

Fostering **SUSTAINABLE TOURISM** in Latin America

HERNÁN MLADINIC



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FOREWORD

As this publication goes to press in June 2020, we are experiencing a world overwhelmed by the uncertainties of the coronavirus. Nonetheless, the global pandemic has provided further evidence that we must begin to reframe how we address complex environmental challenges, now and in the future. This publication offers a small window into how we can foster greater sustainability in the travel and tourism industry throughout the Americas. The industry has suffered immensely, with many companies paralyzed or on the verge of bankruptcy. For the countries in our hemisphere, millions of people across formal and informal labor markets have had their primary source of income destroyed or suspended.

This economic pain, although difficult, will not last forever. The pandemic will not change the desire of the human spirit to seek out adventure or simply enjoy new destinations. As international recovery efforts are developed and slowly implemented, let this pause in the travel and tourism industry serve as an inflection point for businesses.

An eventual reopening should direct us towards a more meaningful focus on sustainable and environmentally conscious outcomes—things that are increasingly in high demand. Any transition will require the review and redesign of strategies as well as institutional changes, not to mention new ways of promoting sustainable tourism practices. These efforts will need a great deal of creativity, innovation, and adaptability. Most important will be identifying the emerging opportunities that offer medium- to long-term environmental solutions in the tourism industry.

I wish to express my immense gratitude to the Fundación Vidanta for supporting this project, especially Dr. Roberto Russell for providing the opportunity to carry out my research on sustainable tourism. The foundation's commitment to the conservation of nature and environmental protection is a key asset for the region's sustainability and the well-being of its people. I am also indebted to the Wilson Center's staff and personnel for not only providing me with the best facilities to develop my work, but also for exposing me to such a diverse and stimulating intellectual community. It was truly a welcoming work environment and gratifying experience, all in such a magnificent and vibrant city.

Many thanks to Janet Spikes and her colleagues in the Wilson Center Library, who provided great support in helping me navigate a sea of information and showed intellectual curiosity about and a genuine interest in my research. Thanks also to my research assistant, Adrienne Dittman, whose support resulted in identifying important data and generating graphics. I also wish to thank my colleague Anders Beal, Associate of the Wilson Center's Latin American Program, an "honorary Chilean" who accompanied me from the very beginning and helped in so many ways to further my work.

Finally, I am most grateful for the support of Dr. Cynthia Arnson, director of the Wilson Center's Latin American Program—an outdoor enthusiast with whom I shared stimulating walks in the woods of Rock Creek Park; and who understands, like many, that the concepts of conservation and sustainability will become indispensable for a viable development strategy in the hemisphere.

Hernán Mladinic Alonso
Puerto Varas, Chile
May 2020

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INTRODUCTION

The growth of the tourism industry has been impressive. International tourist arrivals have doubled in the past twenty years, and recent estimates put the industry at approximately 10 percent of global gross domestic product (GDP). Despite sensitivity to economic cycles, several factors have had a significant impact on the industry's growth in emerging markets, including reductions in the cost of airfare, the rise of the growing middle class worldwide, and the increased flow of information and access to social media and digital platforms.

The economic benefits of tourism generate many opportunities for local communities. However, a series of sustainability challenges for how national governments and local municipalities manage the flow of international visitors will need to be addressed in the future. What can local communities and national governments interested in seizing development opportunities offered by tourism expect in terms of their effects on the natural environment?

In Latin America and the Caribbean, where the tourism industry has made important economic contributions during the past two decades, there are incredibly important ecological and cultural implications to consider. Environmental pressures and sustainability concerns are likely to become more prominent in the near future; therefore, public policy is an essential component in creating a more sustainable framework for tourism development.

This paper discusses how to foster sustainable tourism in the region. It offers an assessment of critical areas, including the economic impact of tourism within a global and regional context, the evolution of sustainability concepts and policies, and the opportunities and challenges associated with tourism growth in Latin America.

It also assesses the growing impact of digital platforms, the emergence of postmaterial millennial travelers, and the concept of "overtourism" as a trend to avoid. Finally, the paper offers recommendations for how countries in the region can seize opportunities and build a more sustainable framework for the development of the tourism industry in the future.

THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF TOURISM ON THE WORLD ECONOMY AND LATIN AMERICA

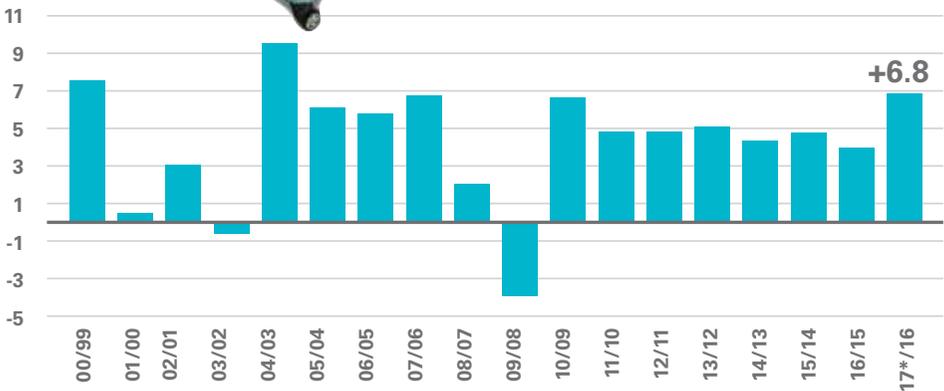


Tourism is defined as a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon, concerning the activities of people traveling to and staying in places or countries outside their usual environment for leisure, business, and other purposes for more than 24 hours and less than one consecutive year.¹

We may likely see this most basic definition become radically altered in the future, as international tourism quickly evolves into one of the most dynamic and vibrant industries of the world economy. The industry offers not just significant income and tax revenues for developing nations but also a much-needed base of formal employment throughout its value chain.

A 2018 report from the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) shows that international tourism and travel reached a notable increase of

FIGURE 1:
International Tourist Arrivals, Change (%)



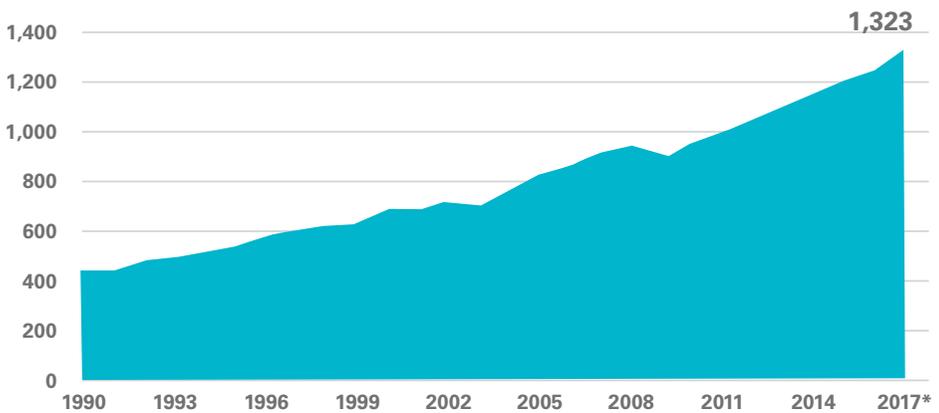
Source: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

6.8 percent in 2017 (figure 1), representing a total of 1.3 billion visitors (86 million more than in 2016), and the biggest increase in six years (figure 2). This rate is much higher than the previous constant of approximately 4 percent growth per year, which has been the overall trend since 2010.²

Since the advent of the global tourism industry midway through the past century, we have seen sustained growth, only in-

terrupted by major economic crises. Such growth speaks volumes to the strength of the industry but also to that of the human spirit, represented by a collective interest in traveling and discovering new places. The convergence of a “long peace” after two world wars and the emergence of commercial aviation made the facilitation of movement much easier, especially to places that had once suffered major conflicts.

FIGURE 2:
International Tourist Arrivals (Million)



* = Provisional figure or data
Source: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)



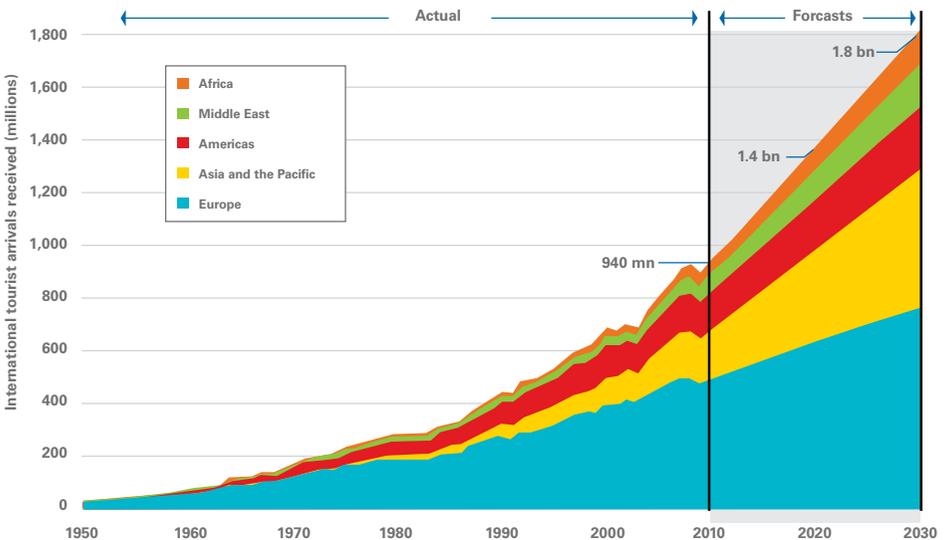
Historic Downtown in Guadalajara, Mexico. Source: Pixabay - Kevin Alejandro Reyes, October 2019.



The period from the end of World War II in 1945 through a newfound “relative peace” during the Cold War led to the tremendous growth we see today. In the 1950s, only 25 million people traveled internationally. Between 1980 and 2000, the number of international tourists doubled, from 278 million to 674 million. Estimates by the UNWTO project indicate that international visitors could reach up to 1.8 billion by 2030 (figure 3).

Left: Machu Picchu, Peru. Source: *Unsplash- Sara Monk, August 2019.*

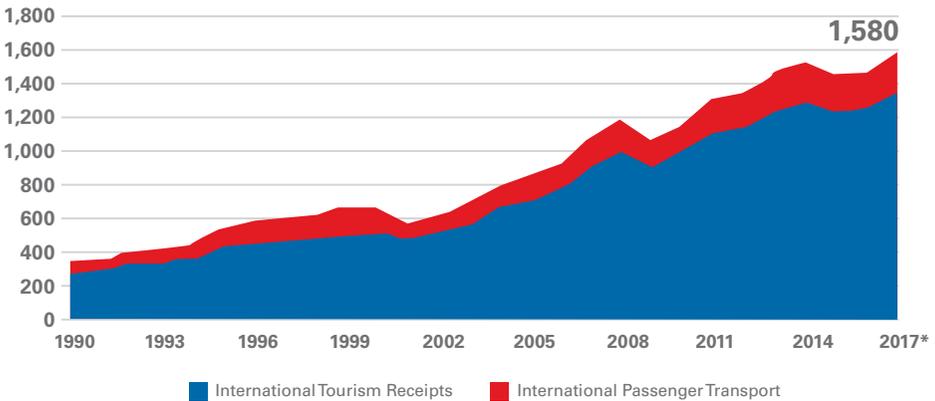
FIGURE 3:
UNWTO Tourism Towards 2030: Actual Trend and Forecast 1950-2030



Source: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) ©

FIGURE 4:

Total Tourism Exports (International Tourism Receipts + Passenger Transport =Services)
(US\$ Billion)



* = Provisional figure or data

Source: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

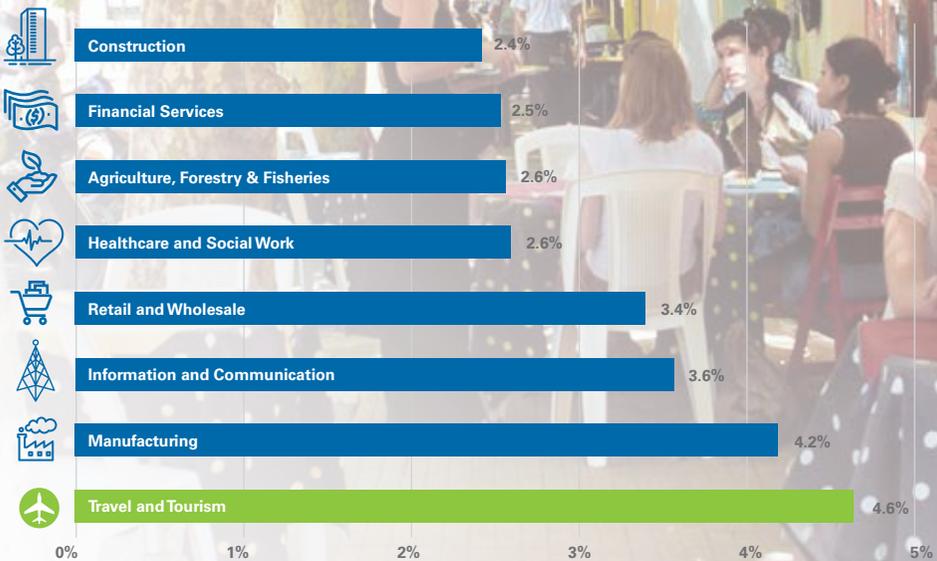
International tourism receipts, which correspond to all direct expenses of foreign visitors in each country, have been growing along with arrivals of tourists—from \$ 2 billion in 1950 to \$104 billion in 1980. Between 2000 and 2017, these figures more than doubled, to \$1,340 billion. If income from passenger transportation is added, the total for 2017 comes to \$1,580 billion—*more than \$4 billion per day* (figure 4).

It is also interesting to note, that although the value of exports related to international travel is significant, domestic travel, or revenue generated by residents of their own country, is approximately 73 percent of the sector's total direct contribution to GDP. Similar figures occur in many other Latin American economies, except for the Caribbean island nations, where domestic tourism accounts for less than 30 percent.



Santa Catalina de Alejandria Cathedral in Cartagena, Colombia. Source: Unsplash – Ricardo Gomez Angel, August 2018.

FIGURE 5:
Industry Sector GDP Growth, 2017



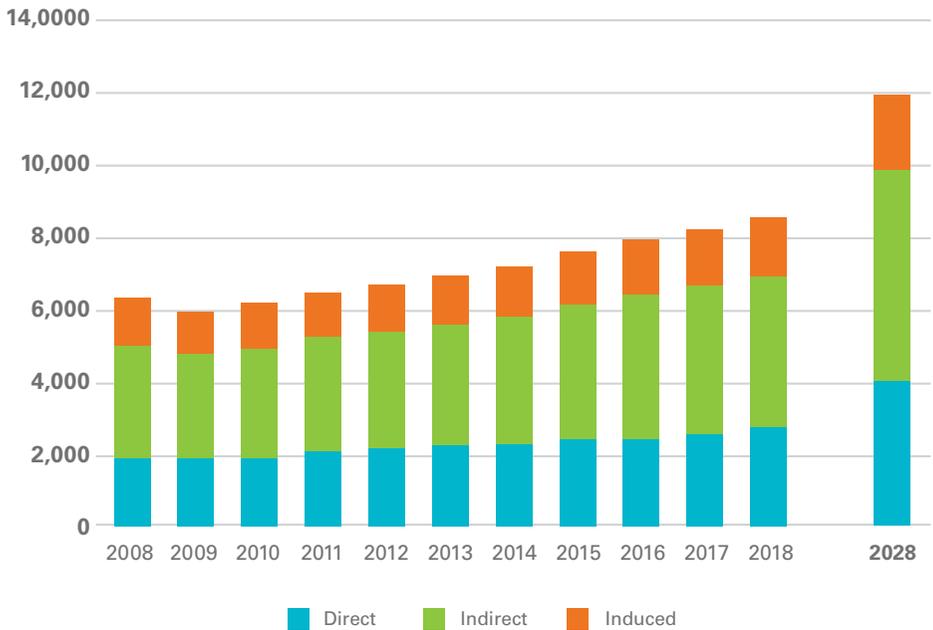
Source: Oxford Economics

Tourism and GDP

In economic terms, the travel and tourism sector is a dynamic one, having surpassed the overall growth of the global economy. In 2017, for example, growth in global output was approximately 3 percent, however, the tourism industry worldwide grew at 4.6 percent.³ Moreover, the industry surpassed all economic sectors for the seventh consecutive year (figure 5).

The direct contribution of the travel and tourism industry in 2017 was 2.6 trillion, representing *3.2 percent of global GDP*. If we consider the total economic impact (direct, indirect, and induced income), the figure is even more significant, contributing *10.4 percent of global GDP*, or \$8.3 trillion (figure 6). In many countries in the region, but particularly the Caribbean island nations, the travel and tourism sector represents one of

FIGURE 6:
Total Contribution of Travel and Tourism to GDP



Source: WTTC, 2018.

the primary exports that help to sustain economic development. In countries such as Anguilla, Aruba, and the Bahamas, the value of international visitors represented approximately 70 to 90 percent of the total value of exports in 2017 (see appendix C).

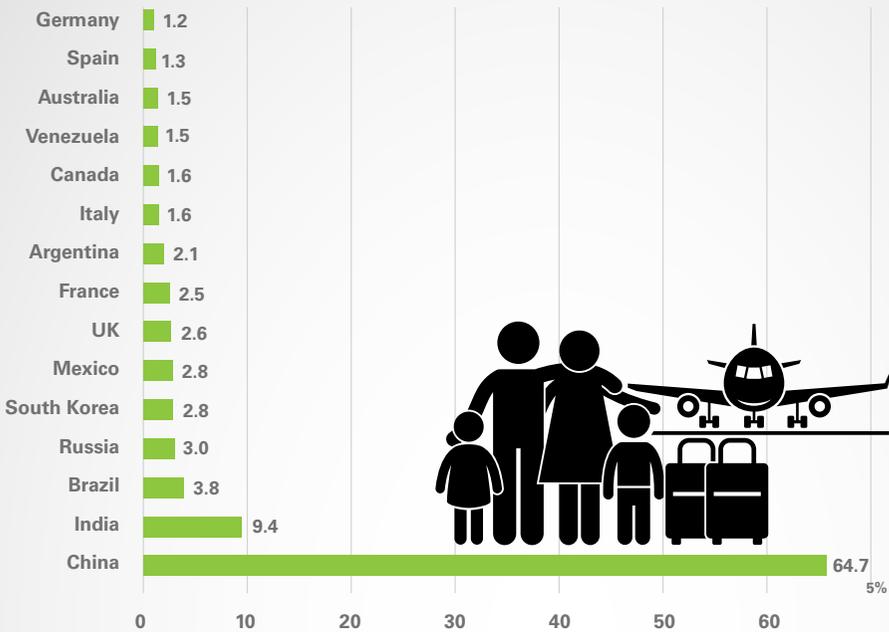
The Middle Class Packs Its Suitcase

An interesting 2013 study by Goldman Sachs and cited by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) highlights an important income effect of tourism. The report examines the rise in demand for tourism,



FIGURE 7.

Added Households with Income > \$35,000 2027 versus 2017



Source: Oxford Economic

showing that households with an income of about \$35,000 dedicated consumer spending to domestic tourism, but as income grows to \$50,000 or more, the demand for international tourism shows an impressive increase.

Figure 7 illustrates the growing level of households with incomes that will likely affect future demand for international tourism. These households have the potential to become new “traveler households,” with expectations that within the next decade incomes may increase to levels where international travel will become much more

attractive. In China alone, 64 million households are expected to eventually reach these criteria and thus increase demand for international travel.

Tourism and Employment

Tourism is also considered a key source of employment distributed throughout the value chain, representing income for workers and good-quality jobs, including opportunities for low-skilled labor. In 2017, the travel and tourism industry was responsible for 118 million jobs, or 3.8 percent of global employment. If we include the aggregate im-

part of tourism within secondary markets, the figure increases further, representing 313 million jobs, or 10 percent of global employment.

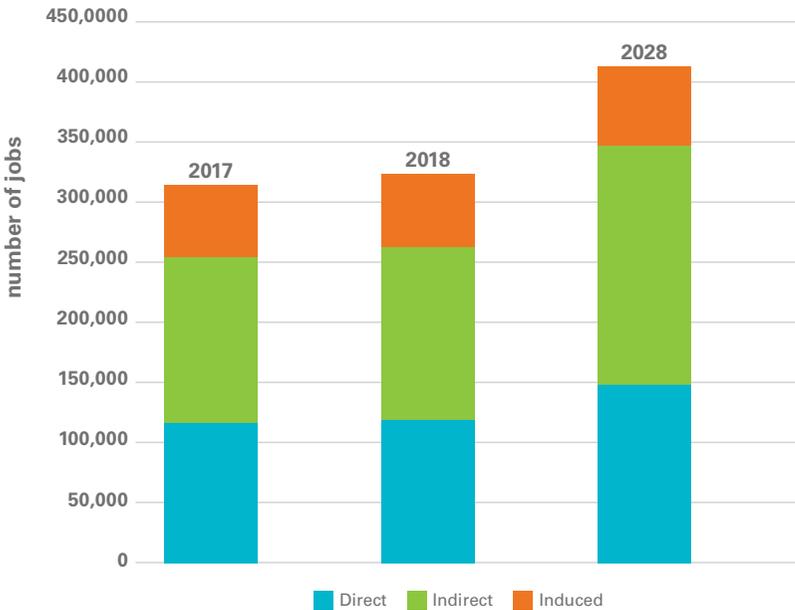
In 109 of the 185 countries studied by the WWTC, employment in the tourism industry grew faster than the overall global economy. With adequate support, 100 million new jobs could be created within the next decade, where 1 out of every 4 new jobs would be linked to the tourism industry. In 2028, it is projected that globally, the

travel and tourism industry will represent approximately 414 million jobs (figure 8).

Tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean

In 2017, according to the UNWTO, Latin America and the Caribbean received 113 million international tourists (figure 9), which represents 8.5 percent of total visitors worldwide (figure 10) and a 7 percent growth from the previous year, which is more or less aligned with the global trends.

FIGURE 8:
World: Direct Contribution of Travel and Tourism to Employment



Source: WTTC, 2018.

FIGURE 9

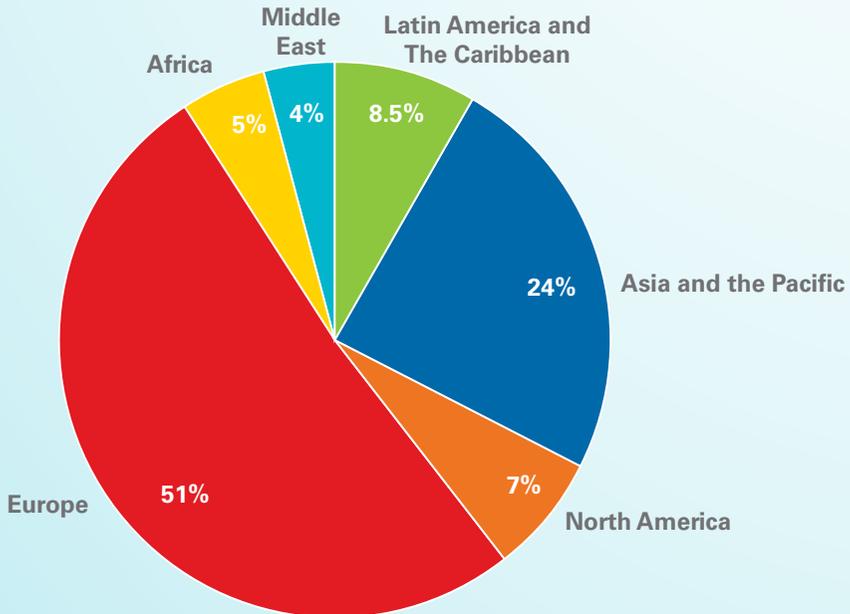
LAC International Tourism Arrivals (1995-2017)



Source: UNWTO, *Tourism Highlights 2018*.

FIGURE 10:

International Tourism Arrivals 2017 (Millions) Total: 1323 Million



Source: UNWTO, *Tourism Highlights 2018*.

These figures are partly due to an important increase of travel to Mexico, which had 40 million international visitors in 2017, a 12 percent increase from the previous year. This country represents more than a third of all tourist arrivals in the region, positioning it among the ten most visited countries in the world. Such strong figures have resulted in Mexico spending approximately \$160 million annually in the development and promotion of tourism at the national and regional levels.⁴ Figure 11 illustrates the top ten countries that represent 42 percent of all international tourist arrivals.

Within the region, Mexico is followed by South America, which had 36.7 million international visitors (figure 12), representing 32 percent of total visitors to Latin America

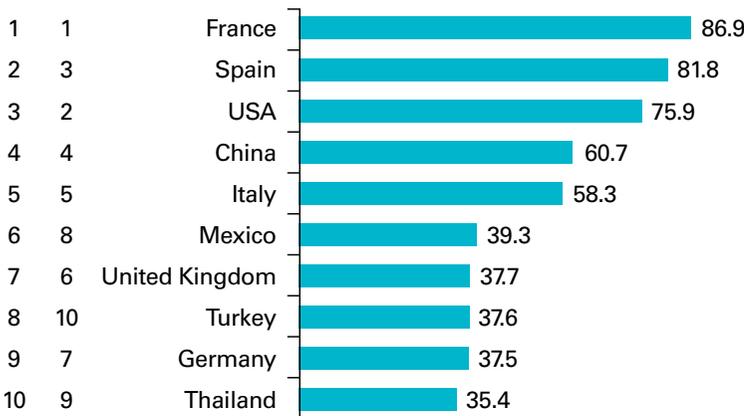
and the Caribbean (figure 13). The number of visits grew at a faster pace than the global average (8.3 percent), given double-digit growth in Colombia (21.4 percent), Uruguay (21 percent), Paraguay (17.5 percent), Chile (14.3 percent), and Ecuador (13.4 percent). The growth of tourism in Chile was largely due to the decrease in the exchange rate, which favored a large number of Argentine tourists (figure 14).

South America was followed by the Caribbean, with 30.6 million tourist visits and a 2.9 percent increase from 2016. Central America accounted for the least amount of international visitors within the region, with only 11.2 million visitors and a 4.7 percent increase during the same period. Caribbean countries accounted for 23 percent of total

FIGURE 11:
International Tourist Arrivals, 2017 (Million)

RANK

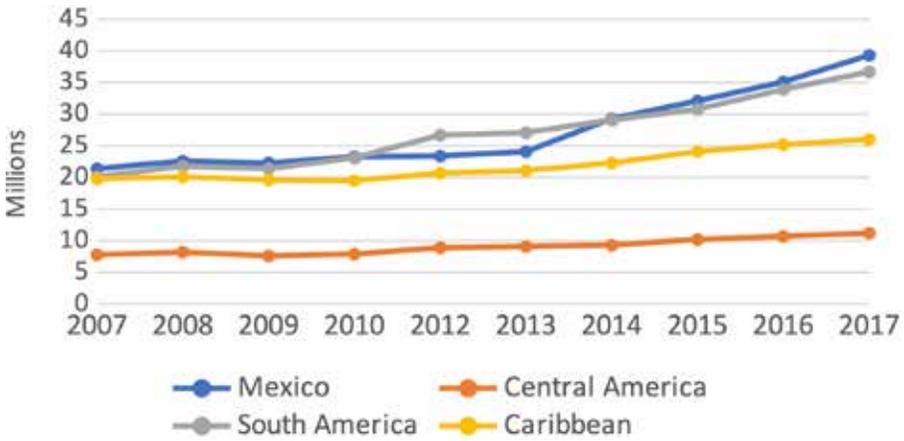
#17* #16



Source: UNWTO, *Tourism Highlights 2018*

FIGURE 12:

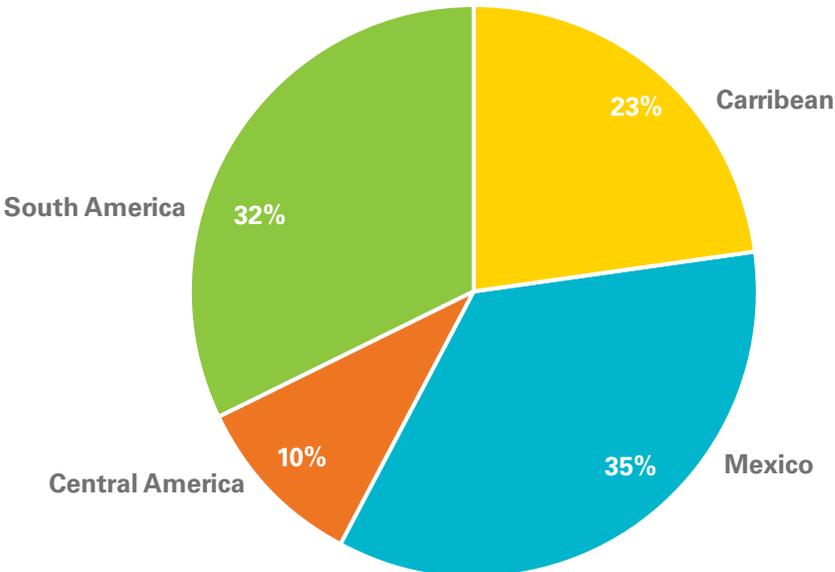
International Tourist Arrivals (2007-2017)



Source: UNWTO, Tourism Highlights 2018.

FIGURE 13:

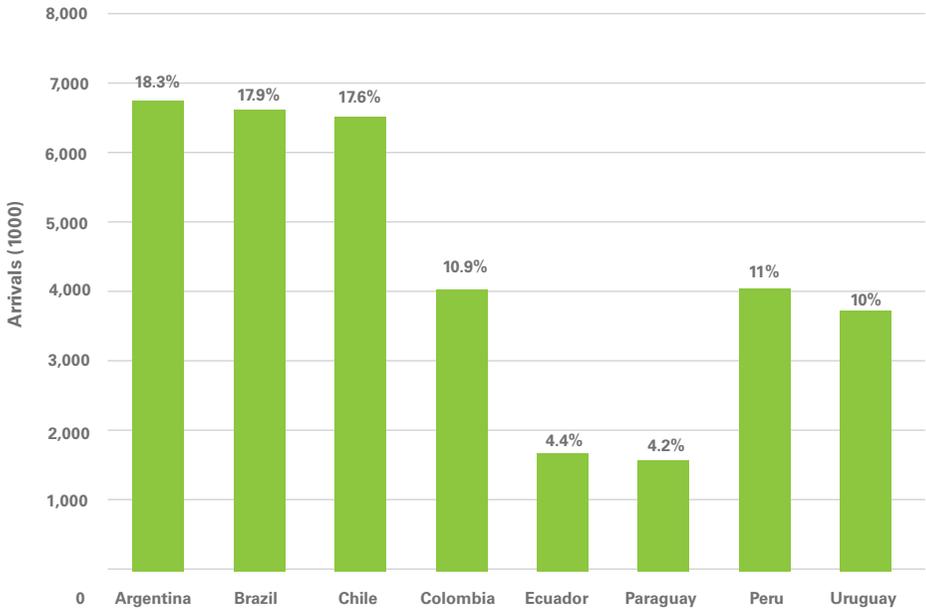
Latin America and the Caribbean International Tourist Arrivals in 2017 Total: 113.2 Million



Source: UNWTO Tourism Highlights 2018.

FIGURE 14:

South America International Tourist Arrivals in 2017, Total 36.7 Million



Source: UNWTO, *Tourism Highlights 2018*.

international visitors in the region, led by the Dominican Republic, with 6.2 million; the Bahamas, with almost 6 million; and Cuba, with 4.7 million (according to official figures from the Ministry of Tourism)—followed by Puerto Rico and Jamaica (figure 15).

Costa Rica continues to be the undisputed leader in Central America and an interesting model for regional efforts, given its focus on nature tourism, with approximately 3 million annual visits during the past two years. The numbers are considerably lower in Panama, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador. Among this group, the 18.8 percent increase in tourist arrivals to Nicaragua in 2017 stands

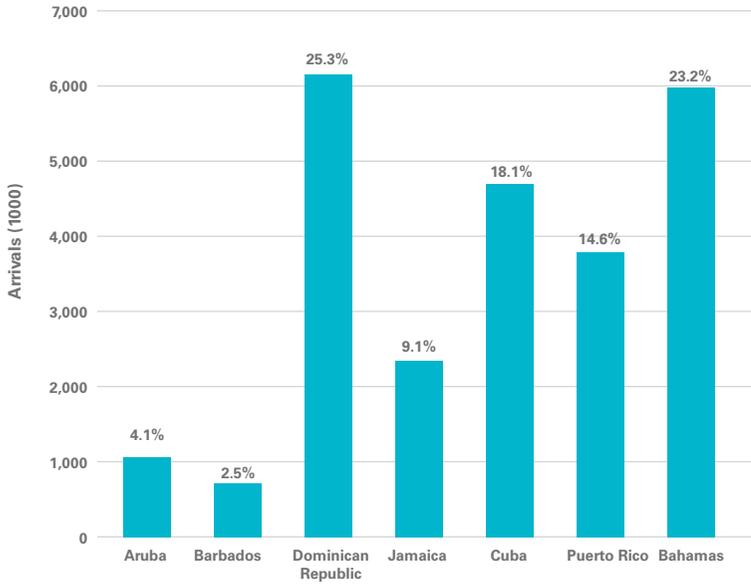
out (figure 16). According to the last report from the WTTC, the country experimented one of the fastest rates of GDP growth attributed to tourism.

Revenue from Tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean

The region generated approximately \$95 billion in revenue from international tourists, or 7 percent of total revenue worldwide.⁵ These figures for 2017 represent an impressive 22 percent increase compared with figures for 2016, with the Caribbean generating \$32 billion in revenue, followed by South America, Mexico, and Central America

FIGURE 15:

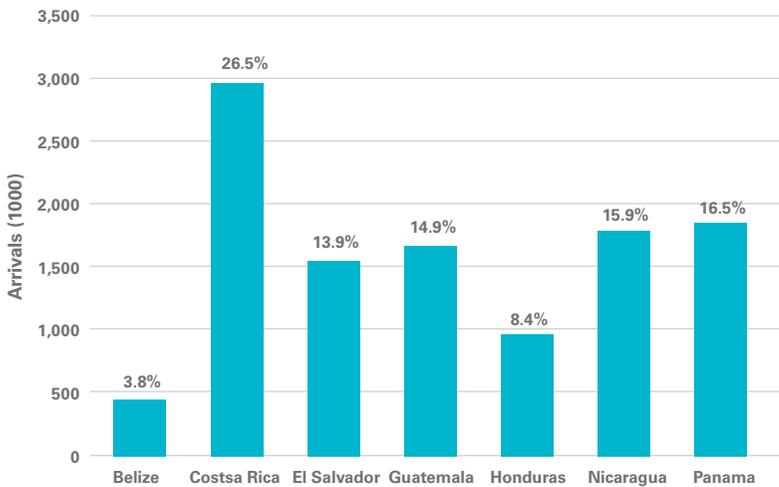
Caribbean International Tourist Arrivals in 2017 Total: 30.6 Million



Source: UNWTO, Tourism Highlights 2018.

FIGURE 16:

Central America International Tourist Arrivals in 2017 Total: 11.2 Million



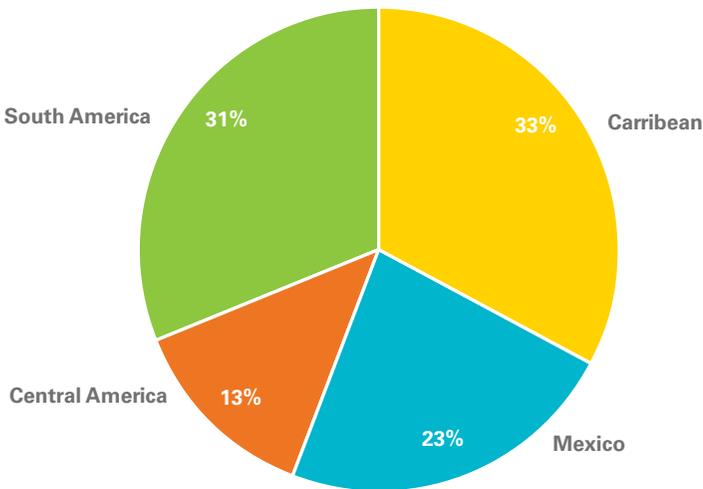
Source: UNWTO, Tourism Highlights 2018.

(figure 17). It is worth highlighting that this region, despite receiving 50 percent fewer tourists than Mexico, generated 50 percent more in revenue. This suggests that an increase in the number of tourists does not necessarily imply a proportional increase in the level of revenues. It may be possible to develop policy strategies geared toward tourism that are less about increasing the total number of visitors, instead focusing on higher-quality services and purchasing values.

The case of Caribbean countries is a great example of how tourism represents a significant proportion of economic sustainability in small countries. According to the WTTC, tourism in the Caribbean region made the greatest contribution to GDP and employ-

ment in 2017, at 15.2 percent and 13.8 percent, respectively. The most notable cases are the British Virgin Islands, Aruba, Anguilla, and the Bahamas. In 2017, they were among the ten countries with the greatest direct contribution of tourism to GDP, representing 35.4 percent, 28.1 percent, 21.2 percent, and 18 percent, respectively (see appendix A).⁶ If we include the indirect and induced revenues of tourism in these calculations, total tourism can represent 50 to 90 percent of GDP in some cases (see appendix B). The same dynamic is at play in these countries when it comes to the contribution of tourism to employment, which is close to 30 percent if we only consider its direct impact, and can go up to 50 to 80 percent if we consider its total impact (see appendixes A and B).

FIGURE 17:
Latin America and the Caribbean International Tourism Receipts in 2017 Total: \$95 Billion



Source: UNWTO, *Tourism Highlights 2018*.

However, these achievements are not possible without investments to sustain them. Jamaica's minister of tourism, Edmund Bartlett, highlighted that tourism is the main generator of dividends in sixteen of twenty-six Caribbean countries. Those assertions are supported by the most recent ECLAC report, which shows that in 2017, the Dominican Republic received more than half of all foreign direct investment (FDI) flows to the Caribbean and that the tourism sector in that country was the third largest recipient of FDI, with annual flows of \$700 million in the past three years. In the case of the Bahamas, tourism is the main sector of the economy, with an FDI close \$928 million. In Jamaica, tourism represented 19 percent of total FDI, at \$169 million.⁷

Although tourism plays a strategic role in the Caribbean, an economy so dependent on one sector can be fragile if the environmental, social, and economic factors that influence its sustainability are not properly

identified and protected and the long-term provision of goods and services cannot be guaranteed. Climate change is a critical issue for these countries, which face increasingly frequent and intense hurricanes, with devastating consequences in terms of loss of human lives and damage to infrastructure and the economy.

Tourism Employment in Latin America and the Caribbean

In 2017, the travel and tourism sector was directly responsible for the creation of 10.4 million jobs in Latin America and the Caribbean, which represents almost 4.9 percent of employment in the region. If we consider the total impact (which includes direct, indirect, and induced revenues), the figure increases to *26.8 million jobs*, or *12.6 percent of total employment*—surpassing the average rates for the sector at the global level, which are 3.8 and 9.9 percent, respectively (figure 18). Half the Latin American



Riviera Maya, Mexico: Vidanta Group - Kristen Echeverria, 2019.

countries studied exceeded these rates; in the majority of Caribbean countries and in some Central American countries, the employment rate associated with travel and tourism surpasses two digits. (See the tables of total and direct country employment figures in appendixes A and B.)

Tourism and Gross Regional Domestic Product in Latin America and the Caribbean

The direct contribution of the travel and tourism sector to GDP in Latin America and the Caribbean was \$227.5 billion on 2017, which represents 5 percent of the gross regional domestic product. The proportion more than doubles if we consider the total impact of the sector, which was \$591.2 billion, repre-

senting 10.4 percent of gross regional domestic product (figure 19).

Adventure Tourism and Ecotourism

It is widely recognized that this kind of tourism depends on the sustainable provision and management of natural and cultural resources. However, there are no official sources that provide a precise and systematic measurement of the number of travelers that constitute this sector, even though its an emerging and increasingly important market. Some sources estimate that ecotourism generates \$100 billion annually.⁸ Other sources mention that adventure tourism mobilized 69 percent of the trips from Europe, North America, and South America, which together represent \$263 billion.⁹

FIGURE 18
Contribution of Travel and Tourism to Employment in Latin America and the Caribbean (2012-2018)

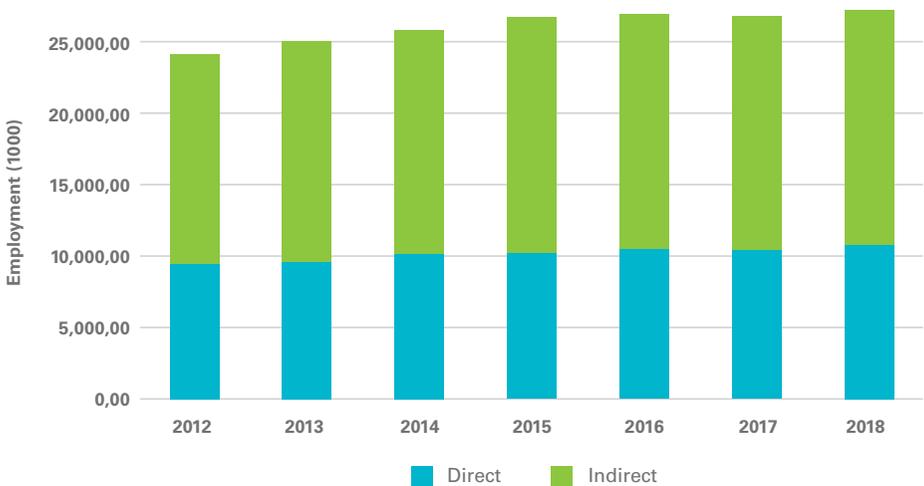
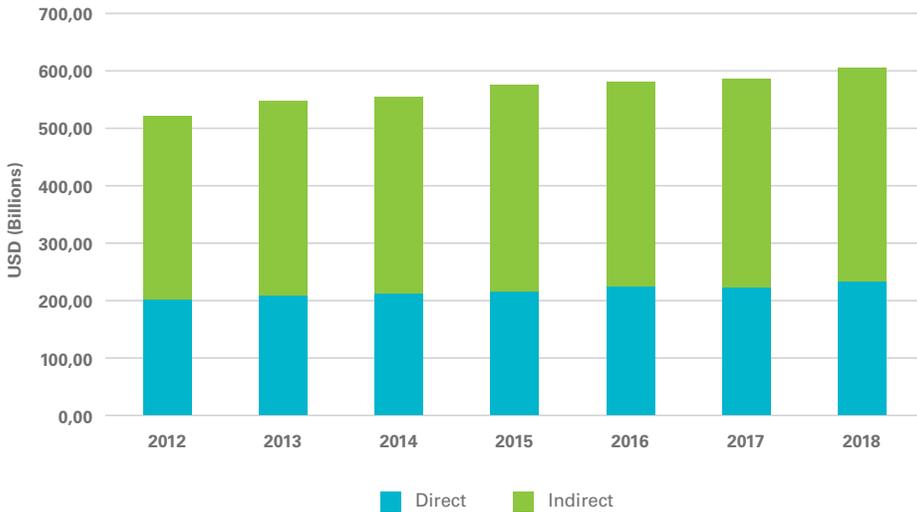


FIGURE 19:

Total Contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP in Latin America and the Caribbean (2012-2018)



Source: Own calculations based on the 2018 WTTC report.

The Long-Term Regional Forecast

According to the WTTC, South Asia will be the fastest-growing region in the world in the next ten years, with the direct contribution of the travel and tourism sector to GDP increasing at an average annual growth rate of 6.9 percent, driven mostly by rapid

growth in India (of 7.1 percent). In China, it is estimated that the average annual growth rate in the long term will be 6.7 percent. The equivalent number for Latin America will be 3.2 percent, with a 3.6 percent growth rate expected in the Caribbean and a 3.3 growth rate expected in Mexico.



Torres del Paine National Park, Chile. Source: Unsplash - Olga Stalska, November 2016



Toucan, Boca Tapada, Laguna de Lagarto Lodge, Costa Rica.

THE EVOLUTION OF SUSTAINABILITY CONCEPTS AND POLICIES

The concept of *sustainable tourism* emerged from the convergence of two currents that evolved in the second half of the twentieth century. One emerged out of the field of international development assistance programs in developing countries that originated in rich countries, which contributed to the debate about development models. There were questions as to the effectiveness of large infrastructure projects to alleviate poverty, which in most cases resulted in greater inequality and irreversible environmental damage, along with negative social and cultural effects. These criticisms led to a revision of aid strategies and changes in governance models, assuming citizen participation in the decisionmaking process, in order to have the necessary social legitimacy,¹⁰ following the recognition that a more sustainable world requires more inclusive models.

In parallel, there was an increased awareness of tourism as a rapidly growing economic sector, apparently benign (“without a chimney”), but whose pernicious effects became increasingly evident. The developmentalist current began to reflect on the social and environmental effects of development—which had until then been dominated by the dimension of economic growth—resulting, finally, in the concept of sustainable development in the 1980s. Rather than being a prescription, sustainable development reflects an aspiration that acknowledges a consumption and production model that is on a collision course and that requires a dramatic shift, which takes into consideration the social and environmental aspects of development. In general, *sustainable development* is conventionally represented by all the activities that develop at the intersection of these three components, which must be environmentally appropriate, socially acceptable, and economically viable. This theoretical framework later incorporated reflections about tourism, leading to the notion of sustainable tourism,¹¹ a concept in permanent evolution: a “reframing concept” for some, constantly reviewed in light of new information, new premises, and a changing environment.¹²

The Impact of Human Activities on the Environment

There was not a greater recognition of the *effects of human activities on the environment* during the 1950s. It was not until 1962, when Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* was published to popular acclaim, that public consciousness about the topic began to emerge. In addition to her book, the decade saw the approval of important laws and political instruments—such

as the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, the Wilderness Act of 1964, and the National Environmental Policy of 1969—as well as the publication of notable essays, such as Kenneth Boulding’s “The Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth,” (1966), and Garrett Hardin’s “The Tragedy of the Commons,” (1968).¹³

The Emergence of Tourism

Tourism on a massive scale began after World War II, thanks to the development of commercial civilian aviation and the end of global armed conflicts, which facilitated traveling and sparked the public’s interest to know new places. International trips quadrupled between 1950 and 1970. Until the mid-1970s, tourism was seen exclusively as a social and quotidian phenomenon, with benign social and environmental consequences. It was during that decade, however, that the first academic journal dedicated to the topic emerged: the *Journal of Travel Research*.¹⁴ By the 1980s, the potential of tourism as an economic and employment engine began to be recognized, and so began its promotion.

The Sociocultural Impact of Tourism

As the number of travelers and the diversity of destinations increased, the impact of tourism on pristine environments of regions or countries affected by poverty began to be questioned by different sectors. For the first time, subsistence economies were experiencing cultural and structural changes

for which they were not prepared socially, economically, or politically.¹⁵ There were concerns and complaints about the commodification of local cultures and the negative effects on their environments, often the basis for their development; the exclusion of host communities from decisionmaking processes regarding tourism; a lack of recruitment of the local labor force; inequity in the distribution of the benefits of tourism; and foreign control of tourism products and services.

The Environmental Impact of Tourism

The first environmental warning signs were given by nongovernmental conservation organizations—such as the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the World Wildlife Fund, Conservation International, and the Nature Conservancy—which were calling for the establishment of protected areas and showing growing concern about the impact of tourism on biodiversity. These topics were debated in various forums, such as the World Parks Congress and the Congress on Tourism and the Environment. Although tourism was seen as an instrument for economic well-being and as a funding source for the management of protected areas, there was growing concern about the size of its cultural and environmental footprint, due to poor management, insufficient planning, and disequilibrium in the priorities the industry ought to have.

In the 1980s, the industry's initial response was to come up with a form of *alternative tourism* that was opposed to conventional and commercial tourism on a global scale, and that favored forms of accommodation that promoted contact with local communities.¹⁶ Alternative tourism combined the rejection of mass tourism and the search for experiences that were deemed authentic.¹⁷ From it emerged *ecotourism*, a concept that was first applied generically to small-scale and low-impact activities that were more conscious of their social and environmental context. The International Ecotourism Society, founded in 1995, summarized ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education.”¹⁸

The Convergence toward Sustainable Development

In the 1970s, concern over the interaction of development and the environment gained a global stage for the first time, during the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment, also known as the Stockholm Conference. This event was a turning point in the development of international environmental politics, and it thus declared that the protection and improvement of the human environment is a vital factor in well-being and economic development. The 1970s also saw the creation of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the introduction of the historic and polemic Club of Rome report, *The Limits to Growth*, which forecasted the depletion of several natural resources if current consumption levels are maintained.



Bernardo O'Higgins National Park, Chile. Source: Pixabay – Luis Valiente, June 2016.

Many of these concerns were later included in the World Conservation Strategy, which was published in 1980 by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. This report is considered one of the most influential documents on nature conservation in the twentieth century and one of the first official documents to introduce the concept of sustainable development. It was followed in 1991 by *Caring for the Earth*, setting out fundamental principles and objectives for conservation worldwide, and the need to integrate conservation and sustainable development goals.

All the above-mentioned elements—the need for participatory models in the decisionmaking processes that affect people, the social and political acceptability of those decisions, and the maintenance of environ-

mental conditions that do not limit the options available in the future—were included in the 1987 Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, which was commissioned by the United Nations' World Commission on Environment and Development. Although the concept of sustainable development was evolving for a while in academic and conservation circles, the commission recognized that the current development model was headed on a collision course and that its patterns of production and consumption needed to be deeply revised and modified in order to achieve an equitable and lasting state of well-being.

The commission established the three pillars of sustainable development, which continue to be part of the concept today: economic growth, environmental protection,



Caminito, Buenos Aires, Argentina. Source: Unsplash - Nathana Rebouças

and social equity. And it defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

The Brundtland Report was the basis for the conversations that initiated the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, in 1992. Better known as the Earth Summit, the conference established historical legal instruments such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and Agenda 21, a nonbinding action plan that established a series of sustainable development goals at the regional, national, and local levels.

The Integration of Tourism and Sustainable Development

In this context, tourism begins to be integrated into the paradigm of sustainable development. In 1993, the first specialized academic journal on the subject was launched, *The Journal of Sustainable Tourism*.¹⁹ The first article published in the journal was dedicated to defining the subject and outlining its roles. Two years later, in 1995, the first World Conference on Sustainable Tourism was held in Lanzarote, Spain, with the motto “Towards a New Tourist Culture,” under the auspices of organizations like UNESCO, UNEP, and the UNWTO.²⁰ The conference saw the establishment of the concept of

sustainable tourism and the adoption of the World Charter for Sustainable Tourism, which drove tourism toward more responsible ways of conceiving of and conducting the activity.²¹

Before the concept of sustainable tourism was deployed and consolidated as the governing model for all forms of tourism, ecotourism seemed to be the obvious answer to the problems and concerns of touristic activities on the environment. The proliferation of this concept led the United Nations to declare 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism, whose main activity was the celebration of the World Ecotourism Summit, which established the Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism. This event was followed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, which, in its Plan of Implementation, specifically called for the promotion of sustainable tourism as one of a number of strategies for protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development.²²

Sustainable Tourism Is Firmly Established

Soon after, in 2005, UNEP and the UNWTO gathered a decade of joint work by publishing the report *Making Tourism More Sustainable: A Guide for Policy Makers*. The document consolidates the concept and elaborates proposals on the objectives, policy guidelines, and strategies for the imple-

mentation of sustainable tourism, which it simply defines as “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.”²³ The UNWTO emphasizes that all forms of tourism—regardless of their nature, scale, and target market—must be sustainable, and that these needs and effects must be considered from the planning stage through the operation of touristic activities, as part of a continuous process of improvement. Sustainable tourism should thus make optimal use of environmental resources, conserve biodiversity, and maintain essential ecological processes, all which constitute a key element in tourism development. It should respect communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage, and ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing benefits that are distributed fairly among all stakeholders, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.²⁴

Moreover, the UNWTO establishes that “sustainable tourism development requires the *informed participation* of all relevant stakeholders, as well as *strong political leadership* to ensure wide participation and *consensus building*. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it *requires constant monitoring* of impacts, introducing

the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary. . . . Sustainable tourism should also *maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience* to the tourists, *raising their awareness about sustainability issues* and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them.”²⁵ Therefore, an appropriate balance must be established between the environmental, sociocultural, and economic aspects of tourism development so as to guarantee its sustainability in the long term.

Since then, the concept of sustainable development has continued to advance and gain relevance on national and international agendas. In 2012, the final document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (RIO + 20) emphasized tourism for the first time. That is how, in 2015, the World Summit on Sustainable Tourism (ST+20) was held in Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain, twenty years after the encounter in Lanzarote. Here, the question was no longer whether tourism should be sustainable but how we can reach the full potential of sustainable tourism, benefiting communities and generating economic prosperity at the same time as we protect our cultural and natural patrimony.²⁶

In recent years, the United Nations General Assembly adopted several resolutions acknowledging its importance as a tool for development, poverty eradication, and en-

vironmental protection, culminating in the UN declaration of 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development (IY2017), where five pillars of tourism for development were identified:

- i. Sustainable economic growth;
- ii. Social inclusiveness, employment and poverty reduction;
- iii. Resource efficiency, environmental protection, and climate change;
- iv. Cultural values, diversity, and heritage; and
- v. Mutual understanding, peace, and security.

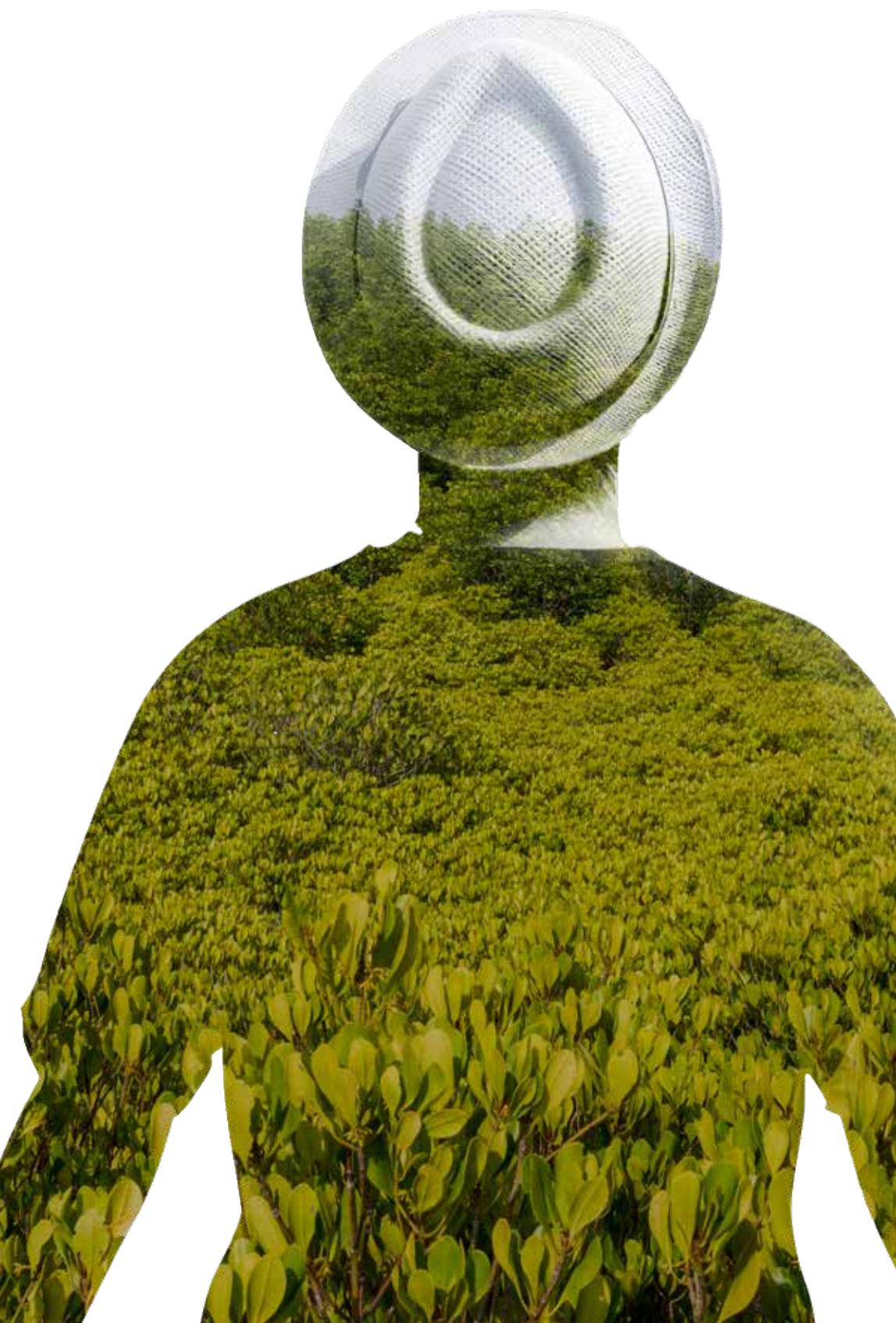
Tourism and the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals

The five pillars of tourism mentioned above provided a framework for all the players involved in tourism (companies, planners, tourists, and host communities) to consider how their actions and initiatives could contribute to sustainable development and make tourism a catalyst for positive development.²⁷ Conveniently, this coincided with the adoption in 2015 of the United Nations

2030 Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, which made a universal call for measures to end poverty, fight inequality and injustice, protect the planet and address climate change, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity, without anyone being left behind, by 2030. The agenda works as a reference frame and an action plan for states, civil society, and the private sector to orient and measure their contributions to sustainable development by 2030. Using a more holistic and integrated approach, this plan establishes seventeen Sustainable Development Goals and recognizes tourism as an engine that can boost both socioeconomic development and environmental conservation. Tourism is mentioned specifically in three of the seventeen goals: related to sustainable economic growth and decent employment, on responsible consumption and production, and the conservation and sustainable use of oceans.



Salvador de Bahia, Brazil. Source: Pixabay - Diga Salinas, November 2019.





THREE OPPORTUNITIES FOR LATIN AMERICA,

Millennials: Postmaterial Values for Sustainable Tourism in LAC

There has recently begun to be an interest in studying the future of tourism from a generational standpoint. The goal is to understand the values and motivations that drive different generations to travel, and to identify the types of products and touristic experiences for which they are looking. Special attention has been devoted to understanding the so-called millennial generation and, more recently, Generation Z, both of which represent a profound break with the past. While there is no consensus on the definition of millennials and many authors warn of overgeneralization, the term basically refers to individuals who reached adulthood at the beginning of the twenty-first century (born between 1981 and 1995), with Generation Z corresponding to those who were born after millennials (between about 1996 and 2010).²⁸ Generation Z, also known as the “iGeneration,” is the first generation born in the twenty-first century. They are 100 percent digital, having grown up in a world of cell phones, tablets, and social networks and being unable to recall a time without Internet. They are multitaskers, are pragmatic, and have short attention spans.

There are two factors that combine in these generations and that provide opportunities for sustainable tourism in Latin America. First, their members are skilled with technology, social media, and digital platforms and are immersed in a global online culture, which translates into new ways of finding information, relating to others, communicating, and sharing.²⁹ Second, because these generations have grown up between global economic and environmental crises, studies consistently show that their members have a preference for sustainable options, socially responsible brands, and lived rather than material experiences, as well as a focus on the generation of shared values. “In other words, millennials consider themselves as explorers, and would rather spend money on experiences than on material things.”³⁰ The CEO of Airbnb, Brian Chesky, noted that “three out of four millennials said they would rather purchase an experience than a good,” which represents a great opportunity for growth.³¹

According to the *Millennial Traveler Expedia Report*, 72 percent of millennials prefer to go on a dream holiday than to buy a brand new car (65 percent).³² Recent data show that millennials are willing to pay more for sustainability, compared with 51 percent of baby boomers.³³ They were born in a soci-





Tulum, Mexico. Source: Unsplash – Radek

ety where technology has made the division between home and away less important.³⁴ They live ubiquitously, hyperconnected, and their playing field is global. Which country these young people come from may not matter as much.

The interest in this generation as consumers of sustainable tourism services should not just be thought in terms of its present potential. According to the UNWTO,³⁵ young travelers age 15 to 29 accounted for an estimated 23 percent of international tourists in 2015; one of three hotel guest were millennials, and it is forecasted that by 2020, almost 370 million young travelers will account a total spend over \$400 billion.³⁶ By 2025, millennials will constitute three-quarters of the global workforce, which will bring them into a new era of spending power.³⁷

Therefore, if the tourism sector in Latin America and the Caribbean wants to pre-

pare for the future by designing products and services that future tourists will demand, it must take into consideration generational change and understand the values and motivations of current generations. Given that values are fairly stable determinants of conduct, understanding the values and motivations of current travelers will allow us to be prepared for the future.

The concept of tourism as an experience is of greater relevance among youth because they seek to avoid standard or homogeneous products, instead seeking new emotions and genuine experiences. They look for the new and avoid the quotidian—however, they are also sensitive to prices.³⁸

However, the meaning assigned to travel transcends individual needs, but also the need to be part of social trends, socialize with others (the “social other”), and be in contact with nature.³⁹ Millennials are moti-

vated by self-transcending values and look at the travel experience as an opportunity to learn about and understand other people and cultures in order to create a better world for themselves and others.⁴⁰ These are *young travelers with a purpose*, who want to “live like locals” and believe in making a difference into the world.⁴¹

Millennials, then, are natural travelers and consider travel an important part of their lives.⁴² They travel more, make more reservations online, explore more destinations, look for information, and tend to be ahead of tourism trends.⁴³ The exchange of photographs is an important part of their communication.⁴⁴

Young travelers *need for uniqueness* and *opinion leadership* with regard to travel increase the propensity to share travel experiences during a trip via social media. The choice of a vacation destination is a means of expressing this uniqueness and then sharing it with others.⁴⁵ Thus, in the future, trying to find and influence these opinion leaders, providing them with exceptional and unique experiences, should be the primary focus of

the travel experience provider. “Simply put, give a millennial opinion leader a ‘bucket list’ experience, and 100 will follow.”⁴⁶

The postmaterial values that characterize the millennial generation—their willingness to spend more on experiences than on things; their interest in the environment their longing to make contact with nature; and their desire to learn and understand other people and cultures—is an opportunity for Latin American and Caribbean countries and low-income or rural communities. Usually with limited infrastructure and underdeveloped resources, but with rich cultural and environmental features at its disposal, it can create an attractive, personalized, local, and unique sustainable tourism offer for the new generation of travelers.

However, adequate digital connectivity for providers of tourism services and guests must be secure to engage with this generation and grasp the potential of this segment of the market. This does not mean neglecting or abandoning other generations of travelers. An investigation conducted by



the Visa credit card company foresees that the trips of the population of older adults (over sixty-five years old), who are living longer and getting there in good condition, will double, to more than 180 million, by 2025.⁴⁷

As described by the authors the *Travel Trends Report 2018: TrekkSoft 2018*: “The beauty of travel is that it is for everyone. All abilities, all age groups, all backgrounds. If you want to attract millennials, show us you value all of your customers and that you see them as people, not just the chance to grab at millennial money. *Authenticity will keep business going* in a time when everyone’s trying so hard to be cool.”

Overtourism: An Opportunity for Less-Visited LAC Destinations?

In recent years, celebrated and growing international tourism, with all its economic benefits and jobs generation, has begun to show a negative side, especially in the most developed markets in Europe. Coincident with the 2017 World Year of Sustainable Tourism organized by the United Nations, “overtourism” became the buzzword of the season in the media, due to the coverage of antitourism protests by local residents in destinations such as Venice and Barcelona, who have been overwhelmed by the excessive increase of tourist crowds. This overcrowding is repeated in other places like Amsterdam, Dubrovnik, and Iceland, where

it is negatively altering daily life. With the current trend of tourists wanting to live like locals and have authentic experiences during their visit, residents are seeing a vanishing of their sense of place, in a wave of crowds, souvenir shops, buses, and noisy bars.⁴⁸

Overtourism has come to define itself as “tourism that has moved beyond the limits of acceptable change in a destination due to quantity of visitors, resulting in degradation of the environment and infrastructure, diminished travel experience, wear and tear on built heritage, and/or negative impacts on residents.”⁴⁹

Therefore, as these thresholds are surpassed, the quality of life of local populations diminishes, tourist assets begin to deteriorate, and, sometimes, the quality of the visitors’ experience is degraded. A recent document from the WTTC found that “some destinations are in danger of being loved to death,” identifying the five major problems associated with overcrowding: alienated local residents, a degraded tourism experience, an infrastructure overloaded, damage to nature, and threats to cultural heritage.

The same dynamics of travel and tourism that are discussed above have exacerbated this overcrowding: The rise of the middle classes throughout the world, which have more money to travel with an anxious pattern that tends to take the form of a bucket


 Tortugero National Park, Costa Rica

list (actually, 45 percent of travelers have a travel bucket list in mind, and 82 percent of them plan to tick one or more destinations off their list in the coming year;⁵⁰ the new generations of millennials who are travelers by nature; the dramatic reduction of airfare and digital platforms that facilitate travel; and the massive diffusion and awareness of rankings and reviews of the places that “must be visited before you die,” which are concentrated in the same famous attractions. Even the spread of endangered natural destinations, whose threatened condition can encourage more people to visit these places “while they still can,” exacerbates the problem.⁵¹

These nuisances attributed to “tourismphobia,”⁵² although perceptions and conditions change from place to place, have grounds in reality. First, numbers do not lie, and they are exploding in many places. For example, in Iceland, from 2009 onward, tourist growth has been a hockey stick curve, with a population of 350,000 residents receiving 2.2 million tourists in 2017, which led the authorities to establish restrictions on vulnera-

ble natural areas. Barcelona estimates that it had 30 million overnight visitors in 2017, compared with the 1.6 million resident population.⁵³ Also in 2017, 20 million tourists visited Amsterdam, which has a local population of a little over 800,000.⁵⁴ In global terms, currently almost half the tourist arrivals in the world are concentrated in twenty countries, and by 2020 it is estimated that the twenty most popular destinations will add another 120 million tourists, more than the rest of the world combined.⁵⁵ With all the benefits tourism brings, this unsustainable degradation of places and people cannot continue indefinitely. In the words of Taleb Rifai, former secretary general of the World Tourism Organization, “Jobs alone are not enough, charity is not enough, paying back in CSR [corporate social responsibility] is not enough... We can no longer be building 5-star hotels in 3-star communities.”⁵⁶

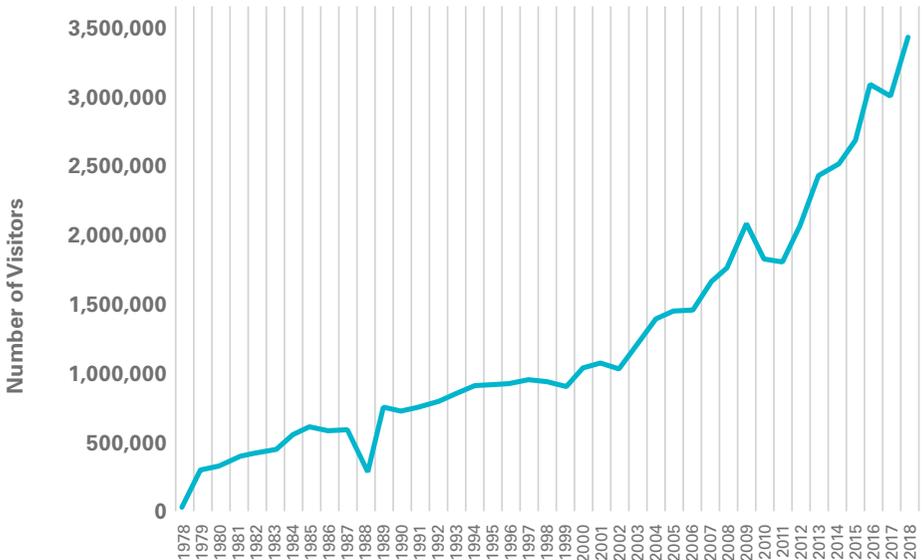
However, not only cities are experiencing overcrowding problems. Natural and protected areas all over the world have experienced a rise in visitation. Galapagos National Park in Ecuador almost doubled its

land visitors, and from 65 hotels in 2007 the number increase to 317 in 2017.⁵⁷ Chile's Torres del Paine National Park has doubled its visitation, from 128,000 to 265,000 in the last ten years, with a similar trend for its national park system (figure 20). In Maya Bay in Thailand, made famous by Leonardo DiCaprio's movie *The Beach*, had to close for several months because overtourism was damaging the marine environment. The same restrictions were applied on Moracay Island, in the Philippines, which went from 1 million visitors in 1990 to 6.6 million in 2017. New Zealand has also experienced a boom in tourism visitors of its natural features, due to what is called *The Lord of the Rings* ef-

fect, from the movie filmed in that location in 2001.⁵⁸ To manage overcrowding and avoid deterioration of the place and experience, cultural and archaeological sites such as Machu-Pichu have put in place access restrictions, not allowing more than 5,000 people a day, which requires booking in advance, and allowing entrance only with an official guide.

As a response to the fact that more places are threatened by their own popularity, many travel adviser websites have published "No Go" lists. Places like Galapagos, Machu Pichu, and Venice were among the no-go destinations.⁵⁹ However, beyond the nuisance and strains of tourism congestion, other serious issues are also affecting local resi-

FIGURE 20:
Total Annual Visitation to Chile's National Parks



Source: <http://www.conaf.cl/parques-nacionales/visitamos/estadisticas-de-visitacion/>.



Guatemala. Source: Unsplash – Jeison Higueta

dents: like the expansion of short-term rentals via platforms like Airbnb, which has been accused of displacing residents, increase of rents and the lack affordable housing—and also increases in shop prices, restaurants, cafes, and public transportation.⁶⁰ Others are mentioning the influence of social media, like Instagram and Facebook in promoting places. Justin Francis, CEO of Responsible Travel, stated in a press article: “Seventy-five years ago, tourism was about experience seeking. Now it’s about using photography and social media to build a personal brand. In a sense, for a lot of people, the photos you take on a trip become more important than the experience.”⁶¹ Photo-driven social media is also changing the outdoor experience.⁶²

Although some tourist operators and officials say this is not a problem of limiting numbers but rather of management and finding the way to accommodate everyone, it is really both. Overtourism occurs when tourism ex-

pansion fails to acknowledge that there are limits.⁶³ The management of a tourist destination is not so different from the management of a natural resource, which needs to respect sustainable thresholds in the activity so it can contribute with generalized benefits to the local economy, “but too many ruin it for everyone.”⁶⁴ So there is a carrying capacity for tourism resources that must be the basis for the tourism strategy for any destination if it wants to be sustainable.

The mention of overtourism in this section, and within the framework of this paper, seeks to point out how a growing and global problem, which is in part a product of the same success of the travel and tourism sector, can shed light on how Latin American countries can face their future development in tourism. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, which represent only 8 percent of the world’s tourist arrivals and are still at manageable volumes, can capture a growing segment of the market that wants



to escape from crowds and offer authentic, sustainable tourism products and services, where protection of the environment, respect for cultural heritage, and the well-being of local communities are priorities.

There are also economic reasons why low-scale operations can bring more resources to local economies than mass tourism. In Dominica and other Caribbean islands, tourists who stay in nature-based small hotels spent eighteen times more than cruise ship passengers visiting the same locations.⁶⁵ So-called eco-hotels hire and buy locally and, sometimes, contribute 95 percent of the local economy's money. UNEP notes that in most all-inclusive mass tourism package tours, about 80 percent of travelers' expenditures go to airlines, hotels, and other international companies and not to local businesses or workers. Of each \$100 spent on a vacation tour by a tourist from a developed country, only about \$5 actually stays

in a developing destination economy.⁶⁶ This economic loss is what UNEP calls "tourism leakage," due to factors such as foreign-owned operators, airlines, hotels, and imported food and products. At the opposite end, the Adventure Travel Tourism Association estimated that 65.6 percent of the total trip cost from an adventure package remains in the destination visited.⁶⁷

As a response to overtourism, a recent travel trends report stated that "undertourism is the new overtourism." This is a way of saying that many are beginning to understand that tourism is about quality rather than quantity: "As undertourism enters the industry's collective consciousness, offbeat destinations or those with new stories to tell are marketing immersive experiences that build relationships with people, places, culture, and community over Instagram-worthy photo ops and mass touring."⁶⁸

Digital Platforms: A Democratization of Media Access

Digital platforms, mobile computing, and social media are changing the way travel is traditionally researched, bought, sold, and experienced. Today's traveler leans heavily on technology during all stages of the journey, and is always connected. In a recent survey, 59 percent of travelers mentioned that they would use smartphones more than at home and 79 percent will check email on the trip.⁶⁹ A total of 49 percent of direct online bookings are now made on mobile devices, compared with 31 percent in 2016. In addition, messaging apps will very soon become a key marketing tool for businesses: A study from BI Intelligence shows that messaging apps have 20 percent more monthly active users than social networks. Validating this trend, travel statistics project that messaging apps will hit 2.48 billion users in 2021.⁷⁰

User-Generated Content

Connectivity on social networks is clearly

important to travelers. With things like user-generated content (UGC),⁷¹ every traveler is now a content creator and a publisher. UGC is fast becoming the most important and widely used source of travel information. Among the factors in rising UGC are massive adoption of mobile phones (now one-third of the global population⁷²); the rise of social media channels; the high-quality, intuitive, and user-friendly aspects of content creation platforms; and the decline of consumer brand trust as a source of information.⁷³

Sharing content, like travel experiences and photographs or posting reviews, is becoming natural for the travelers as part of a new interactive tourism experience. In a recent survey, 70 percent were very likely to share their holiday pictures on social media. In 2017, Instagram reported the uploading of more than 95 million videos and photographs every day.⁷⁴ Online travel reviews on TripAdvisor have grown to 660 million (in 2018), with more than 255 new contributions

Patagonia, Argentina. Source: Unsplash - Nathana Rebouças - Eric Carlson.

every minute.⁷⁵ In addition, most studies are pointing out that UGC is perceived as more trustworthy than official or traditional travel sources of information. Thus travelers trust other travelers more than they trust brands. As mentioned in a TripAdvisor report,⁷⁶ “travelers put trust in real reviews”: 53 percent of bookers will not commit to booking until they have read reviews, and 80 percent would read between six and twelve reviews before booking. In a study in which more than 23,000 participants participated in thirty-three markets, 86 percent of travelers will not book accommodations without reading reviews first.⁷⁷ Traditional media, conversely, are losing validity; fewer than 4 percent of those interviewed in a global report said that they had thought about their new trip because of something they saw in a news-

paper or magazine, or in advertising.⁷⁸

Digital platforms have allowed a free stage where people are able share their travel experiences online about the places they have visited or stayed.⁷⁹ Expanding traditional *word-of-mouth* (WOM) beyond their physical social circles has given rise to a phenomenon called eWOM.⁸ Because travel is not a tangible product that can be tested before purchase, UGC and eWOM stories allow travel researchers to have a sense of what the experience would be.⁴ A kind of “(virtual) experience before the (actual) experience” is thus becoming a strong influence on consumers’ decisionmaking. In the case of millennials, different studies have found that 89 percent plan travel activities based on content published online by their peers, nearly



all post on social networks, and 75 percent post at least once a day.

The ability to interact with others and share content without a media outlet is shifting the power dynamics between businesses and consumers, democratizing digital media.⁸⁰ This is significantly affecting the ways business operate and destinations manage to attract visitors. Although it can be disruptive for traditional businesses and mature destinations, it can be a source of new opportunities for low-income countries and developing destinations to become more sustainable, inclusive, and competitive. Thanks to digital platforms, and the reduction of technological and access barriers, small and medium-sized tourism businesses can access and reach new markets and customers as never before, with almost zero transaction costs, providing services and engaging directly with the consumer, without the need for intermediaries.⁸¹ Therefore, as people are looking for experiential and transformative travel, new and low-income travel destinations that connect with local culture are in demand.⁸² Cost-effective ways to access the market, which included direct contact between the provider and the customer, leave out the extra cost of the intermediate person. And they also give access also to UGC platforms—like TripAdvisor, Facebook, Google, Instagram, ND, and

Twitter—that can market your destination or businesses.

The challenge now is how accessible these technologies are, how these places access high-speed connectivity or the Internet at all: “Harnessing innovation for the benefit of the poor is one of the most important challenges currently facing development organizations.”⁸³ And once you are online, how businesses respond to tourists’ expectations in a very timely fashion is crucial.

The Sharing Economy

Another source of opportunities for ordinary residents to participate in the tourism value chain is what is known as the “sharing economy,” meaning the “sharing of underutilized assets and services, monetized or not, between private individuals, using an online platform.”⁸⁴ Service companies like Uber, Lyft, and Airbnb are the best examples. In the case of Airbnb, P2P accommodation, where the provider charges a rental fee and the guest directly pays the provider or uses an intermediary platform, which charges a commission, can be an option where local residents can participate, providing genuine experiences that new travelers are demanding. Although there has lately been a public debate, over issues like rising real estate prices and rental home affordability, the projected annual rate growth for global P2P



Isabela Island, port of Puerto Villamil, Galapagos Islands, Ecuador. shutterstock.com

accommodation was estimated at 31 percent between 2013 and 2015, six times the growth rate of traditional bed-and-breakfasts and hostels. In addition, data from Airbnb showed that the number of guests in low-income and lower-middle-income communities increased from a little over 300,000 in 2014 to more than 4 million in 2017, although Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries still represent between 3 to 1 percent of the demand. Again, the millennials: 60 percent of all guests who book on Airbnb are between the age of eighteen and thirty-five.⁸⁵

However, as limited these statistics are, trends are relentlessly growing everywhere. LAC countries should be prepared on how to respond to and seize these opportunities. Rural and isolated areas, with a lack of formal lodging facilities, have an opportunity to respond to this demand. In emerging

low-income destinations and areas without overtourism, P2P accommodation may be a useful tool to offer genuine local experiences, and intelligently designed digital campaigns based on UGC can make a significant difference. Indeed, as World Bank case studies point out, “Those destinations that tap into the power of UGC to tell their story have managed to increase awareness of their product. Low-income tourism destinations can also leverage the data and insights gained from UGC to improve destination management, product offerings, industry insights and marketing. UGC and the data it yields can provide less costly alternatives to traditional tourism marketing like trade fairs and mass-media campaigns and costly and time-intensive surveys.

Harnessing Opportunities

Nevertheless, to do it right and grasp the opportunities of these new tools will require addressing regulatory challenges, improved digital access and literacy, increasing business capacities, planning ahead, integrated management, developing quality standards, and the involvement of and engagement with all stakeholders. The host community, with the help of governments agencies and tourism service providers, must together define the identity of the place where they live, what they have to offer, and the story they want to tell in the form of a tourism products and services. Their story must pur-

sue the integrity of the community, secure livelihoods, protect the environment and cultural heritage and the quality of the experience for guests, and guarantee inclusive and sustainable growth.

As we can see, they revolve around the power of stories, people, and places—not material things. As put by Olan O’Sullivan, the COO of TrekkSoft: “Travel is about the people we meet. It is about who we are and what we want to do. Is it food experiences? Active outdoor pursuits? Experiencing different cultures? *Travel is about what you do and who you experience it with.*”



Eco lodge, Puerto Viejo de Talamanca, Costa Rica



Brazil, Praia do Toque-Toque Pequeno.
Source: Unsplash - Sergio Souza

IV A BASIC FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AGENDA

The notion of sustainable tourism served for some time to challenge an industry guided by commercial interests and market rules, forcing it to review its performance based on what is ecologically appropriate, culturally and socially acceptable, and economically feasible. Apparently, no one could be against the principles or definition of sustainable development established in such general terms, whose concept seems to be logical and irrefutable and generates full acceptance. However, this traditional notion does not seem to be very useful today; again, it is being challenged according to who determines what is appropriate, what is acceptable, and what is feasible in a particular environmental, social, and economic context. Also, basically, what do we seek to sustain, what needs do we want to satisfy, for what and for whom; and what do we mean by optimal use of resources, inclusive development, and fair distribution of benefits? How are the needs of the present and future considered? Therefore, some authors consider it valid to ask the question of whether these conventional definitions of sustainable tourism are adequate to face the challenges in the context of complexity and the uncertainty of the twenty-first century.⁸⁶

Therefore, to face in a practical way the future challenges to build tourism products and destinations based on the incorporation of sustainable tourism as a force that preserves nature and culture, and generates well-being and quality of life for host communities and economic prosperity, we must begin first to understand its nature and start with those questions that aim directly at the objectives they wish to achieve.

In first place, recognize that tourism is an economic activity, a form of development embedded in global capitalism, which tends by its nature to maximize profits but that depends for its viability on the conservation of resources that attract tourists, either cultural or environmental. That is to say, on one hand, in its economic dimension, it is aimed at producing economic progress, but on the other hand, in its social dimension, it aims at the well-being of society. Sustainable tourism will permanently face this tension, which must always be resolved in favor of guaranteeing the protection and integrity of the social and environmental components on which it depends. This tension between development and sustainability rests on two different paradigms. While development assumes linear logic that points to a growth tra-

jectory, sustainability rests on circular logic or a closed system loop.⁸⁷ This is why Bosak suggests that sustainable tourism should be approached as a socioecologically resilient system, capable of reacting, reorganizing, and adapting to alterations; recovering its integrity; retaining its functions; and maintaining its trajectory. In the end, it has the ability to change while maintaining its identity. The resilience of the socioecological system is what sustainable tourism must maintain.

And because sustainable tourism does not happen spontaneously, to address this task, planning is required—but planning that, according to Bosak and McCool, must be inclusive, thoughtful, and adaptive, and thus respectful of diversity of perspective and underlying and shared values, that recognizes the critical role that local and regional institutions frame as possible. Planning allows

for deliberation, idea generation, innovation, and visioning, and a clear set of goals and actions to achieve those goals, which must be followed by implementation, managing, and monitoring for the desired outcomes. If the desired outcome is not achieved, plans must change. So, as well as being participative, planning must be adaptive. Bosak and McCool propose a set of questions to encourage communities to dive deeply on their journey toward sustainable tourism: Why is a community pursuing sustainable tourism? What is to be sustained, and why, and what is the ultimate goal? What do communities want from sustainable tourism? What will be the strategy for sustainable tourism development at the community level?

Along with the system thinking approach mentioned above, several aims suggested by the United Nations to articulate an agen-



Cost Rica. Source: Unsplash – Perry Grone

da for sustainable tourism can be used as a framework to identify policy areas and actions, recognizing two directions in which tourism policy can exert an influence:⁸⁸

- minimizing the negative effects of tourism on society and the environment; and
- maximizing tourism's positive and creative contribution to local economies, the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, and the quality of life of hosts and visitors

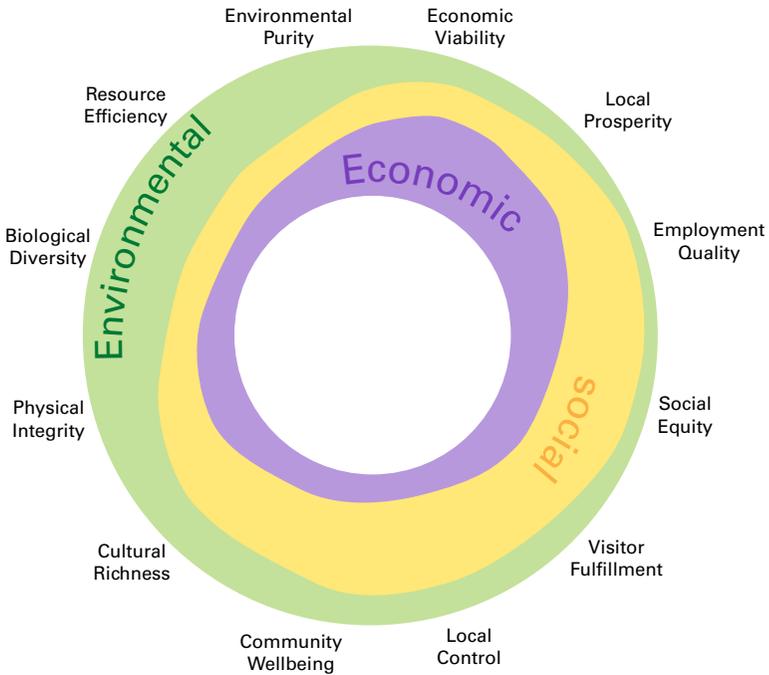
There are twelve proposed aims for an agenda for sustainable tourism:⁸⁹

6. *Economic viability:* To ensure the viability and competitiveness of tourism destinations and enterprises, so that they are able to continue to prosper and deliver benefits in the long term.
7. *Local prosperity:* To maximize the contribution of tourism to the economic prosperity of the host destination, including the proportion of visitor spending that is retained locally.
8. *Employment quality:* To strengthen the number and quality of local jobs created and supported by tourism, including the level of pay, conditions of service and availability to all, without discrimination by gender, race, disability, or in other ways.
9. *Social equity:* To seek a widespread and fair distribution of economic and social benefits from tourism throughout the recipient community, including improving opportunities, income, and services available to the poor.
10. *Visitor fulfillment:* To provide a safe, satisfying, and fulfilling experience for visitors, available to all without discrimination by gender, race, disability, or in other ways.
11. *Local control:* To engage and empower local communities in planning and decisionmaking about the management and future development of tourism in their area, in consultation with other stakeholders.
12. *Community well-being:* To maintain and strengthen the quality of life in local communities—including social structures and access to resources, amenities, and life support systems—avoiding any form of social degradation or exploitation.
13. *Cultural richness:* To respect and enhance the historic heritage, authentic culture, traditions, and distinctiveness of host communities.

- 14. *Physical integrity*: To maintain and enhance the quality of landscapes, both urban and rural, and avoid the physical and visual degradation of the environment.
- 15. *Biological diversity*: To support the conservation of natural areas, habitats, and wildlife, and minimize damage to them.
- 16. *Resource efficiency*: To minimize the use of scarce and nonrenewable resources in the development and operation of tourism facilities and services.
- 17. *Environmental purity*: To minimize the pollution of air, water, and land and the generation of waste by tourism enterprises and visitors.

Figure 22 illustrates how many of the aims relate to a combination of environmental, economic, and social issues and effects.

FIGURE 22. Relationship between the 12 Aims and the Pillars of Sustainability





Parque Das Aves, Brazil. Source: Unsplash – Jaime Spaniol



CONCLUSION

It has been established in this paper that the travel and tourism sector is a remarkable generator of wealth and jobs, and that it has become a very important part of the economy that sustains many low-income countries. However, the accelerated growth of the tourism sector is starting to pressure the socioecological system that sustains this activity, with an increase in greenhouse emissions associated with the increase of airline flights, and saturated or overpopulated destinations; communities overwhelmed and disturbed in their livelihoods and that do not perceive benefits; contaminated and deteriorated environmental and cultural assets; and degraded tourism experiences and disappointed tourists.

Tourism's economic contribution to development can be maintained over time only if understood as equitable and inclusive growth, based on ensuring the protection of nature, its habitat and biodiversity, and preserving the sociocultural heritage and promoting the well-being of the communities—that is, if it is based on the development of a tourism that is sustainable.

This leads us to rethink what we understand by sustainable tourism, and what should be sustained? What we must affirm is the capacity of the socioecological

system to maintain its integrity and prosperity. It is the strength and integrity of the social and environmental dimensions that are at the base of the system's resilience, on which the economic dimension depends and which is called to integrate and make its contribution, in a cycle of virtuous and lasting feedback. As a United Nations report very lucidly expressed: "Tourism has immense power to do good. Yet it can also be the vector for the very pressures that may destroy the assets on which it relies. Developed without concern for sustainability, tourism can not only damage societies and the environment, it could also contain the seeds of its own destruction."⁹⁰

The positive side of this challenge is that travel trends are showing new sources of opportunities for the kind of tourism that Latin America and the Caribbean region should seek and of which they are in a better position to take advantage. We are seeing a growing segment of new travelers and new generations of millennials demanding more authentic and unique experiences, not "things," or standard products or sophisticated infrastructures. This "sustainable traveler" is more educated; spends more and stays more days in destinations; cares about choosing activities and businesses that generate social, economic, and environmental benefits for local communities; and is increasingly

aware of conservation of natural and cultural assets. The new traveler is looking for a personalization of experiences, avoiding the massive and depersonalized, aspiring to live a meaningful and memorable experience, getting to know people with their histories and cultures; knowing and touring places and landscapes, but more than just learning facts about various locations, immersing themselves in the cultures and lifestyles of others, to be a “temporary” local. Therefore, the opportunities for the LAC region to embrace tourism based on experience depends largely not on the expensive, heavy infrastructure found in other latitudes but on the capacity of the host country and communities to build these meanings. Hospitality and welcoming values that are naturally present in our cultures, which make for great hosts—together with conserving their environment, culture, and ways of life—become a source of income opportunities, high-quality jobs, and prosperity for local communities.

Another positive trend is the proliferation of digital platforms, which is democratizing access and facilitating direct interaction between providers of tourist services and consumers, without the need for intermediaries. This is helping small and medium-sized business that were traditionally subsumed by large tourist operators. The rise of social media and user-generated content is making it easier for users to share experiences,

make and read reviews, and promote places without the need for providers of services to market in traditional media outlets, reducing promotional costs.

LAC countries can seize this momentum; with 50 percent of global biodiversity, a percentage of protected areas in double digit numbers, a diversity of landscapes, thriving indigenous communities, a unique cultural and historical heritage, and remote and less visited places, these countries can play a leading role in the new tourism trends, seeking more genuine and enriching experiences. In the maintenance of these attributes rests the future of any tourist activity, because only good conservation will make possible sound, sustainable tourism development. Places like the Atacama Desert, the Galapagos, and the Amazon; the protected areas of Costa Rica; and the recently created Routes of Parks of Patagonia—to name a few—are increasingly captivating the attention of the new explorer tourists of the twenty-first century, a true and sustainable economic opportunity for these regions to generate value and raise awareness of these amazing places.

Of course, to harness these opportunities and unleash the potential for sustainable tourism, key basic arrangements will be needed, like investments in digital connectivity, improved digital and business

literacy, capacity building in tourism management in local communities, developing standards for tourism products and services, and public access infrastructure for natural and cultural assets, enough to seize sustainable tourism flows. More than complex and onerous investments, it will require intelligent design, simple but functional infrastructure, planning, destination management, motivating stories, and placing as a central value to protect environmental and cultural assets, which are at the base of a sustainable tourism.

For the tourism industry, beyond acting as a responsible citizen, sustainability is the only way to keep the viability of its business in the long term, because any damage to the natural, cultural, or social assets of a destination can lead to the eventual destruction or loss of tourist products. That is why tourism companies must go beyond operational efficiency and philanthropy, and must align their business objectives with sustainable development objectives, integrating sustainability into the heart of the business, which will improve competitiveness and protect tourist assets.

Conversely, governments must very carefully develop well-crafted and precise designs of the attributes they want to highlight, the image they want to project, and how to develop an intelligent destination

management strategy that puts more emphasis on quality than quantity, with a long-term view. Investing in destinations—such as archaeological sites, protected areas, or traditional towns—in many cases is more necessary, useful, and profitable than to continue spending on traditional promotion, which today is being replaced by digital channels, of lower cost and effectiveness. In addition, governments must lead and generate alliances and coordination among different interest groups to adopt policies and actions and initiatives between government, the private sector, nongovernmental organizations, experts and academics, the local community, and other international actors from whom they can learn of their experiences.

Finally, the economic benefits of tourism and its contribution to employment and investments, are undeniable. We know that with well-designed and -managed sustainable tourism, we can help reduce poverty, protect biodiversity and cultural heritage, and support the well-being of communities in Latin America and the Caribbean. As expressed by the UNWTO: “The shift from commitment to actions and results can only be achieved if sustainable development moves from the periphery to the core of decisionmaking in both public and private domains”⁹¹



Los Flamencos National Reserve in San Pedro de Atacama, Chile. Source: Unsplash - Paula Porto, September 2015



APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:			
Direct Tourism's Impact on GDP and Employment in Latin America and the Caribbean			
DIRECT GDP (%)		DIRECT EMPLOYMENT (%)	
British Virgin Islands	35.40	Aruba	30.10
Aruba	28.10	St Lucia	26.40
Anguilla	21.10	Bahamas	26.20
Bahamas	19.00	British Virgin Islands	25.20
Belize	15.00	Anguilla	22.80
St Lucia	15.00	Antigua and Barbuda	13.50
US Virgin Islands	13.30	Barbados	13.50
Antigua and Barbuda	13.00	Belize	13.40
Barbados	13.00	US Virgin Islands	12.80
Dominica	12.40	Dominica	11.30
Jamaica	10.30	Cayman Islands	9.70
Cayman Islands	8.10	Jamaica	9.20
Mexico	7.10	Bermuda	9.10
Grenada	7.00	Mexico	7.50
Nicaragua	6.00	Grenada	6.40
St Vincent and the Grenadines	5.90	Panama	6.30
Panama	5.90	St Vincent and the Grenadines	5.50
Honduras	5.50	Costa Rica	5.10
Dominican Republic	5.40	Dominican Republic	4.80
Bermuda	5.20	Honduras	4.70
Costa Rica	5.00	Nicaragua	4.50
El Salvador	4.00	WORLD AVERAGE	3.80
Peru	3.80	Martinique	3.80
Argentina	3.70	Trinidad and Tobago	3.70
Uruguay	3.60	Uruguay	3.60
Chile	3.40	Argentina	3.50
Haiti	3.30	El Salvador	3.50
Martinique	3.30	Chile	3.40
WORLD AVERAGE	3.20	Guadeloupe	3.20
Brazil	2.90	Haiti	2.80
Guatemala	2.90	Brazil	2.60
Trinidad and Tobago	2.80	Guatemala	2.60
Bolivia	2.80	Peru	2.50
Venezuela	2.60	Cuba	2.40
Cuba	2.50	Bolivia	2.40
Guadeloupe	2.40	Colombia	2.40
Ecuador	2.20	Venezuela	2.30
Colombia	2.10	Ecuador	2.20
Paraguay	1.70	Paraguay	1.30

Source: WTTC, 2018.

APPENDIX B:			
Total Tourism's Impact on GDP and Employment in Latin America and the Caribbean			
TOTAL GDP (%)		TOTAL EMPLOYMENT (%)	
British Virgin Islands	98.50	Aruba	87.00
Aruba	85.60	British Virgin Islands	72.80
Anguilla	61.60	Anguilla	64.30
Antigua and Barbuda	51.80	Bahamas	55.70
Bahamas	47.80	St Lucia	50.80
St Lucia	41.80	Antigua and Barbuda	41.60
Belize	41.30	Barbados	40.50
Barbados	40.60	Belize	37.30
Dominica	37.60	Dominica	34.40
Jamaica	32.90	Cayman Islands	31.30
Cayman Islands	29.50	Jamaica	29.80
US Virgin Islands	28.00	US Virgin Islands	25.40
St Vincent and the Grenadines	23.40	St Vincent and the Grenadines	21.50
Grenada	23.30	Grenada	21.40
Dominican Republic	17.20	Bermuda	20.70
Bermuda	17.10	Mexico	16.40
Mexico	16.00	Dominican Republic	15.90
Honduras	15.00	Panama	14.40
Panama	14.50	Martinique	13.90
Martinique	13.50	Honduras	13.20
Costa Rica	12.90	Costa Rica	12.50
Nicaragua	12.70	Guadeloupe	11.50
Guadeloupe	10.90	Nicaragua	10.50
Cuba	10.70	Chile	10.20
Uruguay	10.60	Uruguay	10.20
WORLD AVERAGE	10.40	WORLD AVERAGE	9.90
Chile	10.40	Cuba	9.90
Argentina	10.30	Trinidad and Tobago	9.90
El Salvador	10.10	Argentina	9.80
Peru	9.80	El Salvador	9.10
Haiti	9.70	Haiti	8.50
Guatemala	8.00	Peru	8.00
Brazil	7.90	Brazil	7.30
Trinidad and Tobago	7.70	Guatemala	7.20
Venezuela	7.40	Venezuela	6.40
Bolivia	7.10	Bolivia	6.30
Colombia	5.80	Colombia	5.80
Ecuador	5.40	Ecuador	5.10
Paraguay	4.80	Paraguay	3.90

Source: WTTC, 2018.

APPENDIX C:			
Tourism Visitor Exports and Investment in Latin America and the Caribbean			
VISITOR EXPORTS (%)		INVESTMENT (%)	
Anguilla	91.00	US Virgin Islands	45.10
Aruba	75.50	Antigua and Barbuda	41.40
Bahamas	72.80	Aruba	31.70
Barbados	68.20	Belize	27.00
St Lucia	67.10	St Lucia	24.70
British Virgin Islands	62.10	Cayman Islands	23.90
Jamaica	60.90	Barbados	22.70
Grenada	60.80	Cuba	21.60
Antigua and Barbuda	60.40	St Vincent and the Grenadines	19.10
Dominica	56.40	Bahamas	18.60
US Virgin Islands	54.10	British Virgin Islands	17.80
St Vincent and the Grenadines	48.00	Grenada	14.00
Guadeloupe	45.60	Jamaica	12.90
Belize	43.10	Dominica	12.10
Martinique	42.90	Anguilla	11.40
Dominican Republic	38.70	Trinidad and Tobago	11.00
Haiti	34.40	El Salvador	10.90
Cuba	27.10	Chile	10.50
Panama	25.20	Honduras	10.50
Uruguay	24.60	Guatemala	8.30
Cayman Islands	24.20	Uruguay	7.70
Costa Rica	20.30	Argentina	7.50
Bermuda	16.40	Martinique	6.10
El Salvador	16.10	Brazil	6.10
Nicaragua	14.90	Venezuela	5.90
Colombia	14.30	Panama	5.20
Ecuador	10.60	Ecuador	4.90
Bolivia	9.80	Guadeloupe	4.80
Guatemala	9.50	Peru	4.80
Peru	9.20	Bermuda	4.60
Trinidad and Tobago	8.20	Mexico	4.60
Argentina	7.60	WORLD AVERAGE	4.50
Honduras	7.30	Haiti	4.20
WORLD AVERAGE	6.50	Nicaragua	4.00
Chile	6.20	Costa Rica	4.00
Mexico	5.20	Dominican Republic	3.80
Paraguay	3.70	Colombia	3.30
Venezuela	2.80	Bolivia	2.80
Brazil	2.30	Paraguay	1.60

Source: WTTC, 2018..



San Camillo market, Arequipa, Peru

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AUTHOR



Hernán Mladinic has nearly three decades of experience as an executive and professional in non-profit and governmental organizations, as well as businesses concerned with environmental issues including the planning of public-private nature conservation initiatives. For the past ten years, he served as Executive Director of the Pumalín Park and Project (later Tompkins Conservation). From that position, he led efforts with Chilean government institutions concerning the development of national parks and headed the team that proposed the “Network of Parks of Chilean Patagonia,” an agreement with the government of President Michelle Bachelet. The agreement resulted in the creation of five new national parks and the expansion of three existing parks, encompassing 10 million acres. This resulted from the historic donation of one million acres made by Tompkins Conservation, the largest donation ever made from a private organization to a single nation in the world.

The initiative has led to the creation of a new tourist destination, the “Route of the Parks,” a vision of development based on conservation, which will establish a network of 17 national parks, throughout 1,700 miles from the southern city of Puerto Montt to Cape Horn, boosting economic development and prosperity of local communities. Mladinic currently serves as a member of the Advisory Board of the non-profit organization “Friends of Parks in Patagonia,” created under the umbrella of the Tompkins Conservation group to promote a culture of appreciation and protection of national parks in Chile and beyond. He holds a B.A. in Sociology from the University of Chile, and an M.A. in Environmental Studies from the University of Toronto.



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