

Tourism: how to achieve the sustainable development goals?

In *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes (WHATT)* Volume 12 Number 3, we considered the relationships between Caribbean tourism investment and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and then in Volume 12 Number 5 the ways in which sustainability and the SDGs can be applied to hotel and travel companies. In this issue, theme editors Hugues Séraphin and Vanessa Gowreesunkar and their team of academics and practitioners undertake a broader examination of the interrelationships between tourism destinations in different world regions and the SDGs. I should like to thank Hugues, Vanessa and their team for the breadth and depth of insight that this issue provides in the context of the dramatic changes arising from the pandemic.

WHATT aims to make a practical and theoretical contribution to hospitality and tourism development, and we seek to do this by using a key question to focus attention on an industry issue. If you would like to contribute to our work by serving as a *WHATT* theme editor, do please contact me.

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Tourism: How to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals?

The growing influence of the tourism sector and its potential as a tool for development are irrefutable. As one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world, tourism is increasingly recognized as a vital contributor to job and wealth creation, economic growth, environmental protection and poverty alleviation. As a result, the quest for sustainability in tourism continues to be a priority for both established and emerging destinations. The vulnerability of the industry is mainly attributed to the depleting nature of tourism resources: emerging issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing natural disasters and weak institutional systems. As the world faces the devastating consequences of the pandemic, the tourism sector is among those being affected most severely; travel is down, anxiety levels are up and the future is uncertain. Nonetheless, tourism has significant future potential when aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). If well managed, the sector can generate jobs for durable growth, reduce poverty and offer incentives for environmental conservation – a triple win to help countries transition toward more inclusive, resilient economies. The SDGs are therefore central to the United Nations' agenda for sustainable development and embrace a wide range of environmental, social and economic issues. However, as we progress toward the middle of the 21st century, the question as to how to fully implement the SDGs is still being debated. Undoubtedly, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) plays critical role in enforcing the implementation of SDGs, but not all countries have the same level of development, nor all governments the same level of commitment. As a result, tourism businesses are conducted in an unsustainable way, and the consequences are often reflected in emerging issues such as overtourism and ongoing issues such as depletion of tourism resources.

According to the UNWTO, attainment of the SDGs is possible through collaboration and discussion between stakeholders. Therein lies the contribution of this issue: harnessing of tourism's positive contribution to sustainable development and the mitigation of the sector's adverse effects call for strong partnerships and decisive action by all tourism stakeholders. However, if the industry is to play its part in promoting a more sustainable and equitable



future, industry operators face a number of challenges to the way they currently conceptualize and manage their sustainability strategies and their sustainability reporting processes. A well-designed plan that follows the SDGs can help preserve the natural and cultural heritage assets upon which it depends, empower host communities, mitigating the consequences of future pandemics, generating trade opportunities and fostering peace and intercultural understanding. The uniqueness of this issue is that it unpacks important initiatives that can be implemented by tourism stakeholders in challenging contexts. Practical solutions are proposed as to how to redirect tourism goals toward the SDG's aspirations while focusing on national circumstances, needs and priorities.

The theme issue explores a strategic question facing many destinations relying on their tourism industry: how to achieve SDGs? In response, articles presented in this issue explore this specific concern. Enriched with a variety of case studies and evidence, the articles offer insights on strategies used by destinations to implement SDGs in their respective contexts. The contributors (academic and practitioner) provide realistic strategies used by some destinations that are likely to benefit others. The strength of this issue lies in the fact that it draws from a collection of case studies and success stories derived from important tourism destinations. The objective is to provide recommendations to practitioners on how to achieve SDGs to achieve sustainability for the economy, society and the environment. From an academic point of view, this theme issue addresses a gap and advances knowledge in sustainability issues in tourism. We hope that you will enjoy reading each article and you will be able to identify strategies applicable to pursue your goal in sustaining your tourism destination and its businesses.

Hugues Séraphin and Vanessa G.B. Gowreesunkar
Theme Editors

About the Theme Editors

Hugues Séraphin is a Senior Lecturer in Tourism and Event Management Studies at the University of Winchester. His research focuses on tourism development in postcolonial, post-conflict and post-disaster destinations; children in the tourism industry; and the applications of ambidextrous management/organizational ambidexterity to tourism (and related subjects).

Vanessa G.B. Gowreesunkar is a Senior Lecturer and she serves as Head of Department for Tourism and Hospitality at the University of Africa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Her research interest includes, among others, sustainable tourism; island tourism; tourism management and marketing; and postcolonial, post-conflict and post-disaster destinations.