

Our Chance to Rethink Tourism: Regenerative and Beyond

Now is time to plan a sustainable, long-lasting
corona recovery. Technology must help.

*Presented by Jonathan Tourtellot,
Director, Destination Stewardship Center;
Co-chair, GSTC Destination Stewardship Working Group*



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National Geographic
Traveler magazine
1991-2011

Launched
Sustainable
Tourism
Initiative
2001



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I worked with NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELER for 20 years,
launching the Society-sponsored **Sustainable Tourism Initiative** in
2001.

- Crass over-development
- Crowding
- Cultural degradation
- Pollution
- Ecological damage
- Ugliness
- Social problems

The two faces of tourism



- Economic benefit
- Cultural pride
- Conservation of historic and natural sites
- Public education
- International understanding



DESTINATION
STEWARDSHIP CENTER

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During my first few years at Traveler, I came to appreciate the two faces of tourism.



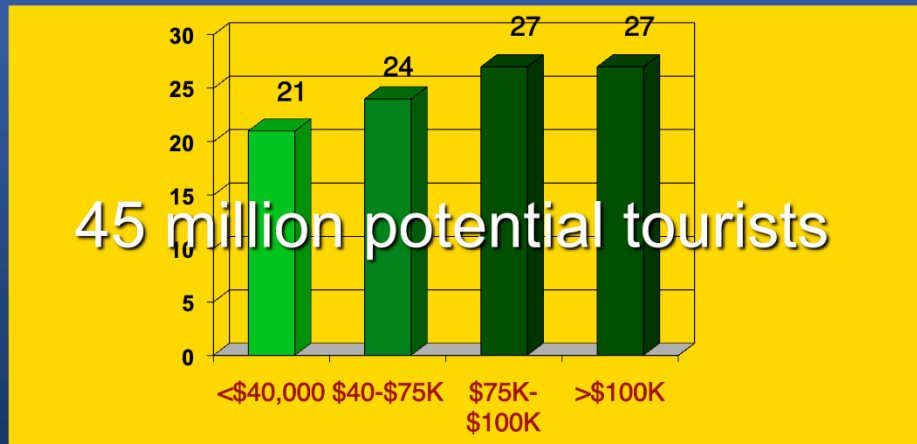
Corona recovery should avoid a repeat of overtourism, seeking instead a mutually beneficial relationship between visitors and locals. The schoolgirl is welcoming ecotourists whose operator is bringing needed school supplies.

Ecotourism grows



Gannet colony, Newfoundland—an ecotourism attraction.

Bird diversity is an asset. Percent of Americans who like watching birds, by household income.



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As a component of travel, bird watching skews toward the affluent, creating an incentive to protect bird habitat.

Source: National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service* and *U.S. Census Bureau*

Can we afford sustainability
while trying to survive
the pandemic crisis?



We must.
Sustainability
/S survival.



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Tourism did not cause the virus, but it did speed its spread. Humankind's unsustainable tendency to exploit natural resources without regard to consequences – such as in wildlife-packed wet markets and decimated rain forests – has been shown to favor the introduction of new viruses.

Coronavirus
notwithstanding,
climate change
remains a
paramount issue
for destinations



Tourist rental,
North Carolina,
USA

Global warming impacts coastal tourism and air travel, among many effects.

Protecting the planet for all destinations



- Greenhouse gases
- Waste disposal
- Water management
- Pollution
- Sea rise
- Growing disease risk
- Plastics, etc.



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To these hazards, add mismanaged tourism itself.

Badly managed tourism



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Thoughtless tourism development has put the famous Angkor ruins at risk, not only from being literally worn down by relentless foot traffic, but from the overbuilt hotel district in nearby Siem Reap that depletes the water table and destabilizes the ruins. Many World Heritage sites suffer similar pressures.

Your guide to the
overtourism problem:

Mona Lisa

Size:
77 cm x 53 cm



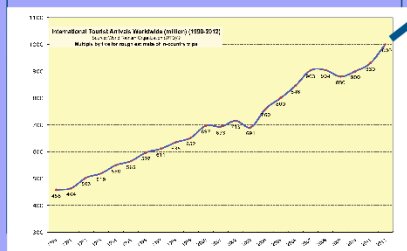
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I'll use one of the world's most famous tourist attractions to illustrate the arrival of overtourism.

“By 2050, three billion people will be enjoying middle class wealth.”
—David Scowsill, CEO, WTTC,
April 2013

**3 billion
international
arrivals!?**

Tourism growth since 1990



Drivers of overtourism
will eventually return:

- Population
- Affluence
- Technology (Internet, transportation, etc.)

1990

2016

2050

Not too long ago, Mr Scowsill, then CEO of the World Travel and Tourism Council, suggested that arrivals could reach **3 billion by 2050**. The challenge is simple arithmetic: We cannot continue cramming infinitely growing numbers of people into finite spaces and places.

International arrivals have increased – until 2020– 40 times
since international air travel began ramping up in 1960.

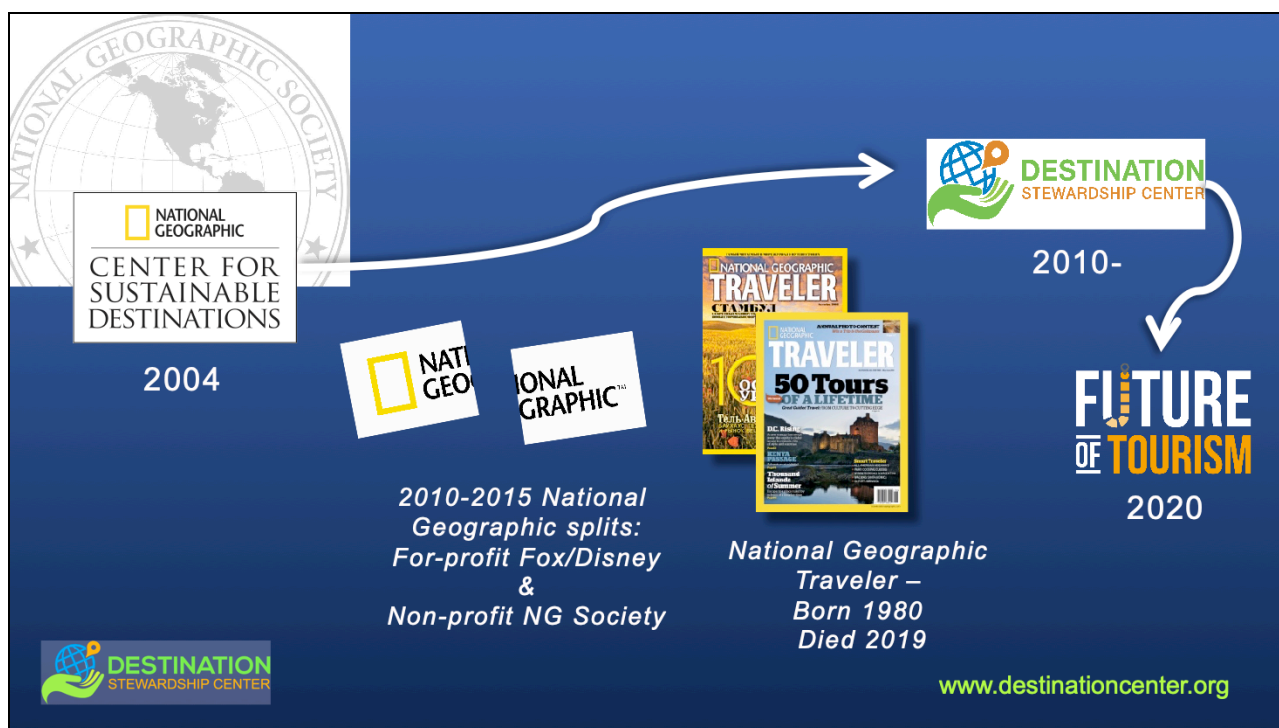
5 people in 1960 > 200+ people in 2019 ?!?!



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5 people in 1960 > 200+ people in 2019





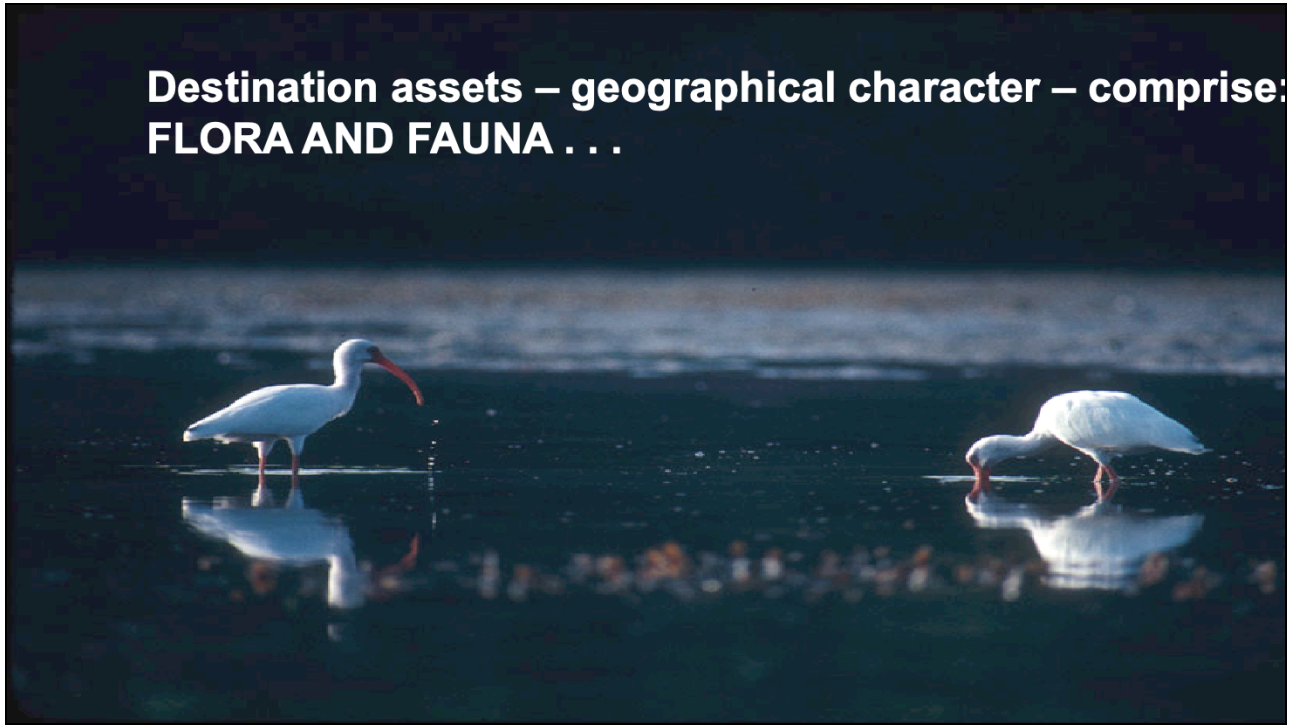
A destination stewardship council can shape a recovery that fits the vision of constructive tourism (“geotourism”) defined via National Geographic as:

‘Tourism that sustains or enhances the **geographical character** of a place —

- its environment,
- geology
- culture,
- aesthetics,
- heritage, and
- the well-being of its residents’ = ‘regenerative tourism’

This definition, which we introduced in 2002 when I worked at National Geographic, sums up the intent of the GSTC Destination Criteria. “Geographical character” – sense of place – drives tourism and relies on numerous destination characteristics.

**Destination assets – geographical character – comprise:
FLORA AND FAUNA . . .**



HISTORY

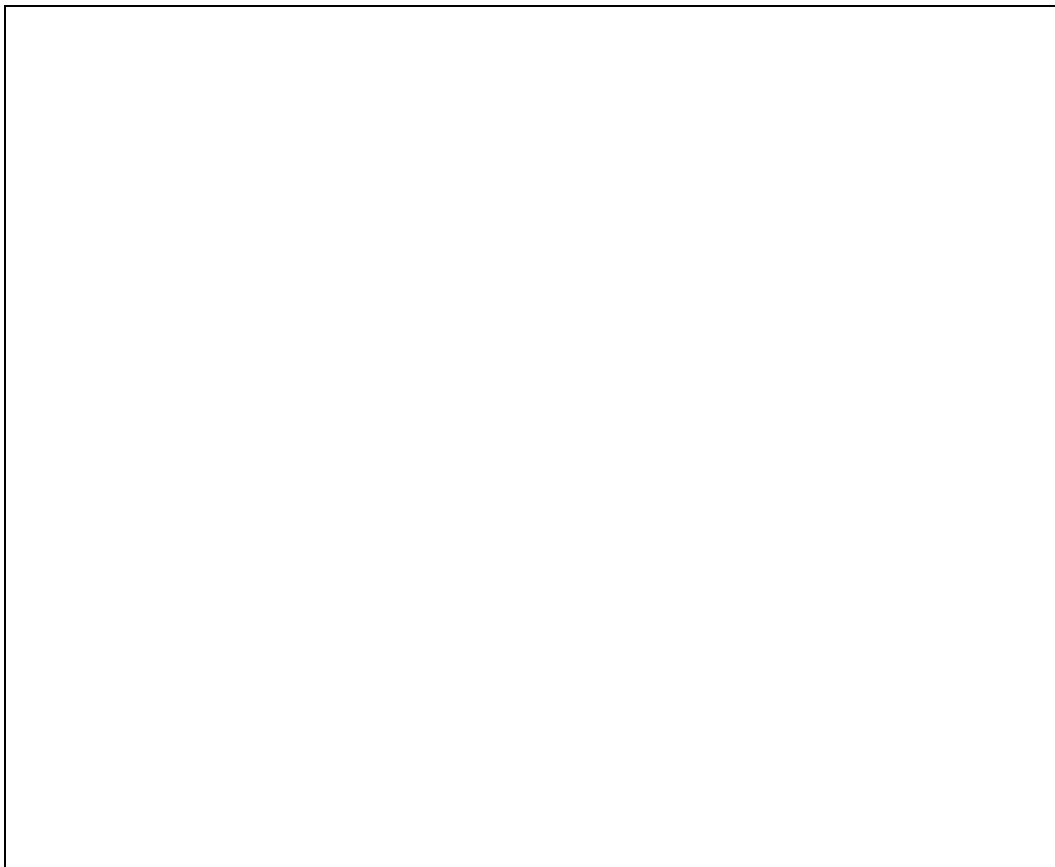


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SCENIC PLACES



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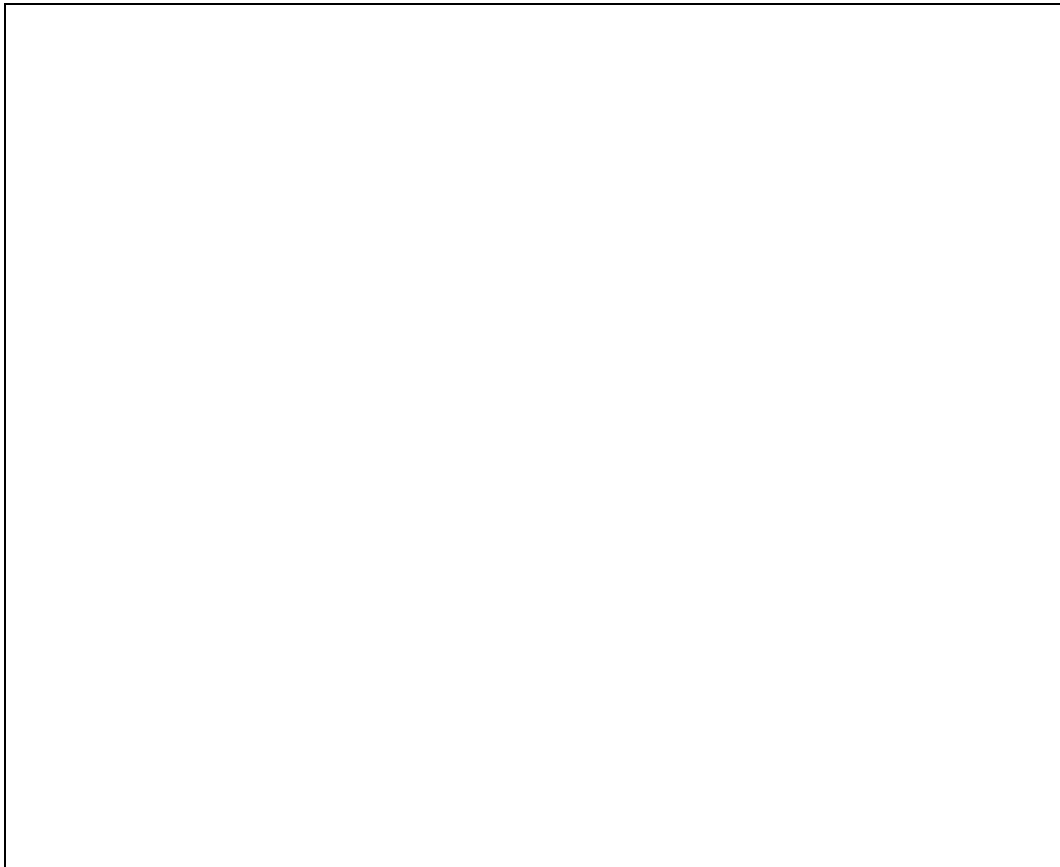
ARCHAEOLOGY

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GEOLOGY



Incidentally, you may hear geologists use “geotourism” to mean “geological tourism”—a very narrow niche!—but one that still falls within the broader, geographical definition.



SPIRITUAL PLACES



DISTINCTIVE CUISINE



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LOCAL MUSIC



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DANCES

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LOCAL CRAFTS AND ARTISANRY

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ARTS

Many small/medium
businesses related
to local culture



Creative entrepreneurs can add texture to the travel experience. Their enterprises add to “sense of place” – what most people travel for. Recovery from the 2020 pandemic should emphasize support for restarting distinctive small businesses and creating new ones to replace the many that will be lost.

The travel editor's conclusion:

**DESTINATIONS ARE A HOLISTIC PRODUCT,
AND A HOLISTIC PRODUCT REQUIRES
HOLISTIC MANAGEMENT.**



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STRUCTURING HOLISTIC MANAGEMENT



To coordinate all these diverse aspects of destination stewardship, GSTC Destination Criterion A1 calls for a coordinated response.



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Criterion A1 Destination management responsibility

The destination has an effective **organization, department, group, or committee** responsible for a coordinated approach to sustainable tourism, **with involvement by the private sector, public sector and civil society**. This group has defined responsibilities, oversight, and implementation capability for the management of **socio-economic, cultural and environmental issues**. The group ... follows principles of sustainability and transparency in its operations and transactions.

In summary, a “destination stewardship council” or “collaborative”.



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Barcelona's new approach to success

The Strategic Plan for Tourism 2020 'aims to break the dichotomy that has traditionally separated "tourism" from the "rest of the city". Tourism is not an outside phenomenon, something unconnected with the city; rather, tourism is an inherent and integral part of the current urban phenomenon.'



**Barcelona City and Tourism Council,
'an open, diverse, and
participatory civic body**

*set up to discuss what
kind of city we want and,
therefore, what kind of
tourism suits the city best.'*

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Barcelona appears to have closed the Kuznets perception gap.



Management disconnect between marketing and stewardship

Example: Ireland's popular Cliffs of Moher.

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This is a popular destination on the west coast of Ireland. The Cliffs of Moher Geopark meets some of GSTC's Criterion A1 for a destination stewardship council. But not all.



To protect the destination and its reputation, park managers wanted to raise tour-bus parking fees, but . . .

. . . County Clare government wanted more tourists.



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This gap between stewardship and governmental marketing ambitions is common worldwide. In County Clare the two points of view have since been reconciled – to an extent.

Why the disconnect?

The tourism industry is often seen as simply the sum total of business transactions – the sector's contribution to Gross Domestic Product.

Economist Simon Kuznets, the Nobel-winning architect of GDP, would disagree.

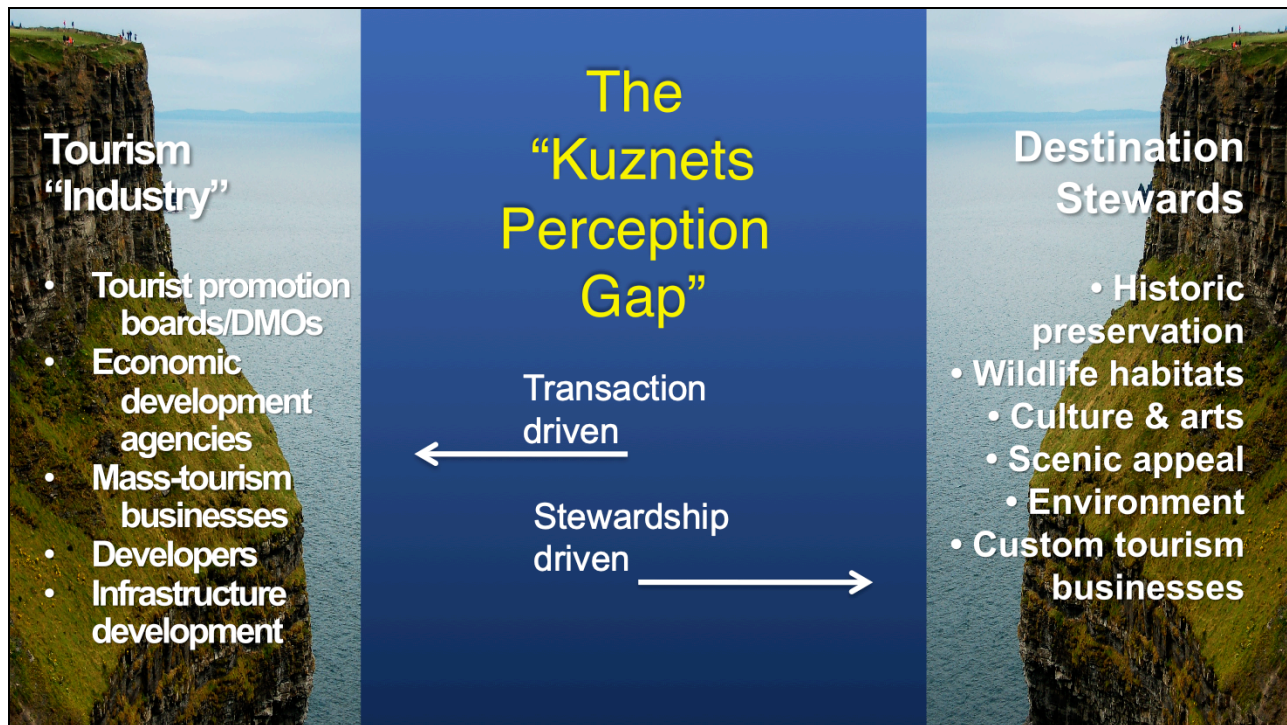


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Kuznets won the Nobel for his work in the 1930s but became distraught at the way governments were embracing his tool to the exclusion of all other considerations.



Guided by revenue metrics alone, government policy often leans toward the “industry” side, with little regard to the stewardship side. Civic engagement, enlightened business, and a collaborative approach can change that and bridge the “Kuznets Gap”.



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A2 Destination management strategy and action plan

“ The destination has . . . a multi-year . . . plan that is publicly available. . . developed **with stakeholder engagement** and is based on sustainability principles. The strategy includes an identification and assessment of tourism assets and considers **socio-economic, cultural and environmental** issues and risks. . . .”



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A tourism management plan is essential, yet few destinations have one. Corona recovery provides an excellent argument for creating one.

One of a destination council's first projects should be to create a tourism management plan with input by all stakeholders, especially the community.

Ask resident communities,

Which visitors do we want?



To ensure sustained and beneficial demand,
plan not for “tourism,” but for the best tourists.



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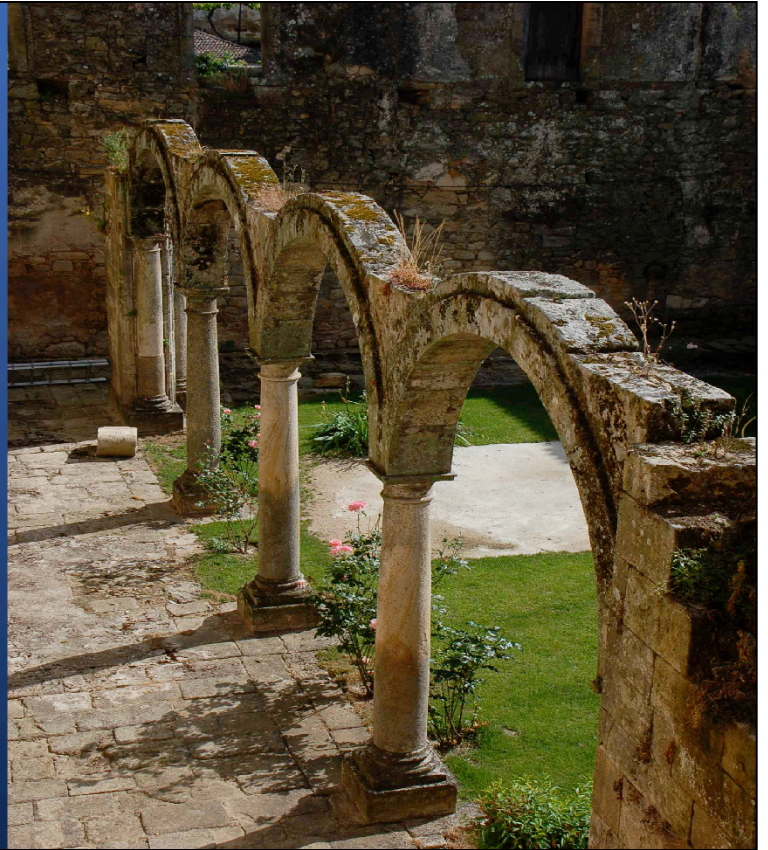


Are hit-and-run selfie-stick tourists the ones we want? Sex tourists?
Maybe not.

Nat Geo Traveler readers' comments

- “See that the money spent on tourism goes to support community visited.”
- “Not visiting the world as though it was a theme park.”
- “Use local, hire local.”
- “More advertising about the culture of the places being traveled to.”

SOURCE: NGT Reader Panel 2007



National Geographic Traveler and similar readers tended to fit the most suitable profile for destination compatibility.

Economics of quality versus quantity

The same revenue stream: Which is better?

10,000 tourists spending \$10 a day =
\$100,000

500 tourists spending \$200 a day =
\$100,000

Which puts less stress on the destination?



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Economic success in tourism need not be the same as increased visitation.

Fewer tourists staying longer is a better long-term business plan than more tourists staying briefly. Over the years it yields better economic benefit with a much lighter footprint—less stress on the site and on the patience of more valuable stay-over visitors.

Reinventing tourism first requires bridging the perception gap and perceiving tourism as it really is.

The true tourism product is the PLACE.

Tourism businesses facilitate and add value, but they depend on the place.

Therefore:

Managing tourism and managing the place are the same job.

It requires **collaboration** among destination marketers, industry, government, heritage site managers, researchers and scientists, residents, and travelers themselves – **a technological opportunity**.



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VALUING CHARACTER OF PLACE

MEASURING CARE FOR DESTINATIONS MUST GO BEYOND MERE REVENUE TARGETS

What is a destination worth?

A great deal. It's rich in assets.

Most of them cannot be reproduced.

Yet these assets have little or no monetary value – an “externality” typically omitted from tourism industry and government calculations and plans.



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How to measure a complex destination's sustainability and assign an overall rating for how well people are taking care of it – an index of destination stewardship? Here's what not to do:

GIGO = Garbage In, Garbage Out

UK: RIRO = Rubbish In, Rubbish Out



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From 2004 to 2010, National Geographic Traveler annually published the results of a global survey of destination stewardship by polling hundreds of expert panelists from different pertinent professions.

Index of Destination Stewardship

We asked 200-400 sustainable tourism experts and others, based on:

SIX CRITERIA

- Environment
- Cultural/social impact
- Aesthetics
- Built heritage
- Tourism management
- General outlook

. . . to rate destinations on this scale

RATING SCALE

- 0-2 Catastrophic
- 3-4 In serious trouble
- 5-6 In moderate trouble
- 7-8 Minor difficulties
- 9 Authentic, unspoiled, and likely to remain so
- 10 Enhanced



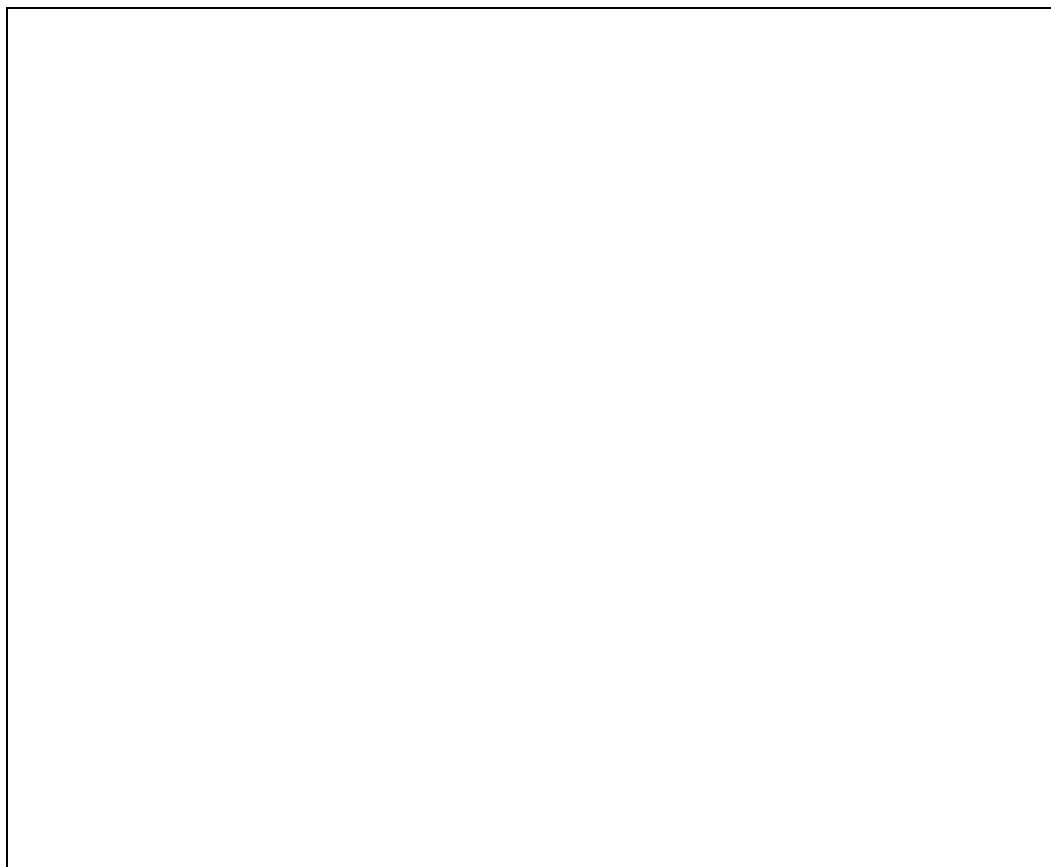
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Panelists were asked to consider these six criteria for each destination, weighted according to their relative importance for that destination. Panelists then chose a single score on a 0 to 10 scale that best indicates the overall condition of the destination. (On publication, the decimal moves one space for readability, so an average of 6.3 becomes 63, etc.) Thus 90 would be a superb score. Panelists rate only those destinations with which they were personally familiar. On average, each destination averages about 20 panelists. Generally, a minimum of 10 panelists is required for publications of results

Destination Stewardship Surveys		2004-10	Year
Norway	Fjords	86	2003&9
Spain	Alhambra/Granada	78	2009
Morocco	Essaouira	72	2010
Nepal	Annapurna circuit	62	2009
Uzbekistan	Bukhara	61	2008
India	Goa	41	2010
Egypt	Sharm el Shiekh	38	2010
Spain	Costa del Sol	31	2003&9



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What are the measures of success?



Quality of tourism, not quantity of tourists

True travel experiences, not hit-and-run, selfie-stick tourism

Spending benefits—
How much? To whom?

Social, educational benefits

Long-term investment

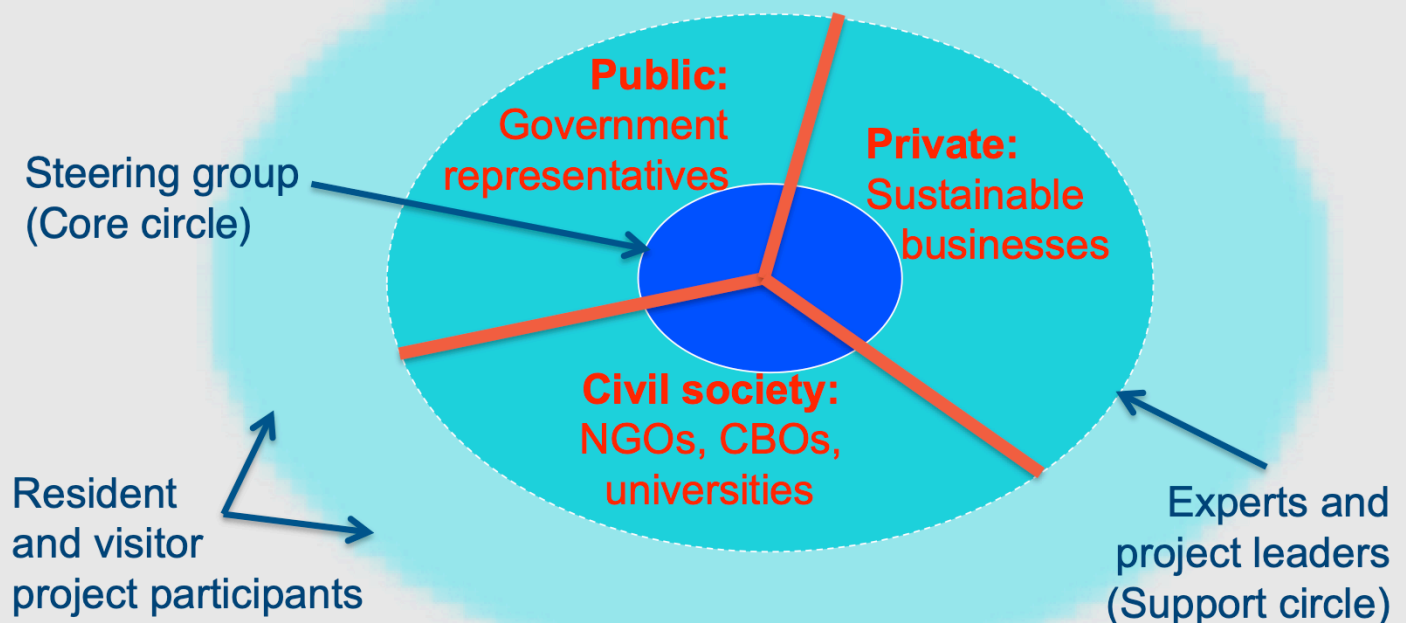
Quality of the destination

Quality of life for the residents



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Destination stewardship councils: A structural approach



The core group does most of the planning, coordination, and policy-making. A much larger pool of affiliate members can help with specific projects or expertise as needed. Projects and events can engage both residents and tourists as appropriate.

To plan holistically, destination stewardship councils should represent these different features of a place:

- historic sites
- nature & ecotourism
- farm/restaurant programs
- beautification
- traditional performing arts, crafts
- indigenous and minority groups
- urban renewal
- local government
- tourism and local business expertise
- tourism marketing
- spiritual sites
- other characteristics of the place



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At National Geographic, we encouraged geotourism stewardship councils, committees, or an equivalent that include people who understand each different aspect of their locale.

To start a holistic tourism program, they might design a marketing project with lots of local community participation.

Significantly, this particular council failed, for a common reason: It depended on one inspired leader. When he retired, the council collapsed. Councils controlled by governments face a similar problem, often terminated when the government changes. Councils must plan to sustain themselves.

Steps to creating a sustainable destination stewardship council

1. Convene a steering group.
2. Propose a mission statement, with collaborative input. Visioning may be appropriate at this point.
3. Adopt a set of guiding principles. The more signatories endorsing the principles, the better.
4. Formalize a stewardship council pledged to the mission and principles.
5. Perform a destination assessment.
6. On the basis of public engagement and the assessment, develop a plan and strategy [GSTC Criterion A2], including a long-term, self-sustaining plan for the council itself with sufficient revenue.



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It's important to plan long term. Councils must sustain themselves by arranging for multiple sources of funding.

A certification program for distinctive, responsible businesses is one constructive option for council sustainability

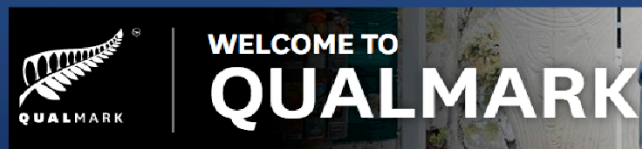
Wisconsin certification



Iceland certification



New Zealand certification



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A joint project of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council and the Destination Stewardship Center

New in 2020: Newsletter on destination stewardship

Autumn 2020 October-December
Volume 1, Issue 2

The Destination Stewardship Report is an e-quarterly collaboration between the Destination Stewardship Center and Global Sustainable Tourism Council, and in time maybe others. Our goal is to provide practical information and insights useful to anyone whose work or interests involve improving destination stewardship in a post-pandemic world. It's an all-volunteer experiment, so its success will depend on your interest, feedback, and content contributions. Join us, and help each other. Please subscribe [HERE](#) if you have not done so already. For more information and participation [contact us](#). — Jonathan Tourtellot, Editor



Mallorca Tries to Tame Tourism

*Among notoriously overcrowded destinations, Spain's island of Mallorca is striving, if half-heartedly, for a sustainable tourism reset once the pandemic recedes. **Daza Garcia** reports that right now, their chances of avoiding errors of the past are encouraging but far from certain.*

"If you are stunned by the noise that civility entails... follow me to an island that I will tell you, is an island where there is always calm, where men are never in a hurry, where women never go old, where they don't waste themselves not even words, where the sun stays longer and Mrs. Moren walks more slowly, infected by laziness."

— Santiago Rusiñol, Spanish painter and writer (1922).

That was Mallorca in 1922. Largest of the Balearic Islands, which lie in the eastern part of the Spanish Mediterranean, Mallorca has become [READ MORE →](#)



The Greening of Gritty Ulsan, South Korea

Ulsan, industrial powerhouse of South Korea, wasn't known for its ecotourism opportunities.

A joint DSC-GSTC initiative.
E-mailed quarterly.
Article proposals welcome

How Data Science Can Help Destinations

Sustainable destination planning is frequently hobbled by conventional measures of return on investment. But if ROI is expanded by using data science to include tangible but often omitted factors at both company and destination levels, says Irene Lane, then the picture is more accurate — and brighter.

Before COVID hit, destination stakeholders were concerned about the social, economic, and environmental impact of overtourism at their locales. On the one hand, tourists eagerly looked [READ MORE →](#)

Second issue rolled out in October 2020. Contact jonathan@destinationcenter.org to receive it or contribute an article proposal.

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