

The end of global travel as we know it: An opportunity for sustainable tourism

March 18 2020, by Freya Higgins-Desbiolles



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Saturday, March 14 2020, is "The Day the World Stopped Travelling," in the words of [Rifat Ali](#), head of travel analytics company Skift.

That's a little dramatic, perhaps, but every day since has brought us closer to it being reality.

The COVID-19 crisis has the global travel industry—"the most consequential industry in the world," says Ali—in uncharted territory. Nations are shutting their borders. Airlines face bankruptcy. Ports are refusing entry to [cruise ships](#), threatening the very basis of the cruise business model.

Associated hospitality, arts and cultural industries are threatened. Major events are being cancelled. Tourist seasons in many [tourist destinations](#) are collapsing. Vulnerable workers on casual, seasonal or gig contracts are suffering. It seems an epic disaster.

But is it?

Considering [human activities need to change](#) if we are to avoid the worst effects of human-induced [climate change](#), the coronavirus crisis might offer us an unexpected opportunity.

Ali, like many others, wants recovery, "even if it takes a while to get back up and return to pre-coronavirus traveler numbers."

But rather than try to return to business as usual as soon as possible, COVID-19 challenges us to think about the type of consumption that underpins the unsustainable ways of the travel and [tourism industries](#).

Tourism dependency

Air travel features prominently in discussions about reducing carbon emissions. Even if commercial aviation accounts "only" for about 2.4% of all emissions from fossil-fuel use, flying is still how many of us in the industrialized world blow out our carbon footprints.

But sustainability concerns in the travel and tourism sectors extend far beyond carbon emissions.

In many places tourism has grown beyond its sustainable bounds, to the detriment of local communities.

The overtourism of places like Venice, Barcelona and Reykjavik is one result. Cruise ships disgorge thousands of people for half-day visits that overwhelm the destination but leave little economic benefit.

Cheap airline fares encourage weekend breaks in Europe that have inundated old cities such as Prague and Dubrovnik. The need for growth becomes self-perpetuating as tourism dependency locks communities into the system.

In a 2010 paper [I argued](#) the problem was tourism underpinned by what sociologist Leslie Sklair called the "[culture-ideology of consumerism](#)"—by which consumption patterns that were once the preserve of the rich became endemic.

Tourism is embedded in that culture-ideology as an essential pillar to achieve endless economic growth. For instance, [the Australian government](#) prioritizes tourism as a "supergrowth industry," accounting for almost 10% of "exports" in 2017-18.

Out of crisis comes creativity

Many are desperate to ensure business continues as usual. "If people will not travel," said Ariel Cohen of California-based business travel agency [TripActions](#), "the economy will grind to a halt."

COVID-19 is a radical wake-up call to this way of thinking. Even if Cohen is right, that economic reality now needs to change to accommodate the more pressing public health reality.

It is a big economic hit, but crisis invites creativity. Grounded business

travelers are realizing virtual business meetings work satisfactorily. Conferences are reorganizing for virtual sessions. Arts and cultural events and institutions are turning to [live streaming](#) to connect with audiences.

In Italian cities under lockdown, residents have come out on their balconies to create music as a community.

Local cafes and food co-ops, including my local, are reaching out with support for the community's marginalized and elderly to ensure they are not forgotten.

These responses challenge the atomized individualism that has gone hand in hand with the consumerism of travel and [tourism](#). This public health crisis reminds us our well-being depends not on being consumers but on being part of a community.

Staying closer to home could be a catalyst awakening us to the value of eating locally, traveling less and just slowing down and connecting to our community.

After this crisis passes, we might find the old business as usual less compelling. We might learn that not traveling long distances didn't stop us traveling; it just enlivened us to the richness of local [travel](#).

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: The end of global travel as we know it: An opportunity for sustainable tourism (2020, March 18) retrieved 23 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-03-global-opportunity->

[sustainable-tourism.html](#)

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.