

Policy Brief

#1 — 2023

Recommendations for traveling to the Caribbean

The tourism growth that has taken place after the COVID-19 pandemic in the Caribbean has not necessarily improved the welfare and living conditions of the local population, but rather seems to intensify the negative impacts of the activity.

In this context, the document presents proposals to promote more sustainable and responsible tourism aimed primarily at European travel agencies and tour operators. It also targets local administrations to promote tourism that generates a more positive impact on the region.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has not stopped tourism development in the Caribbean. In some countries, such as the Dominican Republic, the pandemic was perceived as an opportunity to [expand hotels](#) and tourist flats. Thus, once mobility restrictions were lifted, a strong reactivation of the tourism sector occurred throughout the region, mainly driven by North American and European visitors (Table 1).

Even without official data for 2023, this growth in the number of arrivals has increased. Thus, this past year, the [Dominican Republic surpassed 10 million international tourists for the first time](#). And overall, compared to 2022, the [Caribbean Island destinations in 2023 have experienced an increase of between 10% and 15%](#).

This growth does not necessarily mean greater well-being, better living conditions or employment for the local population. Therefore, as professionals in the sector, it is necessary to be aware that in

places where there are many inequality gaps and human rights violations, there is a risk that tourism travel can become an accomplice in this situation and aggravate it or, on the contrary, be an active agent in the transformation of tourism.

It is crucial to promote **responsible tourism** that ensures development that benefits local communities and respects the environment. These **recommendations** are intended to be a means for the tourism sector to influence the improvement of the quality of life of the Caribbean population through the creation of decent jobs and respect for local cultures and traditions. In addition, strengthening responsible tourism reduces labour exploitation and environmental degradation, contributing to a fairer and more sustainable economic development in the long term.

Table 1. International tourist arrivals in Latin America and the Caribbean by country, 2000-2022 (unit million).

Country	2000	2010	2019	2020	2021	2022
Mexico	20,64	23,29	45,02	24,82	31,86	38,33
Dominican Rep.	2,98	4,13	6,45	2,41	4,99	7,16
Puerto Rico	3,34	3,19	3,18	2,62	2,75	3,27
Cuba	1,74	2,51	4,26	1,09	S.D.	S.D
Jamaica	1,32	1,92	2,68	0,88	1,46	2,48

Source: UNWTO (2023) Compendium of Tourism Statistics.

Methodology

Alba Sud is an independent tourism research centre with more than fifteen years of experience in responsibly transforming tourism. We have been working in the Caribbean region for more than a decade and have a wide network of collaborators in Mexico and the Dominican Republic.

Based on this accumulation of experience, we have drafted this document, which is mainly aimed at European travel agencies and tour operators. It is also addressed to the administration of these countries to ensure that tourism has a more positive impact on the region.

Read more:

Some of Alba Sud's most important publications on the region are: [De la plantación al resort. El Caribe en el siglo veintiuno](#) (Pantojas, 2022); [La producción del espacio turístico en Puerto Morelos, México](#) (Calvario-Morales & Palafox, 2020); [El espejismo de Cancún. Análisis del desempeño y evolución de un destino turístico](#) (Mcoy, 2017); [El turismo como catalizador de la pobreza. Trabajo turístico y precariedad en Cozumel, México](#) (Rubí & Palafox, 2017), [Turismo placebo](#) (Blázquez & Cañada, 2011).

Key findings

The pattern of tourism specialisation has been reinforced in the Caribbean region after the pandemic. In some countries of the region, tourism intensity is higher than in others, as can be seen from some basic pre-pandemic indicators of COVID-19 in 2020 (Table 2). Although Mexico's data are proportionally lower than those of other Caribbean destinations, in reality, its tourism supply is highly concentrated territorially, with considerable weight in the Yucatan Peninsula, in the Caribbean area of the country.

In general terms, tourism **continues to grow in a haphazard and unplanned manner**. For example, there is a sustained growth of infrastructures wi-

thout taking into account the environmental, economic, and social impacts of these large projects. Furthermore, this development is being carried out to the detriment of natural resources and the casualisation of employment in order to reduce costs.

All of this means that the negative impacts outweigh the positive ones, with little benefit for local communities and people working in the sector. In addition to the increase in the number of hotel places, there has been an increase in the informal supply through tourist flat marketing platforms. This has not only driven up land prices, but municipalities are not prepared to meet the demand for services, supplies, and basic foodstuffs.

Table 2. International arrivals by different dimensions, 2019.

Country	Arrivals per km ²	Arrivals per 1.000 inhab.	Tourist beds per km ²	Tourist beds per 1.000 inhab.
Dominican Rep.	132,28	592,72	4,65	23
Cuba	38,77	376,42	0,97	9
Mexico	20,78	359,92	0,80	13

Source: UNWTO (2023) Compendium of Tourism Statistics.

As a result, **the cost of living has risen, wages are derisory, and it is increasingly difficult to live.** For example, during the last decade, the minimum wage in the hotel sector in the **Dominican Republic** did not even cover half of the basic food basket, so its workers, in addition to needing tips, are forced to go into debt and ‘make a living’ to supplement their income. According to data from the Central Bank of the Dominican Republic and its Ministry of Labour, in 2022, while the minimum wage in hotels, bars, and restaurants was 14,000 pesos per month, the basic food basket reached 42,270 pesos, only 33% of this.

Other indicators show the **imbalance between tourism infrastructure and that which meets the needs of the local population.** For example, in the Dominican Republic, while there were 23 tourist beds per 1,000 inhabitants in 2019, according to UNWTO data for 2023, the number of

hospital beds was only 15.6, according to ECLAC data from 2017.

It is also difficult for the Caribbean population to engage in tourism or to have free or affordable public leisure and recreational facilities in their country.

This socio-economic model increases the region’s vulnerability. Relying only on a sector as volatile as tourism is not sustainable in the long term. Especially if we take into account the poly-crisis context in which we find ourselves, where the limits of the planet are becoming more and more evident, for example, the whole region is suffering from the “brown tide” of sargassum. Thus, the white and turquoise blue beaches on which the tourist attraction is based, are in danger of disappearing and, with it, a large part of the tourist offer.

Suggestions

Slow travel

We recommend offering longer journeys where tourists can travel more slowly and have more time to get to know the destination. In this way, despite the environmental impact of a transatlantic flight, the economic impact and possible distribution of benefits will be better.

Moving away from the conventional offer

The majority of the offers in the Caribbean focused on the ‘all-inclusive’ model, whereby tourists do all their spending within the hotels. Although this model offers guarantees in terms of security, it is much better and enriching to get out of the ‘all-inclusive’ and discover the territory and its people. To this end, we recommend working with local businesses and promoting rural or community-based tourism.

Responsible promotion

Taking into account gender and racial inequalities and not reinforcing them through tourism promotion. Traditionally, part of the Caribbean has been promoted based on the objectification and exoticisation of bodies. Therefore, we recommend reviewing the promotional content used to promote tourism in these territories without reinforcing or taking advantage of existing inequalities.

Raising awareness for responsible consumption

We encourage travel agencies and tour operators to educate their clientele to consume responsibly in the destination. First, they should be informed about the socio-cultural particularities of the country, the regulations, and the laws for better coexistence. Secondly, it is advisable to know the **protocols against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents**, such as **The Code**.

Thirdly, tourists should be reminded not to buy or consume fake handicrafts or exotic animals, especially those endangered or protected. Finally, try to make tourists become actors of change through their trip. For example, let the travel agency know if the place where you are staying does not offer good working conditions.

Due Diligence

The approval of the Corporate **Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD)** by the **European Parliament** establishes requirements for companies to conduct due diligence in the identification and mitigation of adverse human rights and environmental impacts, as well as in the development of climate plans.

Although this framework is limited, as it only affects large companies, we encourage small travel agencies and responsible tourism tour operators to review and comply with the requirements of the Directive. For example, review the working conditions of the people we work with at the destination: guides, private transport staff, accommodation staff, etc. In this way, we will stop being complicit in perpetuating these inequalities and labour exploitation.

Further requirements of the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive:

- Have a due diligence policy in place.
- Determine actual or potential negative effects on human rights and the environment.
- Prevent and mitigate potential negative impacts.
- Establish and maintain a grievance procedure.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the due diligence strategy and measures.
- Communicate publicly on due diligence.
- Adapt a climate transition plan aligned with the Paris Agreement and limit global warming to a maximum of 1.5°C.

Source: pactomundial.org

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Authorship: Carla Izcara, Giselle Cedeño & Ernest Cañada

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