



Avoiding the Pitfalls of Overtourism

In 2021, the New Hampshire Division of Travel and Tourism Development announced new visitation records, including a 38% increase over 2019, with 4.3M visitors traveling to the Granite State. Spending by visitors in New Hampshire reached nearly \$2 billion — a 65% increase over the previous year.

"In the 2021 Fall Season, the Merrimack Valley Region alone saw a 49% increase in spending and a 32.2% increase in overnight visitors to the area," said Lauren Getts, Director of Marketing and Communications at the Greater Manchester Chamber. "Tourism is critical to the economic growth of the state economy. Beyond creating jobs and business opportunities, a strong tourism industry also helps to build infrastructure, provide more community resources, and aids in the preservation and education around the beautiful natural resources of the Granite State."

The economic benefits of a strong tourism economy are hard to overstate. But at what point does tourism become "over tourism" — a buzzword that has become prominent in recent years?

According to tourism researcher Kelly Bricker, PhD. of Arizona State University, the key to understanding "over tourism" is to look beyond the actual number of visitors. "It's about the impacts that communities and their associated resources face — for example, when social-cultural, environmental, and economic aspects of a community are negatively impacted and not supported to the degree that tourism brings benefits, communities may be experiencing over tourism, or unmanaged tourism."

New Hampshire's Leave No Trace initiative is a statewide education program that aims to avoid the pitfalls of over tourism and rising visitation. For example, [The Leave No Trace Partner Toolkit](#) provides resources for the tourism industry that address the issues raised by Dr. Bricker. The guide was created with input from community members, park staff, and local tourism leaders to help people understand the area's particular considerations for enjoyable experiences that benefit local economies and protect natural resources at the same time.

Diana's Baths, a popular sightseeing area in the White Mountains, serves as an example of the Leave No Trace approach. In 2022, a [Hot Spots](#) event organized by the U.S. Forest Service Conway Office, the Carroll County Conservation District, and the Mount Washington Valley Chamber of Commerce address an increase in negative impacts at Diana's Baths. With the numbers of visitors sharply climbing the area was experiencing unprecedented issues with trail erosion, litter, pet waste, and other problems.

The Hot Spots effort included developing new Leave No Trace educational messaging and signage for

Diana's Baths, as well as community-led cleanups, planning work and a vision for improving the experience for visitors. Helon Hoeffler, a Forest Service manager, called the Hot Spots effort "incredibly valuable" in "getting the entire community working together" to protect a natural area.

"The vast majority of people who visit natural spaces have no intention of harming the environment," says Andrew Leary, the director of Leave No Trace's [Sustainable Tourism](#) program. "However, we know that providing visitors with simple, actionable advice about the things they can do to protect nature results in measurably better outcomes. Leave No Trace provides an effective framework that people can easily understand — plus, it's a more enjoyable experience for visitors when they perceive themselves as stewards of the natural world."