

Background Guide

United Nations World Tourism Organization

Overtourism



JACKRABBIT MUN VIII

L.B. POLY - MAY 23th, 2026

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CO-HEAD CHAIR LETTERS

Hello Delegates!

My name is Amira Inui, and I will be your co-chair for this year's room regarding the global over tourism crisis. I am a sophomore in Highschool, and this is my second year in Model United Nations. Through the various MUN conferences I have attended, I have gained valuable public speaking skills, and MUN taught me how to efficiently collaborate and share ideas on topics that affect millions of people around the world.

Outside of MUN, I enjoy attending speech and debate tournaments, drawing and animating, and attending my internship at the Japanese American Museum. During my free time, I enjoy nerding out, and obsessing over my favorite anime (Naruto) and reading manga.

I am so excited to see all of your ideas, work with all of you, and see all of the effort you put into making this a well-researched room! If everybody participates and showcases their research to the best of their abilities, you all will do amazing. It has been fun to observe the behind-the-scenes process work that goes into each and every room here at Jackrabbit MUN, and I heavily recommend seizing the opportunity to be a chair in the future.

See you all soon!

Sincerely,

Amira Inui

UNWTO: OverTourism | Co-Head Chair

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CO-HEAD CHAIR LETTERS

Ciao delegates!

My name is Kamille Banks, and I will be your other co-chair. I'm a senior in Highschool, and this is actually my first year in Model United Nations! This year has definitely taught me a lot, and I'm so glad that I had the opportunity to join. Outside of Model United Nations, I do swim here at poly. In the past I've played volleyball, basketball, and soccer. I'm the Oxford comma's biggest defender and I hope I can influence everyone to bring it back. My favorite movies are Scar Face and Almost Famous (My mom calls me her mini Penny Lane) and I love the anime Fullmetal Alchemist! I love to listen to music and I'm very diverse with what I listen to. I've been listening to a lot of Bruce Springsteen, The Beach Boys, and Blood Orange. Last year I was a big fan of Osamason, Che, and Summrs. I actually went to an Osamason concert and was at the barricade, definitely a very loop interesting experience. I've done pretty much everything and I've liked pretty much everything before. I'm a very adventurous person so I like to get into as many things as I can.

I absolutely cannot wait to work with everyone and see what you've all come up with. I'd know first hand, charm can only take you so far, preparation is key. If anyone has any questions please reach out! I'm a very friendly gal and I love to talk and meet new people.

Sincerely,

Kamille Banks

UNWTO: OverTourism | Co-Head Chair

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POSITION PAPER GUIDELINES

- Position Papers are due at 11:59 PM on **Sunday, May 17th**.
- Delegates **must** submit position papers to be eligible for **research AND committee awards**.
- Position Papers can be submitted through a Google form:
 - <https://forms.gle/H3ruhahP2SQUEPs38>
- At the top of each paper, include your character/country name, first and last name, school name, and appropriate committee.
 - United States
 - First Last
 - School Name
 - UNWTO
- Papers should be emailed as a PDF file if necessary
 - Paper content should also be copied and pasted into the body of the email so it can still be graded in the event of any technical difficulties
 - Please name the file and subject line of the email [Committee_Country]
 - Ex. **UNWTO_UNITED STATES**
- Papers should be 1-2 pages in length with an additional Works Cited page in MLA format
- Papers should be single-spaced in Times New Roman 12 pt. font and include no pictures or graphics
- Please include the following sections for each committee topic:
 - Background & UN Involvement
 - Position of your Country
 - Possible Solutions

If you have any questions or concerns, please email one of your chairs.



TOPIC SYNOPSIS

Tourism is one of the world's largest economic sectors, and accounts for roughly 10% of the global GDP. As international travel continues to grow at a rapid rate, it creates what is known as “Overtourism.” The number of visitors to a destination becomes unsustainable; there is damage to architecture, local residents are displaced, and communities are exploited. The pressure mass tourism exudes threatens the very sights and experiences that tourists seek. Local residents suffer the most, often facing rising rent prices, the overcrowding of public spaces, and a loss of culture as cities start to lean into gentrification and economies become reliant on tourism for their economies. In these “Tourist hot-spots,” the environment is prone to suffering as well, facing issues like waste management crisis, water scarcity, and the destruction of fragile ecosystems.

Delegates will have to navigate the complex interests of countries, taking into consideration economies that might be tourist-dependent; some developing nations rely heavily on the money tourists bring for their survival. Additionally, private sectors such as airlines, hotel chains, and booking platforms focus on the expansion of these markets.

The cities of Barcelona and Kyoto are seeking congressional ways to limit day-trippers, and they will most likely not be the last. The goal isn't to seek an end to tourism, but to transform it into a sustainable system, in which the presence of travelers is beneficial to the lives of those living within the destinations rather than detrimental.

COMMITTEE DESCRIPTION

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is the UN agency responsible for promoting sustainable, responsible, and universally accessible tourism for all nations. The organization holds 159 members and 500 affiliates. UNWTO serves as the leading international body for rapidly evolving tourism policy, development, and governance.

Founded in 1975 and headquartered in Madrid, UNWTO's origins can be traced back to the International Union of Official Travel Organizations (IUOTO), which was established in 1925. UNWTO became a full UN specialized agency in just 2003 and has gone on to set new rules and guidelines into place. Things like the 1999 Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (GCET) have been passed by the UNWTO to set principles for responsible tourism.

In the last few years, the UNWTO has become a larger voice on the growing problem of overtourism. This evolving issue of visitor volumes exceeding the city's tourist capacity is compromising residents' well being and the environment. Places like Bali, Venice, and Barcelona are main victims and have faced rising home costs, environmental decay, and cultural assimilation. UNWTO has already responded with limited frameworks for visitor management and capacity assessment, but there is still room for improvement.

In partnerships with UNEP, UN-Habitat, and the World Bank, UNWTO is aligning new tourism frameworks with the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG 8 (decent work), SDG 11 (sustainable cities), and SDG 17 (partnerships) to address the ever evolving issues faced with growing tourism.



BACKGROUND

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The construct of tourism overcrowding erupted as early as the 19th century when European regions began promoting the development of tourist infrastructure to influence western tourism. This rise of industrialization created upper and middle classes that had available leisure time and the financial means to travel, leading ambitious entrepreneurs to invest heavily in coastal regions like England and France. These became the center of transforming towns and villages from working communities to leisure sites to develop resorts, walkways and entertainment venues for western vacationers who could help funnel more money into their economy.

However, this type of infrastructure was highly criticized as a rapid modification to how native European citizens would live everyday and inevitably, tourist infrastructure reshaped local economies to benefit the visitors rather than the residents' needs. Fishing villages specifically faced significant economic and cultural displacement as their daily work became a wonder and an inconvenience to tourists.

An example of this was the town of Brighthelmstone (modern day Brighton). Originally a fishing community, it evolved into a trendy seaside resort in the late 18th century. Local fishermen who aided the appeal to tourists by showcasing their wonders of sea life through their baiting machines and tours on their boats proved that their everyday lives were useful in promoting an ideal place to visit until tourists began to complain of their fishing nets obstructing their scenic views. Their high amount of complaints led to regulation and eventual police intervention that blocked the fishermen from their beaches. This marked a clear turning point of when local livelihoods would suffer at the hands of tourist demands.

This takeover not only bloomed in seaside regions but also inland. Expanding new railroad networks began to face the same pressures. The growth of railroad travel in the 19th century allowed railway companies to capitalize on more affordable travel packages which opened overcrowding to even more towns. They did so by exaggerating the charm and accessibility of traveling by train. This type of development overwhelmed and completely changed the landscapes of places nearly overnight. In other European regions such as Switzerland and Italy, the increase of railway travel encouraged tourism to alpine villages where overcrowding and environmental strain became a prominent issue. As well as cultural accommodation where traditional customs were forced to conform to tourist expectations and needs.

The developments seen early on would become the beginning of a century wide issue that would later be coined “Overtourism” by the Oxford Dictionary in 2018.

Causes and Growth of Overtourism

Many factors have contributed to the mass eruption of Overtourism, from economic appeals to mass culture. For many countries, tourism is at the forefront of economic growth, sparking the cultivation of 357 million jobs worldwide, the rise of money spent by visitors both domestically (5.4%) and internationally (11.6%) which has contributed to the 10% annual growth that tourism has contributed to the global GDP. Tourism is the source of many businesses' booming economies because of attraction to Airbnbs, local souvenir shops, food spots, clothing/jewelry shops. All which are promoted by the ideal of mass culture influence. Online platforms such as Instagram, Tiktok and Facebook are all filled with extensive amounts of information and influencers who continuously promote Tourist Culture, by promoting which restaurants to eat at, which monuments or hidden spots to explore and what countries



are ideal to visit at what times. Even film culture has played a significant part in tourism, when tourists plan to visit where their favorite movies have been filmed. While pressure on certain cities like Barcelona, Venice and Amsterdam are substantial, tourist marketing campaigns continue to target the same popular destinations through accessible transportation, improved prices to both hotels and flights which raise rents to local residences pushing locals out to make room for the growing normality of overtourism, ensuring a greater negative impact on these locations environmental and social wellbeing.

Environmental and Cultural Impacts

While tourism has presented economic growth both locally and globally as well as employment growth, there is a greater issue it presents. Overtourism has brought about the creation of new jobs but those of which are often seasonal and low paying, with significant revenue often going straight to corporations . Large numbers of tourists also place a prominent strain on natural environments, since the development needed to house and maintain tourist culture is dependent on construction of recreational facilities , these blueprints often work in a way that destroys important habitats and ecosystems, while also demanding an abundant use of natural resources like water and energy.

Venice and Barcelona have both had their cultural identity and daily life reshaped by Overtourism. In Barcelona, the influx of visitors has led to extreme overcrowding in popular tourist attractions such as the sagrada familia and Casa Batllo, usual everyday shops from locals are being replaced with tourist oriented shops. Additionally, there were over 150,000 illegally registered rooms all to accommodate the growing demand for more tourist housing. Similarly, Venice faces

the same growing issue of crowding, specifically in the San Marcos neighborhood where a majority of the popular sites are and the waterboats systems where locals are forced to wait for boats overcrowded by tourists with their luggage.

Thailand's Maya Beach is the most popular tourist location which in the past received close to 8,000 visitors and 100 boats on the bay everyday. Constant visitors destroyed the beach's ecosystem leaving 8% of the coral reefs intact compared to the 70% it was in previous years. This caused their closing in 2018 and it did not reopen until 2022.

When infrastructures are not built to sustain the amount of pollution and foot traffic that has been generated, that is when ecosystems and historic sites which have originally pulled tourists to these locations, are harmed and become vulnerable to erosion and deterioration. The high consumption rate of these resources has also depleted the amount available for local residents which in turn raises the growing resentment towards tourists. Overcrowding has reduced the overall quality of life for many locals who are forced to adapt to the public spaces that have now become dominated by visitors. This imbalance has reinforced social tensions and sparked countless protests across the globe for removal of tourists.

The need for Sustainable Tourism

While tourism has the potential to provide economic benefits to all residents of an inundated area, these cannot be enacted without serious tourism regulations. Sustainable tourism would ensure that all residents, not only tourists are allowed a positive experience, enhanced economic growth for all, appropriate cultural exchange and supported conservation efforts of prime locations across the world. When measures are placed proactively, popular tourist populations are allowed to

balance/limit the amount of visitors which would allow a more sustainable environment full of quality jobs and rising income that would ensure a quality experience for all people. Sustainable tourism is needed to ensure the quality of life for locals that have often received the short end of the stick far too often, such practices can work to protect not only the residents but also the natural resources and environments that attract tourists in the first place.

This can be done by promoting eco-friendly accommodations, supporting conservation programs and limiting tourists in eco-sensitive locations. For instance, in 2024 Copenhagen established a trial run of 'Copenpay', where tourists would be rewarded for participating in a clean-up, using bicycles as main transportation, and eating plant-based foods. They were able to get reduced or free access to popular attractions, free foods and more, it was such a success that it was approved for another round in 2025 where even more rewards like free yoga sessions and dinner from a Michelin restaurant were offered. This solution was offered to empower tourism in a good way and it did by increasing sustainable transportation by 21%, as well as to show that tourism could exist and do less harm. Similarly, New Zealand launched the Taiki Promise to have tourists act as protectors of the land they are visiting by sharing the culture and importance of nature to the Māori. The promise works to ensure that tourists take the right sustainable steps, like how to go about camping, driving and the ways they could negatively impact the island.

Before tourism took a negative view, it was aimed to promote the long term benefits towards one's economy, spread culture and diversity, allowing nature to thrive as well as people, supporting sustainable tourism would allow that to come back to life.

UNITED NATIONS INVOLVEMENT

The United Nations has changed its approach from once trying to promote more tourists to now encouraging better tourism. This is to say that the United Nations has moved from relying on the number of tourists as a way to measure success. A crucial step in this direction is the announcement of 2027 as the International Year of Sustainable and Resilient Tourism. This policy encourages all countries to practice quality over quantity. By focusing on the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action, the UN is setting strict standards for the industry to cut its carbon emissions in half by 2030. It's a significant move towards making sure that the tourism sector adopts a standard that will guarantee rapid infrastructure growth no longer destroys the local environment or displaces the residents.

To solve the acquisition of land that frustrates locals in cities like Venice and Barcelona, the UN has introduced the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism. This is a major tool, because it finally allows governments to track the hidden costs of travel. Additionally, the United Nations Best Tourism Villages initiative is working to move all the spotlight away from exhausted tourist hotspots and instead to rural communities giving them a chance to thrive as well without being overwhelmed.

In the financial aspect of things, the World Bank has stepped in to ensure that all money made from tourists stays where it is actually earned. Historically, lots of profits from overtourism gets leaked out to massive international corporations, leaving locals with low-paying seasonal jobs. Currently the World Bank targets Micro and Small Enterprises. This means grants and loans are actually going directly to locals.

The UN's main goal is to bring back the idea of travel as meaningful interpersonal communication. Bringing back a time where tourism genuinely helped local communities by balancing digital control and financial benefits, so locals are not at a disadvantage in their own neighborhoods. In total, the United Nations recognizes this bleak topic that's very real to many locals. Locals who feel exploited, and as if their homes and opportunities are being taken from them due to the overcrowding. The initiatives in place are predicted to have positive impacts.



BLOC POSITIONS

African Bloc:

These countries will have to focus on issues regarding their widespread case of issues such as poverty, climate induced droughts, and consistent war. While safaris and tropical rain forests help with Africa's economy, tourism in these areas also causes environmental degradation and marginalizes local communities. In addition to this, much of the revenue profits foreign operators. This continent's current struggle with these crises should be taken into consideration when drafting solutions to displacement and dysfunctional communities.

Asia-Pacific Bloc:

The Asian Pacific bloc faces some of the world's greatest overtourism pressures, due to its tendency towards rapid economic growth and its popular destinations. This bloc contains countries like Japan, Thailand, Korea, Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia. Small island states in the Pacific can be especially susceptible to issues like limited land and a deep rooted dependence on tourism that makes them highly sensitive to visitor surges.

Western European and Developed Bloc:

The Western European and Develop bloc includes countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, Sweden, and Denmark Many of these countries contain extreme tourist magnets like Venice, Barcelona, Amsterdam, and Paris. This can lead to year round overcrowding that stains markets, public transportation, and causes other short term problems that have long term consequences. Solutions should take into account these issues.

Middle Eastern Bloc:

The Middle Eastern bloc contains the countries Egypt, Lebanon, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and Iran. Overtourism in this area is typically concentrated historically at destinations that are major coastal hubs. Rapid post covid 19 tourism rebounds combined with limited infrastructure in less developed areas has intensified pressure on the environment and religious landmarks in those areas. Across this region, overtourism concerns intersect with water scarcity, heritage preservation, and the need for sustainable alternatives for these sensitive areas.

Latin American and Caribbean Bloc:

In Latin American countries such as Peru, Costa Rica, Brazil, and Ecuador. This bloc experiences overtourism through its ecological vulnerability to tourism for revenue. The Caribbean islands face cruise ship overcrowding, and seasonal population spikes that overwhelm the island's infrastructure. World Heritage Sites often experience environmental degradation as a result of excessive tourism in their regions. Overtourism in this bloc highlights the tension between economic necessity and environmental resilience.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Has your country tried to implement sustainable tourism legislation, and if so what was the result?
2. How should eco tourism be implemented in underdeveloped areas who lack the means to host foreigners? How should proper infrastructure be made to accommodate large numbers of foreigners?
3. What specific solutions and NGOs has your country already created to combat the harmful environmental impacts of tourism ?
4. How can your country further accommodate the infrastructure strain tourism can cause (especially common in underdeveloped areas)?
5. What can be done to protect the cultural identity of popular tourist attractions and how can the community be accommodated?
6. How can waste pollution be properly addressed and mitigated without destroying a tourist based economy?
7. How can “green washing” and falsely advertised eco-tourism be prevented, and transparency to the public on sustainable alternatives to harmful environmental practices be ensured

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