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, inadequate infrastructure and traffic congestion, 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.

1 The Oregonian, ‘Portland-area population growth slows to lowest level since 2013, Census Bureau says,’ March 22, 2018.
