



Policy Brief 2:10

Excerpt from the Swedish report Konsumtionens gränser. (The Limits of Consumption)

Tourism Within Planetary Boundaries

The tourism sector needs to transform. The changes required need support and legitimacy to be effective, and these will be strongly shaped by how we frame messages about the problems tourism faces and the solutions available. Working with 'framing' is therefore a key tool for moving towards sustainable tourism.

Tourism contributes tax revenues and jobs for residents, and it offers learning, rest, and experiences for tourists. But it also generates greenhouse gas emissions, pressure and wear on local nature and infrastructure, and negative effects for residents. In 2025, we are already seeing glimpses of the future: protests against overtourism in Southern Europe, forest fires in Turkey and Greece, water scarcity, floods, and the coolcation trend where Europeans exchange continental heat for cooler climates in Scandinavia. These developments show that the current tourism system is unsustainable and that it takes place in a world increasingly shaped by climate change. How we travel, take holidays, and consume experiences as tourists therefore needs to change.

Anchoring strong sustainability in established values and norms

In tourism, as in many industries, goals are often built around maximisation and expansion. More guests, higher profits, and a broader offer are frequently assumed as desirable. This logic contributes to the unsustainable development described above. To create real change, conventional sustainability measures such as energy efficiency or water saving need to be combined with efforts that lead to real reductions in consumption. The challenges lie in the often dominant logics of growth and maximisation. For stronger forms of sustainability to take hold, new framing may be needed to build acceptance and legitimacy in the sector. In our study of the West Sweden Tourist Board's initiative Stepping Up Sustainability, we saw examples of how more effective sustainability strategies can be implemented. Measures such as promoting staycations and visits from neighbouring countries, giving greater consideration to residents and the environment, and enabling longer stays can be anchored in norms such as hospitality, respect, and pride of place. This shows that further-reaching sustainability measures can be integrated into tourism planning and governance when they are linked to established values and norms.



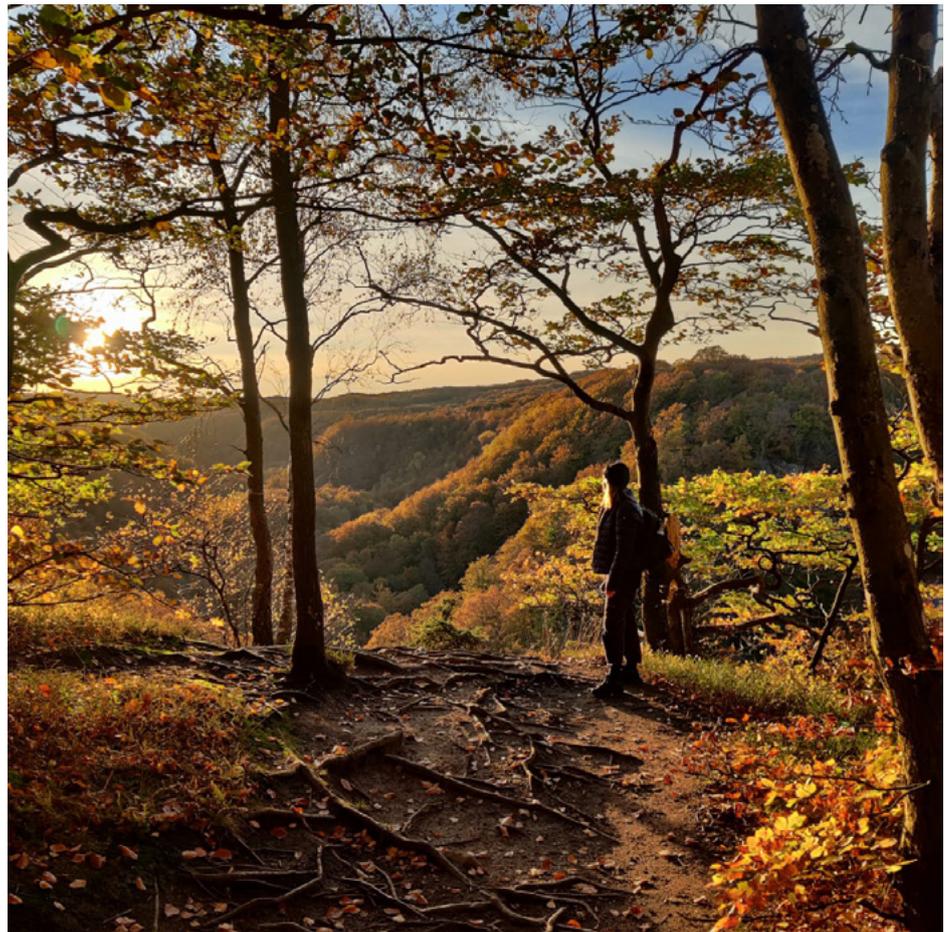
Sara Skarp
Postdoctoral Researcher,
Lund University



What counts as a “proper holiday” is often narrow, but there are plenty of opportunities to reshape and broaden our imagination.

Positioning nature tourism and outdoor recreation as alternative land use

Nature is one of the main reasons people holiday in Sweden. It also supports well-being for residents and can be a reason to choose a staycation instead of flying abroad. At the same time, extractive industries are continuously expanding, for example through increased logging and new mines, which threatens the most basic resource for nature tourism and outdoor recreation. We examined how the trade association Swedish Nature and Ecotourism Association frames nature tourism as a form of land use that creates long-term value without destroying the nature resources it depends on. They highlight societal benefits, including tax revenues, employment, rural development, environmental protection, and education, in contrast to the more short-term benefits of extractive industries. Such framing can help establish legitimacy for nature tourism in arenas where different objectives compete. Nature tourism and outdoor recreation also need to be practised responsibly to not undermine their own foundation. This includes dialogue with stakeholders and users to understand different perspectives and visions for nature use now and in the future.



roadening the idea of a 'proper holiday' could include seeing a day in the forest as an experience with rest, learning, and new impressions. Photo: Sara Skarp

Expanding the notion of a proper holiday

Holidays and tourism are not human needs, but the needs often associated with holidays, such as rest, learning, and social connection, are. These needs can be met in many ways, including without resource- and emission-intensive travel. The pandemic showed that many travellers could appreciate nearby destinations and that the feeling of a proper holiday did not necessarily depend on flying and beach life. In our study of Stepping Up Sustainability, we also saw work to shift the framing of what a proper holiday means. Instead of marketing sunny images of already popular destinations, which risks fuelling overtourism, other imagery is highlighted, including bracing winds, rain jackets, cosy autumn darkness, and the warmth of a fire. This marketing also encourages staycations and discovering local tourism offers close to home. Our research shows that the idea of a proper holiday is often narrow, but there are good opportunities to broaden it. New framing can make the alternatives to long distance travel, to the most crowded destinations, to the instagrammable beach selfie, more visible and desirable.



Further reading – or ask questions using www.greenchat.se/eng

- Skarp, S. (2025). Unsheltered from the storm: A wind shelter as focal point for recreational nature use conflicts. Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism.
- Skarp, S., Hoolohan, C. (2024). Exploring pandemic holiday practices: Meaning, experience and aspiration. Annals of Tourism Research Empirical Insights.
- Skarp, S., Klintman, M. (forthcoming). Changing (dis)course: How a Destination Management Organisation navigates sufficiency-oriented sustainability. Scandinavian Journal of Tourism and Hospitality.

This research is funded by the Mistra Sustainable Consumption research programme.

For further information, see:
www.sustainableconsumption.se/en

Reference to this text

Skarp, S. (2026). Tourism within planetary boundaries.
Mistra Sustainable Consumption – policy brief 2:10. Stockholm:
KTH Royal Institute of Technology.

