

AMERICAN RESIDENT SENTIMENT TOWARDS TOURISM

Introduction

The Global Travel & Tourism industry continues to grow at a healthy pace, but not without some challenges. Over the past decade, we have been witnessing significant resident backlash against tourism growth in several major international destinations including: Barcelona, Venice, Amsterdam and Dubrovnik. In addition, there has been growing concern about the environmental and social impacts increased visitation may have upon natural attractions and local communities (i.e. pollution, depletion/degradation of the resource and sustainability).

As most of this attention has been focused overseas, it has not been generally seen as an American concern, until recently. As these issues gain media attention globally, our U.S. domestic media has begun asking the same questions and has focused in on some communities across our country that have been debating the challenges of “Mass Tourism,” tourism development, the shared economy in previously “local” neighborhoods and the encouragement of tourism growth.

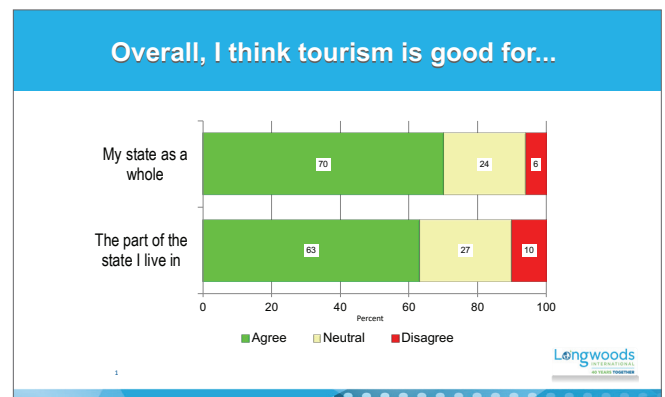
That being said, Google searches on these topics in the United States typically turn up polite debates over the issues at hand versus the pictures of protests and “hot opposition” we have seen overseas. Most of the discussion was actually rather polite and thoughtful, rather than emotional. After seeing all this, Longwoods International, a premier tourism market research consultancy, decided to find just how Americans felt about tourism.

Longwoods International conducted a national online survey with a representative sample of 1,500 adults drawn from a consumer research panel. In partnership with Destinations International, the results of this first-ever national benchmark survey of American Resident Sentiment Towards Tourism are being made available.

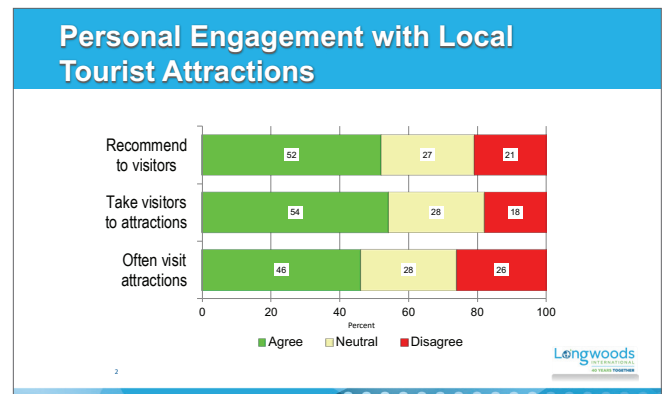
Here are the highlights:

For all the buzz in the tourism industry about “over tourism” – who ruined Barcelona? -- new research from Longwoods International confirms that most Americans support the industry in their state and community.

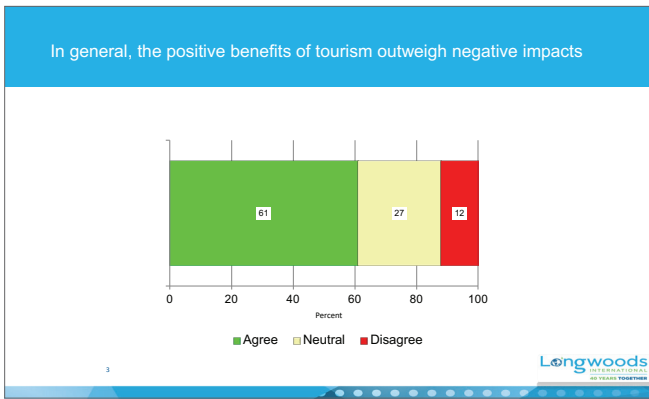
Despite some local pockets of anti-tourism sentiment, the Longwoods survey of 1500 U.S. residents found broad support for the industry with **70% saying tourism was positive for their state and 63% saying the industry is good for their community.**



In fact, **more than half of Americans are actively engaged with the tourism industry**, if only to recommend or take visitors to local attractions.

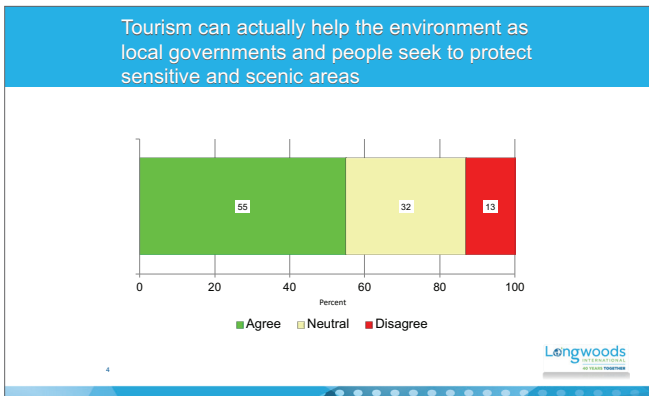


And while Americans do believe there are some negative aspects of tourism, **61% say they see the positives of the industry outweighing any negative consequences.**

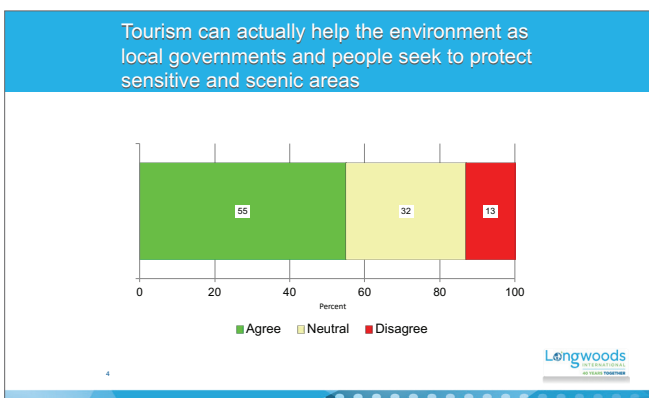


Tourism is seen to deliver a number of benefits, including investment in the local economy, recreational opportunities available to both locals and visitors, better shopping, improved public services and an enhanced quality of life. That said, U.S. residents do believe there are a number of negatives associated with the industry, including low-paying, seasonal jobs, traffic and parking problems, overcrowding at local attractions and leisure facilities and higher prices to the detriment of local residents.

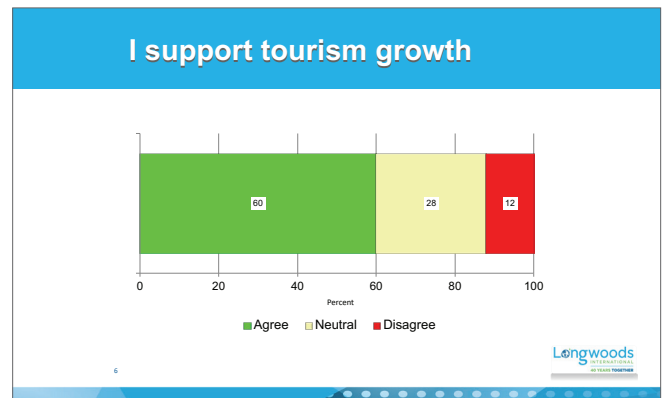
Regarding concerns about the environment, tourism is judged as less detrimental environmentally than other types of development.



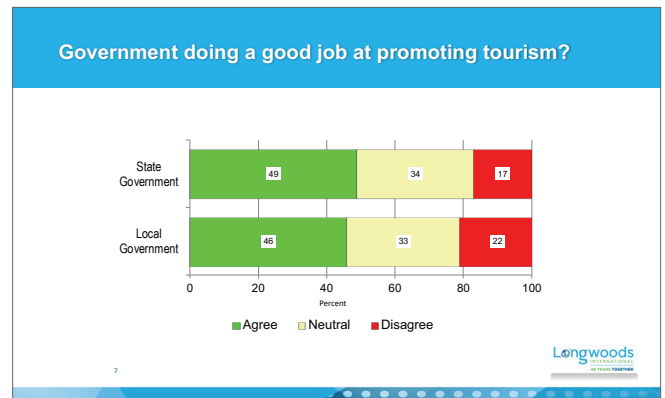
60% of Americans believe careful planning can ensure tourism development is environmentally friendly.



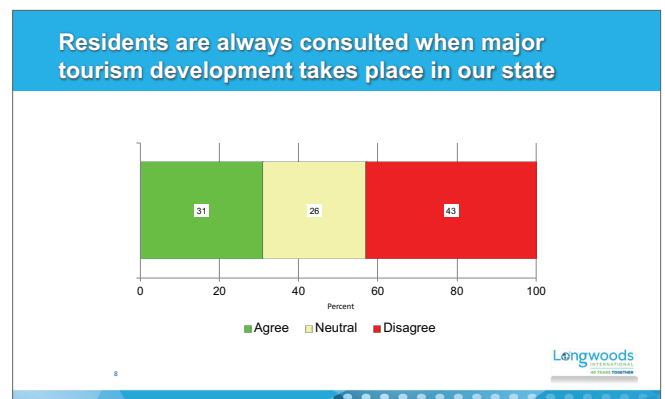
The survey also found strong support for growing the tourism industry, with **60% voicing support for growth in the industry, and only 12% opposing it.**



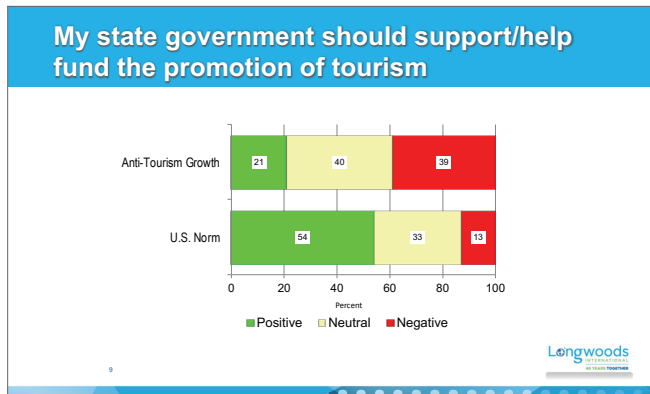
Regarding publicly funded promotion of tourism, there is strong support for both state and local marketing efforts.



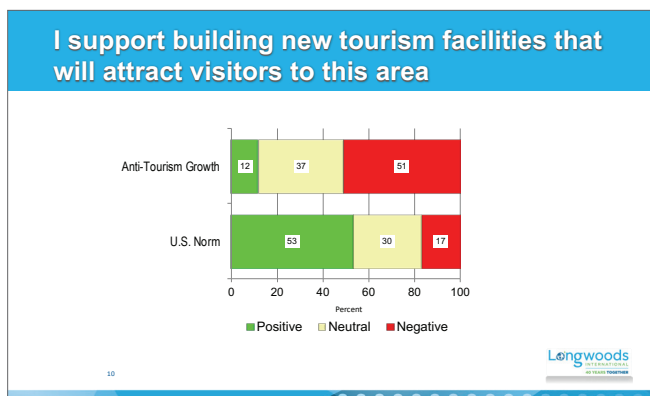
Despite the general support for the industry, more than **40% of respondents do not believe that residents are informed or consulted regarding major tourism development projects.**



In examining the minority of Americans who oppose tourism growth, they tend to be older, less educated, lower income and more rural than the national norm. They also tend to be less traveled, less informed about the tourism industry and less supportive of government promotion of tourism.



They also are not supportive of tourism development projects, with a majority of those who do not support growth of the tourism industry against new tourism development.



In order to prevent a vocal minority from thwarting the broad support the American tourism industry enjoys, it is important for industry leaders to constantly educate their communities about the benefits of the industry and efforts to mitigate the industry’s perceived negative attributes. Open, two-way communication about the industry with government officials at all levels, all segments of the business community and the public is essential. Fact sheets highlighting the tourism industry’s objectives, planning and successes can help keep everyone informed and on message.

Conclusion

The Bottom Line is this:

- There is strong support among residents for tourism in the United States, including its growth.
- Most Americans believe the benefits of tourism growth outweigh the negatives.
- However, most do not see tourism as a direct contributor to their personal income, so they may not be very engaged in tourism-related issues.
- Residents are generally very supportive of state and local tourism promotion efforts.
- There is an underlying “Not in my backyard!” concern about tourism growth when it involves more visitors into one’s own destination.
- While the opponents of such growth are in the clear minority, they do have a slightly different profile than most residents surveyed that is led by a general negative outlook to many things beyond tourism. They also tend to be very vocal.

Key takeaways from these conclusions:

- Never assume residents understand what you do and how much tourism benefits your local area. You need regular and continuous communications.
- Have a messaging and engagement strategy for every group, especially the “Naysayers!”
- Turn locals into “Brand Ambassadors” so they are engaged in your tourism assets and success.
- Be a part of the solution. Coordinate with policymakers and other areas of economic development and government to make sure tourism is seen as a part of the solution to other community needs.

In partnership with Destinations International, this study will be repeated on an annual basis allowing resident sentiment on current and emerging issues to be monitored and shared with its membership and other stakeholders. We look forward to providing future updates.

To learn more, please visit <https://destinationsinternational.org/featured-partners> to learn more about participating in your own resident sentiment study.

*Source - all data property of Longwoods International. <https://longwoods-intl.com/>