

Article

## Foreign Experience in Reducing the Impact of Overtourism in Sustainable Tourism Development

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**Abstract:** Overtourism has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges in global tourism management, threatening ecological integrity, local community well-being, and the long-term viability of tourist destinations. This study systematically examines international strategies employed to mitigate overtourism within the framework of sustainable tourism development. Using a comparative qualitative analysis of case studies from Europe, Asia, and the Americas, the research evaluates the effectiveness of regulatory, economic, technological, and community-based interventions. Findings demonstrate that integrated, multi-stakeholder approaches combining visitor management systems, digital technologies, pricing mechanisms, and participatory governance yield the most resilient outcomes. The study further identifies transferable policy lessons applicable to emerging destinations experiencing rapid tourism growth, including those in Central Asia. Results indicate that no single intervention is universally effective; rather, success depends on contextual adaptation, institutional capacity, and continuous monitoring. The paper concludes by proposing a framework for sustainable destination management that balances economic growth with environmental and socio-cultural preservation.

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### 1. Introduction

Tourism has long been celebrated as a catalyst for economic development, cultural exchange, and poverty alleviation. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimated that international tourist arrivals reached approximately 1.5 billion in 2019, generating over USD 1.7 trillion in export revenues and supporting nearly 10% of global GDP [1]. However, the exponential growth of tourism has simultaneously produced a suite of negative externalities that challenge the sustainability of destinations worldwide. The phenomenon of overtourism — defined as the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitors' experiences in a significantly negative way — has garnered increasing scholarly and policy attention [2], [3].

Overtourism manifests across multiple dimensions, including environmental degradation of natural and cultural heritage sites, congestion of public infrastructure, housing market distortions, erosion of local cultural identity, and declining quality of the visitor experience itself [4], [5]. Iconic destinations such as Venice, Barcelona, Amsterdam, Dubrovnik, Machu Picchu, and Bali have all been cited as emblematic cases where unchecked tourist flows have generated systemic conflicts between tourism stakeholders

and resident communities [6]. Anti-tourism protests, legislative interventions restricting short-term rentals, and the imposition of tourist taxes signal a paradigm shift from growth-oriented to quality-oriented tourism governance.

The COVID-19 pandemic, while catastrophic for the tourism sector, inadvertently provided an opportunity for reflection on the structural vulnerabilities of tourism-dependent economies and ecosystems (Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020). As destinations contemplate recovery strategies, the imperative to rebuild tourism on a more sustainable, equitable, and resilient foundation has never been more urgent. This context underscores the relevance of examining global best practices in overtourism mitigation, particularly for developing and emerging destinations that aspire to leverage tourism for socioeconomic progress without replicating the unsustainable patterns observed in mature markets.

Central Asian countries, including Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan, are experiencing an acceleration in tourism development facilitated by infrastructural investments, visa liberalization, and growing international interest in Silk Road heritage [7], [8], [9]. While tourism volumes remain significantly below European benchmarks, the rapid pace of growth and the fragility of both natural and cultural heritage assets necessitate proactive adoption of sustainable management principles. Learning from the missteps of destinations that have already encountered overtourism provides an invaluable opportunity to chart a more measured and sustainable developmental trajectory.

This study is guided by the following research questions: (1) What strategic interventions have proven most effective in mitigating overtourism in diverse international contexts? (2) What conditions and institutional arrangements facilitate or impede the successful implementation of these interventions? (3) What transferable lessons can be derived for destinations in early stages of tourism development? The paper is organized according to the IMRAD structure: following the introduction, the methodology section describes the analytical framework and data sources; the results section presents findings from comparative case study analysis; the discussion interprets results in relation to existing literature; and the conclusion offers policy recommendations and future research directions [10], [11], [12].

## **2. Research Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Design**

This study adopts a systematic comparative case study methodology, which is appropriate for exploring complex, context-dependent phenomena such as overtourism governance across heterogeneous national and regional settings (Yin, 2018). Case study analysis enables in-depth examination of how interventions operate within specific social, political, and ecological contexts, while comparative analysis across multiple cases facilitates the identification of transferable principles and patterns (Flyvbjerg, 2006). The research design is qualitative and interpretive, prioritizing analytical depth over statistical generalizability.

### **2.2 Case Selection**

Case selection followed a purposive maximum variation sampling strategy (Patton, 2002), designed to capture a diverse range of geographic regions, destination types, institutional frameworks, and intervention modalities. The following destinations were selected as primary cases: (1) Venice, Italy – a UNESCO World Heritage Site facing acute residential displacement and heritage degradation; (2) Amsterdam, Netherlands – an urban cultural destination experiencing nightlife-driven nuisance tourism; (3) Dubrovnik, Croatia – a historic walled city managing cruise tourism congestion; (4) Machu Picchu, Peru – a natural and archaeological heritage site grappling with carrying capacity exceedance; (5) Bali, Indonesia – a cultural-spiritual landscape experiencing rapid mass

tourism growth; (6) Kyoto, Japan — a historic city implementing behavioral management for cultural preservation; (7) Iceland — a nature-based destination developing geotourism governance frameworks; and (8) Bhutan — a high-value, low-volume tourism model anchored in Gross National Happiness principles.

### 2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through a systematic review of peer-reviewed academic literature published between 2010 and 2024, sourced from databases including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect. Search terms included: 'overtourism', 'sustainable tourism management', 'visitor management', 'carrying capacity', 'destination governance', 'tourism regulation', and combinations thereof [13], [14]. Additionally, grey literature sources including UNWTO policy documents, European Commission tourism strategies, UNESCO management reports, and national tourism authority publications were incorporated to capture practitioner perspectives and policy documentation. A total of 112 academic articles and 34 policy documents were reviewed, with 67 sources directly informing the case analyses presented.

### 2.4 Analytical Framework

Analysis was guided by the Destination Management and Governance (DMG) framework synthesized from Butler's (1980) Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model, Saarinen's (2006) sustainability thresholds approach, and Bramwell and Lane's (2011) governance perspective on sustainable tourism. Interventions were coded and classified according to four typological categories: (i) Regulatory and Legal Instruments, (ii) Economic and Market-Based Mechanisms, (iii) Technological and Infrastructure Solutions, and (iv) Community-Based and Participatory Approaches. For each case, the research analyzed intervention design, implementation context, outcomes, challenges encountered, and lessons derived.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Regulatory and Legal Instruments

Regulatory interventions represent the most widely adopted category of overtourism management and include visitor caps, zoning ordinances, short-term rental restrictions, and time-bound access limitations. In Dubrovnik, the city introduced a cruise passenger cap limiting daily arrivals to 4,000 visitors (from peaks exceeding 10,000) under the 'Respect the City' campaign [15], [16], [17], [18]. Implementation was accompanied by mandatory itinerary coordination with cruise operators and real-time monitoring of visitor density through smart sensors installed throughout the Old City.

Venice has pursued a long-debated day-tripper access fee, finally piloted in 2023 as a EUR 5 entry charge for non-overnight visitors during peak periods (Bertocchi & Visentin, 2019). While politically contentious, the measure reflects growing recognition that fiscal instruments alone are insufficient without complementary residential protection policies. The city has also imposed strict limits on new hotel licensing in the historic center, seeking to counteract the Airbnb-driven displacement of permanent residents, whose population declined from 175,000 in 1951 to fewer than 50,000 by 2022.

Machu Picchu offers a salient example of access quota management for natural heritage sites. Following UNESCO pressure and deterioration assessments, the Peruvian Ministry of Culture introduced timed-entry ticketing with daily caps segmented by circuit and time slot [19], [20], [22]. The system distributes visitor flows across three circuits and five entry windows, reducing peak congestion and mitigating trail erosion. Enforcement is reinforced through digital ticketing and on-site guardianship, though leakage through informal markets remains a challenge.

### 3.2 Economic and Market-Based Mechanisms

Economic instruments leverage market signals to influence tourist behavior, volume, and spatial distribution. The most systematically applied model is Bhutan's 'High Value, Low Impact' (HVLI) tourism strategy, operationalized through a mandatory Sustainable Development Fee (SDF) of USD 200 per person per night for international tourists. The fee funds conservation, education, and social services while positioning Bhutan as an exclusive destination that self-selects for high-expenditure, culturally engaged visitors [23]. Tourist arrivals have been deliberately constrained, with annual volumes maintained well below 300,000.

Amsterdam has deployed a multi-pronged economic strategy targeting the low-budget party tourism segment. Measures include a hotel bed tax increase to 12.5% — among the highest in Europe — and restrictions on new hotel development within the canal ring. The city also negotiated agreements with platforms such as Airbnb to cap short-term rental days at 30 per year per host (later amended to 60 for licensed operators), directly reducing housing supply diversion [25]. These measures were accompanied by a campaign explicitly discouraging disruptive tourist behavior, illustrating the integration of economic and communicative strategies.

The Galapagos Islands in Ecuador represent an early and influential application of differentiated access pricing, with foreign visitor entrance fees (USD 100) significantly exceeding those paid by Ecuadorian nationals. Fee revenues are earmarked for conservation programming under the Galapagos Special Law, and annual visitor quotas have been institutionalized through the Galapagos National Park Visitor Management System [26]. The model has been partially replicated in other ecologically sensitive destinations including Antarctica, where proposed visitor levies and operator permits have been discussed under the Antarctic Treaty System.

### 3.3 Technological and Infrastructure Solutions

Technology-enabled visitor management has emerged as a rapidly expanding frontier in overtourism mitigation, leveraging digital platforms, real-time data analytics, and smart city infrastructure. Japan has been a global pioneer in applying artificial intelligence and big data to tourism flow management. In Kyoto, the municipal government partnered with telecommunications providers to analyze anonymized mobile phone mobility data, identifying bottleneck locations and peak temporal patterns (Suzuki, 2020). Heat maps and predictive models inform decisions on signage redirection, transportation scheduling, and targeted communication campaigns encouraging visitors to explore less-congested neighborhoods and off-peak periods.

Iceland developed a comprehensive geotourism governance architecture following the dramatic post-2010 eruption-driven tourism surge that saw arrivals grow from 460,000 in 2010 to over 2.3 million by 2018 [27]. The Icelandic Tourism Board invested in distributed ranger networks, trail infrastructure hardening, and a 'Inspired by Iceland' behavioral platform communicating responsible tourism norms to international visitors. Digital infrastructure investments included real-time road and trail condition monitoring, GPS-enabled trail apps, and collaboration with Google to promote lesser-known 'off the beaten path' attractions.

Barcelona's Superblocks (Superilles) initiative, while primarily designed as an urban mobility and public space reclamation project, has demonstrated secondary benefits for tourism deconcentration by reducing tourist-oriented commercial activity in residential neighborhoods [28]. The program reassigns traffic-calmed residential blocks to community use, effectively discouraging the commodification of everyday neighborhood life. Complementary smart tourism initiatives including a real-time tourist density dashboard accessible to visitors and local businesses have been deployed to redistribute tourist flows across the metropolitan area.

### 3.4 Community-Based and Participatory Approaches

Community-based tourism (CBT) and participatory governance models are increasingly recognized as essential complements to top-down regulatory mechanisms, particularly in destinations where resident alienation and loss of cultural ownership have fueled anti-tourism sentiment. In Bali, the traditional community governance system known as Subak — a UNESCO-recognized cooperative water management system — has been adapted as a model for community-led tourism management in heritage rice terrace areas (Luo & Bao, 2021). Village cooperatives regulate the number of licensed tour operators, set behavioral guidelines for visitors to sacred sites, and retain a portion of entrance revenues for communal benefit.

New Zealand's Maori communities have developed iwi-led tourism enterprises that embed cultural protocol, environmental stewardship, and economic benefit-sharing as constitutive elements of the visitor experience. The 'Tiaki Promise' — a national responsible tourism pledge — was co-designed with Maori leadership and integrates indigenous values of kaitiakitanga (guardianship) into mainstream visitor communication. This approach demonstrates how participatory co-creation of tourism policy can generate interventions with greater legitimacy, cultural resonance, and community acceptance than externally imposed regulatory regimes.

Costa Rica's long-standing community ecotourism network (ACTUAR) provides another instructive example of how locally grounded enterprises can compete with mass tourism infrastructure while simultaneously delivering superior conservation and social equity outcomes (Stroma, 2009). Certified rural community enterprises receive technical support, market linkage assistance, and co-branding benefits from the national tourism certification system (CST), illustrating the enabling role of state institutions in facilitating community-driven sustainable tourism.

## 4. Discussion

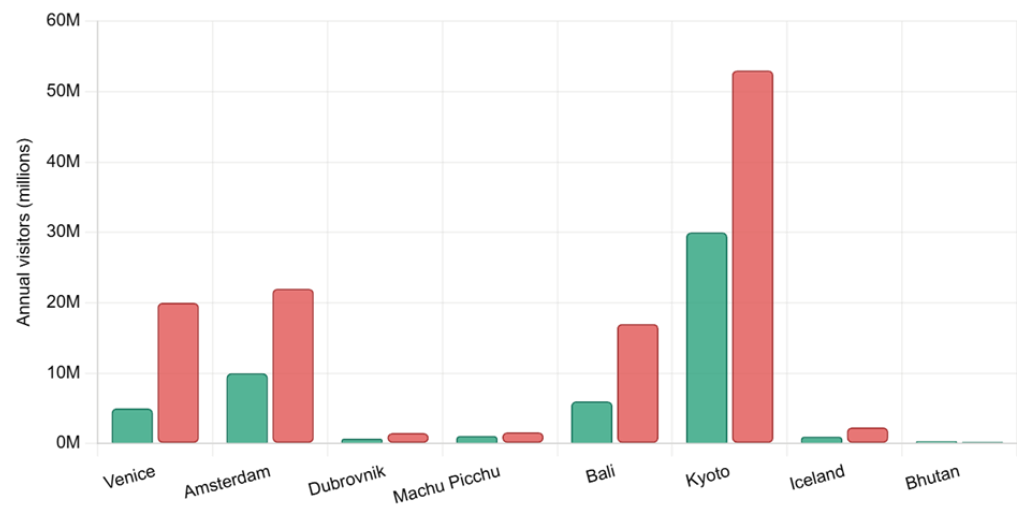
### 4.1 Cross-Case Synthesis and Emerging Patterns

The cross-case analysis reveals several consistent patterns that transcend geographic and institutional contexts. First, the most effective overtourism mitigation strategies are systemic rather than singular, combining regulatory, economic, technological, and participatory mechanisms within an integrated destination management framework. No single intervention in the reviewed cases achieved durable outcomes in isolation; rather, effectiveness emerged from synergistic combinations that addressed multiple dimensions of the problem simultaneously. This finding aligns with Novy and Colomb's argument that overtourism is fundamentally a governance failure requiring structural rather than technocratic responses.

Second, temporal distribution strategies — shifting demand across seasons and times of day — consistently demonstrated cost-effectiveness relative to absolute restriction measures. Kyoto's off-peak promotion campaigns and Dubrovnik's cruise timing coordination achieved meaningful congestion reduction without sacrificing overall tourism volumes or revenues. This has important implications for destinations where outright visitor capping may be politically infeasible or economically undesirable, suggesting that temporal management offers a viable intermediate strategy.

Third, spatial redistribution of tourist flows — encouraging visitors to explore secondary and tertiary attractions beyond saturated nodes — emerged as a complementary strategy in cases including Barcelona, Iceland, and New Zealand (1-figure). The effectiveness of redistribution depends critically on the quality of infrastructure, interpretation, and accessibility at dispersal destinations, as well as the communication channels available to reach visitors with alternative itinerary information.

Digital platforms, in particular, have demonstrated high potential for personalized recommendation systems that guide visitors toward less congested areas in real time.



**Figure 1.** Comparison of Annual Visitor Numbers Across Global Tourist Destinations.

#### 4.2 Contextual Conditions for Success

Across cases, several contextual conditions consistently appeared to facilitate or impede intervention success. Institutional capacity — specifically the existence of a dedicated, well-resourced destination management organization (DMO) with regulatory authority — was a robust predictor of implementation effectiveness. Destinations such as Bhutan and Iceland, which invested significantly in institutional infrastructure prior to implementing management restrictions, achieved more coherent and enforceable outcomes than those relying on fragmented, multi-agency arrangements. This reinforces Bramwell and Lane's (2011) governance thesis that sustainability transitions in tourism require robust institutional architecture.

Community participation and political legitimacy were equally decisive. In cases where regulations were imposed without meaningful stakeholder consultation — as occurred in early phases of Venice's governance response — implementation encountered sustained resistance from industry actors and legal challenges from property rights interests. By contrast, participatory processes in New Zealand and Costa Rica generated interventions with broader acceptance and more durable compliance. This pattern resonates with Ostrom's (1990) foundational work on collective action institutions, which demonstrates that resource governance rules designed by users themselves are more likely to be respected and maintained.

Economic incentive alignment also emerged as a critical condition. Where tourism businesses and local governments derive significant short-term revenues from high visitor volumes, the political economy of overtourism management is profoundly challenging. Bhutan's HVLI model succeeds partly because the SDF generates state revenue commensurate with what would be earned from higher-volume, lower-yield tourism — a condition rarely replicable without a unique market positioning or strong government commitment. In destinations where short-term economic pressures dominate, transitioning to quality-oriented models requires phased implementation, compensation mechanisms for affected operators, and sustained political commitment.

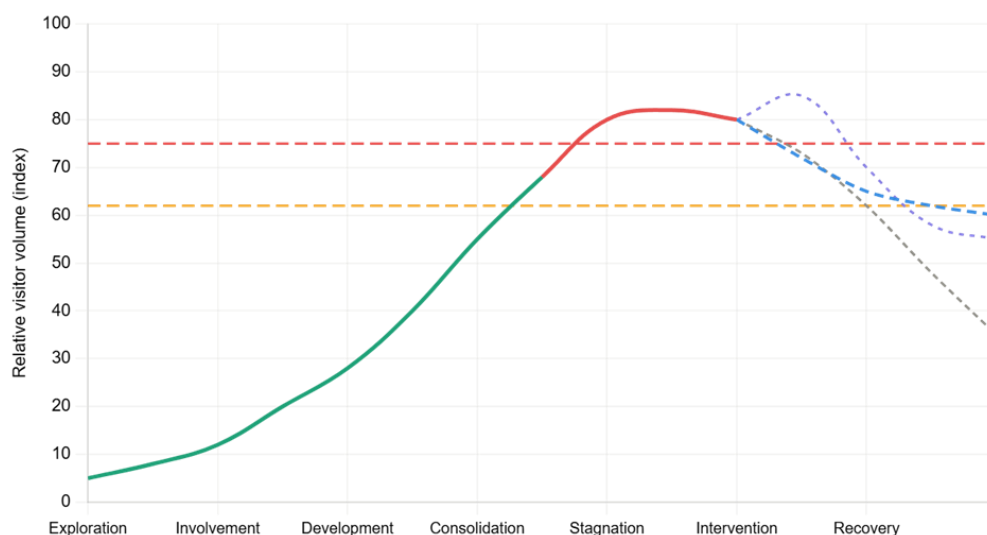
#### 4.3 Implications for Emerging Destinations

The findings carry particular relevance for tourism destinations in Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and other regions experiencing rapid tourism growth from a relatively modest base. Several precautionary lessons are discernible. First, the development of

monitoring and early warning systems for carrying capacity thresholds should precede rather than follow the emergence of overtourism conditions. The retrospective nature of most interventions reviewed in this study — implemented after significant damage had already occurred — underscores the value of proactive governance over reactive crisis management (Dodds & Butler, 2019).

Second, the diversification of tourism products and the development of secondary destinations should be prioritized from the outset to mitigate the gravitational concentration of visitor flows at flagship heritage sites. Uzbekistan's tourism industry, for example, while justifiably oriented around the Silk Road cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva, possesses substantial untapped potential in ecotourism, rural community tourism, and gastronomy that could support a more geographically distributed and resilient visitor economy.

Third, the establishment of transparent, participatory tourism governance frameworks — including mechanisms for resident voice, benefit-sharing, and cultural autonomy — should be institutionalized before community alienation crystallizes. The cases of Barcelona and Venice demonstrate the political costs of governance frameworks that prioritize industry interests over residential well-being, suggesting that community social license is a prerequisite rather than an optional add-on to sustainable tourism planning.



**Figure 2.** Changes in Analytical and Critical Thinking Development through Reading.

#### 4.4 Limitations

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. The qualitative, case-based methodology prioritizes contextual depth over statistical representativeness, and findings should not be generalized to all destination types without appropriate contextual adaptation. The reliance on published literature and official policy documents may introduce publication bias, as unsuccessful or contested interventions may be less extensively documented. Additionally, the dynamic and evolving nature of destination governance means that conditions in reviewed cases may have changed since the publication dates of source materials. Future research employing primary data collection, longitudinal tracking of intervention outcomes, and quantitative impact assessment would strengthen the evidence base.

## 5. Conclusions

This study has systematically examined international experience in mitigating overtourism within the framework of sustainable tourism development. Through comparative analysis of eight destination cases across Europe, Asia, the Americas, and Oceania, the research demonstrates that effective overtourism management requires integrated, multi-instrument strategies combining regulatory, economic, technological, and participatory approaches. Single-instrument interventions consistently prove insufficient to address the multidimensional character of overtourism, while integrated frameworks that align institutional capacity, community participation, economic incentives, and digital infrastructure achieve more durable and equitable outcomes.

Key policy recommendations derived from the analysis include: (1) establishing carrying capacity monitoring systems and early warning indicators as foundational governance infrastructure; (2) deploying temporal and spatial demand redistribution strategies as cost-effective complements to absolute visitor restrictions; (3) institutionalizing resident participation in tourism planning and benefit-sharing mechanisms to sustain community social license; (4) leveraging digital technologies for real-time visitor flow management and personalized alternative itinerary promotion; and (5) aligning economic incentive structures among government, industry, and community stakeholders around quality-oriented tourism indicators rather than volume metrics alone.

For destinations in Central Asia and other regions experiencing accelerating tourism development, these lessons offer a roadmap for avoiding the well-documented pitfalls of mature mass tourism destinations. The post-pandemic tourism recovery moment presents a unique and time-sensitive opportunity to establish governance frameworks that embed sustainability principles from the outset. Investment in institutional capacity, community partnership, and monitoring infrastructure now will yield substantially lower social, environmental, and economic costs than the retrospective crisis management interventions necessitated by overtourism conditions in destinations such as Venice, Dubrovnik, and Bali.

Future research should pursue longitudinal evaluation of intervention outcomes using standardized sustainability indicators, cross-national comparative studies incorporating primary stakeholder data, and the development of simulation models capable of predicting tipping point thresholds under different governance scenarios. Interdisciplinary collaboration between tourism scholars, environmental scientists, urban planners, and social equity researchers will be essential to advancing a genuinely integrated understanding of sustainable destination management in the face of continued growth pressures.

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