

## **‘No one comes here any more’: the human cost as Covid wipes out tourism**

From Bolivia’s Lake Titicaca to wildlife tourism in Nepal, we find out how the crisis has affected people in four travel hotspots – and whether or not they want the tourists to return

- Opinion: Africa’s park tourism crash is a wake-up call. Can we find new ways to finance conservation?

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In March last year, it was predicted that the global travel shutdown would cause international arrivals to plummet by 20 to 30% by the end of 2020.

Six weeks later, the UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) revised their warning: international arrivals could fall by up to 80% – equating to a billion fewer tourists and the worst crisis in the history of the industry.

“We are back to levels of travel we saw 30 years ago,” says Sandra Carvão, chief of tourism market intelligence at the agency.

Eighteen months into the pandemic, domestic tourism is bouncing back, but efforts to open up international travel have been hampered by the emergence of new virus variants and by the variations in vaccine policy and availability between countries. Recovery is “very fragile and uneven”, according to the UNWTO. Almost 50% of experts it surveyed predicted that travel is unlikely to return to pre-pandemic levels until at least 2024.

The economic cost of the global tourism freeze is immense. A UNWTO report published with UN Conference on Trade and Development at the end of June forecast a loss of more than \$4tn (£2.9tn) to global GDP by the end of 2021. Developing countries are predicted to take the biggest hit, with Central America suffering the most.

The human cost is vast. The challenges for hoteliers and tour operators are huge, but also the pandemic has upturned millions of lives in tourism communities across the globe. We visit four such communities – three in countries on England’s red-list, one in an amber-listed location – to find out how the crisis has affected people and whether or not they want the tourists to return.

### **Chitwan National Park, Nepal**

Ashish Kadariya was born on the edge of a lush forest in the south of Nepal, home to the endangered Bengal tiger and one-horned rhino. Today he finds himself in a different kind of jungle; one of towering buildings, six-lane highways and oppressive heat.