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## Many tourism hotspots are 'de-marketing' – with mixed success. We researched the smartest ways to do it

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Those who watched the recent Milan Cortina Winter Olympics and Paralympics probably placed Italy high on their travel bucket lists.

Global events frequently generate abrupt spikes in visitor demand.

This is a boon for many tourism operators and business owners, but it often leads to short-term yet significant pressures on destinations, resulting in concerns regarding overtourism.

Some destinations are therefore actively trying to reduce tourism – with mixed success.

We recently researched how tourism destinations could do this successfully without causing major disruptions.



## This research is yet to be peer-reviewed. Why does that matter?

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### Overtourism and 'de-marketing'

Overtourism can strain local communities and damages heritage and ecosystems.

Many of our favourite destinations are now trying to “de-market” themselves.

“De-marketing” is a term that has been used since 1971.

Rather than using the traditional “4 Ps” of marketing (price, produce, place and promotion) to attract tourists, de-marketing uses them to keep people away.

### Tasmania's Overland Track: a case study

Our soon-to-be-published research shows de-marketing risks failure if it ignores trends and pressures in society.

We found successful de-marketing cannot be conducted from one angle, such as changing the way a location is marketed. This is because attractions, businesses cultures, residents, heritage assets and natural areas all form the tourism system – when one is altered, the entire system is affected.

The Overland Track in northwest Tasmania, Australia, illustrates this well.



Hikers walk along Tasmania's Overland Track with Barn Bluff in the distance. Adam Cooper/AAP

By the 1990s, the 65-kilometre, five-day hike was under significant strain. Rising visitor numbers, overcrowded huts, waste issues and track erosion were reducing environmental quality and visitor satisfaction.

Following extensive consultation, in 2011 the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service introduced a suite of measures:

- a booking and permit system
- a track fee
- capped daily departures
- the introduction of free mid-track access for Tasmanians to maintain local recreation opportunities.

In 2011, hiker numbers were at 8,260 per year. Since then, there has been modest increase, and for the past three years numbers have stabilised at around 11,000 per year.

Using permits and capped daily departures slowed the growth of visitors, while track fees provide revenue from which rangers are employed and improvements to trails, huts and toilets can be made. This in turn reduces track erosion and environmental impacts.

## **Sometimes it backfires**

Ironically, as destinations have tried to de-market themselves, media coverage of their actions can cause these attempts to backfire.

Locations such as Venice, Barcelona and Amsterdam are recent examples.

Amsterdam attracts around 20 million visitors a year and in 2023 the city tried to push back.

Its "stay away" campaign targeted young British men searching online for terms like "stag weekend" or "pub crawl," aiming to deter tourists seeking party trips.

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Watch Amsterdam's dramatic new video urging tourists to 'stay away'.

The famous European city has launched a new campaign discouraging British party tourism 🙅

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The campaign backfired.

Some businesses began selling “stay away” t-shirts and promoting rebellious “stay away weekends” while the campaign was parodied on social media.

Instead of discouraging this market, the message became a meme – and, for some, a reason to visit.

## Why there is often pushback

De-marketing can be successful. But how can destinations that have had major investments from private and public stakeholders suddenly slow down business without triggering economic instability and resistance?

Not surprisingly, there is often pushback from businesses. Sudden halts to tourism hurt the hip pockets of those whose livelihood depends upon it. [In Venice](#) in 2021 for example, a ban on large cruise ships from entering the Venetian lagoon was met with resistance from local business leaders.

Regulating tourist behaviour, banning short-term rental accommodation and tourists taxes are popular responses to overtourism but are often ineffectual.

Iceland introduced a [tourist tax in 2024](#), but what followed was a rise in tourist numbers.

Taxes can create revenue to repair environmental damage but they do not reduce people's desire to travel.

## How it can be done successfully

Our research shows successful de-marketing requires simultaneous use of soft and harsh responses.

Harsh responses include caps on visitor numbers, complete bans, regulations on visitor movement and raising pricing or taxes.





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As destinations grapple with #overtourism, #Barcelona has approved one of Europe's highest #touristtaxes, with visitors potentially paying up to €15 per night.

The move aims to ease visitor pressure while helping fund affordable housing.

The move aims to manage rising visitor pressure while helping fund affordable housing, reflecting a growing global shift toward stricter tourism management policies. While authorities see it as a step toward sustainability, industry stakeholders warn it could impact destination competitiveness.

Is tourism entering a new era of [#regulation](#) and responsibility?

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Soft responses include changing the types of attractions on offer (to attract certain tourist segments), codes of conduct, educational campaigns and using social media to promote initiatives.

Both soft and harsh responses must be co-designed with the tourism industry and community.

Technology can also be used.

Majorca, in Spain, has implemented an AI-powered platform to help tourists plan trips. At the same time, it recommends alternative attractions when tourist attractions are crowded.

Travellers can also contribute: staying longer rather than taking short, high-impact trips, avoiding peak periods and looking beyond algorithm-driven “must-see” lists can reduce pressure.

The most responsible travel choices are rarely the most “Instagrammable”. And sometimes, the most sustainable decision is not where to go, but when, or whether to go at all.