

Tourism and Hospitality Sustainability Modules

Module 2: Tourism, Local Communities, and Socioeconomic Impact

Overview

This module focuses on the relationship between tourism and local communities. Students examine how tourism can create jobs, income, infrastructure, cultural exchange, and local pride, but also how it can produce inequality, displacement, dependency, leakage, rising prices, poor working conditions, and conflict between visitors and host communities.

The central idea of this module is community benefit. Sustainable tourism should not only bring visitors into a destination; it should improve the wellbeing of the people who live there. This means looking carefully at who benefits from tourism, who carries the costs, and whether tourism income stays in the local economy or leaks out to external owners, platforms, or suppliers. Community benefit depends not only on how much tourism grows, but also on who owns tourism businesses, who participates in decision-making, and how tourism value, opportunities, and responsibilities are distributed across the destination.

Key SDG links

- SDG 1: No Poverty
- SDG 5: Gender Equality
- SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
- SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities
- SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
- SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
- SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

Learning Objectives

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

- Explain the socioeconomic impacts of tourism on host communities.
- Distinguish between tourism growth and tourism that creates meaningful local benefit.
- Identify how tourism income, opportunities, ownership, and decision-making may be distributed unevenly across stakeholders.
- Explain the concept of economic leakage and why local ownership, employment, procurement, and governance matter.
- Evaluate how tourism can support or undermine SDGs related to poverty, decent work, inequality, gender equality, and sustainable communities.
- Propose practical actions that increase community benefit and reduce negative socioeconomic impacts.

Required Academic Reading

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

- Scheyvens, R. (1999). Ecotourism and the empowerment of local communities. *Tourism Management*, 20(2), 245-249. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177\(98\)00069-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(98)00069-7)
- Chok, S., Macbeth, J., & Warren, C. (2007). Tourism as a tool for poverty alleviation: A critical analysis of “pro-poor tourism” and implications for sustainability. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 10(2-3), 144-165. <https://doi.org/10.2167/cit303>
- Saarinen, J. (2006). Traditions of sustainability in tourism studies. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 33(4), 1121-1140. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2006.06.007>
- Scheyvens, R., & Biddulph, R. (2018). Inclusive tourism development. *Tourism Geographies*, 20(4), 589-609. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2017.1381985>
- Dong, X. D., & Nguyen, T. Q. T. (2023). Power, community involvement, and sustainability of tourism destinations. *Tourist Studies*, 23(1), 62-79. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687976221144335>

Pre-class Activities

Purpose

The pre-class activities prepare students to think about tourism from the perspective of host communities, not only visitors or businesses. Students use one academic reading to examine who benefits from tourism, who may be excluded, and where socioeconomic pressures may appear.

Guiding question: Who has the power to decide who benefits from tourism?

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 tourism and community benefit. For example:

- Empowerment
- Pro-poor tourism
- Leakage
- Inequality
- Local ownership
- Dependency
- Community control
- Stakeholder power
- Inclusive tourism
- Tourism as development

Students do not need to master the entire reading. They should identify one useful idea and apply it to a real tourism setting. As you prepare, consider:

- Why is this concept useful for understanding community benefit in tourism?
- Who appears to benefit most from tourism in this setting?
- Who has the power to decide how tourism develops?
- What kind of evidence would help show whether tourism is creating broad local benefit?

Pre-class Activity 2: Community Impact Scan

Choose one tourism setting in Vietnam or Southeast Asia.

You may choose from:

- a beach resort destination
- a heritage town
- a national park or protected area
- a homestay or community-based tourism village
- a cruise or boat tour destination
- a food tour or street food district
- an island tourism destination
- a mountain or ethnic minority tourism destination
- an urban nightlife or entertainment district
- a destination familiar to you

Create a short Community Impact Scan by answering:

- Who earns money from tourism in this setting?
- Which jobs or business opportunities are created?
- Who owns the tourism businesses in this destination?
- Who has the greatest influence over tourism decisions?
- Which local groups may benefit least?
- What costs might local people experience?
- Could tourism increase prices, pressure on land, pressure on services, or cultural tension?
- What would make tourism feel fairer or more beneficial for the host community?

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 tourism in your chosen setting creates broad community benefit or mainly benefits a smaller group of actors.

In your response, include:

- the tourism setting you selected

- the academic reading you used
- one concept from the reading
- one benefit tourism brings to the local community
- one possible negative socioeconomic impact
- one stakeholder who seems powerful
- one stakeholder who may be overlooked
- one SDG that seems relevant

In-class Activities

Activity 1: Tourism Benefit Chain Analysis

Goal: Help students trace where tourism money goes, who influences each stage of the tourism value chain, and whether local communities benefit meaningfully.

Groups choose one tourism setting from the pre-class activity and create a simple Tourism Benefit Chain. They trace how visitor spending moves through the destination. Students should consider:

- Accommodation
- Food and beverage
- Local transport
- Tours and activities
- Entrance fees
- Souvenirs and crafts
- Online booking platforms
- Guide services
- Suppliers
- Labour and wages
- Taxes or public fees
- Community funds or conservation fees

Groups then identify where the money is most likely to stay local, where it may leak out, and which organisation or stakeholder has the greatest influence over each stage of the value chain.

Prompt questions:

- Which parts of the tourism economy are locally owned?
- Which parts may be controlled by outside companies or platforms?
- Which workers or businesses benefit most directly?
- Which groups may be excluded from tourism income?
- Which organisation or stakeholder has the greatest influence at each stage?
- Does the tourism model support decent work?
- Which SDGs are strengthened by local benefit?

- Which SDGs are at risk if benefits are uneven?
- If you could intervene at only one point in the value chain, where would it be and why?

Output: A Tourism Benefit Chain showing where visitor spending flows, where local value is created, where leakage or inequality may occur, which stakeholder has the greatest influence at key points, and which academic concept helps explain the pattern.

Activity 2: Host Community Impact Hearing

Goal: Help students understand that different stakeholders experience tourism development differently, and that power shapes whose concerns are heard in tourism planning.

Groups are given the following scenario:

A destination such as Mang Den, Pu Luong, Hoi An, Da Nang, Sa Pa, or Phu Quoc is considering expanding tourism through new hotels, more tours, and stronger digital promotion. The plan may increase revenue and jobs, but local residents are concerned about rising prices, crowding, cultural disruption, land pressure, and whether benefits will actually reach the community.

Each group discusses the scenario from the perspective of different stakeholders:

- local resident
- hotel or resort manager
- small restaurant owner
- tour guide
- local government tourism officer
- NGO or community organisation representative
- young worker seeking tourism employment
- women entrepreneur or women-owned tourism business representative
- ethnic minority or Indigenous community representative, where relevant to the context
- cultural heritage representative
- visitor
- transport provider

Students should discuss:

- What does this stakeholder gain from tourism growth?
- What does this stakeholder risk losing?
- What would this stakeholder want included in a sustainable tourism plan?
- Which stakeholder has the most power?
- Which stakeholder needs more protection or voice?
- Which stakeholder had the greatest influence over the final decision?
- Whose interests were least represented?

Output: A short Community Impact Hearing Summary listing three stakeholder concerns, one conflict between stakeholders, one stakeholder whose interests were least represented, one SDG supported by tourism growth, one SDG placed under pressure, and one recommendation for more inclusive tourism planning.

Activity 3: Community Benefit Redesign Studio

Goal: Move students from critique to practical redesign.

Groups now propose changes that would make the tourism model more beneficial for host communities. Rather than simply selecting three actions, groups first complete a simple prioritisation table to compare possible actions by impact and feasibility. They then choose their top three recommendations and explain why they ranked them in that order. Possible improvement actions:

- hire and train more local workers
- improve wages and working conditions
- increase local procurement from farmers, fishers, artisans, or small businesses
- support local guide certification or training
- create a community tourism fund
- introduce transparent revenue-sharing for tours or entrance fees
- limit tourism development in sensitive residential or cultural areas
- support women-owned or youth-owned tourism businesses
- create a visitor education campaign about respectful behaviour
- improve consultation with host communities before tourism expansion
- reduce dependence on outside platforms or suppliers
- create a complaint or feedback channel for residents
- support accessible tourism so more local groups can participate
- link tourism businesses with local cultural or environmental projects

Prioritisation table:

Possible action	Expected impact	Feasibility	Priority ranking	Reason for ranking

For each chosen action, groups explain:

- What problem does this action address?
- Which stakeholder should lead it?
- Which group benefits most?

- Which SDG does it support?
- What measurable indicator would show whether the action is working?
- What trade-off or challenge might appear?
- What unintended consequence might this recommendation create?

Output: A one-page Community Benefit Plan with three recommended actions, their SDG links, one academic concept used, one likely implementation challenge, one measurable indicator for each recommendation, and one possible unintended consequence.

Post-class Activities

Post-class Reflection

Students respond to the prompt: *“When does tourism development create genuine local benefit, and when does it simply extract value from a destination?”*

In their reflection, students should include:

- one thing they learned about tourism’s socioeconomic impacts
- one concept from the academic reading that helped explain the issue
- one stakeholder they had not considered before
- one example of how tourism can create inequality
- one SDG that became clearer through the module
- one action that could make tourism fairer for host communities
- one measurable indicator that could show whether that action is working
- one unintended consequence that destination managers should watch for