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TOURISM 2023: NEW HORIZONS AND INCLUSIVE TRAVELS IN THE MODERN WORLD

After years of unrest and uncertainty, the tourism industry is finally showing signs of revival. According to the latest data from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), international tourist arrivals this year are expected to reach 80-95% of the pre-pandemic levels [1]. This indicates a resurgence of tourism activity across all

regions, including Asia and the Pacific, where COVID-related restrictions persisted longer than in other parts of the world.

Despite this optimistic outlook, it is crucial for tour operators to understand the tourism trends of 2023 and harness the growth in tourist numbers (Fig. 1), especially in the face of unpredictable global trends such as rising inflation, which is driving consumer prices up, and the ongoing challenges of the «Great Resignation,» impacting airlines and hotels.

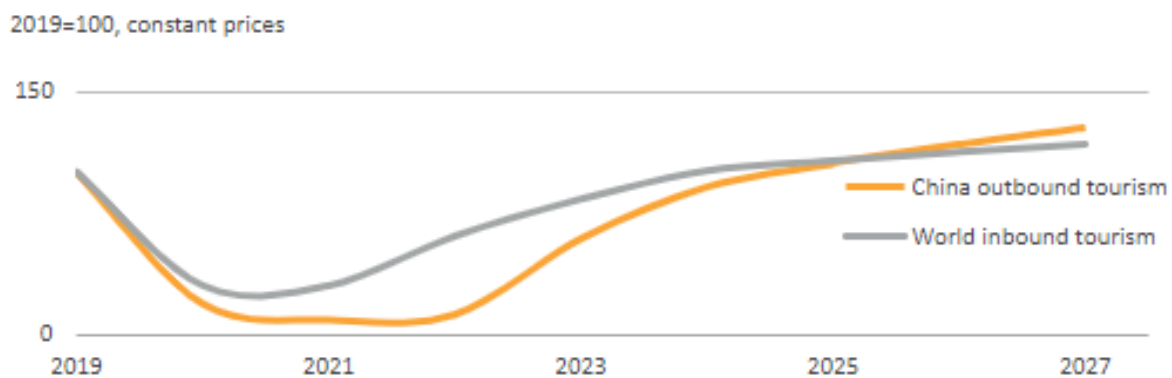


Figure 1. World inbound tourism and China outbound tourism spending growth index 2019-2027 [3].

Consumers are seeking ways to cut costs on their travels amid increasing expenses and inflation. According to Skyscanner's 2023 tourism trends report [2], approximately 46% of tourists plan to visit the same number of countries as in 2022, and about a third wish to travel even more. However, they are looking for more budget-friendly destinations due to rising expenses and inflation.

This trend is reflected in surveys conducted among tour operators [2]. According to the surveys, 66% of respondents believe inflation will have a noticeable but not devastating impact on their business, while 19% expect a profound effect.

The trend of digital freelancers and remote workers opting for prolonged stays in their travels remains relevant. People continue to embrace the advantages of remote work, and countries worldwide are issuing visas for IT professionals.

There is an increase in the number of young, affluent travelers seeking unique

experiences and luxury as a lifestyle, as well as «solitary and self-focused» travelers, directing their journeys toward health improvement. Many of these solo travelers, particularly women over 55, are seeking tours that are safe for independent exploration.

Additionally, travel is becoming more inclusive, with a growing number of LGBTQ+ and POC travelers. However, concerns about discrimination still exist. Creating marketing campaigns that cater to diverse groups of travelers and fostering a welcoming environment for everyone could be the key to attracting this audience.

In summary, travel is becoming an integral part of many people's lives in 2023. People are looking for ways to travel longer, spending less money, and preferring authentic experiences at competitive prices. Destinations such as Georgia, Turkey, Colombia, Bulgaria, El Salvador, and Guatemala are capitalizing on the demand among budget-conscious travelers. Economically unstable countries like Argentina and Brazil have suddenly become more accessible, making them attractive to various freelancers. Demand for «traditional» Western European destinations remains stable, and countries like Portugal, Hungary, and Croatia are gaining popularity. These trends align with the popularity of sustainable tourism and ecotourism.

Undoubtedly, the tourism industry has a significant impact on both the environment and local communities. However, tourists are becoming more aware of this impact, highlighting the importance for destinations and tour operators to implement «green» policies, considering this trend.

Many sectors of tourism have adopted various approaches to offset the negative impacts of mass tourism. One strategy involves implementing different types of taxes, while others focus on reducing emissions associated with overnight stays and food consumption. Tour operators also contribute by organizing direct flights for travelers, introducing ground options where possible, promoting slow tourism, and implementing new technologies to reduce waste.

For tourism businesses, offering consumers interesting and environmentally friendly travel options has become increasingly important. Otherwise, there is a risk of losing potential visitors to competitors. Sustainable tourism, as defined by UNWTO, fully considers its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts,

catering to the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities.

Recently, sustainability has become a critical issue in the tourism industry. Tourism companies have moved from words to actions by adopting sustainable business practices to preserve the natural environment and, potentially, attract new customers. Surveys show that 90% of consumers actively seek sustainable holiday options, creating significant demand for sustainable tourism services. According to Euromonitor International, 73.8% of tourism company executives have observed an increasing interest in sustainability among their clients in 2022. This opens new opportunities for tour operators, as many people are willing to pay more for tours or activities that meet sustainable standards.

Notably, individuals who value sustainability are also interested in lesser-known travel destinations, seeking more authentic experiences. This creates new opportunities for companies operating in these areas.

Natural tourism, including adventure and ecotourism, as well as sun and sea holidays, is currently experiencing high demand among consumers. It is expected that in 2023, it will account for 57% of all tourist packages worldwide [3]. These packages encompass rural, beach, and adventure destinations and activities, as the allure of nature and wildlife continues to grow post-pandemic, serving as an antidote to urbanization and new hybrid work methods (Fig. 2).

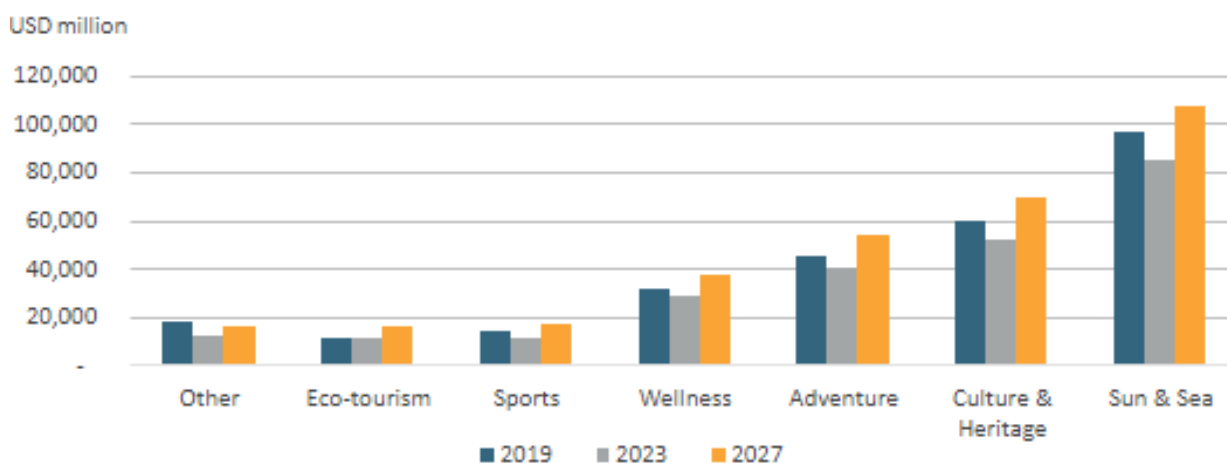


Figure 2 - World packages by category 2019/2023/2027 [3].

Therefore, changes in tourist demographics and the rising demand for affordable travel might seem like challenges for the industry. However, these trends are closely interconnected. Even minor adjustments in the product offerings and pricing policies of tourism companies can have a significant impact on the overall business.

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