

Tourism and Hospitality Sustainability Modules

Module 1: Sustainable Tourism Management and Destination Health

Overview

This module introduces students to sustainable tourism as a management and planning challenge. Students examine how destinations must balance visitor experience, community benefit, environmental protection, cultural integrity, infrastructure pressure, and long-term resilience.

The central idea of this module is destination health. A successful destination is not simply one that attracts more visitors or generates more revenue. A healthy destination is one where tourism supports local communities, protects natural and cultural resources, manages visitor pressure, and creates long-term value without damaging the place that visitors come to experience. Destination health should not be understood as a fixed “sustainable” state that can be achieved once and then left alone. It is an ongoing management process that requires destinations to balance environmental, social, cultural, and economic outcomes over time.

Students will explore how tourism businesses, local authorities, communities, visitors, and industry bodies all share responsibility for sustainable tourism outcomes. They will also connect tourism management decisions to the SDGs, especially those related to decent work, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, and partnerships.

Key SDG Links

- SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
- SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
- SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
- SDG 13: Climate Action
- SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, students should be able to:

- Explain the concept of sustainable tourism and why it matters for destination management.
- Describe the idea of destination health and identify signs that a destination may be under pressure.
- Evaluate destination sustainability by considering trade-offs between different stakeholder interests.
- Identify SDG synergies and trade-offs created by tourism management decisions.
- Recognise tensions between tourism growth, community wellbeing, environmental protection, and visitor experience.
- Propose practical management actions that support more sustainable tourism outcomes.

Required Academic Reading

Students should choose one of the academic readings below and use it as a lens for the pre-class response.

- Butler, R. W. (1999). Sustainable tourism: A state-of-the-art review. *Tourism Geographies*, 1(1), 7–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616689908721291>
- Bramwell, B., & Lane, B. (2011). Critical research on the governance of tourism and sustainability. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 19(4–5), 411–421. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2011.580586>
- Torres-Delgado, A., & Saarinen, J. (2014). Using indicators to assess sustainable tourism development: A review. *Tourism Geographies*, 16(1), 31–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2013.867530>
- Pham, K., Andereck, K. L., & Vogt, C. A. (2025). Stakeholders' involvement in an evidence-based sustainable tourism plan. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 33(4), 673–696. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2023.2259117>

Pre-class Activities

Purpose

The pre-class activities prepare students to think about tourism destinations as living systems. Students begin by choosing a destination and using one academic reading to identify where tourism may create benefits, pressures, and trade-offs.

Pre-class Activity 1: Reading Lens

Choose one academic reading from the list above.

As you read, identify one concept that helps you think about sustainable destination management. For example:

- destination governance
- sustainable tourism indicators
- stakeholder coordination
- evidence-based planning
- tourism pressure
- destination limits
- long-term management
- management beyond marketing

Students do not need to master the entire reading. They should identify one useful idea and apply it to a real destination of their choosing. Use the reading to prepare for the workshop by considering:

- What is the biggest sustainability challenge facing this destination?

- Which stakeholders are most affected?
- What trade-offs are involved in managing this issue?
- What kind of evidence would help support your judgement?

Pre-class Activity 2: Destination Snapshot

Choose one tourism destination in Vietnam or Southeast Asia. For example:

- Hoi An
- Ha Long Bay
- Sa Pa
- Da Nang
- Phu Quoc
- Nha Trang
- Hue
- Da Lat
- A local destination familiar to you

Create a short Destination Snapshot by answering:

- What attracts visitors to this destination?
- Who benefits from tourism in this place?
- Who may be negatively affected?
- What environmental pressures might tourism create?
- What cultural or community pressures might tourism create?
- What signs would suggest that the destination is becoming unhealthy or unsustainable?

Pre-class Activity 3: Short Written Response

Write 200–250 words and post to the class discussion forum before the session.

Respond to the following prompt: *Use one idea from your academic reading to explain whether your chosen destination is more focused on attracting visitors or managing tourism sustainably.*

In your response, include:

- the destination you selected
- the academic reading you used
- one concept from the reading
- one benefit tourism brings to the destination
- one pressure or risk tourism creates
- one SDG that seems relevant
- one question you have about how the destination is managed

In-class Activities

Activity 1: Destination Health Diagnostic

Goal: Help students evaluate tourism destinations using academic concepts and a sustainability/SDG lens.

In groups, students choose one destination from the pre-class activity and complete a Destination Health Diagnostic. Groups assess the destination across six areas:

1. Visitor pressure: Are there signs of overcrowding, congestion, seasonal pressure, or pressure on public space?
2. Community benefit: Are local people gaining meaningful economic and social benefits from tourism?
3. Environmental pressure: Is tourism contributing to waste, water use, pollution, habitat pressure, emissions, or resource strain?
4. Cultural integrity: Is tourism protecting and respecting local culture, or turning it into a product for visitors?
5. Infrastructure and services: Can transport, water, waste, energy, and public services cope with tourism demand?
6. Governance and coordination: Are tourism businesses, local authorities, communities, and visitors working toward shared goals?

After assessing the six areas, groups should answer:

- Which dimension is creating the greatest pressure on the others? Explain why.
- Which issue is most urgent from a management perspective?
- What evidence or indicators would help support your assessment?

Possible indicators include:

- resident satisfaction
- visitor satisfaction
- visitor numbers or crowding levels
- waste generation
- water or energy use
- local employment
- visitor spending retained locally
- pressure on public services
- condition of cultural or natural heritage sites
- level of stakeholder participation in decision-making

Groups must use at least one idea from the academic readings and at least one possible indicator to support their diagnosis.

Output: A short Destination Health Statement:

"We believe this destination is _____ because _____. The academic concept that helped us most was _____. The destination dimension creating the greatest pressure is _____. One indicator that could support this judgement is _____. The most relevant SDGs are _____. The stakeholder who needs to act most urgently is _____."

Activity 2: Stakeholder Sustainability Matrix

Goal: Show students that sustainable tourism cannot be managed by one actor alone, and that different stakeholders often have competing goals, responsibilities, and levels of influence.

Using the same destination, groups create a Stakeholder Sustainability Matrix. Students must consider:

- local government or tourism authority
- hotel and accommodation providers
- tour operators and guides
- transport providers
- restaurants and local businesses
- host communities
- visitors
- NGOs or conservation groups
- media and influencers
- destination marketing organisations

For each stakeholder, groups complete the following:

- What does this stakeholder gain from tourism?
- What goal or interest does this stakeholder have?
- What responsibility does this stakeholder have?
- What sustainable action could this stakeholder take?
- What might prevent them from acting responsibly?
- Which stakeholders are most likely to disagree?
- How could these conflicts be managed?

Students should then identify the three stakeholders with the most influence over destination health and the one stakeholder group whose interests are easiest to overlook.

Output: A simple Stakeholder Sustainability Matrix showing:

- key stakeholders
- their goals or interests

- their responsibilities
- one sustainable action each could take
- one likely stakeholder conflict
- one way that conflict could be managed

Activity 3: Destination Management Decision Brief

Goal: Move students from diagnosis to practical management action.

Each group acts as a destination management team. They must recommend three actions to improve the sustainability of their destination. Students may choose from the following action areas:

- visitor flow management
- waste reduction
- water or energy management
- local hiring and training
- community consultation
- cultural heritage protection
- responsible visitor education
- limits on sensitive areas
- support for local businesses
- sustainable transport options
- destination certification or sustainability standards
- better data collection on visitor impacts

For each action, groups explain:

- What problem does this action address?
- Which stakeholder should lead it?
- Which SDG does it support?
- What trade-off or resistance might appear?
- What evidence or indicators would you use to evaluate whether your recommendation is successful?
- What was the most difficult trade-off you encountered when making this recommendation?

Output: A one-page Destination Management Decision Brief with three recommended actions, their SDG links, one academic concept used, one likely implementation challenge, one success indicator, and the most difficult trade-off the group had to manage.

Post-class Activities

Post-class Reflection

Students respond to the prompt: *“Why is attracting more tourists not always the same as developing tourism sustainably?”*

In their reflection, students should include:

- one thing they learned about destination health
- one idea from the academic reading that changed or sharpened their thinking
- one stakeholder responsibility they had not considered before
- one SDG that became clearer through the module
- one trade-off that destination managers must face
- the most difficult trade-off they encountered when making recommendations