

# DESTINATION OVERCROWDING

## and Its Footprint on the Travel Industry

Steps and Solutions Regarding Visitor Management in the U.S.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Travel and tourism is growing around the world. However, due to several contributing factors, many destinations are grappling with a new reality—overcrowding, just one element contributing to concerns over visitor management. While this issue has predominately been on the rise in Europe and other parts of the world, the United States is beginning to see evidence of this emerging trend.

### While not widespread, destination overcrowding and resident discontent is a growing concern across the U.S.

U.S. Travel Association analysis finds overcrowding to be mostly localized to cities and national parks. Many factors can lead to overcrowding in an area: America's national parks and cultural sites, for example, are some of the most unique and diverse landscapes and historical centers in the world, and they intrigue domestic and international visitors alike.

The factors that make a city an attractive place to live also make it an attractive place to visit. It's not surprising, therefore, that residents express concern about issues that arise with rapid growth—and sometimes seek to attribute these problems too broadly to tourism.

Most discussions of overcrowding as a concerning trend happen locally and within the context of several broader issues, including residential population growth<sup>1</sup>, inadequate infrastructure and traffic congestion<sup>2</sup>, rising housing prices, and the continuing pattern of migration to urban areas. While few of these issues are spurred by tourism alone, growing tourism demand and imbalances of visitors during certain seasons, days of the week and times of the day, or during headline events, put added pressure on existing infrastructure.

### What Can Be Done?

While the destination overcrowding challenges facing American communities today may be nowhere near the scale and scope of the problems facing Europe and other iconic global destinations, it is important to address issues before they escalate. Industry leaders can seize this opportunity to help steer this discussion and offer solutions to inform and engage residents and visitors alike.



#### STEP 1

**Conduct a self-audit** of your destination's risk for overcrowding.

#### STEP 2

**Monitor resident sentiment and build a relationship with this key stakeholder.** When residents feel their concerns are heard, they are more likely to support initiatives that boost travel.

#### STEP 3

**Educate residents on the power of travel.** The less informed people are about the benefits of tourism, the more likely they are to consider overtourism a problem so make sure they understand the benefits travel delivers to your community.

#### STEP 4

**Establish partners and lay the foundation with influential stakeholders,** including residents, business owners, political leaders and the media to drive solutions to the broader problems rather than focusing exclusively on the impact of tourism.

#### STEP 5

**Reassess your destination's public story** to make sure you're messaging all the ways travel and tourism benefits your community and thinking about growth in a sustainable way—not just continuing to break records.

#### STEP 6

**Promote visitor management strategies** by highlighting the many diverse locations, landmarks and activities for all seasons to help spread out travel volume.

#### STEP 7

**Educate visitors to become destination stewards** and provide tips on how they can enjoy your community, parks and natural wonders without having a negative impact.

#### STEP 8

**Get involved at the national level by advocating to Congress** to invest in our travel infrastructure and alleviate a key complaint of overcrowding: congestion.

#### STEP 9

**Help shape the debate at the local and national level** on overcrowding by working with U.S. Travel and our membership to shape the narrative and define terminology that best represents the problem.

<sup>1</sup> The Oregonian, 'Portland-area population growth slows to lowest level since 2013, Census Bureau says,' March 22, 2018.

[https://www.oregonlive.com/front-porch/index.ssf/2018/03/portland-area\\_population\\_growth.html](https://www.oregonlive.com/front-porch/index.ssf/2018/03/portland-area_population_growth.html)

New York Times, 'New York City's Population Hits a Record 8.6 Million, March 22, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/22/nyregion/new-york-city-population.html>

<sup>2</sup> American Society of Civil Engineers, '2016 Tennessee Infrastructure Report Card'. <https://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/state-item/tennessee/>