

Climate change is set to make our holidays look very different—here's how

September 15 2023, by Nick Davies



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

Holidays are making a comeback after several years of disruption caused by the COVID pandemic. Nearly 4 billion passengers [boarded international flights](#) in 2022, up from fewer than 2 billion in 2020. [Recent research](#) suggests that people are likely to continue traveling more in 2023 and beyond.

But this resurgence in travel is concerning. The tourism sector alone is responsible for an [estimated 8%–10%](#) of [global greenhouse gas emissions](#). And conditions at traditional holiday destinations in high summer are becoming [increasingly unpleasant](#) if not [downright hazardous](#).

During the past year, [numerous climate records have been broken](#) as heat waves and wildfires ravaged large parts of Europe, Asia and North America. In July, both Sardinia and Sicily experienced temperatures [in excess of 46°C](#), nearly breaking European records.

Most of what we do while on holiday, particularly on holidays abroad, [releases greenhouse gases](#) into the atmosphere and ultimately has an impact on the climate. But the way most of us get there—by flying—is potentially most damaging. UK data suggests that a single passenger on a short-haul flight, for instance, is responsible for releasing the [equivalent of approximately 154g of CO₂](#) for every kilometer traveled.

As the effects of climate change become increasingly severe, there's genuine concern that traditional destinations will become too hot in summer to remain appealing to visitors. This raises the question: how will tourism adapt?

Changing destinations

Researchers have been trying to predict the future of tourism for quite some time. One idea is that tourism will undergo a "[poleward shift](#)" as global warming causes temperatures to rise not only in traditionally hot regions, but also in locations further to the north and south.

A [modeling study](#) from 2007 predicted that, by 2050, hotter weather would make popular tourist hotspots like the Mediterranean less appealing in the summer. At the same time, northern destinations such as

Scandinavia and the UK would experience longer holiday seasons.

Approximately [half of global tourism](#) is concentrated in coastal areas. So another concern is the potential loss of beaches due to rising sea levels. In the Caribbean, an [estimated 29% of resort properties](#) would be partially or fully inundated by one meter of sea-level rise—though many of these resorts would have lost a significant amount of their beach area before this.

Some other beach destinations are potentially even more vulnerable. Sardinia was hit by disruptive storms in 2022. [Research](#) suggests that the beaches there may struggle to accommodate tourists in the near future due to a greater risk of flooding and storms.

The [impact of climate change](#) on tourism will extend beyond just [coastal areas](#). Many popular city break destinations, including [Porto](#) in Portugal, are expecting to endure more severe heat. [Tourism in mountainous areas](#) will be affected, too, as accelerated snow melt leads to shorter ski seasons.



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

The practicalities of tourism shifting

Changing conditions will affect where humans can safely travel to. But travel patterns take time to evolve. In the meantime, established destinations will need to change to withstand challenges such as [extreme heat](#), rising sea levels and other climatic conditions.

Existing tourist destinations in areas of the world that are vulnerable to the effects of climate change, such as the Nile Delta in Egypt, are already [considering ways to adapt](#). These include building seawalls and natural dunes to protect tourist areas from coastal flooding. Changing [construction materials](#) and reconfiguring urban spaces to improve ventilation have also [been proposed](#) as ways to reduce reliance on expensive and energy-intensive air-conditioning.

New destinations that begin to emerge in more temperate regions will require substantial infrastructure development to support the influx of visitors. This includes [transport systems](#), accommodation, dining options and attractions. The process of establishing tourist destinations typically takes time and requires careful thought.

Barcelona, for example, has experienced a [rapid surge in tourism demand](#) since the 1992 Olympics. This has resulted in a tenfold increase in visitors over the past three decades.

Such rapid tourism development can [put a strain on local people](#) and the environment. Although Barcelona already had a transport system and some infrastructure to accommodate visitors, the rapid growth in tourism has led to [strong opposition](#) from local residents.

What will happen next year?

The [current thinking](#) among tourism academics is that those responsible for managing [tourist destinations](#) should work towards reducing carbon emissions by focusing on the domestic market.

But, as recent summers have shown, international tourism does not look set to slow down yet. Even amid crises such as the fires burning through Rhodes in summer 2023, tourists [continued to arrive](#).

Rather than choose different destinations, the most likely scenario—at least in the short-term—is that tourists themselves will adapt to the effects of climate change. During Europe's summer 2023 heat wave, there were reports that people were staying in their hotel rooms [in the hottest part of the day](#) and taking sightseeing trips in the evening.

Nevertheless, there are some signs that travelers may be starting to worry about more extreme weather conditions and adapt their travel plans

accordingly. A survey conducted in May 2023 showed that [69% of Europeans](#) planned to travel between June and November—a fall of 4% compared to 2022.

The heat wave of summer 2023 might mean that tourists start looking for [cooler destinations](#) as early as the coming year.

The evolving landscape of global [tourism](#) in the face of climate change is complex. What is clear, though, is that if Europe continues to experience [extreme weather conditions](#) like the summer of 2023, many people will think twice about booking their place in the sun.

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

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Climate change is set to make our holidays look very different—here's how (2023, September 15) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-09-climate-holidays-differenthere.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.