

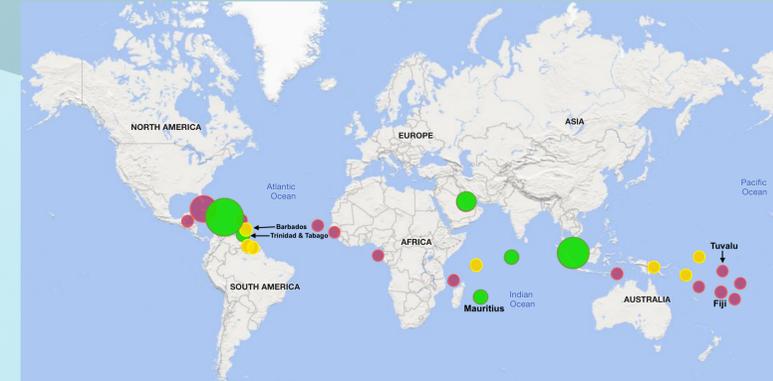
# Using Sustainable Tourism Practices to Address the Challenges & Impacts of COVID-19 for Small Island Developing States: A Case Study Approach

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## 1. ABSTRACT

- TOURISM WITHIN SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES (SIDS) PRESENTS AN INTERESTING PARADOX, ON THE ONE HAND, INCREASED AVIATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE AS A RESULT OF TOURISM IS UNDOUBTEDLY CAUSING MORE DAMAGE TO SOME OF THE MOST PRISTINE LOCATIONS ON EARTH FOUND WITHIN SIDS; AND YET ON THE OTHER HAND, TOURISM IS ESSENTIAL FOR THE ECONOMICS OF MANY SIDS
- THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS TURNED THE TABLES BY DECIMATING THE GLOBAL TOURIST SECTOR, LEAVING MILLIONS OF PEOPLE LIVING WITHIN SIDS JOBLESS AND UNSURE OF WHEN TOURISM WILL RECOVER.
- THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS HAS HAD A PARTICULARLY SEVERE IMPACT ON SIDS.
- DUE TO THEIR RELIANCE ON INTERNATIONAL TOURISM, SIDS HAVE HAD THEIR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GREATLY EXACERBATED BY THE CURRENT CRISIS.
- THE PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER IS TO GO INTO FURTHER DETAIL ABOUT HOW SIDS ARE NOW FARING AFTER COVID-19, HOW THEY ARE HANDLING THE PANDEMIC, AND THE APPLICATION OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STRATEGIES TO ALLEVIATE THE SITUATION.



Global map overlaid with SIDS' represented as circles. Green circles represent SIDS which handled the COVID19 pandemic well, yellow circles represent SIDS' which handled the COVID19 pandemic moderately well, and red circles represent SIDS' which handled the COVID19 pandemic poorly. The size of each circle represents the vaccination rate per capita for each SIDS, the larger the circle, the higher the vaccination rate per capita. Source for Vaccination Data: United Nations, 2022

## 2. INTRODUCTION & METHODOLOGY

### THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

Tourism is a huge global industry; at the turn of the century, it was producing over USD 450 billion, and two decades later, in 2019, it was generating USD 1.5 trillion in world tourist receipts worldwide.

### WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) define Sustainable Tourism as: "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities".

### WHAT ARE THE SIDS?

The 52 Small Island Developing States (SIDS), are a distinct set of developing nations with unique social, economic, and environmental vulnerabilities, spread throughout the world from the Caribbean to the eastern Pacific.

### METHODOLOGY

Synthesized information through a thorough literature review was analyzed in order to investigate the application of sustainable tourism practices for SIDS post pandemic (results section), and by studying case studies of a broad range of SIDS, their experiences with the pandemic, and their future going forward (discussion section).

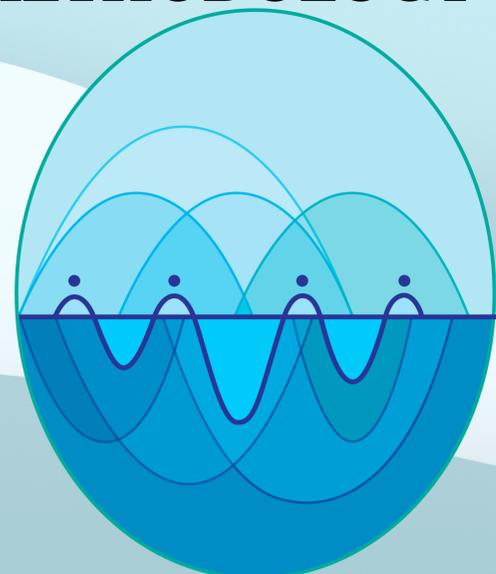


Image 2. SIDS Logo from UN 2014 Conference

## 3. RESULTS) Moving Past the Pandemic: Applying Sustainable Tourism Practices

### FINDING 1. COVID RECOVERY TIMELINE

- UNWTO (2020) concluded that before the summer of 2023, it does not appear possible for post pandemic SIDS tourism to rebound to its pre pandemic levels globally.
- In fact, according to 43% of UNWTO experts, this won't happen until late 2023, while 41% of them predict a return to 2019 levels by 2024 or later .
- Thus, SIDS tourism will be gradually but steadily rebounding, and is projected to reach pre pandemic levels soon



### FINDING 2. "COVID-FREE" PLACE MARKETING TACTIC

- During the pandemic, as a place-marketing tactic, several small islands also promoted themselves as "COVID-free" locations in an effort to draw in travelers who are often more discriminating about their vacation spots.
- For instance, small Greek islands with less than 1000 residents have enrolled in the government's "Liberty" immunization programme in an effort to be "liberated" from the dangers of COVID-19 after their adult population has received 100% of the recommended doses.



### FINDING 3. FOCUS ON ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION

- In accordance with the literature, SIDS economies should diversify towards agriculture, winemaking, and other services.
- This should be paired with creative travel packages that have a higher service content in order to meet tourists' newly emerging demands, which include less crowded and outdoor focused activities and locally produced goods
- For example, the Seychelles expanded its tuna exports during the COVID-19 period, allowing it to decrease its dependency on tourism solely



### FINDING 4. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF WORK FROM HOME

- For tourism-oriented SIDS looking to attract new customers from high-income and high living cost regions, the combination of work from home opportunities coupled with affordable living costs in distant COVID-free and properly Internet-connected SIDS locations may offer a newly promising market, as three to four times as many individuals as before the outbreak are working remotely
- SIDS like Barbados, Mauritius, Aruba, and the Cayman Islands already offer new long-term permits, of up to 12 months



### FINDING 5. PROMOTE NATURE BASED TOURISM

- The literature also stresses that plans for post-COVID-19 rehabilitation must emphasize quality rather than quantity of tourist growth
- This can be done through providing a more sustainable kind of tourism development with an emphasis on nature, experiential, rural, and active tourism will help many SIDS confront the severe health and economical effects of the pandemic and enhance inhabitants' quality of life and tourists' safety



## 4. DISCUSSION & CASE STUDIES

### FIJI: ENVELOPED IN CRISIS



- Fiji decided to close its borders very early (in March 2020), which had a significant economic impact in a nation. where tourism had previously provided about 34% of GDP
- Unfortunately for Fiji, since the COVID outbreak, three above-average-strength tropical cyclones have hit the nation, further decimating the economy.
- Recovery, according to the literature, includes the revival of traditional techniques for intensified agricultural production, such as irrigated terracing for the cultivation of root crops which conserves water.

### TUVALU: COVID FREE



- The government of Tuvalu issued a restriction on non-essential movement of individuals and freight into and out of the country after COVID-19 cases were verified in the neighboring nation of Fiji.
- This, among other precautions ensured that Tuvalu was one of only 13 nations in the world labeled COVID free.
- This status allowed Tuvalu to fare through the pandemic better than expected, and set up a COVID free tourism market strategy to keep their tourism industry afloat as restrictions loosened

### MAURITIUS & BARBADOS: ATTRACTING ISLAND ESCAPISTS



- Mauritius introduced a new, 1-year visa with the option of further extensions in an effort to boost the tourism industry. The premium visa is intended for retirees, tourists, and professionals who work remotely.
- Similarly in Barbados, for travelers who desire to reside on the island and conduct business remotely from their home country for a year, the 12 month Welcome Stamp Programme was established.
- The visa programmes constitute a repositioning of both Barbados and Mauritius' sun, sea, and sand tourist product, to a refuge that is comparatively secure from COVID-19 and has a digital landscape to assist international professionals who operate as digital nomads and work from home expats.

### TRINIDAD & TOBAGO: DEVELOPING OTHER INDUSTRIES



- During the pandemic, Trinidad and Tobago changed its focus to local food production to address supply chain interruption. The government committed to expedite land tenure and review the use of unused state lands for agriculture, while also allocating TT \$500 million to an agricultural stimulus package.
- All in all, Trinidad and Tobago's experiences show how the pandemic may serve as a catalyst for increased regional food autonomy. However, to maintain long-term climate resilience and ecological sustainability, it is crucial for Trinidad and Tobago to emphasize agriculture resiliency and apply regenerative practices, while also taking climate change into account as the country makes the shift towards self-reliance.

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