

Locals hold key to Overtourism issues

Rob Gill

WORKING TOGETHER with local

residents in key destinations could help the travel industry to start tackling the growing problem of overtourism.

A panel session at WTM London heard that many residents in cities such as Barcelona and Venice had become disillusioned with the rise in visitor numbers, believing increased tourism was making their lives worse, rather than benefiting them.

Carlos Vogeler, executive director for member relations at UNWTO, said: "Overtourism is becoming a problem that we can't ignore. The problem sometimes is that the tourists arriving are not providing the benefits that the community is expecting - that's where the clash comes.

"Tourism growth is not the enemy - it's the way in which we handle and manage that growth. We need to look at how we make tourism a benefactor."

The panel at the Responsible Tourism

Theatre also heard from Joan Torrella Rene, tourism department director at Barcelona City Council, who explained how the Catalan city had set up a tourism and city council in 2016 comprising both tourism bodies and local residents.

The council has been formed to draw up Barcelona's tourism plan for 2020, which aims to tackle problems such as visitors being "concentrated in the same place at the same time" in tourism hotspots.

"We are working with all the different groups so we can understand all the different sensitivities around these questions," added Torrella Rene. "We need citizens' opinions so we can hear all the different points of view in the debate."

Jonathan Keates, chair of Venice in Peril, said the problems of overtourism in certain parts of the Italian city meant that he supported an increase in tourism tax.

"That will be very unpopular with hoteliers and businesses of all kinds, but this has to be done to deal with the

problem created by what I might call tourism accretion," he added.

Keates said there had even been discussions in Venice about possible ways to limit tourism numbers.

"We have not yet got to the stage of having timed tickets but it's being talked about," he said. "We're not talking about having turnstiles but some kind of way of managing the numbers. We have not arrived at the ideal practical solution."

Garry Wilson, managing director, product and purchasing at Tui Group, said the tour operator was always "very keen to get the community involved" when it was looking to build a new resort or start a new route.

"When we're looking to invest we have to make sure there's long-term sustainability where we're building that hotel or sending that aircraft," explained Wilson.

"You have to be making a positive contribution - making sure food is locally sourced and local people are being employed in the hotels."

TOURISM PROGRAMME

Rio de Janeiro fights negative media images



Rio is seeking to generate positive interest

April Hutchinson

A FOCUS on a new year-round programme of events in Rio de Janeiro has been highlighted as a way of offsetting ongoing negativity around the Brazilian city, including media reports of continued violence.

Vinicius Lummertz, president of Embratur, acknowledged: "We live in a very unsafe world in general, and that [violence] is the nature of big cities unfortunately."

He added: "We successfully hosted a series of major international events - the Fifa World Cup and the Olympics - but then we faced an economic and political crisis, and media images of Rio were not always positive. All this has been a hindrance to what could have been our heyday."

The "Rio de Janeiro a Janeiro