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Principles need instruments

The World Economic Forum has told the visitor economy where it is going. It has not told anyone how to measure whether they got there.

A response to Travel and Tourism at a Turning Point
World Economic Forum with Kearney, July 2025

The number everyone will quote

$16tn

projected contribution to global GDP by 2034

11%

of the world economy, on that projection

30bn

tourist visits anticipated worldwide

1 in 10

jobs supported by the sector in 2024

Every one of these is a forecast of demand. None of them is a measurement of what a place keeps.

Source: World Economic Forum with Kearney, Travel and Tourism at a Turning Point, July 2025.

Growth is global. Capacity is local.

The Forum is direct about where the strain shows: friction between visitors and residents, arising from an imbalance between visitor numbers and the capacity of the place receiving them.

That imbalance is not felt at the level of a global projection. It is felt on one street, in one week, at one price. Protests in Barcelona, entry charges in Venice and viewpoint closures elsewhere are all responses to one unmeasured quantity: how much load a place absorbs before hosting turns negative.

A sector heading for 30 billion trips cannot manage that with annual arrivals data.

WHAT A PLACE ACTUALLY ABSORBS

Beds	occupancy, rate, displacement
Seats	routes, fares, origin capacity
Streets	mobility, dwell, congestion
Services	waste, water, policing, transport
Residents	sentiment, tolerance, consent

Ten principles, no instruments

The report sets out ten guiding principles — responsible innovation, crisis resilience, empowered communities, cultural stewardship among them. They are the right principles. They are also, without exception, unfalsifiable as written.

01

What is measured today

Arrivals. Bed nights. Annual survey estimates. A headline impact number produced once, by a consultancy, three months after the event.

02

What a principle requires

Retention. Leakage. Displacement. Marginal load. The value of one more visitor in one more week — and the week where that value turns negative.

03

The distance between them

Not methodological. Both are well-established economics. The distance is instrumentation: continuous, traceable, at the grain a decision is actually taken.

Three questions

Put these to any destination authority, convention bureau or venue operator. The answer is rarely no. The answer is usually: not this quarter.

How much of it stayed here?

Of the spend your last major event generated, what share was retained in the local economy, and which sector leaked it?

What is the binding constraint?

If you hosted the same event again next year, what limits the outcome first — beds, seats, or the willingness of residents?

What would you lose by moving it?

Shift the date twelve weeks into a quieter season. Does regional value rise or fall, and by how much?

Signals in. Decisions out.

Living Lab connects and geotags market signals, vectorises the demand they reveal, and translates that movement through government-grade economic models built on OECD-aligned methodologies.

SIGNALS

Events, aviation, accommodation, media, weather, calendars, tourism flows and investment — captured continuously and anchored to place and time.

VECTORS

Direction, strength, timing and place. Fragmented signals become a measurable view of where demand is moving.

ECONOMIC VALUE

Retained output, GVA, employment, fiscal return, leakage and supply-chain effects across 50 OECD ISIC sectors.

ACTION

Which date, which event, which market, which intervention — ranked by expected impact.

Every figure carries its basis, confidence, as-of date and model run.

Evidence behind you. Foresight ahead of you.

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WHAT HAPPENED

Impact	GVA, employment, tax, room nights; direct, indirect and induced on Leontief Type I and Type II
Retention	Leakage by geography and by sector — what the place actually kept
Comparison	Events and seasons side by side on one method; roll-ups across the full calendar
Provenance	Methodology annex and auditor access to every model run

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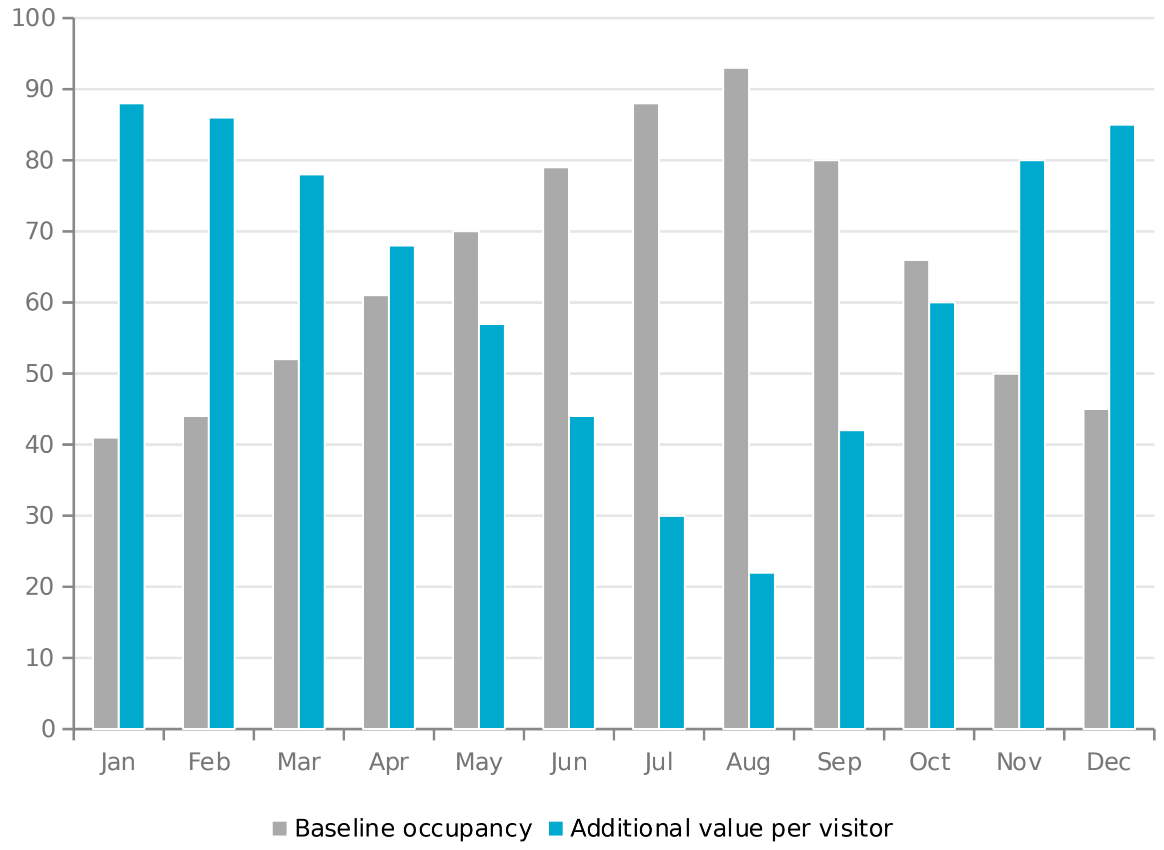
WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Timing	Candidate dates ranked on attendance, access, beds, weather and incremental spend
Portfolio	The calendar ranked on regional return, season-weighted and net of displacement
Pacing	Sales against break-even, with a forecast finishing position and confidence range
Risk	Access, capacity, disruption and climate exposure priced in economic terms

The peak week is rarely the valuable week

Hold an event when a destination is already full and most of the spend displaces a visitor who would have come anyway. Hold the same event in a soft week and far more of it is genuinely additional. Headline attendance falls. Retained regional value rises.

This is the calculation almost no destination runs before fixing a date — and the one that most changes the answer.



Illustrative pattern, not a measured result. Actual values are destination-specific and modelled per event.

Impact is not the same as benefit

A large gross number tells a minister very little. What matters is the share that stays — and the sector through which the rest leaves. Retention is where an impact study becomes a policy instrument: it names the supply chain worth building.

Gross visitor spend
Less imported goods and services
Less non-local operators
Retained direct spend
Plus indirect and induced
Net local impact

THE WATERFALL

Every Living Lab economic run decomposes gross spend through to net local impact, step by step, across 50 OECD ISIC sectors.

Each step is separately sourced and separately auditable. Observed, derived and inferred inputs are kept visibly apart, so a reader can see which parts of the answer are measurement and which are model.

That separation is what makes a number survive scrutiny from a treasury rather than a press office.

Making the principles measurable

WEF PRINCIPLE	MEASURABLE INDICATOR
Balance visitors and local capacity	Marginal load by week against bed, seat and service ceilings — with the binding constraint named
Support local communities and SMEs	Retention and leakage by sector; the share of spend reaching locally owned supply
Build crisis-resilient strategy	Exposed demand by origin market under disruption, entry-rule and climate scenarios
Grow responsibly	Net additional value per visitor by week, net of displacement — not gross arrivals
Steward cultural assets	Programming value by venue and season, including the days between marquee events

Principles restated as quantities. Living Lab interpretation of the report’s themes; not a WEF framework.

A sector that cannot measure itself cannot govern itself

The Forum has done the hard part: it has said out loud that growth on this scale carries obligations. What follows is not another framework. It is instrumentation — continuous, traceable, and specific enough that a minister, a board or an auditor can act on it and defend it afterwards.

The destinations that come through the next decade well will not be the ones that grew fastest. They will be the ones that could show their working.

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Government-grade economic intelligence for the visitor economy