

DOC1 - Which cities have the worst overtourism problem?

The Economist Aug 1st 2024

Cities everywhere are busy implementing measures to deter excess tourism. But most people agree holidaymakers offer an economic bounty. So what would the ideal tourist market look like? Residents would probably prefer a small number of high-spending visitors, to minimise disturbance and maximise revenues. Figures compiled by *The Economist* rank 20 popular destinations on their appeal to international travellers, and provide a sense of which cities are nearest to—and furthest from—this ideal.

Start with international arrivals. In absolute terms London and Tokyo led the field last year, with 20m visitors each, followed by Istanbul, with 17m. Global cities attract lots of visitors. Divide them by population, though, and Amsterdam, Paris and Milan claim the top three spots, with a remarkable ten, eight and six arrivals per resident. The Dutch city's appeal may frustrate local officials. In recent years they have sought to stem the flood of tourists by reducing the supply of hotel accommodation, banning cruise ships and raising hotel taxes. In the end, it seems the lure of some lovely canals and gouda cheese, among other things, is too much to overcome.

Tourist spending—on attractions, accommodation, transport and the like—was highest in Dubai at \$29bn last year, followed by London at \$21bn and Singapore at \$19bn. Amsterdam, Paris and Dubai earned the most on a per resident basis. The gap between high-ranking cities is surprisingly large. Visitors to Amsterdam spent four times as much, on such a basis, as those to Milan. If you cram an unfeasibly large number of tourists into a city, spending per resident rockets. An Amsterdam with fewer tourists would be a poorer city. Overcrowding has some upsides.

Some places, though, have stumbled across an even better state of affairs: bringing in big revenues without overcrowding. Visitors to Osaka, Japan's ancient second city, spend \$4,900 per local; those to Madrid spend \$4,300. Neither city is particularly busy, with four and two visitors a year per resident, respectively. That will sound very attractive to residents of Amsterdam. Yet perhaps even a few tourists is still too many. Authorities in Osaka are considering charging foreign tourists an entry fee in order to combat "overtourism". And anti-tourist graffiti has started to appear across Spain's capital city. ■

DOC2 - Bans, Fees, Taxes. Can Anything Stop Overtourism?

The New York Times, Jan. 28, 2025

If 2024 was the year in which concerns about overtourism achieved a critical mass in places around the globe, sparking protests from Amsterdam to the Canary Islands, and triggering new regulations from Iceland to Indonesia, it was also the year in which it became clear just how complicated reducing tourism, once it is unleashed, can be.

“The hard truth is that once overtourism has arrived,” said Rachel Dodds, professor of tourism management at Toronto Metropolitan University, “it’s exceedingly difficult to turn back the clock.”

As early as 2010, tourism experts observed that some destinations were approaching or had exceeded their carrying capacity. By the middle of the last decade, cities like Amsterdam and Barcelona had begun taking tentative steps to relieve tourism’s impacts on infrastructure, housing, the environment and quality of life.

But it was only after the pandemic, when “revenge travel” brought greater numbers of visitors to more destinations, that efforts to apply the brakes became more widespread.

This year, travelers will feel the effects of those efforts. New legislation regulating Airbnbs and other short-term rentals goes into effect in France, the Czech Republic and Greece, where a 24.5 percent surge in foreign visitors in 2024 over the previous year is also behind an increased tax — up to 20 euros a day — for cruise passengers on the islands of Santorini and Mykonos.

In Italy, tourists will be limited to 20,000 a day in Pompeii, and new legislation in Florence may prevent tourists from using golf carts to tool around.

And in South Korea, authorities have imposed a curfew in a historic neighborhood of Seoul to dampen tourist excesses.

Whether these strategies will work remains to be seen. The evidence is spotty and suggests that measures take a long time to have an effect. Barcelona, for example, implemented its first tourist tax in 2012, began restricting short-term rentals in 2015 and capped new hotel construction in 2017. Yet tourists continued to arrive in record numbers through the first third of 2024.

Set at an amount roughly equivalent to a coffee and cornetto, Venice’s 5 euro fee, introduced last year, was hardly dissuasive. Venice seems to have reached the same conclusion: This year, the rate doubles to 10 euros.

The greatest obstacle to solving overtourism may be the lack of consensus that it is actually a problem. As a source of revenue and employment — globally, tourism generated a record 1.6 trillion dollars in 2024 — travel is an engine for economic growth.

Take Copenhagen. The city council approved a tourist tax in 2024 “as a nice way to prevent us from ending up like Barcelona,” said Rasmus Steenberger, a member of the municipal government. But the national government — which is currently expanding Copenhagen’s airport, and recently announced a plan to increase tourism revenue to 200 billion kroner per year (about \$28 billion) from 152 billion kroner, by 2030 — rejected the proposed tourist tax.

Such conflict is why many experts believe more profound changes are needed.

But with international arrivals globally expected to grow 12.4 percent in 2025 over their 2019 levels, overtourism seems likely to spread. “I’m not sure there is a solution,” said Ms. Novelli of the University of Nottingham. “Unless it’s people taking responsibility and saying, ‘You know what? I don’t need to see Venice. I’m not going to go.’”



