



Syrniki (Russia): Pancakes made of quark and garnished with sour cream, jam, honey or apple sauce.

## The Ultimate Agony Of 'Atithi, Tum Kab Jaoge?' Raised By Overtourism

**A**s travelers strap their backpacks, fill their suitcases and get their passports stamped, the hopes of being the ultimate voyager come crashing to the ground. Why, you ask? Well, their dream destinations have shut the front doors, some going to the extent of putting up the sign 'You are not welcome'. But how can that happen? Aren't countries supposed to be boosting tourism and rejoice in the revenue? Well, that was long ago. Today, things have changed and if you are wondering why or how, **Mrinal Verma, GT Network**, brings you all the information you need.



### THE GOOD

As the burgeoning middle class of the world collectively upgraded their lifestyle, a surge in tourism began. Add to this the fact that the world has become more accessible than it has ever been — cheaper airfares, online accommodation booking services and what not. The result? Tourists, tourists everywhere! According to United Nations World Tourism Organisation, international tourism went from 25 million in 1950 to 1.4 billion per year in today's time. And that, my friend, is just the beginning. Chinese tourists, key-players in the game, are responsible for a good chunk of this number. In 2017 alone, the Chinese tourists made about 130 million trips abroad, accounting for 80% of the key growth of tourism in the last decade. While tourism was on an all-time rise, not every country felt the surge. 46% of global tourism is concentrated in the top 100 cities of the world like New York, Bangkok, London, Paris, Dubai, etc. In 2016, New York City hosted more than 60 million tourists, double of what it hosted in 2002. London, too, has seen more than 20% growth in its guests and Berlin's number has doubled from 15 million in 2005 to 31 million in 2016. Tourism has served as the economic lifesaver for a lot of European countries, generating around 321 billion USD for European Union in 2018 and helped with the employment of around 12 million people. And the tourism industry on the rise meant the same for the country's revenue. Tourists happy, countries happy. So far, so good.

### THE BAD

Who doesn't enjoy the occasional doorbell rung by a beloved guest, but imagine the same guests coming everyday in large hordes. That's what happened to a lot of the countries that were initially happy. Netherlands, a country of 17 million people, expects 42 million visitors annually by 2030. Giethoorn, a village of picturesque windmills housing 2,500 people, is being swamped by 350,000 Chinese tourists every year. Clearly, 'our gates are open' policy had backfired, leaving government with no option but to take action. While some of them were rather subtle, others not so much. Netherlands' government plans to shut down attractions and impose tourist taxes as Amsterdammers are being squeezed out of their homes; the iconic 'Iamsterdam' letters were removed from outside of the Rijksmuseum to the same effect. With 1.3 billion international arrivals counted by UN, 51% of which were in Europe, the Mayor of Venice has ordered installations of checkpoints intended to block the visitors. Mallorca, Spain, went as far as witnessing anti-tourism demonstrations right at the airport. Barcelona is fining its visitors excessively, prohibiting construction of new hotels in the city's center, not providing docking licences to foreign cruise ships that want to stop for the day and are only allowing tour groups to visit Boqueria market at certain times. The Croatian city of Dubrovnik, that was the for King's Landing in HBO's Game of Thrones, has also limited its daily visitors to 8,000, a number the new mayor wants to cut to half.

### THE UGLY

As a result of this surge in over-eager travelers, the streets are clogged up, housing supplies have diminished, water is polluted, grocery stores are replaced by souvenir stalls and monuments have turned into no-go zones. In short, the life of residents has become tough, so it doesn't come as a surprise that they are choosing to leave their hometowns and move out.

As Venice sees major surge in tourists, it is, in reality, losing residents, dropping from nearly 175,000 in 1991 to 55,000 in 2017. Increasing tourism has had its impact on not just the families living there, but the land they are living on, too. Boracay in Philippines, which was known to have dazzling white sand and crystal-clear water, now has water bodies filled with green algae. Illegal fishing, pollution and unmonitored snorkeling have destroyed 70-90% of the coral cover. Angkor Wat in Cambodia, the famous temple in 'Tom Raider', has spurred the growth of nearby urban areas so much that the result is a shortage of groundwater that could trigger a sudden collapse of the monument at any time.

The 19 islands of Galápagos, the very ones that inspired Darwin's theory of evolution, once hosted approximately 9,000 species. Today, the UN has listed the destination as an endangered heritage site, courtesy — a high soar in tourism since 2007. A similar sorry fate was written for Machu Picchu that saw its visitors' number grow from 400,000 to 1.4 million in the last 20 years. The same visitors climbed and crawled all over the ancient Incan ruins, littering and eroding pathways so much so that UNESCO had to step in to enlist the destination as one of the heritage sites in danger.

While Thailand declared 3 of its islands as strictly prohibited to tourists because of 80% reefs being degraded, Bhutan has restricted the number of tourists allowed and charge them more than 15,000 INR a day for visas and fees.

Does this mean that 'tourists go back' is on its way to become the anthem of numerous countries? Or should the travelers explore the world of virtual tourism? Should countries be stringent with their tourism policies? Or maybe the travelers need to be a bit more careful, so as to not to disrupt the natural habitat of their destination? The answer, perhaps, lies in a bit of yes to all of the above.

