

The Era of Cheap Flights Might Be Coming to an End

We should not feel sad about it



Image by [Tobias Rehbein](#) from [Pixabay](#)

That headline seems a bit odd. Considering that I am currently sitting in front of a computer in São Paulo, Brazil. Yes, that is where I have chosen to spend my well-deserved holiday. The main reason is that I still have some 'emotional ties' to the country. And I am grateful, that my economic circumstances allowed me to do this travel. I still found some cheap flights. Who knows how long it can continue.

Currently, many major airports in Europe are in turmoil. I avoided the worst by only traveling with hand luggage and checking in online. And I was at the airport nearly five hours in advance. For me, the journey was without any major hiccups. Even the Covid rules are not a [major issue anymore](#).

But I did meet quite a few passengers who had trouble with long wait times at the check-in. Both in Berlin, and Amsterdam. Those troubles are a symptom, that the business model of cheap flights for the masses is in trouble.

Cheap Flights Were Offered on the Backs of Workers

The airlines are reeling after Covid. The lockdowns are a major reason for that. The flight companies had to fire many employees during the pandemic. Now, they are not coming back. It affects every part of the chain. My father trains security personnel. Like the ones, you meet at the airport. The ones who check that you did leave that shampoo bottle in your check-in luggage. He once told me, that the new training courses for the Berlin airport have been pushed back several times. There are not enough applicants for the courses.

The reasons for this were there long before Covid. The salaries and working conditions suck. Many of the fired workers don't return. It doesn't matter, whether we talk about ground staff or flight attendants. The flight companies managed to offer cheap flights to the masses because of it. Ryanair has been [fighting unionization](#) since the very beginning. The tactics they use are common in the industry.

Even major, traditional players tried to get into the discount game. Now they are breaking their neck. Look at SAS, for example. Their pilots are [rebellling](#), and so is their ground staff. It has become so bad, that they [filed for bankruptcy](#). Their customers are [stranded](#) everywhere in Europe. Almost all companies cancel thousands of flights this holiday season. And for the same reason. [KLM](#), [Lufthansa](#), you name it.

It is not just about salaries. It is about working conditions as well. I know people who work in the industry. These are [high-stress work environments](#). All work environments, where you face customers are. Many times, customers are assholes. I've been flying enough times to witness customers get nasty to airline staff. Even to the point where they get [physically violent](#). I prefer to deal with teenagers in my classroom.

Mass Tourism Based on Cheap Flights Was Always Unsustainable

This business model of cheap flights was always unsustainable in the long run. It could only survive for one reason. The workers carried the burden. With lousy work conditions, poor compensation, and high stress. But this business model also had another prize attached to it. The environment and local communities.

Some years ago, I was doing a study trip with my students to Mallorca. We investigated the effects of mass tourism on the Island. If you start to take a closer look, you see the effects everywhere. For example, there is a severe [water shortage on the Island](#) that gets exacerbated by mass tourism. The average tourist consumes 440 liters of water a day in Mallorca. It takes huge amounts of water to fill all the swimming pools and fountains for the tourists.

Many Tourist Hotspots End Up in a Dilemma

In Palma, you do not meet many local people. That is because all businesses only cater to tourists. Instead of local culture, you find endless rows of souvenir shops. Along with chain café chain stores, jewelers, and kebab shops.

There are almost no locals living in Palma anymore. The same apartment brings much more profit if it is rented out to tourists instead of locals. So they have to go live [wherever they can afford](#). Other tourist hotspots are even worse. Take Barcelona and Venice, for example. Authorities are finally starting to put some limits. And the locals start protesting. Rightly so.

The Environment Takes a Massive Hit From Mass Tourism

The truth is, that there are very few places, where tourists have not been before. In the chase for the perfect nature selfie, they trample down ecosystems they are not [even aware of](#). Ecotourism doesn't exist. I wrote in another article, that [every human activity has an ecological impact](#). We can minimize it, but we can not avoid it. Tourism is a major source of ecological destruction.

Those cool nature places we see on Instagram cannot handle millions of visitors.

The tourism industry [destroys](#) what attracted visitors in the first place. Whether those are wild animals, beautiful nature spots, or cultural heritage.

Cheap Flights Made Mass Tourism Possible. It Is Time for a Change

Cheap flights made mass tourism to distant destinations available to nearly everyone. Workers, nature, local communities, and the earth's resources pay the price. For privileged westerners like me, it became a thing we took for granted. Myself, I managed to visit most continents. I am grateful for the many experiences this has given me.

But it is not a human right for me to see some rare rock formations in Australia. Or some endangered animal in the African Savannah. The only way to make tourism more sustainable is to end this era of cheap flights. And it will come to an end. Not just because of the workers who do not want to return. Also because we do not know how long we can power this business model. Cheap fossil fuels are drying up. And there are plenty of interesting areas to explore in our home countries. Be honest. how many villages near your city have you explored? There might be some hidden gems there.