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## International Tourism

*Dr Jane Turner & Dr Peter Robinson*

### *Scope of International Tourism*

International tourism refers specifically to travel between different nations and is best explained using Leiper's Tourism System model which illustrates the flow of travellers from a tourist generating area to a tourist destination (Leiper, 1990).

*Insert figure here*

Figure 1: A basic tourism system

Source: Leiper 1990, cited in Robinson, 2020

In the context of international travel, tourists leaving their home country are referred to as **outbound** tourists and those arriving from another country are **inbound** tourists. Indeed, the **UNWTO** distinguishes international tourism from **domestic** tourism, as the activities that take place outside of the borders of the persons home nation where they reside most of the time (UNWTO, 2010). International travel flows are measured in terms of tourist arrivals and are counted within **tourism satellite account** models which attempt to quantify the volume and value of both inbound and domestic tourism, within a particular country.

In 2019 there were 1.45 billion international tourist arrivals generating US\$1.7 trillion in total tourism **export** earnings (WTO, 2020). Yet, during the first eight months of 2020, as a result of the COVID-19 **pandemic** and travel restrictions introduced by **destinations** worldwide, international tourism declined by 70% (700 million fewer international tourists than in 2019). The unprecedented decline translated into a loss of US\$730 billion, more than eight times the loss felt in 2009 as a result of the global economic crisis.

International travel relies largely upon **air transport**, with water-borne craft and trains playing an important, but less ubiquitous role (WTO, 2019). According to AirportWatch (2019), 4.4 billion people travelled by air in 2019.

### *Current Issues*

Over the past decade the airline industry has been dominated by the emergence of low-cost carriers many of which have exacerbated concerns around the environmental impact of **mass tourism**. While **slow tourism** has emerged as an alternative model of travel (using trains, travelling shorter distances and spending time and money in local communities), there has been no significant adoption of this practice amongst travellers. During periods of relative geopolitical, economic and environmental stability, number of visitors have grown exponentially in many destinations. This growth has been facilitated by increased mobility alongside lower transportation costs and has contributed to **overtourism** in a number of destinations (UNWTO, 2018). Barcelona and Venice are examples of destinations which have experienced several high profile overtourism protests, with many thousands of participants keen to see a reduction in visitor numbers and a more carefully managed approach to balancing the needs of tourists and the host community.

However, recent events, including both the Icelandic ash cloud and the Covid-19 pandemic have illustrated the fragility of international travel, and the consequences of **globalization**. Conversely, increased globalization has also led to the emergence of new technologies which have profoundly impacted consumer travel behaviour. Notable examples include the shift away from high street retail to online travel booking, the creation of new peer-to-peer platforms such as Airbnb and the role of electronic Word of Mouth to influence and inform individual travel choices and destinations.

### *The future of International Travel*

Covid-19 has significantly affected the international travel industry. Before the pandemic most forecasters predicted strong, continued growth in air travel despite continued concerns about the economic growth, trade wars, geopolitical tensions and social unrest. The economic **impact** of the crisis has resulted in airlines downsizing fleets and reducing the scale of their operations. While post-pandemic it is likely there will be a resurgence in demand for international travel, it is likely to take a number of years to return to the levels anticipated in advance of 2020. In the short-term, it is highly likely that domestic travel will increase as it is perceived as lower risk, with the regrowth of the travel sector dominated by a renewed focus on health and hygiene and greater adoption of contactless technologies.

Prior to 2020 it should be noted that overtourism was becoming part of a wider debate focussed on concerns around the environmental impacts of air travel. These issues have not disappeared, and although they have been less prevalent in the media, the drive to minimise the environmental impacts of international travel will almost certainly re-emerge as a key priority over the next few years. This will bring with it the evolution of new technologies which will require new skills and expertise. While the transition to hybrid and electric technologies is well underway for cars, trains and even some smaller water-borne passenger transport, the development of this technology in the airline industry is still in its infancy. It is highly likely the adoption of new technologies, greater awareness of the impacts of travel and the legacy of the coronavirus pandemic will lead to a reshaping of the way consumers experience international travel in the future.

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