

2017 Outlook Forum: International insights underscore destinations' shared challenges, successes

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Tourism is a competitive business, and destination marketing organizations around the globe are constantly creating strategies to help their destination rise to the top of potential visitors' bucket lists.

But given the success of so many of these programs, capacity has quickly become a very real concern in many places – and in some cases is even threatening the visitor experience.

At 2017 Outlook Forum, DMO leaders from three of the world's most in-demand destinations took the stage for a lively conversation about finding the perfect balance among growing their businesses, the preservation of cultural and natural resources, and the growing demand for authentic visitor experiences.

Visit California President & CEO Caroline Beteta led the panel, which featured: Inga Hlín Pálsdóttir, Director of Tourism at Promote Iceland; Paul Sloan, CEO of Tahiti Tourisme; and Roger Valencia, Tourism Deputy Minister at Visit Peru.

The discussion shined a light on an issue that leaders of many California destinations find themselves already facing in their own backyards: That cities throughout the Golden State reach capacity during peak travel seasons and often get pushback from residents who feel that tourists are harming their quality of life.

The three panelists echoed this sentiment, though the nuances of their market situations and the ways in which they address the challenges varied.

But while the issues facing them are as diverse as the destinations themselves, a common theme rose to the top: Work with the locals, not against them.

To that aim, each leader offered a different approach:

- Sloan noted that Tahiti Tourisme intertwines the unique experiences visitors love about the islands – crystal-clear water, privacy, and a romantic setting – with true, authentic local experiences, including dance, food and culture.
- Pálsdóttir said that, in her work leading Promote Iceland, the organization taps local experts to tell authentic stories about the country's singular outdoor adventure culture, its sustainable mindset, and the prevalent air of mystery about the country — mixed with a healthy dose of humor.
- Valencia explained that Peru's Ministry of Tourism has gone to great lengths to alleviate congestion at Machu Pichu, a sacred space for native Peruvians and an iconic, must-visit destination for visitors, by opening up other parts of the Inca Trail to tourists and broadening scope of the destinations for travelers to visit by increasing promotion of some of the country's lesser-known finds.

As global travelers seek out authentic experiences in every trip they take, destinations and DMOs have to continue to adapt in order to meet those needs, while still finding ways to preserve the local culture and ethos that makes those destinations appealing in the first place.

It is a theme felt around the globe, whether at home in California or in another hemisphere away. One thing that is certain, however, is that through these shared challenges, we all live in a truly connected world.

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