residents – Overtourism affects local residents a lot. Housing prices are much higher as well as prices in restaurants and bars. Noise, traffic jams, crowded streets force many residents to leave their cities, especially during touristic season. Besides, small local shops are being replaced by big chains of luxury shops that attract tourists.

Combat overtourism – Tips&tricks for "green" traveling

"Green" tourism is used as an umbrella term that covers broad spectrum of terms from sustainable tourism and ecotourism to responsible tourism and it implies responsible travel practices that strive to benefit the environment and the social and economic well-being of the local people.

Before we dive into tips and tricks for more sustainable travel we should clarify some terms related to green tourism.

Sustainable tourism - Tourism that leads to the management of all resources in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life-support systems.

Ecotourism - Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, socially and economically sustains the well-being of local people, and creates knowledge and understanding through interpretation and education of all involved (including staff, travelers, and community residents).

Geotourism - Tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place – its environment, heritage, aesthetics, culture, and well-being of its residents.

Pro-Poor Tourism - Tourism that results in increased net benefit for the poor people in a destination.

Ethical Tourism - Tourism in a destination where ethical issues are the key driver, e.g. social injustice, human rights, animal welfare, or the environment.

Responsible Tourism - Tourism that maximizes the benefits to local communities, minimizes negative social or environmental impacts, and helps local people conserve fragile cultures and habitats or species.

➡ **Here are some tips how to travel more green and to reduce your carbon footprint while traveling.**

1. If travel to nearby destination avoid planes – taking just one flight can produce more CO_2 emission than some people produce in an entire year. You don't have to give up flying completely, just try to use it when traveling on far away destinations.

2. Pack light – Lighter luggage means less fuel no matter if you travel by plane, bus, car or train. Bring clothes that you can wear multiple times, and save space by putting toiletries into smaller, reusable bottles.

3. Spend more time in one destination – Instead of running from one to another destination in order to visit all "must-see" places, try to spend more time on one destination. Doing this will reduce emission of CO_2 ypu produce while traveling from one to another place, but it will also allow you to experience destination fully and more genuine.

4. Use local services – stay in local hotel, eat in local restaurants and take tour with local operators. In this way you will support jobs and generate income for local community members.

5. Save water, electricity and avoid overusing of plastic – Switch off lights, turn down air condition and electronics, take shorter showers and avoid singe use plastic. In this way you will conserve water and energy and keep destination cleaner.

6. Participate in the local activities and buy meaningful souvenirs – attend cooking class, buy hand crafted souvenir and support local culture in this way. Try to buy souvenir that you will actually use.

7. Use the "do not disturb" sign in accommodation – Hotel staff is doing best to provide you with excellent service, but do you really need clean towels and your room vacuumed every day? Excessive usage of detergents and chemicals in general, in hotels is a huge problem.

8. Use efficient transport to explore destination – try to use public transport, instead renting car – take a bus, tramp or simply use metro to move around the place. If you are into active travel you can also take a bicycle or explore place by foot.

9. Book eco friendly accommodation – When search accommodation, choose one that is dedicated to protection environment. Many hotels are eco friendly in a sense that they have installed energy efficient fixtures, use renewable energy or use local products. Visit website of the hotel before book, to check if they use eco-friendly practices.

10. Support sustainable tourism initiatives – Find a nonprofit organization that is advocating for sustainability in tourism and see if there is a way to support them.

PAY ATENTION

Green washing

Green washing is form of marketing where companies are making misleading claims about sustainability of their products, policies and goals so they appear to be more environmentaly friendly than they are in practice. In order to myximize profit, companies are spending more money to convince customers that their goods/services are eco friendly, than money they spend to actually itroduce bussines practices that are their more sustainable.

For example in 2018 Starbucks decided to ban plastic straws and introduced strawless lid that actually had more plastic than old lid and straw together. In tourism, example is TripAdvisor that claims to be environmental friendy but still offers services that can be harmful for environement – like tours to walk with wild animals. Another common situation wher greenwashing occurs is that „eco-friendly" hotels still employs cheap labour from foreign countries instead providing jobs for local population.

Best way to combat greenwashing is to inform well and do research before you travel or decide to give your trust to a certain brand.

Useful resources

For additional information on this topic you can visit websites of 10 most important responsible travel organizations listed below:

1. [The Center For Responsible Travel](#)
2. [Destination Stewardship Center](#)
3. [Ethical Traveler](#)
4. [Global Ecotourism Network](#)
5. [Global Sustainable Tourism Council](#)
6. [The International Ecotourism Society](#)
7. [Green Globe Travel](#)
8. [International Sustainable Tourism Initiative](#)
9. [Sustainable Travel International](#)
10. [United Nations World Tourism Organization](#)