



Results from CREST 2020 World Tourism Day Webinar

“The Case for Responsible Travel: Lessons from COVID -19 for Tourism in a Changing Climate”

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Introduction

In September 2020, CREST released the annual report, [*The Case for Responsible Travel: Trends & Statistics*](#). This report shared key studies on COVID-19 and climate change, and the lessons that may be applied from the former to meet the challenges of the latter. As a companion, CREST held a [*World Tourism Day Webinar*](#) to illuminate the findings of the CREST Trends & Statistics report, and continue the dialogue by bringing together distinguished speakers with the goal of exploring the unprecedented opportunity to mitigate two of the world's existential threats, climate change and COVID-19. The webinar was attended by more than 265 participants from across the globe.

The CREST World Tourism Day Webinar was moderated by:

- ❖ **K. Denaye Hinds**, *Owner and Managing Director, JustaTAAD, LLC*

Panelists included:

- ❖ **Dr. Daniel Scott**, *Executive Director, Interdisciplinary Centre on Climate Change (IC3), University of Waterloo*
- ❖ **Erin Francis-Cummings**, *President and CEO, Destination Analysts*
- ❖ **Ewald Biemans**, *Owner and CEO, Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort, Aruba; Recent Winner of the Global United Nations 2020 Climate Action Award for Climate Neutral Now*

*This report was produced by the **Center for Sustainable Tourism**, Arizona State University, to synthesize the knowledge from the webinar and other scientific and industry data. Researchers included:*

- ❖ **Christine A Vogt, Ph.D.**, *Professor & Director, Center for Sustainable Tourism, School of Community Resources and Development, Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions, Arizona State University*
- ❖ **Tanner Caterina-Knorr**, *Research Assistant, Center for Sustainable Tourism; Ph.D. Student, School of Community Resources and Development, Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions, Arizona State University*

Dr. Gregory Miller, *Executive Director* of CREST, set the tone of the webinar by giving the participants a sense of urgency and hope. While COVID-19 has changed the travel industry, he said, "For decades, tourism has frankly been on a path of self-destruction. Valuing profits at the expense of people, planet and purpose." However, he noted that this could be the perfect time for a change. "Crisis often breeds innovation and destinations, communities, and businesses must not let this opportunity go to waste."

"Crisis often breeds innovation and destinations, communities, and businesses must not let this opportunity go to waste."

~Dr. Gregory Miller

In the spirit of continuing the conversation and disseminating thoughtful and consolidated information from the webinar, ASU's Center for Sustainable Tourism looked to the [*Future of Tourism Coalition*](#) for inspiration and to unify knowledge and provide solutions for the planet, communities, and the tourism industry.

Guiding Principles of the Future of Tourism Coalition & Research Process

Six non-governmental organizations, including CREST, formed the Future of Tourism Coalition in June 2020. Destinations, businesses, academics, and NGOs have become signatories of the coalition's Guiding Principles to appeal for change in the tourism industry. The thirteen **Guiding Principles** of the Future of Tourism Coalition were chosen to organize the strategies mentioned in the CREST Webinar as a means of unifying various approaches to examine and to activate tourism's future.

ASU's Center for Sustainable Tourism synthesized the data produced within this webinar by transcribing the audio, sorting and attributing the text to the appropriate panelist, and coding the information by the **Guiding Principles** of the Future of Tourism Coalition. These principles were used over other frameworks to advance the dialogue on the values and actions to help propel sustainable, responsible travel by both the tourism industry and travelers.

Future of Tourism Coalition's 13 Guiding Principles

1. See the whole picture
2. Use sustainability standards
3. Collaborate in destination management
4. Choose quality over quantity
5. Demand fair income distribution
6. Reduce tourism's burden
7. Redefine economic success
8. Mitigate climate impacts
9. Close the loop on resources
10. Contain tourism's land use
11. Diversity source markets
12. Protect sense of place
13. Operate business responsibly

The data, after analyzed with qualitative techniques, rendered a flow chart (**Figure 1**) with several mitigating variables to explain how the panelists viewed the transition from the existential threats of COVID-19 and climate change to the outcome of destination resiliency.

Figure 1. Flow Chart Generated from CREST’s World Tourism Day Webinar



Explanation of Flow Chart

There are two tracks leading to destination resiliency:

- ❖ COVID-19 → Quality of Destination → Tourist Health → Destination Resiliency
- ❖ Climate Change → Quality of Destination → Destination Health → Destination Resiliency

Figure 1 rendered a novel way of representing dialogue sourced from a webinar. A graphical representation of the main themes discussed in the webinar can help businesses, governments, consumers, and local communities visualize their roles and responsibilities. The intersection of these two existential threats converged at “Quality of the Destination” and again at “Destination Resiliency.” In other words, the primary way that climate change and COVID-19 can be managed, from a tourism perspective, is at the destination level. Appropriate strategies to increase the quality of the destination, for the health of the tourist and the health of the destination, led to the resiliency of the destination. The panelists discussed several ways to mitigate and manage the impacts of these two threats that ultimately leads to destination resiliency.

Future of Tourism Coalition Guiding Principles discussed

The top five Future of Tourism Coalition principles discussed in CREST’s World Tourism Day Webinar around the topics of climate change and COVID-19 were:

- ❖ **Principle 3:** Collaborate in destination management (*10 mentions*)
- ❖ **Principle 4:** Choose quality over quantity (*13 mentions*)
- ❖ **Principle 8:** Mitigate climate impacts (*9 mentions*)
- ❖ **Principle 11:** Diversify source markets (*9 mentions*)
- ❖ **Principle 13:** Operate business responsibly (*7 mentions*)

The following sections elaborate on how these top five principles were discussed in the webinar, in addition to a section on consumers’ perspectives and responsibilities.

Principle 3: Collaborate in destination management

Seek to develop all tourism through a collaborative management structure with equal participation by government, the private sector, and civil society organizations that represent diversity in communities.

Panelists spoke about collaboration in the destination as a way to better manage COVID-19 and climate change. Destination leadership, private sector, and consumers were all seen as actors in the systems-thinking approach to collaboration and management.

Key Quotes

- ❖ After sharing an example from Barcelona, **Dr. Daniel Scott** clarified what he thinks is a missing component of collaboration within destinations: “Destinations have to get on the same page with... a unified vision, and that takes time [and] it takes leadership. But whether it's climate change and to some extent, even in [a] COVID-19 context, when I look at leadership, it's really coming from the business or the destination community, the bottom up. It's not coming as much as I'd really like it to see [from the top down].”

“The more they get on the bandwagon, the better for all of us because we really need to work on climate change and global warming.”

~Ewald Biemans

- ❖ **Dr. Daniel Scott** connected the importance of collaboration to systems-thinking and climate change: “I think there has to be transformative change at the system level. And that's where green investment as part of a global recovery could be a huge part of [consumers acting in a sustainable way] if it's done well.”
- ❖ **Ewald Biemans** offered the webinar attendees his help in climate change mitigation strategies: “The more they get on the bandwagon, the better for all of us because we really need to work on climate change and global warming. It is in my own interest and in the interest of the health of the world, actually, to do our best to preserve and to do as much as we can to ameliorate the damage that we're doing.”
- ❖ **Dr. Daniel Scott** urged attendees to work together and sees policy as a primary mechanism for change: “We've got tourism policy... then we have the sustainability and climate and other things in another bucket. There are two different groups of people. Typically, they're not connected. We saw that disconnect from the country level to the state level. Part of that is getting those groups of people together. And as you all so eloquently put it, this is in your best interest, not just now, but in 10 years, 20 years. It's going to mean more for you as a destination. That connection of the industry to other parts of the economy [and] other parts of policy remain, unfortunately, in isolation.”

Principle 4: Choose quality over quantity

Manage tourism development based on quality of visitation, not quantity of visitors, so as to enhance the travel experience while sustaining the character of the destination and benefiting local communities.

Panelists spoke about destination quality in terms of both COVID-19 and climate change, with effective quality improvements leading to healthier travelers and destinations. However, there were different views on the source of the demand for higher quality destinations, and a discussion of how COVID-19 could benefit destination quality and sustainability.

Key Quotes

- ❖ **Ewald Biemans** connected consumers' demand and healthy and high-quality destinations: "In the hospitality industry, we see a trend towards less and better. I see that we are making real progress towards a more sustainable life, a more sustainable industry. I am convinced that this is a new era for the hospitality industry. It fits right into sustainability. People are much more health conscious today, they are outdoors, they're exercising, they're eating healthily, and they're so much more demand for health and wellness. The tourism industry is cleaning up its act, I think, and overtourism has come to a screeching halt. All of these points will help sustainability tremendously in many ways."

"I think what COVID-19 did was really show that tourism is a leader... in the overall health and humaneness of a destination. You see all these DMOs taking part, doing the advertising and the public health campaigns about how to travel safely."

~Erin Francis-Cummings

- ❖ **Erin Francis-Cummings** discussed the "converging paths" of destination health and consumers' heightened consciousness of travel during COVID-19 from her work at Destination Analysts: "[Travelers] have the more consciousness of how they're going to behave because [of] COVID-19. When I've interviewed business travelers lately, the perception of tourism excess, I think, [is] going to go away, at least in the short term, because of COVID-19. Business travelers say, 'I'm going to be more conscious about the trips I take.' It's just a different mindset that we're seeing. In the survey, too, we see a lot of people saying, 'I'm going to avoid crowded places. I am going to be more aware of the trash that I create.' I think what COVID-19 did was really show that tourism is a leader... in the overall health and humaneness of a destination. You see all these DMOs taking part, doing the advertising and the public health campaigns about how to travel safely. I think that sets a precedent for how people should behave correctly when they travel and not have such an impact on the environment."
- ❖ **Ewald Biemans** introduced the business perspective: "I've been always the hotel leader [who] said quality is more important than the quantity. I have noticed that people have no problem paying more for a sustainable well-run and well-managed resort. Quality is today even more so in demand. The customer also knows that we have invested lots of money in their safety, security, and well-being."

Principle 8: Mitigate climate impacts

Strive to follow accepted scientific consensus on needed reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Invest in green infrastructure and a fast reduction in transport emissions involved in tourism - air, sea, and ground.

Panelists spoke about the different levels of stakeholders' insights around climate change mitigation, both from a consumer and business perspective. Additionally, ideas for how to manage and who would manage mitigation at the destination level was explained.

Key Quotes

❖ **Erin Francis-Cummings** discussed the changes in consumer beliefs around climate change: "Since March 15th, we've conducted a weekly survey of 1,200 American travelers. I asked questions this past weekend about how Americans are thinking about sustainability and their consciousness of climate change. There's been a 10% increase [since last fall] in people saying they see that leisure travel has an impact on the environment. It's still relatively low overall; it's still under 30%. But still, to see a 10% gain just in one year, I think... that's a good trend. We're moving in the right direction."

❖ **Erin Francis-Cummings** also shared insights around climate change and tourism business attitudes: "We do a lot of business-to-business research of tourism leaders. We could see when we surveyed destination marketing organization leaders last year that they really saw that sustainability and climate change was something that they needed to start tackling now. A majority of them said that was going to be a big part of their jobs in the next year."

❖ **Dr. Daniel Scott** explained the opportunity of utilizing COVID-19 stimulus funding for climate change mitigation and adaptation: "If it's done right, it could be a real boost to the low carbon transition. But, if countries don't prioritize, if that policy of climate and other sustainability elements is not built into that stimulus, I think it will actually work against some of the sustainability momentum that we had. In a paper that we published in April, we looked at the place of climate and sustainability within the planned economic recovery plans, and at the time, there wasn't a lot of "green" [investment] outside of Europe."

"If countries don't prioritize, if that policy of climate and other sustainability elements is not built into that stimulus, I think it will actually work against some of the sustainability momentum that we had."

~Dr. Daniel Scott

Principle 11: Diversify source markets

In addition to international visitation, encourage robust domestic tourism, which may be more resilient in the face of crises and raise citizens' perceived value of their own natural and cultural heritage.

Panelists discussed the challenges and opportunities to diversifying the source markets, specifically in relation to domestic travelers, in connection to overtourism, COVID-19, and climate change outcomes.

Key Quotes

- ❖ **Dr. Daniel Scott** explained the broad challenges for destinations experiencing a shift in the market sources for travelers, and how this connected to overtourism: “In some parts of the world that have really strong domestic markets, travel overseas [has stopped] because of travel restrictions. Overtourism has shifted to domestic destinations in ways that we wouldn't have anticipated, whether it's the coastal places in the British islands, inland lakes, mountain communities in the United States and Canada, and other places... Not just from a consumer's perspective, but from the destination's in some respects, if we look at what a low-carbon tourism future for, say, Europe might look like, part of that is staying closer to home, staying longer. This experiment we've been thrust into provides us some good opportunities to learn how some communities didn't anticipate that additional demand, and what they need to do differently to make sure they don't have the same problems with overtourism as some other places have had over the last several decades.”
- ❖ **K. Denaye Hinds** mentioned how some destinations are currently pivoting: “What I find interesting and what I'm seeing in some of the work and research that I've been doing is how a lot of these destinations are pivoting to a more “staycation” type of atmosphere.”

“This experiment we've been thrust into provides us some good opportunities to learn how some communities didn't anticipate that additional demand, and what they need to do differently to make sure they don't have the same problems with overtourism as some other places have had over the last several decades.”

~Dr. Daniel Scott

Principle 13: Operate business responsibly

Incentivize and reward tourism businesses and associated enterprises that support these principles through their actions and develop strong local supply chains that allow for higher quality products and experiences.

Panelists discussed how businesses can operate more responsibly during this time of COVID-19 and climate change to provide better outcomes for destinations.

“We show them all we do, and we prove to them that... luxury is not influenced by an environmental conservation program. In fact, they go hand in hand.”

~Ewald Biemans

Key Quotes

- ❖ **Ewald Biemans** explained the extensive work that he does at the Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort, Aruba: "There's a lot of education involved. We have an extensive educational program for staff and for our customers. When our customer arrives, the first thing he sees on their television in the room is a welcome message and an environmental video. We explain our process from A to Z. We educate our staff [and] they're carrying the message home to their children and so forth. Additionally, if we have a site inspection by a group of operators or a group of travel agents... we give them an environmental tour. We show them all we do, and we prove to them that... luxury is not influenced by an environmental conservation program. In fact, they go hand in hand."
- ❖ **Ewald Biemans** continued as he explained the motivations of his business: "We are not in the tourism business. We are in the nature business. Without nature, there is no tourism. And I tell this to my grandkids and I tell this to my staff and I tell this to every customer that we have. Nature is a business and we need to protect it, especially in the case of Aruba, what are 100,000 people going to do when that one source of business, which is tourism, is destroyed because nature was destroyed? There's nothing else, there's no industry, there's no agriculture, there's no production of anything. So it is important that that we understand that we're not in the in the tourism business, we are in the nature business, we need to preserve it with everything we have."
- ❖ **Dr. Daniel Scott** connected **Ewald Biemans'** business operations to governmental leadership in several ways throughout the webinar. Emphasizing the need for destination leadership to recognize the importance of a bottom-up approach to tourism management, **Dr. Scott** concisely described: "I'm always thrilled when I hear people like Ewald and his nature. That is the perspective [that] far more businesses need to translate up to the destination and country leadership level."

Consumers' perspectives and responsibilities

The role of the consumer was the final distinct theme that was discussed in the webinar but was not directly reflected in the Future of Tourism principles. Panelists connected travelers to principles 3 (collaborate in destination management), 4 (choose quality over quantity), and 8 (mitigate climate impacts).

Key Quotes

- ❖ **Erin Francis-Cummings** elaborated on the surveys she conducted on consumers' opinions of their environmental impacts while traveling and where change needed to occur: "The most common [understanding of consumer impact] was plastic. Whatever we've done in the media seems to be getting [at plastic], but [consumers are not understanding] carbon as much. It's just too much to put it on to them alone. We need large leadership and governmental change."
- ❖ **Erin Francis-Cummings** urged businesses to put more emphasis on climate change efforts because of the developing consumer trends: "Look at these Generation Z travelers, look at these millennial travelers. [Climate change is] really a point for them. It's a lot more in their consciousness. We already saw that a year ago, so at some point there will be enough pressure."
- ❖ **Ewald Biemans** discussed his relationship with travelers staying at his resort: "We were able to tell our customers, when you stay with us, the only thing you leave behind is your footprint in the sand... The customer accepts this so readily and he's so happy, he feels actually redeeming himself by staying in an environmentally sustainable resort or in a location that has sustainability at heart. It behooves anybody to start thinking in that direction because the whole world eventually will have to go that way."
- ❖ **Erin Francis-Cummings** explained the motivation of travelers during COVID-19: "At least amongst American travelers, who's traveling right now are those that feel less risk averse. It's not just luxury... If they feel it's less of a risk and they're not as worried about COVID-19, that's who's traveling right now."

"At least amongst American travelers, who's traveling right now are those that feel less risk averse."

~Erin Francis-Cummings

What's Next?

Destinations around the world are currently facing two critical challenges: COVID-19 and climate change. Both threats have dramatic impacts on the resiliency of tourism destinations. By utilizing the Future of Tourism Coalition Guiding Principles to understand the statements made in the CREST 2020 World Tourism Day Webinar, key strategies took shape to improve the quality of destinations through the health of the tourist and destination. Speakers at the CREST Webinar stated the following strategies to address the threats of COVID-19 and climate change.

Strategies to manage climate change and COVID-19

- ❖ Systems-thinking across the tourism system
- ❖ Managing business operations for immediate and long-term recovery
- ❖ Scaling up business initiatives to government management systems
- ❖ Increasing domestic tourism, with emphasis on local markets
- ❖ Decreasing carbon emissions generated by the industry and consumers
- ❖ COVID-19 stimulus for climate change solutions
- ❖ COVID-19 and sustainability-related education of consumers, travel business staff, and travel agencies
- ❖ Closing the loop on resources and reducing resource use, specifically related to single-use plastics

Strategies to manage the quality of destination

- ❖ Addressing carrying capacity and overtourism at the destination level
- ❖ Reducing impact through responsible and sustainable development and consumption
- ❖ Ensuring equitable distribution of natural, social, and economic capital for businesses, consumers, and communities
- ❖ Growing partnerships at the local, national, and international levels
- ❖ Creating new policies and/or modifying existing policies to incorporate response to climate change and COVID-19

While COVID-19 has been detrimental for the tourism industry, one opportunity has emerged: time. Understanding the challenges destinations presently encounter and harnessing this time to strategize will allow for healthier, higher-quality destinations to be produced, while also promoting equitable distributions of capital for local communities.

“Looking after and doing right by our people is going to be a fundamental thing that we have to focus on over the next 20 years.”

~Dr. Daniel Scott