

Over-Tourism Impacts and Strategies: An Assessment of Current Strategies for Sustainable Tourism

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Abstract: This article explores the effectiveness of public protests and administrative policies in reducing the impacts of overtourism by examining two cases of cities facing overtourism; Barcelona, Spain and Venice, Italy. Total tourist visits are used as the dependent variable and compared across time with specific actions taken by local populations and their governments to reduce or mitigate overtourism. Strategic plans for tourism in both case cities are examined and plans are compared to a recommended set of actions from the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Tourism levels are explored from 2010 to 2024, which includes the pandemic period. Quantitative analysis includes linear regressions showing strong correlations although the data does not allow useful tests of causality in many cases. The article finds that total visitor counts across most of the world had completely recovered from pandemic impacts by 2024, with strong forecast growth for future years. Excessive tourism levels bring threats to regional infrastructure, culture, quality of life, and environmental sustainability, making solutions critical as tourism levels continue to increase. Unfortunately, few of the actions taken within each city studied produced any significant reduction in tourist visits to the city. The economic and social/cultural conflicts between increasing and decreasing tourism are examined, as well as the difference between mitigation strategies aimed at the effects of overtourism and overtourism itself. Conclusions call for new approaches to limiting tourism, as well as specific additional research.

Key Words Overtourism, Global Tourism, Tourism Threats, Barcelona, Venice

1. Introduction

Overtourism is a well-documented threat to many areas popular with tourists. Overtourism is defined as so many tourists in a given area that they overtax physical infrastructure and the natural environment and change the nature of the region's culture, and quality of life. Global tourism levels, according to the United Nations, are expected to grow steadily, increasing the threat of overtourism to affected areas and bringing overtourism conditions to other regions (UNWTO, January 2025).

This article examines two specific cases of overtourism; Barcelona, Spain and Venice, Italy. It explores the patterns of tourism, especially in the post-pandemic years, for each city and examines the various attempts by their local citizens and governments to limit tourism or to mitigate its negative impacts. It uses total tourist visits between 2010 and 2024, as provided by municipal agencies, as a dependent variable. This selected period provides adequate background for tourism growth patterns, while including the period during which tourism in each case was identified as excessive and actions begun to mitigate it. It compares the number of tourist visits to the use of specific actions by citizens and governments, attempting to identify examples of strategies that were effective.

Demand-reduction strategies, including fees and taxes and attempts to educate or influence tourists to change objective behaviours or to disburse themselves to less crowded areas or times appear generally ineffective. One example of a supply-based restriction on cruise ships in Venice appears effective, but not enough to overcome the increases in tourism in the region from other sources.

The challenges of overtourism, its cultural, social, and economic impacts to affected areas and populations, and possible approaches to management/mitigation are well-researched, but relatively little has been written to date on the effectiveness of the proposed and utilized strategies to respond to overtourism. The shortage of existing assessment of overtourism strategies is further hampered by the fact that tourist counts have been affected by the global pandemic, making it challenging to separate impacts of the pandemic or its immediate aftermath from that of specific policy interventions against overtourism in specific areas, in the past five years. For this research, the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021 are treated as statistical outliers. Forecasts of future tourism trends are included with and without these years.

1.1 Overtourism and its Impacts on Housing and Culture

In 2024, international tourism levels had recovered to over 99% of pre-pandemic 2019 levels, with Europe, Africa, and the Middle East all showing growth over 2019 levels (UNWTO, January 2025). In 2024, the world saw 1.4 billion international overnight tourists and generated a record \$1.6 trillion in tourism receipts and \$1.9 trillion in exports, making 2024 the largest tourism year economically on record (UNWTO, 2025). The World Travel & Tourism Council reports that tourism in 2024 comprised 10% of the global economy, with domestic tourists spending an additional \$5.3 trillion in 2024, in addition to the international tourists reported by the United Nations (Travel & Tourism EIR, 2025). Forecasts call for continued significant growth in tourism in 2025 and beyond (UNWTO, 2025).

Data from the UNWTO shows international tourism trips increasing from 543 million trips in 1995 to a peak of 1.76 billion trips in 2019, an average increase of 2.9% annually across the 24-year period. While international tourism saw enormous reductions in the 2020 – 2021 period due to the global pandemic, by 2022 it had already begun to show extremely rapid recovery (Herre & Samborska, 2024).

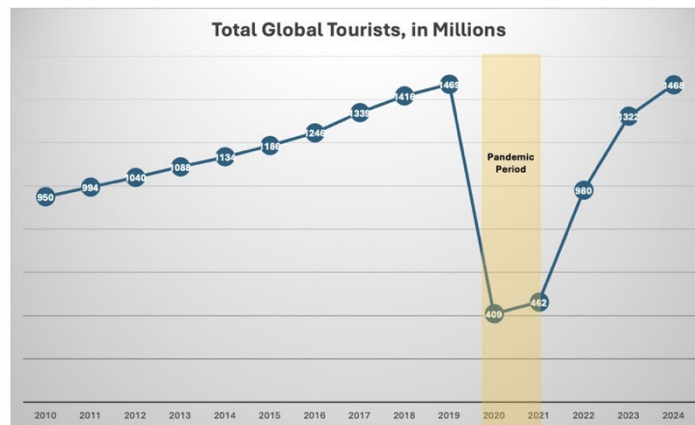


Figure 1: Data from UNWTO, January 2025

One of the most common impacts of overtourism is described as a significant rise in local housing prices and cost of living, driven by short-term rental services like AirBnb. As the short-term market increases, landlords are given a powerful incentive to convert housing stocks to short-term rentals rather than the longer-term rental options needed by residents (Rowe, 2024). Similar challenges can occur when retail spaces in an over-touristed area are converted to meet tourists' needs, such as souvenirs, leaving local residents short of retail supporting needs like hardware or household supplies (Rowe, 2024).

In addition to negative economic impacts on local residents, overtourism can also have destructive effects on a region's cultural heritage, as local Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is adapted to meet the needs of tourists, resulting in a loss of authenticity (Yasar, & Yayla, 2023). This effect can contribute to a corrosive effect on the opinions of local residents regarding tourists and tourism in general. Even when residents are aware of the economic value of tourism, it can be difficult to accept the stress in daily living that comes with being surrounded by crowds of strangers, many of whom appear to have little understanding or interest in local culture and ways of life (Gautam, 2023).

1.2 Responses to Overtourism

While the impacts of overtourism are most often reported in major cities and tourist sites, they can be apparent in much smaller regions as well, exacerbated by the region's lower carrying capacity for visitors, including less-developed infrastructure and smaller ratios of locals to visitors. While smaller regions facing overtourism (as defined by the perceptions of local residents and visitors) may have similar concerns as those in larger areas, their responses may not always be the same (Krajickovaa et al, 2022). Infrastructure is a significant concern in smaller regions, while ecological/space concerns may be less so (Jurincic, 2022).

Literature in the field of overtourism also includes significant coverage of possible solutions or mitigations to the identified negative impacts. The UNWTO, in cooperation with four international universities, released a 2018 study of overtourism in major urban areas that recognized urban overtourism as being exacerbated by global trends of urbanization and the increase in global tourism. The study identified 11 strategies to better manage

urban overtourism, all of which were aimed at mitigation and management, rather than any effort to reduce total tourist headcounts (UNTWO, 2018).

2. Results

2.1 Barcelona, Spain

2.1.1 *Barcelona and Overtourism*

The city of Barcelona has 1.6 million residents, but experienced 15.6 million overnight visitors in 2024. The entire region of Barcelona, called “Destination Barcelona” by the *Observatori del Turisme a Barcelona* (OTB), the regional tourism research agency, experienced over 26 million visitors in the same period (OTB, 2025). NOTE: The OTB collects demographic and economic data on tourists visiting the region in three increments: Barcelona City, which includes only the primary metropolitan area; Barcelona Region, which includes a much larger area surrounding the city itself; and Barcelona Destination which includes a large portion of the Catalanian region and is the sum of the city and region numbers (Barcelona Tourism Activity Report, 2024). Only data for the City of Barcelona is used for this research.

Barcelona has seen a number of serious protests by local residents against excessive tourism, most organized by an array of social and political groups. While the most serious of these protests began in 2017, their roots can be traced to 2014 protests against short-term holiday apartment rentals (Huges, 2018). By 2024, protests became directed more specifically at tourists themselves, with protestors demanding the tourists leave Barcelona and shooting toy water guns at tourists in outdoor cafes along the famous La Rambla street in Barcelona City (Pitrelli, 2025). The water gun protests were part of a broader set of protests organized at the same time in other parts of Spain, as well as in Venice, Italy, and Lisbon, Portugal (Wilson, 2025).

In 2010 Barcelona began experiencing a significant increase in short-term rental properties, led by AirBnB. In the face of rising concerns over the lack of affordable housing for locals, the Barcelona municipal government began cracking down on illegal rentals and their promotion on sites such as AirBnB, as well as applying a moratorium on the construction of new hotels in 2014 (Mead, 2019). In spite of the restriction on new hotels, the OTB reported a 4.7% increase in the number of tourist residences year on year in 2024. This growth was generated by nearly 500 expansions in currently licensed short-term rentals (OTB Press Release, 2025).

2.1.2 *Barcelona’s Responses to Overtourism*

The administrations of Catalonia and Barcelona have enacted a number of measures to reduce tourism in the city or to better manage it and mitigate its worst impacts. These include the planned doubling of regional and city overnight tourism taxes in 2025 (OTB Press Release, 2025), restrictions on short-term tourist rental offerings and the construction of new hotel space in the city (Mead, 2019), and requirements for appointments and paying fees to visit many of the city’s most popular attractions (OTD Press Release, 2025). The additional tax revenues have been used to improve infrastructure to better accommodate both tourists and residents and to address issues of life quality for residents (Goodman, 2025).

Barcelona Impulse 2025-2035, the city’s recently-released economic agenda for the next 10 years addresses the need to “Manage Tourism”, but focuses on mitigation strategies such as fees, continued and perhaps increased restrictions on accommodations, improved tourist infrastructure, and better planning for tourist mobility, encouraged diversion to less crowded areas in the city, and the use of enhanced tourist tax revenues to fund social programs for residents. The agenda calls for a respectful balancing of the needs of tourists and local residents and seeks a more sustainable tourism model, but also calls for continued recruitment of tourists. These plans appear to conform closely to the recommendations of the UNWTO’s strategies for overtourism responses, but carefully avoid anything to reduce the total number of tourists visiting Barcelona City (Barcelona Impulsa, 2025).

2.1.3 *The Effectiveness of Proposed and Enacted Responses to Overtourism in Barcelona.*

Barcelona, through popular protests, and administrative actions, has been attempting to address problems with overtourism since 2010, but the effectiveness of these responses seems to have had little measurable effect on total tourism levels in the city. Figure 2 shows the annual totals for the number of tourists staying overnight in Barcelona city between 2010 and 2024, using data provided by the ODT in their annual reports on tourism demand (ODT Latest Data, 2025), as well as total visitors arriving on cruise ships (typically daily only, without an

overnight stay off the cruise ship), using data provided by the Port of Barcelona (Cruise Passenger Counts, 2025). These figures are cross-indexed with the years in which various responses, occurred, to allow a visual comparison of any impacts to tourist levels from these responses.

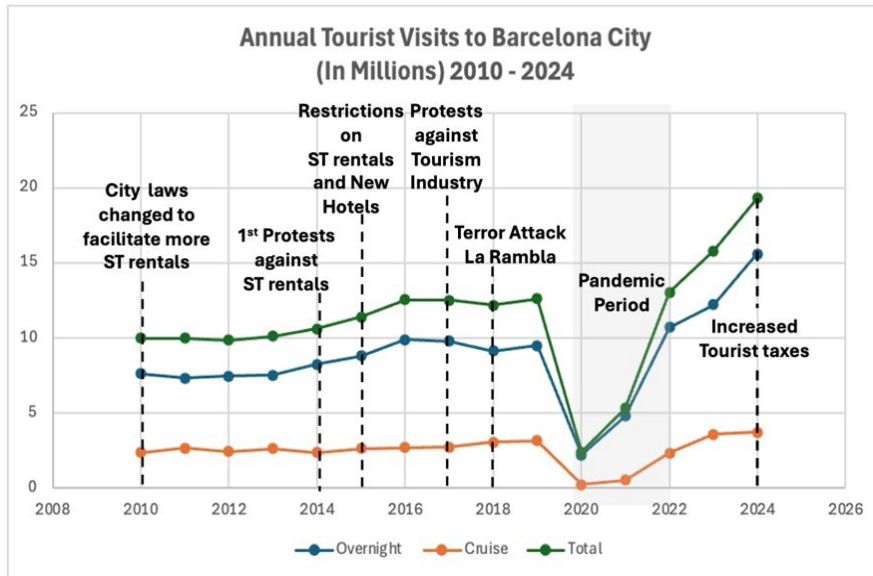


Figure 2: Data from ODT & Port of Barcelona Cruise Passenger Counts

Statistical analysis of tourism numbers is complicated by the presence of huge variations during the pandemic years. If these are assumed to be statistical outliers and excluded from the analysis, however, a simple linear regression shows that the growth of tourism in Barcelona has been steady during much of the period between 2010 and 2024, but that growth post-pandemic is much higher than in the past and has already exceeded the forecasts of the regression trend line in 2023 and 2024. Figure 3 shows this regression for total tourism numbers. An R2 value of .7947 suggests reasonably strong correlation between the tourism values and predicted results. The same analysis for the years 2010 – 2019 only, gives an even higher R2 of .8618. Current tourism growth in Barcelona is now much higher than pre-pandemic predictions



Figure 3: Analysis conducted using Excel Statistical Toolkit, using Total data from Figure 2

There appears to be no significant impact on tourism visitor counts in the city of Barcelona from either public protests or administrative attempts to limit tourism demand. Tourist visits in Barcelona, like that of the global economy, have risen steadily across time, with especially strong increases in the post-pandemic years, in spite of attempts to limit tourism or manage it in various ways.

2.2 Venice, Italy

2.2.1 Venice and Overtourism

The official municipal boundaries of the City of Venice include the entire lagoon area with over 100 islands, as well as the mainland industrial city of Mestre. Overtourism, however is largely concentrated on the main island of historic Venice (Yearbook of Tourism Data, 2024).

According to the City of Venice's 2024 Yearbook of Tourism, like Barcelona and global tourism in general, tourist visits to Venice have largely recovered from drops associated with the pandemic. In fact, visitor counts for Venice in 2024 were actually 6.4% higher than in 2019, the last reporting year before the pandemic. Figure 4 shows tourism levels in the Veneto region, the City of Venice, and the historic centre between 2010 and 2024, cross-indexed with major actions to limit tourism, reflecting a very rapid post-pandemic recovery (ETIAS, 2025). Like Barcelona, Venice has seen increasing levels of overnight tourist visits but also experiences a large number of day visitors who do not spend a night in the city. Some of these are from cruise ships but many others come from the mainland areas or on group tours. The number of these day visitors is typically estimated as 25 – 30 million per year (ETIAS, 2025). For this research, only the actual visitor counts from data provided by the Italian Systema Statistica or other municipal or European Union sources are used (Yearbooks of Tourism 2011 – 2024, 2025).

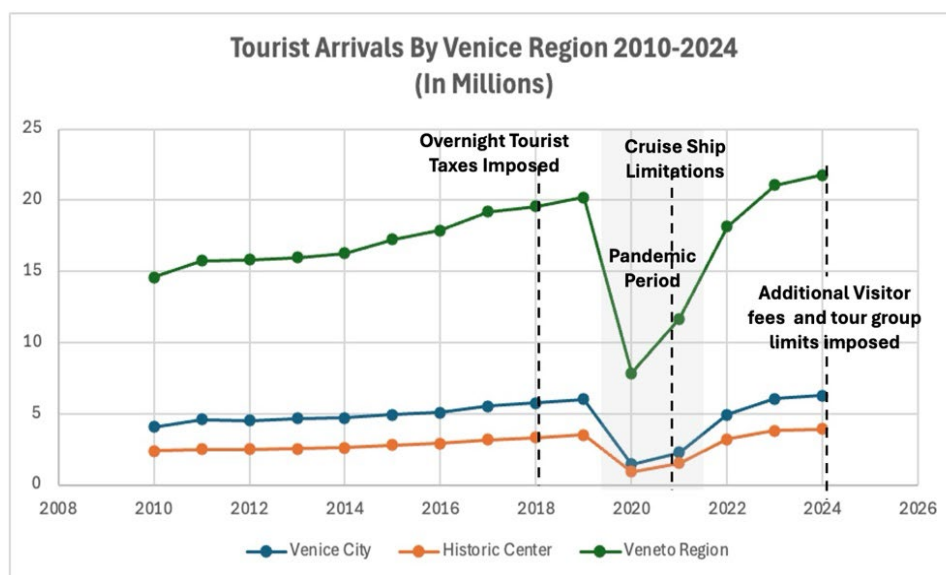


Figure 4: Data from Città di Venezia, Yearbooks of Tourism

Like Barcelona, residents of historic Venice have reported serious degradation of their quality of life from overtourism, including the loss of businesses supporting local residents, the rise in housing prices as many are converted into holiday rentals, the overloading of local infrastructure such as public transportation, and the degradation of local cultural aspects (Choi et al, 2024). A key difference between Venice and Barcelona, however, is that Historic Venice, has much lower resident populations than Barcelona and has seen steady declines in those populations, increasing the domination of tourists as the economic force within Venice (Choi et al, 2024).

2.2.2 Venice's Responses to Overtourism

As overtourism in Venice and especially the historic centre has become more concerning, the Venetians have mounted responses similar to those used in Barcelona. Venice participated in the water-gun protests (Pitrelli, 2025), and have conducted a series of public protests and made appeals to the local government for policies that limit tourism and improve quality of life for residents (Choi et al, 2024). In 2018, the city enacted fees for tourists staying overnight in the historic centre, with a 5 Euro charge for hotel stays and a charge of between 3 and 10 Euros per person staying in other accommodations (rates vary by season). Turnstiles and restricted access were also established for primary cultural and historic sites within the Historic Centre, requiring visitors to pay additional fees and to make reservations in advance to visit these sites (Sistema Statistico Regionale, 2025). In 2024, the city went further, charging daily 5 Euro fees to all visitors (in theory). Rather than being

collected by accommodations or sites, these fees require visitors to use a QR code to demonstrate that they have paid their fees before entry, leaving enforcement up to random checks by police. In 2024, the city also limited guided tour groups in the city to no more than 25 visitors per group, and prohibited the use of loudspeakers in the central areas (Choi et al, 2024) and (Sistema Statistico Regionale, 2024).

In 2021 the city restricted cruise ship arrivals in the primary canal serving the historic centre to only ships of less than 25,000 tons displacement (Choi et al, 2024). This forced the majority of the cruise ships to relocate their docking and trans-ship their passengers wishing to visit the historic centre onto smaller boats from the mainland or elsewhere in the lagoon (Choi et al, 2024). The city has also engaged in tourist education programs designed to encourage visitors to visit areas beyond the crowded historic centre and to explore the culture and lifestyle of the city respectfully, avoiding undesirable behavior (Choi et al, 2024). The city is exploring restrictions on the development and operation of short-term rentals, especially in the historic centre and offering grants and tax breaks to encourage artisans and traditional businesses to open in the city, (Choi et al, 2024).

2.2.3 The Effectiveness of Proposed and Enacted Responses to Overtourism in Venice

As in Barcelona, it is difficult to assess the impacts of many of the actions taken to reduce overtourism in Venice or to mitigate its impacts. The city was affected by the pandemic in a similar fashion to other cities globally, making it difficult to statistically separate the impacts of actions taken near or within the pandemic period. It is still too early to effectively assess the impacts of actions taken in 2024. However, some analysis is possible. Figure 5 shows the total tourist arrivals for the city of Venice from 2010 – 2024 with a trend line for total tourism numbers, with the values for the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021 removed, as statistical outliers. An R^2 value of .7306 suggests reasonably strong correlation between the tourism values and predicted results. It should be noted that, while the Barcelona trend line shows recent increases as much higher than predicted values, the same analysis for Venice shows the city as continuing to grow at a rate similar that of the pre-pandemic period.

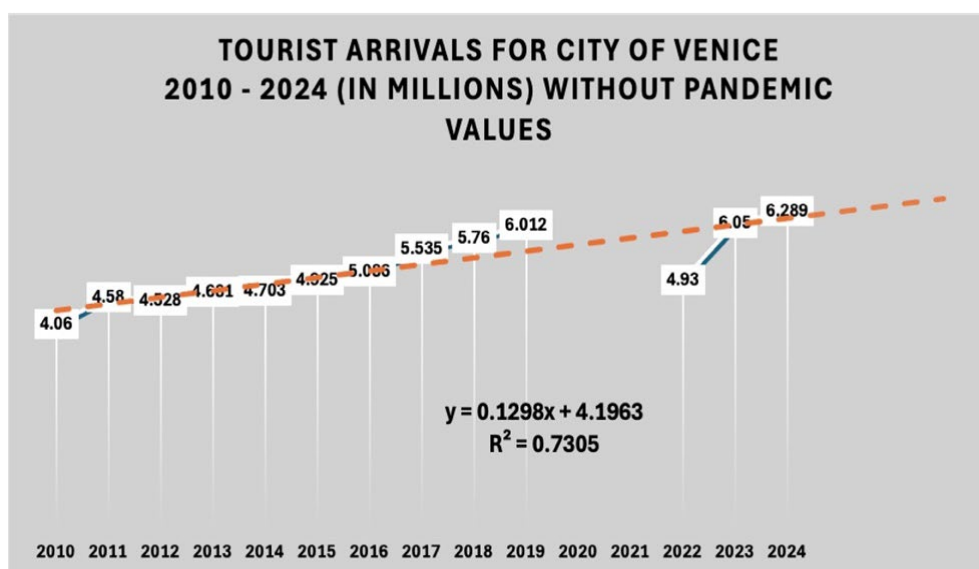


Figure 5: Analysis conducted using Excel Statistical Toolkit, using Total data from Figure 3

The policy restricting large cruise ships from docking at the Historic Centre took place during the pandemic, but total cruise ship visitors remain well below pre-pandemic (and pre-cruise ship restrictions) levels, while other areas of tourism have more than recovered. Figure 6 shows the arrival of cruise ship passengers between 2011 and 2024, illustrating a 70% decrease in cruise ship passengers arriving in the city across this period. While this does not conclusively prove that docking restrictions are the cause of this, it is worth noting that the Cruise Line Industry Association in its 2024 industry report shows that global cruise line activity was 6.8% higher in 2023 than in 2019, the last year prior to the pandemic shutdown, and 6.5% higher in Europe specifically (CLIA, 2024). Venice saw declines during a period when the world saw increases.

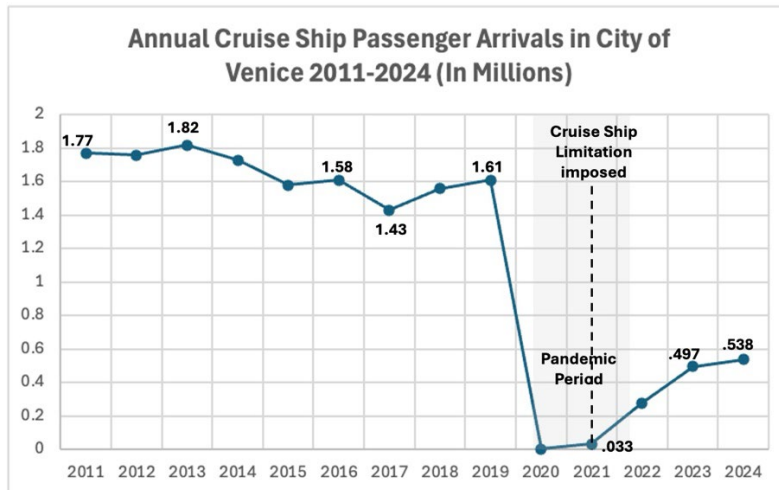


Figure 6

As with Barcelona, there appears to be no significant impact on tourist arrivals in the city of Venice from either public protests or administrative attempts to limit tourism demand. While the restriction on docking large cruise ships does appear to have been effective in limiting the number of cruise ship passengers arriving in the City of Venice, cruise ship passengers were only 8.8% of all arrivals in 2024 (Yearbooks of Tourism 2011 – 2024, 2025). The decline in cruise ship passengers has been more than offset by the rapid post-pandemic increase in overall tourism in the city.

3. Conclusions

Table 1 shows the actual data for global tourism numbers and those from Cities of Barcelona and Venice between 2010 and 2024, along with annual percentage changes from the previous year in each case. Because of the large differences in means of the global and city annual tourism counts, a linear regression analysis was done using the percent changes from year to year, to eliminate differences caused by the scale of each set of data. Analysis was accomplished using the Excel Data Analysis tool. This regression analysis at the .95 level shows Multiple R values of .689 for Barcelona and .764 for Venice, suggesting that 68.9% of all differences year to year for Barcelona and 76.4% for Venice can be accounted for by changes in global tourism levels, rather than local changes in tourism policies or local reactions to tourists. Both strong correlations. Both reasonably strong positive correlations, although not absolutely conclusive.

Table 1

Year	Global Tourists (In millions) ¹	% Change from previous year - Global	City of Barcelona Tourists (In millions) ²	% Change from previous year - Barcelona	City of Venice Tourists (In millions) ³	% Change from previous year - Venice
2010	950		9.97		4.06	
2011	994	4.63%	9.96	-0.10%	4.58	12.81%
2012	1040	4.63%	9.85	-1.10%	4.528	-1.14%
2013	1088	4.62%	10.1	2.54%	4.681	3.38%
2014	1134	4.23%	10.6	4.95%	4.703	0.47%
2015	1186	4.59%	11.38	7.36%	4.925	4.72%
2016	1246	5.06%	12.55	10.28%	5.086	3.27%
2017	1339	7.46%	12.5	-0.40%	5.535	8.83%
2018	1416	5.75%	12.16	-2.72%	5.76	4.07%
2019	1469	3.74%	12.61	3.70%	6.012	4.38%
2020	409	-72.16%	2.399	-80.98%	1.453	-75.83%
2021	462	12.96%	5.301	120.97%	2.27	56.23%
2022	980	112.12%	13.03	145.80%	4.93	117.18%

Year	Global Tourists (In millions) ¹	% Change from previous year - Global	City of Barcelona Tourists (In millions) ²	% Change from previous year - Barcelona	City of Venice Tourists (In millions) ³	% Change from previous year - Venice
2023	1322	34.90%	15.79	21.18%	6.05	22.72%
2024	1468	11.04%	19.3	22.23%	6.289	3.95%
Multiple R Regression to Global				0.68933457		0.76362019
¹	Data from United Nations World Tourism Organization (2025) file:///Users/gregorygardner/Desktop/OMT_TEND_Novembre2016.pdf and https://www.untourism.int/tourism-data/un-tourism-tourism-dashboard					
²	Data from <i>Observatori del Turisme a Barcelona (OTB)</i> , (2025) and Cruise Passenger Counts, <i>Port of Barcelona Administration</i> , (2025) https://observatoriturisme.barcelona/en/resources/ and https://www.portdebarcelona.cat/en/business-and-services/cruise-ships/passenger-evolution					
³	Data from Yearbooks of Tourism 2011 – 2024, <i>Città di Venezia</i> https://www.comune.venezia.it/it/content/studi					

Figure 7 provides a visual comparison of change rates in tourist counts from 2010 to 2024, as compared to a trendline for global tourism changes. This visual examination illustrates the very close resemblance of all three change rates. There are minor differences in the period leading up to the pandemic but the collapse for tourism in all three measures was virtually identical. In the recovery of tourism after the pandemic, however, both Barcelona and Venice saw more rapid and complete recoveries than the global tourism markets, in spite of the efforts taken by local governments and populations to limit such growth. While Venice’s growth rate in 2024 returned to a very similar rate as that of global markets, Barcelona’s rate remained higher.

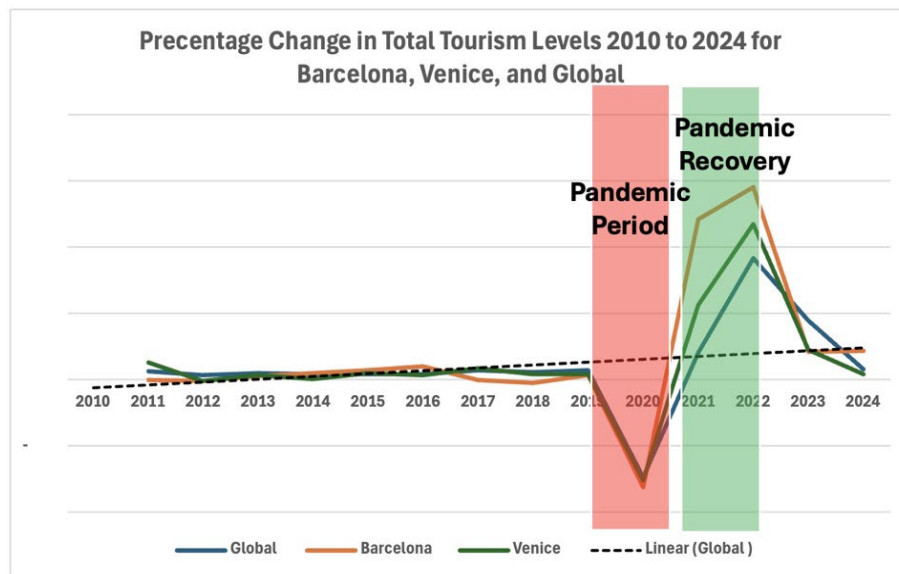


Figure 7

The majority of the responses taken by the citizens and governments of Barcelona and Venice to overtourism are aimed primarily at reducing tourism demand, making a visit to the city more expensive or less convenient. Many of the mitigation efforts seem aimed at changing objectionable tourist behaviour and encouraging tourists to disperse among less famous sites, areas, or seasons. The evidence studied in this research suggests that none of this is effective in countering what seems to be a relentless increase in the number of tourists globally. Both cities, and the global tourism industry in general, show a steady increase in tourism demand promising to eventually overwhelm even the most aggressive attempts to mitigate the impacts of this rising demand.

The only example of a possibly effective strategy identified in this research was the barring by Venice of large cruise ships in the main canal. While not conclusive, the analysis suggests that preventing cruise passengers from arriving in Historic Venice was effective in reducing the number of visitors. That reduction was not, however, enough to offset the increase in other tourist streams in the city. Things might have been worse without that restriction, but they still got worse overall in terms of bottom-line tourist numbers.

Tourism revenues in Barcelona were 14% of the total GDP of the city (Watkins & Dumoulin, 2025). For Venice, tourism accounts for 1 job in every 3 (Tattara, 2024). Tourism is forecast to be 11.5% of global GDP by 2035,

generating an estimated \$16 Trillion in revenues (WEF, 2025). That cashflow is vital to support many tourist areas and sustains a set of powerful commercial interests which depend on tourism to survive, as well as local governments who need those revenues to fund services for their citizens.

While tourism interests, including governments in tourist areas, will benefit from and support attempts to boost those revenues through taxes and fees on tourists and their activities or from attempts to disburse the tourists physically or temporally, they will resist attempts to reduce the overall numbers of tourists or to reduce their spending. While supply-side attempts to limit the number of tourists who can enjoy a given region might be effective in reducing the total number of tourists visiting an area, they will be very difficult to implement.

The field of tourism in general and overtourism is well-researched by scholars and explored by the news media as well. No clear solutions are identified, which supports the need for more research, both into the impacts and possible solutions to overtourism, but also into the motivations of tourists. Specific further research should also include the study of cases outside Western Europe, the continued study of total visitor counts by region as time passes, and the study and modelling of tourist responses to mitigation efforts.

No ethical approvals were required for this research.

No AI was used in the research or writing for this article.

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