

FORUM: United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

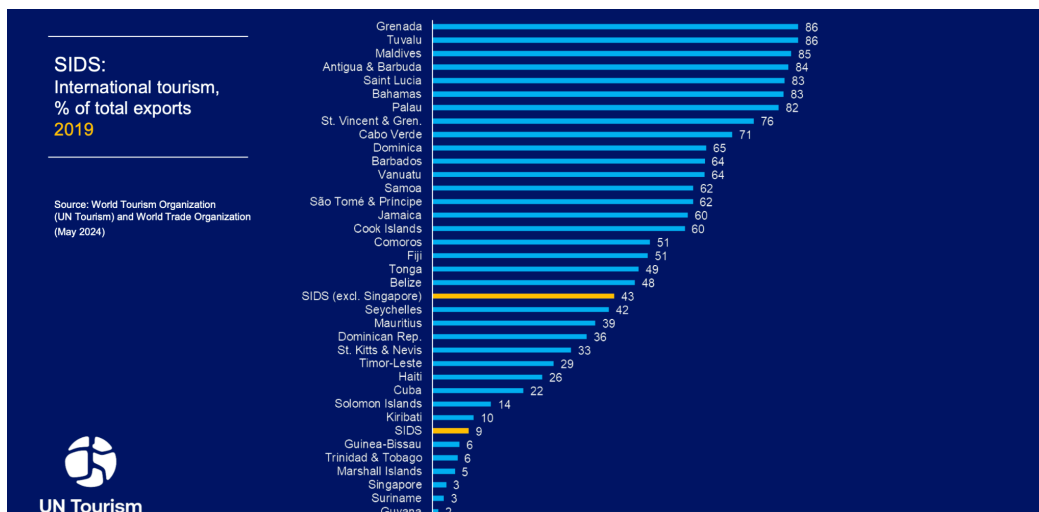
QUESTION OF: Discussing the effects of tourism on Small Island Developing States

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INTRODUCTION

Small island Developing states receive an extensive amount of tourists yearly, which has become a profitable business that opens up to more job opportunities for the locals, boosts GDP growth, export revenues and overall increase in the development of socio-economic wellbeing of these states. Tourists have been really interested in SIDS for decades due to their distinct remoteness and exotic scenery that renders them as “Tropical Paradises”. This has resulted in growing tourist popularity since the 1960s. For the past three decades, tourism development has been thriving in SIDS due to the demand for more luxuries, accommodations, services etc. bringing in more tourists every year. In 2023, 38% of export revenues in SIDS came from international tourism, being as high as 85% in some cases, such as of the Maldives, making SIDS economies heavily reliant on tourism.¹



¹ “Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) | UNWTO.” www.unwto.org, www.unwto.org/sustainable-development/small-islands-developing-states.

Figure 1: Total exports of tourism in SIDS in 2019²

While on the contrary, tourism also has serious issues that have been brought upon vulnerable SIDS, having negative effects on their environments, cultural heritage, and infrastructure. Furthermore, the high reliance on the tourist industry has made SIDS economies vulnerable to crises. For example, the recent Covid-19 Pandemic hindered overall development in SIDS, as it halted the tourism sector, leading to significant job losses and a considerable drop in GDP.³ Not only that, the influx of tourists has caused significant environmental issues. The mass pollution of land and water has led to the significant degradation of marine and island ecosystems, as tourist activities place immense pressure on already fragile ecosystems. The effect of tourism on Small Island Developing states is inherently connected to “Ethos vs Progres”, as ethical and environmental factors must be considered when discussing the development and utilization of SIDS.

²“Un Tourism: Bringing the World Closer.” *Small Islands Developing States (SIDS)*, www.unwto.org/sustainable-development/small-islands-developing-states. Accessed 22 Sept. 2024.

³ The pandemic hit SIDS hard causing significant job losses, decreased public revenue and hindering development SIDS/UNWTO [Tourism in Small Island Developing States \(SIDS\)](http://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development/small-islands-developing-states)

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

SIDS (Small Island Developing States) are a distinct group of UN Member States and Associate Members of United Nations regional commissions that have unique social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities. The three geographical regions in which SIDS are located are the Caribbean, the Pacific, the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea. Their distinct characteristics, and further vulnerabilities, can be seen in the small population, remoteness from the international market, high transportation costs and small landmass.⁴ These characteristics make them vulnerable to exogenous economic shocks as well as biodiversity loss and climate change due to the lack of economic alternatives.

Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism covers the complete tourism experience while it takes into account the current and future economic, socio-cultural and environmental impact it has on host locations and communities. It respects both the environment and culture of a tourist destination but also satisfies economic growth and the needs of the visitors.⁵

Mass Tourism

The large movement of people visiting popular tourist destinations for recreational purposes. It is characterized by mass consumption of products, standardized leisure products as well as experiences. While it is a great source of income, it can have negative effects on local culture, social matters and environment, being blamed for local cultural loss, overexploitation of cultural resources, overcrowding and pollution.⁶

⁴ United Nations. "About Small Island Developing States | Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States." *Www.un.org*, 2021, www.un.org/ohrls/content/about-small-island-developing-states.

⁵ "Sustainable Tourism | Department of Economic and Social Affairs." *Sdgs.un.org*, United Nations, 2023, sdgs.un.org/topics/sustainable-tourism.

⁶ Author's copy of Naumov, N. & Green, D. (2015) Mass tourism. In Jafari, J. & Xiao, H. (Eds.) *Encyclopedia of Tourism*. New York: Springer http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/11843/1/Naumov_Nikola_Green_David_SIP_2016_Mass_tourism.pdf

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Formation of SIDS

The SIDS were formed in 1992 in the United Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) also known as the Earth Summit. They are defined as a group of both UN and associate member states that are distinct as they face significant social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities due to their shared characteristics, such as remoteness, small population and land capacity as delicate environments. They are said to be on the frontline when it comes to climate change as they feel most of its impact. Full list of Members of the SIDS group is composed of 38 UN member states as well as 20 Associate/Regional Commissions, those being :

UN MEMBER STATES (38):

Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Bahrain, Barbados, Belize, Cabo Verde, Comoros, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Fiji, Grenada, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Kiribati, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Micronesia (Federated States of), Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, Samoa, Seychelles, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Suriname, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tuvalu, Vanuatu.

NON-UN MEMBERS/ASSOCIATE MEMBERS OF REGIONAL COMMISSIONS (20):

American Samoa, Anguilla, Aruba, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Commonwealth of Northern Marianas, Cook Islands, Curacao, French Polynesia, Guadeloupe, Guam, Martinique, Montserrat, New Caledonia, Niue, Puerto Rico, Sint Maarten, Turks and Caicos Islands, U.S. Virgin Islands

Figure 2: List of UN member states and associate members of regional commissions that make up the SIDS.⁷

Multiple Associate treaties and plans of action have been drafted and implemented ever since the UNCED in 1992 that have addressed the multiple aspects of the vulnerabilities of SIDS, their development goals and measure their progress. Some of the most significant documents that have been adopted are the Barbados plan of action and the “SAMOA” Pathway which have addressed areas that need immediate action and insisted on

⁷Nations, United. “Conferences | Small Island Developing States.” *United Nations*, www.un.org/en/conferences/small-islands .

international cooperation and intervention respectively.⁸ Their significant vulnerability to the effects of climate change have also been highlighted in many assemblies such as the September 1999 UNGA and the 2002 Johannesburg plan of action.⁹

Historical Background of Tourism in SIDS

Over the last decades, tourism has become one of the most important and valuable industries among SIDS due to their unique sceneries, first portraying the ideal “paradise” for western ideologies in the 1960s and by the 1980s being diversified into offering vacation packages that include sports, adventure and culture. Before the growth of mass tourism in SIDS, the Caribbean islands were the first to develop tourism significant industries for visitors from the USA and Canada before WWII¹⁰. The industry has become the fastest growing in SIDS due to the immense demand. Between the year 2000 and 2013 international arrivals in popular destinations within Small Island Developing States have increased from 28 million to 41 million and exports also increased from 26 billion USD to 53 billion USD. Obviously, tourism has been the key in the development of SIDS economies, recently allowing states such as Samoa, Cabo Verde and The Maldives to graduate from the Least Developed Country status (LDC). The industry was also considerably resilient towards the global economic crisis of 2008, as most SIDS had a growing revival in their tourist industries in its aftermath and an amazing economic recovery, according to the IMF.¹¹

⁸ Nations, United. “Conferences | Small Island Developing States.” *United Nations*, www.un.org/en/conferences/small-islands.

⁹ “International Year of Small Island Developing States.” *Un.org*, 2014, www.un.org/en/events/islands2014/smallislands.shtml.

¹⁰ *Challenges and Contributions: Tourism Development in SIDS*. <https://www.thecommonwealth-ilibrary.org/index.php/comsec/catalog/download/98/95/440?inline=1>.

¹¹ *Tourism in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Building a More Sustainable Future for the People of Islands*. <https://webunwto.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/2019-07/unwtotourisminsidsa4wtables.pdf>.

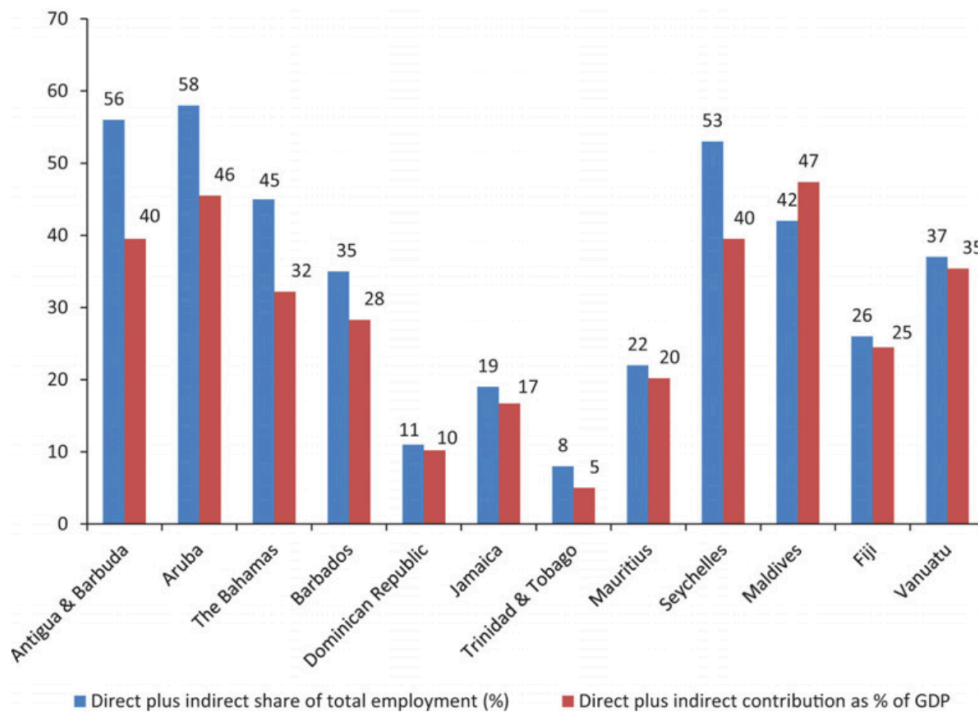


Figure 3: The direct contribution of tourism on GDP and employment rates in Small Island Developing States in 2011.¹²

Benefits of Tourism in SIDS

Tourism has been proven evidently of vital importance to SIDS as it is the main contributor to business expenditure, GDP, foreign investment and government revenue. It accounts for one quarter of the GDP in all SIDS while in some cases it can reach more than 40% with Aruba and the Maldives having 45.5% and 47.4% of their GDP being directly dependent on tourism.¹³ Data also shows that it accounts for more than 9% of the total exports of SIDS being equal to 61 billion USD in 2013. Employment rates are also highly dependent on tourism. In the Caribbean more than 30% revolve around the tourist industry while in the SIDS in the Indian Ocean it accounts for 24%. Women also account for more than 50% of the workforce in the tourist industry, making it an impeccable source for

¹²Challenges and Contributions: Tourism Development in Sids, www.thecommonwealth-ilibrary.org/index.php/comsec/catalog/download/98/95/440?inline=1. Accessed 21 Sept. 2024.

¹³ Challenges and Contributions: Tourism Development in SIDS. <https://www.thecommonwealth-ilibrary.org/index.php/comsec/catalog/download/98/95/440?inline=1>.

financial support and empowerment of women. Furthermore, revenues from tourism have been the main source by which SIDS governments tackle climate change and reach their development goals.¹⁴

Negative Effects of Tourism in SIDS

But while tourism is beneficial for SIDS, their development and their economies it has also been the main source of multiple environmental, social and economic issues. As previously mentioned, SIDS economies faced extreme setbacks in their economies during the Covid-19 Pandemic as the halt of tourist operations on the islands caused significant decreases in gdp, employment rates and revenues because tourism is evidently the sole main source of income. So it is questionable whether these economies are resilient to shocks as they have been proven to be prone to outside crises. Furthermore, tourism has provoked the massive build up of accommodation and other tourist facilities around multiple coastal areas of islands, provoking damage to the surrounding unique environment. Sometimes the damage could be permanent. Among damages could be erosion of beaches, sand dunes, disturbance of the animal habitat and degradation of forests. Not only that, tourist activities as well as the production of waste are also harmful for the natural habitats of SIDS causing pollution as well as degradation and bleaching of coral reefs. The immense import of tourists also causes extreme environmental and social challenges. Overcrowding in small islands is one significant issue that disturbs the surrounding environment with means such as noise pollution. Behaviors that are uncaring towards the environment are also in common among tourists with the most significant being littering. The high presence of tourists on SIDS also contribute to the loss of culture and heritage of local populations as they make a cultural invasion causing the loss of local identities, music and arts.¹⁵ Government corruption and human rights abuses are also significant, such as limited access to education and high salaries for local populations as well as preferential governments that neglect local

¹⁴ Website User. "Tourism – the Lifeblood of SIDS: UN High-Level Thematic Event on Tourism – AOSIS." *Aosis.org*, 2024, www.aosis.org/tourism-the-lifeblood-of-sids-un-high-level-thematic-event-on-tourism/#:~:text=Tourism%20is%20a%20vital%20part .

¹⁵ Sun, Yujie, et al. "Tourism in Small Island Developing States." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 1 Jan. 2023, papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4634270, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4634270> . Accessed 9 Sept. 2024.

businesses and focus on foreign funded tourism projects that have weak regulation from formal institutes and can in many cases evade local law.¹⁶

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

Maldives

The Maldives has been attracting tourists with its resorts and natural attractions, having a surge in tourist arrivals in recent years. But the rapid push for tourism development on its islands has led to environmental degradation in order to build more accommodations, including erosion of beaches, loss of natural habitat, coral reef bleaching and distraction as well as pollution of the sea. Tourism is taking toll over the distraction of its distinct and biodiverse natural habitats which support both marine life but also locals who sustain themselves by fishing.¹⁷

Mauritius

Mauritius has been struggling with mass tourism for years and locals have reported loss of heritage and culture by commodifying them in order to be likable to the tourist industry. Tourism has been flourishing in the island but mass tourism and foreign investing has had many negative effects on the island itself as well as the locals. Cultural erosion has deeply affected local communities and the island has suffered overexploitation of its landscapes and ecosystem. Furthermore locals suffer from social disparity as foreign investors have been reaping most benefits of the tourist industry.¹⁸

Fiji

Fiji, being renowned for its tourist industry has made its economy highly reliant on tourism. The Covid-19 Pandemic, which temporarily terminated all tourist

¹⁶Sun, Yujie, et al. "Tourism in Small Island Developing States." *SSRN*, 14 Dec. 2023, papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4634270.

¹⁷ "The Dark Side of Maldivian Tourism: Examining Its Historical, Environmental and Social Implications." *www.linkedin.com*, www.linkedin.com/pulse/dark-side-maldivian-tourism-examining-its-historical-environmental#:~:text=These%20activities%20have%20resulted%20in .

¹⁸Redd, Dani. "Beyond the Resorts: The Rise of Responsible Travel in Mauritius." *Much Better Adventures Magazine*, Much Better Adventures Magazine, 14 Sept.2023,www.muchbetteradventures.com/magazine/responsible-tourism-mauritius/

operations on its islands, made Fiji face the biggest economic contraction in its history. Its GDP dropped significantly by 15.7% and public debt went up to almost 90% of the GDP. About 20% of tourist businesses also declared that they were unable to pay their debt and a great amount of job losses as well as wage reductions were reported in all sectors, including tourism. This economic turmoil can be directly linked to the closure of the tourist industry which caused a reduction of international tourist arrivals by 80%, exposing how prone the Fiji economy can be when it comes to crises and reliance on the tourist industry.¹⁹

UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

The UNCTAD was one of the first organizations to recognize the challenges of SIDS and collaborate with other UN bodies to tackle them. It has linked issues of SIDS regarding development to proneness to external economic and natural shocks that are beyond domestic control and it works in accordance with the SAMOA Pathway to enable the UN to take action and address the vulnerabilities of SIDS.²⁰

UN Tourism (UNWTO)

The UNWTO itself has made significant efforts to address the effects of tourism on SIDS. While it recognizes the vital impact of tourism in SIDS economies it also emphasizes on the pressing need to transition the SIDS tourist industry to more sustainable and eco-friendly grounds. It has pledged to aid SIDS in providing socio-cultural protection and formal job creation for locals and support local productive sectors as well as support climate action. In association with many organizations such as the IMF it has organized side events, encouraging SIDS to rethink their tourist and finance policies and provide ideas for sustainable tourism.²¹

¹⁹ OECD. *Towards a Blue Recovery in Fiji: COVID-19 Appraisal Report*. OECD ILibrary, Paris, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2022, www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/towards-a-blue-recovery-in-fiji_a3661a09-en.

²⁰ "Small Island Developing States | UNCTAD." *Unctad.org*, unctad.org/topic/vulnerable-economies/small-island-developing-states.

²¹ "UN Tourism Commits to the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for Small Island Developing States (SIDS)." *Unwto.org*, 2024, www.unwto.org/news/un-tourism-commits-to-the-antigua-and-barbuda-agenda-for-small-island-developing-states-sids.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of Event
1960s	SIDS across the Caribbean and the Pacific gain independence, entering a post-colonialist era
1970s	Tourism businesses begin to flourish in multiple SIDS
1980s	Mass tourism causes massive development of the tourist industry in SIDS
1992	Recognition of SIDS as a distinct group at the UN conference on Environment and Development
1994	The Barbados program of Action was produced to assist SIDS in implementing their development goals
2002	The Johannesburg plan of action highlights the vulnerability of SIDS on climate change
2014	The 3rd International Conference on SIDS took place and the "SAMOA" Pathway was implemented
2020	Covid-19 pandemic, international arrivals decrease by 76% and SIDS economies face serious cuts in export revenues
2023	Fast recovery of SIDS economies from the pandemic with more than 36 million tourist arrivals and 91% recovery from 2019
2024	The Antigua and Barbuda agenda was declared for SIDS in the fourth international conference on them and demands the tourist industry to promote resilience and sustainability

UN INVOLVEMENT: Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)

The first conference that created the term SIDS and comprised the list of 38 UN member states and 20 non-UN member states which are included in this group and are characterized as a distinct group of developing countries that face specific social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities. Its Agenda makes states committed to addressing the issues SIDS face in sustainable development as well as implement plans of action for these states to cope with environmental crises and set development goals.²²

The Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS3)

Naming its outcoming document “The Samoa Pathway” in 2014, this conference recognized the necessity of support and the needs of SIDS nations in order to achieve sustainable development highlighted the need for international cooperation and the need for foreign investment²³. The Samoa Pathway addressed many vulnerabilities of SIDS, the target areas that need to focus in order to achieve smooth development and the need for aid from United Nations institutions.²⁴

The Barbados Programme of Action(BPOA)

The BPOA was adopted in 1994 in the UN Global conference on the Sustainable Development of SIDS, where it identifies all the priority areas and the specific actions that are needed to address the challenges SIDS go through. It addresses issues such as climate change, energy and tourism resources as well as human resources. Furthermore it identifies the causes of major set-backs in development goals that were addressed in previous conferences.²⁵

²² United. “Conferences | Small Island Developing States.” *United Nations*, www.un.org/en/conferences/small-islands.

²³ Nations, United. “Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States.” *United Nations*, www.un.org/en/conferences/small-islands/apia2014.

²⁴ SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n14/628/45/pdf/n1462845.pdf>

²⁵ “BPOA (1994) - Barbados Programme of Action :: Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform.” *Sustainabledevelopment.un.org*, sustainabledevelopment.un.org/conferences/bpoa1994 .

The Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States(SIDS4)

Held in Antigua and Barbuda in May 2024 it declared the Antigua and Barbuda agenda. A renewed declaration that emphasizes on the sustainability of the tourist industry in SIDS by demanding the reduction of waste and pollution, modernizing facilities to be eco-friendly, collaboration with other sectors, and enhancing entrepreneurship and education on culture and heritage.²⁶

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Allocation of funds towards the transition towards sustainable tourism industries

Proposing funds to make tourist facilities and accommodations sustainable as well as aid in recovery of the covid affected SID economies would be essential in provoking a smooth transition to sustainable and eco-friendly tourist environment in SIDS.

These funds could be considerably helpful in tackling economic turmoil caused by the needs of the tourist industry and the Covid-19 Pandemic. They would also target tourist facilities in transitioning to sustainable resources in order to uphold sustainable tourism, allowing the flow of tourists without damaging the surrounding,unique environment.

Promote Government collaboration with local businesses

Government collaboration with local people and their businesses instead of international corporations could be beneficial for the local industry and the native heritages. It would allow for the government to start promoting local cultures and businesses rather than solely depending on multinational industries to run tourism on SIDS , making the tourist experience more culturally rich and establishing a working welfare state that would also protect locals from eroding their culture and

²⁶ "Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) | UNWTO." *Www.unwto.org*, www.unwto.org/sustainable-development/small-islands-developing-states .

giving up on their businesses to work as employees for big multinational corporations.

Reduce of taxation and aid to other industries

Reduction of taxes and tariffs in trade and the investment in aids local businesses and other industries rather than tourism could promote easier access to products and services abroad and faster growth of other productive industries. Such measures could relieve SIDS economies and businesses by lowering the cost of their operations as well as reinvest into expansions and refurbishment which high fees due to isolation prevent. It would also allow SIDS economies to terminate their over-reliance on the tourist industry and international corporations, furthermore growing their local businesses and increasing their competitiveness with other businesses on a global scale. All these openings could allow for the development of many more industries rather than solely tourism, strengthening SIDS economies and enhancing their tolerance towards crises.

Proposing legislations that prevent overbooking

These legislations by preventing overbooking could make an effort to prevent mass tourism, By monitoring the inflow of tourists and better managing the overall tourist capacity, aligning with the capabilities of the local tourist infrastructure and preventing overcrowding. Also these legislations could decrease the environmental strain which is caused by mass tourism and decrease the overwhelming strip of resources, pollution and degradation of the environment by mass crowds.

Increased Security and Strict Regulations

By enhancing security, imposing more strict regulations regarding respect to the environment and criminalizing acts of pollution and degradation, the tourist industry in SIDS could rapidly evolve to a sustainable and eco-friendly business that provides both economic benefits but also protection of the environment and the local communities. These acts could deteriorate destructive and polluting behaviors

among tourists and legally protect the fragile environments such as coral reefs and rainforests as well as the livelihoods of locals.

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www.linkedin.com/pulse/unveiling-potential-threats-maldives-tourism-you-prepared#:~:text=With%20its%20undeniable%20allure%2C%20the .

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