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Tourism Resilience Day – OP ED
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DRAFT ONE

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Resilient tourism rebuilds developing countries

Even in an age of criticism of celebrities jetting around the world, bombs dropping in war-torn countries and climate changing in front of our eyes, travellers still want to see the world. The number of international travellers has grown exponentially from 1950 to 2023. After a drop during the recent pandemic, tourists have returned and are exploring the world, with 1.3 billion people travelling in 2023. So how can this be done responsibly?

Resilient tourism is a relatively new term meaning, improving sustainability post environmental disaster and fostering economic growth. Developing countries, small island states and middle-income countries rely on tourism to support their populations. Resilient tourism creates productive employment and helps to alleviate poverty.

Similarly, the term ecotourism means exploring nature in a respectful manner and supporting the culture around it. Whether visiting an elephant sanctuary or snorkelling with turtles, the sustainable use of oceans and wildlife areas is vital. Tourists should become educated in the region and environment before partaking in the adventure.

Additionally, promoting local culture, avoiding big chain stores and shopping at local businesses or supporting local restaurants when travelling, improves the well-being for locals. Investing in entrepreneurship, invests in the quality of life for locals, indigenous communities, women and girls.

For example, in Indonesia, the North Sulawesi region has been transformed from a run-down, overfished region to a hot tourist destination. Visitors pay a minimal fee to explore the renovated pier, enjoy local drinks and take in the ocean views. Female entrepreneurs have received hospitality and business training, allowing them to successfully run operations and stand-alone businesses.

Businesses in developing countries are most vulnerable to emergencies and environmental shocks. Limited resources don't allow for building, redevelopment or for the continuation of growth. In 2022, storms were the most expensive natural disaster worldwide, followed by floods, droughts, earthquakes and wildfires. Storms worldwide cost more than US \$130 billion in damages. With global warming rising, natural disasters become more frequent and costly for the worldwide economy.

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Tourism remains a driver for positive change and can impact the outcome for countries facing constant environmental effects. Additional funding is added by national and local governments to ensure infrastructure and services are available for tourists. Some examples include higher water quality, paved roads, adequate shelter, access to sanitation and hygiene, in addition to improved protection of nature and natural resources.

By investing in developing and middle-income countries, locals benefit by having control over the tourism sector and how the land is developed or used in sustainable ways. Working with a vast number of Canadian organizations the Peter Gilgan Foundation has witnessed the immediate and long-term impact on individuals and communities.

Each of us can add to the transformation of countries and witness the growth. Investors, organizations, public companies, donors and travellers can all get involved and work to create a more sustainable future.

February 17 marks the second annual Global Tourism Resilience Day. Travellers are encouraged to do their homework and become informed about the location they intend to visit, before the adventure begins. Through research and understanding visitors can ensure the money spent goes towards building up local businesses and supporting real people.

Stephanie Trussler is the executive director for the Peter Gilgan Foundation.

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