

# Through Responsible Tourism towards a Green Economy

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## Introduction

Tourism is a cross-cutting economic activity with a wide-ranging impact on the environment, climate and economy, in particular on the economic growth, employment and social and sustainable development. It has significant potential as a driver for growth of the world economy and even small changes toward greening can have important impacts (United Nations Environment Programme and World Tourism Organization, 2012).

For quite a long time, the focus has been on the positive impact of tourism growth on economic development (creating gross domestic product (GDP), job places, attracting investments, improving infrastructure, etc.), leaving aside the negative effects (use of resources, negative impact on natural environment, locals, etc.).

Today, with the increased concern about global environmental, sociocultural and other significant problems, the concept of sustainable development and the direction of a green future is receiving more attention. The tourism–environment relationship, shaped by some concerns about natural and social environments, creates the concept of sustainable tourism and forms other concepts such as responsible tourism.

The transition to responsible tourism and the practical application of its principles is driven by both global forces, including the elements of the Sustainable Development Goals (2018), European Green Deal (2021) and the search for the optimal balance of tourism at national and local level – cities, protected areas, businesses, or communities, as well as the growing awareness of travellers. The COVID-19 pandemic has been also an incentive for tourism transformation. When the pandemic struck the world, T&T sector was the first to feel the effects. Traditional tourism business models have stopped working. Travel restrictions and lockdowns hit hard to the sector, that significantly contributes to the global economic development. Tourism numbers have dropped sharply, together responding in economic indicators. This crisis is an opportunity to transform the relationship of tourism with nature, climate and the economy (United Nations, 2020). There is a need to build a stronger, more resilient tourism economy for the future (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2020). Therefore, it is important to evaluate whether moving to a greener economy, responsible tourism could be a possible direction.

**The aim of the research** is to evaluate whether responsible tourism could be a possible direction moving to a green economy.

**The research methods** of scientific literature analysis and synthesis, logical analysis, data analysis, situation modelling, logical conclusions are applied.

## Results

Tourism creates new employment opportunities, generates income, stimulates economic activity, and attracts investment in tourism-related business. Tourism development can make a significant contribution to tackling unemployment, emigration and promoting economic growth. The role of tourism in economic development is incontrovertible. However, digitalisation, overtourism, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, environmental and social impacts, customer and regulatory accountability demands, were increasingly raising questions about the industry's linear growth-based model (The World Tourism Organization (UNTWO), 2020). Therefore, with the emergence of negative consequences of tourism development in highly visited regions, increasing attention has been paid to integrating sustainable and responsible tourism concepts into tourism development programs.

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As in the green economy, which is defined as low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive, growth in employment and income are driven by public and private investment into such economic activities, infrastructure and assets that allow reduced carbon emissions and pollution, enhanced energy and resource efficiency, and prevention of the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services (United Nations Environment Programme, 2022), responsible tourism, aimed at maximising benefits (economic, social, and environmental) and minimizing costs to destination, may be the right direction looking for the green solutions. Responsible tourism involves local communities' participation in economic activities and decision making, enhancing local communities economically, socially, and environmentally (Amin, 2016). It is about making better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit.

**Table 1. The definition of responsible tourism**

Source: The Cape Town Declaration, 2002.

Responsible tourism	Minimizes negative social, economic and environmental impacts
	Generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well-being of host communities
	Improves working conditions and access to the industry
	Involves local people in decisions that affect their lives and life chances
	Makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage embracing diversity
	Provides more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people, and a greater understanding of local cultural, social and environmental issues
	Provides access for physically challenged people
	Is culturally sensitive, encourages respect between tourists and hosts, and builds local pride and confidence

**Table 2. The main dimensions of responsible tourism**

Source: compiled by the authors, based on the scientific literature.

<b>Economic responsibility</b>	It refers to the role of tourism in local economic development, especially through sustainable livelihood opportunities
<b>Socio-cultural responsibility</b>	It captures the responsibility exhibits by the destination in empowering and involving local communities in development and covers the contribution of tourism towards preservation and promotion of local art, culture and traditions
<b>Environmental responsibility</b>	It captures the perception concerning endeavours of tourism to ensure that negative impacts are minimum development, especially through sustainable livelihood opportunities

**Table 3. Responsible tourism impact**

Source: Mathew and Sreejesh, 2017.

Responsible Tourism Economic Responsibility indicators	Employment opportunities
	Purchasing of local produces
	Skill development
Destination Sustainability - Economic Sustainability indicators	Local enterprise support
	Local enterprise growth
	Improvement of living standards
Quality Of Life - Material Well-Being indicators	Jobs and benefits
	Tangible benefits
	Consistent and reliable income
	Income and employment
	Income at current job
Quality Of Life - Material Well-Being indicators	Economic security of job
	Family income
	Pay and fringe benefits
	Cost of living
	Real estate taxes
Quality Of Life - Material Well-Being indicators	Cost of basic necessities

**Table 4. Sustainability-related challenges that need to be resolved through the greening tourism industry**

Source: United Nations Environment Programme and World Tourism Organization, 2012.

Specific challenges that need to be resolved through the greening of tourism industry					
Energy and GHG emissions	Water consumption	Waste management	Loss of biological diversity	Effective management of built and cultural heritage	Planning and governance

**Table 5. Key messages in greening tourism for green economy**

Source: compiled by the authors, based on the scientific literature.

<b>Tourism has significant potential as a driver for growth for the world economy</b>	Tourism contributes to GDP, creates job places, attracts investments, contributes to improving infrastructure, etc.
<b>The development of tourism is accompanied by significant challenges</b>	Contribution to global GHG emissions, excessive water consumption, discharge of untreated water, the generation of waste, the damage to local terrestrial and marine biodiversity and the threats to the survival of local cultures, built heritage and traditions.
<b>Green tourism has the potential to create new, green jobs</b>	It is estimated that one job in the core tourism industry creates about one and a half additional or indirect jobs in the tourism related economy. The greening of tourism, which involves efficiency improvements in energy, water and waste systems, is expected to reinforce the employment potential of the sector with increased local hiring and sourcing and significant opportunities in tourism oriented toward local culture and the natural environment.
<b>Tourism development can be designed to support the local economy and reduce poverty</b>	Local economic effects of tourism are determined by the share of tourism spending in the local economy and the amount of the resulting indirect economic activities. Increasing the involvement of local communities in the tourism value chain can contribute to the development of the local economy and to poverty reduction.
<b>Investing in the greening of tourism can reduce the cost of energy, water, waste and enhance the value of biodiversity, ecosystems, cultural heritage</b>	Improving waste management is expected to save money for tourism businesses, create jobs and enhance the attractiveness of destinations. Under a green economy investment scenario, tourism makes a larger contribution to GDP growth, while significant environmental benefits include reductions in water consumption, energy use and CO2 emissions.
<b>Tourists are demanding the greening of tourism</b>	More than a third of travellers are found to favour environmentally-friendly tourism and be willing to pay more for this experience. Ecotourism, nature, heritage, cultural and "soft adventure" tourism are taking the lead and are predicted to grow rapidly over the next two decades.
<b>The private sector, especially small firms, can, and must be mobilized to support green tourism</b>	The promotion and widespread use of recognized standards for sustainable tourism, such as the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC), can help businesses improve sustainability performance, including resource efficiency, and assist in attracting additional investment and customers.
<b>Much of the economic potential for green tourism is found in SMEs, which need better access to financing for investing in green tourism</b>	Most tourism businesses are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with potential to generate greater income and opportunity from green strategies. Public and private partnerships can spread the costs and risks of large green tourism investments. Besides reducing administrative fees and offering favourable interest rates for green tourism projects, in-kind support such as technical, marketing or business administration assistance, could also help.
<b>Destination planning and development strategies are the first step towards the greening of tourism</b>	In developing tourism strategies, local governments, communities and businesses need to establish mechanisms for coordinating with ministries responsible for the environment, energy, labour, agriculture, transport, health, finance, security and other relevant areas.
<b>Government investments and policies can leverage private sector actions on green tourism</b>	Government spending on public goods such as protected areas, cultural assets, water conservation, waste management, sanitation, public transport and renewable energy infrastructure can reduce the cost of green investments by the private sector in green tourism.

## Main conclusions

Responsible tourism, which is more responsible form of tourism that seeks to minimize the negative economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts while maximizing the positive effects of tourism, has been shown to be a possible direction for sustainable economic development. It has significant effects on economic dimension such as local enterprise growth, improving of living standards, working conditions, job places, consistent and reliable income, tourism integrated economy, etc.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put tourism at a crossroads where transformation has become essential. The transition to responsible tourism is also supported by organizations of global significance, including the Sustainable Development Goals (2018) and the European Green Deal (2021).

The analysis revealed that the current tourism situation, due to the circumstances – exacerbation of the negative effects of tourism and the experienced stagnation in recent years – together with sustainable, green direction, dictating by the global forces may be the opportunity to rethink the pre-existing form of operation of the sector into more responsible and sustainable tourism. This time could be an opportunity for the tourism to be restarted in a new, more sustainable and responsible form and be one of the key elements moving towards a more sustainable and responsible future for tourism, which will follow the direction of a green future.

To achieve the results of rethinking tourism into responsible form towards green future of tourism and economy, the involvement and unity of the actors of the tourism system and complex initiatives and actions are needed.

Responsible tourism has its unique power to lead the response to the environmental problems and ensure sustainable economic growth, moving towards the green future.

