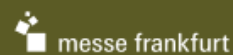


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Cities need 'code of conduct' to address over-tourism: Virtuoso talkBy [Mary Gostelow](#) on 8/15/2019

"We need guests coming to Amsterdam to understand more about the city," says Roberto Payer, general manager of the Waldorf Astoria Amsterdam, Netherlands, and head of Hilton's luxury portfolio in the Dutch city.

The Italian was a keynote speaker at a Tuesday breakfast on over-tourism. This was one of the most important events at the annual Virtuoso Travel Week 2019, hosted by three of MGM's central properties in Las Vegas.



Roberto Payer speaking at Virtuoso's think tank on over-tourism

"The problem is the volume, and the city cannot cope," he explained. Amsterdam, which has a population hovering around 1 million, had 16.7 million overnight stays in 2018, up 5.1% over the previous year. Of

these, 1.8 million were visitors from the USA, a rise of 6.4% over 2017. The latest figures (2017) for Airbnb show the disruptor accounted for 2.5 million overnight stays, with average length of 3.4 nights, which Airbnb claims is almost twice as long as a hotel stay.

"Say garbage is picked up Tuesdays and Fridays, departing guests leave their garbage in the street. Another frequent gripe is that visitors walk on our dedicated bike lanes. In Amsterdam, bicycles rule," explained Payer.

At the 93-key Waldorf Astoria Amsterdam, he has seen little effect of the city's reported over-tourism. Although no exact figures are forthcoming, he expects 2019's occupancy and average rate to compare more than favorably with last year. His current year-round average stay is 2.1 nights.

“Whatever the time of year, there needs to be a code of conduct. Those coming to Amsterdam need to learn about local culture, and this is the responsibility of the media, plus travel advisers and the travelers themselves. For Amsterdam’s sake, the next generation has the right to experience the city in the same way that we can.”


This was a message put out, too, by other speakers, sharing views on the situations and offering solutions

on Barcelona, Spain; Everest, Nepal; Machu Picchu, Peru; and Venice, Italy. Barcelona and Venice both have bans on new hotel construction in city centers, and Barcelona finds that marketing the region as well as the city helps spread volume.

There was also interesting input from Petra Stusek, managing director of Ljubljana Tourism, Slovenia: There, long before tourism picked up after the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, the Ljubljana authorities made a lot of the city center vehicle-free, which goes well with today’s visitor appreciation of sustainability (they also appreciate having an electric car-sharing service).

Matthew Upchurch, Chairman and CEO of Virtuoso, says it is essential that hotels are part of the narrative. “We need to make sure that we work together with destinations,” he said. Another message from the breakfast meeting was the need to encourage travel out of season.

“Frankly, Amsterdam is far more than tulips. People come year round,” said Payer.

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