

## **An Analysis of Overtourism in Hong Kong: Its Negative Impacts on Tourist Experiences and Locals**

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### **Abstract**

Overtourism is one of the main problems faced by many destinations around the world. While national governments strive to increase tourism revenues and tourist numbers, they also seek ways to mitigate the negative effects of overtourism. Overtourism practices that exceed the carrying capacity of a region not only harm the environment but also lead to dissatisfaction in visitor experiences, causing a decline in the quality of life of the local population and leading them to oppose tourism development. This study investigates the negative effects of overtourism practices on tourist experiences and the local population in Hong Kong, a Special Administrative Region of China, which is the second most visited city in the world according to 2025 statistics. The methodology used is qualitative research, specifically literature review and observation. The results show that Hong Kong is exposed to overtourism practices, creating dissatisfaction by reducing visitor experiences, and that the local population reacts negatively to overtourism. Among the proposed solutions, it is emphasized that in order to ensure sustainable tourism development, different types of tourism should be developed and the pressure of tourism on certain regions should be reduced through smart tourism applications.

**Key words:** Overtourism, Hong Kong, Visitor Experience, Locals  
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## 1. Introduction

The concept of overtourism has evolved from the past to the present. To conceptualize, it is a type of tourism that exceeds the carrying capacity of a destination, damaging tourist experiences, the quality of life of the local population, and environmental factors (natural environment, socio-cultural environment, etc.), and has been the subject of much research. To reduce the damage caused by this type of tourism, efforts are being made to ensure sustainable tourism development by developing alternative tourism types such as ecotourism, which are sensitive to carrying capacity. Carrying capacity indicates the upper limit in tourism development (that does not cause damage to visitor experiences and tourism resources) (Inskeep, 1991: 144).

The rapid advancement of world tourism, the increase in the number of participants in international tourism, and the imbalances between tourism supply and demand are rapidly increasing the damage caused by overtourism. The concept of sustainability, which has not lost its popularity, is widely used in many disciplines such as sustainable economy, sustainable environment, and sustainable competitive advantage. While countries aspire to increase tourist numbers and tourism revenue, they are also contributing to irreversible consequences by supporting mass tourism, which damages the natural and socio-cultural environment that is the very reason for tourism's existence. In their study on overtourism, Cheung and Li (2019) addressed the relationship between visitors and locals. They noted that many destinations ignore tourism carrying capacity while increasing tourist numbers, creating unrest among locals living in tourism areas. They emphasized that carrying capacity should be considered in visa applications for sustainable tourism development, and that issues such as "building resilience in tourism" and "exploring sustainable degrowth" should be considered as potential strategies for long-term tourism growth.

**Table 1: Top 10 most visited Cities in 2025 in the World (Million)**

1	Bangkok	30.3
<b>2</b>	<b>Hong Kong</b>	<b>23.3</b>
3	London	22.7
4	Macao	19.7
5	İstanbul	19.7
6	Dubai	19.5
7	Mecca	18.7
8	Antalya	18.6
9	Paris	18.2
10	Kuala Lumpur	17.3

**Source:** Euromonitor International (2026). Top 100 City Destinations Index 2025: Driving Growth and Innovation, retrieved 20.04.2026

Hong Kong, a Special Administrative Region of China, was handed over to China from the United Kingdom in 1997. It is a cosmopolitan region with a population of approximately 7.4 million (2023), serving as an international center

for trade, finance, and tourism, and blending both British and Chinese cultures. In terms of international tourist numbers, it is projected to be the second most visited city in the world in 2025 with 23.3 million tourists (Table 1).

The Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB, 2026a) reports that the number of tourists visiting Hong Kong in 2025 reached 49.9 million, a 12% increase compared to the previous year. 76% of these visitors were from mainland China (37,833,784), with an average stay of 3.1 nights. The top 5 countries visited Hong Kong from outside mainland China are listed below in terms of visitor numbers: Macau SAR: 1,184,782, Taiwan: 1,578,494, Philippines: 1,347,717, South Korea: 963,616, Japan: 741,860 (HKTB, 2026b). While the majority of tourists come from mainland China (37,833,784), this magnitude strains tourism carrying capacity and leads to declines in tourist experiences and the quality of life for locals due to tourist influx to certain regions. The fact that the sister Special Administrative Region (SAR) Macau ranks 4th (Table 1) shows that day trips between the two special administrative regions may lead to declines in tourism experiences and negative attitudes towards tourism among the local population in both regions.

It is evident that tourism contributes to economic growth, improves infrastructure, and increases investments (Kim et al., 2013). Furthermore, tourism authorities continue to encourage the development of tourism (Hall, 2011). However, this study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. Does overtourism lead to a decline in the experiences of visitors to Hong Kong?
2. Does overtourism lead to a decrease in the quality of life of the local population?
3. What should be done to improve visitor experiences and the quality of life of the local population?

## **2. Literature Review**

The concept of overtourism, the opposite of undertourism (Peltier, 2019), has become a significant issue worldwide. Overtourism is defined as tourism that exceeds the carrying capacity of a region or destination, negatively impacting visitor experiences and quality of life due to overuse (UNWTO, 2018).

Butler and Dodds (2022), addressing global trends in the emergence and continuation of overtourism, highlight the reluctance to reduce national and international tourist numbers as one of the most important factors. As a result of the negative consequences of overtourism, the concept of antitourism has emerged. This concept, which is becoming widespread among local populations exposed to overtourism and unable to adequately benefit from its returns, is likely to become even more prominent if uncontrolled tourism developments continue. Some examples of cities that have suffered the negative consequences of overtourism include Palma de Mallorca, Paris, Dubrovnik, Kyoto, Berlin, Bali and Reykjavik,

and Maya Bay on the island of Phuket in Thailand (Milano, Cheer, & Novelli, 2018).

### **2.1. Negative Impacts of Overtourism on Visitor Experiences and Local Population**

In tourism, carrying capacity refers to and indicates the optimum number of visitors without causing performance degradation, and also includes socio-demographic and political-economic dimensions (Guo and Chung, 2019).

It is a concept that expresses physical and psychological well-being, where quality of life can change (Lamb, 1996). If tourism movements towards a destination cause the local people to reach a point of physical and mental illness, it is possible to see the traces of overtourism. This can be seen in examples such as disruptions in municipal services due to the excessive demand created by tourism, overcrowding, and excessive increases in housing rents due to the changing and renting of second homes.

One of the most important aspects to consider when planning tourism is the participation of the local people (Nonkoo and Gürsoy, 2012). Therefore, ways to improve tourism as a growth model should be sought by explaining the regional opportunities of tourism to the local people and developing formulas that minimize the potential negative impacts of tourism development. Tourism, whose *raison d'être* is the environment, must be managed with alternative sources of sustenance for future generations without securing the assets inherited from our ancestors. At this stage, developments that do not consider the local people and that will lower their living standards cannot be successful in the medium and long term.

It is evident that excessive tourism practices also encompass many negative developments (Ziegler et al., 2020).

In their study (2022), Kılıç and Seçilmiş found that when a destination's social carrying capacity is exceeded, the local population's support for tourism decreases, and their quality of life also declines.

There is a significant relationship between local people's support for tourism and their standard of living (Liang & Hui, 2016). In short, if tourism improves the quality of life of the local people (such as infrastructure development and increased job opportunities), their support increases; otherwise, it decreases.

Overtourism leads to the degradation of the tourism product, causing declines in visitor experiences and the quality of life for local populations. Therefore, the governments of cities experiencing overtourism, such as Venice, Barcelona, and Paris, are trying to manage tourism development by imposing various restrictions to avoid straining the cities' carrying capacity. Milano et al. (2018) emphasized that overtourism is one of the most significant problems for global cities, while Goodwin (2019) focused on the socio-spatial impacts of

overtourism. In Hong Kong, the concentration of overtourism demand in certain areas has led to significant accommodation problems for locals in those regions.

The conversion of multi-story buildings into hotel rooms and the rental of homes to tourists at higher returns through Airbnb applications are causing locals to develop negative attitudes towards visitors. It is evident that overtourism has negative impacts on visitor experiences. For example, Barcelona, in its fight against overtourism, aims to create harmony between locals and visitors by positioning visitors as temporary residents, thus mitigating the effects of overtourism and ensuring that both visitors and locals benefit from tourism, thereby achieving sustainable tourism development (Goodwin, 2019).

In addition to its positive effects, tourism also negatively impacts the local population by causing increases in the prices of goods and services (Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1996). Tourism also has negative effects such as increased crime rates, drug use, and mugging incidents. The influx of mass visitors into an area makes it more difficult for security forces to respond to such incidents in a timely manner. In their research, Liu and Minamikawa (2026) concluded that the negative attitudes of locals towards tourism are related not only to the crowds but also to perceptions of injustice and distrust of the administration. Mihalic (2020) suggested expanding existing perspectives on sustainable tourism in his study.

### **3. Methodology**

This study involved a comprehensive literature review of qualitative research methods related to overtourism, which leads to declines in visitor experiences and the quality of life of local people. In this context, peer-reviewed scientific journals, books, websites, and databases were used. Additionally, the researchers collected information through observation by visiting Hong Kong in August 2025.

### **4. Findings**

In Hong Kong, tourism is concentrated in certain areas, increasing pressure on limited public spaces. This concentration is a primary cause of overtourism.

Multi-story buildings, substandard hotel rooms, and high prices negatively impact tourist experiences.

Observations made by the researcher in the region revealed that hotel prices are above the regional average, multi-story residential buildings converted into hotels catering to middle and lower income visitors, lack adequate elevator safety measures and protection against fire and other disasters, hotel rooms and reception areas are on different floors, communication between hotel guests and reception is difficult, and even waiting in line for minutes to use the elevator negatively impacts the tourist experience. These kinds of shortcomings and substandard services for tourists traveling far from home for vacation purposes are a natural consequence of overtourism. This makes it difficult for the region to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Among Hong Kong's most crowded areas are:

**Mong Kok:** One of the most densely populated areas in the world.

**Tsim Sha Tsui:** A particularly popular area for shoppers, known for its Victoria Harbour waterfront, boat tours, and large shopping malls.

**Causeway Bay:** The American equivalent of Times Square. Extremely crowded due to shopping.

**Central City:** Financial center, nightlife, and luxury restaurants. Extremely crowded.

**Wan Chai:** Business and entertainment center. Particularly crowded due to the distribution of events.

**Temple Street Night Market:** A heavily visited area by tourists.

**Lan Kwai Fong and Soho:** Nightlife hubs. Extremely crowded, especially on weekends.



**Figure 1.** Central  
(Source by Authors)



**Figure 2:** Stars Avenue  
(Source by Authors)



**Figure 3:** Congress and  
Exhibition Centre  
(Source by Authors)



**Figure 4:** Wong Tai Sin  
(Source by Authorss)



**Figure 5.** Victorio Dock  
(Source by Authors)

In their research (2013), Muangasame & Khunon found that Hong Kong's tourism plan was successful in terms of transportation, food and beverage, and shopping. They identified the combination of affordable shopping and a mix of cultures, particularly for short-distance travel, as key reasons for visitors' arrival.

The excessive increase in housing purchase and rental costs causes local residents to allocate a large portion of their income to housing. In his study (2012), Ko stated that while wealthy tourists from mainland China are welcomed because they increase hotel occupancy rates and provide economic benefits, the local

population, especially those in the lower and middle income classes, are hostile towards tourism due to the rising costs of renting and buying housing in the city.

Piuchan et al. (2018), in their study, examined the impact of mainland Chinese visitors, who constitute the majority of visitors to Hong Kong, on the local population under two main headings: Economic and socio-cultural impacts of visits from mainland China on the local population of Hong Kong. Economic results show that these visits have positive effects such as increased hotel occupancy rates, increased labor demand due to the opening of new facilities, and increased cash flow. However, they also increase housing prices, making it more difficult for locals to purchase housing. Regarding socio-cultural impacts, it was found that cultural differences exist between the local population of Hong Kong and the people of mainland China, shopping malls and transportation become overcrowded, long queues form, and arguments occur while waiting in line.

This study analyzed the effects of overtourism on visitor experiences and the quality of life of the local population in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong example is a typical example of tourist-resident conflict and dissatisfaction.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Türkcan (2024) discussed the importance of data-driven management and spatial planning tools in dealing with overtourism.

To mitigate the effects of overtourism, some cities are developing strategies such as new tax regulations, fines, and attracting more conscious tourists with higher spending levels instead of large groups (Milano, Cheer, & Novelli, 2018).

Looking at the development trend and current state of Hong Kong tourism, it is rapidly growing. Its ranking as the third most visited city is a prime indicator of this. Therefore, carrying capacity is crucial for the sustainability of tourism. From a strategic perspective, a product gains a sustainable competitive advantage if it is unique, rare, and difficult to imitate. Otherwise, it becomes commonplace. This is also true for the Hong Kong tourism product. Healthy development of Hong Kong tourism is only possible through the development of tourism types that are sensitive to carrying capacity. Otherwise, it will become commonplace and lose its advantage over current and future competitors. This can only be achieved by gaining the support of the local population. Expecting healthy tourism development without considering tourism stakeholders is nothing more than a pipe dream.

The fact that the majority of visitors to the Hong Kong SAR region are from mainland China, and that China's population has reached 1.41 billion (Worldometers, 2026), constitutes the main source of overtourism. Although the Hong Kong administration strives to attract tourists from different countries, it cannot be said that it has been successful in this regard. The study shows that overtourism in Hong Kong produces significant spatial inequalities, especially in

the use of public spaces. To minimize the damage that excessive tourism activities could cause to Hong Kong, measures such as increasing alternative tourism practices (environmentally friendly tourism types), targeting high-spending and conscious audiences, spreading event calendars throughout the year, introducing additional taxes in some areas to reduce visitor density (accommodation tax, etc.), and using smart tourism applications can be implemented.

## 6. Limitations and Future Research

This study utilized qualitative research methods, specifically literature review and observation. It is recommended that future studies focus on field research and conduct comparative analyses with similar cities.

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